

ACTING FEMININE ON THE SOUTH'S ANTEBELLUM AND CIVIL WAR
STAGES

by

ROBIN OGIER WARREN

(Under the Direction of Christy Desmet and Frances Teague)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes the theatrical repertory and performative daily roles of women who acted on the antebellum and Civil War southern stage. Actresses helped shape gendered identity for the South by entrenching and subverting accepted norms of femininity. Because their stage and everyday performances took many appearances according to class, time, place, and race, they showed that constructions of gendered identity vary according to circumstance. Family connections brought women to the southern stage; these relationships operated as one of the multiple cultural, social, and political forces that Judith Butler says constructs identity. Actresses learned to enact scripted feminine behavior in their personal lives and on stage as young girls. Trained to improvise, however, actresses did not always adhere to their play or social scripts. Instead, abiding by and transgressing against the region's traditional gender norms, they occupied what Victor Turner calls a liminal status. Actresses constituted part of a small, diverse group of urban women who worked for pay and contributed to the region's developing economy and cultural life. Since actresses maintained private lives, they moved between what Jürgen Habermas terms the private and public spheres and showed

that these supposedly distinct worlds actually overlapped. As members of what Michel Foucault calls “a society of blood” in which sex maintained the family relations of the power structure, actresses had to temper the sexuality of performances to maintain pure reputations. Because some players overturned traditional sexual values while others upheld them, these shifting representations of sexuality confirmed the artificiality of gendered identity and showed masculine and feminine roles are bodily styles outwardly enacted through repeated performative gestures. Actresses’ various portrayals of sexuality revealed that a range of sexual identities exists and refutes a binaric understanding of sexuality. Because white actresses dominated women’s roles, they also enacted a variety of racial identities, including African Americans, Native Americans, and indigenous people from faraway places and times. They raised connotations of exoticism and confirmed for white theatergoers the Otherness of people whose skin was darker than their own. Plays by William Shakespeare dominated repertory, but eighteenth-century Restoration dramas and nineteenth-century melodramas were also popular.

INDEX WORDS: Acting; Actress; Actresses; Drama; Stage; Theater; South; Southern; Antebellum; Civil War; Family; Kinship; Script; Scripts; Role; Roles; Performative; Performance; Performativity; Repertory; Gender; Identity; Feminine; Femininity; Subversion; Transgression; Liminal; Liminality; Private; Public; Sphere; Spheres; Work; Class; Status; Sex; Sexuality; Race; Alterity; Otherness; Exoticism; William Shakespeare; Restoration; Melodrama; Judith Butler; Victor Turner; Jürgen Habermas; Michel Foucault; Culture; Economy; Urban.

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For Wally

“Thou art all the comfort / The Gods will diet me with.”

Imogen, *Cymbeline*, 3.4.179-80, William Shakespeare

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“When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a warm and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.”

Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Out of Solitude*.

“We are advertis’d by our loving friends.”

King Edward, *Henry VI, Part III*, 5.3.18, William Shakespeare.

I have learned in writing my dissertation that scholarship is a collaborative enterprise, and I have many friends of the mind, heart, and spirit to thank for their contributions to this undertaking. Over the past seven years, many faculty members helped me navigate the twists and turns that have culminated in this project. Christy Desmet and Frances Teague stand out, however, as faithful mentors who have given selflessly of their time and energy to guide and direct my academic endeavors. They have maintained high standards and expected me to engage rigorously in research and writing, but they have also helped me set and attain realistic goals. Both Christy Desmet and Frances Teague have exposed me to new theoretical approaches that

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Theater historian Faye Dudden, who entitled the introduction to her book, *Women in the American Theater*, "Acting Female," also helped inspire my titles. Dudden explains that "traditionalists" prescribe gender roles for women and expect them to "act female," but "acting females" [actresses] illustrate that they can escape those essentials by becoming someone else in performance and escaping the fixity of identity (2). The actresses I investigated revealed the fluid nature of identity both on stage and in their everyday lives. Thus, I am grateful to Faye Dudden—and to the many other scholars and theorists—whose work has informed my own.

John Inscoe's research on the history of Appalachia and the nineteenth-century South has certainly had a large impact on my thinking. His book *Mountain Masters, Slavery, and the Sectional Crisis in Western North Carolina* gave me a more nuanced view of the nineteenth-century South as a complex place that eludes simplistic, easy definition. I cherish John's friendship, his good humor, and his willingness to read and respond to these chapters as well as many of my articles in their changing forms over the years. I am also thankful for his eagle

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Valley Collection in the Hill Memorial Library at Louisiana State University, the Historic New Orleans Collection, the Missouri Historical Society, the Special Collections Department in the Howard-Tilton Memorial Library at Tulane University, and the P. K. Yonge Special Collections Library at the University of Florida. While all the staff at these institutions provided able assistance, several individuals stand out for the interest they took in my work. In particular, I would like to thank Pamela Arceneaux of the Historic New Orleans Collection, Christopher Gordon and Christina Perez of the Missouri Historical Society, and James Cusick of the P. K. Yonge Library for the extra help they gave me in locating sources.

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research and writing has focused on nineteenth-century Florida, and she has gone to great lengths to help me locate pertinent information on several occasions. For instance, she found the tiny port of Picolata, landing site of the Forbes Acting Company, a troupe that traveled from Savannah to Florida to perform in the midst of the Second Seminole War. On their way from Picolata to St. Augustine, the troupe was ambushed by Seminoles who appropriated the players' costumes. Amanda clocked the mileage from Picolata to St. Augustine, so that I would know that the actors had to ride 18 miles overland once they had disembarked from their steamer. She took several hours on a Saturday to drive around back roads that are an hour from her house just so that I had a small, but correct, fact, which I used in a previous article and in the introduction to this project. This example is but one of the many generous gestures Amanda has made towards supporting my research over the years. I remain grateful for her love and participation in my work.

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INTRODUCTION: ACTING SOUTHERN

The Emperor of the *Cherokee* nation with his Empress and their Son the young Prince, attended by several of his Warriors and great Men and their Ladies, were received at the Palace by his Honour the Governor and attended by such of the Council as were in Town and several other Gentlemen, on Thursday the 9th Instant, with all the Marks of Civility and Friendship, and were that Evening entertained, at the Theatre, with the Play (the Tragedy of *Othello*) and a Pantomime Performance, which gave them great Surprise, as did the fighting with naked Swords on the Stage, which occasioned the Empress to order some about her to prevent their killing one another. The Business of their coming is yet made publick; but is said to relate to the opening and establishing of Trade with this Colony, which they are very desirous of. They were dismissed with a handsome Present of fine Cloaths, Arms, and Amunition, and expressed great Satisfaction in the Governor's kind Reception, and from several others; and left this Place this morning.

Friday last, being the anniversary of his Majesty's Birth-Day, in the Evening, the whole City was illuminated. There was a Ball, and a very elegant Entertainment at the Palace, where were present, the Emperor and Empress of the *Cherokee* Nation, with their Son the young Prince, and a brilliant Appearance of Ladies and Gentlemen; several beautiful Fireworks were exhibited in Palace Street, by Mr. *Hallam*, Manager of the Theatre in this City, and the Evening concluded with every Demonstration of our Zeal and Loyalty. ”

17 November, 1752, *Virginia Gazette*

Lewis Hallam found himself performing *Othello* (1603) for an outraged Cherokee “Empress” and setting off fireworks for the pleasure of the Williamsburg Governor in November 1752 because he had run afoul of the London law in 1747 for illegally performing plays at a non-patented playhouse, the New Wells Theatre. Under England's Theatre Licensing Act of 1737, only the patent houses of Covent Garden and Drury Lane could perform drama, so proprietors like Hallam were limited to entertainment such as musical concerts, acrobatics, and pantomimes. To raise his receipts and attract spectators, however, Hallam advertised that he would follow these amusements with an “incidental” play that would be “free of charge.” In actuality, the play provided the

substance of the evening's entertainment, and after three years, the London authorities got wind of Hallam's ruse and shut him down. He reopened sporadically for the next three years, showcasing tumbling and music, but these pastimes did not draw as well as plays, and by 1751, he was mired in debt. Selling some theatrical properties and equipment, Hallam gathered a small troupe, consisting of ten players and his family. With this assemblage, he headed for America, where he hoped to retrieve his fortune.¹

The Hallam Company arrived in Yorktown, Virginia, in June 1752 and proceeded immediately to Williamsburg, where the group applied to Governor Dinwiddie for permission to act. After his trouble in London, Lewis Hallam clearly wanted no difficulties with the legal authorities in America. Dinwiddie welcomed the troupe, which found that the colonial capital already had a playhouse that they could use for their residency. For its eleven-month stay, the Hallam Company performed a high-quality repertory, which included six Shakespearean selections and assorted Restoration dramas by playwrights such as George Farquhar, William Congreve, George Lillo, and Nicholas Rowe.²

While the Hallam troupe sought to establish itself in America as a respectable and proper English acting company, the group came close to losing that newly refashioned status in its encounter with the Cherokee visitors who interrupted the *Othello* performance on November 17. What started as a decorous English staging of a great Shakespearean tragedy became a farce as real native Americans intervened to stop the

¹ A Dispatch from Williamsburg, 17 November, 1752, *Virginia Gazette*; Charles Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage: From the Hallams to Edwin Booth* (Washington, D. C.: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), 1-4; quotations on p. 4. I am grateful to Frances Teague for bringing this event to my attention.

² Arthur Hornblow, *A History of the Theatre in America* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1919), 74; Shattuck, 5.

violent action of the play. The Indians might have appeared naïve, but the players who could not control the wild audience pandemonium or keep command over their stage in turn looked ineffectual and foolish.

While the *Virginia Gazette* report of the *Othello* performance deserves serious consideration for several implicit racist assumptions in its text, the dispatch also merits attention for its failure to mention the lead female character. Where was Desdemona in all of this chaos, and who was the actress that had assumed her role? Sarah Hallam, Lewis's wife, likely played the part across from her husband, as she sustained most of the company's leading roles. In addition, the two had played Desdemona and Othello at the Lemon Street Playhouse in London just before sailing for America, and the Shakespearean play about the jealous Moor and his Italian wife was a standard part of the company's repertory.³ Though Sarah Hallam's part as Desdemona turned out to be inconsequential to that of the Cherokee "Empress" on the evening that her company played for the Governor and his guests, Mrs. Hallam and the many women who followed in her footsteps to perform on the South's stages in the antebellum and Civil War years, played roles of great consequence both in their daily lives and on stage. Southern actresses participated in shaping gendered identity for the region both by mirroring and further entrenching accepted norms of accepted femininity and by questioning and subverting dominant standards through transgressive roles and behavior. Because their performances took on a multitude of appearances according to class, time, place, and

³ Robert J. Myers and Joyce Brodowski, "Rewriting the Hallams: Research in 18th Century British and American Theatre," *Theatre Survey* 41:1 (May 2000): 1-22, see especially p. 3 for information on the marriage of Lewis Hallam and Sarah Smythies. Hornblow also says on p. 92 that Mrs. Hallam played Desdemona in Williamsburg.

race, they also showed that constructions of gendered identity vary according to circumstance.

Though the *Virginia Gazette* failed to mention Sarah Hallam and focused instead on the exotic Cherokee “Empress” and her retainers, the English actress still lived and worked in the same milieu presented by the newspaper’s description. She, like her native counterpart, was part of a world changed forever by the circum-Atlantic traffic that had begun to move back and forth amongst the continents of Europe, Africa, and America.⁴ Indeed, the anecdote that excised Mrs. Hallam shows the circum-Atlantic roots of American theater, for she was a member of an English troupe who had traveled to the colonies in hopes of accruing a great fortune and establishing a famous name for itself in England’s newest outpost. Moreover, the Hallams brought with them their English repertory selections, and these offerings would find permanent places in the dramatic presentations of other acting companies who followed in their wake.

The *Virginia Gazette* story contains other themes that proved to be equally important as theater developed in the American South. For instance, the anecdote illustrates how gendered identity can change according to cultural and historical setting, for the Cherokee “Empress” ended the performance, an action that a white female colonist would likely have refrained from taking. Endowed with power from the important positions that they inhabited in their matrilineal cultures, Cherokee women played integral roles in the life of their communities. Agricultural land and households were vested in their names, so men could not establish a domicile or farm land without a

⁴ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 4-7.

wife.⁵ In contrast, the English doctrine of coverture stripped white women like Sarah Hallam of independent legal standing once they married, so they could not own property or conduct business in their own names.⁶ Despite these prejudices, women could inherit property if widowed.

Thus, when Lewis Hallam contracted yellow fever and died on a trip to Jamaica in 1756, he left the acting company to his wife Sarah. She managed the group successfully for a year but then remarried actor David Douglass, who became the new company manager, and the two returned to America in 1758 with the reorganized company. The newly named Hallam-Douglass Company spent the next sixteen years establishing a circuit of the country's major east coast cities, consisting of stops in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Williamsburg, Petersburg, Richmond, and Charleston. Throughout this time, Sarah Hallam Douglass maintained her role as leading lady for the troupe; she died in the fall of 1774 when the company had temporarily disbanded after the Continental Congress enacted legislation prohibiting public amusements.⁷ As temporary company manager and permanent leading lady, Sarah Hallam Douglass prefigured other actresses such as Eliza Arnold Poe, Frances Denny Drake, Julia Dean Hayne, and Eliza Logan Wood, who would later play on the South's antebellum stages and conduct their own business in addition to attaining significant public names for themselves. Sarah Hallam Douglass also used her own judgment in making marital choices and remarried a man of her own choosing. Several of the women who followed

⁵ Theda Perdue, *"Mixed Blood" Indians: Racial Construction in the Early South* (Athens: University of Georgia, 2003), 15-23.

⁶ Cynthia A. Kierner, *Beyond the Household: Women's Place in the Early South, 1700-1835* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 11.

⁷ Weldon B. Durham, *American Theatre Companies: 1749-1887* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 10-19.

her, including Poe, Hayne, and Drake did the same, although their choices were not always happy ones.

The report in the *Virginia Gazette* also shows that strict class lines stratified life in the early South, but the dispatch language simultaneously divulges the instability of those status markers. While the Cherokees did elect tribal chiefs, for example, they had no “Emperors” and “Empresses,” nor did they organize their ranks into “great Men and Ladies.” These terms designating class standing came from the white writer’s culture and showed the importance of rank to the English settlers. As historian Carl Bridenbaugh notes, “The primary political and social fact of eighteenth-century Virginia was rule by a class. The gentlemen of Virginia believed implicitly in the right of their class to rule; [and] the proper business of the gentry was politics.”⁸ Power descended from the top down, from the king to the governor to the assembly to the county to the parish, and the *Virginia Gazette* account illustrated this concern with rank through language that indicated the class station of the English colonists. Referring to the governor as “his Honour,” the newspaper writer indicated the respect held for Dinwiddie’s position of power and authority in the newly created colony. In addition, the notice given to the “Council” and the other “Gentlemen” who attended the performance attested to the important places these men held in the settlers’ burgeoning class hierarchy. Though the council members were appointed by the Crown, the other gentlemen were probably well-to-do citizens, but the ambiguity of the descriptor used for them shows that some

⁸ Carl Bridenbaugh, *Seat of Empire: The Political Role of Eighteenth-Century Williamsburg* (1950; reprint, New York: Henry Holt & Company, Inc., 1958), 15.

elasticity existed within the class structure of the colonial settlement that was still in the process of establishing itself.⁹

White women occupied similarly equivocal positions in the early South. While elite women leaned toward European gender ideals and shunned public activities, economic growth created opportunities for women like Sarah Hallam to engage in paid work outside the household after 1700. Non-elite women sought many forms of work, including sewing and weaving, teaching and tutoring, cooking and housekeeping.¹⁰ Since most of these occupations grew out of household duties, they did not threaten the status quo, but actresses often lived and worked on the edges of propriety, partly because they entertained others through the public display of their bodies and partly because their livelihood depended on what theater historian Tracy Davis calls “skills of deception.”¹¹ In addition, though most actresses came from middle-class backgrounds, they could enact a variety of class statuses on stage, and they sometimes assumed different stations in their personal lives as well, although these performative moves were not always successful. Thus, a player like Sarah Hallam insured a level of public distrust any time she impersonated a high-born woman, and since most repertory selections featured elite characters, this misgiving did not dissipate easily. Hallam not only played the privileged Desdemona on November 17, but she started the season portraying the aristocratic Portia in Shakespeare’s *Merchant of Venice* (1594), and her repertory also included the well-to-

⁹ John Richard Alden, *The South in the Revolution: 1763-1789* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1957), 46; Bridenbaugh, 38.

¹⁰ Kierner, 4-5; 18-19.

¹¹ Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), 3.

do Ophelia in the early modern playwright's *Hamlet* (1600), and one of the royal women in his *Richard the Third* (1592).¹²

Though women contributed significantly to public life before and during the Revolution, apprehensive conservatives urged them to return to positions of domesticity after the war. The prominent role of strong-minded women in the French Revolution further fueled a reactionary backlash in America, and those in power sought to bar women from political affairs. The rise of evangelical religion in the early decades of the nineteenth century in the Old South further hobbled women's overt participation in the public sphere, and by 1835, historian Cynthia Kierner says "the passive, dependent, subservient southern 'lady' was the dominant ideal of white womanhood in an increasingly self-conscious region."¹³ Kierner contends, however, that this ideal image did not always fit the reality, and just as women had participated in the public world through social affairs, letters, market and business transactions during the colonial and Revolutionary eras, so too did they find ways to be part of public life in the antebellum years. Women managed their households and wielded moral and spiritual influence as the religious guides of their families. They took part in benevolent activities, and as historians Michelle Gillespie and Susannah Delfino show, many more worked for pay than have previously been credited.¹⁴ The women who followed Sarah Hallam and acted in the South's antebellum and Civil War theaters experienced the same tension by enacting a variety of class statuses both on stage and in their everyday lives. They also refused to fit neatly into a rigid class hierarchy, and they confounded elite southerners'

¹² Hornblow, 74, 80; Shattuck, 5.

¹³ Kierner, quotation on p. 7; see also pp. 5-7.

¹⁴ Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, introduction to *Neither Lady Nor Slave: Working Women in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 1-12.

desires to demarcate classes, thereby showing that class lines could be more malleable than they actually appeared.

In addition to class pliability, the *Virginia Gazette* dispatch lays bare the ideas of racial inferiority that the white settlers harbored for the native people among whom they lived. Though the Indian visitors, whom white writers frequently associated with savagery, were troubled enough by the play's violence to stop the action, the news report never took notice of their "civility." Instead, the reporter commented on the "marks of civility and friendship" characterizing the "kind reception" that Governor Dinwiddie and the other white settlers bestowed upon their Cherokee visitors. In addition, the news report reveals the performative nature of race, for the native playgoers thrust themselves into the action of the play, thereby becoming impromptu participants in a drama that has at its core the investigation of racial identity. By showing their "great Surprise," the newspaper reporter illustrated that to the white settlers, the Cherokees took on the appearance of ridiculous, ignorant buffoons who could not distinguish reality from fantasy when they intervened to stop the play. Moreover, Lewis Hallam likely followed theatrical custom of the day and played Othello in blackface, thereby heightening the whiteness of Sarah Hallam, who was performing Desdemona.¹⁵ When the Cherokees became performative participants in the drama, their presence called even further attention to the social construction of race. The white players were already exposing the social fabrication of race through their false binaric staging of color. As soon as the native Americans joined them, however, they disclosed the erroneous connection between inner and outer attributes, for in halting the play, the Cherokees destroyed the

¹⁵ Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Othello: A Contextual History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 52.

association historically made between people of darker skin tones with wildness and savagery.

In the same way that Sarah Hallam implicitly unveiled the socially defined nature of race through her enactment of whiteness, other actresses who followed her on the South's stages subversively attested to the social fabrication of race when they enacted a variety of racial identities through the many parts that they performed. In the antebellum period, for instance, white women played parts as African Americans, Native Americans, and indigenous people from faraway places and times such as medieval Tartary and seventeenth-century Kashmir in central Asia. Performing racial alterity had varying effects, sometimes contradictory ones. Given nineteenth-century American attitudes toward race, staging color raised connotations of exoticism and confirmed for white theatergoers the Otherness of people whose skin was darker than their own. Relegating different ethnic groups to outsider status on stage in turn affirmed their inferior treatment off stage. Antebellum whites could thereby justify the enslavement of African Americans and the forced removal of Native Americans in their midst, whereas post-bellum whites could defend the inequitable treatment of both groups.

The Hallam performance not only illustrated the social construct of race, but the event also implicitly revealed a tension between the different types of kinship relations that structured life for the different groups of people who made the early South their home. For instance, the reporter's language once again reveals an ignorance of matrilineal tradition in Cherokee culture. The Cherokee "Empress" likely brought her son, the "young Prince" to help her negotiate or to learn from her as she and one of his uncles, probably one of the "great Men," worked out their trading terms. Instead, the

newspaper writer, not knowing that the boy's father would have very little to do with the child's raising, mistakenly identified the three of them as a cohesive family.¹⁶

Similarly, unspoken assumptions abound in the writer's description of the firework's exhibition. The writer notes only that Lewis Hallam shot off the display in Palace Street, but he did not mention that this road runs along the Palace Green, the communal gathering place where all of the Ball attendees would have congregated to watch the spectacle. Lined on east and west sides by settlers' homes, the green was imperiously dominated on its northern end by the Governor's Palace. If the constitution of the Cherokee delegation attested to the high place that women occupied in the native American culture, the arrangement of colonial Williamsburg affirmed the importance that men held in early America. In each house that lined the green, a father or husband ruled his domain. The sweeping green then focused the eye toward the Governor's Palace, the seat of authority in the colonies, but in turn the Governor represented the Crown, who served as the supreme patriarch for the entire British Empire. Celebrations like this marking "his Majesty's Birth-Day" constantly reminded the settlers of the important position that their sovereign held.¹⁷

The Hallams' presence in Williamsburg also sheds light on the importance of kinship networks to acting families. Performers' spouses and children could travel along with them, and usually they learned to act as well, providing extra support to the troupe as it moved from engagement to engagement. For example, the Hallams brought their son Adam and a daughter, in addition to their ten supporting company members. These included a Mr. and Mrs. Rigby, Mr. and Mrs. Clarkson, Miss Palmer, Mr. Singleton, Mr.

¹⁶ Perdue, 16.

¹⁷ Bridenbaugh, 32-4; Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, "The Palace Green," *Colonial Williamsburg*, <http://www.history.org/Almanack/places/hb/hbpalgr.cfm> (accessed 8 February, 2005).

Herbert, Mr. Wynell, Mr. Adcock, and Mr. Malone.¹⁸ The Hallam children took small parts, and their parents played most of the lead roles. Thus, the company comprised a self-sufficient working unit that could enter a community and offer an evening or several months of entertainment, depending upon their reception.

Acting Like Kin

Like Sarah Hallam, most women who pursued acting in the antebellum and Civil War South were born into theatrical families or married into their ranks. Initially, the acting families who toured the Old South came from England, as did the Hallams. Samuel Drake brought his wife and children to America in 1810 and founded the theater in Kentucky. Frances Denny Drake, his daughter-in-law, and Julia Dean Hayne, his granddaughter, became famous regional stars.¹⁹ John and Mary Barnes came to New York in 1816 but traveled south with their daughter Charlotte in the 1830s at the invitation of manager Sol Smith. She gained a well-known name for herself as an actress and playwright, particularly with theatergoers in New Orleans and Mobile.²⁰ Likewise, William Henry Crisp and his wife Eliza immigrated to America in 1844 and established a successful managerial circuit in Georgia during the 1850s. The couple eventually expanded to Tennessee, and they stood out for remaining in the South during the Civil War, while most managers left the region at the start of the hostilities.²¹

¹⁸ Hornblow, 74.

¹⁹ Durham, 254-55.

²⁰ Walter J. Meserve, *Heralds of Promise: The Drama of the American People During the Age of Jackson, 1829-1849* (New York: Greenwood Press), 183-84.

²¹ Iline Fife, "The Theatre During the Confederacy" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1949), 165, 461-62; Gordon Allan Yeomans, "The Contributions of William Henry Crisp to the Southern Ante-Bellum Theatre" (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1952), 1-5, 40-41, 106-9. In addition to these sources, I am grateful to Peggy Galis for introducing me to the Crisp family, both past and present. I am also thankful to Henry Crisp for taking time to talk with me by telephone on 1 December, 2004 about his forebears William Henry and Eliza Crisp.

By the time the Drakes, the Conners, and the Crisps set out on their ventures, they were following a tradition that the Hallams had helped establish and that other English acting families had continued in their absence. Just after the Hallams struck out for America, for instance, the Kemble family began its rise to fame on England's stages. In 1757, actor and manager Roger Kemble and his acting wife Sarah Ward had the first of their twelve children, John Philip, who grew up to become a famous performer and manager of London's Covent Garden Theater. The couple had eleven more children, almost all of whom became provincial performers, and their daughter Sarah Kemble Siddons attained international stardom for her intense portrayal of tragic Shakespearean heroines. In the nineteenth century, John Philip Kemble's daughter, Fanny, also gained fame for her Shakespearean stage performances, as well as for her abolitionist writings and her sensational divorce from the American planter Pierce Butler.²²

The Kean family also stood as a British example for the families that would constitute America's theatrical dynasty. An impassioned Shakespearean actor who took London by storm in 1814, Edmund Kean toured America and became known for the intensity of his Shylock, Richard the Third and Othello. His son, Charles Kean became a famous actor as well, and he married the equally well-known Ellen Tree. Together, the couple performed in both England and America, and they became favorites on Old South stages.²³

Antebellum theater families tended to lead peripatetic lives, so kinship networks supplied key social and economic benefits. Historian Sally McMillan shows that in both

²² Oscar G. Brockett and Frank J. Hildy, eds. *History of the Theatre* (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1999), 357-58; Catherine Clinton, *Fanny Kemble's Civil Wars* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 14-25, 35-48, 137-161.

²³ Shattuck, 37-43, 103-8.

rural and urban southern families, extended family members provided one another with indispensable emotional, physical, and monetary support.²⁴ Theater families found these advantages particularly crucial since star performers traveled to different cities for engagements that could last anywhere from a few days to a month, while stock performers signed on with different theatrical companies for a season, which usually ran from November through April. Some stock entertainers cultivated positions with one company that lasted for years, but many moved from company to company in new cities each year.²⁵ For touring stars and transient stock actors, traveling and working with family members provided a sense of stability in their constantly changing lives. Extended families also ensured companionship since traveling performers found establishing local social ties difficult. Finally, family relations furnished practical aid: they could share the responsibilities of child rearing or nursing the sick and elderly, and they could relieve those in financial straits. Connections among theatrical families proved equally profitable, so performers also carefully cultivated and tended relationships with other acting families. Players relied on both immediate family members and friends in other families to make new business contacts and to keep their calendars booked.

These interconnections within and between families brought women to the southern stage in the antebellum period and during the Civil War. For instance, Frances Ann Denny met the Drake family when they rented rooms in her mother's Albany, New York boarding house while they were there working for John Barnard's Green Street Theatre. After the Drakes had arrived in America, they played in Boston for two years

²⁴ Sally McMillen, *Southern Women: Black and White in the Old South* (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson Inc., 2002), 16.

²⁵ Brockett and Hildy, 367-68; James H. Dormon, *Theater in the Ante Bellum South, 1815-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1967), 243-45.

and then accepted an invitation from Barnard to join his stock company in 1813. Denny became enamored of the acting profession while the troupe was residing with her family, and before a year had gone, she joined the company as an apprentice. She learned the craft by playing small supporting roles and understudying larger parts.

When the Drakes decided to head for Kentucky in 1815, Frances went with them. Eventually, she married into the family. She and Alexander Drake wed in 1822. He was a comic actor, who died when he was only 32, but even before his death, Frances, who cultivated tragic roles, had surpassed him in ability and popularity. Together they had four children, Alexander, Jr. and Richard, who went into the Army, and Samuel and Julia, who followed their parents into the acting profession. Indeed, Julia forged ties with another acting dynasty when she married Harry Chapman, whose family ran the first showboat business on the Mississippi River in the 1820s and 1830s.²⁶

When Frances first joined the Drake Company, she performed with the group in Lexington, Louisville, and Frankfort, but she also toured extensively as a star, playing for managers James Caldwell, Noah Ludlow, and Sol Smith in their New Orleans, Mobile, and St. Louis theaters during the late 1830s and 1840s. Frances gained the moniker “the Siddons of the West” for her passionate stage presence and emotional portrayals of characters such as the maligned Hero in Shakespeare’s *Much Ado About Nothing* (1598) or its melodramatic nineteenth-century appropriation, *Evadne* (1819) by Richard Lalor Sheil. The grief-crazed and suicidal Adelgitha in the drama bearing the same name by

²⁶ Philip Graham, *Showboats: A History of an American Institution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1951), 16-22; Noah M. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life As I Found It* (St. Louis, 1880. New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1966, 364-65.

Matthew Gregory “The Monk” Lewis (1806) brought her the most fame, and she sustained the part throughout her career.²⁷

Frances Denny Drake’s niece, Julia Dean Hayne, also attained great fame as a star in the South. Whereas her aunt’s intense stage persona brought her notoriety, however, Julia’s tenderness and pathos garnered her superb reviews. She was particularly well known for her portrayal of Julia in James Sheridan Knowles’s *The Hunchback* (1832), a role the playwright originally wrote for Fanny Kemble. She also often performed Juliet in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (1595), although she also played Romeo, in addition to the outspoken Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*. A beautiful, dark-haired woman with creamy skin and finely chiseled features, Julia Dean attracted the attentions of an upper-class Charlestonian, Dr. Arthur Hayne, while she was performing in the Queen City. The two married in 1855 and soon afterwards decided to seek their fortune in the West. Audiences in San Francisco, Sacramento, and Salt Lake City raved over Julia’s beauty and stage presentation, which must have been balm to her spirit, for she quickly learned that Arthur was actually an abusive drunk. The couple had three children, but Julia finally sued for divorce. Arthur treated her so badly that she did not suffer much public censure in an age when divorced women were anathema. Indeed, Brigham Young was so taken with her that he presented her with a custom-built sleigh and offered to

²⁷ Frances Margaret Bailey, “A History of the Stage in Mobile, Alabama from 1824-1850” (master’s thesis, The State University of Iowa, 1934), 71, 196; Lucille Naff Clay, “The Lexington Theater from 1800 to 1840” (master’s thesis, The University of Kentucky, 1930), 64; Martha Mary Dietz, “A History of the Theatre in Louisville” (master’s thesis, University of Louisville, 1921), 36, 52; Durham, 254-58; John S. Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 25; Ludlow, 62, 364-67, 425, 484; Beryl Meek, “A Record of the Theatre in Lexington, Kentucky from 1799-1850” (master’s thesis, The State University of Iowa, 1930), 70; Nelle Smither, *A History of the English Theatre in New Orleans* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1967), 111; Robin O. Warren, “They Were Always Doing Shakespeare: Antebellum Actresses and Shakespearean Appropriation,” *Borrowers and Lenders: The Journal of Shakespeare and Appropriation* 1.1 (2005) <http://www.borrowers.uga.edu/issue1>.

make her his twenty-second wife, a dubious honor that she declined. Of course, the Mormons experienced their own social exclusion, but mainstream audiences continued to welcome Julia during and after her divorce, and in 1867, she remarried James G. Cooper of New York. The two enjoyed little time together, for she died the following year in childbirth. While Julia Dean Hayne ended up making the West her home, she often returned to the South for starring appearances before her untimely death in 1868.²⁸

Unlike Julia Dean Hayne, who was born into the dramatic profession, Mary Squires Maury Ludlow came to the stage through her husband's theatrical interest. Mary met Noah Ludlow, an itinerant actor and independent manager, when he was playing in Louisville, Kentucky, during the spring of 1817. Recently widowed, she had never worked outside the home and was unfamiliar with the acting profession, but Ludlow encouraged her to consider apprenticing with his troupe. Performing suited Mary, and she became a regular in Ludlow's company. They married September 1, 1817, and two days later, they commenced a season in Nashville. Mary played on and off with her husband's companies for the next two decades. She generally acted supporting roles in comedies such as Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal* (1777) and John Tobin's comedy, *The Honey Moon* (1805), which her husband frequently used to kick off a new season. Mary not only worked diligently to learn stagecraft, though, she also worked hard at home. She gave birth to eight children over the course of the Ludlows' forty-six year marriage, and she also managed the family business accounts. She planted

²⁸ Durham, 453-54; Helene Wickham Koon, *Gold Rush Performers* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1994), 84; Koon, *How Shakespeare Won the West* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1989), 119-123; Ludlow, 240, 711-12; Ralph Elliott Margretts, "A Study of the Theatrical Career of Julia Dean Hayne" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Utah, 1959), 307.

a sizeable garden each year and ran a market stall, and she took care of many legal transactions for her family as well.²⁹

In contrast to Mary Ludlow, Martha Matthews brought some stage experience to her marriage with Sol Smith, who was a lawyer with aspirations to go into acting. She had studied music, and she sang professionally with the Haydn Society in Cincinnati, where the two met in 1822. After their marriage later that year, Smith pushed ahead with plans for a new career in drama, and Martha joined him in his venture. He formed a small company, which included his wife. Sometimes Martha sang between acts, and at other times, she played supporting roles in dramas such as Isaac Pocock's adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's *Rob Roy Macgregor* (1818) or Sheridan's *Pizarro* (1799). She had nine children in sixteen years, and she tenaciously worked alongside her husband until her early death in 1838.³⁰

Other antebellum actresses also entered the acting profession through their family ties. Eliza Arnold Poe, mother of the gothic writer Edgar Allan Poe, started acting as a child alongside her mother, an English actress who immigrated to America in 1796. The two first began performing in the Northeast, but after her mother's death, Eliza traveled south, where she found employment with the Virginia Company, which ran a circuit among the cities of Fredericksburg, Petersburg, Richmond, and Norfolk. In 1802, she married her first husband, another Virginia Company player named Charles Hopkins, who died just three years later of yellow fever. Eliza then remarried another actor, David Poe, with whom she had three children before he abandoned her to seek his own fortune

²⁹ Dormon, 87, 260; Ludlow, 108, 114, 119, 139, 184, 340, 403, 440.

³⁰ Bailey, 70; Ludlow, 502; Sol Smith, *Theatrical Management in the West and South for Thirty Years* (New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, 1868), 24, 49, 79-80, 89, 123, 136.

unencumbered by family obligations. Though Eliza and David had moved on to work in Boston and New York, Eliza returned to Virginia after her husband left her. When she fell ill during the fall of 1811, the southern connections that she had previously established proved indispensable, for kind-hearted friends brought the destitute woman food and took in her children after she died on December 8. Eliza Arnold Poe played her first full-length role, Little Pickle, in a farce called *The Spoiled Child* (n.d.) to great acclaim throughout her career, but she also expanded her offerings to include more complex characters such as Ophelia in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* and Cordelia in the early modern playwright's *King Lear* (1604-5).³¹

Like Eliza Arnold Poe, Charlotte Barnes Conner began her stage career as a young girl. The Barneses included Shakespearean plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth* (1606), and *The Merchant of Venice* in their repertory, but they also performed popular comedies such as *The School for Scandal* and melodramatic favorites such as *The Hunchback*. In addition, the Barnes family became known for staging two dramas that Charlotte wrote in 1837, *Octavia Brigaldi* and *Lafitte*. The first follows the events of a Kentucky revenge killing that occurred in 1825, but Charlotte transferred the events to fifteenth-century Italy. The second traced the roguish career of pirate Jean Lafitte, who plundered ships in the Caribbean and then sold their cargoes on the black market in New Orleans. Crescent City residents particularly enjoyed *Lafitte*, as did nearby Mobile residents. Charlotte married actor Edmund S. Conner in 1847 and the two acted together in California and New York until her sudden death at the age of forty-five in 1863.³²

³¹ Gedde Smith, *The Brief Career of Eliza Poe* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1988), 15-20, 59, 119, 127-29, 134-46.

³² Bailey, 208, 262-63; Mary Morgan Duggar, "The Theatre in Mobile: 1822-1860" (master's thesis, The University of Alabama, 1941), 97-98; Ludlow, 519, 541-42; Walter J. Meserve, *An Outline*

Eliza Logan Wood too grew up traveling with a parent who acted. Her father, Cornelius Logan, a comic actor and minor playwright from Baltimore, encouraged all five of his daughters to cultivate theatrical careers, but initially only Eliza followed his example. Her younger sister Olive later took up acting in addition to newspaper reporting and public speaking, but Eliza first attracted the most attention for her stage talent. She commanded a wide repertory that spanned over thirty roles, ranging from her favorite melodramatic part of Evadne in Sheil's play by the same title to tragic characters such as Cordelia in *King Lear*. She also enjoyed playing in Samuel Yates Levy's *The Italian Bride*, a play written especially for her in 1856. Logan climbed to star status in William Crisp's Georgia and Tennessee theaters, and she enjoyed great popularity with Ludlow and Smith's New Orleans, Mobile, and St. Louis audiences as well. Eliza Logan married actor and manager George Wood in 1854 and helped him run Woods' Theatre in St. Louis for the next five years. The couple then moved to New York, where they ran the Broadway Theatre for the next decade. There, Eliza helped her sister Olive get her start in 1864.³³

Jane Placide, a leading stock lady in New Orleans, also came to the profession through her family connections. Her father, Alexandre Placide, a French actor, dancer, acrobat, and pantomime artist, immigrated to America in 1791. For two years, he played in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston, but he finally settled in Charleston, South

History of American Drama (New York: Feedback Theatrebooks & Prospero Press, 1994), 183-84; Sol Smith, 109.

³³ Margaret Blackburn, "The Stage in St. Louis, Missouri After 1850" (master's thesis, The State University of Iowa, 1927), Appendix C; Elvena Marion Green, "Theatre and Other Entertainments in Savannah Georgia from 1810 to 1865" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 1971), 78; Ludlow, 583, 730; Olive Logan, *Before the Footlights and Behind the Scenes: A Book About Show Business in All Its Branches* (Philadelphia: Parmalee & Company, 1870), 22-3; Meserve, *Heralds*, 71, 90; Print of Eliza Logan, *Miss Eliza Logan as Cordelia* (New York: Johnson, Fry & Co., 1859), in the possession of the author; J. Robert Wills, "The Riddle of Olive Logan" (Ph.D. diss., Case Western Reserve University, 1971), 4, 21-28, 52; Yeomans, 52, 124-27, 139-40.

Carolina, where he procured a position with the French theater. When the French and English theaters joined forces to give a benefit for the victims of Charleston's great fire in June 1796, he met Charlotte Wrihten, an English actress who was playing in Charleston with her mother and sister. The couple fell in love and married two months later. Soon thereafter, Alexandre joined Charlotte as a member of the city's English theater, where he worked hard to move up in the company's hierarchy. To fit in better with his colleagues, he adopted the English spelling for his first name, Alexander, and he began learning English dramatic roles. By 1800, he had risen to become manager of the theater, a position he held until his death in 1812. During their sixteen-year marriage, Alexander and Charlotte had five children; Jane was their third, born in 1804.³⁴

Like her siblings, Jane received theatrical training as a child, but she debuted in 1820 with Charles Gilfert's Virginia Company in John Tobin's *The Honey Moon*, an appropriation of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* (1592) when she was sixteen. Soon afterwards, she accepted a position with James Caldwell's American Company in New Orleans. The accolades that followed Placide's debut, combined with an introduction provided by her elder sister, Caroline Placide Waring, brought her to Caldwell's attention. She began work in the fall of 1821, and within a few seasons, Placide had won the steadfast admiration of English-speaking New Orleans playgoers for her mastery of a broad spectrum of roles. She played Shakespearean parts such as Ophelia, Desdemona, the Queen in *Richard the Third*, Juliet, and Lady Macbeth. She also acted comic Restoration parts such as Mrs. Candour in *The School for Scandal* and emotional melodramatic parts such as Mrs. Haller in Benjamin Thompson's translation of Augustus

³⁴ Deborah I. Bloodworth, "Alexandre Placide: His Impact on American Theatre from 1791 to 1812" (master's thesis, University of North Carolina, 1977), 27-28, 45-52, 77-81.

von Kotzebue's *The Stranger* (1798). Before her early death in 1835, Placide played across from famous star performers ranging from Thomas Abthorpe Cooper and Junius Brutus Booth to Edwin Forrest.³⁵

Eliza Riddle Field and Mary Vos Stewart, leading ladies on the Mobile stage during the 1830s, also started their stage careers as young girls. William and Mary Riddle, Eliza's parents, worked first as stock actors for the Drake Company in its infancy and then for Noah Ludlow when he and his family managed their own small company in the early 1820s. Eliza acted bit parts as a child and began to take on more solid roles as she matured. In 1835, Ludlow and Smith hired her as their leading lady for their first joint season in Mobile and St. Louis. She opened as Julia in *The Hunchback*, and she also starred as Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*. Mariana in Knowles's *The Wife* (1833), an appropriation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, and Julia in *The Honey Moon* also attained solid appeal for her with spectators in both cities. In 1837, she married a fellow actor, Joseph M. Field, who became a minor playwright and helped Ludlow and Smith with some of their managerial tasks in the 1850s.³⁶ Mary Vos Stewart's parents started working for the Drake company as well, but their artistic skills first brought them to the theater. Samuel Drake hired John Vos, a house painter, to design sets in 1815. Mrs. Vos, a milliner, would make costumes for the troupe. Within a few years, the couple had transferred their talents to acting, and their small daughter quickly joined them in their profession. The Voses left the Drake Company and went to work for Noah Ludlow in

³⁵ Patricia L. Burroughs, "The Theatrical Career of Jane Placide in New Orleans" (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1970), 1-6, 27, 34, 68, 95-7, 104; Paul Smith Hostetler, "James H. Caldwell: Theatre Manager" (Ph.D. diss., Louisiana State University, 1964), 49, 123; Ludlow, 216-17, 226; Beverly B. Lyle, "A Detailed Survey of the New Orleans Theatre from 1800 to 1825" (master's thesis, Louisiana State University, 1938), 37, 41-3, 56; Smither, 39-44; Warren, "They Were Always Doing Shakespeare," 6.

³⁶ Bailey, 73, 177; Dormon, 124n, 197, 224; Duggar, 59; Ludlow, 265-67, 272, 440-41, 448, 455, 470, 480-82, 491-93, 619; Meserve, *Heralds*, 167; Sol Smith, 29, 116-123, 131; Warren, "They Were Always Doing Shakespeare," 6.

1819, and Mary Vos Stuart worked for him and Sol Smith throughout the rest of the decade and during the 1830s as well. She played in their stock company and also played occasional lead roles in popular melodramas such as *The Hunchback* and *The Stranger*.³⁷

Like the Riddles and Voses, William Henry and Eliza Crisp trained their children for the stage, but as experienced English actors, the Crisps started their American careers performing at the Park Theatre and Niblo's Garden in New York, as well as at William Burton's Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia. They came south in 1853 and established a Georgia circuit that included Savannah, Augusta, and Columbus. Within four years, they had also opened theaters in Nashville and Memphis. When Eliza Crisp made her New York debut in June of 1845, she played Pauline in Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton's melodrama *The Lady of Lyons* (1838). She acted leading roles in similar popular selections such as *The Wife*, *The Stranger*, *The Hunchback*, and *The Honey Moon*, but primary roles in Shakespearean plays such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *King Lear*, *Richard the Third*, *Hamlet*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Taming of the Shrew* also constituted frequent fare. William Henry Crisp played male leads across from his wife, and the two cast their sons, William Henry, Jr. and Charles Frederick, in supporting roles. As their daughters, Cecilia and Jessie, grew, they too joined their parents on stage.³⁸

Because the Crisps defied the trend amongst southern theater managers to flee the region after the outbreak of the war, they resembled other war-torn families in the region.

³⁷ Bailey, 17, 449; Clay, 8; Dietz, 16; Dormon, 83; Duggar, 6, 31; Ludlow, 184, 270, 287, 304, 423, 470, 509.

³⁸ Dormon, 168-171, 209-213; Durham, 53-55; Helen Barker Keller, "The History of the Theater in Columbus, Georgia from 1828 to 1865" (master's thesis, The University of Georgia, 1957), 122-23; Yeomans, 1-7, 40-42, 60-61, 68, 100-101, 106-7, 122-28, 131-41. Yeomans notes that William Henry Crisp, Jr. enjoyed a long and successful career on the New York and Boston stages. He died in April, 1882. Cecilia Crisp and Jessie Crisp Clarke played with the family during and after the Civil War in the South and Southwest. Charles Frederick Crisp became a lawyer in Georgia and served as Speaker of the House of Representatives in President Cleveland's administration. See p. 6.

William Henry felt duty bound to contribute to the war effort if he were going to remain in the South, and he joined the Confederate Army, serving as a captain for the first year of the war. During his absence, Eliza managed the company by herself. William Henry received an honorable discharge when he was wounded, and he resumed his managerial position in 1862. According to the *Mobile Advertiser and Patriot*, Crisp served “like a true patriot and a Southern man . . . [who] volunteered his services in defense of our homes and institutions.”³⁹ His willingness to fight for the South clearly gained this transplanted Englishman full acceptance in the region and assured him and his troupe of a welcome reception wherever they played for the duration of the war.

Though the Crisps’ daughters had performed some prior to the war, neither had cultivated a great deal of stage experience. Jessie had concentrated on musical skills, and she sometimes sang and danced between play acts. Cecilia had studied drama with her parents and debuted in Dion Boucicault’s *Old Heads and Young Hearts* (1844) when the family was playing in New Orleans during the fall of 1856, but she never became a regular company member. After the fighting began, however, the Crisps needed the two young women to play supporting roles that had previously been filled by professional actresses, who would no longer perform in the South. Although Jessie continued to sing and dance, she also studied acting, and she joined the troupe along with Cecilia in March 1862 while the group was playing at the Richmond Varieties Theatre. By the end of the summer, the two sisters had made themselves indispensable to the company and had established solid reputations in Atlanta and Mobile. By the end of the war, Cecilia and Jessie were playing lead roles along with their mother.⁴⁰

³⁹ “Theatrical,” *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, 4 October, 1862.

⁴⁰ Fife, 155-56, 164-68, 194; Keller, 123; Yeomans, 96.

As minor performers who had stayed in the South began to develop their skills, the Crisps took advantage of their growing renown to hire them on as stars with their company as well. Eloise Bridges, a stock actress living in New Orleans at the start of the war, played with the Crisps during 1862, although she went to work for E. R. Dalton in Savannah the following year and moved in 1864 to Richmond, where she worked for R. D'Orsey Ogden. Originally from Brooklyn, New York, Bridges debuted in 1854 at Burton's Chambers Street Theatre as Mariana in Knowles's *The Wife*. William E. Burton did not hire stars and maintained a low overhead, thereby keeping ticket prices low, and he scheduled diverse offerings to appeal to many playgoers.⁴¹ Thus, Bridges acquired a broad repertory that served her well when she came south to New Orleans and joined David Bidwell's company at the Academy of Music after her marriage to local merchant C. Erwin in 1857.

Though Bidwell kept his theater open intermittently throughout the war, Bridges apparently desired more stable work, for she hired on with the Crisps when they leased the Mobile Theatre in the fall of 1862. While her play rotation consisted of the standard antebellum selections, including *The Wife*, *Evadne*, *The Hunchback*, *The Lady of Lyons*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Macbeth*, and *Romeo and Juliet*, she also wrote an original play, *Our Cause; or, The Female Rebel*, which the Crisp troupe performed several times for Mobile audiences in October. No extant copies remain of Bridges' composition, but the title implies that the play was a southern nationalist drama meant to excite the passions of its Confederate viewers. Since the Crisp troupe repeated the selection twice and Bridges used *Our Cause* again for a benefit performance on December 2, 1864, in Wilmington, North Carolina, the drama seems to have been a success. Historian Drew

⁴¹ Durham, 134.

Gilpin Faust notes that cultural products such as music and literary periodicals helped incite and instill Confederate nationalism, and dramas surely joined in the creation of the region's ideology. Indeed, a small, though very prolific, group of playwrights helped reproduce Confederate doctrine throughout the Civil War. These included Richmond residents John Hill Hewitt and James Dabney McCabe, Charlestonian D. Ottolengui, and a New Orleanian, John Davis. Eloise Bridges stands out as one of the few women who undertook playwriting during the war years. A play entitled *The Soldier's Wife* written anonymously by "A Lady of Atlanta" to raise money for the city's hospital fund in 1862 also exists, but Bridges retains a distinction as the only named female author.⁴²

Ida Vernon also starred for the Crisps, although she did not join the troupe until March of 1863, when the group was playing in Mobile. Born in the South to an English army officer and his French wife, Vernon had joined John Ford's stock company at the Richmond Theatre in 1860 and stayed on through 1861. In 1862, encouraged by the consistent public praise she received, Vernon decided to try her luck as a traveling star. She headed for Montgomery, Alabama, where the *Daily Mail* sang her praises as an "accomplished and beautiful tragedienne."⁴³ Her repertory included *The Lady of Lyons*, *The Stranger*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and two plays enacting native American identity, John Augustus Stone's *Metamora* (1829), and George Washington Parke Custis's *Pocahontas* (1830). Vernon then traveled from Montgomery to Mobile to meet the Crisps. She spent the last year of the war playing in Wilmington, North Carolina, where she defied southern

⁴² Drew Gilpin Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism: Ideology and Identity in the Civil War South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 7-19; Fife, 101, 109, 194-95, 222-23, 289, 292, 330-39, 364-65, 415, 435-6, 440; Kendall, 486-87; Charles S. Watson, *The History of Southern Drama* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1997), 64-84.

⁴³ Fife, 211.

female stereotypes by running the Union blockade to reach the city. After the fighting, she found success with New York's Union Square Theatre Stock Company.⁴⁴

The Crisps also hired Eliza Wren in 1862, but her sister, Ella found greater renown as a star actress during the Civil War. Members of an English acting family who came to America in 1847, the Wren daughters and their brother Oliver, came south when Ella married a Richmond merchant, F. P. Redford in 1860. The three became important performers during the war, while their five siblings remained in New York state and sided with the Union. Ella starred in Montgomery, Mobile, Augusta, Savannah, Wilmington, and Richmond during the war. Known as "the Mockingbird of the South" for her beautiful singing voice, she also played a typical round of antebellum dramatic favorites, including *The Hunchback*, *The Wife*, *Evadne*, *Hamlet*, *Richard the Third*, and *Metamora*. In addition, she performed in *The Italian Bride*, the drama that Samuel Yates Levy wrote for Eliza Logan.⁴⁵

The Crisps were not the only family that exploited the dearth of entertainment throughout the war years. New England actor Alfred Waldron found himself waylaid in Charleston at the start of the war, and he made the best of the situation by showcasing his six children on the city's stage until the theater burned in December 1861. The three daughters, Laura, Fanny, and Julia, so endeared themselves to their spectators and to the press that the family became known as "the little Queen Sisters," even though the three boys, Alfred, Andrew, and Arthur also acted.⁴⁶ While the Waldrons debuted in *The Hunchback* on June 6, 1861, the troupe became particularly well known for its performances of southern nationalist drama. Their signature play, *The Vigilance*

⁴⁴ Durham, 491-99; Fife, 67, 141n, 205-6, 215-220, 399-401, 420, 450.

⁴⁵ Fife, 138-39, 151, 211, 218, 307, 387, 398, 431.

⁴⁶ "The Little Thespians," *Charleston Daily Courier*, 6 June, 1861.

Committee (1861), by D. Ottolengui, described the events leading up to secession and concluded with a rendition of the song “Dixie,” which the *Charleston Daily Courier* said provided “a new and appropriate vision by way of epilogue” for the region.⁴⁷

After the Charleston theater fire, the Waldrons moved to Augusta, which became their base as they cultivated an east-west circuit stretching from Savannah to Macon to Montgomery. They also made occasional trips north to Richmond, where they met manager and playwright John Hill Hewitt, who later joined them in the management of the Augusta Concert Hall and wrote many of his Confederate dramas for the troupe. His *The Scouts, or, the Plains of Manassas* (1861) drew high praise in the fall of 1862 from the Augusta press, while his spy drama, *The Vivandiere* (1863) and his satire, *King Linkum the First* (1863) garnered similar accolades the following year. Savannah audiences also enjoyed the productions. In the summer of 1863, Ottolengui wrote another play for the Waldrons entitled *The Rebel Spy*, and they added two more Hewitt dramas, *The Marquis in Petticoats* and *The Veteran*. While the Queen Sisters enjoyed success during the height of the war, Alfred Waldron worried for the safety of his family as southern defeat loomed. In April of 1865, he and his children braved the Savannah blockade, hoping to make their way to Canada.⁴⁸

After the Civil War, resident stock companies that relied on family connections for their sustenance steadily declined as traveling companies took their place throughout the 1870s. Called combination companies because they brought the entire cast for a show, not just the principal stars, these groups had little need for local actors and actresses. Theater historians Oscar Brockett and Franklin Hildy explain that combination

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Fife, 88-95, 122-23, 139, 225-27, 233, 239, 294, 394; Stanley Hoole, “Charleston Theatricals During the Tragic Decade, 1860-1869,” *The Journal of Southern History* 11.4 (1945): 538-547.

companies used New York as a common base, and throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, their ownership consolidated into fewer and fewer hands. This movement culminated in 1896 when six men joined forces to create “The Syndicate,” a monopoly that controlled theater bookings throughout the United States.⁴⁹ With the demise of family-run local theater companies, national and international actresses with famous reputations gradually superseded the women who had made significant names for themselves within the region during the first two-thirds of the century.

The family connections that brought women to the southern stage before and during the Civil War illustrate the profound importance of kinship relations in shaping identity. As historians Cathy Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher explain, identity derives from both individual and collective experience; hence, southern acting families molded femininity by prescribing certain roles for the women and girls in their midst.⁵⁰ Kin thereby operated as one of the multiple cultural, social, and political forces that gender theorist Judith Butler says constructs identity. Butler explains that children and adults absorb—and sometimes reject—expectations for gendered behavior placed upon them by family, teachers, religious leaders, and government officials. In turn, people stage gender through performative actions, those repeated daily mannerisms and ritual gestures that produce the illusion of a stable, internal core of identity.⁵¹ Actresses who worked in the nineteenth-century southern theater occupied an unusual position, since they not only enacted gender in their daily lives but also on stage. They lived in relationship to other family members and played important roles within their kinship networks, but their stage

⁴⁹ Brockett and Hildy, 405, 455.

⁵⁰ Cathy N. Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher, introduction to *No More Separate Spheres!* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 2.

⁵¹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 19-20, 173-79.

presence allowed them to depart from the traditional expectations that bound many other women in the region. Indeed, as working women who earned their keep, actresses constituted a small, though consequential and diverse, group of women who worked for a living and wrought significant social and cultural change through their participation in the workplace.⁵²

Acting Urban

Most women who worked for a living in the antebellum South found employment in the region's urban areas, and this certainly proved true for actresses as well. Where people congregated, they desired entertainment, and those with the capital and desire financed theaters to meet that desire. The 1752 *Virginia Gazette* dispatch, which failed to mention Sarah Hallam, illustrates that appetite for drama in one of the South's earliest cities. Indeed, Williamsburg became the site of America's very first theater when William Levingston built a playhouse there in 1716.⁵³ When the Hallams performed for Governor Dinwiddie and the Cherokee delegation in 1752, however, they played in a brand new theater, built by money raised through public subscription prior to their arrival.⁵⁴ With Lewis Hallam's expertise in entertainment, the governor clearly felt comfortable calling on the theater manager to oversee the firework display that dominated Palace Green following King George's birthday ball as well. The Governor included the Cherokee visitors as honored guests at the ball and staged the *Othello* performance in their honor, for according to the dispatch writer, the Indians had come to initiate trade. The colonists therefore put on the best entertainment that their locale had to offer in hopes of securing a lucrative agreement. The anecdote illustrates that place

⁵² Delfino and Gillespie, 1-14.

⁵³ Brockett and Hildy, 262.

⁵⁴ Dormon, 8.

produces performance. As performance theorist Joseph Roach shows, however, performance also produces place, for performative acts, both improvisational and scripted, allow people to imagine and define themselves, their communities, and the sites that house them.⁵⁵

When the Cherokees made themselves a part of the Hallams' performance, then, *Othello* suddenly became a play about the developing relationship between the native Americans and the newly arrived white colonists. Indeed, the performance seemed to set the tone for any negotiations that took place between the two groups. The Cherokees' "great Surprise" at the staged violence endowed them with a childlike stature for their English hosts that carried over into subsequent treatment, for the dispatch writer noted with a patronizing tone that "They were dismissed with a handsome Present of fine Cloaths, Arms, and Amunition" Nevertheless, the Cherokees turned the place of their dismissal into what Roland Barthes has called a "ludic space," or a public place that spawned a carnivalesque performance and allowed them to express their own values of peace in the midst of the dominant culture's celebration of violence.⁵⁶ Of course, the Hallams used the same ludic space to promote their cultural values and ultimately to help define "the Place" that the English colonists had come to settle. As subsequent actors and actresses performed on the South's antebellum and Civil War stages, they continued to define and construct an identity for themselves and their region.

Southern stage performers joined a long tradition of self-definition, for historian Richard Gray says that southerners had been creating their region through writing since its founding. Early colonists crafted a local identity for the South as either home to

⁵⁵ Roach, 144-52.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Roach on p. 28.

England's old landed gentry or as a site for the reestablishment of the declining English yeomanry. As northern industrial centers grew throughout the eighteenth century and as a strong federal government emerged, the South's view of itself as a unique rural enclave strengthened.⁵⁷ John Grammer agrees that early writings constructed the South's image, but he says that the region emerged in the eighteenth century as a place of pastoral republicanism, a peaceful, rural land inhabited by independent and stalwart property owners.⁵⁸ Both interpretations paint a picture of a place with a self-consciously imagined identity that planted seeds of nationalism, which sprouted and grew full-blown into war by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Neither view takes into consideration the impact of the cities that grew up throughout the South and that served as thriving commercial centers, which provided places to export the region's agricultural products and to purchase imports not made in the area. Historian Richard Wade observes that the urban centers of the South eventually formed an "irregular perimeter" around the region and served as "enclaves of cosmopolitan life in a generally agricultural society."⁵⁹ These cities, consisting of Charleston, Savannah, Richmond, Baltimore, Louisville, St. Louis, New Orleans, and Mobile, contained only a small portion of the South's population, but their influence as hubs of business was far reaching. They made an important impact on the South's identity by tying the region in to larger national and international economies, thereby making the area less isolated and perhaps less pastoral than many early southern writers

⁵⁷ Richard Gray, *Writing the South: Ideas of an American Region* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1997), 1-40.

⁵⁸ John Grammer, *Pastoral and Politics in the Old South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 1996), 1-10.

⁵⁹ Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 4.

indicated. In his analysis of the Confederacy, Emory Thomas provides more insight into the construction of southern identity when he points to southerners' widely held belief in state's rights and their commitment to racial slavery.⁶⁰ Richard Wade reveals that city dwellers as well as large planters owned slaves and helped fuel that belief in human bondage. Drew Gilpin Faust adds that evangelical religion and nationalistic discourse also molded southern identity and fanned the fires of war. She too shows that these phenomenon were not limited to a rural or urban proximity.⁶¹ These varied views all affirm that the nineteenth-century South was what Benedict Anderson would call an imagined community created through the mental fabrications of its members. Buttressed through religion, family dynasties, and cultural products such as poetry, prose, fiction, music, and drama, imagined communities are illusions that encourage belief in the unity of place and people.⁶²

The cities that made up what Richard Wade calls the South's "urban perimeter" were also imagined communities.⁶³ As permanent theaters established themselves throughout the South, they followed this perimeter and turned these cities into important cultural centers. This urban milieu molded the lives of actresses such as Sarah Hallam, but actresses like her in turn shaped the urban backdrop against which they lived and worked. The Hallam Company's arrival in Williamsburg during the summer of 1752 not only marked the beginning of professional theater in America, then, their coming also heralded the development of a rich cultural life in the South's growing cities.

⁶⁰ Emory Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1971), 1-22.

⁶¹ Faust, 22-40.

⁶² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 1-9; 141.

⁶³ Wade, 3.

The Hallams found that Virginia's colonial capital was home to a public with the means and desire to attend their plays, and the English thespians ended up playing an eleven-month engagement before moving on to try their luck in New York and Philadelphia. Over the next twenty-four years, however, the Hallams returned regularly to perform in Williamsburg.⁶⁴ Indeed, the Virginia city became their base for expanding into larger nearby southern cities, such as Charleston and Baltimore. Situated on a peninsula between the James and York Rivers, Williamsburg enjoyed eight decades of prosperity after its founding in 1699 due to its status as a seat of provincial government. Though the town did not serve as a local distribution center for goods like nearby Richmond, it was large enough to hold bi-weekly markets and annual fairs. Indeed, until the state moved the capital to Richmond in 1779, Williamsburg enjoyed a flourishing economy and a vibrant cultural scene that included an active theater.⁶⁵

When Sarah Hallam and David Douglass returned to America with their newly reorganized acting troupe in 1758, then, they made frequent treks to Williamsburg, though they initially resumed performing in New York and Philadelphia. From the Virginia capital, they traveled down to Charleston and up to Baltimore as well as to nearby Norfolk, Suffolk, Fredericksburg, and Petersburg, Virginia. While in Williamsburg, the troupe used the playhouse that had been built before their visit, but in the other cities, they often had to fit up temporary structures as theaters.⁶⁶

Building permanent playhouses for his troupe to use in their travels therefore became a priority for David Douglass. He devoted himself to this cause and raised

⁶⁴ Brockett and Hildy, 262-63; Hornblow, 66-87.

⁶⁵ Bridenbaugh, 27-8; David R. Goldenfield, *Cotton Fields and Sky Scrapers: Southern City and Region* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1982), 16-17.

⁶⁶ Dormon, 8-15; Hornblow, 88-113.

money to build theaters in both the North and South. He opened Philadelphia's Southwark Theatre in 1766, and the following year, he built the John Street Theatre in New York. After cultivating a playgoing public in Charleston, South Carolina, over a ten-year period, Douglass opened the New Charleston Theatre in 1773. Charlestonians had briefly patronized a playhouse, which opened in 1736 for a few years, but the rise of religious fervor brought on by the second Great Awakening caused the theater to close for eighteen years. Douglass's arrival in 1763 was the first dramatic entertainment the Queen City residents had enjoyed in nearly two decades.⁶⁷

Douglass did not have the opportunity to relish his new theater for long, however, since the 1774 ban on theatricals halted most dramatic activity throughout the colonies until the Revolutionary period came to an end. After the war, though, Douglass's New Charleston Theatre attracted a series of capable theater managers, including Thomas Wade West and John Bignall, who turned the city of 16,000 people into the fourth most important theatrical center of the country by the mid 1790s.⁶⁸ Much of the vigor that the city's theater experienced during this time came with two groups of French refugees. The first made their way to Charleston after the French Revolution, and the second came from Santo Domingo in the wake of a slave uprising there in 1793. One of the most important French players was Alexandre Placide, the dancer, acrobat, and pantomime artist, who had come to America in 1791 and performed with many major troupes before he became manager of Charleston's theatre from 1798 to 1812.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Brockett and Hildy, 263; Dormon, 6-9, 15-17; Hornblow, 146-47.

⁶⁸ Thomas P. Abernethy, *The South in the New Nation: 1789-1819* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1961), 13; Brockett and Hildy, 364; Dormon, 24.

⁶⁹ Deborah I. Bloodworth, 24; Brockett and Hildy, 364.

Though Charleston enjoyed a vital economy based on cotton and rice exports at the turn of the century and could support a theater for a sustained winter season, Placide soon recognized the benefits of taking his company to perform in another nearby city in the spring. The Hallams, West and Bignall, and another early troupe, the Murray-Kean Company had also established local circuits to increase the use of their players' time and talent, and southern theater managers would continue to follow this tactic throughout the nineteenth century. Placide first expanded operations in 1801 to nearby Savannah, which he and his troupe could reach by sea in a day. Savannah residents had been traveling to attend Charleston theatricals since the first playhouse opened there in 1736, so Placide knew that drama also had an appeal to Georgia's coastal residents. Furthermore, Savannah, like Charleston, sustained a thriving export business and could support an extended theatrical season. After expansion to Savannah proved a success, Placide added Augusta, Georgia, to his circuit in 1808. Every year, he traveled up the Savannah River to the Georgia capitol with his troupe for a two-week stay and then headed back to Charleston by stage coach at the end of the two-month foray. By the time the troupe returned home, Queen City playgoers eagerly awaited another season of theatrical entertainment.⁷⁰

Placide continued to provide dramatic fare for Charlestonians until his death in 1812. Before then, however, he added one more southern city to his circuit. This time, he ventured northward and tried his luck in Richmond, Virginia. After replacing Williamsburg as the state capitol, Richmond had quickly developed into the nation's

⁷⁰ Monique Davis Boyce, "The First Forty Years of the Augusta, Georgia Theatre" (master's thesis, University of Georgia, 1957), 54; Dormon, 26-29; Green, 9; J. Max Patrick, *Savannah's Pioneer Theater from Its Origins to 1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1953), 1-2.

tobacco center following the Revolution.⁷¹ By 1785, the city's population had reached two thousand people and boasted a public library in addition to an active theater, which Wade and Bignall had also begun when they were managing the Charleston Theatre in the 1790s. Thus, Placide found a public very receptive to the entertainment he brought each year. On December 26, 1811, however, disaster struck when the theater caught fire during the middle of a performance. Over six hundred people had gathered to see L. H. Girardin's translation of *The Father, or Family Feuds*, by French dramatist Diderot. Girardin, a Richmond resident, had written the play for Placide's benefit, and his local name recognition combined with the holiday spirit had drawn the exceptionally large crowd. The theater ignited between acts of a gothic pantomime afterpiece by Matthew Gregory Lewis entitled *Raymond and Agnes: The Traveler's Benighted, or The Bleeding Nun of Lindenberg* (n. d.). Seventy-two people died when the fire spread from a burning chandelier to some scenery stored over the stage to a new pine roof on the wooden building. The dead included Governor George William Smith as well as L. H. Girardin's wife and son.⁷²

The conflagration horrified the nation and traumatized the people of Richmond. After a mass funeral, however, citizens decided they would not let the disaster paralyze them. They raised money and built "a living memorial" that they called Monumental Church on the site of the fire.⁷³ The church, which would house an Episcopal congregation until 1965, was consecrated on May 14, 1814, but Placide's reputation was

⁷¹ Wade, 13.

⁷² I am grateful to Sarah Cooleen, Special Project Manager for the Historic Richmond Foundation, for talking with me by telephone on 14 February, 2005 about the Richmond Theatre fire. She provided the title and translator of the main play that the Placide Company were staging as well as the pantomime afterpiece title. She also gave valuable information on the construction of Monumental Church. See also Dormon, 28-9.

⁷³ Justin Gunther, "National Significance and History of Monumental Church," Historic Richmond Foundation, <http://www.historicrichmond.com/monumentalhistory.html> (accessed 19 February, 2005).

ruined, his finances were wrecked, and his spirit crushed. He died less than a year later. His wife, Charlotte, tried to carry on Placide's managerial duties after his death but found the burden too great. Her sons Henry and Thomas and her daughter Jane found great success on the southern stage, whereas her daughter Caroline married a prosperous actor, William Rufus Blake. Amongst the four of them, they provided for their mother's support in her elderly years.⁷⁴

After Charlotte Placide's failed try at management, the Charleston Theater closed for three years, before the British-born actor-manager, Joseph George Holman arrived in 1815 to reactivate dramatic activity and resurrect the Savannah and Virginia circuits. Holman had debuted at London's Covent Garden and played in the stock company at New York's Park Theatre, two of the world's premier theaters at the time. Holman rejuvenated theatrical entertainment in Charleston, Savannah, and Richmond, and in the summer of 1816, he traveled to England to recruit actors, returning with James Caldwell, who James Dormon describes as "a strikingly handsome man, with dark curly hair, expressive eyes, and a fine physique."⁷⁵ The good-looking Caldwell quickly became a favorite with audiences on Holman's circuit, and his soaring popularity led the actor to ask for more pay in 1817. Holman reluctantly held out against the arrogant young man's demands and fired him instead. Incensed playgoers rioted and retracted their patronage. Holman had to relinquish his position, while Caldwell set out to seek his fortune, first in Virginia and then in Louisiana, where he established the English-speaking theater in New Orleans and nearby towns of Natchez and Memphis.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Burroughs, 14-23; Dormon, 22-3, 28-9; Durham, 152-56; Ludlow, 226.

⁷⁵ Dormon, 33.

⁷⁶ Julia Curtis, "A Summary of the Charleston Theatre Riot of 1817" *Theatre Symposium 2* (1994): 2-5; Dormon, 33, 76-101.

Holman's brother-in-law, Charles Gilfert, assumed the manager's position after the Caldwell scandal, and Gilfert successfully held his post for the next six years. During that time, he continued the tradition of running a circuit amongst Charleston, Savannah, and Augusta, as well as between Charleston and Richmond. In 1818, Gilfert oversaw the building of a permanent theater in Savannah on Chippewa Square, and he was involved in the construction of the new Richmond Theatre in 1819. This playhouse replaced the one that had burned in 1811. Drama had been slow to rebound after the fire due to anti-theatrical blame for the conflagration. Clergy as far away as England used the disaster to spread mistrust for the stage. The Reverend Samuel Miller of New York City's First Presbyterian Church insisted that the fire "was not a work of chance. A righteous God has done it . . . Theatrical entertainments are criminal in their nature and mischievous in their effects."⁷⁷ Despite such polemics, however, Gilfert got a new Richmond theater up and running and attracted audiences in good numbers.

Notwithstanding good houses in all of his theaters, Gilfert eventually ran into financial difficulties and sought to remedy his monetary woes by adding short engagements in small towns such as Norfolk and Lynchburg. He also began to book star actors and actresses such as Henry Wallack, Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, Junius Brutus Booth, Edmund Kean, and Clara Fisher in hopes of boosting attendance and raising ticket prices. Gilfert's financial straits did not improve, however, and by 1823, he had to give up his management of both the Charleston and Richmond Theatres. In 1827, he followed suit and relinquished his duties in Savannah.⁷⁸ In addition to Gilfert's fast expansion, the manager faced operating in an increasingly depressed economy beset by financial panics.

⁷⁷ Gunther, "National Significance and History of Monumental Church."

⁷⁸ Boyce, 22; Dormon, 39, 40-46; Green, 10-14.

Not enough circulating currency and planters feeling the effects of exploited land long used for single-crop agriculture contributed to the eastern seaboard's decline. In Savannah, Charleston, and Richmond, a string of managers struggled to succeed Gilfert as the economy worsened throughout the 1830s.⁷⁹

No one achieved permanent success in Savannah until 1837 when William Forbes arrived with a company of actors from New York and reestablished the historic circuit between the coastal city and its inland neighbor of Augusta. Forbes had debuted at New York's Bowery Theatre in 1833 and become leading tragedian at the more prestigious Park Theatre by 1835. The following year, he began appearing as a star at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theatre, and by the end of the season, he had decided to strike out on his own. Forbes recruited a solid company of actors and appeared alongside them in popular repertory selections. He also followed Gilfert's lead and brought in star performers to attract audiences. His strategies paid off, for the *Savannah Georgian* stated in January 1842 that the he was offering the best theater the city had seen "since the time of Gilfert."⁸⁰

Forbes succeeded in part because of his willingness to take a risk, but in the spring of 1840, he nearly lost everything, including his life, when he took his company into the midst of the Second Seminole War, which was raging in Florida, to play a two-week engagement in St. Augustine. On the way, a group of Seminoles ambushed the troupe, stole their costumes, and killed two of the actors. In the coming months, the

⁷⁹ Dormon, 127-28; Douglas C. North, *The Economic Growth of the United States, 1790-1860* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1961; reprint, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), 198-203; Charles S. Sydnor, *The Development of Southern Sectionalism, 1819-1848* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1948), 262-64; Harold D. Woodman, *King Cotton and His Retainers: Financing and Marketing the Cotton Crop of the South, 1800-1925*, (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968; reprint, Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 167-68.

⁸⁰ Dormon, 140-41; quotation on p. 141.

Indians donned the Forbes Company costumes at crucial moments in their conflicts with American Army soldiers. To the troops who witnessed them, the Indians in their captured costumes presented a ludicrous, though menacing sight, for the soldiers largely saw the Seminoles aping Shakespearean acting roles. To the Seminoles, however, their new clothes carried functional and aesthetic appeal, marking both rank and manhood.⁸¹

When Coacoochee, also known as Wild Cat, who had led the band that ambushed Forbes and his troupe surrendered to Army officials a year later, he wore a costume that John T. Sprague, a witness to the event, described as Hamlet's garb. Coacoochee wore "the nodding plumes of the haughty Dane," said Sprague, and beside him "modestly . . . walked a faithful friend wound up the simple garb of Horatio." Bringing up the rear was Richard the Third "judging from his royal purple and ermine, and the hideousness of a distorted, dark, and revengeful visage." All in all, said Sprague, parts of the stolen costumes "were wrapped about their persons in the most ludicrous and grotesque style."⁸²

The absurdity of that style came not from the Seminoles' ignorance of how a Shakespearean character should dress, but from the soldiers' misunderstanding of the Indians' use of the clothing. The costumes that had started out in Forbes's trunks had become spoils of war that the Seminoles could use to bolster their status in the midst of surrender, for the clothes gave them power by reminding their white enemies of their daring. The Indians had killed Americans on one of their most protected roads, they had

⁸¹ Robin O. Warren, "Hamlet Rides Among the Seminoles," *Southern Cultures* 7.4 (2001): 31-63.

⁸² John T. Sprague, *The Origin, Progress, and Conclusion of the Florida War* (New York: Appleton Company, 1848), 259. The P. K. Yonge Special Collections Library at The University of Florida houses a copy of this book; all references come from this edition. I am grateful to Curator James Cusick for bringing Sprague's book and many other sources pertinent to the Forbes ambush to my attention.

shown up several times wearing the dead American's clothes in the ensuing months, and here they were flaunting their feats by wearing the clothing at their last stand.⁸³

Though the ambush shook Forbes and his company, they buried their dead and then proceeded with their two-week season as scheduled. Their decision might have appeared unseemly, but having lost their props and costumes, they needed money more than ever. The citizens of St. Augustine did not seem to fault the troupe for its decision to go on with the show, for they filled the temporary theater, which had been fitted up for the actors in the Wharton Building, each evening of the engagement. While Forbes made the best of a grim experience, he and his remaining performers were no doubt glad to re-board the steamship *Florida*, which ran twice a week between Savannah and Picolata, a little town 18 miles west of St. Augustine on the St. John's River, and return home to Georgia when their two-week stay came to an end.⁸⁴

For the next two years, Forbes was no doubt content to run his circuit between Savannah and Augusta, but in December 1842, he decided once again to follow the lead of his predecessor and add Charleston to his managerial load. Ever the astute businessman, Forbes had watched carefully as Charlestonians welcomed the Viennese dancer Fanny Elssler and the American actor Edwin Forrest under the brief management of William Abbott in 1840, and he realized that the economy of the once prosperous city, which now boasted a population of 40,000 was beginning to rebound. When Forbes added Charleston to his rounds, he continued his practice of scheduling popular repertory selections and engaging fine star performers, such as William Charles Macready and

⁸³ Warren, "Hamlet," 58.

⁸⁴ Cécile-Marie Sastre, "Picolata on the St. Johns: A Preliminary Study," *El Escribano: The St. Augustine Journal of History* 32 (1995): 44-48; "Theatre," *St. Augustine News*, 29 May, 1840; "The Indians Again," *St. Augustine News*, 29 May, 1840. In addition to these sources, I am grateful to Amanda Warren for locating the tiny port of Picolata and confirming the distance between there and St. Augustine.

Anna Cora Mowatt. Again, playgoers filled his houses year after year in all three of the cities that he served, but in the spring of 1847, he decided to give up his southern circuit and return to his native New York.⁸⁵ Theater historian Weldon Durham notes that “he may have been prophetic,” for the next five years in Charleston again saw a series of unsuccessful managers, and the theater was finally destroyed in a fire at the beginning of the Civil War.⁸⁶

Savannah had better luck than Charleston after Forbes’s departure. Though its population only just topped 15,000 in 1850, Georgia’s main coastal city enjoyed more prosperity than its much larger northern neighbor, and its inhabitants could afford to spend more on leisure activity such as theatrical outings. Savannah not only maintained its status as the state’s major port, but it also sat at the head of a direct railroad line, 190 miles in length, that ran inland to Macon. Thus, the city’s economy bustled with import and export traffic, and manufacturing also established a hefty presence in the growing commercial center.⁸⁷ When William and Eliza Crisp arrived in 1853 to manage the Savannah Theatre, then, they found a receptive playgoing public. The Crisps followed tradition and immediately added an annual stay in Augusta to their Savannah season. The following year, 1854, the couple decided to add another city to their theatrical circuit, but rather than going north to Charleston, they turned their sites inland to Columbus. Incorporated by the Georgia legislature in 1827, the little town became a way station on the interior trade route between Charleston and Mobile, but its location on the

⁸⁵ Dormon, 133-35.

⁸⁶ Durham, 157.

⁸⁷ Wade, 8-9.

Chattahoochee River gave the town a trade outlet as well. Columbus quickly grew in population and became increasingly important for the volume of cotton it processed.⁸⁸

In 1855, the Crisps expanded business even further and opened a small theater at Parr's Hall in Atlanta. James Dormon describes Parr's as a "three-flight walk-up of very little pretension," so the Crisps prevailed upon the town's 2,500 residents to raise money for better accommodations. By February, they had built the Atheneum Theatre, which the Crisp Company would lease on and off throughout the rest of the decade and at the beginning of the Civil War. In 1856, the family began operating a theater in New Orleans that they called Crisp's Gaieties. Ultimately they added Nashville and Memphis to this circuit and let the management of their Georgia theaters go to Henry Plunkett, who carried on the well-built empire successfully until the outbreak of the war. The Crisps, like Forbes and Gilfert before them, prospered in part by appealing to audiences, and they knew that visiting stars were an essential attraction to any stage. The Crisps did not try to schedule expensive national stars in their theaters, however. Instead, they booked talented regional performers, who endeared themselves with local audiences over a succession of appearances. For instance, actress Eliza Logan became a particular favorite of Savannah theatergoers from the very beginning of the Crisps' tenure there, and they subsequently booked her in every one of their theaters throughout the 1850s. This strategy would hold them in good stead as peripatetic managers during the Civil War, when they had to rely on the skills of a much beleaguered acting force.⁸⁹

While The Crisps prospered in Georgia during the 1850s, an old itinerant actor, John Sharp Potter was helping revive the theater in Richmond. After Charles Gilfert had

⁸⁸ William Osler Langley, "The Theatre in Columbus, Georgia from 1828 to 1878" (master's thesis, Alabama Polytechnic Institute, 1937), 1-5; Dormon, 169.

⁸⁹ Dormon, 168-171, 209-213; Green, 22.

given up his position as head of the Richmond Theatre in 1823, the city saw manager after manager try and fail to offer sustained dramatic entertainment in the new capital. Indeed, the poor economy kept Virginia playgoers from attending the theater in large numbers throughout the 1830s. A partial financial recovery began in the mid 1840s, and in 1844, Potter opened the Marshall Theatre in addition to a circuit that included Lynchburg, Petersburg, and Norfolk. He enjoyed a successful first year and repeated his venture for two more seasons, before his position was taken in 1847 by a more well-known actor and manager, William Rufus Blake, who had married the eldest Placide daughter, Caroline. Blake brought in famous stars such as Edwin Forrest, Charles and Ellen Kean, and William Charles Macready, but after several years he returned to New York to pursue his own acting career.

In 1851, the theater's shareholders hired James H. Taylor, who offered popular repertory selections performed by star and stock players in a newly renovated building, and the playgoing public responded enthusiastically. Like his southern counterpart, William Crisp, Taylor relied more on regional star talent, probably because he could not afford to pay the salaries that national stars commanded. Thus, he also featured performers such as Eliza Logan, who became a favorite with his Virginia audiences. Taylor managed the Richmond Theatre until 1856, when John Thomson Ford succeeded him. The economy had rebounded fully by then, theatergoers could pay higher ticket prices, and the able management of Taylor had left the theater in sound financial shape. Thus, Ford followed the example of Blake and theater managers in other major theatrical centers by engaging star performers of national and international renown. Charlotte

Cushman, Barry Sullivan, Joseph Jefferson, and Anna Cora Mowatt all acted in Richmond during the last five years of the decade.⁹⁰

As theaters grew in the urban centers of the eastern seaboard, so too did they develop along the upper periphery of the South in the major cities of Kentucky. Louisville grew up at the falls of the Ohio, where irregular shoals force a break in transportation, and the town became a point of exchange for inland traders who came to ship their goods on the river. In 1850, Louisville's population totaled 40,000, but that number increased to nearly 70,000 by 1860. A large mercantile business developed around the river trade, and the prosperous industry in turn supported a thriving theater culture, which the city shared with nearby Lexington and Frankfort. A small town of 4,326 in 1810, Lexington was also an important urban community, for it was home to Transylvania University and a range of industries including three nail factories, four paper mills, six powder mills, seven brick yards, five hat factories, five bag factories, and seven distilleries. Likewise, Frankfort served an important function as capital of the state. The three cities, located within fifty miles of one another, became the locus for a healthy theatrical circuit throughout the antebellum period.⁹¹

The Kentucky Theater got its start when Baltimore entrepreneurs Luke and Harriet Usher moved to Lexington in 1806. Initially, they started an umbrella factory, and two years later, they opened a brewery. Clearly believers in diversifying their assets, they soon had the idea to fit up the second floor of the brewery for use as a theater and featured their son, Noble Luke Usher and traveling amateur companies as the entertainment. Residents in the small manufacturing enclave of Lexington responded

⁹⁰ Dormon, 143-160.

⁹¹ Dormon, 52-3; Wade, 14-15.

well, and the Ushers' theater prospered. When Harriet died in 1814, however, Luke felt inadequate to the task of managing his growing business alone and sent his son to Albany, New York, to recruit a professional theater manager and a resident company of actors with the aid of John Barnard, who ran the city's Green Street Theatre. Noble Luke hired the Drake family, who in turn employed Noah Ludlow and Frances Denny. The group set out by carriage in 1815, and when they reached Pittsburgh, they traveled by boat down the Ohio River to Louisville. They disembarked at towns along the way and performed to help pay for the company's travel expenses.⁹²

Usher's choice proved fortuitous, as the Drake family dominated the theatrical scene in Kentucky for the next thirty years. In turn, Noah Ludlow went on to become one of the most powerful theater managers in the Mississippi River Valley between 1830 and 1850. The Drakes first used Lexington as the center of their operations, but they performed regularly in Louisville and Frankfurt and occasionally tacked on seasons in Nashville and St. Louis. Samuel Drake tried opening a theater for a few years in the early 1820s in Cincinnati but ultimately found that managing four stages was simply too much.⁹³ By 1830, the economy in Lexington had begun to decline, while Louisville flourished, so the Drakes focused most of their attention on the river town. The regular season expanded throughout the decade until the theater was open almost year round by 1840. When a fire burned the old theater down in 1843, however, Samuel Drake decided

⁹² Dietz, 9, 11-12; Dormon, 54-63; Helen Langworthy, "The Theatre in the Frontier Cities of Lexington, Kentucky and Cincinnati, Ohio: 1797-1835" (Ph.D. diss., The University of Iowa, 1952), 66-67, 78; Ludlow, 5-56; Meek, 29.

⁹³ Dietz, 10-11, 17, 34; Dormon, 63.

to retire from management and allow someone else to expend the time, energy and money necessary to rebuild.⁹⁴

The Louisville press mounted a campaign to erect a new theater, and within a year, citizens had raised the money. John Bates, who managed a theater in Cincinnati, agreed to run the new playhouse, which he named after himself. Regional star Julia Dean delivered the prize address from Douglas Jerrold's comedy, *Time Works Wonders* (1845) at the Grand Opening on February 9, 1846, and despite the arrival of two more theaters in the next five years, Bates's Theater remained the premiere place of entertainment in Louisville for the next twenty years. In 1851, Mozart Hall opened; though this building was primarily a concert hall, some plays occasionally took place there. A few months after opening, residents filled the hall to capacity when they flocked to see the famous Swedish singer Jenny Lind perform three consecutive concerts. Construction of the Masonic Temple in 1857 provided Louisville with its third entertainment hall. Also used for a combination of music concerts and plays, this building gave some competition to Bates's Theater but never seriously jeopardized its position as the city's primary playhouse.⁹⁵

Dramatic entertainment also developed apace with growth along the South's western perimeter, defined by the Mississippi River Valley and anchored by St. Louis to the north and New Orleans to the south. Located just below the confluence of the Mississippi and Missouri Rivers, St. Louis was founded in 1764 by French fur traders but quickly grew into one of the country's key trading centers with the advent of steam boat traffic in 1814. Population increased from 10,000 in 1820 to 78,000 in 1850 and topped

⁹⁴ Dormon, 202-3; Durham, 254-58; Meek, 38-39.

⁹⁵ Dietz, 40; Dormon, 204-5.

160,000 by 1860. Steam boat arrivals and departures doubled between 1840 and 1860, and the products that they carried came from all over the country. As the *Missouri Republican* observed in 1855, “The sugars of the South lay mingled with the cereals of the North, and the manufacturers of civilization contrasted with the peltries of the Indian.”⁹⁶ Like Louisville residents, the citizens of St. Louis also supported a robust theater business throughout the antebellum period.

The burgeoning commerce of St. Louis attracted newcomers from New Orleans, Canada, and Europe. Many of these settlers were highly educated and brought with them a taste for theatrical entertainment. Noah Ludlow, who had left the Drake Company in 1818, came to St. Louis with his new wife, Mary Maury Squires, his first partner, the itinerant actor John Vos, and a small company of actors in the winter of 1820. Ludlow and his troupe hoped to cash in on the local desire for dramatic fare. Soon after their arrival, however, Ludlow’s old employer, Samuel Drake also brought his group of performers to try their fortunes. The companies quickly found that St. Louis could not support two acting troupes and merged into one.⁹⁷

A depression in the early 1820s slowed theatrical activity in St. Louis and discouraged visits by professional actors of Ludlow and Drake’s caliber. By 1826, though, financial prosperity was returning, so James Caldwell, now an established theater manager in New Orleans, set out to add St. Louis to his Mississippi River circuit, which already included Natchez and Memphis. Despite Caldwell’s success in Louisiana and Tennessee, his experiment in Missouri was not particularly lucrative, in part because he scheduled seasons there for the summer when temperatures were unbearably hot.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Wade, 15.

⁹⁷ Dormon, 63-75; Ludlow, 180-90.

Nevertheless, he persisted in his venture until 1831, trying to ward off competition, which inevitably followed when he did finally withdraw.⁹⁸

In 1835, Noah Ludlow and his new partner, Sol Smith, opened a new playhouse in St. Louis. For the next twenty years, they staged two annual seasons, one running from late spring through mid-July and one in autumn. By breaking for the hottest months of the summer, they ensured spectators of a more comfortable theater experience, and the new managers prospered in their venture as Caldwell had not. The partners also ran a winter season in Mobile, and beginning in 1840, they presented a season during the cooler months in New Orleans.⁹⁹

By the time Ludlow and Smith retired in 1851, the population of St. Louis had exploded, in part from its position as a portal to the California Gold Rush, and the city housed three theaters, the Varieties Theatre, the People's Theatre, and the St. Louis Theatre. Built in 1852 to provide entertainment for the members of the St. Louis Dramatic Varieties Association, an elite society of upper-class citizens, rather than to hold plays for the general public, the board bought Ludlow and Smith's scenery, sets, props, and costumes in the summer of 1851. They hired Joseph M. Field, who had managed Ludlow and Smith's Mobile theater, to run the Varieties, but he resigned in 1855 after he was unable to turn a profit. Most St. Louisians found the theater's mission offensive and would not even attend functions that were open to the public. Thereafter, the society used the building primarily for grand balls and concerts. In contrast, the People's Theater, as the name suggests, catered to public interest. Also built in 1852, the People's Theater passed through several short-term managers before the competent actor

⁹⁸ Brockett and Hildy, 365-66; Dormon, 90-91.

⁹⁹ Durham, 306-12.

and manager George Woods assumed leadership in 1854. He hired an able stock company, scheduled popular repertory offerings, and booked famous star performers, including Charlotte Cushman, Eliza Logan (whom he later married), Maggie Mitchell, and John E. Owens. Finally, the St. Louis Theater was sold by John Bates of Cincinnati to Ben DeBar, who had also taken over Ludlow and Smith's St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans after their retirement. DeBar expanded the St. Louis facility, and he too hired an able stock company and brought in famous stars. DeBar was so successful that he drove Woods out of business in 1859. He weathered the Civil War and even enjoyed another prosperous decade in its aftermath.¹⁰⁰

To the south of St. Louis, in New Orleans, James Caldwell saw the potential for establishing a theater in the growing American Quarter, which was developing above Canal Street in the *Fauborg St. Marie* (St. Mary Suburb) between 1815 and 1820. Caldwell arrived at the height of this expansion in 1819, and over the next twelve years, the Crescent City continued to grow, becoming the largest city in the South by 1831. 30,000 people called the river port home in 1820, and that number had leaped to over 100,000 within a decade. Ships arrived at its docks daily with imports from Europe, Latin America, and Asia, and they took away exports that had been carried by steamer down the Mississippi: cotton, sugar, grain, and livestock.¹⁰¹ Most of the newcomers were English-speaking Americans who were attracted to Caldwell's new theater.

In 1819, New Orleans already housed two theaters that catered to its large French population, and Caldwell first arranged to lease one of these, the St. Philip Theatre, on nights when it was unoccupied. In his second season, he rented the Orleans Theatre. By

¹⁰⁰ Dormon, 198, 223-25; Durham, 246-254.

¹⁰¹ Dormon, 76-77; Durham, 29-31; Wade, 4-6.

1823, he had made enough money to build his own theater on Camp Street, which he named the New American Theatre. Caldwell followed a standard pattern for organizing his seasons that held him in good stead throughout his tenure as manager. He opened with a popular repertory favorite, usually a comedy, to excite the public, then he introduced his company members in different types of productions that showed off their varying talents. By mid-season, he began scheduling star performers, a tradition that he and Charles Gilfert of Virginia essentially inaugurated in nineteenth-century theater, and to close out the year's entertainment, he offered benefit performances for the principal company members and the visiting stars. Caldwell brought such well known performers as Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, Edwin Forrest, Junius Brutus Booth, Frances Denny Drake, Charlotte Cushman, and Ellen Tree to his theater. His strategy worked, and for the next decade, he maintained a monopoly on English-speaking theater in the Crescent City as well as upriver in Natchez and Memphis.¹⁰²

In 1833, Caldwell decided to retire from theatrical management and enjoy the profits from another business venture, his investment in the New Orleans Gas and Light Company, but after two years, he reversed his decision and returned to the dramatic world with a plan to build a grandiose theater on St. Charles Street. The spectacular new building opened in November 1835 to rave reviews from an admiring press and an awed public. Ten Corinthian columns flanked the 130-foot width of the new "Temple of Drama," which soared eighty-six feet above street level. Inside, rococo decoration adorned the house, which consisted of a pit, parquet, boxes, and gallery. The huge stage measured 90 by 96 feet, and behind it were twenty-six dressing rooms, two green rooms, a painting room, and several storage rooms for props. For all its beauty and grandeur, the

¹⁰² Durham, 29-33; Kendall, 22-4.

new “temple” did not draw as Caldwell had hoped, however, for he faced growing competition. He had rented his old theater on Camp Street to Richard Russell, who drew respectable crowds until Caldwell canceled his lease in 1839. In addition, the French theaters, and the traveling circuses, magicians, and acrobats that regularly visited town all attracted spectators. Rather than risk financial ruin, Caldwell responded by offering a diversity of entertainment, including melodrama and spectacle.¹⁰³

By 1839, Caldwell’s business in New Orleans had leveled out, and he turned his sights to expanding in nearby Mobile. A port city of 12,000 residents that handled the export of Alabama’s tremendous cotton crop as well as the importation of the commodities ordered by the state’s planters and farmers, Mobile could easily support a thriving seasonal theater.¹⁰⁴ Caldwell would take advantage of a series of disasters that partners Ludlow and Smith had recently experienced and try to drive the two men out of business. Prior to a disastrous summer brought about by a yellow fever epidemic and the loss of their building in a massive fire on October 7, 1839, which consumed one-third of the city, Ludlow and Smith’s theatrical operations were thriving in Mobile and St. Louis. Their success no doubt threatened Caldwell, who knew the advantage of controlling surrounding circuits. In addition, the two men had met each other while working for Caldwell’s company during the 1831 season, and their ambition to go into independent management themselves must have galled him. By 1840, Caldwell had arranged local financing for a new theater on Royal Street in Mobile, and the building opened on January 11, 1841.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ Dormon, 174-78.

¹⁰⁴ Wade, 8-9.

¹⁰⁵ Dormon, 185-86; Kendall, 186.

Caldwell's aggressive move ultimately backfired, for Ludlow and Smith saw that Mobile could not support two theaters and decided to open a theater in New Orleans. They secured financing and threw wide the doors of the New American Theater on November 10, 1840. This new facility attracted crowds in part due to its Grand Equestrian Circle, a ring at the front of the stage in which Ludlow and Smith could present popular equestrian dramas, such as Henry M. Milner's adaptation of Byron's *Mazeppa* (1831) or Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Timour the Tartar* (1811). A spectacular form of drama using live horses in its staging, equestrian plays drew crowds for their novelty. J. Purdy Brown, a famous equine manager, appeared frequently in the antebellum years throughout the South and West with his troupe, but Adah Isaacs Menken brought the genre to particular fame for her semi-nude breeches stagings of *Mazeppa* during the Civil War. Though she was from Louisiana, however, she never performed the drama that brought her such fame in the Crescent City.¹⁰⁶

Ludlow and Smith's New American Theatre immediately gave Caldwell substantial competition. Trying to maintain a lead on ticket sales, he engaged the famous ballerina, Fanny Elssler, who drew huge crowds to the St. Charles Theatre in 1841. He still lost money on the engagement, since she received a flat \$1,000 per night, and Caldwell barely covered his house expenses after he had paid her. In contrast, Ludlow and Smith enjoyed a \$20,000 profit the same year. The final blow to Caldwell came when a fire destroyed his beautiful new theater on March 13, 1842. Ludlow and Smith's New American also succumbed to a conflagration in July of the same year. Arsonists with anti-theatrical sentiments probably set both fires. Caldwell tried to regroup and lease another theater the following year, but he suffered a poor season and retired

¹⁰⁶ Dormon, 104, 187-89, 220n, 273; Durham, 307-8.

permanently in January 1843. Four days after Caldwell's farewell to the stage, Ludlow and Smith opened their New St. Charles Theatre. The two men had beat their rival in a bitter battle, and they would take his place as uncontested leaders of the theater in the Southeast for the next decade.¹⁰⁷

When Ben DeBar succeeded Ludlow and Smith as manager of their New St. Charles Theatre in 1853, he enjoyed eight prosperous years before the advent of the Civil War convinced him to close and focus solely on his St. Louis operation until the fighting ceased in 1865. DeBar reopened and ran the New St. Charles until 1877, when financial difficulties forced him to retire. In his heyday, DeBar flourished by changing repertory offerings every few days, featuring a different star weekly, hiring solid local stock performers, as well as recruiting talent from New York City. He acted himself and scheduled his talented sister, Clementine DeBar, who later married Junius Brutus Booth, Jr. Edwin Forrest and Maggie Mitchell also acted for his company at the St. Charles Theatre. In St. Louis, he featured the sensational Adah Isaacs Menken during the war, and in the decade that followed, he booked Lotta Crabtree, Helena Modjeska, Fanny Janauschek, Dion Boucicault and his wife, Agnes Robertson, as well as Buffalo Bill Cody. The variety of this list shows that DeBar followed the adage he adopted as a manager: "Something for Everyone."¹⁰⁸

Ben DeBar's departure from New Orleans at the outset of the Civil War heralded the flight of several other influential southern managers and their companies, including John Owens, who ran the Varieties Theatre in New Orleans, S. B. Duffield of the Mobile Theatre, and I. B. Phillips, manager of the Richmond Theatre. Despite this exodus,

¹⁰⁷ Dormon, 190-201; Durham, 34; Kendall, 187, 201-2, 208, 216.

¹⁰⁸ Durham, 246-54, quotation on p. 248, 438.

David Bidwell, who operated the New Orleans Academy of Music, remained in the Crescent City. And once William Henry Crisp had determined to join the Confederate Army, the Crisp family stayed in the region, although they gave up the leases on their Tennessee theaters so Eliza could rent the Atlanta Atheneum Theatre for their performances. An important military center and supply depot for the Confederacy, Atlanta's population grew steadily throughout the war, and Eliza astutely chose the burgeoning city to launch her sole managerial venture. When William received his discharge, the family initially accepted a starring engagement in Richmond, but by September, they had moved to Mobile, where they ran successful seasons for two years. True to the spirit of their past entrepreneurial endeavors, the family expanded their Alabama offerings to Montgomery in 1863. In the final year of the war, they headed back to Georgia, playing in E. R. Dalton's Macon, Columbus, and Savannah theaters.¹⁰⁹

In Richmond, John Hill Hewitt, an itinerant musician from New York who had come to the city to teach in 1859, accepted an offer to manage the theater after Phillips's flight in 1861. Hewitt retained many of the local stock company actors who had been working for the theater before he took over, including Clementine DeBar, Ida Vernon, Emma Morton, Mary and Sallie Partington, Charles Warwick, J. M. Barron, C. Merton, and W. H. Baily. When arsonists set fire to the theater on January 1, 1862, Hewitt found new accommodations for his troupe at the Richmond Varieties playhouse.¹¹⁰

Meanwhile, though the war raged, cultural minded citizens raised money to build the New Richmond Theatre, which opened with a gala celebration on February 3, 1863, marked by the reading of an Inaugural prize poem by the "Laureate of the Confederacy,"

¹⁰⁹ Fife, 66-7, 73, 155-56, 161-9, 189, 190-209, 306-9, 322-28, 428-9; Kendall, 488.

¹¹⁰ Watson, 76-77.

Charleston poet, Henry Timrod. His “Address Delivered at the Opening of the New Theatre at Richmond” appropriated Shakespearean characters to embody the South, which became variously personified as an innocent Miranda, an abused Desdemona, an indecisive Hamlet, and a world-weary Lear. While the region fought “the malice of a tyrant,” these “charms of Art” would help Richmond residents gather their courage and remember “the dear rights” for which they had fought and prayed.¹¹¹ Timrod’s poem not only showed the cultural capital that Shakespeare maintained in the Civil War South, but the composition also illustrated the spirit of “reckless revelry” that historian Drew Gilpin Faust says settled on the Confederate capital in the last year of the war.¹¹² Perhaps in an effort to dispel the inevitability of defeat, upper-class southerners all over the region gave themselves to a whirl of sociability characterized by balls, concerts, and plays that newspapers severely criticized. A February 1864 article in the *Richmond Enquirer* asserted that such frivolity “made a mockery of the misery and desolation that covers the land.”¹¹³ This misery not only included the underpaid and underfed soldiers, the wounded and dying, but also the poor, starving families at home who were finally driven to riot and loot for bread in cities throughout the South in 1864. These demonstrations broke out in Savannah, Mobile, High Point, Petersburg, Milledgeville, Columbia, and even in the capital of Richmond, where the brand new theater stood as a testimony to the availability of wealth that could have been used to fend off such tragedies.

¹¹¹ Christina Murphy, “The Artistic Design of Societal Commitment: Shakespeare and the Poetry of Henry Timrod,” in *Shakespeare and Southern Writers: A Study in Influence*, ed. Philip C. Kolin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 29-48, see especially p. 44; Henry Timrod, “Address Delivered at the Opening of the New Theatre at Richmond,” in *The Poems of Henry Timrod*, ed. Paul H. Hayne (New York: E. J. Hale & Son, 1873), 121-25, ll. 113, 122, 125.

¹¹² Drew Gilpin Faust, *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1997), 244-45; quotation on p. 244.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 245.

When the New Richmond Theatre opened its doors to the public, the manager of the Richmond Varieties Theatre, R. D'Orsey Ogden, had been appointed manager in place of John Hill Hewitt, who moved on to work with the Waldrons in Augusta. Under Hewitt's tenure, Richmond playgoers had cultivated a taste for the southern nationalist drama that he enjoyed writing and staging, and they clamored for more of the same when Ogden assumed leadership. Ogden made an arrangement with local playwright James Dabney McCabe to schedule his military play, *The Guerillas* (1862), which traced three generations of early Virginians through the Revolutionary war period. The play featured contrasting characters that represented the North and the South and condemned northern brutality. Audiences loved the play, although the newspapers gave mixed reviews. As the *Southern Illustrated News* chided, "Southern people are making history *now*."¹¹⁴ Ogden continued in his dual managerial post through the end of the war, engaging performers such as Ida Vernon and the Partington sisters, who had been favorites in Richmond since the fighting broke out.¹¹⁵

After the onset of the Civil War, the urban perimeter that had defined the antebellum South and that theatrical development had followed quickly became a beleaguered circumference. As a result, the dramatic perimeter collapsed inward. Blockades of strategic port cities such as New Orleans and Charleston severely cut back the theatrical offerings in both places, and the Charleston Theatre fire on December 11, 1861, effectively terminated dramatic fare in the Queen City for the duration of the war. Thus, entertainment migrated to smaller coastal cities such as Savannah and Mobile, where enterprising managers such as Crisp, Waldron, and Dalton held with long-standing

¹¹⁴ Quoted in Watson, p. 82.

¹¹⁵ Fife, 52, 145-47, 158, 187, 441-453; Watson, 76-84.

tradition and arranged inland circuit engagements to buttress their income. While these companies managed to hold together their Georgia and Alabama rounds, Richmond, Virginia, emerged as the new theatrical center for the Confederacy. Home to a long-standing dramatic tradition that had existed since the days when the Hallam Company first visited the city, Richmond built on that history as its population grew with its designation as the Confederate capital in April 1862. The influx of people that accompanied the military personnel created a demand for entertainment, which continued almost unabated through the end of the war, though attendance and performances declined in 1864 and 1865 as the South headed for defeat.¹¹⁶

Repertory Acting

Though Civil War actresses such as Ida Vernon and the Waldron daughters were performing in plays hastily written to shore up Confederate ideology, others such as Eliza Crisp were acting in many of the same dramas that had constituted the repertory that early actresses like Sarah Hallam had known and played. Whereas Sarah Hallam acted Desdemona for the horrified Cherokee delegation in 1752, Eliza Crisp played the role in November 1862 for a Mobile audience that might have seen the character's demise as an anti-miscegenist warning.¹¹⁷ Aside from performing Desdemona in *Othello*, Sarah Hallam sustained roles in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Richard the Third*. She also played parts in Nicholas Rowe's *Jane Shore* (1713), George Lillo's *George Barnwell* (1731), David Garrick's *Miss in Her Teens* (1747), and George Farquhar's *Beaux's Stratagem* (1707). These and ten more plays of similar persuasion constituted the Hallams' repertory when they performed for

¹¹⁶ Fife, 24, 126, 406-7, 464; Watson, 75, 83.

¹¹⁷ Fife, 196.

Williamsburg theatergoers throughout the autumn of their arrival in America.¹¹⁸ The Shakespearean plays maintained their popularity on southern stages through the Civil War, while the Restoration and eighteenth-century dramas attracted southern audiences for the first few decades of the nineteenth century but gradually gave way to melodrama.

The *Virginia Gazette* noted that the Hallams followed *Othello* with a “Pantomime Performance,” and the presence of this afterpiece shows that the troupe knew it had to offer a variety of entertainment to its audience, which contained a diversity of members, ranging from the aristocratic Governor Dinwiddie and his “Council,” to the other “Gentlemen” and any townspeople in attendance, to the Cherokee visitors. This conglomeration reflected the odd mixture of people that frequently attended the theater together in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century America. As theater historians Lawrence Levine and David Grimsted contend, representatives of every class, race, and sex then came together in the country’s playhouses. Theatrical offerings in the Old South paralleled those in other parts of the nation: ribald farces, circus acts, music recitals, burlesques, and equestrian spectacles shared the stage with Shakespearean dramas and plays by contemporary European and English dramatists. An evening’s entertainment generally featured one full-length, “legitimate” play, and an assortment of the shorter variety acts preceded, followed, and even punctuated the main offering.¹¹⁹

Shakespeare topped the list of playwrights, however, and Colley Cibber’s revised version of *Richard the Third* probably ranked as the most popular of the early modern dramatist’s plays in early American theater offerings. Of the tragedies, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*,

¹¹⁸ Hornblow, 74; Shattuck, 5.

¹¹⁹ Dormon, 252-280; Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow / Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 21-23; David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987), 99-110.

Romeo and Juliet, *Othello*, and *King Lear* dominated, in that order. David Garrick's *Catharine and Petruchio* (1756), an adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, headed the list of favorite comedies, while *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Comedy of Errors* (1592-3) followed. The star system, with its early reliance on English actors, partly entrenched Shakespeare in early American theater repertory.¹²⁰ By the nineteenth century, Shakespeare had already been enshrined as England's finest playwright, and his plays commanded the stage repertory. Indeed, performers cultivated particular Shakespearean roles, with which audiences came to associate them over time.¹²¹ Local stock companies had to make sure that their performers could play the necessary supporting roles when the touring stars visited. When American actors and actresses began to rise to star status, they followed in the tradition of their English forebears. For instance, in the eighteenth century, English actress Sarah Siddons became known for her Lady Macbeth, while her niece Fanny Kemble thrilled American audiences with her characterizations of Juliet, Portia, and Beatrice when she toured the country in 1835.¹²² Later in the decade, American actress Charlotte Cushman garnered fame for Lady Macbeth and for her breeches portrayal of Romeo.¹²³ Similarly, southern stars Frances Denny Drake and her niece Julia Dean Hayne both benefited from the associations they made in playing the witty Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*.¹²⁴

Shakespeare also maintained a following in part because audiences saw cut versions of some plays, and these revised forms presented simpler, shorter plots that

¹²⁰ Dormon, 256-57.

¹²¹ Gary Taylor, *Reinventing Shakespeare: A Cultural History from the Restoration to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 114-119.

¹²² Clinton, 47-63; Shattuck, 102-3.

¹²³ Shattuck, 87-95.

¹²⁴ Bailey, 71; Blackburn, Appendix B; Dietz, 54; Duggar, 31; Koon, *How Shakespeare Won the West*, 122; Margretts, 254.

spectators could follow more easily. The altered dramas also underscored thematic dichotomies that shored up current political and sexual ideology. Cibber's *Richard the Third* streamlines the cast and diminishes the corruption of the title character's peers, thereby turning Richard into the main site of evil in the play. Patriotic Americans could attend Cibber's version and leave feeling smug that they had vanquished such self-serving, aristocratic monarchs. Similarly, by deleting the frame story of Christopher Sly that begins *The Taming of the Shrew*, Garrick's *Catharine and Petruchio* draws more focused attention to the process of enfolding the recalcitrant Kate into the established patriarchy.

Managers modified full-length plays according to the taste of their clientele as well. Though David Garrick's version of *Romeo and Juliet* ends tragically, many nineteenth-century companies gave the play their own happy surprise ending until William Charles Macready and Charlotte Cushman restored the tragic finale.¹²⁵ David Grimsted notes, as well, that some managers followed the example of the Royal Patent Theatres at Drury Lane and Covent Garden and eliminated explicit sexual allusions or softened offensive words such as "whore," which became "wench." Juliet sometimes refused for Romeo to kiss her at their first meeting, and Hamlet often failed to harass Ophelia about her wantonness. These linguistic alterations helped associate Shakespeare with morality, but the notoriety and gentility already affiliated with his name brought the same recognition to his plays that might not always suffer from drastic plot modifications. Thus, theatergoers could ostensibly bolster their moral codes and raise their class status simply by attending a Shakespearean production.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ Shattuck, xi, 92, 139

¹²⁶ Dormon, 257; Grimsted, 112-23; Shattuck, xi.

American theaters could easily follow the example of the English patent theaters in part because John Philip Kemble had tenaciously published his own acting versions of the Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean plays he produced at the Drury Lane Theatre when he was manager between 1783 and 1802. Then, when he moved to Covent Garden, he published his reworked repertory in 1808. Theater managers in England and American saw him as “the high-priest of Shakespeare” and wanted to model their productions after his. Later editors of acting editions, such as Elizabeth Inchbald and William Oxberry even reprinted some of his texts verbatim.¹²⁷ The early nineteenth-century American reading public, on the other hand, probably knew *Bell’s Edition of Shakespeare’s Plays* (1773), as this single-volume edition was the first one of Shakespeare’s plays published in the United States. Available by 1795, this text used Samuel Johnson’s 1765 edition as its basis. Readers might also have owned multi-volume copies of individual plays imported from England edited by Thomas Hanmer in 1744 or Alexander Pope in 1725. All of these editions differed from the staged versions, retaining many of those altered and cut words and phrases that theater managers deemed inappropriate for public performance.¹²⁸

Plays by Shakespeare also appealed to nineteenth-century spectators who enjoyed the emphasis on melodrama, oratory, and violence that theater companies frequently gave to their stagings.¹²⁹ Theater managers could play up the sword fight between the Capulet and Montague faction in *Romeo and Juliet*, and they could similarly draw out the drunken brawl between Cassio and Roderigo in *Othello*. In *Macbeth*, a stage manager

¹²⁷ Charles Shattuck, General Introduction, *John Philip Kemble Promptbooks*, ed. Charles Shattuck (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), ix-xxi; quotation on p. xiv.

¹²⁸ Taylor, 127-29.

¹²⁹ Dormon, 258.

could emphasize the blood-thirstiness of Lady Macbeth and make the scene where she appears with dripping hands especially gruesome. The battle scenes in *Richard the Third* lent themselves particularly well to spectacular staging with horses, armor, weapons, and all sorts of special sound effects.

Repertory in the antebellum South might have differed little from that in other regions of the country, but as Shakespearean scholar Jean Marsden points out, different audiences bring a variety of interpretations and understandings to the dramatic productions that they watch. For the last four centuries, Shakespearean plays have engendered particularly diverse responses.¹³⁰ Christy Desmet agrees, but she contends that a more deliberate exchange takes place as performers, spectators, and even new dramatists appropriate and circulate the signifier “Shakespeare,” which in turn amasses and bestows “symbolic value on cultural projects.”¹³¹ For playgoers in the Old South, Shakespearean plays functioned in part to confirm the region’s conservative patriarchal ideology. As historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown explains, southern families, like the English aristocracy that they emulated, wished to pass on intact their wealth to the next generation. Men needed the guarantee of chaste wives to ensure a line of legitimate offspring who could inherit and hand on their assets; hence, raising virtuous daughters who guarded their virginity and revered male authority was of paramount importance, especially to the wealthy.¹³² Since many Shakespearean plays emphasize the importance of female fidelity, they found a permanent place on the region’s stages.

¹³⁰ Jean I. Marsden, ed. *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), 1.

¹³¹ Christy Desmet, introduction to *Shakespeare and Appropriation*, eds. Christy Desmet and Robert Sawyer (London: Routledge, 1999), 1-12; see especially pp. 4-5, quotation on p. 5.

¹³² Bertram Wyatt-Brown, *Honor and Violence in the Old South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 85-89.

While elite southerners saw themselves as heirs of an English aristocratic tradition, they also saw themselves as important leaders in America's democracy, and Shakespeare came to represent the values inherent in that form of government. Scholar Michael Bristol concedes the irony of this connection, but given America's initial rejection of "hereditary privilege and all things English," Bristol says that the political and cultural locations of Shakespearean productions have allowed them to take on different meanings over time.¹³³ Nineteenth-century Americans associated the playwright with democratic goodness and morality that could buttress their democratic way of life, and paternalistic southern leaders took that charge to heart as well. Thus, when Ludlow and Smith built their New St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans in 1842, they had painted on the stage curtain a picture of "Shakespeare borne in a halo of light on the pinions of the American eagle."¹³⁴

While Michael Bristol and Lawrence Levine assert that the cultural capital associated with Shakespeare's name ensured the production of his plays in nineteenth-century America and see his popularity resulting from reverence, Thomas Cartelli contends that appropriations in the form of burlesques and farces reveal irreverence that bolstered the country's emerging democratic ethos.¹³⁵ Cartelli does acknowledge, however, that appropriations can also enrich or thicken a narrative, and he agrees that serious re-readings can draw on the cultural capital of the original creator to gain clout and to encourage the author's institutionalization.¹³⁶ Given the respect for white male

¹³³ Michael Bristol, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1990), 1-10, quotation on p. 2.

¹³⁴ Bristol, 1-10; Grimsted, 111-12; quotation in Kendall. 209-210.

¹³⁵ Bristol, 123-130; Thomas Cartelli, *Repositioning Shakespeare: National Formations, Postcolonial Appropriations* (London: Routledge, 1999), 29; Levine, 21.

¹³⁶ Cartelli, 18.

authority in the Old South, the popularity of Shakespeare makes more sense in the latter terms.

Though southern audiences took pleasure in watching Shakespearean plays, they also enjoyed attending an array of other dramas, and the partial listing of the Hallam's 1752 repertory illustrates this variety. Many of the eighteenth-century plays that the Hallam Company offered held their appeal into the early nineteenth-century, while others faded to obscurity. For example, Ann Robinson and Susannah Wall, two pioneering actresses who opened a theater in Augusta, Georgia, between 1790 and 1792, staged both Lillo's didactic *George Barnwell* and Farquhar's *The Beaux's Stratagem*, a popular early eighteenth-century comedy of marriage and divorce, which English playwright Hannah Cowley appropriated with her comedy of manners, *The Belle's Stratagem* in 1780. The Lillo and Farquhar dramas return infrequently after this time, but the Cowley play became a particular favorite of antebellum southern companies. Frances Denny Drake, Eliza Riddle Field, Mary Ludlow, and Eliza Logan Wood all played the lead character, Letitia Hardy, during their careers.¹³⁷ Eliza Arnold Poe achieved great success when she added David Garrick's comedy *Miss in Her Teens* to her repertory in 1796, but the play faded from view soon afterwards.¹³⁸ Similarly, both Jane Placide and Eliza Riddle Field performed the title character in Nicholas Rowe's tragedy *Jane Shore*, but the play had largely disappeared from regular dramatic fare by the end of the 1830s.¹³⁹

Several late eighteenth-century plays by Richard Brinsley Sheridan not only found great popularity at the time of their composition but also retained their appeal long

¹³⁷ Ludlow, 108, 425, 449; Joseph Roppolo, "A History of the American Stage in New Orleans, 1842 to 1845" (master's thesis, Tulane University, 1948), 73.

¹³⁸ Geddeth Smith, 24.

¹³⁹ Hostetler, 128-29; Ludlow, 456-57.

into the nineteenth-century. The Drakes performed his comedy of love and deception, *The Rivals* (1775), which includes the verbally bungling Mrs. Malaprop, soon after they arrived in Frankfort, Kentucky, in 1816. Ludlow and Smith also successfully included the play in their repertory in the 1840s.¹⁴⁰ Sheridan's social satire, *The School for Scandal*, depends on lively dialogue for its forward movement as well. The sharp-tongued Lady Teazle dominates the play, and many actresses from Charlotte Barnes Conner to Eliza Riddle Field performed her part.¹⁴¹

For all the popularity of *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal*, however, Sheridan's greatest fame rested on his sensational and melodramatic *Pizarro*. A translation of Augustus von Kotzebue's German play by the same title, *Pizarro*, recounted the first encounters between the conquistadors and the Incans. Sheridan filled his drama with spectacle and sentimentality for effect. The presentation of a grand ritual scene in the Incan Temple of the Sun traditionally thrilled spectators, as did the daring rescue of a kidnapped Incan child by Rolla, the Incan ruler. A sub-plot that celebrated domesticity and motherhood similarly appealed to playgoers. The combination of these elements certainly drew southerners: the Charleston Theatre produced *Pizarro* more than any other between 1800 and 1816. Then, between 1816 and 1831, only *Richard the Third* outpaced the drama.¹⁴² Likewise, *Pizarro* stood at the head of the play lists in Cincinnati and Lexington between 1810 and 1835.¹⁴³ In addition to its stage popularity, however, the play also marked an important turning point in the history of drama. *Pizarro* not only drew on the sentimentality of neoclassicism, but it also employed the

¹⁴⁰ Ludlow, 102, 611, 613.

¹⁴¹ Bailey, 73, 78, 177; Grimsted, 125-26; Ludlow, 440-41, 448, 493; Sol Smith, 109, 116.

¹⁴² Garff B. Wilson, *Three Hundred Years of American Drama and Theatre* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1973), 127.

¹⁴³ Langworthy, 146.

more excessive appeal to emotion that characterized melodrama, the genre that emerged to dominate theater in the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁴

Describing the purpose of *A Tale of Mystery* (1802), the first English play specifically designated as a melodrama, playwright Thomas Holcroft helped define the genre. Holcroft hoped “to fix the attention, rouse the passions, and hold the faculties in anxious and animated suspense.”¹⁴⁵ By creating a plot that swirls around the crafty deeds of a villain, Romaldi, who stands between a virtuous heroine, Selina, and her heroic lover, Stephano, Holcroft set up the basic melodramatic plot structure that scores of other playwrights would emulate. His emphasis on binaric absolutes reduced a need for complex characterization. Instead, he featured flat characters that lacked individuality, that were action driven, and that lacked introspection. They operated in dangerous environments, barely avoided disaster, and displayed emotion outwardly. In short, the melodramatic recipe included sensational ingredients and elicited cathartic audience response.¹⁴⁶

Historian Thomas Donohue speculates that the simplicity of melodrama and its ability to induce fantasy in spectators contributed to its rise in England, while David Grimsted asserts that in America, the genre appealed with its democratic ethos. Even when theaters featured English plays about perils encountered by kings and queens, most plots still revolved around searching for the right mate. This emphasis, Grimsted says, gave melodrama a democratic leaning, for “love was the great emotion experienced by all

¹⁴⁴ Joseph Donohue, *Theatre in the Age of Kean* (Totowa, New Jersey: Rowman and Littlefield, 1975), 86; William Harmon and C. Hugh Holman, *A Handbook to Literature* (Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1995), 312, 342-344.

¹⁴⁵ Donohue, 106-7.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 107-118.

classes.”¹⁴⁷ Furthermore, Grimsted contends that when rank and privilege were present, those attributes faded in light of the hero’s moral worth. Thus, he asserts, “if melodrama worked within a feudal social structure, it was a belligerently egalitarian feudalism.”¹⁴⁸

Nineteenth-century American managers relied on English melodramas and their translations of Continental plays until native playwrights began to produce works that would similarly appeal to theatergoers. In part, American dramatists only emerged slowly because the lack of international copyright allowed managers to avoid paying royalties on the foreign plays they produced. Additionally, playwrights either made a small set sum for a drama, or they agreed to the house receipts on the third, sixth, and twentieth nights of an original unbroken run. The latter was a riskier proposition but could prove more lucrative. Most English authors made 100 pounds or less for a five-act play if they agreed to a predetermined amount, and few received more than three hundred pounds when they contracted for house receipts. Not until America signed the international copyright law in 1891 did the native playwright gain more protection.¹⁴⁹ Despite the lack of incentive, a few American authors did write for the stage, but especially in the very early decades of the nineteenth-century, managers borrowed from the English.

While American theaters had been staging popular Restoration and eighteenth-century selections since the Hallams’ arrival, William Dunlap, manager of the John Street Theater in New York City initiated the trend for performing melodrama. After suffering through eight losing seasons and facing bankruptcy in 1804, Dunlap knew that he had to make some changes in his staid repertory. Recalling the extraordinary success he had

¹⁴⁷ Grimsted, 220.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 208.

¹⁴⁹ Brockett and Hildy, 393-94, 405.

with an adaptation of Kotzebue's *The Stranger*, a play about a repentant wife who returns to her husband after a villainous cad has caused her sexual downfall, Dunlap set to work translating a new German play each year for twenty years. Three-fourths of these were Kotzebue dramas and touched off an American fad for the German author that lasted through the Civil War. In addition to *The Stranger*, which regularly brought audiences to tears, *Pizarro, Rolla, or The Virgin of the Sun* (1805), another Incan resistance drama, and *The Lovers' Vows* (1802) rose to highest popularity.¹⁵⁰

Translations of Kotzebue's plays found a following on southern stages and were as important in establishing the melodramatic tradition in the Old South as they were in the North. As Shakespearean plays took on different meanings for southerners, though, so too did the melodramas that they staged. Some plays such as Sheridan Knowles's *The Hunchback* and *Virginius* (1820) or Richard Lalor Sheil's *Evadne* affirmed female filial duty, while Knowles's *The Wife*, Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Adelgitha*, and Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Lady of Lyons* buttressed feminine chastity and wifely fidelity. Other melodramas featured female characters who transgressed against antebellum gender codes by enacting masculinity. In Isaac Pocock's reworking of Sir Walter Scott's *Rob Roy Macgregor*, Helen Macgregor takes over leadership of the Scottish troops in her husband's absence, and J. M. Weston's revision of Victor Hugo's *Lucretia Borgia* (1844) focuses on the title character, who maintains a reputation as a feared assassin. When actresses enacted breeches roles, as Adah Isaacs Menken did when she played the lead part in Henry Milner's stage rendition of Byron's *Mazeppa*, they explicitly performed masculinity and exposed the social construction of gender on stage. Some melodramas such as Bulwer-Lytton's *Money* (1840) or Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion* (1845) shed

¹⁵⁰ Grimsted, 1-20.

light on how southerners viewed their social structure. And many plays investigated the volatile racial politics that held the region in its grip. Through plays such as Frederick Halm's *Ingomar the Barbarian* (c1851), acting companies interrogated whiteness, while anti-Uncle Tom spoofs and the ballet *The Moorish Page* (n. d.) explored blackness, John Augustus Stone's *Metamora*, George Washington Parke Custis's *Pocahontas*, and Sheridan's *Pizarro* examined redness, and Lewis's *Timour the Tartar*, Milner's *Mazeppa*, and Daniel Terry's *Guy Mannering* (1816) probed yellowness.

During the Civil War, melodrama shored up Confederate nationalism through the stage compositions that new regional playwrights hurriedly penned. Charlestonian D. Ottolengui started the trend for this new genre with *The Vigilance Committee*, the play tracing the South's road to secession that he wrote for the Waldron family in June 1861. Then John Hill Hewitt's *The Scouts; or, The Plains of Manassas* followed this course with its debut on November 18, 1861, at the Richmond Theatre. This play about the first battle of the Civil War ran for six nights and then returned several times throughout that winter. Hewitt wrote many other dramas over the next four years, but he became best known for an 1863 satire mocking President Lincoln and his cabinet entitled *King Linkum the First* and an 1862 operetta that he wrote for the Waldron troupe called *The Vivandiere*. Theater historian Charles Watson observes that the figure of the *vivandiere* became a popular figure in Confederate drama, for John Davis also featured her in his melodrama *The Roll of the Drum*, which he produced at the New Orleans Academy of Music, where he served as stage manager under David Bidwell in 1861. The guerilla fighter also arose as a favorite character in Civil War melodrama.¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Fife, 103-4; Watson, 74-84.

Hewitt's *The Scouts* had treated guerilla warfare, but James Dabney McCabe's *The Guerillas* focused solely on the topic, even though he set the play in revolutionary Virginia. Because McCabe had *The Guerillas* published, many companies throughout the South staged the drama. Mobilians saw the play in June 1863, while Macon residents viewed it in April 1864 and again in September of the same year. Then, the Wilmington Theatre, one of the last to stay open, produced *The Guerillas* on July 1, 1864. In contrast, the Davis and Hewitt plays existed only in handwritten promptbooks.¹⁵² One other Civil War play, *The Soldier's Wife*, was published in 1862, but this anonymous play never achieved the regional notoriety of *The Guerillas*. A domestic drama that traces the trials of a poor wife and mother left to fend for herself while her husband fights for the South, *The Soldier's Wife* lacks the excitement and spectacle of a military drama. The familial focus combined with the didactic message, which encouraged spectators to support separated military families, likely discouraged theater companies from staging the play when more rousing dramas would draw greater crowds.

Melodrama remained popular throughout the Civil War, even though the genre employed awkward language, stereotypical characters, conventional plot sequences, and dualistic themes. As David Grimsted says, the form endured because "it took the lives of common people seriously and paid much respect to their superior purity and wisdom. It elevated them often into the aristocracy, always into a world charged with action, excitement, and a sense of wonder. It gave audiences a chance to empathize in a direct way, to laugh and to cry, and it held up ideals and promised rewards, particularly that of the paradise of the happy home based on female purity, that were available to all."¹⁵³ As

¹⁵² Watson, 81-3.

¹⁵³ Grimsted, 248.

Shakespearean plays reflect, underscore, and sometimes question the culture in which they are performed, however, so too did melodramatic selections in the antebellum and Civil War South.

CHAPTER 2: ACTING LIKE A WOMAN

Sir Simon Loveit: I must have you burn your plays and romances now that you are mine.

They corrupt your innocence; and what can you learn from 'em?

Miss Biddy Bellair: What you can't teach me, I'm sure.

Miss in Her Teens (1747), 2.1.451-54, David Garrick

Biddy Bellair, one of Eliza Arnold Poe's favorite roles, defied the diffidence inculcated in women by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century gender conventions by voicing an opinion that differed from the one held by her betrothed. Simon Loveit distrusts Biddy's plays and romances, not out of altruistic concern for his fiancée's well-being, but out of worry that he will not land the innocent, acquiescent wife for whom he has bargained. His admonition to Biddy reveals the power of texts to influence, to challenge and to subvert, but as performance theorist William B. Worthen points out, when those texts are dramatic, that power lies dormant until actors and actresses transform them into performances. "Texts in the theater are always more like the phone book than like *Hamlet*: they are transformed by the performative environment of the theater into something else, a performance," says Worthen.¹ This transformation packs the heretofore lifeless text with contemporary cultural and political values brought to the performance by the actors, actresses, and spectators. When Eliza Poe played Biddy Bellair, for example, the turmoil of her personal life endowed her role with ambiguity. As a wife, mother, and professional actress, Poe moved in and out of traditional gender

¹ William B. Worthen, "Drama, Performativity, and Performance," *PMLA* 113.5 (1998): 1093-1107, quotation on p. 1100.

roles all of her life, and this incongruity simultaneously questioned and upheld the gender conventions under scrutiny in Garrick's play. Poe was not alone; most antebellum and Civil War actresses struggled with the gender roles prescribed for them in their daily lives.

American gender roles have their roots in European traditions and laws. Settlers brought specific ideas about the moral, intellectual, and physical capacities of men and women that determined how they interacted with one another. Supposedly endowed with a natural superiority in all of these categories, men occupied dominant positions in early American political, social, religious, and familial life. European traditions of patriarchal family organization as well as English common law and its doctrine of coverture, which erased a wife's legal identity and prevented her from controlling property, constituted the legal foundation for the subordination of women in colonial America. Historian Cynthia Kierner explains that southern women attained some autonomy during the Revolution because high mortality rates brought about unconventional labor divisions and greater opportunities for self-direction, but this fluidity in gender roles began to wane in the early nineteenth century as the cult of domesticity arose and as stable mortality rates reinvigorated patriarchy.²

By the beginning of the nineteenth century, fixed constructions of masculine and feminine roles became the ideals that governed life in the antebellum South. Harriet Amos and Anne Firor Scott describe the model southern lady as a woman who embodied grace, modesty, beauty, and poise. She also displayed sympathy, compassion, patience, and piety. She depended upon her husband or other male relatives for support and guidance; she obediently acquiesced to their advice, and she devoted herself to rearing

² Kierner, 11-12.

children or to the pursuit of other domestic duties if she did not have any offspring.³ No mirror to elusive ideals, however, the day to day reality of southern women's varied experiences sometimes reflected a very different picture. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese shows that antebellum plantation mistresses worked long, hard hours supervising and carrying out household tasks, while Suzanne Lebsock, Susanna Delfino, and Michelle Gillespie reveal that urban women worked at a variety of jobs both in and out of the home.⁴ These duties endowed women with a degree of independence and action, blurred the distinctions between separate private and public spheres, and generally redefined stereotypical notions of femininity. During the Civil War, women assumed responsibilities and jobs that their husbands and other men had held before they left for battle, so domestic and civil realms overlapped even more.⁵ Historians disagree about the long-term effects that the war had on women in the years that followed. Anne Firor Scott asserts that women built on the autonomy they had gained during the war years and secured more political and personal freedom for themselves afterwards. In essence, as a New South emerged, so too did a "New Woman." Drew Gilpin Faust and George Rable disagree, however, and say that to buttress the wounded psyches of their men, women retreated to subordinate positions in the late nineteenth century.⁶

³ Harriet Amos, "'City Belles': Images and Realities of the Lives of White Women in Antebellum Mobile," *The Alabama Review* 34.1 (1981): 3-19, see especially p. 3; Anne Firor Scott, *The Southern Lady from Pedestal to Politics, 1830-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 4-21.

⁴ Delfino and Gillespie, 1-14; Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, *Within the Plantation Household: Black and White Women of the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 109; Suzanne Lebsock, *The Free Women of Petersburg: Status and Culture in a Southern Town, 1784-1860* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1984), xv-xviii, 193-94.

⁵ LeeAnn Whites, *The Civil War as a Crisis in Gender* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1995), 12.

⁶ Scott, 96-102, 129-133; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 248-52; George Rable, *Civil Wars: Women and the Crisis of Southern Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press), 1989, 265-88.

The disparity between the ideals set forth for southern women and the reality of their lives belies the construction of gender. That women who were supposedly unequal to the demands of hard work and unable to function in the harshness of the public sphere proved their abilities in both regards reveals the fiction that some innate, essential core constitutes and dictates identity. As gender theorist Judith Butler contends, however, simply recognizing the construction of gender is not enough; instead, one must ask how it is constructed. She explains that cultural, social, and political formations intersect to create masculine and feminine identities, which shift and change according to time and place. Despite this malleability, Butler asserts that the repeated performance of corporeal acts and gestures reinforces and solidifies identity so that it appears to be fixed, unified, and stable. Performative gestures also regulate gender by establishing norms, but because those outwardly repeated acts are historically and culturally prescribed, they do not signify the essence of gender. Following Michel Foucault's lead, Butler goes on to recognize that norms require the creation of abnormality for their perpetuation and support. To maintain its dominance, for example, heterosexuality depends upon defining homosexuality or transgendered sexuality as deviant.⁷

While the performance of daily tasks, social rituals, and work shaped, enforced, and perpetuated gender roles for nineteenth-century men and women, the performance of those roles by actors and actresses on stage further embedded them in the region's social and cultural foundations. As Butler contends, though, performative acts can also flout convention; female impersonators and cross-dressers, for instance, question and subvert

⁷ Butler, 9-12, 30, 98, 184-90; Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (1977; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 24, 101-2, 183-84; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (1978; reprint, New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 38.

traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity. Hence, stage performers also possess the power to oppose convention, but in the nineteenth-century South, actresses particularly contested accepted standards of feminine behavior simply by acting visibly in public. Butler, however, makes a clear distinction between applying her theories of performativity to performance, as does the philosopher J. L. Austin. For Austin, a performative action must take place in ordinary circumstances to be authentic; otherwise, the artificiality of the stage and the premeditation of an actor's gestures and utterances render any theatrical performative "hollow or void."⁸

In the wake of Austin's work, though, scholars have located parallels between performativity and performance. Sociologist Erving Goffman contends, for instance, that people present themselves in certain ways to guide and control impressions: "we do not merely live but act; we compose and play our chosen character . . . we soliloquize and we wrap ourselves gracefully in the mantle of our inalienable part."⁹ Likewise, philosopher Jacques Derrida sees stage and world as linked by the iterative structures that shape and bind them together in a common theatricality.¹⁰

Victor Turner and performance theorist Richard Schechner acknowledge these likenesses, but both back away from directly conflating the performative and performance. Turner asserts, for example, that if daily life is a kind of theater, then drama becomes metatheater featuring a special dramaturgical language about ordinary

⁸ J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words*, eds. J. O. Urmson and Marima Sbisà (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 22.

⁹ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), 56.

¹⁰ Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, introduction to *Performativity and Performance* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 1-18, see especially p. 4.

role playing.¹¹ Schechner sees performativity and performance as occupying a continuum along which roles bleed into one another. Blurry boundaries might separate acting in everyday life from stage acting, but he still contends, “most people, most of the time, know the difference between enacting a social role and playing a role on stage.”¹² Most recently, Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have questioned this divide with their collection of essays that closely allies the performative and performance, but Geraldine Harris points out that likenesses do not blot out differences.¹³

The lives of antebellum and Civil War southern actresses illustrate the tension between performativity and performance that contemporary theorists have discussed at length. These women both upheld and tore down the region’s traditional gendered norms by playing conventional and unconventional social scripts in their personal lives and by enacting textual scripts on stage that simultaneously questioned and buttressed those same standards. Actresses began learning to enact scripted feminine behavior in their personal lives and on stage from the time they were young girls. As young women traversing the traditions of courtship and marriage, they learned to perform another set of gender-specific manners, which they also played out in their daily lives and dramatic roles. In turn, actresses transmitted these performative scripts when they became mothers, either in their own lives or on stage. Finally, when faced with death in everyday life or within the context of a play, they learned that women once again deport themselves in certain ways. Trained to improvise when necessity demanded, however, actresses did not always adhere to the play scripts handed to them or to the social scripts

¹¹ Victor Turner and Richard Schechner, *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York: PAJ Publishers, 1987), 75-76.

¹² Richard Schechner, *Performance Studies* (London: Routledge, 2002), 146.

¹³ Geraldine Harris, *Staging Femininities: Performance and Performativity* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 76-77; Parker and Sedgwick, 8.

expected of them. Indeed, abiding by and transgressing against the region's traditional gender norms, antebellum and Civil War actresses occupied what anthropologist Victor Turner has termed a liminal status.¹⁴ They were neither members of the status quo, nor were they outcasts. Instead, they carved out unique positions for themselves at every stage of life.

Learning to Act

“[I] never stuffed your head with histories and homilies; but you draw, you sing, you dance, you walk well into a room; and that's the way young ladies are educated nowadays in order to become a pride to their parents and a blessing to their husbands.”

Sir John, *Money* (1840), 1.1.67-70, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Sir John's words to his daughter Georgina at the beginning of Bulwer-Lytton's play sum up a dominant attitude in the early nineteenth century toward women's education. Though *Money* made a splash in Noah Ludlow and Sol Smith's St. Louis and Mobile theaters during the 1846 and 1847 season, Sir John's sentiments probably did not represent those of the drama's performers, as education was important to acting families.¹⁵ They made their livings by capitalizing on their literacy, so they ensured that daughters as well as sons received academic instruction.

Independent elementary schools and institutions of higher education for women flourished in the antebellum South, but few theatrical families could afford private instruction for their daughters. Wesleyan, America's first women's college, was founded in Macon, Georgia, in 1839. A high school for girls opened in New Orleans in 1842, and similar institutions began operating in other cities throughout the 1840s. School girls

¹⁴ Turner, 25; Victor Turner, *from Ritual to Theater* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982), 46.

¹⁵ Ludlow, 642, 658, 660.

learned reading, writing, spelling, grammar, arithmetic, music, and art, whereas young women of college age learned the rudiments of Latin and French and continued to develop skills in the fine arts. Since sending one's daughter to a female academy and later to college did not come cheaply, though, only wealthy planters or merchants could pay others to educate their girls.¹⁶ Acting families without the means to send their daughters to school had to provide that education themselves. Their scholarly training thus reveals one facet of southern actresses' liminality: they were literate and familiar with English texts, but most lacked the formal training in classical works, romance languages, and fine arts that elite women possessed.

Eliza Arnold Poe occupied this in-between space throughout her short career. Taught to read, act, sing, and dance by her mother, Eliza continually learned new parts that she could add to her repertory. She began her stage apprenticeship when the two came to America in 1796. Mrs. Arnold procured a job at Boston's Federal Street Theatre for the winter season and featured her daughter in a song and dance number as part of her benefit in her spring benefit. She then set out with Eliza to play in various New England theaters over the summer. Although Eliza largely took parts in afterpieces such as David Garrick's farce, *Miss in Her Teens*, she was introduced to a variety of roles that would become the mainstay of her adult repertory. Receiving her early instruction from a single mother and training for a professional career set Eliza apart from her contemporaries. Finding themselves alone with children, most single mothers in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century sought the aid of extended family, but Mrs. Arnold elected to use her stage skills and strike out on her own. As a result, Eliza grew up with a strong female

¹⁶ Christie Ann Farnham, *The Education of the Southern Belle: Higher Education and Student Socialization in the Antebellum South* (New York: New York University Press, 1994), 3, 12, 25-26, 47; "High School for Young Ladies Opening," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 19 December, 1842.

role model who showed her that women could succeed in the work world. Moreover, she received the benefit of her mother's experienced tutelage as she learned the acting profession.¹⁷

When Mrs. Arnold married actor Charles Tubbs in late 1796, Eliza's family life changed significantly. She continued to act with her mother, but her step-father also helped in directing her blossoming career. The three continued to tour New England through early spring of 1797, then headed south where they procured an engagement with Alexander Placide at the Charleston Theatre through the end of the season. There, Eliza played several small but significant roles; most notably, she began performing in plays listed as principal features. The breeches role, Little Pickle in *The Spoiled Child* constituted her most frequent part. At the end of the Charleston season, the Tubbs left for Virginia, where they had found stock positions with Thomas Wade West's company, which played a year-round circuit in Norfolk, Petersburg, Fredericksburg, Alexandria, and Richmond.¹⁸

On the way to Virginia, life as Eliza had known it changed permanently, for her mother contracted and died of yellow fever. With her mother's death, the eleven-year old not only lost her only blood relation, she also lost the one constant female presence in her life. Charles Tubbs escorted her to Virginia and continued to supervise her career for the next several years, but he deserted her by the time she turned fifteen. Nevertheless, Eliza's early training and the example that her mother had set stood her in good stead. By the time she turned fifteen, she knew nearly seventy roles; she had developed contacts

¹⁷ Gedde Smith, 15-20.

¹⁸ Ibid., 22-27 & 38-43.

in both the northern and southern theatrical circuits, and she could successfully negotiate her own employment terms.¹⁹

Like Eliza Poe, Eliza Logan received the bulk of her professional training from one parent, but her father, Cornelius Logan, provided that expertise. Logan also got her start in the North, but she made her career in the antebellum South. Born in Philadelphia in 1830, Eliza was fortunate to attend a private academy in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, for her elementary education. Since she and her seven siblings began training for the stage under their father's direction when they were young, however, Eliza and her five sisters did not go on to finishing school, then the equivalent of higher education for young women, even though their brothers trained for the legal and medical professions. The literate impulse was strong in their family, though. Her sisters Celia and Olive cultivated careers in journalism and lecturing, while Eliza was taken with the stage. Olive spent time acting later in her life, but she attained more recognition for her literary efforts.²⁰

Eliza Logan debuted at the Chestnut Theatre in Philadelphia at the age of eleven. When she and her father began touring together two years later, they found their largest and most enthusiastic houses in the South. Between 1843 and 1849, Eliza and Cornelius worked as stock company members for Ludlow and Smith in Mobile, New Orleans, and St. Louis, but by 1850, Eliza had gained such popularity that the partners began to feature her as a star. Logan often enacted the lead roles in Sheridan Knowles's *The Hunchback*, Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Lady of Lyons*, and Benjamin Thompson's adaptation of Kotzebue's *The Stranger*. Though non-Shakespearean roles largely dominated her

¹⁹ Ibid., 2 & 44-46.

²⁰ J. Westland Marston, *The Patrician's Daughter: A Tragedy in Five Acts and A Memoir of Miss E. Logan* (Boston: William V. Spencer, 1856), 3-4. The Folger Shakespeare Library holds a copy of this play in its Rare Book Collection. All quotations and references come from this edition. See also Meserve, *Heralds*, 90; Wills, 21-8.

repertory, Logan did include Juliet, Hero, and Cordelia in her offerings. She appeared at the St. Louis theater more than any other star in the 1850s, but Ludlow and Smith also booked her in their New Orleans and Mobile theaters.²¹ Logan attained great acclaim elsewhere in the South as well. She returned often to act in Savannah, Augusta, and Columbus, while Louisville, Kentucky, and Nashville, audiences also looked forward to her appearances. When Logan's father died in 1853, she mourned him grievously. A letter to Sol Smith described her shock at his sudden death and thanked him profusely for his condolences, which she noted had been true "balm to the feelings."²²

Eliza Logan commanded a large repertory, but she most frequently appeared in Richard Lalor Sheil's *Evadne*, a drama about a maligned woman proven true.²³ Announcing her arrival for a star appearance at The New Orleans St. Charles Theatre, the *Daily Picayune* encouraged playgoers to turn out for her performance of *Evadne*, "one of Miss Logan's most successful parts."²⁴ The play's favored position within Logan's repertory particularly resonates because of the title character's intense filial devotion that ultimately wins her political favor and saves her reputation. *Evadne* reflected the close relationship between Eliza and her father, but in the Old South where patriarchy made honoring one's father paramount to children, the play also took on particularly charged meaning.

²¹ Blackburn, Appendices B, C; Duggar, 179; Keller, 119, 121, 125, 136; Langley, 76-77; Marston, 3-4; *Miss Eliza Logan as Cordelia* (New York: Johnson, Fry & Co., 1859); Meserve, *Heralds*, 90; Wills, 21-28; Yeomans, 52, 124-27, 139-140.

²² Blackburn, 718; William Scott Craig, "The Theatrical Management of Sol Smith: Organization, Operation, and Techniques" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1963), 168; Dietz, 45; Duggar, 150; Sol Smith, 223-225; Eliza Logan to Sol Smith, 1 April, 1853, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter cited as Sol Smith Collection); Keller, 117-136; Langley, 58-60 & 76-77; Marston, 4.

²³ Yeomans, 52.

²⁴ "St. Charles Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 21 November, 1854.

Like Shakespeare's Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing*, Sheil's Evadne falls prey to the malevolent machinations of a power-hungry but thwarted villain; in an attempt to redeem himself with the King of Naples, the miscreant, Ludovico, offers to arrange an assignation between the monarch and Evadne.²⁵ Using rather odd logic, Ludovico thinks that if he can impugn Evadne's reputation with her betrothed, Vicentio, she will come readily to the king's arms. Evadne surprises everyone, though, when she saves herself in the final act by articulately reminding the king of her late father's honorable standing: defiling the daughter, she chides, means tarnishing the father's memory. Ashamed of his willingness to strip Evadne of her personal and familial honor, the king turns on Ludovico, rights Evadne's reputation, and restores her to Vicentio.²⁶

Scholars have not remarked on Sheil's use of Shakespeare, but the plot of *Evadne* too closely follows that of *Much Ado* to dismiss the similarities between the plays. Since nineteenth-century critics appreciated successful imitations, Sheil likely borrowed from Shakespeare to endow his dramatic endeavor with esteem.²⁷ Nevertheless, Sheil's awareness of the parallels between his text and *Much Ado* becomes immaterial in light of

²⁵ Nineteenth-century acting and reading editions of *Much Ado* retained the early modern plot in which an ignominious Don John persuades a gullible Claudio that Hero has betrayed him. If nineteenth-century theater managers used John Philip Kemble's Shakespeare promptbooks as a guide for staging, however, they used a text that eliminated sexually explicit language. For instance, Kemble marked through Claudio's accusation that "She knows the heat of a luxurious bed" at 4.1.33. See William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *John Philip Kemble Promptbooks*, ed. Charles Shattuck (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1974), p. 45. Similarly, Kemble toned down Claudio's cruelty a bit by excising lines such as "Give not this rotten orange to your friend," which nineteenth century readers would have found at 4.1.32 in texts published by Samuel Johnson, Thomas Hanmer, or Alexander Pope. See William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear*, 1743, ed., Thomas Hanmer (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1969), 4.1.27, 485; Shakespeare, *Much Ado*, *The Plays of William Shakespeare*, ed., Samuel Johnson, 1765 (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1968), 4.1.32, pp. 235; Shakespeare, *Much Ado*, *The Works of Shakespear*, 1725, ed., Alexander Pope (New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1969), 4.1.27, p. 530.

²⁶ Richard Lalor Sheil, *Evadne* (London: W. Clowes, 1819; *Literature Online*, 1994), 5.1.349-95, pp.73-74 of 80, via Galileo online database, <http://galileo.usg.edu> (accessed 5 September, 2002).

²⁷ Richard Foulkes, Introduction to *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 1-9, see especially p. 1.

theorist Roland Barthes's argument that "as soon as a fact is *narrated* . . . [a] disconnection occurs, the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, [and] writing begins."²⁸ Sheil himself ceases to matter, while his text becomes the bearer of a variety of possible meaning(s). Because spectators and readers in both England and America revered Shakespeare's name, however, *Evadne's* association with the early modern playwright assured the play of an enthusiastic following in both countries.

Theater historians Lawrence Levine, Michael Bristol, and Thomas Cartelli have all written about the central place that Shakespeare occupied within nineteenth-century American culture, but whereas Levine and Bristol see his popularity resulting from reverence, Cartelli contends that appropriations in the form of burlesques and farces reveal irreverence that bolstered an emerging democratic ethos.²⁹ Cartelli does concede, however, that appropriations can also enrich or thicken a narrative, and he agrees that serious re-readings can draw on the cultural capital of the original creator to gain clout and to encourage the author's institutionalization.³⁰ Given the respect for white male authority in the Old South, the popularity of *Evadne* on southern stages makes more sense in the latter terms. While *Evadne* stands up to the preeminent masculine power figure by insisting on her innocence, she also endorses patriarchy by lauding her father and placing concern for his good name ahead of her own reputation.

Julia Dean Hayne, another actress trained as a girl by her male parent, made quite a name for herself playing Hero in *Evadne's* prototype, *Much Ado About Nothing*, but she also garnered praises for her frequent performances of James Sheridan Knowles's

²⁸ Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Authorship: From Plato to the Postmodern*, ed. Sean Burke (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 125-130, quotation on p. 125.

²⁹ Bristol, *Shakespeare's America, America's Shakespeare*, 123-130; Cartelli, 29; Levine, 21.

³⁰ Cartelli, 18.

melodrama, *The Hunchback*. Born in 1830 to actors Edwin Dean and Julia Drake Fosdick Dean, the daughter of theatrical pioneer Samuel Drake, Julia Dean Hayne spent the first eleven years of her life with her paternal grandparents in Dutchess County, New York. Her mother died when she was only two, and her father felt inadequate to the demands of raising a toddler, so he enlisted the aid of his parents in raising his young daughter. Apparently, the needs of a pre-teen did not seem quite as daunting, however, for Edwin Dean resumed custody of Julia when she turned eleven. He immediately began training her for the stage, and by 1843, he had procured positions for himself and Julia with Ludlow's stock company in Mobile. She made quite a sensation there according to actor Joseph Jefferson, who recalled in his autobiography working with her that year. He asserted that Julia's beauty, confidence, and stage presence dazzled her Alabama audiences and held them spellbound. Over the next two years, she and her father went on to play stock roles in Nashville, Cincinnati and Louisville.

By the time Julia turned 15, her father was seeking starring positions for her. In March of 1846, Dean touted Julia's popularity and successful reception as evidenced by many laudatory newspaper articles, which he assured Sol Smith were "entirely unsought" on his part. He went on to boast that his daughter exhibited "an extraordinary degree of talent" and urged Smith to engage her in New Orleans before the end of the 1846 season.³¹ Smith had already booked the remainder of the season, but Dean's words did not fall on deaf ears, for Smith and Ludlow featured Julia during their 1847-48 season,

³¹ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 15 March, 1846, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 17.

and thereafter, she became a regular star in their theaters and many others throughout the Southeast.³²

Audiences came to expect a performance of *The Hunchback* when Julia Dean Hayne appeared for theatrical engagements. English actress Fanny Kemble originally played the lead when Knowles launched the drama at Covent Garden in 1832, and the play's popular reception quickly made it a regular part of many nineteenth-century actresses' repertory.³³ Cognizant of this appeal, Edwin Dean included the drama in his daughter's offerings when he first began booking positions for her, and playing the lead character, also named Julia, remained an important role for Julia Dean Hayne throughout her career. She played the title character every other year in Louisville between 1845 and 1856, and when she returned to the city on a special visit in 1867, the role found a spot in her repertory again. Julia performed Julia in Mobile, New Orleans, and St. Louis almost every year between 1849 and 1853 as well.³⁴ The role clearly resonated with theatergoers, but an 1850 review in the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* shows that spectators also delighted in the new approach she brought to her acting. The drama critic lauded the "freshness" of all her roles and praised her acting for its "absence of the trickery and clap-trap which too often disfigure the portraiture of character on our

³² Clipping from the *Mobile Sunday Times*, March 1868, Julia Dean Theater Papers, Theatrical Collection, 1823-1890, Box 1 of 2, Missouri Historical Society (hereafter cited as Julia Dean Theater Papers); Craig, 167-68; Dietz 42-44; Duggar, 150, 164, 185; Joseph Jefferson, *The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson* (New York: The Century Company, 1890), 147-48; Koon, *Gold Rush Performers*, 83; Koon, *How Shakespeare Won the West*, 119; Ludlow, 665-67; "Miss Julia Dean," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 5 December, 1850; Sol Smith, 206.

³³ James Sheridan Knowles, preface to *The Hunchback* (London: E. Moxon, 1832), vi-vii.

³⁴ Bailey, 54, 358-59; Blackburn, Appendix B; Dietz, 43-44, 55-56, 87-88; Duggar, 164-65, 185; Ludlow, 665.

boards.”³⁵ Thus, Julia Dean Hayne’s ability to portray honesty and sincerity appealed to those who came to watch her.

On the surface, *The Hunchback* affirms companionate marriage and celebrates romantic love, but a deeper look at the plot reveals that the play also staunchly endorses filial obedience and a daughter’s duty to honor her father. The heroine falls in love with the young and dashing Clifford, but she cannot marry him without her absent father’s permission. Walter, the Earl of Rochedale and the hunchback of the title, hides his identity as Julia’s father by masquerading as her guardian; he tests her constancy and sense of duty by urging her to marry the well-to-do Wilford instead. Julia capitulates and resists Clifford to her father’s satisfaction; gratified by his daughter’s loyalty, Walter finally reveals his identity and bestows his blessing upon her and Clifford.

In the same way that *Evadne* mirrored the fidelity that Eliza Logan displayed toward her father, *The Hunchback* reflected the allegiance that Edwin Dean expected and received from his daughter, Julia. While Edwin certainly provided the necessary training and forged the connections that made possible Julia’s success, theater historian Helene Koon asserts that he also exploited his daughter for his own financial gain.³⁶ A series of letters from Dean to Sol Smith corroborates this charge and shows that Dean clearly depended upon Julia’s income for his own support. In July 1855, Dean complained that his daughter’s new husband, Arthur Hayne, would likely cut off the share of her earnings that Dean traditionally took for his own when Julia was single, and by August, he grumbled about receiving a final lump sum of \$10,000 from Hayne “for breach of

³⁵ “The Benefit of Julia Dean,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 11 December, 1850.

³⁶ Koon, *Gold Rush Performers*, 83.

contract.”³⁷ In the same letter, Dean noted that he had grown tired of marketing his elder daughter in “the protégé business,” or he would consider starting his younger daughter, Edwina on the same path.

Charlotte Barnes Conner also received her education and professional training from her parents who were traveling actors. Born in 1820 to John and Mary Barnes who were then living in New York, Charlotte played small parts when she was young, but as she matured, her parents began casting her in principal roles. She debuted in 1834 at the age of fourteen at the Park Theatre, but when her parents met Sol Smith while he was in the North on a recruiting trip the following year, he encouraged them to try their fortunes in the South. The two first saw the region as the perfect training ground for their daughter, but ironically, Charlotte came to act for most of her career in the southern cities that her parents initially saw as second-rate cultural centers. The Barneses performed regularly as a family for Ludlow and Smith between 1835 and 1847 when Charlotte married Edmund S. Conner and the two began to travel as a couple.³⁸

The Barneses often included Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s social satire, *The School for Scandal* in their repertory. On visits to New Orleans in 1837, 1840, and 1858, for instance, they presented the play to critical acclaim.³⁹ The play pokes fun at social hypocrisy as the characters all gossip about scandals but fail to recognize their own disreputable behaviors. Charlotte played the sharp-tongued Lady Teazle, and her sophisticated command of the language in Sheridan’s play as well as others in the Barneses’ repertory, brought high praise from theater critics. In 1837, the New Orleans

³⁷ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 11 July, 1855 and 22 August 1855, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

³⁸ Ludlow, 518, 541.

³⁹ St. Charles Theatre Advertisements, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 2 February, 1837, 15 April, 1840, 15 May, 1858.

Picayune lauded Charlotte's "fine education," which the writer asserted, enabled her to speak her parts with "vigor" but "classical" refinement.⁴⁰ As historian Ann Firor Scott asserts, speaking out forthrightly and boldly in public contrasted substantially with the reserve that respectable middle and upper class southern women were expected to demonstrate in the Old South.⁴¹ Hence, Charlotte Barnes Conner and other actresses who played Lady Teazle or characters like her stood apart from their elite educated contemporaries who would have eschewed public expression.

Jane Placide differed from Charlotte Barnes Conner and many other antebellum actresses, for she grew up in an acting family that did not travel very much. Managing the theater in Charleston kept her father busy, and though Alexander Placide took his company to Savannah where they periodically staged a mini-season, he elected not to tour more widely. Since his wife and children constituted part of his stock company, the whole family spent many hours at the theater. Thus, Jane learned how to act, dance, and sing under her parents' direction. Knowing that theatergoers soon tired of the same fare, Alexander Placide staged a variety of entertainment, and Jane followed his example by cultivating a wide repertory when she moved to the American Theatre in New Orleans. This versatility allowed her to play with ease across from most of the national and international male stars that Caldwell brought to his theater.⁴²

Cornelia Ludlow Field and her sister Mary stand out from other daughters born into theatrical families who made the southern stage home. Rather than grooming their girls for a professional career, Mary and Noah Ludlow strove to provide them with the

⁴⁰ "Lafitte at the St. Charles," *New Orleans Picayune*, 15 April, 1837.

⁴¹ Scott, 4.

⁴² Burroughs, 103; William Stanley Hoole, *The Ante-Bellum Charleston Theatre* (Tuscaloosa: The University of Alabama Press, 1946), 6; Lyle, 56.

genteel education usually available only to daughters of the wealthy. Though Ludlow struggled financially in his early years of management, he and Sol Smith began to enjoy more stability and prosperity after their theaters in Mobile and St. Louis were established. The Ludlows' increased income allowed them to move upward socially by adopting many customs of upper-class southerners, but they never amassed the kind of fortune that placed them solidly in the ranks of the South's upper echelon. Nevertheless, by sending their daughters to a prestigious girls' academy in Mobile, where the Ludlows maintained a permanent residence, they could still improve their social standing. This training came at no little cost to the family, though. Cornelia's tuition for just one term cost \$2,670.⁴³ An 1837 letter to Cornelia from her father, who spent half of every year overseeing the partnership's theatrical operations in St. Louis, reveals the importance he attached to his daughters' education: he admonished her to practice her music daily and to study hard in French, the language that set refined southern girls apart from their uncultured contemporaries.⁴⁴

The Ludlows also placed a high premium on their daughters' honor and personal repute, for these qualities also served as key class markers in the antebellum South. Historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown explains that elite southern families, like the English aristocracy that they emulated, wished to pass on intact their wealth to the next generation. Men needed the guarantee of chaste wives to ensure a line of legitimate offspring who could inherit and hand on their assets; hence, raising virtuous daughters who guarded their virginity and revered male authority was of paramount importance,

⁴³ Richard Corre to Noah M. Ludlow, 17 January, 1841, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 2 of 17, Missouri Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri (hereafter cited as Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers).

⁴⁴ Noah Ludlow to Cornelia Ludlow, 3 August, 1837, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 1 of 17.

especially to the wealthy.⁴⁵ In another 1837 letter, Noah Ludlow showed his concern that Cornelia maintain her high character: “You cannot but be aware, my daughter, how dear you are to me—your happiness and respectability is the last fond wish and hope clinging to this heart of mine”⁴⁶ And later in the year he admonished, “be as pure in heart and act and as ingenuous in your language and conduct as any mortal that ever trod the earth.”⁴⁷

The popularity of a standard stock play, *Virginius* (1820), by James Sheridan Knowles, reflects the importance of a young woman’s purity and honor in the Old South. A retelling of a Roman story that became one source for Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* (1592), the drama traces Virginius’ agonizing decision to kill his daughter Virginia after Appius Claudius has compromised her sexual honor.⁴⁸ While southern theatrical companies did not stage *Titus*, the model for Knowles’s play, they frequently scheduled performances of *Virginius*, which likely appealed more to audiences for its paucity of gore. Shakespeare wrote *Titus* early in his career, and the play included many conventions of bloody revenge tragedies then the rage on early modern stages. The plot swirls around a political rivalry, and events include the gang rape and murder of a young, innocent woman in addition to human sacrifice, bodily mutilation, and mother-son cannibalism.⁴⁹ Antebellum southerners fancied themselves as genteel and cultured, so

⁴⁵ Wyatt-Brown, 85-89.

⁴⁶ Noah M. Ludlow to Cornelia Ludlow, 5 June, 1837, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 1 of 17.

⁴⁷ Noah M. Ludlow to Cornelia Ludlow, 1 September, 1837, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 1 of 17.

⁴⁸ Christopher Murray, “James Sheridan Knowles: The Victorian Shakespeare?” in *Shakespeare and the Victorian Stage*, ed. Richard Foulkes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 165-179, see especially pp. 164-67.

⁴⁹ Katharine Maus, introduction to *Titus Andronicus*, 1592, by William Shakespeare in *The Norton Shakespeare*, edited by Stephen Greenblatt (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997), 371.

they likely found the rawness of *Titus* repugnant, even though many could ignore the horrors inflicted on the African-American slave population in their midst.

In contrast to Shakespeare's *Titus*, Knowles's *Virginius* found a regular place in the region's stage repertory due to its streamlined focus on the defamation of its lead female character and the revenge extracted by her father for the damage to her name. The play's Shakespearean style also probably appealed to playgoers, who venerated the early modern playwright and associated him with respectability.⁵⁰ Like his model, Knowles wrote in verse, rather than prose, and he featured soliloquies, word play, syntactical inversions, and archaic Elizabethan phrases. In addition, he used a five-act play structure peppered with multiple plots. His female characters also reflected an idealized view of womanhood and mimicked many of the Shakespearean heroines that Victorian spectators admired, including Juliet, Rosalind, Desdemona, and Cordelia.⁵¹

Knowles often focused on father-daughter relationships, and he depicted fathers as divine sources of authority in an otherwise disordered world. *Virginius*, like Walter in *The Hunchback*, plays this role. He both expects and receives total submission from his dutiful daughter. Before Appius Claudius has even seen and desired Virginia, for example, her father has vouched for her innocence and virtue. Presenting her to Icilius, her betrothed, *Virginius* boasts that she is

My daughter truly filial—both in word
And act—yet even more in act than word;
And—for the man who hopes to win her hand—
A virgin, from whose lips a soul as pure

⁵⁰ Foulkes, 1-9.

⁵¹ Anthony Drago, *Sheridan Knowles in Context* (Ph.D. diss., City University of New York, 1995), 10-15, 175, 378; Murray, 164-179.

Exhales, as e'er responded to the blessing in a parent's kiss.⁵²

Virginius' pride in his daughter derives not only from her chastity, but also from her obedience and filial devotion to him. Called to speak with her father about her future in act 1, she quickly comes into his chambers and immediately asks, "Well, father, what is your will?"⁵³ For southern playgoers, Virginia would have represented the ideal antebellum daughter: she has internalized an allegiance to patriarchal ideals and accepted for herself a submissive and dutiful role.

The frequent stagings of *Virginius* attest to its vogue with spectators. The play debuted at Covent Garden Theatre in London on May 17, 1820, and brought Knowles immediate recognition as a rising playwright. *Virginius* soon gained a standard place in stock repertory offerings with theaters in London and the provinces, but the play accrued even more popularity in America. New York's Park Theatre scheduled the play eighty-five times between 1827 and 1877, while playgoers from Philadelphia to New Orleans similarly clamored for frequent performances.⁵⁴ Hearing of the play's initial London success, James Caldwell included *Virginius* in his 1821 season at the American Theatre in New Orleans, and the response was so good that he re-scheduled the drama the following year. When he sent a small company to Natchez that spring, Caldwell chose the drama as one of those the group performed. Jane Placide acted the part of Virginia across from Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, who was Noah Ludlow's favorite interpreter of the masculine role.⁵⁵ Ludlow said that Cooper brought a "tender, loving fatherly"

⁵² James Sheridan Knowles, *Virginius*, 1820, in *The Dramatic Works of James Sheridan Knowles* (London: Routledge, Warnes & Routledge, 1859; *Literature Online*, 1994), 2.2.50-55, p. 28 of 95, via Galileo online database, (accessed 5 September, 2002).

⁵³ Knowles, *Virginius*, 1.2.53, p. 17 of 95.

⁵⁴ Durham, 33, 94, 211, 398, 448, 452, 534; Murray, 175.

⁵⁵ Durham, 33.

quality” to the part, whereas Edwin Forrest would later endow the role with “a soldierly bearing” and William Charles Macready was simply too stiff and unnatural for the manager’s taste.⁵⁶ Jane Placide’s style must have complemented Cooper’s, for she performed Virginia across from him again when he returned to New Orleans in 1827. Ludlow and Smith also favored the play in the repertory of their theaters, as they regularly scheduled performances throughout the 1830s and 1840s in Mobile and St. Louis.⁵⁷

Plays such as *Virginius* served an important didactic role on the antebellum stage by affirming the traditional upbringing that white families sought to give their daughters. While the Ludlows emulated this trend, the training they provided for their daughters stands in stark contrast to that given by most other southern theatrical families and affirms that many actresses who entered the profession as children departed radically from southern antebellum norms. The Ludlows’ determination to follow the customs of the region in raising their daughters indicates that with sufficient financial means, other acting families might have chosen the same alternative for their girls. That they did not or could not offer other choices makes actresses whose families trained them for the stage from a young age stand out more markedly as liminal figures.

Since women of all classes stepped away from their traditional roles during the Civil War, actresses who came to the profession during these years did not differ quite so noticeably from their contemporaries. Many elite women volunteered their services in hospitals while some middle class women attained jobs working in munitions factories or

⁵⁶ Ludlow, 233.

⁵⁷ Burroughs, 68; Ludlow, 233, 245-46, 288, 304, 463, 486, 593, 683.

for the Confederate government.⁵⁸ Thus, the few families such as the Crisps and Waldrons who continued to perform and train their daughters for stage careers during the war years resembled others in the region who struggled to maintain a livelihood in the midst of war and to procure a stable means of future support for their children.

Acting Courtly

“Come, let me wed the man that loves me, or else die a maid!”

Catherine, *Love* (1840), 1.1.220, James Sheridan Knowles

Catherine’s desire to marry for love reflected the wishes of most girls in the antebellum South, but class status, wealth, and race all limited young women as they set about choosing prospective mates, a process that involved participating in the region’s courtship rituals. Knowles’s play focuses particularly on the way that class confined marital choices, even for those with means. Though Catherine and her friend the Countess both succeed in finding loving husbands, they encounter many obstructions on their journey. The play’s popularity in Ludlow and Smith’s theaters throughout the 1840s and 1850s reflected the interest that antebellum southerners maintained in the marital choices their children made.⁵⁹

In the Old South, well-to-do white families staged elaborate debutante balls, dinner parties, and teas to introduce their daughters to eligible young men of the same class, while middle-class yeoman families relied on church and community activities to locate appropriate spouses for their girls. Elite families had more at stake economically and politically; thus, they wished their daughters to marry for wealth and connections, while middle-class families tended to evaluate prospective mates on character,

⁵⁸ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 88-91.

⁵⁹ Ludlow, 658, 710, 662, 665, 666.

appearance, behavior, and work ethic.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the financial stability of a prospective husband weighed heavily in any young woman's decision to marry, for men legally acquired their wives' assets when they wed. A prospective bride would find a man with his own wealth more attractive, as he would be able to leave intact any holdings she might bring to the marriage.⁶¹ Popular advice books extolled romantic love, but practical economic concerns frequently eclipsed the ideal. Despite the desire of young women to marry someone with more money, and possibly greater social status, most ended up marrying within the same class, since social connections limited contact with others from very different economic backgrounds.⁶² Young women raised in acting families primarily relied on connections forged through their work to find partners rather than participating in social activities as did other girls in the region. Thus, the antebellum stage became a site for enacting socially and textually scripted courtship rituals.

Because antebellum actresses mostly met their spouses through work, they too frequently married men of the same class, but exceptions occurred. Fanny Kemble, the English star who toured America in 1832, married Pierce Butler, a wealthy Philadelphian who followed her from city to city fervently proffering his suit. Though Kemble never performed on the southern stage, she did visit the region with Butler, for his fortune came from the vast rice plantations he and his family owned on the Georgia coast. Horrified by what she saw when she visited the Butler plantations, Kemble poured out her thoughts and feelings in letters and diaries that she subsequently published as *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839*. The text became influential in the abolition movement but also drove an irreparable wedge between Fanny and Pierce.

⁶⁰ McMillen, 10-22.

⁶¹ Lebsack, 16-23; 35.

⁶² Kierner, 28.

Similarly, Julia Dean married Arthur Hayne, an elite Charlestonian who became enamored of her while she was performing in the city in 1854. Though Kemble and Dean both raised their class status through their vertical marriages, neither gained much financially. Secure with her new husband's considerable assets, Kemble gave most of what she had earned on her successful American tour to her debt-burdened family in England. When her marriage later dissolved in divorce, however, she was left penniless. Kemble resorted to her acting skills and gave dramatic readings throughout the Northeast to support herself. Unlike Kemble, Julia Dean gained nothing but an aristocratic name when she married, for her alcoholic husband, Arthur Hayne, drank up the meager earnings that he made when he was sober. The couple relied on her salary for their support, so when their marriage also broke down in divorce, Dean could finally enjoy the full benefits of her pay.⁶³ While Kemble and Dean made marriages that raised their social stature, most upper and middle-class southerners wished to see their daughters forge alliances that also brought them financial stability.

Reflecting the view that marriage should bring both social and economic benefits to its participants, Isaac Pocock's stage adaptation of Walter Scott's novel, *Rob Roy Macgregor*, features a man and woman who marry to secure an alliance between their two noble families. Diana Vernon and her family will increase their already considerable social and political clout through her marriage to Frank Osbaldistone; unfortunately, Frank's cousin, Rashleigh, covets both Frank's match with Diana and his large inheritance. Rashleigh conspires to strip Frank of his fortune and to woo Diana for his

⁶³ Clinton, 49, 56, 137-158; Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 20 July, 1855, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; Koon, *Gold Rush Performers*, 83; Hugh Ruppersburg, *Georgia Voices: Volume Two, Nonfiction* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1992), 63, 65.

own. His plans ultimately fail, though, so Diana and Frank end up happily wed.⁶⁴ The characters' allegorical names further drive home the drama's conservative message: a woman should avoid marrying "rashly." Instead, she ought to search for a "frank" man who will bring her the promise of honestly made (or inherited) money. This theme apparently drew theatergoers, for James Caldwell included *Rob Roy* in the repertory of the New Orleans American Theatre for its first five years. Ludlow and Smith also presented the play consistently in their St. Louis and Mobile theaters in the 1830s.⁶⁵

While *Rob Roy Macgregor* would have resonated with southerners who valued marriage as a means of forging connections and building capital, the experiences of antebellum performers sometimes diverged from the norm, and quite a few actresses made horizontal love matches rather than marrying for money or social alliance. For example, Eliza Riddle and Joseph Field met one another while performing with Ludlow and Smith's stock company in Mobile during the 1835-36 season. They served as leading lady and man and acted together in most of the company's productions. A letter negotiating terms for an engagement in Vicksburg from Joseph to Sol Smith in October of 1836 indicates that the strength of Joseph's attachment to Eliza maintained its vigor after the previous season ended. He urged Smith to create a place for her in the company and asserted that "a little extra profit would not make me budge all the way there if obliged to go alone."⁶⁶ Courting on and off stage eventually brought about their marriage

⁶⁴ Isaac Pocock, *Rob Roy Macgregor* (London: W. Sams, 1818; *Literature Online*, 1996), via Galileo online database (accessed 5 September, 2002).

⁶⁵ Burroughs, 37-38; Ludlow, 436-37, 459, 460; Lyle, 72.

⁶⁶ Joseph M. Field to Sol Smith, 15 October, 1836, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

at the end of the summer season in 1837. The couple continued to act for a living, and their daughter Kate followed their lead as public figures to become a popular lecturer.⁶⁷

Stage connections also brought about the marriage of Cornelia Ludlow and Matt Field, Joseph's brother and fellow actor. Cornelia and Eliza Riddle were good friends who frequently wrote to one another when Eliza was performing away from Mobile, so when Matt developed a liking for Cornelia, he approached his sister-in-law for help in cultivating her friend's mutual interest. In a May 1840 letter to Eliza, Matt confessed that he was "a poor chicken-hearted lover" but hoped that she could portray him in a better light.⁶⁸ Eliza willingly undertook her part as matchmaker, and though Cornelia coyly assured Matt in a July 3 letter that news of his feelings came as a surprise to her, previous correspondence shows that she had already spoken of the matter to her father.⁶⁹

A June 3 letter from Noah counseled his daughter to move slowly and judiciously; a happy marriage, he ominously wrote, could bring much joy while an unhappy one could be "the source of endless worldly misery." Ludlow shored up his points with references to two plays his daughter would know. First, he reminded Cornelia of the Reverend Anhalt's advice to Amelia in Kotzebue's *Lover's Vows*: "When convenience and fair appearance join with folly and ill humor to forge the letters of matrimony, they gall with their weight." Similarly, he recalled Lieutenant Worthington's words to Emily in Coleman's *Poor Gentleman*: "Wed not for wealth for without love, it is gaudy slavery, nor for love without competence, 'tis twofold misery."⁷⁰ Historians Sally McMillen and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese explain that in the antebellum South, women derived their

⁶⁷ Ludlow, 491; Meserve, *Heralds*, 167.

⁶⁸ M. C. Field to Eliza Riddle Field, 14 May, 1840, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 2 of 17.

⁶⁹ Cornelia Ludlow to Matt Field, 3 July, 1840, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 2 of 17.

⁷⁰ Noah Ludlow to Cornelia Ludlow, 3 June, 1840, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 2 of 17.

identity and social standing from their husbands; hence, making a good marriage was of primary importance to young women of the region.⁷¹ Ludlow knew the critical role that marriage played in a woman's life, and a July 1840 letter to Matt reflected this understanding in words that echoed the sentiments he had expressed to his daughter the previous month: "the happiness or misery of her [Cornelia's] life depends chiefly on such an event." To ensure the young lovers' caution, Ludlow asked that they wait at least a year before marrying. Cornelia and Matt heeded her father's wishes, and though Ludlow worried about Matt's financial stability, the marriage proved to be long and happy.⁷²

In addition to the repertory standards Ludlow mentioned to Cornelia, two other plays, *Love* (1840) by James Sheridan Knowles and *The Rivals* (1775) by Richard Brinsley Sheridan, also celebrate the ideals of companionate marriage rather than contractual marriage. In *Love*, since the wealthy Catherine wants to marry for love, not money, she eavesdrops on her suitors to make sure that they are not courting her just to acquire her financial reserves. Meanwhile, Catherine's aristocratic friend, the Countess, falls in love with a peasant but has to divest herself of class pretensions before she can accept his offer of marriage. In a similar situation, Lydia, the well-to-do protagonist of *The Rivals*, marries beneath her station. She proceeds without her family's consent and loses her inheritance, but she gains a husband whom she knows loves her, not her money.⁷³

⁷¹ Fox-Genovese, 28-9; McMillen, 47.

⁷² Matt C. Field to Cornelia Ludlow, 9 July, 1840, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 2 of 17; Noah Ludlow to Matt Field, 10 July, 1840, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 2 of 17.

⁷³ James Sheridan Knowles, *Love*, 1840 (London: Routledge, Warnes, & Routledge, 1859; *Literature Online*, 1994), 1.1, via Galileo online database (accessed 12 August, 2003); Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The Rivals*, 1775, ed. Elizabeth Duthie (London: A & C Black, 1989).

Charlotte Barnes Conner was one of the first southern actresses to introduce *Love* into her repertory when Knowles brought out his new play in 1840. She played the Countess alongside her mother's Catherine twice in New Orleans and once in Mobile. Julia Dean Hayne followed the Barneses' example and included the play in her offerings, performing the Countess on visits to St. Louis, Mobile, and New Orleans throughout the late 1840s and early 1850s.⁷⁴ *The Rivals* maintained a stronger appeal in the eighteenth century, but a few nineteenth-century companies still chose to stage the play. Eliza Poe acted as Lady Languish when she performed in Charleston with the Placides during January of 1811, and the Drake Company included the play in their early repertory. The popularity of *The Rivals* waned in the 1830s, but Noah Ludlow resurrected the drama briefly in his Mobile and New Orleans theaters during the 1844 season.⁷⁵ He might have had his daughter's recent experience in mind when he scheduled the old play about companionate marriage, or he might simply have been hoping an old favorite could attract some interest with theatergoers tired of the usual offerings.

While Cornelia Ludlow's courtship experience indicates that even daughters raised in acting families who did not train for the stage relied upon the theatrical world's network to find their spouses, Jane Placide shows that not all women who went into acting elected to marry. Historian Victoria Bynum explains that remaining single incurred quite a risk in the Old South, since unmarried white women could not serve as "the vessels through which white male property and progeny passed."⁷⁶ Indeed, their

⁷⁴ Bailey, 262; "The Barnes," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 10 April, 1840; Blackburn, Appendix B; Duggar, 98, 185; Ludlow, 665; "St. Charles Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 27 December, 1854, 13 February, 1855; St. Charles Theatre Advertisements, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 23 January, 1840, 13 February, 1855.

⁷⁵ Ludlow, 102, 191, 611, 613; Gedde Smith, 123-125.

⁷⁶ Victoria E. Bynum, *Unruly Women: The Politics of Social and Sexual Control in the Old South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 89.

unguided, unprotected state made them a potential danger to themselves and to the status quo, for innocent single women could fall prey to the wiles of unscrupulous men, while wayward women could tempt upstanding men into adulterous relationships. Moreover, they could become mothers of troublesome children who had no male direction.

Jane Placide bore no illegitimate children, but her experience bears out southerners' fear that unprincipled men could succeed in seducing vulnerable single women. Soon after arriving in New Orleans, Jane attracted the attentions of her manager, James Caldwell, who was already married to Maria Carter Hall Wormsley, a great-granddaughter of Robert "King" Carter, an early rich planter on the James River in Virginia.⁷⁷ While most antebellum theater managers assumed a paternalistic interest in their company members, especially any single women in their employ, Caldwell's personal involvement with Jane Placide exceeded the norm. Placide also drew the interest of the young actor Edwin Forrest when he came to work for Caldwell in 1824.

As Forrest's infatuation for Placide eventually came to light in his second season of employ, Caldwell angrily rebuffed his lead actor's romantic overtures toward the woman whom local critics had come to call "Queen of the Drama in New Orleans."⁷⁸ Forrest had not yet achieved star status, but the finesse he exhibited as Caldwell's lead stock man gave an indication of the skill that would bring him fame and fortune on the national stage over the next twenty years. His expertise in wooing women was also foreshadowed by his attentions to Jane Placide, for Forrest later gained quite a reputation as a rake. He so flagrantly cheated on his wife, Catherine Sinclair Forrest, that when they

⁷⁷ Hostetler, 22-25.

⁷⁸ Richard Moody, *Edwin Forrest: First Star of the American Stage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 44.

divorced, the judge issued an unusual ruling, deeming her the injured party and awarding her \$3,000 a year in alimony.⁷⁹

During the 1824 season in New Orleans, Forrest and Placide co-starred at Caldwell's American Theatre in non-Shakespearean favorites such as Augustus von Kotzebue's *The Stranger*, Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *School for Scandal*, and Daniel Terry's adaptation of Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering*, which Charlotte Cushman later made famous for her depiction of Meg Merrilies. They also played across from one another in Shakespearean standards such as *Richard the Third* and *Romeo and Juliet*.⁸⁰ Forrest was content to play the silent stage lover in the first year of his acquaintance with Placide, but in 1825, he grew more forthright in his attentions and began to publish love poems dedicated to her in the *Louisiana Advertiser*.⁸¹ Caldwell resented Forrest's attentions toward Jane, and as the two men vied for her attentions, an explosive break finally occurred between them.

Caldwell announced a performance of *Twelfth Night* in which he played the Duke and Placide played Olivia. So fervidly did he deliver his lines that the jealous Forrest challenged Caldwell to a duel a few nights after the performance. Caldwell refused Forrest's dare, whereupon the hot-headed young actor posted a series of broadsides that denounced Caldwell as a "scoundrel and a coward."⁸² Caldwell fired Forrest, who

⁷⁹ *Case of Catharine N. Forrest, Plaintiff Against Edwin Forrest, Defendant* (New York: n. p., 1863), Micropublished in *The History of Women* (New Haven: Research Publications, Inc., 1975), see especially The Plaintiff's Complaint, pp. 3-11, The Defendant's Exceptions, pp. 15-16, and The Order Confirming Referee's Report as to Alimony, pp. 1188-1193. Catharine Forrest accused Edwin Forrest of committing adultery with at least six different women, including the actress Josephine Clifton, and though he vociferously denied her charges of infidelity and abuse, the many witnesses who testified against him convinced the judge to rule in her favor.

⁸⁰ Hostetler, 77; Lyle, 45, 53; Smither, 39-44.

⁸¹ Moody, 46.

⁸² William R. Alger, *The Life of Edwin Forrest, The American Tragedian* (Philadelphia, J. B. Lippincott, 1877), 137; Hostetler, 91; Moody, 46; Smither, 44.

avoided performing in New Orleans again for several years. Forrest's challenge and the wording of his posters bear out Bertram Wyatt-Brown's contention that inexperienced young men who were uncertain about their social standing and manhood often initiated duels as a way to secure status and enhance their masculinity. Wyatt-Brown also notes, however, that many elite southerners castigated the practice of dueling and recognized its congruence to lower-class fist fights.⁸³ Hence, Forrest's hotheaded behavior actually distanced him from the upper class he hoped to join, while Caldwell's reticence aligned him with the elite ranks.

Thirty years before Forrest crossed Caldwell over Jane Placide, her father, Alexandre, had similarly challenged a fellow French actor who was showing a romantic interest in his lover, a dancer known as Mademoiselle Columbine. Columbine accompanied Placide when he came to America in 1791, and to cultivate the appearance of respectability, she billed herself as Madame Placide, though the two had never married. She moved with Placide to Charleston, but when Monsieur Douvillier, a pantomime actor in the French theater, began to make overtures to Columbine in the spring of 1795, Placide challenged the man to a duel. The two fought with short swords behind the Tobacco inspection building, but the encounter ended in a draw. Later that year, Columbine attracted another admirer, and Placide also challenged this man, who died in the contest. Soon afterwards, Columbine left Placide for Douvillier, but the public so disapproved of her ambiguous marital status that the two had to leave town.⁸⁴

Whether or not Jane Placide knew of her father's mistress and the public censure that she suffered, she never subjected herself to a similar situation. Cognizant of their

⁸³ Wyatt-Brown, 142-153.

⁸⁴ Bloodworth, 9, 43-50; Charles S. Watson, *Antebellum Charleston Dramatists* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1976), 12.

visible public positions, she and James Caldwell never lived together, but the two continued to maintain a relationship that was closer than usual for a manager and his leading stock lady. In the summer of 1828, she went with him on a recruiting trip to New York while he left his wife and children visiting family in Virginia, and in 1833, the two spent six months together in England. Placide went to debut and act in London, and Caldwell ostensibly accompanied her to recruit more actors. His visit was out of the ordinary, however, as he missed the start of the season in New Orleans and stayed longer than was necessary to interview and hire performers.⁸⁵

Caldwell's management of Placide's business affairs was also unusual. He advised her in all of her financial dealings, a position that her brother Thomas would ordinarily have assumed as her eldest living male relative. If Thomas had made no efforts to stay in touch with his sister, or if he had lived far away, his lack of involvement in Jane's affairs might be more understandable, but he too lived in New Orleans and acted for Caldwell, thereby seeing her on a regular basis. Jane not only relied on Caldwell to manage her personal affairs during her life, but she also left her entire estate to him when she died in 1835.⁸⁶

Caldwell's later extramarital affairs confirm his disregard for conjugal fidelity and increase the likelihood of his involvement in a long-term intimate relationship with Jane Placide. The year after Placide died, Caldwell hired another young actress, Josephine Rowe. The two became romantically involved, and he subsequently divorced Maria in order to marry Josephine in 1850. His second wife could not restrain Caldwell's roving eye either, however. While he was married to Josephine, he also carried on an affair with

⁸⁵ Burroughs, 95-97; Hostetler, 123, 133.

⁸⁶ Hostetler, 249-251.

Margaret Abrams, who bore him two illegitimate children.⁸⁷ Caldwell's penchant for pretty young women, coupled with Jane Placide's legendary appeal in New Orleans, makes an affair between the two quite plausible. If Jane Placide did indeed carry on an affair with her employer, however, she was discreet enough to avoid the social ostracism that would have accompanied public exposure of such a relationship.

The centrality of marriage in the Old South and southerners' low regard for single women spurred parents to provide opportunities for courtship commensurate with their financial means. Friends and acquaintances also maintained an interest in the futures of the single women in their circles, and in this respect, the theatrical world was no different. Sol Smith and Noah Ludlow frequently discussed impending marriages of the young women they employed; for instance, the courtship and engagement of Eliza Riddle and Joseph Field occupied their attention in several letters.⁸⁸ Likewise, a series of letters from Edward Woolf, a Philadelphia theater manager, to Sol Smith in 1841 and 1842 revealed his concern for the marital status of Eliza Petrie, a single stock actress in her late twenties who had worked for Ludlow and Smith since she was sixteen. In May 1841, Woolf jokingly asked why Smith could not find her a rich Louisiana planter; thirteen months later, he mused that she must be a "man-hater."⁸⁹ Petrie eventually proved Woolf wrong, for in 1845, she married Robert Place, who managed the American Theatre in New Orleans.⁹⁰

Since stock repertory changed little during the Civil War, a continued emphasis on courting to procure an advantageous marriage permeated many stage productions, and

⁸⁷ Ibid., 358-59, 569.

⁸⁸ Sol Smith to Noah Ludlow, 15 May, 1837 and 21 May, 1837, Sol Smith Collection, Box 1 of 6.

⁸⁹ Edward Woolf to Sol Smith, 4 April, 1841, 27 March, 1842, and 4 June, 1842, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

⁹⁰ Ludlow, 558-59.

the few new plays that debuted during the war years also affirmed this goal. In addition, these dramas shored up the antebellum ideology that demanded sexual purity from white women. For instance, John Hill Hewitt's *The Marquis in Petticoats* centers on verifying the chastity of a Russian czarina before a French king will extend an offer of marriage to her. The king sends an emissary to court the Russian noblewoman, but he also charges his go-between to confirm her purity.⁹¹ Savannah playgoers greatly enjoyed the comedy when The Queen Sisters staged it for the first time in March of 1863. Indeed, the drama critic for the *Daily Morning News* remarked that "the entire performance went off to the perfect satisfaction of the audience," which was one of the largest the theater had seen in quite a while.⁹²

A letter from Confederate soldier, Sammy Cline to his sister Helen echoed the emphasis on feminine virtue that Savannah spectators found so compelling in Hewitt's play. After describing a trip from camp into Mobile where he and his friends took in the sights and attended the theater, Sammy warned Helen to use great discretion before she wrote to any soldier in the Army. He cautioned that the men "talk about their Lady Correspondents" and noted that "Miss E. Hernshaw has very imprudently allowed herself to get in correspondence with 3 or 4 young men in this company. They show their letters to their friends so it goes from one friend to another until the whole company have something to say about it."⁹³

⁹¹ John Hill Hewitt, *The Marquis in Petticoats*, 1863, John Hill Hewitt Papers, Manuscript Collection 31, Special Collections and Archives, Robert W. Woodruff Library, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter cited as Hewitt Papers).

⁹² "Theatre," *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 24 March, 1863.

⁹³ Sammy to Helen S. Cline Chase, 11 March, 1864, Helen S. Cline Chase Papers, Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library, Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Sammy's concern for his sister stemmed from her vulnerable single status, and the plays that appeared during the Civil War years confirmed this desire to protect single women from moral and sexual corruption. The perennial popularity of stock repertory plays such as *The Hunchback* and *Romeo and Juliet* affirmed the importance of defending female honor, but another new play by John Hill Hewitt also reflected this persistent, conservative element of antebellum ideology.⁹⁴ Hewitt's *The Battle of Leesburg* (1862) includes a sub-plot that traces the perils of Ella Dorsey, a young woman accosted by Union soldiers as she tries to cross the battle lines to meet her betrothed, a Confederate soldier named Harry Mason. Harry manages to rescue Ella from her attackers in the nick of time, and the two safely escape back to Confederate territory where they can finally marry. Harry's heroic act not only saves Ella's honor but also preserves his good name, since her virtue reflects on him as her protector and future husband.⁹⁵

Acting Married

"A wife has done with friends! Her heart, had it the room of twenty hearts, her husband ought to fill . . ."

Antonio, *The Wife* (1833), 3.4.145-46, James Sheridan Knowles

Julia Dean Hayne and Frances Denny Drake probably wondered at the validity of Antonio's words to Mariana in *The Wife* when the men that they had hoped would be loving husbands turned out to be abusive drunks. Despite the questions that Hayne and Drake might have had for the zealous curate, his advice still reflected many southerners'

⁹⁴ "The Varieties Last Night," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 8 January, 1863; "The Varieties," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 27 February, 1863; "Amusements," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1 February, 1865.

⁹⁵ John Hill Hewitt, *The Battle of Leesburg*, 1862, Hewitt Papers.

belief in the subservient position that married women should occupy. While Hayne and Drake opposed this stereotype and left their unhappy marriages, many other wives in similar circumstances could not find the means or the courage to make their way in a world that was largely unfriendly to single, working women, especially if they were divorced.

Marriage in the nineteenth century could of course bring considerable happiness to both husbands and wives, but as Suzanne Lebsack points out, when matrimony failed, women especially suffered for men retained the upper hand. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese agrees and points to a wife's loss of legal status as the primary cause of married women's inequity. Men might promise their wives mutual affection and respect, but a woman's legal erasure upon marrying ensured that the relationship could never be equal. Laura Edwards notes that some families tried to protect their daughters' property from husbands by filing separate estates, marriage contracts, and wills in equity courts, and Sally McMillen traces the slow protection of a married woman's property in the common-law courts.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the majority of white women in the antebellum South never attained equal footing with their husbands, and most would have found the idea quite strange.

Eliza Arnold Poe experienced both the joys and the miseries of marriage in her short life. In 1800, when she was just 13 and working as a stock actress at the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia, Eliza met and fell in love with another actor, Charles Hopkins. The two played in many performances together that year and the next. Then in 1802, Charles accepted a position with the Virginia Company; Eliza soon joined him in

⁹⁶ Laura F. Edwards, *Scarlett Doesn't Live Here Anymore: Southern Women in the Civil War Era* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 28-9; Fox-Genovese, 9; Lebsack, 18, 31; McMillen, 50-51.

Alexandria, where they were married, and for the next three years, the couple toured with the company on its circuit throughout the state. During this time, Eliza began undertaking more substantial roles such as Maria in *The School for Scandal* and even the occasional leading role such as Ophelia in *Hamlet*. Charles also enjoyed professional success, and the two settled comfortably into their new relationship with one another. When Charles suddenly contracted yellow fever and died in October 1785, however, Eliza's life once again changed drastically.⁹⁷

A year later, Eliza married another actor with the Virginia company, David Poe. He was the nineteen-year old son of a Revolutionary War hero from Baltimore, Major David Poe. Trying to escape his father's long shadow and make a name for himself, the young David decided to try acting. Unfortunately, he never progressed far in the profession: rather than honing his stage skills, he moved from theater to theater vainly seeking a positive critical reception. When drama critics in Virginia wrote poor reviews of his performances, he moved to Boston, where audiences hissed him when he mumbled, rushed, or forgot his lines. He moved again to New York, but hardly did better. In contrast, Eliza continued to grow as an actress. Everywhere that she and David went, Eliza consistently garnered positive reviews and added more leading roles to her repertory. She even began to play across from well-known stars such as John Howard Payne. As her professional development outstripped David's, though, their marriage began to suffer. He began to leave her for long periods to visit family or to secure new engagements, but by 1809, he was gone for good. In the same way that Eliza weathered every move with fortitude, she survived her husband's desertion. Recalling the

⁹⁷ Gedde Smith, 54-81.

enthusiastic reception she had always maintained in the South, Eliza headed back in that direction and booked engagements on the Virginia circuit once again.⁹⁸

Julia Dean Hayne also suffered from an unhappy marriage, but she had to contend with physical abuse in addition to jealousy and desertion. At first, her union with Arthur Hayne seemed to promise great happiness. Indeed, Julia's father Edwin Dean crowed to Sol Smith in February 1855 about Arthur's fine South Carolina family connections and his long-standing love for Julia.⁹⁹ By July, however, Dean's tune had changed: he noted that Smith's "aversion" to Hayne upon their first meeting was well founded, for "his cruel treatment . . . will destroy her health . . . and break her heart." Dean went on to assert, "I am convinced that she cannot long live with him."¹⁰⁰ Later the same month, Dean admitted to Smith that Hayne beat Julia when he was drunk, but "to everybody else, he is extremely complaisant."¹⁰¹ Arthur Hayne may have turned to drink to drown feelings of inadequacy, for as Noah Ludlow noted, he had failed to measure up to his elite Charleston family's standards of worldly success.¹⁰² His father was Robert Y. Hayne, a South Carolina senator, and though Arthur trained for a career in medicine, Edwin Dean conceded to Sol Smith in February 1855 that Arthur was still living at home off of his family's means when he was 31.¹⁰³ Julia Dean became Arthur's ticket to attaining independence from his family, but resentment over the contrast between her professional

⁹⁸ Ibid., 3-8, 88, 103-114, 119.

⁹⁹ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 1 February, 1855, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

¹⁰⁰ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 11 July, 1855, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

¹⁰¹ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 20 July, 1855, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

¹⁰² Ludlow, 711-12.

¹⁰³ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 1 February, 1855, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

success and his failure manifested itself in the ugly brutality that ultimately drove Julia to sue for divorce in 1865.¹⁰⁴

Obtaining a divorce in nineteenth-century America was difficult, but southern states made the procedure nearly impossible. Laura Edwards and Suzanne Lebsack explain that southerners found divorce anathema because it threatened to unravel the social and economic fabric of the region: if white men could lose authority over their wives, they could also lose control of their slaves. Hence, most southern states reinforced husbands' power by requiring a special legislative act to secure a divorce, but lawmakers did not acquiesce lightly. A plea of abandonment, wifely adultery, or impotence might attain legal severance of a marriage, but rarely did charges of abuse or irreconcilable differences sway a legislative body to grant a divorce.¹⁰⁵ Victoria Bynum recognizes the irony in lawmakers' reluctance: on the one hand, southerners venerated marriage as an ideal institution that provided love, honor, and protection to women, but on the other hand, their governing bodies refused to protect unfortunate women caught in abusive or degrading marriages that existed far outside the ideal.¹⁰⁶

Sally McMillen notes that frontier states were the first to relax divorce laws, and this liberality might have been a factor that led Julia Dean Hayne to file her suit in Utah.¹⁰⁷ She was also touring the West at the time, and her decision might have simply coincided with where she was performing. Regardless, the court ruled in her favor. Arthur's intemperance, coupled with his neglect of Julia and their three children, probably swayed the legal decision, for she received full legal custody and total control

¹⁰⁴ Bill for Divorce, Filed by Julia Dean Hayne in Probate Court, Territory of Utah, Great Salt Lake City County, 20 December, 1865.

¹⁰⁵ Edwards, 24-26; Lebsack, 34-35, 68-69.

¹⁰⁶ Bynum, 2.

¹⁰⁷ McMillen, 54.

of her financial and material assets.¹⁰⁸ Julia Dean Hayne's upstanding reputation and popular reception with western audiences might also have worked in her favor, for historian George Rable remarks that a female plaintiff would not succeed unless she could establish unquestioned respectability.¹⁰⁹

Even when divorced women maintained impeccable reputations, they usually endured severe social disapproval. The threat of rejection could not outweigh the misery that drove many women to petition for divorce, but possessing a skill that promised actresses the ability to support themselves might have made them more willing to leave their husbands and seek legal redress. Julia Dean Hayne banked on her professional skills and continued to play to enthusiastic houses in the West and South. Frances Denny Drake's example might have provided the courage that her niece needed to pursue her divorce, for Frances had herself divorced her second husband, George Washington Cutter, whom she had married in 1840, ten years after her first husband's early demise. Like Arthur Hayne, Cutter was an abusive drunk, and his intemperance drove Frances to leave him and sue for divorce within just a few months. She resumed her first married name and continued to act until her retirement in 1850.¹¹⁰

The independence that Eliza Arnold Poe, Julia Dean Hayne, and Frances Denny Drake exhibited by weathering or initiating separations from their husbands stood at odds with the submissive, wifely roles that they and other antebellum actresses frequently played on stage. Some of these dramas focus on a maligned woman proven true, while others center on taming an unruly wife. Several Shakespearean productions feature these

¹⁰⁸ Divorce Decree, No. 25, Filed by Hon. Elias Smith in Probate Court, Great Salt Lake City County, Territory of Utah, 27 August, 1866.

¹⁰⁹ Rable, 11.

¹¹⁰ Dietz, 36; Ludlow, 367; James W. Swain, "Mrs. Alexander Drake: A Biographical Study" (Ph.D. diss., Tulane University, 1970), 181-82, 190-91.

plots and were especially popular with antebellum audiences. Theater historians James Dormon and David Grimsted explain that nineteenth-century Americans associated Shakespeare with morality and gentility; thus, playgoers could ostensibly bolster their moral codes and raise their class status simply by attending a Shakespearean production.¹¹¹ Appropriations of the early modern playwright's works also received plenty of attention as they drew on the notoriety and cachet associated with Shakespeare's name. Both Julia Dean Hayne and Frances Denny Drake regularly included Knowles's *The Wife* and Tobin's *The Honey Moon* in their stock repertory, for example. The two plays follow their Shakespearean models, *Othello* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, by calling for wifely fidelity and obedience, characteristics that Drake and Hayne eschewed when they left their abusive husbands and initiated divorces. Wise to the source of their income, however, the two actresses continued to perform in *The Wife* and *The Honey Moon*, as well as their Shakespearean counterparts, for the dramas all drew appreciative audiences in the antebellum South.¹¹²

Unlike many appropriations that implicitly draw on their sources, Knowles's *The Wife* explicitly borrows from *Othello*. Following the same approach he took to writing his first play, *Virginius*, which received rave reviews and remained a repertory staple for most of the century, Knowles relied on another successful Shakespearean plot to structure his later play.¹¹³ In an epilogue crafted by Charles Lamb for the play's opening at Covent Garden in 1833, the lead female character, Mariana, who was first played by English actress Ellen Tree, recognizes the Shakespearean parallels even as she

¹¹¹ Dormon, 257 ; Grimsted, 112-23.

¹¹² Bailey, 169, 359; Blackburn, Appendix B; Dietz, 49; Duggar, 164-65; Koon, *Gold Rush*, 83-4; Ludlow, 91, 100, 458, 665; Smither, 118.

¹¹³ Murray, 167.

acknowledges some differences between *The Wife* and *Othello*. Mariana declares, “I dream’d each night, I should be Desdemona’d But *my* Othello, to his vows more zealous— / Twenty Iagos could not make *him* jealous.”¹¹⁴ Her lines show that like Desdemona, Mariana has fallen prey to a scheming, jealous, and power-hungry villain intent on tarnishing her spotless reputation and ruining her marriage. Ferrardo, Iago’s counterpart, gets St. Pierre drunk and brings him to Mariana’s room, where he leaves his scarf, and like the handkerchief planted on Cassio in *Othello*, the scarf serves as ocular proof of Mariana’s supposed indiscretion. Unlike Othello, however, Mariana’s husband Leonardo, never doubts his wife’s chastity; instead, he ferrets out the culprit and exonerates her good name.

The Wife further differs from *Othello* by avoiding the complications of race and class. Leonardo, a prince of Mantua, hardly shares an equal status to Othello, no matter how distinguished an army career the Moor has built for himself. Knowles’s high-born protagonist likely appealed to elite southerners who fancied themselves the equivalent of English aristocrats and to middle-class southerners who had aspirations of upward mobility. Similarly, the play might have attracted playgoers who recoiled from the specter of a free black man marrying a young white woman. Yet literary critic Charles Lower contends that the frequency of *Othello* performances suggests southerners could enjoy the play, even when the lead character was played with very dark skin.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ James Sheridan Knowles, *The Wife*, 1833 (London: Routledge, Warnes, and Routledge, 1859; *Literature Online*, 1994), epilogue, ll. 23, 30-31, pp. 93-94 of 94, via Galileo online database (accessed 5 September, 2002).

¹¹⁵ Charles B. Lower, “Othello as Black on Southern Stages, Then and Now,” in *Shakespeare in the South: Essays on Performance*, ed. Philip C. Kolin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983), 199-228.

However antebellum spectators interpreted *Othello*, they probably welcomed the comparative simplicity of *The Wife's* streamlined plot. In particular, the play's emphasis on wifely faithfulness would have resonated with most audience members. Before Leonardo has vindicated Mariana, for example, their family priest, who clearly doubts Mariana's innocence, cautions her to cultivate modesty and virtue in her person. He warns:

A woman hath in every state
Most need of circumspection;—most of all
When she becomes a wife!—she is a spring
Must not be doubted; if she is, no oath
That earth can utter will so purge the stream
That men will think it pure!¹¹⁶

In the same way that Othello calls Desdemona “a weed” that attracts summer flies and “a cunning whore,” Mariana's priest implies that his parishioner has become a permanently polluted stream.¹¹⁷ The didactic purpose of this name calling might have mitigated its harshness for southerners who relied on married white women to uphold and reproduce the patriarchal ideology of the region. Southern readers would have known the brutal terms that the Moor employed from their Shakespearean texts, but theater managers likely softened his abusive language for the stage by replacing terms such as “whore”

¹¹⁶ Knowles, *The Wife*, 3.4.69-74, p. 58 of 94.

¹¹⁷ Shakespeare, *Othello* (Hanmer), 4.9.50, 76, p. 520; *Othello* (Johnson), 4.9.50, 77; *Othello* (Pope), 4. 9.50, 76, p. 562-63.

with “strumpet.” When Othello says, however, that he wishes Desdemona “hadst ne’er been born,” his mistreatment does not diminish significantly.¹¹⁸

The Taming of the Shrew and John Tobin’s appropriation, *The Honey Moon*, focus not only on ensuring wifely fidelity but also on inculcating wifely submission and obedience. Antebellum audiences knew David Garrick’s shortened version of Shakespeare’s *Shrew, Catharine and Petruchio*, which excises the frame story of Christopher Sly and focuses entirely on the conflict between the title characters. Garrick’s rendition played to great acclaim on Old South stages, but Tobin’s play received even more approbation. When *The Honey Moon* debuted at the Drury Lane Theatre on January 11, 1805, contemporary English critics praised the drama for its similarities to *Shrew* and commended Tobin for his abilities to model England’s finest playwright.¹¹⁹ Philadelphia’s Park Theatre quickly scheduled the play for a May appearance, and American audiences reacted with similar approbation. Samuel Drake’s company included *The Honey Moon* in its repertory as the troupe traveled west in 1815. The play became a favorite with Noah Ludlow, who was then a fledgling actor with the troupe. When Ludlow struck out on his own, he frequently staged the play on opening night, and the drama quickly became a standard season opener for many southern theatrical companies.¹²⁰

In the same way that Shakespeare’s Petruchio sets about to tame Catharine’s scolding tongue and teach her docility, so too does Tobin’s Duke of Aranza work on

¹¹⁸ William Shakespeare, *Othello*, in *John Philip Kemble Promptbooks*, ed. Charles Shattuck, vol. 7, 4.2.75, p. 62.

¹¹⁹ *Cumberland’s British Theatre* (London: John Cumberland, 1826), 6, quoted in Joe E. Smith, “The Honeymoon,” *Players: The Magazine of American Theatre* 52.1 (1977), 14-17, see p. 15 for quotation.

¹²⁰ Dormon, 260; Ludlow, 184; Joe E. Smith, 14.

reforming Juliana's willfulness and pride. Intent on showing his manly prowess, Petruchio boasts to his friends Grumio and Gremio that he has heard lions roar and thunder rumble like artillery, so a "little din" such as a woman's chatter will not daunt him. Furthermore, Petruchio assures them, he has overcome "pitched battle" midst "loud larums, neighing steeds, and [clanging] trumpets" vanquishing the shrewish Catharine will hardly be a test for him.¹²¹ Both Catharine and Juliana stand up admirably to the browbeating they receive from their husbands, but eventually each caves in and repents of her assertiveness. The contrition that the two express verbally would have buttressed antebellum southerners' belief in a wife's duty to submit to her husband, but as a 1976 American Conservatory Theatre production directed by William Ball shows, facial expressions and body language can undermine and dismantle this message.¹²² If Catharine uses a sarcastic tone when she reminds her sister, "Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper, / Thy head, [and] thy sovereign," she can show scorn for the words she mouths.¹²³ Similarly, if Juliana rolls her eyes or looks disgusted, she can call into question her assertion

That modesty, in deed, in word, and thought,
Is the prime grace of a woman; and with that,
More than by frowning looks and saucy speeches
She may persuade the man that rightly loves her,

¹²¹ David Garrick, *Catharine and Petruchio*, 1756, in *The Plays of David Garrick*, edited by William Pedicord and Frederick Louis Bergmann (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1981), 187-220, 1.1.48, 53-54, p. 194.

¹²² Kenneth S. Rothwell and Annabelle Henkin Melzer, *Shakespeare on Screen: An International Filmography* (New York: Neal-Schuman, 1990), Item 602.

¹²³ Garrick, *Catharine and Petruchio*, 3.1.250-51, p. 219.

Whom she was ne'er intended to command.¹²⁴

Nonetheless, actresses who risked undercutting the sentiments expressed by Catharine and Juliana with body language or intonation could have endangered their careers. Audience disapproval combined with poor press reviews could keep playgoers from attending future performances as well as deter theater managers from re-engaging such transgressive performers.

Had Frances Denny Drake and Julia Dean Hayne played Catharine and Juliana as independent-minded women who only complied reticently with their husband's wishes, it is likely that neither would have attracted such large audiences or received as many contracts from theater managers. Nor would local newspapers have raved so approvingly about their demure but compelling stage performances. Despite the conservative personas that they portrayed on stage, however, Drake and Hayne did cultivate autonomous performative roles in their personal lives. Both women terminated unhappy marriages even though they risked public censure, and they subsequently juggled the demands of career and single motherhood with great success.

Over the past four centuries, say Shakespearean scholars Michael Bristol and Jean Marsden, playwrights have rewritten and redefined Shakespeare's work to please new audiences as well as to reflect and question an ever-changing social and political terrain.¹²⁵ In the Old South, Shakespearean plays and their appropriations shored up the region's conservative patriarchal ideology that demanded complete faithfulness and obedience from its wives. These dramas acted in much the same way during the Civil War, for southerners' belief in the sanctity of marriage grew during this time when

¹²⁴ John Tobin, *The Honey Moon* (London: T. Davison, 1805; *Literature Online*, 1994), 5.1.114-119, p. 89 of 104, via Galileo online database (accessed 3 September 2002).

¹²⁵ Michael Bristol, *Big-Time Shakespeare* (London: Routledge, 1996), 11; Marsden, 1-3.

women were bereft over the absence of their husbands and yearning for the reestablishment of their families. Indeed, historian Drew Gilpin Faust points out that women's needs on the home front, coupled with a commitment to re-forming their families, led many to urge their husbands to desert.¹²⁶

The literature produced by the region's intellectuals sometimes borrowed from Shakespeare and also frequently reflected patriarchal themes. For instance, the Charleston writer William Gilmore Simms used *Othello* as a template for his novel, *Confession*, since he saw the Shakespearean drama as "one of the most noble of all moralities."¹²⁷ While the Desdemona character dies needlessly, she still represents the pure wife who never veers in loyalty to her husband. Another member of the Charleston Circle, poet Henry Timrod, later earned the encomium "The Laureate of the Confederacy" and saw Desdemona as the maligned and victimized South in his "Address Delivered at the Opening of the New Theatre at Richmond." Christina Murphy says that if Desdemona represented an abused South, Miranda from *The Tempest* stood for an innocent South, which walked unknowingly into the tragedy of war but could regenerate itself with its beliefs "in the brave new worlds yet to be."¹²⁸

The Crisp Company reflected Simms and Timrod's fondness for Shakespeare, since the troupe had always relied heavily on Shakespearean plays to fill its antebellum repertory and diverged little from this formula during the Civil War years. When William and Eliza Crisp played the lead parts in *Macbeth* during the fall of 1862 in Mobile, spectators might have viewed Lady Macbeth as an example of an ungoverned

¹²⁶ Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 243.

¹²⁷ Charles S. Watson, "Simms's Use of Shakespearean Characters," in *Shakespeare and Southern Writers: A Study in Influence*, ed. Philip C. Kolin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1985), 13-28, see p. 19.

¹²⁸ Murphy, 44.

wife's need for her husband's guidance and discipline. Popular stage and reading versions of the play presented a power hungry woman who eagerly anticipated her husband's accession to the throne and urged him forward despite danger. "But screw your courage to the sticking place, / And we'll not fail," Lady Macbeth declares in the Kemble promptbook as well as in the Hanmer and Johnson texts.¹²⁹ Mobile playgoers who saw Macbeth's wife as a woman gone astray without male supervision probably paralleled the reaction of Montgomery theatergoers who watched the Crisps present the drama a decade earlier. Similarly, their war performances of *Othello* must have strengthened viewers' beliefs in the necessity to keep close watch on the marital aspirations of their daughters in much the same way as their 1858 staging of the play in New Orleans would have done. Finally, if the Crisps chose to follow Charlotte Cushman and William Charles Macready's example and ignore the popular tradition of altering David Garrick's version of *Romeo and Juliet*, thereby cutting the tragic ending and allowing the couple to live happily ever after, Mobile theatergoers might have had similar reactions to the rash lovers who act without regard for parental consent and die.¹³⁰

While the Crisps staged many non-Shakespearean plays that also buttressed the reverence for patriarchy in the Old South, their offerings ironically operated to liberate Eliza Crisp and her daughters, Jessie and Cecilia, from the seclusion that so often accompanied women's domestic lives. Like Julia Dean Hayne and Frances Denny Drake, performing conservative stage roles allowed the Crisp women to perform non-traditional roles in their daily lives. The war further underscored this dichotomy, as Eliza Crisp had to act as company manager when her husband enlisted in the Confederate

¹²⁹ *Macbeth*, (Hanmer), 1.10.39-40, p. 493; *Macbeth*, (Johnson), 1.10.39, p. 401; *Macbeth*, (Kemble Promptbooks, ed. Shattuck), 1.7.62, p.20.

¹³⁰ Shattuck, 92.

Army for the first year of the war. Moreover, the lack of performers in the war-torn South drove Jessie and Cecilia to become full-fledged company members.¹³¹

Though many stage roles during the war years affirmed the subordinate position that women were supposed to occupy as wives within the traditional patriarchal family, a few also implicitly suggested that women could attain a degree of equality. Popular antebellum offerings continued to shore up conventional wifely roles, but newer additions to the repertory offered different and sometimes conflicting perspectives. John Hill Hewitt's musical drama, *The Vivandiere* focuses on a woman who accompanies her husband's Confederate company to sell provisions to the soldiers, but she also uses her position as a guise for entering Union territory as a spy. Returning to her Confederate company, she imparts information gleaned from the enemy troops. While Hewitt's heroine represents the antebellum ideal of a wife loyal to husband and country, she also dismantles the image of the demure, retiring wife who waits patiently at home for her husband's return. Instead, she follows him to war and then becomes a brave participant in the hostilities.

Theater historian Charles Watson says that such women regularly appeared in Richmond, "dressed in Turkish trousers and feathered hats after the French manner. With admiring men in their train, they strummed tunes on hotel pianos."¹³² These exotic *vivandieres*, along with Donizetti's opera *La Fille du Régiment* (1840), provided Hewitt with the inspiration for his musical. A pro-southern play that celebrated the patriarchal structure of the Old South, *The Vivandiere* nevertheless gave the Waldron women a political voice that turned them into activists for the southern cause when they first

¹³¹ Fife, 461.

¹³² Watson, *The History of Southern Drama*, 79.

performed the drama for Augusta playgoers in the spring of 1863. Spectators clearly approved of what they saw, for the local paper reported “frequent rounds of applause” and noted the “perfect abandon” of Miss Laura’s singing.¹³³ Buttressed by their success in Augusta, the Waldrons traveled down the river to Savannah, where the *Daily Morning News* likewise praised their “bold and patriotic” production and singled out the singing that Miss Laura “so beautifully rendered.”¹³⁴

Another Hewitt play, *The Artist’s Wife* (1863), similarly casts its wifely figure in an ambivalent light. Newly married Estelle Keller desperately wishes to use her musical talent to contribute in some way to the income her poor artist husband, Paul, brings home. Too proud to let his wife work, Paul refuses. When he suddenly goes blind, though, Estelle secretly arranges a series of singing concerts to raise some desperately needed cash. On the day of her first performance, Estelle’s manager, Harvey, places a “puff” in the paper to pave the way for her success. His advertisement promises: “A lady of surpassing beauty and astonishing vocal abilities will make her first appearance before an audience tonight. The fair cantatrice is an object of interest from the fact of her having been compelled to resort to the stage for the purpose of supporting her family”¹³⁵ Harvey’s advertisement parodies contemporary newspaper notices of dramatic and musical performances and seeks to protect Estelle’s reputation by rationalizing her public stage appearance for familial need. Later, he assuages Estelle’s doubts by assuring her, “you are acting a loving wife’s part. The world will applaud your devotion to your

¹³³ *Augusta Daily Constitutionalist*, 10 February, 1863, quoted in Fife, 232; John Hill Hewitt, *The Vivandiere*, 1868, Hewitt Papers.

¹³⁴ “The New Opera,” *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 18 March, 1863; “Theatre,” *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 24 March, 1863.

¹³⁵ Hewitt, *The Artist’s Wife*, 1863, Hewitt Papers, 2.2.1-8, p. 6 of 16.

office.”¹³⁶ Paul begins to doubt his wife’s fidelity due to her frequent absences from home, but when he finally learns what she has been devising, he forgives her deception and thankfully offers his appreciation for her efforts. As a working woman dedicated to preserving the stability of her married life, Estelle shared a liminal stature not only with the Waldron women who performed her part but also with other actresses who continued to perform during the Civil War years.

Acting Motherly

“A mother’s love for her dear babe . . . is a new delight that turns with quicken’d gratitude to Him, the author of her augmented bliss.”

Cora, *Pizarro* (1799), 2.1.12-13, Richard Brinsley Sheridan

Richard Brinsley Sheridan’s Cora represented the motherly ideal for antebellum playgoers. She adores her child, but she reveres her husband for providing her with offspring. “Oh, my Alonzo,” she gushes, “daily, hourly, do I pour thanks to Heaven for the dear blessing I possess in him and thee.”¹³⁷ Cora’s grateful piousness endows her with an ethereal saintliness that would have been impossible for Eliza Logan Wood, Julia Dean Hayne, Jane Placide, or any other actress who might have played her part to attain. Yet Cora’s portrayal reflects the sacred place that motherhood occupied in the culture of the Old South and might have accounted for part of *Pizarro*’s popularity.

Historians Sally McMillen and George Rable explain that southerners deified a mother’s role, which ensured the continuity of the patriarchal structure that controlled the social and economic world in which they lived. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese adds that from a young age, girls learned their highest calling beyond marriage was motherhood, and

¹³⁶ Hewitt, *The Artist’s Wife*, 2.2.82-3.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.1. 35-37, p. 27 of 114.

they prepared to embrace the responsibility of this adult role throughout their childhood and teenage years.¹³⁸ This lifelong training for a specific gender role placed antebellum southern women within what Judith Butler calls a “maternal libidinal economy [that is] a product of an historically specific organization of sexuality.”¹³⁹ In other words, biological reproductive capacity determined the social role that most southern women would play during their lives. Married actresses, like the few married women who lived in urban centers and worked outside the home, also had children, but as working women their identities were not solely tied to their maternal roles.

Actresses who had children carried a double burden, for they had to juggle the demands of their professional careers with those of their families. Sally McMillen contends that motherhood was the most hazardous and demanding occupation in the antebellum period: pregnancy and childbirth were fraught with physical maladies, while nursing children through the many contagious illnesses that they inevitably contracted further wore down a mother’s health. When mothers were not contending with sickness, their own or their children’s, simply meeting the daily physical and psychological needs of their offspring added additional stress to their lives.¹⁴⁰ For actresses with children, these responsibilities took on an even heavier weight, for they also struggled to find time to attend rehearsals and performances. Some hired nurses while others relied on relatives to care for their families when they were working, and when children grew old enough, many actresses simply took them to the theater. Regardless of how they solved their

¹³⁸ Fox- Genovese, 1131; Sally McMillen, *Motherhood in the Old South: Pregnancy, Childbirth, and Infant Rearing* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 6, 24; Rable, 2, 8.

¹³⁹ Butler, 118.

¹⁴⁰ McMillen, *Motherhood*, 1-2.

childcare needs, though, balancing family and work gave actresses an additional load to carry.¹⁴¹

The biological experiences of most actresses paralleled that of other mothers in the antebellum period. Sally McMillen says that the average white southern woman bore a child toward the end of her first year of marriage and continued to give birth every two to two and a half years until she reached menopause, death, or the inability to bear due to ill health. McMillen further points out that southern families tended to be larger than those in other areas of the country. John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman concur and explain that more children meant more laborers for middle-class farmers, while a large family brought increased status to elite planters, who saw their number of offspring as a measure of virility. Furthermore, birth control was still primitive, and for southern women, this information was usually elusive.¹⁴²

Many children translated into more performers for theatrical families, and the Drakes, Placides, Ludlows, and Smiths certainly did their share to people the stage. Frances Denny Drake had her first child a year and a half after her marriage in 1821, and over the next seven years, she had added three more to that number. While Frances took extended sabbaticals from the stage during her pregnancies, she returned to work within two months of each child’s birth. Charlotte Placide gave birth to her first child in August 1798, two years after she married, and four more children followed over the next ten years. During these years, she continued to act with her husband’s stock company. Beginning in June 1819, a year and a half after her marriage to Noah, Mary Ludlow bore

¹⁴¹ Grimsted, 87-89.

¹⁴² John D’Emilio and Estelle B. Freedman, *Intimate Matters: A History of Sexuality in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 58-65; McMillen, *Motherhood*, 3, 32; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 58-9.

a child every two years until 1835. Though her responsibilities at home grew, she continued to perform with her husband's theatrical companies throughout this entire period. Only with the birth of her eighth child in 1835 did she finally retire from the stage. Similarly, Martha Smith had her first child in 1824, two years after she married. Every year and a half afterwards for the next fourteen years, she gave birth to another child, and despite her frequent pregnancies and the burdens of a growing family, she remained active on stage as well.¹⁴³

While the size of their families aligned Frances Denny Drake, Charlotte Placide, Mary Ludlow, and Martha Smith with the antebellum norm, their working lives set them apart. All four women played substantial roles in their husbands' companies, and preparing these parts took a significant amount of time both at home and at the theater. Noah Ludlow and Sol Smith's rules and regulations for their employees' conduct give a glimpse of the demands placed on actresses for rehearsals and performances. Performers were required to attend all rehearsals, to arrive promptly, to come prepared, to have all parts memorized by the final rehearsal, to pay attention, and to avoid interrupting the proceedings by talking with other performers. Requirements for performances adhered to equally stern stipulations: again, actors and actresses had to arrive punctually, perform their parts in full without cuts, make all stage entrances and exits on time, and avoid addressing the audience extemporaneously. Failure to comply brought a cut in pay or dismissal.¹⁴⁴ Since a paucity of income, especially in the early years of their marriages,

¹⁴³ Bloodworth, 59, 63, 77; Ludlow, 184, 238, 256, 286, 311, 403, 426, 440; Sol Smith, 43, 89, 111, 134; Swain, 58, 66-69, 73, 85.

¹⁴⁴ Rules and Regulations of the Theatres Under the Direction of Ludlow and Smith, Sol Smith Collection, Box 1 of 6.

demanded that these women contribute their acting talents to the family's theatrical ventures, none wanted to risk forfeiting salary due to tardiness or absence.

Charlotte Placide shows that actresses did not always relish playing the roles of working wife and mother regardless of familial need. Her experience also reveals that financially desperate husbands could go to desperate lengths to ensure that their wives played these dual roles regardless of their desires. A comic actress who was not comfortable playing heavy tragic roles, Charlotte refused to play Juliet on December 4, 1799, when the actress who was scheduled to perform suddenly got sick. Furious that he would have to close the theater and lose an evening's revenue, Charlotte's husband, Alexander, who had just become the theater's co-manager, beat his wife until she agreed to play the role. His angry abuse ended up working against him, for Charlotte's bruised and swollen face prevented her from performing that evening, although she did appear wearing heavy makeup the following night.¹⁴⁵ Alexander's hot temper, the specter of unstable finances, and Charlotte's unhappiness made the burden that she already bore as a working wife and mother even heavier.

The hardships that came with constant travel could also compound the strain of juggling work and family for actresses. As managers' wives, Mary Ludlow and Martha Smith knew the pressures of a migratory life well, for the two women often accompanied their husbands on their circuits throughout the Mississippi River valley. Similarly, Julia Dean Hayne and Frances Denny Drake experienced the rigors of constant travel, since they moved from one starring engagement to another throughout their careers. Historian Joan Cashin notes that transience hit antebellum women especially hard; frequent moves

¹⁴⁵ Bloodworth, 64-5.

not only eliminated the support of nearby extended family members and close neighbors but also made establishing new ties difficult.¹⁴⁶

Mary and Noah Ludlow sought a solution to their peripatetic existence by buying a house in Mobile, where Mary eventually took up permanent residence with the children. When Noah had to leave for long periods of time to oversee operations in his New Orleans and St. Louis theaters, though, Mary was left with full responsibility for running the house and raising the children. She also continued to act at the Mobile theater when needed. Tired of losing her husband's help for months at a time and worried for the toll that travel took on his health, she and her daughter Cornelia petitioned him repeatedly to leave the stage and find another means of support. Though he had tried studying for the law and working in retail sales, Noah could muster no sustained interest for any but the theatrical profession.¹⁴⁷

Eliza Poe also knew the difficulties of caring for her children alone when David disappeared for long periods. Financial instability plagued the Poes for the duration of their marriage, and as the primary wage earner, Eliza found herself working full-time throughout each of her three pregnancies. In the early nineteenth century, these times were difficult, for prenatal care was poor and rare. Some women fell ill from little understood complications such as purpural fever or gestational diabetes, while others suffered from chronic exhaustion since household chores and care of other young

¹⁴⁶ Joan E. Cashin, *A Family Venture: Men and Women on the Southern Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 44.

¹⁴⁷ Ludlow, 175-77, 398-409; Mrs. Noah M. (Mary) Ludlow to Cornelia Ludlow, 2 May, 1830; Cornelia Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 6 August, 1838, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, 1817-1839, Box 1 of 1.

children did not abate during pregnancy. Southern women faced an even greater risk, as they were also highly susceptible to malaria.¹⁴⁸

While Eliza Poe experienced few complications during her first two pregnancies, her third brought a long-term illness that finally ended in her death. Within three weeks of delivering her first child, Henry, in 1807, Eliza was performing again at the Federal Street Theatre in Boston, and she shortened her recovery by a week following the birth of Edgar in 1809. By 1810, when she was pregnant with her third child, Rosalie, Eliza was again working on the Virginia circuit, but her plans to resume her career after delivery in January 1811 crumbled when she contracted a severe fever that continued to plague her in the ensuing months. Though she tried to work again, her health slowly failed, and Eliza found herself bedridden and destitute in Richmond by October. Despite the efforts of neighboring women, who brought her medicine and food, Eliza died on December 8, 1811.¹⁴⁹

The plight of the three young Poe children probably prompted the women of Richmond to come to their mother's aid, for as a single, working mother, Eliza herself was an outsider, a position exacerbated by the questionable circumstances surrounding Rosalie's conception. David Poe had abandoned Eliza sometime in late 1809, but when she secured her position with the Virginia circuit in the spring of 1810, she was pregnant again.¹⁵⁰ Victoria Bynum notes that southerners saw motherhood as a married woman's highest calling, but they looked upon the preservation of virginity as a single woman's most important duty. Outside the bonds of marriage, motherhood "became the most appalling symbol of degradation," for a woman's reproductive capacity existed to ensure

¹⁴⁸ McMillen, *Motherhood*, 43, 61-4.

¹⁴⁹ Geddeth Smith, 8, 89, 99-101, 123-9.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 119-123.

racial purity and perpetuate familial wealth.¹⁵¹ Eliza's benefactors would not necessarily have known when David left her, however, so they could not be sure she broke the bonds of marriage to conceive her third child. Hence, the mystery surrounding Eliza's personal circumstances, combined with her physical helplessness and the vulnerability of her children, likely worked to incite the sympathy of her neighbors.

Julia Dean Hayne also juggled career and motherhood without the support of a husband. In May 1856, a year after marrying, when she and Arthur left the South and ventured west, Julia was five months pregnant. Despite her physical condition, she still impressed audiences in San Francisco, Sacramento, and throughout the California mining camps. Her success not only drove the envious Arthur to drink, but the responsibility of fatherhood also overwhelmed him, and he began to disappear for extended periods soon after the birth of their son, Arthur Jr., in September. Julia negotiated life as a single mother as successfully as she played her stage roles, but her extraordinarily large income helped, since she could afford to hire a nurse for her child when she needed to be at the theater. Arthur continued to surface periodically, and over the next nine years, the couple had two more children: Robert in 1860 and Julia in 1862. The burden of additional dependents, combined with Julia's continued professional success, ultimately drove Arthur to abandon his family permanently, but Julia met and fell in love with another man, James Cooper, whom she married in 1867, a year after she obtained her divorce from Arthur. Happiness for Julia and James was short-lived, however, for she died giving birth to their first child on March 8, 1868.¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ Bynum, 2.

¹⁵² Koon, *Gold Rush Performers*, 83-4; Margretts, 32, 307.

The death of a mother hit particularly hard in the nineteenth century. While the absence of antibiotics and other medicines meant that more people died from diseases that became preventable or treatable in the twentieth century, nineteenth-century Americans saw mothers as particularly unique moral and spiritual guides who shaped the country's future by teaching their children. For southerners who already hallowed the maternal role for its integral place within the region's social and economic structure, a mother's death was especially devastating.¹⁵³

After a mother died, family members usually stepped in to help with childcare. In Julia Dean Hayne's case, her extended family took care of Arthur, Robert, and Julia after she died, but Eliza Poe's children went to three different families. Major David Poe and his wife took their eldest grandchild, Harry, to live with them in Baltimore, while Mr. and Mrs. John Allan of Richmond adopted Edgar, and Mrs. William Mackenzie took Rosalie.¹⁵⁴ Edgar Allan Poe's biographer, Kenneth Silverman, says that the three children bore the marks of their mother's early death throughout their lives, but Edgar expressed his loss most poignantly in the many poems he wrote about the premature death of beautiful young women.¹⁵⁵

Though some antebellum stage offerings such as *The Hunchback* by James Sheridan Knowles or Richard Lalor Sheil's *Evadne* focused on motherless characters, many others placed a strong emphasis on mothers, thereby reflecting the importance that southerners placed on motherhood. Characters represented a range of stereotypes from the nurturing Cora in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro* to the ferociously protective

¹⁵³ McMillen, *Motherhood*, 8.

¹⁵⁴ Geddeth Smith, 128.

¹⁵⁵ Kenneth Silverman, *Edgar A. Poe: Mournful and Never-Ending Remembrance* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), 26.

Zorilda in Matthew Gregory Lewis's *Timour the Tartar*. Rather than focusing on motherly paragons, however, three popular plays, Bulwer-Lytton's *The Lady of Lyons*, Thompson's translation of Kotzebue's *The Stranger*, and Lewis's *Adelgitha* hold up their mothers as negative examples.

The Stranger made its English debut in March 1798 at The Drury Lane Theatre in London, where Charles Kemble and Sarah Siddons played the lead roles to great acclaim. The drama gained an immediate place in the repertory of major theater companies and retained its strong popularity for the next century.¹⁵⁶ In the antebellum South, Jane Placide was one of the earliest actresses to play the lead role of Mrs. Haller. She performed the part in New Orleans across from James Caldwell in April of 1824 and then again with visiting star Charles Kean in 1831. Frances Denny Drake included the role in her repertory, acting Mrs. Haller in Mobile during the 1832 season and again in her 1836 visits to Lexington and St. Louis. Eliza Logan also played Mrs. Haller when she starred in Savannah, Columbus, Mobile, New Orleans, and St. Louis throughout the 1850s, and Julia Dean Hayne worked the part into all of her annual stops in Mobile, Louisville, and St. Louis between 1847 and 1851.¹⁵⁷

The Stranger offers Mrs. Haller as an example for mothers not to follow. Cast out by her husband for infidelity, Mrs. Haller mourns the loss of her children and the destruction of her marriage. Racked by guilt, she worries about her "poor children, fainting in sickness and crying to their mother, to their mother who has abandoned

¹⁵⁶ Augustus von Kotzebue, *The Stranger*, 1798, trans. Benjamin Thompson in *Plays of the Restoration and Eighteenth Century*, eds. Dougald MacMillan and Howard Mumford Jones (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931), Introduction, 867-8.

¹⁵⁷ Bailey, 358; Blackburn, Appendix B; Burroughs, 87; Dietz, 49; Duggar, 31, 164-5, 179; Keller, 121; Langley, 58; Ludlow, 458, 666-67; Meek, 34; Smither, 39-43.

them.”¹⁵⁸ By immediately repeating the phrase, “to their mother,” Mrs. Haller employs the rhetorical device of epizeuxis, or immediate repetition of a phrase, which underscores the ostensible damage her personal indiscretion has done to her children.¹⁵⁹ Only when she has suffered, repented, and lived a contrite life of service can she reunite with her family. Even then, Mrs. Haller herself knows that she has stained not only her honor but also her husband’s, and she hesitates to rejoin him. Similarly, Mr. Haller, the stranger of the title, worries that “a wife once induced to forfeit her honor must be capable of a second crime.”¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, the couple recognize their children’s need for a loving mother, and this concern overrides all others. The two reunite, and Mrs. Haller vows never to err again.

Adelgitha also features a contrite mother who has strayed from the bonds of her marriage in a rash moment that she regrets for the rest of her life. When an informant, who wishes to expose the identity of her bastard son, also threatens her respectability by revealing her carefully kept secret, Adelgitha is driven to murder. Unable to live with her crime, she confesses and begs forgiveness from her husband before she takes her own life. The melodramatic plot of the play, which bears the subtitle “the fruits of a single error,” no doubt resonated with southern playgoers who saw wifely fidelity and a demure mother’s example as paramount.¹⁶¹ Frances Denny Drake played the role throughout her career as did Eliza Logan.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Kotzebue, 2.2.62-3, p. 879.

¹⁵⁹ Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech: 60 Ways to Turn a Phrase* (Davis, California: Hermagoras Press, 1993), 80.

¹⁶⁰ Kotzebue, 5.2.116-117, p.893.

¹⁶¹ Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Adelgitha* (London: D. N. Shury, 1806; *Literature Online*, 1994), via Galileo online database.

¹⁶² Bailey, 196; Blackburn, Appendix B; Keller, 125, 136; Langley, 76-77; Ludlow, 367, 425, 484; Smither, 111.

The Lady of Lyons also includes a less than perfect mother and held an important place in the repertory of both Julia Dean Hayne and Eliza Logan. Though spectators throughout the South enjoyed the play, theatergoers in Savannah were especially partial to *The Lady of Lyons*, attending over 42 performances between 1839 and 1864 alone.¹⁶³ Eliza Logan's fondness for the drama as well as her partiality for performing in Savannah might have contributed to the frequent stagings of *The Lady of Lyons* in the coastal city, but the message of marital fidelity driven home to the play's independent-minded mother by her obedient daughter might also have resonated with spectators. Madame Deschappelles, the free-thinking mother, aspires to see her daughter marry a man of rank, but this obsession with status backfires when the daughter, Pauline, falls for a common gardener's son, who is only disguised as a nobleman. When Claude reveals his true identity, Pauline is as incensed as her mother, but over time, she comes to love her husband and repents of her initial prejudice. Thus, in an unusual plot twist, the daughter teaches the mother to recognize intrinsic worth and to prize wifely fidelity, a value of utmost importance to antebellum southerners.¹⁶⁴ Like Mrs. Haller in *The Stranger*, Pauline upholds the sanctity of marriage and emphasizes a wife's duty to remain faithful to her spouse and children.

A few additions to the standard antebellum offerings during the Civil War reflect southerners' conflicted views of motherhood during the hostilities. George Rable explains that Confederate supporters expected mothers to preserve hearth and home in the absence of husbands and sons, but ironically, the very conflict they were waging

¹⁶³ Bailey, 358; Blackburn, Appendix B; Dietz, 49, 54; Duggar, 164-65, 179; Green, 75; Keller, 121, 136; Langley, 58, 76-77; Ludlow, 666-67; Yeomans, 125, 139.

¹⁶⁴ Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *The Lady of Lyons*, 1838 (Belle Fourche, South Dakota: Kessinger Publishing, 1999).

seriously disrupted family life.¹⁶⁵ “Rock Me to Sleep Mother,” a ballad written by Elizabeth Akers Allen and set to music by John Hill Hewitt, reflects this dichotomy. The song features a first-person narrator who longs for the peace and quiet of home and a mother’s soothing company in the midst of a present fraught with “dust and decay” (l. 13).¹⁶⁶ The selection became a standard part of both the Waldron and Crisp families’ entertainment during the war. The song’s six octets, written in heroic couplets, mourn the death of a loving and devoted maternal figure and opine that “None like a mother can charm away pain / From the sick soul and the world-weary brain.” (ll. 29-30). Audiences thrilled to the ballad’s nostalgic tone, and soldiers found the words particularly powerful; a Mississippi enlistee who heard Jessie Crisp Clarke sing the song euphorically wrote to his family that her sweet song filled his soul with “a delicious sense of happiness” and brought back joyful memories of home.¹⁶⁷

While southerners expected mothers to hold their families together and sustain the domestic front, they also counted upon them to urge their sons and husbands to go to war. Victoria Bynum, Laura Edwards, and George Rable show, however, that as the war dragged on, women tired of the duress inflicted upon them as de facto family leaders. Drew Gilpin Faust notes that Confederate leaders called upon women to help stop the high desertion rate, but the needs of hungry families only brought an increase in petitions for husbands and sons to return home. In the meantime, women coped through a variety of strategies: some sought refuge with family members who had fared better, some found employment with the Confederate government, some managed to plant meager gardens

¹⁶⁵ Rable, 50.

¹⁶⁶ Elizabeth Akers Allen, “Rock Me to Sleep, Mother,” in *The Yale Book of American Verse*, ed. Thomas R. Lounsbury (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1912), 395-96.

¹⁶⁷ Faust, *Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 18-19; Fife, 167.

and scratch out a hardscrabble existence, and others took to the streets to protest their impoverished states.¹⁶⁸ As late as February 1865, newspapers such as the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* continued to make desperate pleas for the region's "principal and elderly ladies" to assemble and "Call upon the truant men to go forth for [their] defense," but the tide had already turned.¹⁶⁹

Stage repertory also called upon the sacrifice and aid of the region's mothers. The Waldrons buttressed the war effort by adding two plays by John Hill Hewitt, *The Battle of Leesburg* (1862) and *The Courier* (1863), to their repertory. These plays drive home the power that a mother could wield by inculcating Confederate tenets in her children. An old widow suffers for lack of income when Federal troops arrest her son for peddling pictures of General Beauregard in *The Battle of Leesburg*, but onlookers with Confederate sympathies agree that she has served their cause well by instilling a staunch southern nationalism in her boy.¹⁷⁰ And in *The Courier*, as Francis, a Confederate spy, lies dying from wounds inflicted by Federal troops, he thanks God that he has been able to show his love for the South and his mother through his military service. When the Waldrons added this new selection to their repertory in May of 1863, the Savannah *Daily Morning News* pronounced the drama "a decided hit" and particularly praised Miss Fanny for her personation of Francis.¹⁷¹ Another Hewitt play, *King Linkum the First*, his satire lampooning Abraham Lincoln and other key Federal figures, sets up Mary Todd Lincoln as a negative example for southern mothers. The *Dramatis Personae* says "Queen Linkum" is not only "a fiery wife addicted to self will" but insists she is also "an

¹⁶⁸ Bynum, 11, 134; Edwards, 67, 93; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 15-17; Rable, 78-80.

¹⁶⁹ "Late from the South," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 26 February, 1865.

¹⁷⁰ Hewitt, *The Battle of Leesburg*, 1.1, Hewitt Papers.

¹⁷¹ Hewitt, *The Courier*, 1863, 2.3, Hewitt Papers; "Theatre," *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 5 May, 1863.

indulgent mother” who unwittingly sabotages and impairs the moral development of her children.¹⁷² The Waldrons performed the farce at the Augusta Concert Hall for an enthusiastic audience in February, 1863. The family had previously endeared themselves with the Augusta public when they donated some of their proceeds from a July performance to “our volunteers in the field.”¹⁷³

While the Waldrons’ additions to the standard antebellum repertory shored up the Confederate cause, the Crisp Company also did its part for the war effort. They too staged favorite plays and donated proceeds to needy soldiers and their families. In September 1862, for example, the Crisps held a benefit “for the sick and wounded soldiers of Atlanta,” and in December, they donated the proceeds of a Mobile performance to “the wives and children of the city’s brave soldiers.”¹⁷⁴ Eloise Bridges, who often starred with the Crisps, further aided the company’s commitment to the South’s cause by reciting a patriotic poem entitled “We Can Never Be Conquered” between acts. Ella Wren and Ida Vernon also gave of their time and money. Wren helped put on a benefit for the Wilmington Hospital in 1864, and in the same year, Vernon provided entertainment for a charity dinner funding destitute soldiers and their families in Richmond.¹⁷⁵

The support that Bridges, the Crisp women, and the Waldron daughters provided for the Confederacy stands at odds with the opposition that ordinary wives and mothers demonstrated when they eventually began to call for their husbands to desert and return home. Yet the concern for the physical wellbeing of soldiers and their families that the

¹⁷² Hewitt, *King Linkum the First*, 1863, ed. Richard Barksdale Harwell (Atlanta: Emory University Library, 1947), 12.

¹⁷³ “The Queen Sisters,” *Augusta Daily Constitutionalist* 24 July, 1862.

¹⁷⁴ Fife, 193, 198.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 102, 114, 431, 450.

actresses and their companies showed paralleled the consideration exhibited by home-front women, whom LeeAnn Whites asserts became surrogate mothers to soldiers who were away from home. Women all over the region sewed uniforms and knitted socks for the troops, and those who lived near battlefields nursed and fed the wounded who needed care.¹⁷⁶ Busy rehearsal and performance schedules precluded such help from actresses, so instead they aided soldiers by contributing from their larger monetary resources. While these financial reserves allowed actresses to assist and nurture wounded soldiers who were away from their wives and mothers, their money also set them apart from other southern women who suffered more and more as the war dragged on. This financial difference may partly account for the wholehearted support for the Confederacy that actresses demonstrated on stage. Their association with family-run companies headed by businessmen who knew that they needed to cater to the tastes of their audiences, which included a large contingency of soldiers, could also have dictated the southern nationalism that permeated their performances.

Enacting Death

“My star has set—gone—gone—forever!”

Francis Crampton, *The Courier; or The Siege of Lexington* (1863), 2.3.63,

John Hill Hewitt

When members of the Waldron family enacted Francis Crampton’s death in the arms of his girlfriend Maggie at the end of John Hill Hewitt’s Confederate nationalist melodrama, *The Courier* in 1863, they mirrored the many women who were providing real physical succor to wounded soldiers in the midst of the war. These women were carrying on a tradition of nurturing that they had long maintained as primary care givers

¹⁷⁶ Whites, 57, 73.

in times of illness and death. Sally McMillen says that antebellum women and their families frequently lived with physical discomfort and poor health that often resulted in premature death.¹⁷⁷ While performers were subject to the same ailments, the rigors of travel added to the physical maladies that they experienced.

Eliza Arnold Poe watched helplessly as her first husband, Charles Hopkins, battled yellow fever in the fall of 1785. The two were traveling from Fredericksburg, Virginia to Washington, D. C. when Charles fell ill; despite Eliza's care, he succumbed to the illness and died at the end of October.¹⁷⁸ Mary Ludlow also found herself nursing an ill husband soon after she was married. In the spring of 1818, Noah came down with a severe case of influenza while the couple were on their way from New Orleans to Nashville. Noah fared better than Charles, for he slowly regained his strength, and the couple went on to play in Nashville for a short summer season.¹⁷⁹

Children also inevitably came down with maladies that ranged from minor stomach ailments to more life-threatening illnesses such as infantile cholera, and performing families were as vulnerable to these infirmities as other southern families. Mary Ludlow's sixth child, William, contracted a severe respiratory illness while the family was traveling by steamboat on the Ohio River from Pittsburg to New Orleans. Noah thought to apply mustard plasters to the child's chest. He and Mary spent hours plying their son with the homemade remedy. When they finally got him to a physician in Marietta, a small Ohio town, he had much improved. Even after the Ludlow children had grown up and left home, Mary continued to worry over their health. Cornelia contracted

¹⁷⁷ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 12.

¹⁷⁸ Geddeth Smith, 81.

¹⁷⁹ Ludlow, 153-59.

the measles when she was thirty-one, but her mother still fretted about “dear little Corny” and persistently inquired about her well being.¹⁸⁰

Mary Ludlow’s fears were not groundless, for she ended up losing three of her eight children. Noah describes the horror of learning in 1826 that their first son had died: “In New Orleans, it was my lot to encounter one of those dreadful mental and physical shocks from which few parents of any sensibility are exempt in a prolonged life of matrimony My first born—my beautiful boy—*dead*—and away from his parents!”¹⁸¹ Three years before, when the Ludlows were performing in Natchez, they had met William L. Harding, a wealthy bachelor from Franklin, Louisiana, who wished to adopt a child and proposed raising the Ludlows’ son as his own, after growing quite attached to the young boy. The couple agreed to let Harding care for their son on a trial basis, and for three years, they were pleased with the education and training their child received. When Noah learned quite by accident from a mutual acquaintance that the boy had died from lock-jaw after cutting himself with a rusty knife, however, he nearly swooned in the street. Harding had written with the ominous news, but the letter had gone by way of New York, and the verbal communication reached the bereaved parents first. Eight years after the Ludlows lost their son, an infant daughter died, and their final loss occurred when ten-year old William, who had recovered from the respiratory illness as a baby, drowned in a swimming accident.¹⁸²

Martha Smith lost children to illness as well. When she and Sol were performing in Cincinnati during June 1833, a cholera epidemic broke out. Their two daughters

¹⁸⁰ Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 3 March, 1850, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 4 of 17; Ludlow, 369-70.

¹⁸¹ Ludlow, 286.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 246, 286.

contracted infections and died. Recounting the experience in his autobiography, Sol Smith lamented that he and his wife lost their only daughters to the horrible illness which “raged violently” through the city. Nevertheless, he failed to mention their names, while he remarked that his sons Lemuel and Marcus survived. He also noted that five more sons later joined these boys and grew safely into manhood. Clearly, the survival of Smith’s boys outweighed the death of his daughters in the grand scheme of his life. No records survive to tell Martha’s perspective, but like Mary Ludlow, she probably mourned the death of her daughters grievously.¹⁸³

As Noah Ludlow himself recognized in his rumination on his first son’s death, losing a child in the nineteenth century was not unusual, and child mortality rates in the antebellum South were particularly high. Children’s fragile immune systems, coupled with the prevalence of infantile cholera and malaria, made infants and toddlers especially vulnerable. Still, the death of a child was a traumatic and devastating experience, and mothers mourned openly for extended periods. Many women remembered birth dates of dead children in their diaries, and others similarly marked the anniversaries of their deaths. Friends and relatives also provided strength and support through extended visits and letters, and these proved a source of comfort for grieving women.¹⁸⁴ The Ludlows received an outpouring of sympathetic notes in the wake of each child’s death, and these messages did much to restore their spirits and help the family return to their regular routine.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Sol Smith, 89.

¹⁸⁴ McMillen, *Motherhood*, 167-175.

¹⁸⁵ George S. Simmons to Noah M. Ludlow, 28 July, 1840; Kate (Field) to Cornelia Ludlow, 4 August, 1840, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 2 of 17.

Though few stock plays in the repertory of antebellum theaters treat the death of children, the ones that do indicate the shock that families felt when they lost their offspring. In James Sheridan Knowles's *Virginius*, the title character so suffers from grief and guilt that he temporarily loses his hold on reality after killing his daughter. Desperately searching for his dead girl, Virginius cries out, "My child! My daughter! My daughter! My Virginia! Give her me!"¹⁸⁶ By using anaphora, a rhetorical device that repeats the same word at the beginning of several consecutive sentences, Virginius's lines underscore his anguish and loss of sanity in the wake of his child's death.¹⁸⁷ While southern theaters did not stage *Titus Andronicus*, the Shakespearean prototype for *Virginius*, antebellum theatrical companies offered playgoers many opportunities to see Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. When troupes used versions that retained the original tragic ending, audiences could view an outpouring of grief over the loss of children that might have matched their own. Shakespearean scholar Charles Shattuck says that spectators preferred the reworked Garrick version with a comic ending that many theater companies presented, but Eliza Logan favored the tragic rendition, as did Jane Placide's mother, Charlotte. When English actress Ellen Tree visited the New Orleans Camp Street Theatre in 1839, she too chose to play the tragic version.¹⁸⁸

The death of parents also came as a hard blow to southern women, but for some actresses, these losses could be particularly crippling. After Eliza Logan's father died in 1853, for example, she lost a key figure in her professional life, since Cornelius Logan

¹⁸⁶ Knowles, *Virginius*, 5.3.65-66, p. 88 of 95.

¹⁸⁷ Quinn, 83-4.

¹⁸⁸ American Theatre Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 25 November, 1850; Camp Street Theatre Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 27 February, 1839; Patrick, 28; Shattuck, *Shakespeare*, xi, St. Charles Theatre Playbill, Rogers Family Papers, Collection 724, Special Collections Department, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana.

had also played across from her in supporting roles and served as her business manager. Indeed, he died on board the riverboat *Pittsburgh* while accompanying his daughter on a tour of major cities along the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers, and Eliza had to cut short her tour to bring his body back home to her mother in Cincinnati. Cornelius's death also left his wife bereft of monetary support, so Eliza assumed the responsibility of providing for her mother's financial needs. While she continued to travel and act throughout the South, Eliza now had to return home more frequently to check on her mother.¹⁸⁹ Eliza Petrie Place also experienced the burdens of caring for an aging parent: she found her professional mobility severely curtailed in the spring of 1862 when she had to move to Philadelphia to nurse her elderly mother.¹⁹⁰

While standard repertory offerings such as *Evadne*, *The Hunchback*, and *Virginus* included motherless children, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was the one popular play on Old South stages that treated the immediate effects of a parent's death on a child. After Hamlet has abandoned Ophelia and then killed her father, Polonius, she loses her mind and finally drowns herself to escape the horror of living without either of the men that she loves.¹⁹¹ Eliza Logan and Eliza Place bore the deaths of their fathers with more success than the fictional Ophelia, but neither had to contend with cruelty from a spouse or lover. In addition, their fathers' deaths brought hardship and sadness but not ruin to either actress, for both had their professional acting skills to provide them with a living.

¹⁸⁹ Eliza Logan to Sol Smith, 1 April, 1853, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6; Marston, 4; Wills, 31.

¹⁹⁰ Eliza Place to Sol Smith, 14 December, 1862, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

¹⁹¹ Acting and reading editions of *Hamlet* popular in the nineteenth century remained true to the early modern plot in which Ophelia loses her mind and drowns; see especially William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Hanmer), 4.7, 4.10, pp. 407-409, 415-16; *Hamlet*, (Johnson), 4.7, 4.10, pp. 264-68, pp. 276-77; *Hamlet* (Kemble Promptbooks, ed. Shattuck), 4.4, pp. 59-63; *Hamlet* (Pope), 4.7, 4.10, pp. 440-42, 448-49.

The death of a spouse could also leave actresses in difficult positions. Eliza Riddle Field lost her husband, Joseph, to tuberculosis in 1856; as he was her acting partner and spouse, she too experienced a double blow with his death.¹⁹² When Eliza Petrie Place's husband Robert died, he left her with heavy debts from his unsuccessful management attempt at the American Theatre in New Orleans. Eliza worked for years to clear her husband's accounts, and in his biography, Sol Smith declared that she had "deserved a better lot."¹⁹³ Despite the trials that a spouse's death could bring, some actresses weathered the loss of their husbands quite well. The Drakes had no financial reserves when Alexander died in February of 1830, but Frances had obtained such renown that she had little trouble resuming a successful career after she recovered from the shock of his death. Within two months, she had returned to the stage, and the next ten years would prove to be the apogee of her working life.¹⁹⁴ Eliza Arnold Poe also carried on successfully in the wake of Charles Hopkin's death. She maintained a successful position with the Virginia Company for two years on her own before marrying David Poe, and when he left her, those reserves again surfaced.

Another Shakespearean favorite of the period, *Richard the Third*, features women coping with the death of husbands. The royal women in the tragic history show tenacity and political insight, but they cannot stop the power-hungry Richard from killing their husbands (and children) in order to seize the throne. Even in the streamlined Colley Cibber version that most nineteenth-century theater companies favored and that cut Queen Margaret, widow of deposed King Henry VI, grief-filled rhetoric fills the mouths

¹⁹² Telegram from Eliza Field to N. M. Ludlow, 5 February, 1856, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 5 of 17.

¹⁹³ Sol Smith, 221.

¹⁹⁴ Swain, 115-19, 171.

of the female characters. Deftly using personification to assure her son that he cannot hide from his crimes, Richard's mother, the Duchess of York, contends in act 4, scene 3 that his "Wrongs will speak without a tongue."¹⁹⁵ Queen Elizabeth, widow of the murdered Edward IV, quickly joins the Duchess and the two throw out a series of questions at Richard that rely on the rhetorical device of anaphora, or clauses that begin with the same word, to emphasize their fury and their knowledge of his offenses.¹⁹⁶ "Where is thy Brother Clarence?" asks the Duchess. "Where Hastings?" counters the Queen. "York? Rivers?" queries the Duchess. "Vaughn?" interrogates the Queen. "York? Grey?" asks the Duchess.¹⁹⁷ While Cibber's rhetorical flourishes hardly match the skill of Shakespeare's, the limited linguistic manipulation worked well enough when combined with the sentiment that the play relied on for effect.

Antebellum southerners saw the care of white women as a sacrosanct familial duty, so playgoers would have commiserated with Shakespeare's royal widows. The wronged women, like the wronged men in *Richard the Third*, certainly elicited considerable empathy in southern playgoers, for the drama was a perennial favorite in the region. Jane Placide played Queen Elizabeth across from James Caldwell when she first acted with his company in 1822, and the part became a standard one for her over the years. She acted the Queen to Edwin Forrest's Richard in 1824, and she played the role again when Thomas Abthorpe Cooper starred as the hunchbacked despot in 1827. Eliza Riddle Field and her husband also frequently played in the same plays. Stock actresses Caroline Chapman, Mary Farren, and Mary Vos Stuart all had to be ready to perform any

¹⁹⁵ Colley Cibber, *The Tragical History of King Richard the Third*, (London: Cato's Head, 1718), 4.3. 121-22, p. 65.

¹⁹⁶ Quinn, 83.

¹⁹⁷ Cibber, 4.3. 124-29, p. 65.

of the female roles in *Richard the Third* when Ludlow and Smith brought Junius Brutus Booth to perform in their Mobile, New Orleans, and St. Louis theaters, especially since he favored opening his engagements with the play.¹⁹⁸

Though southerners valued soft-spoken women, the injuries done the queens in *Richard the Third* might have excused their sharp tongues. Nevertheless, playing these strong female characters could also have endowed actresses with an agency that flew in the face of the retiring stereotype expected of southern women. Moreover, their presence in the repertory might have given actresses like Eliza Arnold Poe, Frances Denny Drake, Eliza Petrie Place, and Eliza Riddle Field the strength they needed to press on after their husbands' deaths.

Southern women were no strangers to death during the Civil War, and as the conflict wore on, more and more lost husbands in the fighting. Nevertheless, additions to the antebellum repertory largely presented rousing stories to raise the spirits of disheartened soldiers and civilians. John Hill Hewitt's *The Courier*, does stand apart by reflecting the losses that women endured. Maggie, an orphan girl who makes her living selling flowers, falls in love with Francis Crampton, the Confederate courier of the title. She risks arrest by Federal troops to defend Francis, and in a melodramatic final scene, he bids farewell not only to his mother (and the Confederacy) but also to his faithful and bereaved girlfriend.¹⁹⁹

Death inevitably claimed the South's actresses themselves, and when especially popular performers died, the southern public responded with an outpouring of grief. Jane Placide's demise in May 1835 caused the American Theatre in New Orleans to close for

¹⁹⁸ Burroughs, 45-6; 68, 90; Ludlow, 229, 435, 509, 619-20, 629, 636; Lyle, 72; Shattuck, *Shakespeare*, 43-44; Smither, 44.

¹⁹⁹ Hewitt, *The Courier*.

a day, and when Julia Dean Hayne died in 1868, newspapers throughout the region and nation mourned the passing of the beloved actress. Her memory also remained fresh with the people of St. Louis; twenty-two years after her death, they included Julia Dean Hayne in “a mural cenotaph commemorating the Drama and Orchestral Music in St. Louis to be placed in the Historical Building for general public advantage and enjoyment.” In addition, they erected a life-size marble bust of Hayne and three theater managers who had played important roles in the city’s dramatic history, Noah Ludlow, Ben DeBar, and Charles Balmer.²⁰⁰ Actresses such as Mary Ludlow and Frances Denny Drake who died after they had already passed out of the public eye received less prominent recognition. War news overshadowed the brief notice of Mary Ludlow’s death and funeral that the Mobile newspaper ran on October 3, 1862. The arrangements lacked fanfare, taking place at the Ludlows’ home on Stone Street and including only close friends of the family. While the *Louisville Courier and Journal* ran a lengthy obituary when Frances Denny Drake died just shy of her seventy-fifth birthday on September 1, 1875, her passing would have incited more press interest in the heyday of her career. And like Mary Ludlow, Drake had an intimate funeral of close family and friends rather than a huge public gathering that included many mourning fans.²⁰¹

The death of antebellum performers paralleled the death of the South’s old family-run theatrical system. A depressed post-war southern economy, coupled with the move toward hiring national touring companies, resulted in the eventual disintegration of local stock troupes who had relied on family connections to survive. The paucity of

²⁰⁰ “Actress Julia Dean Hayne is Dead,” *Mobile Sunday Times*, 1 March, 1868; Margretts, 339; Obituary for Julia Dean Hayne, *New York Times* 8 March, 1868; Memorial Subscription Book, 1890, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 6 of 17.

²⁰¹ “Funeral Notice,” *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, 3 October, 1862; Swain, 198-200.

regional stars and stock performers meant that an ever-changing array of traveling actors and actresses from the North and from Europe now entertained southern audiences.

The actresses in these combination companies portrayed an ambiguous construction of femininity, for as Susan Glenn contends, the stage became a dual site of agency and repression for women in the late nineteenth century. Like the assertive, ambitious, and educated “New Woman,” late-century actresses proclaimed their independence by playing unconventional and unorthodox roles. Yet all-girl burlesque reviews also grew in popularity, and these parts largely reduced actresses to sex objects.²⁰² The confusion of gendered identity on stage only paralleled the indeterminacy of gender roles in the everyday lives of post-war southern women. As George Rable and Drew Gilpin Faust contend, wives and mothers sought to rebuild the wounded psyches of their men after the war by resuming their places within households structured around patriarchal tenets. Elite women also formed societies such as the Daughters of the Confederacy and the Confederate Memorial Society to commemorate the accomplishments and valor of their men in war. At the same time, though, the poor economy forced many women to supplement their families’ income by seeking (or retaining) work outside the home.²⁰³

Since antebellum and Civil War actresses had simultaneously breached and endorsed the Old South’s gendered norms by playing out traditional and non-traditional social scripts in their personal lives and in their stage roles, facing the indeterminacy of gender roles in everyday life and in the theater was nothing new to urban post-war

²⁰² Susan A. Glenn, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 1-8.

²⁰³ Faust, 252; Rable, 238.

southerners. Antebellum actresses occupied a liminal position in both the performed and performative roles they played as daughters, lovers, wives, and mothers. By straddling the domestic and public spheres, the experience of antebellum actresses presaged the position that the majority of southern women would find themselves inhabiting in the years following the Civil War.

CHAPTER 3: ACTING CLASSY

Pizarro: Elvira, retire!

Elvira: Why should I retire?

Pizarro: Because men are to meet here, and on manly business.

Pizarro (1799), 1.1.134-36, Richard Brinsley Sheridan

In Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro*, Elvira works tirelessly to convince her lover, the title character, to deal equitably with the Incans, whom he and his conquistadors have come to subdue. Pizarro refuses to listen to her pleas and demands that she stop interfering and stay out of "manly business." Elvira furiously retorts that she won't be silenced or treated as a mere "plaything or slave" and boldly announces, "I will not retire!" Although Elvira clearly recognizes that she risks angering Pizarro by operating outside of the prescribed feminine realm of domesticity, she maintains her determination to participate in public matters and asserts that she is "not formed for tame sequestered love content 'mid household cares.'" ¹ Actions prove her words when she serves as a decoy to deflect Pizarro's attention in battle so that Alonso, his Peruvian enemy, can kill him. Popular stock plays such as *Pizarro* that ostensibly focused on public life but actually included private experience implicitly showed nineteenth-century theatergoers that the two worlds blended into one another.

Women who made acting their careers in the antebellum South similarly revealed how the personal and the communal overlapped. As working women, actresses occupied

¹ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *Pizarro*, adapted and translated from the German by Augustas von Kotzebue (London: James Ridgway, 1799; *Literature Online*, 1994), 1.1.136, 140-41, p. 11 of 114, via Galileo online database (accessed 5 September, 2002).

an unusual, in-between place in the Old South. They were not plantation mistresses or wives of elite urban professionals; they were not married to middle-class yeoman farmers or merchants, nor were they members of the laboring poor. Instead, as educated women who worked for a living, actresses constituted part of a small, though substantive and diverse, group of women who earned their own keep. Historians Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie contend that these working women, whose ranks included nurses and teachers, shopkeepers and seamstresses, basket makers and textile workers, played a critical role in the region's developing market economy and helped bring about social and cultural changes through their participation in the workplace. Since these women also maintained private lives, they moved visibly between what Jürgen Habermas has termed the private and public spheres and showed that these supposedly distinct worlds actually overlapped.²

Like the other working women of the Old South, actresses traversed the civic and domestic realms, for they were daughters, lovers, wives, and mothers in addition to professional performers. Moreover, by enacting the private in public, actresses further deflated the polarities between the two domains. Actresses also contributed considerably to the South's economy, for they generated significant revenue by attracting admiring playgoers to performances. In turn, many achieved widespread regional renown and were well paid for their efforts. Even those who simply made solid names for themselves on local stages made enough to support themselves and their families. In addition, actresses could use their histrionic skills to influence spectators, thereby molding the region's social and cultural landscape.

² Delfino and Gillespie, 2-5; Jürgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere," in *On Society and Politics: A Reader*, trans. and ed., Steven Seidman (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 231-36.

Unlike most of their working counterparts, however, actresses often lived and worked on the edges of propriety partly because they entertained others through the public display of their bodies and partly because their livelihood depended on what theater historian Tracy Davis calls “skills of deception.”³ Since the occupations of many other working women grew out of household duties or buttressed the region’s burgeoning industrial economy, they did not threaten the status quo, but the erotic associations that actresses brought to their work often equated them with loose women and prostitutes, thereby insuring a level of public distrust.⁴ In addition, though most actresses came from middle-class backgrounds, they could enact a variety of class statuses on stage, and they sometimes assumed different stations in their personal lives as well, although these performative moves were not always successful. Still, by refusing to fit neatly into the antebellum class hierarchy, actresses confounded elite southerners’ desires to demarcate classes and showed that class lines were more malleable than they appeared.

Social upheaval caused by the Civil War brought the pliability of class distinctions into sharper relief as soldiers from all social strata fought next to one another and as women of all classes shouldered the tasks that their husbands, fathers, and sons had carried out before they left for battle. In this uncertain social climate, actresses continued to cross the ostensible divide between domestic and civic life. Because they were joined by the majority of other southern women, though, the elasticity of class lines and the porous nature of private and public spheres became even more evident as the war continued.

³ Davis, 3.

⁴ Davis, 77-78; Delfino and Gillespie, 2.

The idea of separate spheres has a long history. Linda Kerber explains that examination of these areas as discrete sectors arose in the 1960s and 70s when scholars were just beginning to examine women's experiences in American history.⁵ Historians first drew on Alexis de Tocqueville's metaphor that described nineteenth-century women as "carefully circumscribed within the narrow circle of domestic interests."⁶ For instance, in 1966, Barbara Welter wrote an influential essay entitled "The Cult of True Womanhood," which examined traits expected of the ideal nineteenth-century woman, including "piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity."⁷ In 1968, when Jürgen Habermas wrote about the creation of the public sphere in eighteenth-century Europe, historians seized on the new terminology that so aptly defined de Tocqueville's figure and the domestic realm that Welter described. Within a year, Aileen Kraditor and Gerda Lerner had published studies of the separate spheres and identified their emergence with the Industrial Revolution.⁸

In the 1970s and 1980s, historians undertook the first regional studies that examined women's unique domestic experiences: Nancy Cott studied women in nineteenth-century New England, and Elizabeth Fox-Genovese focused on rural women in the antebellum South. Whereas Cott saw the separation of spheres as galvanizing northern women to participate in the early feminist movement, Fox-Genovese interpreted most southern women's ties to the domestic sphere as much more constricting. Southern

⁵ Linda Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Women's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History* 75.1 (1988): 9-39.

⁶ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 1840, ed., Alan Ryan, (2 volumes, New York: A. A. Knopf, 1994), II, book 3, chapter 10, p. 201.

⁷ Barbara Welter, "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," *American Quarterly* 18 (1966): 151-74; see especially p. 152.

⁸ Aileen S. Kraditor, ed., introduction, *Up From the Pedestal: Selected Writings in the History of American Feminism* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1968), see especially pp. 9, 10, 14; Gerda Lerner, "The Lady and the Mill Girl: Changes in the Status of Women in the Age of Jackson," *Midcontinent American Studies Journal* 10 (1969): 5-15.

women, argued Fox-Genovese, lacked the associations and clubs that encouraged their northern counterparts to bond and develop a feminist consciousness, for most women lived on isolated plantations and farms under the direction of their husbands or fathers. In her earlier study of women's participation in the southern evangelical community, Jean Friedman anticipated Fox-Genovese. Friedman maintained that church congregations were held together by a complex network of kinship ties, which were dominated by their male members. Women attended church, but only in urban areas where some women enjoyed an increased amount of leisure time and proximity to female friends did women's organizations arise.⁹

Indeed, historians who studied urban women in the antebellum South showed that city women actively contributed to the civic life of the region. Harriet Amos and Suzanne Lebsock described a coherent women's culture that created charitable organizations, developed social groups, and participated in the public work force. Amos described Mobile women who founded a benevolent society and an orphanage in 1839, and she noted that females made up 8 percent of the paid work force in 1850. By 1860, they constituted 10 percent of those who worked for pay. Similarly, Lebsock cited the founding of two orphanages and one home for poor, working women by socially-conscious Petersburg women. Lebsock also observed that many Petersburg women worked for wages despite their positions as wives and mothers.¹⁰ Jean Friedman explained the differences between urban and rural women's lives by pointing out that propinquity to markets relieved city women of some chores that regularly occupied farm

⁹ Nancy Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Women's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 70, 125, 173, 197, 200, 205; Fox-Genovese, 39, 81, 99, 135; Jean E. Friedman, *The Enclosed Garden: Women and Community in the Evangelical South, 1830-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 3-20.

¹⁰ Amos, 11-12, 18; Lebsock, 163, 166, 168, 179-180.

women's time. Urban women could buy food and household staples that rural women had to produce for themselves, so they enjoyed more flexibility and could form associations with friends and neighbors or take jobs in the public sector.¹¹

By the 1990s, scholars began to dismantle the binaries inherent in the idea of separate spheres. In their introduction to a volume of essays entitled *No More Separate Spheres!*, Cathy Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher contended that “the two states are intimately intertwined and mutually constitutive,” and warned against assuming that those on the opposing sides did not converse or come into contact with one another.¹² Habermas himself had recognized this integration when he asserted that conversations on the part of private persons constitute the public sphere.¹³ Literary scholar Lora Romero also took this perspective when she discussed the dialogic nature of women's domestic fiction, which she said often “criticized the patriarchal culture for robbing women of their selfhood.”¹⁴

Though Romero cited the work of northern writers such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Louisa May Alcott, historian Elizabeth Varon has recently shown that southern women asserted themselves in print as well. Varon begins by redefining the public sphere: she asserts that physical spaces such as courthouses, churches, and businesses not only created the public sector, but figurative spaces created in letters, newspapers, and novels, as well as social spaces created by individuals who gathered in homes, also constituted the public domain. By taking part in political discussions through their writing and conversations, southern women also found a way to make themselves heard

¹¹ Friedman, 21-32.

¹² Davidson and Hatcher, 7-28, see especially, pp. 8, 20.

¹³ Habermas, 231.

¹⁴ Lora Romero, *Home Fronts: Domesticity and Its Critics in the Antebellum United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 23.

and to shape the world outside their homes. Cynthia Kierner agrees with Varon when she says that acting as hostesses for balls, political dinners, and holiday celebrations allowed women to straddle the two spheres. Furthermore, participating in church could give women a public role depending on the denomination they attended. In more lay-oriented churches, women could function as leaders in missionary societies and charitable groups.¹⁵

Regardless of the creative ways antebellum women melded the private and public domains in their lives, they were bound by the region's class hierarchy that ranked people according to race, family standing, wealth, and the sort of work they did. White women derived their class status from their husbands or fathers, so plantation mistresses and the wives of wealthy urban professionals sat at the apex of the social pyramid. Wives of yeoman farmers and merchants represented the middle class, and women who were married to wage earners constituted a lower class ranking. Slave ownership played an integral role in determining class for white women, since slave mistresses were largely relieved from taxing physical work that they could require slaves to do instead. Indeed, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese has said, "women, to be ladies, had to have servants."¹⁶ Hence, those women who worked for wages often bore a stigma and occupied a lower status in the white antebellum South.¹⁷

By earning money for their labor, actresses in the Old South most resembled this small group of white women—usually urban—who worked for pay. Unskilled women commonly found work as cooks, housekeepers, and laundresses, while those with more

¹⁵ Elizabeth R. Varon, *We Mean to Be Counted: White Women & Politics in Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 2; Kierner, 2-3, 39, 44, 181-91.

¹⁶ Fox-Genovese, 197.

¹⁷ McMillen, *Southern Women*, 140.

training often set up businesses as milliners and dress makers. The sewing profession was particularly attractive since people always needed clothing, and the seamstress did not need to make a large investment in raw materials. Some women found work as managers of grocery stores, shops, or taverns, and others with large homes who were in need of money sometimes took boarders. Those with knowledge of plants and medicines served as midwives and nurses, and a few went to work in the textile mills that were scattered throughout the region. The majority of women who held paid jobs, however, were teachers. The occupation garnered more respect than any other, for teaching required education and in their roles as teachers, women resembled mothers. They nurtured their students' intellects, helped foster their values and morals, and encouraged their psychological development. A well-managed school could raise a tidy profit over several years, but most women did not own the schools that employed them and only made modest salaries.¹⁸

Though actresses shared some common traits with these other working women, they also stood apart as anomalies. Like cooks, housekeepers, laundresses, midwives, and nurses, women who performed on stage sold an intangible service rather than a tangible product. Like women who ran taverns, groceries, and boarding houses, actresses worked in public and catered to the varied tastes of a specific clientele. Like milliners and dress makers, they made aesthetic decisions and could earn high wages over which they often exercised control. And like textile workers, actresses practiced a skilled craft

¹⁸ Amos, 11-12; Emily Bingham and Penny Richards, "The Female Academy and Beyond: Three Mordecai Sisters at Work in the Old South," in *Neither Lady Nor Slave: Working Women of the Old South*, eds. Susanna Delfino and Michele Gillespie, 174-97; Michele Gillespie, "To Harden a Lady's Hand: Gender Politics, Racial Realities, and Women Millworkers in Antebellum Georgia," in *Neither Lady Nor Slave*, 261-84; Kierner, 19-24, 113-115; Lebsack, 163-82; Timothy J. Lockley, "Spheres of Influence: Working White and Black Women in Antebellum Savannah," in *Neither Lady Nor Slave*, 102-120, see especially pp. 113-14; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 136.

and had to carve out positions for themselves within a male-dominated profession. Yet women who performed on stage differed from those who went into these other professions, for they possessed much higher educational backgrounds. Their schooling might have aligned them more with teachers, as did their abilities to influence and mold a captive audience, but they frequently made considerably higher wages than women who taught.

While education usually raised an antebellum woman's status, actresses suffered from the ignominy that their profession generally bore in the nineteenth century. Theater historian Claudia Johnson says that actresses may have received enthusiastic praise from newspaper reviews and the play-going public, but professional success differed markedly from social acceptance. Polite circles debarred female performers whom they saw as inferior and morally disreputable.¹⁹ Tracy Davis and David Grimsted concur, though they assert that in most cases actresses carefully guarded their reputations and lived morally upright lives. Because they made a living by displaying themselves in public, however, many people continued to think of them as sexually promiscuous.²⁰

Even when actresses came from established, respectable families, they often endured social ostracism. Though Anna Cora Mowatt came from a highly regarded, upper-class family in New York, when she moved to Richmond, Virginia, with her second husband, those in well-to-do circles never fully accepted her. Indeed, Civil War playwright John Hill Hewitt noted in his autobiography that though Mowatt was "a polished lady and an accomplished writer, so stern were the laws of the exclusive 'blue bloods' that she had to take a lower seat." Hewitt understood that her northern

¹⁹ Claudia Johnson, *American Actress: Perspective on the Nineteenth Century* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1984), 4, 11.

²⁰ Davis, 3; Grimsted, 85.

background kept her from receiving full acceptance by the “F.F.V.s” (First Families of Virginia), but he also recognized that the twenty years she had spent in acting tarnished her reputation as well.²¹ Similarly, when Julia Dean married Arthur Hayne, his aristocratic Charleston mother refused to acknowledge her new daughter-in-law and terminated communication with her son. Social censure even followed Julia to the west coast when she toured there in 1856. While California audiences flocked to see her perform and reviewers raved about her talent, residents of San Francisco’s elite South Park neighborhood complained when Bishop King of the Episcopal Church gave her communion.²²

Other instances do show that communities sometimes accepted performers into their midst. David Grimsted notes, for instance, that neither Noah Ludlow nor Sol Smith gave any indication of social ostracism in their memoirs. Indeed, both managers established themselves and their families as respected citizens of Mobile and St. Louis, where they made their respective homes.²³ Since southerners expected men to work in the public sphere, however, they might have accepted the prosperous theatrical partners more readily than they did the actresses who worked for them. Additionally, Ludlow and Smith probably wanted to present themselves in the best light possible in their autobiographical writings.

Nevertheless, female performers could earn substantial financial rewards on the southern stage that sometimes placed them on an equal economic plane with elite antebellum families. Touring stars made the highest salaries, but even stock actresses

²¹ John Hill Hewitt, *Unpublished Autobiography*, Hewitt Papers, p. 328.

²² Frank L Fenton, ed. *Pioneer Western Playbills* (Oakland: Westgate Press, 1951), 4. The Library of Congress Rare Book Room holds a copy of this book. All quotations come from this edition. See also “Julia Dean’s Life and Death,” *New York Dispatch*, 18 January 1877.

²³ Grimsted, 86.

who lived and worked in one place made enough to enjoy luxuries that only elite women could usually afford. Many actresses, for example, kept domestic servants to help with household chores and child care. Julia Dean Hayne and Frances Denny Drake, who came from abolitionist families, hired their help, while others, such as Jane Placide and Mary Ludlow, owned slaves who took care of many domestic needs. Employing or owning servants further separated actresses from other working women and aligned them more with women from wealthy families. Still, receiving pay for work created a barrier that prohibited actresses from attaining full membership in polite circles. Instead, actresses often occupied an in-between social status that they carved out by themselves.

Repertory standards underscored this liminality, and antebellum actresses pushed the region's class boundaries through performances that subversively stressed the pliability of class lines and exposed the social construction of class positions. For example, as the middle-class Juliana angles to marry the aristocratic Duke of Aranza in *The Honey Moon* by John Tobin, she hopes that people will not gossip and say "She does but poorly play a part which nature / Never designed her for."²⁴ Juliana's worries reveal the performative nature of class status. She will do her best to overcome the popular belief that class is inborn by performing her new rank flawlessly, but she fears committing some social *faux pas* and disclosing the class identity of which she is so ashamed. As Juliana's new husband seeks to break her haughty pride by making her believe she has actually married a peasant, he further shows that people stake out their places within the class hierarchy through role playing.

Almost every antebellum actress played Juliana (or her sidekick Volante) during her stage career, for southern theaters frequently opened their seasons with *The Honey*

²⁴ Tobin, 1.2.17-18, p. 15 of 104.

Moon.²⁵ Frances Denny Drake, Jane Placide, Mary Ludlow, Julia Dean Hayne, and Eliza Logan Wood all included the roles in their repertories and attested to the popularity of Tobin's play. Whenever Julia Dean Hayne played Juliana as she did annually in Mobile, St. Louis, and Louisville between 1847 and 1851, her stage performances mirrored the circumstances of her personal life, for like Tobin's lead character, Julia Dean married above her station when she wed the well-to-do Charlestonian, Arthur Hayne.²⁶ Since Hayne's family never accepted Julia, however, her experience discloses a disjunction that sometimes existed between performance and performativity. Antebellum actresses could move across class lines effortlessly onstage but traveling across those borders offstage was not always possible.

Though not staged as frequently as *The Honey Moon*, the popularity of Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Money* in theaters on the Mississippi River circuit during the late 1840s further attested to southerners' obsession with class status and guarding their ranks. Yet Bulwer-Lytton's drama, like Tobin's, ultimately affirmed the social construction of class and disclosed the elasticity of class boundaries. A comedy criticizing greed and vice, *Money* debuted at London's Haymarket Theatre in 1840 and played consistently in English theaters throughout the rest of the century. Ludlow and Smith successfully introduced the play to their St. Louis audiences in June of 1846. The managers then brought the drama to Mobilians the next winter. A January performance proved so popular that they re-staged the play in March before the season closed. Then the partners gave residents in the Crescent City an opportunity to view *Money* in December of 1847.

²⁵ Dormon, 87, 260.

²⁶ Bailey, 358; Blackburn, Appendices B, C; Burroughs, 5, 45; Dietz, 49; Duggar, 164; Keller, 136; Kendall, 23-4; Langley, 76-77; Ludlow, 61, 139, 340, 560-61; Lyle, 22; Roppolo, 70; Smither, 108; Yeomans, 139.

Visiting stars Ann and James Wallack played the lead characters, Clara and Evelyn, and local New Orleans stock actress, Mary Farren played Clara, a cousin of Evelyn's.²⁷

Bulwer-Lytton's play lays bare the hypocrisy of judging others by outward appearances and shows the artificiality and performativity of social status. Clara and Evelyn love one another, but because he has no money, she refuses to marry him. Desire for material possessions and physical comfort keeps Clara from accepting Evelyn's offers of marriage, but the stigma of his low social rank also restrains her. When Evelyn unexpectedly inherits a fortune, however, he suddenly becomes a more attractive mate to Clara. She equates his higher social status with superior inner qualities that make him an acceptable partner. Surmising Clara's hypocritical change of heart, Evelyn betroths himself instead to Georgina, a wealthy heiress, whom he hopes will love him and not his money or stature. Cognizant of the fragility of identity, Sir John Vesey, Georgina's father, warns his daughter, that "men are valued not for what they *are* but for what they *seem* to be."²⁸ When Georgina breaks her engagement with Evelyn after he reportedly loses his fortune, she bears out the truth of her father's words. Georgina soon learns, to her chagrin, that her fiancée never stood in any financial danger at all. Evelyn's changing social rank and the willingness of Clara and Georgina to adapt themselves accordingly not only expose the fabrication of class status but also show how people enact their status positions. By playing characters such as these who dismantled class boundaries, antebellum performers could obtain for themselves a measure of flexibility as they sought different places within the region's social structure.

²⁷ Ludlow, 642, 649, 658, 660.

²⁸ Edward Bulwer-Lytton, *Money*, 1840, in *London Assurance and Other Victorian Comedies*, ed. Klaus Stierstorfer (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 1.1. 40-41, p. 6.

The outbreak of the Civil War quickly exposed the instability of the class hierarchy that southerners so cherished as women of all classes had to take on work that their fathers, husbands, and sons had traditionally done before they left for battle. In towns and cities, the need for women's paid work increased as farms and plantations lost their ability to provide food and clothes for soldiers. The Confederacy began hiring women to sew for piece rates, to clerk for government offices, to nurse wounded soldiers, to spy on enemy troops, and even to work in munitions factories. Lower-class women were not the only ones who took these new jobs; many middle-class women who were suffering from the exigencies of war also left their homes to work in the public sphere for the first time in their lives. The South became more dependent on its own resources as the North's naval blockade continued to cut off the region's trade with Europe.²⁹ Hence, the need for women to work only grew as the war persisted, and as more women entered the paying workforce, actresses stood out less and less for their ability to negotiate private and public spaces.

Stage roles mirrored the melding of domains that occurred in the everyday lives of actresses and other women during the Civil War. Three plays written by John Hill Hewitt for the Waldron family show this elasticity especially well. In *The Battle of Leesburg*, Laura Mason spends hours knitting socks for the soldiers at war; she proudly tells her father she has knit ten pairs and plans to make another ten before she quits. Laura's work occurs at home but allows her to contribute to the war raging in the world outside.³⁰ Estelle Keller, the main female character in *The Artist's Wife*, more explicitly blends private and public when she goes to work as a singer after her husband goes blind

²⁹ Edwards, 76; Faust, *Mothers of Invention*, 82-92; McMillen, *Southern Women*, 159-163; Whites, 42-44.

³⁰ Hewitt, *The Battle of Leesburg: A Drama in Five Acts*, 1862, Hewitt Papers, 2.3.

and cannot paint anymore. Keenly aware of the stigma attached to working women and cognizant of the disrepute often associated with the theater, Paul begrudges his wife's time away from home. Nevertheless, Estelle holds firm in her commitment to aid her ailing husband, and he finally concedes that her work is indispensable.³¹ Like Estelle, Maggie, the flower seller in *The Courier; or, The Siege of Lexington*, also occupies a space in the public domain. She spends her days on the streets selling bouquets, and her experience in the world outside the home endows her with the agency she needs to defend her beloved Francis, the courier of the title, when federal troops accuse him of treason.³²

In every city where the Waldrons performed, the pro-Confederate sympathies of Hewitt's plays ensnared theatergoers, but Augusta's *Southern Field and Fireside* registered that community's pleasure in the thespian family's theatrical offerings quite effusively. "In this troupe we recognize the nucleus of a purifying and elevating power which we hope will prove the inauguration of a new era in the dramatic literature of our young republic, and widen and enlarge its influence until the entire dramatic world will feel its beneficial effect," declared the paper in January 1863.³³ The Augusta paper did not seem bothered, however, by the melding of private and public spheres that the Waldron's enactment of Hewitt dramas buttressed.

The many changes that occurred in women's work during the Civil War contributed to an explicit disintegration of class lines that upper-class southerners could never quite rebuild despite their concerted efforts after the war. Many middle-class women who had gone to work for pay to make ends meet during the war could not afford

³¹ Hewitt, *The Artist's Wife: An Operetta in Three Acts*, 1863, Hewitt Papers, 3.2.

³² Hewitt, *The Courier; or The Siege of Lexington*, 1863, Hewitt Papers, 1.1.

³³ *Augusta Southern Field and Fireside*, 10 January, 1863, quoted in Fife, 90.

to give up their wages even after their men returned. Their continued participation in the public workplace confounded popular post-war notions of ideal middle-class womanhood that proliferated in newspapers, magazines, and even cookbooks of the period. These publications urged women to abandon their positions in the public workplace and re-inhabit their prewar domestic spaces, but many women simply could not afford this option. As they had before the war, women sought work in domestic service as housekeepers, laundresses, and seamstresses, many went into teaching (the occupation that still garnered the most respect for women), and others took jobs in the burgeoning textile industries or in offices or stores. In the changed social landscape of the post-war South, actresses who began to tour the region with national combination companies did not differ too greatly from the other southern women who had to find work to support their families.³⁴

While upper-class women gladly yielded the traditionally male tasks that they had taken on during the war when husbands, fathers, and sons returned—or when they could afford to hire servants—they also participated in the destabilization of the private and public sectors by forming civic groups that staged ceremonies to commemorate the antebellum South and its war heroes. These organizations helped southerners come to terms with defeat by creating what historian Charles Reagan calls the mythology of the Lost Cause. In this new civil religion, white southerners became God’s chosen people who could regain their preeminence by preserving a commitment to the antebellum values of chivalry and noblesse oblige. Practitioners of the Lost Cause religion created a pantheon of heroes who embodied these qualities and who rose up during the war to do battle with evil. While men organized groups such as the United Confederate Veterans in

³⁴ Edwards, 130; Rable, 280-83; Scott, 96-102, 129.

the 1870s to stage Lost Cause rituals and honor their saints and martyrs, women likewise formed the United Daughters of the Confederacy and Daughters of Confederate Veterans. These organizations founded museums and acquired relics such as medals, flags, and uniforms that had belonged to Confederate soldiers; they raised money to erect statues and memorials; they organized Confederate Memorial Day ceremonies, and they participated in funerals of war-time heroes by decorating graves with crosses, flowers, and flags.³⁵ Performance theorist Richard Schechner says that new rituals can quickly taken on an aged character and help people navigate change in their lives.³⁶ The Lost Cause ceremonies acquired this sort of familiarity and helped southerners maneuver the shift from Old South to New. The elite women primarily responsible for orchestrating these civic activities not only straddled the private and public domains as did middle-class women who worked outside the home for pay, but they also bore a similarity to actresses for the scripted parts that they played in publicly staged rituals. Thus, as women of all classes emerged from the Civil War and continued to negotiate both spheres, their lives, like those of antebellum and Civil War actresses, affirmed the interdependent nature of the two realms and the elasticity of class status.

Acting for Pay

“The stage has always been a fine lucrative field for women’s employment.”

Olive Logan, *Before the Footlights and Behind the Scenes* (1870)

Women who went into acting in the antebellum period or during the Civil War years entered an unusual profession, for as Eliza Logan’s sister Olive observed in her memoir, actresses could make good money for their work. In addition, the doors of the

³⁵ Charles Reagan Wilson, *Baptized in Blood: The Religion of the Lost Cause, 1865-1920* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1980), 7-11, 24-8.

³⁶ Schechner, 72.

theater, unlike those of most other work places, were thrown wide to both sexes. Again touting the advantages of the theatrical profession, Logan remarked that “all the trades and professions were open to boys,” but she noted that women had far fewer choices when they entered the workforce.³⁷ They could find work in the theater, however, for plays required leading ladies as well as leading men. Once actresses entered the dramatic profession, they could move up or down in the theatrical hierarchy depending upon the expertise of their dramatic skills. Some never progressed beyond bit parts and simply made a living wage for themselves, while others attained fame and fortune, even surpassing actors in their prominence.³⁸ Since popular antebellum repertory selections frequently portrayed a rigidly gendered world in which men and women occupied specific roles, though, the daily lives and work of actresses paradoxically inverted and subverted the stage ideal. Nevertheless, those women who acquired recognition and wealth for their stage work often did not find a commensurate social acceptance in the Old South.

For those women willing to sacrifice their social standing and take on a more liminal status, acting appealed, since female performers could make better wages than teachers and avoid the hardships that accompanied jobs in the manufacturing or domestic trades. Theater historian Claudia Johnson notes that even the lowest paid supernumeraries made between \$3 and \$4 per week at mid-century, or four times what employers often paid skilled female labor. Stock actresses did even better. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, their weekly wages averaged between \$12 and \$37 per week; by the end of the century, they earned \$50 per week. In addition to their

³⁷ Olive Logan, 24; epigraph quotation, p. 93.

³⁸ Jane Kathleen Curry, *Nineteenth-Century American Women Theatre Managers* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1994), 1-4, 129; Davis, 3.

weekly salaries, local actresses could count on netting anywhere from \$500 to \$1,000 annually from benefit performances.³⁹ In a benefit, an actor or actress played a prominent role that he or she selected, and the others in the company assisted gratis. The proceeds then went to the person for whom the benefit was given. Typically, these productions took place at the end of a season, and performers wanted to ensure a large audience turn-out, so they chose old favorites or new, edgy dramas that would attract curious playgoers.⁴⁰

Between their income for benefits and their weekly wages, stock actresses made more than working-class men, and they often made more than the middle-class men who went into the acting profession as well. In 1838, for instance, Eliza Petrie made the second highest salary in Ludlow and Smith's Mobile company. She received \$30 a week, the same wage that the company paid actor Matt Field. Two couples made \$10 more per week than she and Field did, and otherwise, the nine other company members, of which only three were women, made \$20 apiece or less.⁴¹ As stock actresses gained renown, they could negotiate for more pay. In 1838, Eliza Petrie requested a raise of \$10 per week; Ludlow and Smith compromised by promising an extra \$5 since she had become such "a great favorite" with their audiences. By 1841, however, they could not meet her terms, and she turned down their offer for another that was more lucrative.⁴² Sometimes actresses negotiated terms for themselves as well as making arrangements for husbands and fiancées. For instance, Julia Drake, Frances Denny Drake's daughter, wrote to Ludlow and Smith in June 1843 requesting \$50 per week and half of two benefits to be

³⁹ Johnson, 54-55.

⁴⁰ Lyle, 22.

⁴¹ Sol Smith to Noah Ludlow, 8 March, 1838, Sol Smith Collection, Box 1 of 6.

⁴² Sol Smith to Noah Ludlow, 9 March, 1838 and 3 May, 1841, Sol Smith Collection, Box 1 of 6.

paid to herself and her fiancée, Henry Chapman, for the fall season. The partners countered with an offer of \$45 per week and a quarter of four benefits, which Drake and Chapman later accepted.⁴³

Regional stars commanded much higher salaries than stock actresses. Though Julia Dean Hayne only made \$6 per week when she first began working for Ludlow and Smith in 1846, by 1854 when she had risen to the status of regional star, she could demand between \$600 and \$1,000 per week. In addition, her father had quickly learned to negotiate for half the take on her benefits, which generally totaled around \$700 per performance.⁴⁴ Cornelius Logan also negotiated the best terms he could get for his daughter Eliza. He only accepted an engagement in St. Louis during June of 1847 if Smith and Ludlow would cover the Logans' travel and lodging expenses as well as promise to stage a benefit on their last night in town. Still a novice, Eliza was probably only making \$10 to \$15 a week, but by 1853 when she too had achieved star status, she was making around \$900 a week.⁴⁵

The solid income that regional stars made gave them opportunities to become investors and businesswomen. Some relied on the men in their lives to guide their decisions, while others acted autonomously and oversaw their own finances. Whether due to romantic involvement or to their working relationship, Jane Placide followed the financial advice of her manager, James Caldwell, and invested in New Orleans real estate

⁴³ Julia R. Drake to Ludlow and Smith, 29 June, 1843 and 21 July, 1843, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

⁴⁴ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 8 March, 1848, Julia Dean Theater Papers, Box 1 of 2; Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 13 November, 1851, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 4 of 17; Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 17 March, 4 April, 1854, and 13 October, 1854, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; Jefferson, 146.

⁴⁵ Ben DeBar Receipt Books, Rosemonde E. and Emile Kuntz Collection, Collection 600, Series IV, Section D, Item 4, Special Collections Department, Howard-Tilton Memorial Library, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana (hereafter cited as Kuntz Collection); C. A. Logan to Sol Smith, 3 June, 1848, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

as she began to accrue money from her position as leading stock actress at the St. Charles Theatre. She also bought a slave and invested in Caldwell's gas company. Placide prospered in all of her ventures, for she had also amassed \$42,000 in assets by the time she died in 1835.⁴⁶ Julia Dean Hayne also invested her money in real estate and gas stock, but before she married, her father directed her financial ventures and laid claim to the earnings. Later, he fought with her husband over their distribution. She did not gain full rights to her money until after her divorce.⁴⁷

Before her father, Cornelius, died in 1853, Eliza Logan depended on him to oversee her finances and schedule her engagements. After he died, however, she assumed her own financial responsibilities and arranged her own bookings, rather than hire a manager. At first, Logan assumed a demure persona and simply asked Sol Smith to help her obtain positions with the most "favorable terms possible." She soon gained confidence in making specific requests, however, for within a year, she crowed to Smith, "you would scarcely believe what a little business woman I am." Her boast was not empty, either, for Logan procured lucrative engagements in Savannah, Columbus, Memphis, and St. Louis until she married and went into semi-retirement in 1855.⁴⁸ After her husband's death in 1830, Frances Denny Drake also booked her own performances. In 1837, she agreed to play a week for Ludlow and Smith; she would receive half the ticket sales over \$1800 and half of the receipts above \$300 on her benefit night. She

⁴⁶ Hostetler, 249-251.

⁴⁷ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 13 November, 1851, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection, Box 4 of 17; Arthur P. Hayne to Sol Smith, 4 January and 20 October, 1856, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6; Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 20 July and 22 August, 1855, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

⁴⁸ Blackburn, Appendix C; Eliza Logan to Sol Smith, 1 April, 1853, 11 February, 1854 and 26 June, 1854, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6; Keller, 117-125, 136; Langley, 58-60, 76-77; Yeomans, 52, 124-27, 139-140.

must have made a respectable profit, for she applied to star with the partners every succeeding year until her retirement in 1843.⁴⁹

A stock investor, an entrepreneur, and the family business manager, Mary Ludlow was another regional actress who made a substantial salary and exercised financial independence. Though Ludlow served as a stock performer in Mobile rather than traveling as a star, she used her weekly stage wages to supplement other financial ventures. Every year, she planted a large garden, kept dairy cows, guinea hens, and chickens, and ran a stall at the local farmer's market, where she sold surplus produce and eggs. Some weeks Mary had more for sale than others: excess rain could make it too wet to harvest, and sometimes the animals made life difficult. For example, she proclaimed to Noah in 1842, "I am afraid those pea fowls and I shall always be enemys [*sic*]*—*I kept them shut up for 2 days and no sooner were they let out than the gentleman mounted in air and lit right in the middle of the cabbage patch and before anyone could stop him he had demolished 2 or 3 fine plants."⁵⁰ Despite her trials with the birds, Mary kept them for their beauty and their laying ability.

Mary Ludlow's drive and ingenuity further came to light in her investment and business strategies. Between her own income and the money she received from Noah, Mary crafted an annual budget that covered their property taxes, food and clothing, travel expenses, and legal fees. If she found herself short on cash, Mary came up with creative ways to fulfill her obligations. For instance, in October of 1845, she paid a \$30 oyster bill in kind with a keg of homemade pickles. Over the years, Mary put money into

⁴⁹ Sol Smith to Noah Ludlow, 7 August, 1837, Sol Smith Collection, Box 1 of 6; Frances Ann [Denny] Drake to Sol Smith, 30 October, 1840 and 25 April, 1841, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

⁵⁰ Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 22 April, 1842, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection, Box 3 of 17; Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 5 October, 1845, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection, Box 4 of 17.

Mobile and Ohio Railroad stock, and by 1860, her shares had increased in value to two thousand dollars. She bequeathed that stock to her daughter Cornelia, but within two years, the Civil War had forced her and the family to liquidate all their assets.⁵¹ Before the outbreak of hostilities, though, Mary Ludlow showed how regional actresses could use their means to seize a degree of agency and independence that many other women in the antebellum South could never attain.

While regional actresses like Mary Ludlow often needed to buttress their performance wages with entrepreneurial projects and financial investments, the exceptionally high pay of national and international stars frequently precluded the requirement for such activities. When Charlotte Cushman came south in 1847, 1850, and 1858, she earned an average of \$2,500 per week for engagements that lasted between 2 and 4 weeks. While Ludlow and Smith complained about her high terms in 1847, they still realized a tremendous profit themselves, or they would not have invited her to return in 1850.⁵² Indeed, Ludlow described Cushman as “the greatest card of the [1850] season,” and Cushman herself gloated in a letter to her friend, Emma Stebbins, that “the nightly average of receipts was greater even than [William] Macready’s.”⁵³ To draw larger audiences than the great British star was indeed a feat. Ben DeBar clearly took note of Cushman’s success and the profits that Ludlow and Smith enjoyed, for he captured her contract when she made her final tour of the South in 1858. When the

⁵¹ Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 14 March and 22 April, 1842, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection, Box 3 of 17; Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 5 October, 1845, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection, Box 4 of 17; Mary Ludlow to Cornelia Burk Fields, 3 December, 1860, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection, Box 5 of 17; Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow 29 January, 1862, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection, Box 5 of 17.

⁵² Ben DeBar Receipt Book for the St. Charles Theater, New Orleans, Louisiana, covering 20 November, 1853 - 3 October, 1860, Kuntz Collection; Ludlow, 698, 704, 713, 715; W. Corbyn to Ludlow and Smith, 30 October, 1849, Ludlow-Field-Maury-Collection, Box 4 of 17.

⁵³ Ludlow, 713; Emma Stebbins, *Charlotte Cushman: Her Letters and Memories of Her Life* (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1879), 91.

British actress Ellen Tree first toured America in 1838, she made around \$1300 per week, but after she married the renowned English actor, Edmund Kean in 1842, the two commanded \$2500 per week. To make the overseas voyage worthwhile, however, the Keans always demanded long local engagements, so when they performed for Ludlow and Smith in New Orleans during the 1845 season, they played forty nights and made \$12,000 for their extended stay.⁵⁴ Ellen Tree never compromised on her terms before she married Edmund Kean, and she maintained her unwavering tenacity when negotiating salaries after her marriage as well. Sol Smith may have complained about her rigidity, but because she and Kean drew such good audiences, he and Ludlow always accommodated the actresses' wishes.⁵⁵

International entertainers admired for their dancing or singing drew the highest wages of all female performers in the antebellum South. Fanny Elssler, the Viennese ballerina, demanded and received \$1,000 per night when she performed at the St. Charles Theater in New Orleans during the spring of 1841. Manager James Caldwell tried to bargain with her agent, Henry Wykoff, but he refused to reduce his client's terms. Caldwell finally agreed to pay the astronomical sum that Elssler required, but he offset the cost by auctioning off tickets to the highest bidders and raising the prices for general admission. Philadelphia manager Edward Woolf dismissed her as "avaricious," a label that Noah Ludlow also used for the dancer in his autobiography, but Elssler knew she could not physically manage to perform for the duration of her working life and wisely

⁵⁴ Sol Smith, 134, 199.

⁵⁵ Ellen Tree to Sol Smith, 8 January, 1838, Sol Smith Collection, Box 3 of 6; Ellen [Tree] Kean to Sol Smith, 13 June, 1845, 20 September, 1845, 9 October, 1846, 17 January, 1866, Sol Smith Collection, Box 3 of 6; Sol Smith to Noah Ludlow, 23 January, 1844 (?), Sol Smith Collection, Box 2 of 6.

sought to prepare for the day she needed to retire.⁵⁶ While the French dancer and pantomime artist, Madame Celine Celeste, first demanded smaller sums than Elssler, she still made enviable wages. Her agent, Henry Elliot, informed Sol Smith that she had netted \$35,000 during the first eight months of her American tour in 1835. When she returned in 1837, Celeste's initial success in the United States must have given her the confidence to raise her fees significantly. She charged Ludlow and Smith \$1800 a week for her appearances at their Mobile and New Orleans theaters in March and April, and though the managers might have balked initially at paying Celeste \$700 more per week than she had received two years previously, their investment in the star paid off. The St. Charles Theatre ended up grossing over \$10,000 during her first week in the Crescent City, and Sol Smith told Henry Elliott that her Mobile benefit "was the largest upon record at regular prices in America."⁵⁷

While international stars such as Madame Celeste and Fanny Elssler commanded incredibly high pay for their performances, Jenny Lind, the "Swedish Nightingale," made more money than any female performer who toured America in the nineteenth century. On her 1851 tour of the South, she grossed between \$10,000 and \$20,000 a night. People traveled from all over the southeast to hear her sing as she traveled from Richmond down the east coast, and then from New Orleans up the Mississippi River to St. Louis. The wealthy bid as much as \$250 for individual tickets sold at auctions, and the average theatergoer gave \$7.00 for a general admission ticket that would cost around \$1.00 on other occasions. Lind did well, but she shared part of her proceeds with P. T. Barnum,

⁵⁶ Edward Woolf to Sol Smith, 25 April, 1841; Henry Wykoff to James Caldwell, 2 letters dated only 1840, 27 September, 1840, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; Hostetler, 478; James Caldwell to Henry Wykoff, 1840, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; Ludlow, 538.

⁵⁷ Henry Elliott to Sol Smith, 31 August, 1835, 13 March, 1837, 20 March, 1837, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; Sol Smith to Noah Ludlow, 9 April, 1837, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

who arranged her tour, with the managers who leased their theaters for her performances, and with the charities that she made a point of giving to in each city on her schedule. Nevertheless, when Lind finished her southern tour, she took a handsome sum home to Sweden.⁵⁸

In addition to the enviable wages that many actresses drew, some enjoyed expensive gifts that appreciative and wealthy audience members bestowed upon them. The New Orleans *Daily Picayune* reported that Julia Dean Hayne received “a superb diamond bracelet” when she was performing in Nashville during the 1850 season, and Eliza Logan received a matching diamond bracelet, breast pin, and earrings that she estimated cost her admiring fans nearly \$2,000 when she was performing with William Crisp’s Savannah Theater in the spring of 1854.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, the propriety of admirers’ gifts sometimes made accepting them difficult. For instance, one year while Eliza Logan was visiting Augusta, Georgia, a planter who was particularly taken with her acting, sent to her his black valet, probably worth \$1,000, to show his appreciation for her talents. The young African-American boy walked behind the scenes with a card pinned to his sleeve that read “To Miss Eliza Logan,” but the actress, who had not grown up in a

⁵⁸ C. A. Logan to Sol Smith, n.d. [1851?], Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6; Noah Ludlow to Cornelia Ludlow [Field], 20 February, 1851, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 4 of 17; “Jenny Lind’s Charities,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 21 February, 1851; “Jenny Lind’s Charity Concert,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 3 March, 1851; “Jenny Lind Tickets,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 9 February, 1851; Richard Ludlow to his sister, 23 March, 1851, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 4 of 17; C. G. Rosenberg, *Jenny Lind in America* (New York: Stringer & Townsend, 1851), 95-6, 169-70, 183, 191. The Historic New Orleans Collection houses a copy of this book. All references come from this edition. See also Sol Smith, 223.

⁵⁹ “Miss Julia Dean,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 30 November, 1850; Eliza Logan to Sol Smith, 29 April, 1854, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6; “Miss Eliza Logan’s Farewell Benefit,” *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 6 March, 1854.

slave-owning family, politely sent the boy back to his owner with her regrets and expressions of appreciation for his thoughtfulness.⁶⁰

While well-to-do fans were known to shower their favorite actresses with expensive presents, devotees with lesser means also showed their admiration with less costly tokens. Indeed, after her successful tour of the South in 1845, Anna Cora Mowatt remarked, “Every actress who gains celebrity is tolerably sure of being courted and feted, inundated with poems, complimentary letters, flowers, and rich gifts.”⁶¹ Of all these mementos, playgoers most often gave flowers, as they were affordable but stood out as visible emblems of esteem. Spectators brought bouquets with them to performances and threw them on stage at the end of plays, and they also sent arrangements to dressing rooms before curtain time. John Barnes proudly described the many “bouquets and wreaths” that his daughter Charlotte received after a successful performance in Cincinnati at the beginning of October, 1837, and the *Savannah Daily Morning News* reported that “Miss Logan . . . was greeted by a shower of bouquetts and wreathes [sic] of flowers” after she played Talfourd’s *Ion* in March, 1854.⁶² Similarly, Anna Cora Mowatt described masses of flowers that filled her dressing room at the start of her southern tour in 1845 as well as a particularly lovely arrangement that she received while playing in Baltimore in 1852.⁶³ Even when resources were scarce during the Civil War, flowers remained a favorite symbol of regard. The *Mobile Advertiser and Register* noted that in

⁶⁰ Henry Pitt Phelps, *Players of a Century: A Record of the Albany Stage* (Albany: Joseph McDonough, 1880), 261.

⁶¹ Anna Cora Mowatt, *Autobiography of an Actress* (Boston: Ticknor, Reed, and Fields, 1853), 262.

⁶² John Barnes to Sol Smith, 4 October, 1837, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; “Miss Logan as *Ion*,” *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 2 March, 1854.

⁶³ Mowatt, 415.

October, 1862 admirers threw “a shower of beautiful bouquets upon the stage every evening” to show their appreciation for the talents of Jessie Crisp Clark.⁶⁴

Actresses who maintained a popular public reception with their fans continued to draw higher salaries than those who failed to catch the public’s attention during the Civil War, but no southern acting company could afford to pay the astronomical salaries that antebellum stars had commanded. William Crisp had paid his stock performers \$20 per week before the war began, but matching this figure in the face of the South’s struggling economy was impossible.⁶⁵ Indeed, as the war continued and Confederate money lost its value, entertainers had a more and more difficult time making a living, much less a profit. Those who wanted the assurance of dependable pay or the promise of handsome profits quickly realized that they had to find work in other areas of the country. Even theaters in border states suffered; for example, those in St. Louis struggled to keep their houses filled throughout the war. As a result, Eliza Petrie Place reluctantly gave up a permanent stock job at the St. Louis Theater in 1862 and took a position with Barnum’s Boston Museum that paid significantly more. Burdened by debts her husband had left in the wake of his death, the higher pay would allow her to pay his loans and simultaneously support her elderly mother.⁶⁶

The paucity of high pay combined with the high concentration of hostilities in southern states meant that star actresses also largely eschewed southern stages in favor of those in other regions. Adah Isaacs Menken, who was born in Louisiana and got her start on the New Orleans stage in 1856, headed to New York in 1859 and returned to the South

⁶⁴ “Theatrical,” *Mobile Advertiser and Register*, 4 October, 1862.

⁶⁵ Thomas Gamble, *The Crisp Family of Georgia*, Savannah: n. p., 1932, The Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia.

⁶⁶ Eliza Petrie Place to Sol Smith, 14 December, 1862, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

only sporadically over the next ten years. During that decade, she dazzled northeastern and western audiences with her performance in the melodramatic equestrian drama, *Mazeppa*, which featured her wearing a flesh-colored tight that gave the illusion of nudity during one particularly sensational scene. Menken, like Charlotte Cushman, Ellen Tree Kean, and other nationally known stars, could make much more in New York or San Francisco than was ever possible in Richmond or Mobile, the cities that became the dramatic centers during the war in the South. Menken did bring *Mazeppa* to some of the cities in the upper South when she was passing through them on her tours, or when working in a circuit loop was convenient. She dropped down from New York to perform for a few months in Baltimore in the summer of 1861, for instance, and including Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis on her way to the west coast was also easy. Nevertheless, destinations outside of the South were the goal. Menken wrote to Augustin Daly boasting that she had netted ten thousand dollars during a month-long California tour in 1863, while Ellen Tree Kean reported to Sol Smith in 1865 that she and her husband were grossing \$1200 per night during an engagement in Chicago.⁶⁷

Actresses who had held only minor stock positions on the South's antebellum stages and who emerged as regional stars during the war did earn more than they had before the conflict. Nevertheless, theaters could never guarantee their bookings, and pay was not always consistent. The promise of attaining regional recognition meant that performers were willing to take such risks, but as the war got worse and as the value of Confederate currency continued to decrease, their participation in the theater became more of a gamble.

⁶⁷ Adah Isaacs Menken to Augustin Daly, 14 October, 1863, Mss. Y.C. 4541, The Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D. C; Ellen Tree Kean to Sol Smith, 2 July, 1865, Sol Smith Collection, Box 3 of 6; Johnson, 147-159.

The South's failing economy hit older, retired performers particularly hard during the Civil War; some lost their life savings, and many had to accept financial assistance from extended family members or friends. Frances Denny Drake found herself in such straits. For the first two years of the war, she struggled to run the family farm outside of Louisville, Kentucky, but the Drakes' Union sympathies provoked antipathy from local Confederates, who overran and looted the property several times. By 1863, Drake's assets were drained, and Sol Smith's niece, Mary Farren, informed him that Frances had moved in to town with her friend, Mrs. Prentice, for the retired actress was "quite destitute of any means of support." The Drake children came to their mother's assistance as they regained their financial footing after the war, and she was able to move back to Harmony Farm, where she lived until her death in 1875.⁶⁸

The Ludlow family also suffered financial difficulties during the war years. Though Ludlow's assets hovered between \$70,000 and \$80,000 in the 1840s, most of that money was tied up in real estate, and a legal dispute that had dragged on with Sol Smith since he and Noah dissolved their partnership in 1853 drained the Ludlows of ready cash.⁶⁹ By 1861, the Ludlows had to ask their daughter Mary to find a job so that she could contribute to the family's income. Since she had received an expensive private education rather than training for the stage, Mary found a teaching position in a local elementary school. Shaky finances also drove the Ludlows' older daughter, Cornelia, to find a teaching job to provide for her children while her husband, actor Matt Field, found work where he could. Before the war, the Ludlows had climbed a few rungs on the Old

⁶⁸ Mary A. Farren to Sol Smith, 5 June, 1863, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; Swain, 193-98.

⁶⁹ Francis Hodge, Introduction to *Dramatic Life As I Found It*, 1880, by Noah M. Ludlow (New York: Benjamin Blom, Inc., 1966), ix, xii; Noah Ludlow to Sol Smith, 21 June, 1861, Sol Smith Collection, Box 2 of 6.

South's social ladder partly by keeping their girls out of the acting profession and grooming them to assume privileged positions as upper-class housewives. As theater historian David Grimsted notes, "respectable families looked askance at acting as a career."⁷⁰ Noah Ludlow had felt this disapprobation himself when he chose the stage; he remembered in his autobiography that his mother and sister went into mourning for a month after learning of his career decision. Thus, when Cornelia married a stock actor, the family lost some of its new standing, but when she and Mary joined the workforce, the Ludlows risked forfeiting the rest of the higher status they had worked so hard to attain before the war. Mrs. Ludlow consoled herself that teaching was a "lady-like" profession, but she still bemoaned her daughters' need to work.⁷¹

Though Mary contributed \$30 a month to the family expenses once she secured her teaching position, the Ludlows' financial situation continued to deteriorate, and Noah had to find other ways to supplement the family's income.⁷² Initially he turned to friends and old employees whom he had assisted in the past and who would in turn feel obligated to come to his aid. Throughout his career in theatrical management, Ludlow had always upheld his responsibility to pay the performers in his employ, sometimes to the detriment of his personal finances, and he also provided other assistance when he was able.⁷³ For example, in 1856, Ludlow loaned Eliza Riddle Field money after her husband's death to help cover funeral expenses, and later, he helped her petition for some overdue life insurance money. Remembering her employer's kind generosity, Field in turn came to

⁷⁰ Grimsted, 85.

⁷¹ Ludlow, 7; Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 6 August, 1861, Ludlow-Maury-Field Collection, Box 5 of 17.

⁷² Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 29 January, 1862, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 5 of 17.

⁷³ *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Noah Miller Ludlow," (by Larry E. Grisvard), via Galileo online database (accessed 25 February, 2004).

his aid five years later when she loaned him \$1500, which he took another five years to repay.⁷⁴ The support of friends and former colleagues could not sustain the family through the grim war years, however, and Ludlow was finally driven to request government assistance. Despite his pro-southern sympathies, Ludlow did not shy away from approaching the Union for aid when the Confederacy could not help his family. His dramatic training must have worked in his favor, for Senator William Seward agreed to petition the Department of State for \$250 on the family's behalf.⁷⁵

Enacting Work: Women and the Conditions of Acting

“I had abilities and desired to use them. I came here at my own request;
for here I am no longer *dependent!*”

Gertrude, *Fashion* (1845), 2.2.25-6, Anna Cora Mowatt

Gertrude, the governess and music teacher in Anna Cora Mowatt's play, *Fashion*, explains to a baffled Colonel Howard that she left the comfortable care of her elderly female guardians in Geneva to seek work in America so that she could feel useful and put her talents to work in the world. Howard cannot understand her decision, for Gertrude's position as a working woman has demoted her class standing, a truism the maid Millinette observes when she pronounces that Gertrude is “not anybody at all.”⁷⁶ While Mowatt's Gertrude does not need to work, many women in the antebellum South did, and theater jobs held a particular appeal. Permanent stock positions gave protection from the

⁷⁴ Eliza Field by Kate Field to Noah Ludlow, 22 June, 1856, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection, Box 5 of 17; Eliza Field to Sol Smith, 28 February, 1856, 22 March, 1856, and 12 April, 1856, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; Kate Field to Noah Ludlow, 19 June, 1856, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 5 of 17; Promissory Note between Eliza Field and Noah Ludlow, 24 April, 1865, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 5 of 17.

⁷⁵ F. A. Dick to Col. R. G. Farrar, 4 January, 1862, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 5 of 17; William H. Seward to Noah M. Ludlow, 12 February, 1862, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 5 of 17.

⁷⁶ Anna Cora Mowatt, *Fashion*, 1845, in *Female Playwrights of the Nineteenth Century*, ed., Adrienne Scullion (London: J. M. Dent, 1996), 1.1.30, p. 240.

instabilities of the labor market, and star positions offered the glamour of fame and fortune. Regardless of these perks, however, the costs of working in the nineteenth-century theater were also heavy. Actresses had to pay for their own costumes; they experienced exhaustion and fatigue from the long hours they spent in spare physical spaces; they constantly pored over lines for new roles; they endured hardships of travel by stage coach and steamer, and they worried about producing effective promotional campaigns to boost their public images. In short, actresses balanced the advantages of steady, higher pay with the burdens of work as well as the stigma that came with the career choice.

Expenditures for costumes cut heavily into the pockets of actresses, especially novices who had to build wardrobes from scratch and lesser known stock performers who only made modest salaries. Actors and actresses often spent their entire careers acquiring the necessary accoutrements for their work, as one item could cost the equivalent of several week's pay. For instance, Jane Placide's will listed a headdress worth \$80, which would have taken approximately four week's of her wages to purchase.⁷⁷ The addition of a bi-annual, seasonal benefit greatly increased the earning potential for a successful leading lady like Placide, but costumes still stood out as a major expense that performers had to bear. Since stage garb cost so much, David Grimsted observes that players often had to improvise, and some odd combinations sometimes resulted. When Charlotte Cushman debuted in New Orleans in 1836, for example, James Caldwell asked Madame Closel, a short, stout actress who worked at one of the French Theaters to help outfit the tall, slim beginner. Roaring with laughter at the thought of making her clothes fit Cushman, Closel nonetheless took pity on the amateur "and set to work to see how she

⁷⁷ Hostetler, 249-251.

could help.”⁷⁸ No doubt Closel and Cushman devised some outfit that sufficed, but their experience shows why critics sometimes complained of “dress belonging to all nations under heaven but the right one” in many nineteenth-century performances.⁷⁹

Actresses not only shouldered the extra financial weight of wardrobe costs, they also contended with chronic weariness, for they kept grueling schedules and their work was physically taxing. Tracy Davis contends that performers essentially held two jobs, one that occupied them during the day and one that kept them busy at night. Olive Logan confirms her assessment by estimating that most players spent two to four hours each day learning roles, two to four hours a day in rehearsal, and three to four hours each night performing. As Davis points out, the pressures of this day grew more acute for women who had children, especially if they had no help from husbands or family members.⁸⁰ The paucity of luxury in most dressing rooms and theater wings only added to the physical discomfort that tired actresses experienced. Olive Logan described standing for hours in rehearsal and then standing in the wings and waiting for cues during performances. Without any chairs to sit in, some performers grew faint, and Logan said, “I have seen tears in the eyes of actresses, wrung . . . entirely by physical fatigue.”⁸¹ Anna Cora Mowatt similarly wrote of the “thousand *desagrédmes*, the discomforts, the endless vexations, and the unavoidable fatigues of the profession.”⁸² She most hated the spare dressing rooms that usually only contained “a rude wooden shelf, a dingy looking

⁷⁸ Stebbins, 23.

⁷⁹ Grimsted, 83, 91; quotation from *The Comet* (November, 1811), 52, quoted in Grimsted, p. 83.

⁸⁰ Davis, 55; Logan, 62.

⁸¹ Logan, 63.

⁸² Mowatt, 262.

glass, a couple of superannuated chairs, and a rickety washstand.”⁸³ No one, Mowatt contended, could find a place to rest in those conditions.

If actresses had difficulty resting for a few minutes at work, they also had trouble finding time to relax at home, since they always faced the pressure of studying their stage roles when they were away from the theater. As a beginner or “utility” performer, an actress learned many small roles that she played for several seasons until discovering the type that best suited her style. Then she moved into a “line of business,” or a limited range of character types that she generally played for the remainder of her career. The basic lines of business for women included primary leading ladies, secondary character actresses, tertiary roles called walking ladies, and supernumeraries or utility actresses. Leading ladies usually played heavy tragic heroines, while character actresses generally played light comic roles, and walking ladies received their titles because they were always ready to run away from fathers or guardians with lovers. The lesser ranks included bit parts that ranged from low comedy roles to singing chambermaids, sometimes called “soubrettes,” old women, witches, and hags.⁸⁴ The number of roles an actress had to master varied according to the size of the company for whom she worked; small troupes needed their performers to play a wider range of parts, but even in the larger theaters, players’ loads tended to be heavy.⁸⁵ In 1822, the first year that Jane Placide worked for James Caldwell’s New Orleans theater, she learned 50 new roles, and the following year, she added another 40 to her repertory. Eliza Riddle also played 50 roles when she played in St. Louis during 1837, but Eliza Petrie surpassed both Riddle

⁸³ Ibid., 223.

⁸⁴ Brockett and Hildy, 256; Davis, 22-23; Donohue, 72-3; Johnson, 51.

⁸⁵ Brockett and Hildy, 256; Donald Mullin, *Victorian Actors and Actresses in Review* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1983), xxiii.

and Placide by playing 82 different parts during her tenure with the St. Louis Theatre the same year.⁸⁶

The experience of all three women shows the demands placed on stock actresses, but as the star system came to dominate the theatrical world in the 1830s, the pressures grew more acute. Traveling stars expected stock performers to play a wide variety of support roles, and they frequently gave short notice of their program selections. Thus, a resident actress might have only 24 hours to prepare a part.⁸⁷ The repetition of standard plays helped ease some of this burden, but the stress was still enough to drive many to distraction. Noah Ludlow describes the frustration he and Mary felt as newlyweds in 1818 when they could not find a quiet place to learn their lines in the noisy rooming house where they lived in Natchez. The two finally decamped to a remote bluff overlooking the Mississippi River when the weather permitted.⁸⁸ The fear of forgetting lines also haunted some actresses: Anna Cora Mowatt described the stage fright that sometimes gripped her as “a nightmare” a “horror,” and a “dramatic incubus.”⁸⁹

Though both actors and actresses could feel overwhelmed by their role loads, their lines of business led to the “possession of parts” that both stock and star performers guarded zealously.⁹⁰ Over time, audiences came to associate signature roles with specific players, and they looked forward to seeing their performances in these guises. Performers cultivated their personas and sometimes made careers out of playing one or two characters. For instance, Edwin Forrest’s name became synonymous with *Metamora*, while Joseph Jefferson became famous for his portrayal of Rip Van Winkle.

⁸⁶ Burroughs, 54-55; Craig, 54; Grimsted, 88.

⁸⁷ Brockett and Hildy, 256; Mullin, xviii.

⁸⁸ Ludlow, 153.

⁸⁹ Mowatt, *Autobiography*, 222.

⁹⁰ Brockett and Hildy, 256; Donohue, 62-3.

Similarly, playgoers associated Charlotte Cushman with Meg Merrilies, a mysterious old gypsy woman who helps restore a handsome young man to his stolen patrimony in *Guy Mannering*, a stage adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's novel. Other actresses likewise adopted key roles; playgoers knew Julia Dean Hayne as both Julia in *The Hunchback* and Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing*, while they identified Eliza Logan with Evadne. By associating themselves with particular roles, actresses increased their renown and ensured a steady following at home and when they toured.⁹¹

Traveling expanded opportunities for antebellum actresses, but the peripatetic life was also rigorous and wearing. Famous performers who carried considerable clout could limit their time on the road and make sure their trips paid well, but lesser known entertainers and those who were just establishing their reputations had to endure the fatigue of constant touring without the benefit of large salaries. Jenny Lind refused to perform in Savannah during her 1851 tour of the South because the local manager, F. C. Adams, would not pay the \$15,000 she demanded. Declining the invitation to appear in Savannah incurred considerable displeasure on the part of the city's citizens. The *Savannah Morning News* pointed out that "fifteen thousand dollars, for Savannah, is as much in proportion to our population as half a million would be to the population of New York," and the paper went on to note that "When Jenny Lind visits New Orleans, as she doubtlessly will, it will be on her way to pass through Savannah and Charleston, either going or returning." This logic, however, did not sway the singer or her manager, who would not budge from their original terms.⁹²

⁹¹ Judith L. Fisher and Stephen Watt, eds., introduction to *When They Weren't Doing Shakespeare: Essays on Nineteenth-Century British and American Theatre* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1989), xiii-xxii; see especially pp. xiv-xv; Mullin, xxiv.

⁹² Green, 60; "Too Dear for the Whistle," *Savannah Morning News*, 17 October, 1840.

Similarly, Ellen Tree Kean firmly explained to Sol Smith in 1845 that, “large inducements are necessary to get Mr. Kean from his mother, child and pretty estate in Hampshire” and consider a trip to America. The only way the two would come, she explained, would be if Smith and Ludlow could promise them half the house receipts each night. The partners finally agreed to Ellen’s terms, which proved quite profitable to the English couple, for they ended up netting \$6,000 for an 18 night engagement in 1846.⁹³ In contrast, Cornelius Logan complained in 1847 to Sol Smith that his daughter, Eliza, then a budding regional actress, “was kept continually traveling up and down the [Ohio] river” between Louisville and Cincinnati as she led the business in both places that year.⁹⁴ Eliza made just a fraction of what Ellen Tree Kean could command, but by putting in her time on this regional circuit, she made such a name for herself that she could later require more remuneration.

Performers appealed to audiences through beauty as well as acting talent, but riding in dusty stage coaches and traveling on board sooty riverboats made staying clean a challenge. Nevertheless, maintaining physical attractiveness was important, particularly for actresses. Actors could appear bearded and unwashed without incurring disapproval, but fans expected to see actresses elegantly dressed and impeccably groomed at all times.⁹⁵ Performers even had to try to look their best when they arrived at their destinations, for admirers sometimes gathered to welcome their favorite entertainers to town. When Jenny Lind came to New Orleans in 1851, hundreds of ecstatic fans met her ship, the *Falcon*, and escorted her to the lodgings reserved for her on Pontalba Row in

⁹³ Ellen [Tree] Kean to Sol Smith, 13 June and 20 September, 1845, Sol Smith Collection, Box 3 of 6; Sol Smith’s Memorandum Book, 11-8-1837-1850, Sol Smith Collection, Box 6 of 6.

⁹⁴ C. A. Logan to Sol Smith, 8 July, 1847, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

⁹⁵ Grimsted, 87; Koon, *How Shakespeare Won the West*, 97-98.

the French Quarter. C. G. Rosenberg, who later wrote a firsthand account of Lind's 1851 American tour, said that the "broad wharves in front of the *Place de Armes* were crowded with persons who were waiting the arrival of Jenny Lind and her *entrepreneur*, Mr. Barnum." Rosenberg went on to note that the crowd pushed forward eagerly to see Lind as soon as she appeared on deck, and "ladies in all the houses on either side of the *Place de Armes* were on their balconies to greet her arrival. They waved handkerchiefs, and the crowd below shouted lustily."⁹⁶ Olive Logan describes similarly frenzied receptions for her sister Eliza and for Julia Dean whenever they arrived at destinations throughout the Mississippi River Valley during the 1850s. Brass bands often greeted them at steamship landings and escorted them to their hotels and sometimes serenaded them after performances as well.⁹⁷ Even if no flamboyant welcome met performers when they arrived for new engagements, they still had to look their best, knowing they could run into fans who would scrutinize their appearances.

Since antebellum southerners viewed unescorted women with suspicion, most actresses were accompanied by their parents, husbands, children, or managers as they traveled from one theater engagement to another. Traveling still reinforced actresses' already questionable class status, however, for itinerancy gave actresses and their families a rootlessness that made them outsiders to every community they visited. Performers sometimes felt this Otherness keenly. As Eliza Riddle complained to Cornelia Ludlow in 1844, "I do dislike traveling. I want a Home."⁹⁸ The addition of families made traveling more difficult for actresses, as their engagements frequently took

⁹⁶ Rosenberg, 140, 141-42; "The Arrival of Jenny Lind," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 8 February, 1851.

⁹⁷ Logan, 473.

⁹⁸ Quoted in Grimsted, 87.

them far from reliable medical help, relatives who helped them look after children, and comfortable accommodations. Yet women who struck out on their own lacked protection and opened themselves to the possibility of physical violation.⁹⁹ A few women such as Adah Isaacs Menken took these risks and flouted conventions, but her sexually titillating performances firmly excluded her from polite company so that she did not have to worry about preserving a pristine reputation in the way that other actresses did.

Despite the exigencies of travel, actresses with ambition and the freedom to tour booked as many engagements in the region's principal theaters as possible, for fame and fortune primarily came to those who took their talents on the road. Sophisticated performers promoted themselves long before they arrived in major cities, and their efforts usually paid off. For instance, before Anna Cora Mowatt commenced her tour of the South in 1845, her husband, James, introduced his wife's name to southerners by encouraging theater managers to stage performances of her hit play *Fashion* before she ever came to town. Having procured engagements for her in Mobile and New Orleans, Mowatt advised Ludlow and Smith that producing *Fashion* ahead of time "would serve to make Mrs. Mowatt's name known locally in the different towns and would get up an excitement about her when she herself came in."¹⁰⁰ Mowatt's foresight paid off; by the time his wife arrived for each booking, playgoers knew her work and flocked to see the playwright / actress. Edwin Dean also took care to advertise his daughter's engagements ahead of time, and he vigilantly monitored press releases to make sure they portrayed Julia in a flattering light. When a manager once listed Julia's name in the same size

⁹⁹ Davis, 53; Fox-Genovese, 210.

¹⁰⁰ James Mowatt to Ludlow and Smith, 15 September, 1845, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

typeface as another actor, Dean remarked to Sol Smith, “I had to almost fight with Etying to get [her] properly announced in the bills.”¹⁰¹

Managers preferred to hire actresses who met with audience approval, so performers and their agents worked hard to assure prospective employers of their success. Edwin Dean wrote from Cincinnati to inform Sol Smith of Julia’s “increasing professional success” in the summer of 1851, and Cornelius Logan likewise wrote to Smith of Eliza’s growing reputation in that same year.¹⁰² By February, 1854, Eliza herself was writing to keep Smith up to date on her own professional accomplishments. She boasted that so many people came to see her at a performance in Washington, D. C., that the management had to turn some playgoers away at the door; to drive home the weight of this news, she added that she had been vying with “The Great Tragedian Edwin Forrest” who was playing simultaneously at another theater in town.¹⁰³

The fame that actresses gained sometimes prompted particularly enthusiastic fans to seek tangible mementos of their favorite performers. Players and managers were happy to accommodate admirers, for material souvenirs further boosted their promotional efforts. Thus, when J. S. French wrote to Julia Dean in 1854 asking for her autograph, she willingly sent her signature to him in late October of the same year.¹⁰⁴ Admirers sought even more substantial reminders of Jenny Lind after she departed from New Orleans in 1851. Her clever landlord knew that he would have no shortage of buyers if he auctioned off the furnishings in her Pontalba Street lodgings, so a few days after her visit, he staged a sale, which was over in a scant three hours. Hordes of shoppers

¹⁰¹ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 13 October, 1854, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

¹⁰² Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 14 July, 1851, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 4 of 17; C. A. Logan to Sol Smith, 5 January, 1851, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 4 of 17.

¹⁰³ Eliza Logan to Sol Smith, 11 February, 1854, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

¹⁰⁴ Julia Dean to J. S. French, Julia Dean Theater Papers, Box 1 of 2, Missouri Historical Society.

descended upon Lind's rooms, and the *Daily Picayune* observed that people "cheerfully bid prices that they would have scorned to pay in any everyday furniture store." Jenny Lind's presence had evidently endowed the chairs and tables she had used with an irresistible mystique, for buyers paid \$1,150 for her parlor furniture, \$389 for her dining room suit, and \$475 for the items in her bedroom.¹⁰⁵ The proprietor undoubtedly rejoiced over Lind's charisma, which resulted in a financial boon for himself. As French inventors developed inexpensive technology for mass-producing photographic images in the 1850s, Adah Isaacs Menken saw the potential that the development had for personal promotion. She had several portraits taken and made available for cheap distribution. Since most of the pictures depicted her in exotic and erotic poses, they complemented the risqué figure she sought to promote both on and off stage.¹⁰⁶

Sometimes fervent patrons even took on the promotion of favorite actresses themselves. They requested special benefit performances to express approbation or to raise money when performers were in need, and they loyally attended the regular seasonal benefits of their favorite players to show their support. In 1811 when Eliza Arnold Poe lay on her deathbed in Richmond, for instance, several of her fellow actors staged a benefit for her, and a local admirer ran an advertisement in the *Richmond Enquirer* asking for charitable assistance from the community.¹⁰⁷ Forty years later Eliza Logan so endeared herself to Savannah playgoers that thirty-four leading business men scheduled a complimentary benefit to express their "high appreciation" for her "brilliant

¹⁰⁵ "Sale of Jenny Lind's Furniture," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 19 March, 1851.

¹⁰⁶ Renée M. Sentilles, *Performing Menken: Adah Isaacs Menken and the Birth of American Celebrity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 231-9.

¹⁰⁷ Geddeth Smith, 8-11.

personations of the Drama.”¹⁰⁸ Encouraging theatergoers to turn out for the occasion, the *Daily Morning News* noted that Logan’s audience for a performance of *Lucretia Borgia* the night before “was the largest which we have ever seen assembled at the Atheneum,” and opined that “she will leave us with the unanimous and cordial endorsement of the Savannah public, in whose favor she is firmly established, and by whom she is held in the highest esteem, not less for her private worth than for her professional talents.”¹⁰⁹ Logan chose the equally popular character of Julia in Sheridan Knowles’s *Hunchback* for her benefit, and her foresight paid off, as she later told manager Sol Smith that the performance yielded \$514.¹¹⁰ The paper called the event “the grand *fete*” of the season and noted that standing room only could be found for latecomers.¹¹¹ Stock performers usually contracted with managers to end their seasons with a benefit, and stars generally took a benefit at the end of a visiting engagement, so the gesture of Savannah’s business elite clearly ensconced Logan in the ranks of their favorite actresses.¹¹² Levels of attendance also served as an index of a performer’s popularity. The masses of people who turned out for Logan’s performance not only showed the local renown that she had personally gained, but the numbers also illustrated more generally how spectators could actively shape a performer’s image.

¹⁰⁸ Letter to Miss Eliza Logan from Your Obedient Servants, 13 January, 1854, *Savannah Daily Morning News*.

¹⁰⁹ “Atheneum—Complimentary Benefit to Miss Logan,” *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 13 January, 1854.

¹¹⁰ Advertisement for the Atheneum Theatre, *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 13 January, 1854; Eliza Logan to Sol Smith, 26 January, 1854, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

¹¹¹ “Miss Logan’s Benefit,” *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 14 January, 1854.

¹¹² Eliza Logan knew well the popularity she had accrued in Savannah, and when a yellow fever epidemic broke out in the city during September 1854, she sent a contribution to help abate the spread of the illness. See Eliza Logan to an Unidentified Gentleman, 28 September, 1854, Edwin Parsons Papers, Manuscript Collection 608, Box 1, Folder 2, Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.

Theatergoers sometimes even petitioned managers to extend performers' engagements or asked to rebook them if other commitments prevented an actress from prolonging her stay. In 1837, for example, a group of young men in Mobile demanded that Ludlow and Smith retain stock actress Eliza Petrie for the remainder of the season rather than sending her to perform in St. Louis as planned. Though the young men threatened to boycott the Mobile theater, the managers insisted that Petrie leave, for they were depending upon her popularity in St. Louis to boost that theater's sagging ticket sales. Astutely side-stepping responsibility for their decision, the managers prepared a written statement that they asked Petrie to read at her last performance in order to assuage her admirers—and their theater patrons. The short speech begged Eliza's outraged fans to understand that she could not possibly stay in Mobile, for she had signed a contract and given her word that she would also perform in St. Louis. By placing Petrie's honor on the line, Ludlow and Smith cleverly and successfully appealed to the ethical code of their male patrons who would not want to be the cause of besmirching a woman's reputation. While Petrie agreed to read the statement and assured Ludlow and Smith that they "could not have acted differently," she really had little choice in the matter, for the managers controlled the principal theaters in the Mississippi River Valley, and Petrie had not yet attained the acceptance with eastern audiences that she would win in the early 1840s.¹¹³

When Ludlow and Smith received the young men's petition in 1837, the managers had already gained some experience in handling imperious demands from their patrons. Two years earlier, a group identifying itself only as "the theatrical-going

¹¹³ Petition Signed by the Young Men of Mobile, 1837, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6; Sol Smith, 132-33; Eliza Petrie to Ludlow and Smith, n.d., (1837), Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6; Edward Woolf to Sol Smith, 25 April, 1841, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

community” of Mobile had threatened to disrupt a performance if the theater refused to book Mary Vos during the season. Vos had won the love of Mobile’s play-going public as a child, and as an adult, she had gone to work for Ludlow and Smith’s stock company. During the 1834 season, she served as their leading lady, but she decided to try her luck in northeastern theaters the following year. Her experiment proved to be a disappointment, for she was soon back in Mobile, though not until after the season had commenced and the managers had lined up their permanent company. The partners worked her in as a visitor in their Montgomery and St. Louis theaters, but they did not book her in Mobile for fear she would overshadow their new leading lady, Eliza Riddle.¹¹⁴

Sometimes competing actresses gained such devoted followers that rival factions formed to promote their favorites. Managers had to weigh the response of these theatergoers carefully before deciding how to proceed. Ludlow and Smith handled their disgruntled patrons by asking Eliza Riddle to share her leading position with Mary Vos. Though Noah Ludlow complimented Riddle on her graciousness in his autobiography, he griped about paying the extra salary “in order to gratify a few pertinacious friends of Miss Vos.”¹¹⁵ Ludlow’s misgivings turned out to be ungrounded, however, as Sol Smith noted in his autobiography that the rivalry between the “Vos-ites” and the “Riddle-ites” ended up considerably increasing their nightly receipts.¹¹⁶

Regional stars Julia Dean Hayne and Eliza Logan also possessed some “pertinacious friends” who enjoyed championing the talents of their favorite actresses,

¹¹⁴ Bailey, 68, 74; Craig, 165; Duggar, 6, 31; Theatrical Going Community of Mobile to Ludlow and Smith, 1835, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6; Ludlow, 423, 449; Sol Smith, 110, 119, 123.

¹¹⁵ Ludlow, 449.

¹¹⁶ Sol Smith, 119.

but in 1853, these overly zealous fans showed their support by trying to malign the reputation of the other performer. Olive Logan describes the rivalry between the two factions as “a sort of theatrical war of the red and white roses.”¹¹⁷ Each actress had her separate and ardent set of admirers who even formed fan clubs, which attended their performances together and followed their press reports in the local newspapers. Both Hayne and Logan maintained a cordial friendship with one another and disliked the partisan jockeying of their fans. Their fathers also decried the factions that arose in support of each actress. Indeed, Cornelius Logan remarked to Sol Smith that these “love-lorn swains” would only bring “mortification to themselves and the party they endeavor to serve.”¹¹⁸

The rivalries between Vos and Riddle, Hayne and Logan recall a famous feud between American actor Edwin Forrest and English actor William Charles Macready, but the antagonism that imbued the competition between the actors never characterized the relationships between the actresses. Moreover, in each case, the women shared the same social footing both inside and outside the theater, whereas Forrest and Macready came from disparate class backgrounds. When fans expressed loyalty to Forrest or Macready, they were making deeply infused class statements. Forrest’s admirers championed his ideals of hard work, equality, self-improvement, and social mobility, while Macready’s fans saw him as a representative of refinement and elegance.¹¹⁹ In contrast, the devotees of Vos and Riddle, Hayne, and Logan were besotted young men primarily interested in promoting their favorite female celebrities.

¹¹⁷ Logan, 473.

¹¹⁸ C. A. Logan to Sol Smith, 6 February, 1853, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

¹¹⁹ Levine, 63-9.

The twenty-year old fight between Forrest and Macready erupted into a fatal clash between their supporters at the Astor Place Opera House on March 10, 1849. On May 7, both men had appeared in separate New York theaters in different productions of *Macbeth*, and working-class protesters who saw Macready as a symbol of British aristocracy at odds with American democracy demonstrated in support of Forrest. Prominent members of New York's intelligentsia, including Washington Irving and Herman Melville, signed a petition encouraging Macready to stay in town and finish his engagement, which he was scheduled to make three days later. But agitators also encouraged demonstrators to turn out and protest his performance. A huge crowd gathered and tore up paving stones, which they hurled at the windows of the building. Police could not disperse them peacefully and shot thirty-two people in the crowd before the night was over.¹²⁰ While southerners grew enamored with the famous and rich actresses within their midst, especially when these women personified the region's ideals of feminine beauty and refinement, they never violently demonstrated on behalf of their favorites. Nor did southern actresses become the polarizing forces around which people gathered to define their class alliances.

Southern playgoers had to transfer their loyalties to a new constellation of stars once the Civil War began. Regional actresses with widespread acclaim who had promoted themselves zealously and incited loyalty among admirers stopped touring as did the famous, highly paid international stars. The lesser-known performers and the managers who stayed in the South knew that they needed to advertise to attract theatergoers. A lack of entertainers and performances did not mean that spectators would attend the theater without some incentive. To ensure themselves of a healthy profit,

¹²⁰ Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage*, 70-87.

managers distributed handbills and purchased newspaper advertisements that lauded their performers' talents and made class-inflected claims about their status to encourage spectators to come to the theater. For instance, David Bidwell billed Eloise Bridges as "the famous and accomplished comedienne" in the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* before she appeared at the St .Charles Theater in October 1861, and William Crisp introduced her to the Atlanta public as "the celebrated Southern actress and Shakespearean Reader" prior to her appearance in July 1862.¹²¹ The same month, Alfred Waldron announced the appearance of his family, the Queen Sisters, in the *Augusta Daily Constitutionalist* and assured the paper's readers that "in all places, they have received high encomiums."¹²² Before Ida Vernon appeared in Wilmington, North Carolina, in 1864, the *Daily Journal* likewise praised her theatrical abilities and pronounced that she stood "at the head of the [dramatic] profession in the South."¹²³

Favorable press reviews following productions further benefited performers and kept their names in front of the public. Knowing the power of these reports, theater managers followed an antebellum custom and made arrangements with local newspapers to cover performances. Reporters received free tickets in exchange for ample newspaper coverage, and they usually delivered glowing reviews that pleased managers and ensured more complimentary tickets. Writers couched their effusive praises in flowery prose meant to attract spectators; for example, when the *Southern Confederacy* recounted Eloise Bridges's appearance in *Fazio* at the Atlanta Atheneum in April 1863, the reviewer gushed that "her carriage upon the stage was *comme il faut*; her gesticulations always natural and graceful . . . and her soft, sweet voice when bathing accents of love

¹²¹ Fife, 101, 164.

¹²² "The Queen Sisters," *Augusta Daily Constitutionalist*, 24 July, 1862.

¹²³ *Wilmington Daily Journal*, 30 May, 1864, quoted in Fife, 399.

was as melting as ever.”¹²⁴ Similar language marked a review of Ella Wren when she appeared in Richmond during the spring of 1862. The *Southern Illustrated News* praised her as “a glittering star in the dramatic firmament [who] retains all of her natural vim and power, polished with more than the usual grace and artistic skill.”¹²⁵

Though performers who stayed in the South during the war had to take on a range of roles due to a shortage of acting talent, they continued to cultivate distinct performed identities to help ensure loyal followings. Thus, the Crisp family drew on their antebellum renown as accomplished Shakespearean performers and maintained a repertory that featured many of the early modern playwright’s dramas. During each season in Mobile between 1862 and 1864, they staged *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard the Third*, *Macbeth*, and David Garrick’s adaptation of *Taming of the Shrew*, *Catharine and Petruchio*. In the interim, they included *Othello*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *Hamlet* along with several non-Shakespearean favorites. Since Eloise Bridges frequently performed with the Crisps, she too became associated with Shakespearean roles. She most often played Lady Macbeth, Portia, and Juliet, but audiences knew her best for her recitation of the pro-southern poem, “We Shall Not Be Conquered.”¹²⁶ Playgoers also associated the Waldrons with southern nationalism, since they favored John Hill Hewitt’s dramas championing the Confederate cause. Ella Wren made her name as a versatile actress who could play many lead roles in standard repertory selections such as *Evadne*, *The Wife*, and *The Hunchback*, but she most enjoyed playing Francesca in *The Italian Bride*, the play written by Samuel Yates Levy for Eliza Logan in 1856. In this melodramatic role, Wren enacted a character who embodied the antebellum womanly

¹²⁴ *Atlanta Southern Confederacy*, 10 April, 1863, quoted in Fife, p. 223.

¹²⁵ *Southern Illustrated News*, 23 May, 1863, quoted in Fife, p. 276.

¹²⁶ Fife, 102, 114, 192-202, 306, 310, 321, 382-83, 346, 364-65, 413-14.

ideal, for Francesca remains fervently loyal to both father and husband despite plots to besmirch their honor.¹²⁷ Ida Vernon also played leads in familiar stock dramas. *The Stranger* and *The Lady of Lyons* most often reappeared in her repertory, but she also embraced *East Lynne*, a new play that appeared in 1861. Written by Ellen Price, who wrote under the pseudonym of Mrs. Henry Wood, *East Lynne* traces the downfall of an adulterous wife and focuses on the misery she must subsequently endure. A didactic, moralistic melodrama, *East Lynne* also appealed to southerners who clung tenaciously to the conservative values of the Old South.¹²⁸

Acting Up: Women and Theater Management

“No, no. No, no. Girls don’t understand business!”

Sir John Vesey, *Money* (1840), 4.2.28, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton

Though men such as Noah Ludlow and Sol Smith largely dominated theatrical management in the antebellum and Civil War South and may have agreed with Sir John’s sentiments in *Money*, some women did move up through the ranks and assume management positions. Theater historian Kathleen Curry notes that women did not differ greatly from men in their management practices. They staged similar repertory favorites, they hired many of the same popular local and national stars who would draw large audiences, and they maintained comparable policies that governed the behavior of actors and actresses who worked for them. Women managers also bore the responsibility for overseeing rehearsals, supervising production details, paying their employees, and advertising performances. Because theater managers of both sexes depended upon public

¹²⁷ Kendall, 491-93; Samuel Yates Levy, *The Italian Bride* (Savannah: John M. Cooper and Company, 1856). The Hargrett Rare Book and Manuscript Library at The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia holds a copy of this play. All references come from this edition.

¹²⁸ Fife, 215, 400, 435, 442-3, 450; Mrs. Henry Wood, *East Lynne*, 1861, edited by Sally Mitchell (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984).

approval and goodwill for survival, however, women who went into the profession could not risk assuming an overbearing or aggressive demeanor. Instead they had to demonstrate the polite, self-effacing behavior then expected of women, while simultaneously executing their management duties with precision and deliberation.¹²⁹

Women who entered management found that negotiating this double bind was quite difficult, and some soon returned to acting or found less stressful jobs in other professions. Ann Robinson and Susannah Wall followed this path after giving two years to establishing a theater in Augusta, Georgia. The two women had gotten their start as actresses on the Baltimore stage in the 1780s, but on a visit to Charleston, they observed the potential for starting a theater in nearby Augusta, which then served as Georgia's state capital. Robinson and Wall scheduled their opening to coincide with the convening of the legislature in June 1790. They staged a variety show of sketches and songs for their first performance, which was heavily attended by the many lawmakers in town. Over the next few months, they continued to offer singing, and they performed popular eighteenth-century dramas such as George Farquhar's *The Beaux's Stratagem* (1707), John Home's *The Tragedy of Douglas* (1756-57), Henry Fielding's *The Virgin Unmask'd* (1709) and George Lillo's *George Barnwell* (1731).¹³⁰ Though "Zoilus," the drama critic for the *Augusta Chronicle and Gazette*, disliked the enervated portrayal of the actor who played the lead in *George Barnwell*, he highly praised the talents of the two actresses when they performed the play in July. "Miss Wall," Zoilus wrote, "discovered a sensibility of soul [as Maria] that did her honor," and "Mrs. Robinson's Millwood," he

¹²⁹ Curry, 1-5, 129-133.

¹³⁰ Boyce, 40-46; Mary Julia Curtis, "Women Open Augusta's First Theatre," in *Women in American Theatre: Careers, Images, and Movements*, eds., Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1981), 193-197; "The Theatre," *Augusta Chronicle and Gazette of the State* 31 July, and 2 October, 1790.

continued, “was a perfect model of that diabolical character.”¹³¹ A depraved seductress who lures the upright apprentice, George Barnwell, into loose living that destroys him, Millwood represents the binaric opposite to Maria, Barnwell’s chaste and faithful girlfriend who never leaves his side despite his duplicity and degeneration.¹³²

The simplistic characterization and the moralistic plot of *George Barnwell* appealed to audiences throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and employers often commissioned special performances for the instruction of their workers.¹³³ Ann Robinson and Susannah Wall might have chosen the drama hoping that its conservative content would appeal to spectators. If Zoilus’s reaction reflects that of the larger play-going community, they were not disappointed, for he predicted after their performance that the new theater would bring “a thorough annihilation of native rusticity, refinement of manners, cultivation of taste, and above all, a *true* representation of all ages and professions, of all stages and degrees, from the exalted throne of the monarch, down to the miserable hutt [sic] of the beggar.”¹³⁴ Zoilus’s conflicted views reveal that he, like the upper-class employers who sometimes paid to stage *George Barnwell*, embraced the theater as a great leveler that could instill polite conduct and good manners in all viewers, while simultaneously championing natural distinctions between classes. Thus, Ann Robinson and Susannah Wall were to be congratulated for more than just their talented portrayals of Maria and Millwood, they also deserved the thanks of Augusta’s upper-

¹³¹ “The Theatre,” 31 July, 1790.

¹³² George Lillo, *George Barnwell*, 1731, in *Eighteenth-Century Plays*, ed. John Hampden (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1954), 210-265.

¹³³ Grimsted, 132.

¹³⁴ “To the Printer of the *Augusta Chronicle*,” *Augusta Chronicle and Gazette of the State* 31 July, 1790.

class citizens for helping to create a more pleasant and tasteful lower-class within their midst.

The two actresses' productions played to further acclaim throughout the summer, but the next year, Susannah Wall left the theater when she met and married a local Army officer in May, thereby leaving Robinson stranded without a partner. Susannah's father, Thomas Wall, who was in town for her wedding, joined Ann in a production of Garrick's *Catharine and Petruchio* the same month, but after he left, the strain of operating the theater without any help must have seemed overbearing to Robinson, for she rechanneled her energy and opened a school for young ladies that summer. While she promised instruction in "sewing, mathing, and reading," Robinson emphasized her ability to teach her students the "proper pronunciation of the English language."¹³⁵ Thus, she would use the elocution skills gained from her acting experience in her new pedagogical endeavors. Though the classroom largely usurped the theater in Robinson's life, she did not completely abandon acting. Indeed, she returned each season between 1797 and 1800 to make a special winter appearance with the Placide company at the Charleston Theater. Robinson's ability to pass back and forth between the two occupations and to maintain a respected position in Augusta suggests that some actresses could establish themselves as esteemed members of their communities over time, although her status as a teacher may have mitigated her position as a stage performer and helped to create the approval she came to enjoy. In either case, Robinson preferred the stability that teaching provided, for she never returned full time to acting or managing again.¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Ann Robinson's Advertisement for "A School for Young Ladies," *Augusta Chronicle and Gazette of the State* 3 July, 1792.

¹³⁶ Advertisement for "A Mental Evening's Amusement," *Augusta Chronicle and Gazette of the State*, 21 May, 1792; Curtis, 193-197.

Several other women who became managers during the early antebellum period also left their positions in search of jobs that paid steadier wages. After Alexander Placide died in 1811, his wife Charlotte endeavored to keep the Charleston Theater open, but declining box-office receipts during the War of 1812 caused her to close down in 1813. Rather than repeating her attempt at management, she and her children signed on to act under Joseph Holman's direction when he reopened the Charleston Theater in 1815.¹³⁷ A Mrs. Hamblin also sought to buttress her sagging finances by opening a theater during the fall of 1834 in Petersburg, Virginia. Though she secured a solid stock company, which played successfully from September through November, Hamblin did not reopen the following year.¹³⁸ Perhaps she fully recouped her losses in just one good season, but more likely, Hamblin abandoned managing for more lucrative work. Frances Denny Drake definitely gave up her brief career as a theater manager to earn more as a traveling star actress. She had co-managed the Louisville and Cincinnati Theatres with her husband from 1824 until his death in 1830, when she began touring full time. In 1838, she returned to management when her father-in-law, Samuel Drake, needed someone with experience to run the Louisville Theatre. At the end of the season, however, she turned down his offer to renew her contract rather than spend another year worrying about whether she and the theater would make a profit.¹³⁹

Ann Waring Sefton Wallack and Julia Dean Hayne likewise made brief sojourns into the managerial world. Sefton was the granddaughter of Alexander Placide and the niece of popular New Orleans actress Jane Placide, but she had grown up in New York

¹³⁷ Bloodworth, 82-3; Durham, 152.

¹³⁸ Edward A. Wyatt, "Three Petersburg Theatres," *William and Mary College Quarterly Historical Magazine* (1941): 21.2, 83-110; especially pp. 104-105.

¹³⁹ Curry, 18-19; Durham, 256; Swain, 178.

with her mother, Caroline Placide Waring Blake, and her step-father, William Rufus Blake. Blake, a successful actor, trained Ann for a career in the theater, and she married another thespian, James W. Wallack, Jr., soon after the death of her first husband, William Sefton, in 1839. The Wallacks traveled periodically to New Orleans where they acted in starring roles. The couple happened to be in the city when the American Theater lost its manager in 1842, and Ann Wallack agreed to take on the position. Wallack left the stock company intact and honored the engagements already extended to stars, and the theater logged a profit when it closed for the year in the spring of 1843. Wallack's good fortune and judgment did not prevail during the 1843-44 season, however. She engaged her husband as leading man and booked several lesser known stars. The theater-going public soon tired of James's performances, and the stars did not draw as expected. Disillusioned by their failure and desirous of garnering a favorable reception as well as reinstating their healthy profits, the Wallacks left New Orleans in the middle of the spring season and returned to New York City.¹⁴⁰ When Julia Dean Hayne and actress Annette Ince co-managed the Salt Lake City Theater in 1864, the two successfully and profitably appealed to the taste of spectators. Like Frances Denny Drake, though, Hayne and Ince simply realized that they could make far more as touring stars, and abandoned their managerial experiment after just one year.¹⁴¹

Several women who entered theatrical management did find the work appealing and made lasting careers of their new positions. After her husband William died in 1841, Penelope Britt Chapman took over his job as manager of Chapman's Floating Palace, the first showboat to travel up and down the Mississippi and Ohio Rivers staging on-board

¹⁴⁰ Curry, 22-23; Kendall, 228-234.

¹⁴¹ Koon, *How Shakespeare Won the West*, 122-23.

performances. The Chapmans, English actors who had performed for ten years at Philadelphia's Walnut Street Theatre after they came to America in 1821, eventually wanted to strike out on their own and recognized the heavily traveled river corridor as a potentially remunerative place to ply their trade. In 1831, they launched their first boat, a flat-bottomed barge, at Pittsburgh and floated down the Ohio River to Cincinnati and Louisville, then followed the Mississippi River down to Memphis, Natchez, and New Orleans. Finding their venture a success, the Chapmans followed the same routine for the next two years, when they bought a larger steamboat that gave them more space for acting and allowed them to turn around and repeat their tours upstream. This new-found mobility, combined with the Chapmans' talent, ensured them of enthusiastic audiences in the major cities that lined the two rivers. Co-managing the showboat with William for ten years prepared Penelope to take over on her own when he died. She successfully oversaw the operation for another six years before she retired and sold the business to Sol Smith. Managing the riverboat business clearly took special talents that the successful Smith lacked, for only two days after he stocked up his newly bought boat and set out from Cincinnati, he collided with a steamboat and split his showboat in two. He and his company had to swim ashore, and he had to write off the venture as a total loss.¹⁴²

Eliza Logan and Mary Ludlow also co-managed theaters with their husbands. When Logan married George Wood in 1854, she acted part time and assisted at his St. Louis and New York theaters. According to Noah Ludlow, Wood was "practically unacquainted with management," so his marriage to Logan was a wise move, as she "furnished him with a practical knowledge of theatrical matters in which he otherwise

¹⁴² *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Caroline Chapman," (by James H. Dormon), via Galileo online database (accessed 2 March, 2004); Durham, 526-27; Graham, 16-22.

would have been deficient.”¹⁴³ Logan’s years of experience as a star actress on southern stages and her connections in the acting world ensured the Woods success until they sold their operation nearly ten years later. Like Eliza Logan, Mary Ludlow helped her husband with his managerial work. Throughout her acting career and even after she retired from the stage, Noah Ludlow counted on his wife to keep their business accounts and even arrange legal counsel when necessary. At times, she kept payroll for the Mobile theater, and she occasionally sold seats to patrons. Indeed, without Mary, Noah Ludlow and Sol Smith could not have maintained their Mobile theater, for the two partners were tied up with their St. Louis and New Orleans operations respectively and had little time to travel to Mobile during the season.¹⁴⁴

Women took on management positions during the Civil War years as well. Eliza Crisp, like Penelope Chapman, Mary Ludlow, and Eliza Logan, came to theatrical management through her husband. While Eliza oversaw their company on her own during William’s tenure in the Confederate Army, she had assisted him with his managerial duties prior to the war. This experience stood her in good stead during his absence. When enemy troops camped near Atlanta, and the city council wanted to ban theatrical activity as a precautionary measure, she successfully petitioned to leave the theaters open. She argued that residents should maintain their regular routines and refuse to be intimidated by the proximity of Union forces. Mrs. Crisp also brought her diplomatic finesse to bear on local critics who argued that attending the theater was frivolous and immoral in the face of the human suffering that the war was causing. She

¹⁴³ Ludlow, 730.

¹⁴⁴ Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 21 February, 1842, 22 April 1842, and 5 October, 1845, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 3 of 17; Mary Ludlow to Sol Smith, 23 April, 1841, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 2 of 17.

overcame such objections by staging a series of benefits for Confederate soldiers and their families, and she continued to argue for the necessity of pursuing normal, peacetime activities in the face of the abnormal conditions imposed by the war.¹⁴⁵

Virginia Kemble also convened a company of players in the midst of adversarial circumstances. She had acted with Edmund Dalton's traveling troupe, which had played in Savannah, Augusta, and Macon before the war. When the group disbanded on September 3, 1864, Kemble assembled a new company and opened just five days later at Ralston's Hall in Macon. Her productions of light comedies and farces, singing and dancing, were popular enough to attract a steady stream of spectators, for she stayed open through April 18, 1865, just two days before Union forces captured the city.¹⁴⁶

Other women played a more indirect role in management during the war. An August, 1863 announcement in the *Savannah Daily Morning News* bid interested players apply to Eloise Bridges, "Manageress of the Savannah Theatre" for positions, but subsequent notices carried the names of C. H. Erwin and Edmund R. Dalton, as lessee and manager.¹⁴⁷ While Bridges does not seem to have taken full responsibility for the daily business procedures of the theater, the August advertisement nonetheless indicates that she might have helped make hiring decisions. Another businesswoman, Rose Thompson, who ran a millinery store in Memphis before the war participated in a limited way with the New Memphis Theatre, which her husband managed until federal troops seized the structure in June, 1862. She supervised a group of women in a series of tableaux presentations, which benefited wounded soldiers in November of 1861.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ Yeomans, 80.

¹⁴⁶ Curry, 123.

¹⁴⁷ Fife, 291.

¹⁴⁸ Curry, 123.

The women who undertook theatrical management before and during the Civil War paved the way for others to follow suit in the post-bellum years. Rose Thompson built on her experience and assumed managerial responsibilities along with the New Memphis Theatre's treasurer, Chris P. Steinkuhl, when her husband William fell ill in January, 1867. She oversaw a production of the burlesque *The Black Crook*, rehearsing the fifty young women hired to dance in the show's ballet corps. When her husband died in August, 1868, she officially assumed his position as manager. She traveled to New York annually to hire actors and actresses, and she supplemented her stock company with well-known stars such as Charlotte Thompson, Lotta Crabtree, Maggie Mitchell, Frank Thompson, and Joseph Proctor. Though the public attended her offerings in satisfactory numbers, she found paying the star's high salaries increasingly difficult. In addition, when New Orleans managers David Bidwell and Gilbert Spaulding began producing competing plays at Greenlaw's Opera House, Thompson began to feel a financial pinch. Rather than contend with rivalry and monetary difficulties, she closed her company in 1869 and returned to millinery work.¹⁴⁹

Twenty years after Rose Thompson closed her theater, David Bidwell died, and his wife assumed the management duties for the two New Orleans theaters he then directed. For four years, she operated the St. Charles Theatre and the Academy of Music. She booked occasional appearances by such stars as Mary Ten Broeck, Maude Atkinson, John Henshaw, James O'Neill, and Joseph Jefferson, but mostly, she tried to limit the entertainment to more affordable appearances. Attracting audiences was always a struggle, however, and in 1893, she leased the two theaters to Jefferson, Klaw, and

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 124.

Erlanger's national syndicate. The firm took over bookings and allowed Mrs. Bidwell to retire with the promise of an annual income.¹⁵⁰

Henrietta Baker Chanfrau also managed a New Orleans institution when she took over the Varieties Theatre for the 1875-76 season. Unlike Thompson or Bidwell, however, Chanfrau brought extensive acting experience to her year of management. She had begun performing as a teenager in Philadelphia and Cincinnati and debuted in New York at Wallack's Theatre with her husband, actor Frank Chanfrau in August, 1858. She went on to become a well-known national actress, appearing frequently in New York, Boston, and New Orleans. She played Portia in the famous production of *Julius Caesar* featuring the three Booth brothers, Junius Brutus, Edwin, and John Wilkes, on November 25, 1864, at the Winter Garden Theatre in New York, and the next evening, she appeared as Ophelia to Edwin Booth's Hamlet in a show that ran for more than one hundred nights. Other favorite roles included Isabel in *East Lynne* and Josephine in Clifton Tayleure's *Parted*.

The Varieties Association sought a performer of Chanfrau's stature and experience to raise its theater's reputation beyond that of a combination entertainment house featuring singing and dancing acts, acrobatics, circus performances, and the occasional "serious" drama. To help ensure her success, Chanfrau appointed her agent and good friend, Clifton Tayleure, to be the theater's business manager. She opened the season with his play *Parted*, and she also featured his drama *A Woman's Wrongs* during the season along with old favorites such as Knowles's *Virginius* and *The Hunchback*, Sheil's *Evadne*, and Terry's *Guy Mannering*. Shakespearean standards such as *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, *Richard III*, and *King Lear* found a place in the repertory as well.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 124.

Despite Chanfrau's best efforts to introduce legitimate drama, she could not raise the reputation of the Varieties beyond that of a theater offering combination acts, and she left her management position at the end of a year, returning to full-time acting instead.¹⁵¹

Many women held management positions in the southern theater before, during, and after the Civil War. Some, such as Penelope Chapman, Mary Ludlow, Eliza Crisp, and Mrs. David Bidwell were more successful in their ventures than others, but their combined efforts reveal a desire on the part of southern women who were associated with the theater to enter the business on a competitive level. By ascending to these top-level jobs, women managers confounded the docile stereotypes associated with southern ladies and revealed that they too had the ability to function in what had been a male-dominated profession.

Acting Write: Women and Playwriting

"Out of ten thousand times, ten thousand plays are written and hawked among managers by impecunious authors, ten succeed. The others fail."

Olive Logan, *Before the Footlights and Behind the Scenes* (1870)

Actresses not only ventured into management, they also tried their hands at playwriting. Despite Olive Logan's pessimistic estimation of success for hopeful playwrights, theater historian Donald Mullin observes that nineteenth-century performers were well positioned for the undertaking since they knew the practical side of acting.¹⁵² Moreover, performers who penned plays did so with the expectation of acting the lead part, thereby ensuring themselves of a role that featured their particular dramatic skills. Playwriting also held appeal for antebellum actresses, since southerners placed literate

¹⁵¹ Curry, 124-25; Kendall, 450-58; *American National Biography Online*, s.v. "Henrietta Baker Chanfrau," (by Melissa Vickery-Bareford), via Galileo online database (accessed 16 December, 2004).

¹⁵² See Logan p. 412; Mullin, xxvi.

women in a higher class. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese says that by cultivating their reading and writing skills, women showed they were ladies of high social standing. Hence, elite women prided themselves on their knowledge of fiction, religious literature, and poetry. They kept journals and learned to write letters from a young age as well. For actresses, who inhabited an ambiguous class position, playwriting could endow them with a more refined identity and position them more securely among the privileged few.¹⁵³

Some attempts at playwriting succeeded better than others. When Frances Denny Drake wrote *Leona of Athens* in 1834, she no doubt hoped that the drama would appear more than once, but after its debut in Cincinnati on September 10 the same year, the play was never performed again. The *Daily Cincinnati Gazette* advertised the melodrama as a romantic tragedy that would enthrall spectators, and to further entice playgoers, the paper gave a taste of the fare they could expect. The play takes place in ancient Greece and focuses on the trials of the title character. Somehow, Leona is unfairly defamed and faces a trial in the Tribunal that fails to exact justice. At the play's end, she embraces death rather than live with a ruined reputation. "Here—here upon this cold damp ground," Leona exclaims, "I find at once my empire and my grave!"¹⁵⁴ A number of problems might have plagued the play: audience members may have found the drama too dismal, the plot may have been too thin, or the performers might not have played their parts with vigor. Whatever caused its poor reception, the play was never re-staged, and Drake quickly returned to playing the repertory favorites that had heretofore won her fine reputation.

¹⁵³ Fox-Genovese, 242.

¹⁵⁴ "Leona of Athens," *Daily Cincinnati Gazette*, 10 September, 1834.

Julia Dean Hayne's play, *Mary of Mantua*, which she staged in New Orleans during the winter of 1855, received high praise from the local press after its initial performances, but the play only appeared once more the following year. In a letter to Sol Smith, Edwin Dean, Julia's father, praised the "measured blank verse" that she employed, but he worried that the plot was simply "too neat." The *Daily Picayune* also lauded the drama's "effective" and "eloquent language," but in contrast to Dean, the paper's critic advised cutting down one or two lengthy scenes. Julia paid attention to the press, for when the play next appeared, the *Picayune* noted with gratification that the plot held together more tightly, allowing the audience to follow the fortunes of the protagonist more closely.¹⁵⁵ The New Orleans papers do not provide any plot description, and no copy of the play exists. Nevertheless, the title suggests that the drama traces the life of a young Italian noblewoman. Since Julia Dean Hayne, like Frances Denny Drake, reinstated the standard repertory selections that had won her acclaim, the play must not have met with any wider critical approval.

Charlotte Barnes Conner had more luck with her two compositions, *Octavia Brigaldi* and *Lafitte*, which she wrote and staged in 1837. The first play follows the events of a Kentucky revenge killing that occurred in 1825. An army officer, Colonel Beauchamp, shot a fellow officer, Colonel Sharpe, for allegedly seducing Beauchamp's wife. Charlotte transferred this story to Milan at the end of the fifteenth century, a setting that added an element of gothic romanticism to the melodramatic plot, and the title refers to the new name for the defamed wife. Audiences responded well to the drama, which debuted in New York and then made its way south to Charleston and New Orleans.

¹⁵⁵ Edwin Dean to Sol Smith, 13 October, 1854, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; "Mary of Mantua," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 14 January, 1855; "St. Charles Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 28 February, 1855.

While spectators in the Crescent City enjoyed *Octavia Brigaldi*, they were particularly enthusiastic over *Lafitte*, which traced the roguish career of pirate Jean Lafitte. Lafitte and his crew plundered ships in the Caribbean, then sold their cargoes on the black market in New Orleans. Lafitte supplied people in the Mississippi River valley with many desirable commodities, including African-American slaves, for lower prices than they would normally pay for products sold through legitimate channels. As a result, he won the praise of both rich and poor alike. Not surprisingly, *Lafitte* garnered high praise from New Orleans drama critics, and theater-goers never failed to fill houses when the Barneses produced the play, which became a staple in their repertory. Mobile spectators also enjoyed the drama when the Barneses brought *Lafitte* to their stage. The main character, dubbed the “pirate of the Gulf” by the play’s subtitle ensnared the imaginations of Mobilians who could also claim a regional affinity with the swashbuckling figure.¹⁵⁶

Of all the actresses who appeared on the Old South’s stages, Anna Cora Mowatt alone penned a play that gained widespread and lasting national acclaim, yet she wrote *Fashion* solely as a money-making venture after her husband lost his fortune in 1845. Mowatt may have viewed the play as a quick fix for her family’s financial woes, but *Fashion* acquired a longevity that she never imagined. The play debuted at the Park Theatre in New York to critical praise and proceeded to run for twenty nights to packed houses. Audiences roared at Mrs. Tiffany’s verbal blunders, they ate up Mr. Trueman’s nationalistic rhetoric, and they approved heartily of the classic comic ending that united

¹⁵⁶ “Amusements,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 14, 24 April, 1840; John Barnes to Ludlow and Smith, 30 January, 1837, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6; Kendall, 148; “Lafitte at the St. Charles,” *New Orleans Picayune*, 15 April, 1837; Meserve, *Heralds*, 184; Mobile Theatre Advertisements, *Mobile Commercial Register*, 20, 21, 22, 25 March, 1837; “Octavia Brigaldi,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 18 May, 1838; *New Orleans Picayune*, 28 February, 1837; “St. Charles,” *New Orleans Picayune*, 18 April, 1837; “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1 December, 1838; “Theatre—A Card,” *Mobile Commercial Register*, 21 March, 1837.

three happy couples in marriage. Critics also liked the drama, but they especially appreciated its shrewd assessment of America's social-climbing nouveau riche.¹⁵⁷ Soon after its appearance in New York, the Mowatts began to lease the rights to *Fashion* to local stock companies for limited runs. For instance, when Ludlow and Smith expressed an interest in staging the play, the Mowatts asked for ten percent of the ticket sales for the first two nights, half of the take on the third night (to be billed as "the authoress's benefit), and five percent of all subsequent receipts.¹⁵⁸ Since local productions of the play also served as advertising prior to Mrs. Mowatt's dramatic appearances with each stock company, the Mowatts benefited twice from these performances.

Antebellum actresses who wrote for the stage generally boasted considerable theatrical experience. Anna Cora Mowatt stands out as an exception, for she did not make her acting debut until after she wrote *Fashion*, but Charlotte Barnes Conner, Julia Dean Hayne, and Frances Denny Drake all brought years of theatrical experience to their writing endeavors. Since many of the actresses who remained in the South during the Civil War were new to the profession, however, most spent those years honing their acting skills rather than turning their attentions to writing. Eloise Bridges, a New York actress who married a southern merchant in 1857, stood apart as an exception. She wrote her southern nationalist play entitled *Our Cause; or The Female Rebel* while performing with the Crisp Company during the fall of 1862 in Mobile. The Crisps staged Bridges's drama along with two patriotic panoramas, one depicting the arrival of Stonewall Jackson's division and one the destruction of a northern gunboat. The entertainments appealed to Mobilians, for the company restaged them three nights in a row. Bridges also

¹⁵⁷ Meserve, *Outline*, 84-86.

¹⁵⁸ James Mowatt to Ludlow and Smith, 15 September, 1845, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

performed her play for a benefit performance in Wilmington, North Carolina in December, 1864, and the local paper noted that the drama was “replete with thrilling incidents and patriotic fervor.”¹⁵⁹

Whether acting, managing, or writing plays, then, women who worked in the South’s antebellum and Civil War theaters were suspended among social worlds. As highly educated women who worked for wages and who cultivated well-known public images, they defied established categories of class status. Their work outside the home and their visibility barred them from membership in elite ranks, while their schooling and financial means set them apart from the middle and lower classes. Instead, actresses carved out liminal positions for themselves that revealed the fragility of class boundaries and that blurred the divide between private and public spheres. As women of all statuses joined actresses and began occupying nontraditional roles during the Civil War, class stratifications became less indistinct, and lines between domestic and civic life bled further into one another. In the post-war years, when some women retreated to the private sphere in order to build up the shattered manhood of their battle-weary partners, others became active participants in propagating the myth of the Lost Cause. While the rhetoric of Lost Cause functions celebrated domesticity and separate gender spheres, though, these nostalgic celebrations actually propelled upper and middle-class women into public places once again as they organized Confederate Memorial Day ceremonies, raised money for war memorials, and met to decorate graves of the Confederate dead.¹⁶⁰

As cities began to grow in the New South years, people of all classes also found themselves attending the theater and other popular amusements in large numbers.

¹⁵⁹ Fife, 194-95, 436.

¹⁶⁰ Edwards, 114; Lebsack, 249; Whites, 167; 186; Charles Reagan Wilson, 18-30.

Vaudeville performances attracted women and children with their matinee performances, and families attended the theater together as a way to find release from the pressures of work and city life.¹⁶¹ Since national touring companies came to dominate theater across the nation in the late nineteenth century, southern audiences saw performers from the northeast and Europe more frequently than they did home-grown actors and actresses. The French actress Sarah Bernhardt and the Spanish Opera singer Adelina Patti both toured America in the 1880s and 1890s, included the South in their stays, and caused sensations throughout the region similar to those brought about earlier in the century by Charlotte Cushman and Jenny Lind. The performances of these famous women further dismantled the distinctions between public and private spheres and between class ranks that antebellum and Civil War actresses had already begun to tear down.

¹⁶¹ Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 159-64; David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge Harvard University Press, 1993), 3-4.

CHAPTER 4: ACTING SEXY

“O, lud! I’m ruined! I’m ruined!”

Lady Teazle, *The School for Scandal* (1777), 4.3.108, Richard Brinsley Sheridan

When Sir Peter Teazle finds his wife alone with his good friend, Mr. Joseph Surface, Lady Teazle knows that her husband will suspect her of infidelity. Though she has not betrayed her husband, she worries about her ruined reputation and wonders “what will become of me now?”¹ Nineteenth-century actresses similarly found themselves in a double bind. As stage performers, they made a living by displaying themselves in public and capitalizing on the attractiveness of their bodies, but as members of a patriarchal culture that prized the chastity of its women, those who wished to avoid sullyng their pure reputations had to temper the sexuality of their performances. This dichotomy was even more marked for actresses in the antebellum South, where perpetuation of the economic system required the subordination of women and slaves. To use Michel Foucault’s term, the Old South was “a society of blood” in which sex was crucial to maintaining the family relations of the power structure.² Since antebellum actresses partly used their corporeality to appeal to audiences, they navigated a slippery terrain that was sometimes secure and sometimes threatening. During the Civil War, white southerners clung to the mores of the Old South, so they continued to revere feminine chastity and obedience, but as they had in the antebellum period, actresses sometimes overturned and sometimes upheld traditional sexual values in their performances. This

¹ Richard Brinsley Sheridan, *The School for Scandal*, 1775, ed. F. W. Bateson (London: A & C Black, 1995), 4.3.108, 110, p. 93.

² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 147.

shifting representation of sexuality confirms the artificiality of gendered identity and shows that masculine and feminine roles are actually bodily styles that people put on and outwardly enact through repeated performative gestures. These multiple manifestations of staged sexuality also belie the fabrication of fixed and stable gendered identity while affirming the contingency of constructed male and female social roles. Moreover, actresses' various portrayals of sexuality in the antebellum and Civil War years reveal that a range of sexual identities exists and refutes a binaric idea of sexuality.

The experience of nineteenth-century actresses, whose work was tied to sexuality because they embodied their art publicly on stage, affirms recent scholarship that challenges those conventional historical narratives that describe nineteenth-century sexuality as repressed and reticent. Instead, as philosopher Michel Foucault and historians Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, John D'Emilio and Estelle Freedman reveal, sexual discourse flourished in the nineteenth century, and this on-going conversation pointed to a deep interest in sexual activity and identity. Foucault says that discussion of sex increased in the nineteenth century with growing medical inquiry and with expanding governmental interest in demography. More talk about sex resulted in an emphasis on heterosexual, family-centered sexuality, which ensured the homeostasis of the social body and in turn shored up political power. "Deployments of power," he maintains, "are directly connected to the body." In these terms, sexual activity becomes a charged "transfer point" of power between people, not just an isolated act of personal intimacy.³

Like Foucault, Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz explains that nineteenth-century American scientists were learning more about human physiology, including reproductive organs associated with sexual pleasure; but she also notes that evangelical Christianity

³ Ibid., 36, 103-107, 114-116; see pp. 103 and 151 for quotations.

was growing and spreading its distrust of bodily gratification. Books and pamphlets distributed by doctors encouraged women to limit the size of their families in order to preserve their health, and simultaneously, evangelical ministers preached against the dangers of lust and sins of the flesh.⁴ Since many scientists espoused sex as healthful and encouraged the use of contraception, the two communities, at first glance, seemed to be at odds. John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman show, however, that the interests of both scientific and religious groups actually complemented one another, for the growing medical focus on reproductive control resulted in an emphasis on emotional and physical intimacy within the bonds of marriage. Ministers who preached on the evils of adulterous behavior could still extol the virtues of physical affection between a husband and wife. As the focus of sexuality shifted from reproduction to physical and emotional intimacy, individual sexual desire and orientation came to represent the primary forces creating personal identity.⁵

Historian Thomas Laqueur exposes an underlying irony that accompanied this understanding of personal identity emerging in the nineteenth century, for discoveries in human physiology firmly tied women’s sexual identity to their reproductive capacities. With the 1843 discovery of spontaneous ovulation in mammals, scientists discarded ancient beliefs that women possessed male genitals, which were simply inverted and hidden inside their bodies. New knowledge of ovarian function dispelled old notions that women must experience orgasm to conceive and called into question the idea that men and women shared one sex. If ovaries operated differently from testes, their supposed

⁴ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Rereading Sex: Battles Over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2002), 3-13, 274-84, 440-43.

⁵ D’Emilio and Freedman, xi-xvi, 59, 72, 111.

homological partner, and if the uterus was not an inverted penis, then women were not just inferior men but a different sex altogether.

The birth of two-sex ideology continued to support an oppressive gendered social hierarchy that construed women as subordinate based on their differences from men, while simultaneously providing grounds for the articulation of newly burgeoning feminist stances.⁶ By 1848, for example, women such as Lucretia Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, who had been excluded from full participation in their work with the abolition movement on the basis of biological sex, gathered in Seneca Falls, New York, to condemn discriminatory practices against women and to demand the right to vote. The Seneca Falls Convention gave birth to the women's rights movement in the United States and implicitly revealed the interconnection between sex and gender. By listing eleven "injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman," and by claiming equal treatment under the law, Mott, Stanton, and the other women at the convention called attention to injustices long rationalized by concepts of biological sex.⁷

As Laqueur shows, though, ideas of biological sex that Westerners had viewed as constant and invariable since their inception in Greek medical scholarship suddenly changed when the new information about women's physiology came to light in the mid-nineteenth century. The ideological shift that occurred when "a one-sex world" transformed itself into "a two-sex world" reveals that isolating sex from social context is impossible. Moreover, Laqueur says that this mercurial historical record "bears witness

⁶ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1-24, 195-97, 211-213; Laqueur, "Orgasm, Generation, and the Politics of Reproductive Biology" in *The Making of the Modern Body*, eds. Catherine Gallagher and Thomas Laqueur (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 1-41.

⁷ Linda L. Lindsey, *Gender Roles: A Sociological Perspective* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1994), 108-112.

to the fundamental incoherence of stable, fixed categories of sexual dimorphism, of male and or female.”⁸ Laqueur’s insights prefigure the work of gender theorist Judith Butler and molecular biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling who contend that sexual identity consists of an infinite spectrum of possibilities. Butler asserts that “ ‘sex’ is an ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time” to create an illusion of fixity, which upholds juridical power but that actually exists along a “gendered matrix,” bounded by heterosexual notions of masculinity and femininity. When homosexual desire confounds these classifications, inculcated notions of sexuality likewise crumble.⁹

Fausto-Sterling also recognizes that male-dominated political and legal systems, have vested interests in preserving the myth of two sexes, and she explains that biological bodies come in an array of forms stretching between artificial male and female categories that sit on “extreme ends of a biological continuum.” The presence of intersexuals, individuals born with ambiguous genitalia or genitalia that do not match their chromosomal constitutions (historically referred to as hermaphrodites), transsexuals, and people with genitalia that somehow exceeds or fails to measure up to the norm bear out her contention. While Fausto-Sterling argues for recognition of biological variation, she also notes that knowledge of biological similarities can further break down perceptions of rigid sexual binaries. She cites, for instance, the nineteenth-century discovery that all humans share common embryological beginnings and the twentieth-century finding by

⁸ Laqueur, *Making Sex*, 11, 22.

⁹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 1-23, 31-32, 49-53; see pp. 1 and 51 for quotations.

endocrinologists that estrogen and testosterone exist in men and women, albeit in varying quantities.¹⁰

While antebellum southerners celebrated sexual differences between men and women and thereby clung to established gender roles, their stage offerings revealed that sexual identity does indeed offer a range of possibilities. D'Emilio and Freedman say that prior to the Civil War, commercial culture limited overt representations of sexuality, but the outbreak of the war encouraged many forms of sexual commerce including pornography and prostitution.¹¹ On the surface, the southern theatrical world seemed to follow this trend. Antebellum and Civil War theaters scrupulously lauded the personal virtues of actresses while simultaneously correlating their chaste beauty with fine acting talent, which they praised in handbills and advertisements. Nevertheless, sex occupied a central place in the repertory that was popular on the region's stages. In the same way that nineteenth-century scientists and ministers were talking explicitly about sexuality, so too were playwrights, performers, and by extension, theatergoers. Often dramatic offerings shored up binary depictions of women as either virgins or whores, but actresses' own lives in the concrete, everyday world where they experienced sexual desires and drives that they satisfied in relationships with lovers and husbands broke down these false dualisms.

While some actresses gained admirers for their upright and moral living, others garnered renown for their sexually transgressive behavior. Though fewer in number, the latter somewhat resembled the women who occupied what actress Olive Logan called

¹⁰ Anne Fausto-Sterling, *Sexing the Body: Gender Politics and the Construction of Sexuality* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 5-16, 30-44, 45-77, 107-114, 146-194; see p. 31 for quotation.

¹¹ D'Emilio and Freedman, 133-4.

“that dark, horrible, guilty ‘third tier’” in early nineteenth-century theaters.¹² Historian Claudia Johnson explains that managers had set aside the third tier, or gallery, for prostitutes since the mid-eighteenth century, and this practice continued until the late 1830s when Noah Ludlow and Sol Smith first sought to abolish the tradition in their string of theaters. The managers knew that prostitutes came to the theater to make contacts, not to watch the play. Moreover, the women’s presence incited considerable clerical wrath and discouraged many upstanding citizens from attending. While Ludlow and Smith initially lost income by failing to relinquish their galleries to prostitutes, especially since the members of an entire house frequently attended together, eventually they made up for their losses by establishing their theaters as more respectable places of entertainment.¹³

Ludlow and Smith might have succeeded in purging their theaters of most illicit sexual commerce, but their audiences, like those in other American cities, continued to enjoy watching plays that included sex. Spectators not only relished the polar portrayals of female sexuality that actresses presented, they also delighted in a range of other sexual possibilities when female players took on disguise and cross-dressed roles. Indeed, performing parts written for men brought the tension of same-sex desire to the South’s antebellum and Civil War stages. Breeches roles also introduced the potential for a myriad of sexual identities outside the rigid categories of male and female, and they exploded the myth of sexual suppression that has arisen to explain nineteenth-century sexuality.

¹² Logan, 33; also quoted in Claudia Johnson, “That Guilty Third Tier: Prostitution in Nineteenth-Century American Theaters,” *American Quarterly* 27 (1975): 575-584, p. 575.

¹³ Johnson, 576-79; Ludlow, 478-79.

Staging Sex: Acting Feminine

“Do not insult our ears even with the name of that fiend in an angel’s form.”

Jeppa, *Lucretia Borgia* (1844), 1.1. 100-101, J. M. Weston

When the St. Charles Theatre staged *Lucretia Borgia*, an adaptation of a popular novel by French author Victor Hugo, in 1844, local New Orleans actress Mary Farren played the title character.¹⁴ The binaric terms that Jeppa, the disgruntled cavalier, uses to describe Lucretia in the opening scene buttressed antebellum stereotypes of southern womanhood, but Farren herself confused these polar opposites in her personal life. Though acclaimed by the New Orleans press as a paragon of virtue who was “to the manner [sic] born,” Farren was also a working mother who depended on her acting income to support her family.¹⁵ By leaving her children and seeking work outside the home, Farren exhibited manners that most antebellum southerners would scarcely label as ideal for mothers, but she managed to retain the goodwill of the play-going public by casting herself as a loyal and devoted parent who should also be admired for her gumption and resourcefulness.

Julia Dean Hayne also played the “fiend in an angel’s form” but confused those dualistic markers in her private life.¹⁶ Another favorite of New Orleans theatergoers and critics, Hayne used her stunning beauty, fine acting skills, and careful personal comportment to appeal to her fans, but she risked losing that admiration when she divorced Arthur in 1866. Her bold move could have turned her into the fiend in her

¹⁴ J. M. Weston, ed. and trans., *Lucretia Borgia: A Drama in Three Acts*, adapted from the novel by Victor Hugo (Boston: William V. Spencer, 1856), microopaque (New York: Readex Microprint, 1982), 3-4.

¹⁵ “Mrs. Farren’s Benefit,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 23 March, 1844; “Mrs. Farren’s Benefit,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 22 January, 1845.

¹⁶ Weston, 1.1.100-101, p. 12.

admirers' eyes, but instead they looked with sympathy and compassion on a woman desirous of saving herself and her children from personal and psychological harm.

Like Farren and Hayne, other actresses who performed on the South's antebellum and Civil War stages also broke down binaries inherent in ideas of femininity. Yet regardless of the multiple meanings they might have implied with stage characterizations or in their personal lives, southern theatergoers still held cherished notions of femininity and masculinity that were most clearly marked by physical markers associated with sexuality. Playgoers largely correlated symmetrical faces, expressive eyes and features, trim figures, erect postures, musical voices, and graceful movements with feminine sexual allure. For example, Noah Ludlow praised Julia Dean Hayne's "silver-toned, clear voice" and her "dark expressive eyes," while actor Joseph Jefferson admired her "tall and willowy" figure as well as her grace and charm.¹⁷ In contrast, spectators mostly found uneven faces, harsh features, obesity, brusque voices, and clumsy bodily gestures unattractive and even repelling in women. Ludlow made quite a point of remarking on the obesity of Madame Celine Celeste and Frances Denny Drake in their older years, and his own wife, Mary, was not even exempt from his criticism. "When I married her," Ludlow recalled, "she was a perfect model of womanly beauty, with as handsome an arm and hand, foot and ankle, as ever lady could boast of [but] . . . in after years, she became very stout."¹⁸

Qualities that spectators found attractive in women, they frequently associated with femininity, and attributes that they found unattractive, they often aligned with masculinity. For instance, when the Drake Company was staging *Pizarro* in 1815 and

¹⁷ Jefferson, 148; Ludlow, 240.

¹⁸ Ludlow, quotation on p. 107-8; see also pp. 110, 514.

found itself short on actresses, they drafted their elderly cleaning woman and their property man to play two of the young virgins in the Temple scene. Noah Ludlow said that soon after their entrance, an audience member groaned and remarked with chagrin, “Oh, such virgins!” The effect, Ludlow explained, was like dropping a match into gunpowder: “The explosion was tremendous. The pit shouted, and the house roared with laughter, in which the actors were compelled to join.”¹⁹ Though the troupe had made a valiant effort at improvising, the spectator’s outburst made them see the ludicrous nature of their last-minute choices, for the woman’s age and the man’s sex clearly barred them from joining the ranks of virgin girls. The anecdote further clarifies nineteenth-century standards of womanly beauty and aligns attractiveness with youth and femininity.

Theatergoers also connected femininity with feeling and emotion, while they equated masculinity with thinking and intellect. The *Augusta Chronicle* commended Jane Placide for “the ecstasy of romantic feeling” that she brought to her performances there in the spring of 1821, and she later made her career in New Orleans as an emotional actress.²⁰ Eliza Logan and Julia Dean Hayne similarly attained their fame by playing heavy emotional parts. In contrast, actress Charlotte Cushman, known for playing masculine roles and cross-dressed parts, made her name with her realistic and cerebral acting style perfected under the guidance of English actor, William Macready.²¹ Thus, actresses troubled rigid sexual definitions when they portrayed a proliferation of meanings within these classifications. Furthermore, they broke the opposition inherent in dualistic categories when they exhibited characteristics from other sexual orientations.

¹⁹ Ibid., 67.

²⁰ “Miss Placide,” *Augusta Chronicle*, 19 March, 1821, quoted in Boyce, 117.

²¹ Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage*, 87-89.

Actresses could not avoid newspaper reviews and theater publicity that sought to confine them within the narrow boundaries of feminine sexuality as defined by nineteenth-century southerners. The simplistic language that frequently described their performances, corporeality, and personal morals appealed to prospective spectators and employers. Even when review rhetoric commodified their bodies and passed judgment on their personal moral standards, actresses knew that cultivating an ideal image boosted renown and popularity, although involvement in scandal could also promote public interest.

Some actresses were praised solely on the merits of their physical beauty, which reviewers frequently conflated with talent. For instance, an 1816 notice in Lexington's *Kentucky Gazette* announcing Julia Drake Dean's appearance as the chaste heiress Eliza in Richard Cumberland's *The Jew* (1794) lauded her as "a bud of sweet promise that . . . will one day expand into a full blown flower of Ornament and Delight."²² Though readers likely saw the analogy as a lovely compliment predicting Dean's successful professional development, not as an ironic remark dripping with sexual innuendo, the sexual connotations cannot be overlooked. On the surface, the reviewer's comparison suggests that Dean's comeliness and talent are as fresh and pretty as an unopened flower and promise a mature beauty and skill that will be worth waiting for. In short, she is like the virginal heiress she impersonates in Cumberland's drama. On a deeper level, however, the trope equates Dean with her genitalia. She becomes the "bud of sweet promise," an unpenetrated hymen, that will transform into a "full blown flower," or an open and welcoming vagina. Moreover, this flower will satisfy the visual sexual appetites of viewers by becoming an "Ornament and Delight," a mere thing or

²² "Theatre," *Kentucky Gazette*, 25 November, 1816.

commodity to please and excite the eyes of those who come to view her. Using similar language of objectification in an adulatory manner, Noah Ludlow described Dean in his autobiography as “a perfect specimen of the ancient Italian beauty.”²³ He went on to extol her long dark hair and eyelashes as well as her symmetrical face and her expressive eyes in his explanation of her talent and stage presence.²⁴ Ideally, physical beauty should have no bearing on the critical assessment of acting skills, but in reality, physical presence commands and compels. Hence, Ludlow and the *Kentucky Gazette* drama reviewer’s inclination to couch their conclusions about Dean’s ability in physical terms comes as little surprise.

Other critics joined Ludlow and the *Kentucky Gazette* writer in equating the talents and physical beauty of the performers they reviewed. Praising the abilities, integrity, and attractiveness of Jane Placide in 1821, the *Augusta Chronicle* pronounced her “an object of more than ordinary solicitude, combining all the virtues and accomplishments which give to social life its liveliest endearments and to taste and genius their brightest lustre”²⁵ Though the review complimented Placide, she, like Julia Drake Dean, was reduced to a mere physical thing, “an object,” by the critic’s language. Similarly, a review promoting *Lafitte*, the new play written and acted by Charlotte Barnes in 1837, The New Orleans *Daily Picayune* extolled the actress’s “delicacy, sweetness, and skill.” The reviewer also called Barnes “an accomplished actress and a most beautiful girl,” before apologizing for the digression and moving into a discussion of her “fine education,” which allowed her to endow *Lafitte* with “highly

²³ Ludlow, 365.

²⁴ Ibid., 240.

²⁵ “Miss Placide,” *Augusta Chronicle*, 19 March, 1821.

chaste and classical” language.²⁶ Though Barnes’s physical appearance had no effect on her skills as a playwright, the critic commented favorably on her looks by way of paying her a compliment and encouraging spectators to attend the drama. The remark also helped assuage any social criticism that might have been leveled at Barnes for engaging in what was still largely a male tradition.

When Fanny Elssler, the Viennese ballet dancer, toured the United States in 1840, she also awed southern audiences with her loveliness and skill. Audiences everywhere anticipated seeing her company perform *La Sylphide*, a French Romantic ballet composed in 1832 for Maria Taglioni at the Paris Opera. Elssler danced the title part of the sylph, who entrances a young farmer but dies tragically when an evil witch encourages the man to bind the sylvan creature to him with a scarf. As soon as the fabric touches the sylph’s diaphanous wings, they fall off and she perishes. A full-length production, which The New Orleans *Daily Picayune* called a “grand ballet pantomime,” *La Sylphide* was usually followed by shorter selections such as *La Cachuca*, an exotic Spanish dance staged by Jean Coralli’s ballet at the Paris Opera in 1836, or *La Cracovienne*, a Polish polonaise in 2-4 time.²⁷

Elssler was so popular in America that her tour of three months ended up lasting two years. She debuted in New York, then traveled south to the nation’s capitol, where President Van Buren invited her to dance at the White House and Congress adjourned in her honor. She went on to charm audiences in Boston, Baltimore, Charleston, and New

²⁶ “Lafitte at the St. Charles,” *New Orleans Picayune*, 15 April, 1837; “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1 December, 1838.

²⁷ Lisa Arkin, “The Context of Exoticism in Fanny Elssler’s Cachuca,” *Dance Chronicle* 17.3 (1994): 303-325; “Elssler’s Benefit,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1 April, 1841; St. Charles Theatre Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune* 10 March, 1841; “La Sylphide,” The Royal Danish Theatre, http://www.kglteater.dk/dkt2002/bournonville2005/uk/program_for_festivalen/balletterne/sylfiden/sylfiden.htm (accessed 1 December, 2004).

Orleans, before she sailed to Cuba and back to New York.²⁸ Southerners were as enamored of the classical ballerina as northerners. In Charleston, the *Courier* reported that despite doubled ticket prices, the theater was packed during Elssler's two-week stay. "Vindex," the paper's theatrical reviewer, described the dancer as a "bright meteor that we occasionally see shoot across the heavens," and noted that appreciative audience members threw bouquets and wreaths to Elssler after her performances, which included *La Sylphide* and *La Cracovienne*.²⁹ Once again, Noah Ludlow corroborated euphoric news coverage with his autobiographical musings. She was not only a "magnificent dancer," he recalled, but she was also "exquisitely formed."³⁰ Ludlow's comments also showed that dance costume hemlines were then on the rise, as Elssler's outfit had to reveal enough of her shapely legs for him to make an assessment of her physique. Though dancers' close-fitting, short outfits initially worried some moral arbiters, historian Tracy Davis says that by mid-century, the classical dance tutu had gained acceptance and "come to stand for beauty, vigor, suppleness, vivacity, and harmony."³¹ Ludlow's remarks showed that in the South, Elssler's lovely body clearly appealed to spectators as much as her skilled dance moves.

Fanny Fitzwilliams was a savvy American actress, who capitalized on Fanny Elssler's success by following her around the country and staging parodies of her performances that were so good and so reasonably priced that they sold out consistently. The press also praised her prime physical form and superior talent. In February 1841,

²⁸ Victoria Huckenpahler, "Fanny Elssler Comes to Washington," *Dance Chronicle* 49 (1975): 38-40.

²⁹ New Theatre Advertisements, *Charleston Courier*, 28 December, 30 December, 1840, 1 January, 1841; Quotations in "Theatre," *Charleston Courier*, 5 January, 1841.

³⁰ Ludlow, 537.

³¹ Davis, 110.

The New Orleans *Daily Picayune* crowed, “she is the most dashing, sparkling, captivating little actress that ever visited this section,” and two months later, the same paper reported that Fitzwilliam had taken her Elssler act to Natchez, where poets were “pelting” her with accolades and verses.³² When Fitzwilliam returned to New Orleans the following year, the paper assured readers that “this lively and charming actress has not lost one particle of either her beauty, her mercurial buoyancy, her versatile dramatic power, her skill in pleasing, or the unbounded favor she won in this city last season.”³³ Physical attractiveness and acting skill went hand in hand to assure success on the antebellum stage.

Beauty and respectability also paired up to bring actresses favor with theatergoers in the Old South. Newspapers often remarked on actresses’ virtuous or charitable behavior, and theater managers further played up the reputations of their performers. Underscoring the importance that propriety held in the region, Thomas Smyth, a Presbyterian minister, called for the theater to become a “school of morals” in his 1838 address at the opening of a new theater in Charleston. He cautioned performers and spectators that the theater should emphasize right and decent living while turning its back on vice and immorality. In the tradition of anti-theatrical polemics, Smyth’s speech warned its operators against making the community’s children, particularly their pure and innocent daughters, “famished victims of vile idolatry.”³⁴ Smyth’s concerns reveal a deep-seated, historical, ecclesiastical distrust of the theater: playwrights and performers

³² “Mrs. Fitzwilliam,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 5 February, 1841; “Mrs. Fitzwilliam,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1 April, 1841.

³³ “Fanny Fitzwilliam,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 12 March, 1842.

³⁴ Thomas Smyth, *The Theatre, A School of Religion, Manners, And Morals!* (Charleston: Jenkins & Hussey, 1838), 29, 54. Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library holds a copy of this book. All references come from this edition.

risk turning themselves into demi-Gods and the stage into a false idol. His worries also reveal male southerners' fears for maintaining the sanctity of their female offspring, who possessed the promise of sure and unsullied reproductive lines. An apologist for the theater known only as "Otway" rebutted Smyth's worries in a treatise entitled *The Theatre Defended*. He saw the positive didactic potential of performance and contended for instance, that "the villanies of Iago, the holy innocence of Desdemona, and the end of the unhappy Moor are a lesson against jealousy."³⁵ When actresses made public announcements of virtuous activity carried out in their personal lives, they further quelled concerns of critics such as Smyth. Thus, Fanny Elssler's proclamation that she had joined the Temperance Society and Julia Dean Hayne's donation of benefit profits to help a fellow actor in need also helped to quash anti-theatrical sentiment.³⁶

Other popular and attractive performers donated their time and talents to charitable causes and garnered positive public responses for their good citizenship. For instance, the *Daily Picayune* complimented Mary Ann Duff "as an estimable lady and a sterling actress" who had frequently "offered her aid gratuitously for various charity benefits."³⁷ The paper went on to urge the public to turn out in force for Duff's benefit at the end of the 1838 season to show their admiration for her talent and beneficence. A dark-haired, fair-skinned actress who came to the United States from Ireland in 1810, Duff made a name for herself touring America and playing tragic Shakespearean roles opposite famous actors such as Edmund Kean and Edwin Booth. Despite the fame that she cultivated, Duff suffered a decade of personal penury during which she struggled to

³⁵ Quoted in Watson, *Antebellum Charleston Dramatists*, 25.

³⁶ "Fanny Elssler," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 18 January, 1842; "St. Charles Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 21 December, 1850.

³⁷ "Mrs. Duff," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 31 May, 1838.

support ten children and a dying husband; her financial woes ceased only after she married a wealthy New Orleans businessman in 1836. Thus, reminders of Duff's charitable giving would resonate with theater-goers who were familiar with her history.³⁸

Similarly, Madame Celine Celeste, the French dancer and pantomime actress, who charmed audiences with her beauty and exoticism, pleased the people of Mobile in 1836 when she agreed to donate the proceeds of a performance to the Orphan Boys' Asylum, but the *Picayune* took her to task when she had not followed through on her commitment a year later.³⁹ The publicity may or may not have brought about her prompt response, for no further mention of the benefit appears in the New Orleans paper during 1837. Since Celeste went on to perform a series of twenty-two heavily attended shows in the Crescent City that season, however, she clearly had not permanently damaged her reputation with the nearby coastal residents.⁴⁰ Though the theater-going public appreciated a performer's civic-mindedness, stage presence and physical charms seems ultimately to have mattered more.

Still, respectability brought an added bonus for actresses who already occupied a liminal social status, and antebellum southerners further equated respect with chastity for women. Moreover, a modest physical bearing and unmarred outer beauty denoted a pure and unspotted inner being for southerners, and reviewers enjoyed commending actresses for both. In a typical review, the *St. Louis Beacon* praised Jane Placide, a petite, dark-haired beauty, for her "chaste and effective piece of acting" when she portrayed Elvira in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro* during the 1830 summer season as a visiting star at

³⁸ Johnson, *American Actress*, 79-89.

³⁹ "Celeste," *New Orleans Picayune*, 15 February, 1837; "Celeste," *New Orleans Picayune*, 14 April, 1837.

⁴⁰ Advertisements for the St. Charles Theatre, *New Orleans Picayune*, 30, 31 March, 1837.

the St. Louis Theatre.⁴¹ Yet Elvira is Pizarro's mistress, not his wife, and she boldly acknowledges her physical attraction for the swashbuckling conquistador.⁴² Thus, the reviewer's use of the word "chaste" to describe Placide's depiction of Elvira reveals an understanding that in this case, aligning the actress with the character could easily damage the female player's reputation. If Placide, a single woman, carried on an affair with her married employer, James Caldwell, as circumstances suggest, however, the newspaper's compliment carried quite an ironic twist.

Other actresses received similar accolades. Introducing the new season in January 1837, the *Mobile Morning Chronicle* lauded leading stock actress Eliza Riddle as "chaste, refined, and impressive" and encouraged readers to patronize her performances at the Mobile Theatre that winter.⁴³ While Riddle, also a single woman, upheld southern conventions by confining her romantic interests to one suitor, actor Matt Field, whom she married at the end of the 1837 summer season, she transgressed against regional mores by participating in a private courtship that unfolded publicly on stage. Riddle never conducted herself in any unbecoming fashion on or off stage, but her dramatic lines would have taken on particularly charged meanings when she acted across from Field, especially as their romance developed throughout the season. Repertory selections that focused on courtship and marriage further underscored their private relationship, and the Mobile winter theater schedule was remarkably full of such offerings. For instance, Riddle and Field appeared in a farce called *The Soldier's Courtship* five times during the season, while they played three times in a "petit comedy" entitled *The Handsome*

⁴¹ Quoted in Burroughs, 80.

⁴² Sheridan, *Pizarro*, 1.1, p. 7 of 114.

⁴³ *Mobile Morning Chronicle*, 18 January, 1837, Quoted in Bailey, 77.

Husband and twice in a farce called *The Married Rake*.⁴⁴ Performing parts in standard repertory selections such as Alonzo and Cora, the loving Incan couple, in Sheridan's *Pizarro* or Iago and Desdemona, the jealous schemer and his innocent object of lust, in Shakespeare's *Othello* also called attention to their budding romance.⁴⁵ Imbuing intimate sentiments between a man and a woman with personal meaning in a public setting could have cast Riddle into a questionable light with some of her spectators and might account for the zeal with which the press assured readers of her moral character.

The *Daily Picayune* also took seriously its responsibility to report on actresses' morality. In advertising an 1842 benefit for Eliza Petrie, the New Orleans paper reminded readers that "this pretty young lady is well known in the press and to the public as an indefatigable and agreeable actress, estimable in her private relations, and upon the stage, always respectable."⁴⁶ Though Petrie's "private relations" had little to do with her public stage performances, assurances of her personal honesty and integrity, attributes that also carried sexual associations for women, likely imbued her acting skills with more integrity in the eyes of her spectators.

Similarly desirous of portraying Julia Dean Hayne as a paragon of chastity, the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* conflated her sexual status with her physical appearance in an 1847 feature article that exclaimed, "In figure and in natural grace she is unexceptionable. Her dignity of bearing, chastenadas [sic] and good taste at once points her the queenly heroine, and augurs future preeminence in the higher walks of the drama."⁴⁷ Julia Dean Hayne not only disturbed this assessment of her personal character when she later

⁴⁴ Advertisements for the Mobile Theatre, *Mobile Commercial Register*, 6, 9, 12, 14, 18, 23 January, 8 February, 2, 7, 14, 31 March, 1837.

⁴⁵ Advertisements for the Mobile Theater, *Mobile Commercial Register*, 3, 9 May, 1837.

⁴⁶ "Miss Petrie's Benefit," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 24 February, 1842.

⁴⁷ "Theatre," *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 24 July, 1847.

divorced Arthur Hayne, but as her repertory skills matured, she also redefined the sort of “queenly heroine” that many southern reviewers preferred seeing her play. As a young actress, Julia Dean played passive lead roles such as Julia, in *The Hunchback*, that mirrored the beautiful, virginal, feminine persona the southern press so enjoyed creating for her, but as she acquired experience, she took on roles such as Lady Macbeth and Lucretia Borgia, which bore associations with passion, violence, and masculinity.

The press did not always appreciate her artistic experimentation, as an 1853 review in the *Mobile Daily Advertiser* reveals:

Let Miss Dean continue to act as she acts in Julia, Marianna, and Bianca, and [you have] our word for it, she will long continue the public’s favorite. We think her wholly unsuited for the great unsexed characters of Shakespeare—Lady Macbeth, for instance—nor should she attempt it.[sic] In all those characters which shadow forth the lovelier traits of woman’s nature, the soft confession, the gentle remonstrance, the exhibition of tenderness; in fine, such as characterize the beautiful dramas of Sheridan Knowles and Sir Bulwer-Lytton, I unhesitatingly pronounce Julia Dean *the finest representative in this country*.⁴⁸

By appropriating Lady Macbeth’s famous line in which she calls upon the spirits to come and “unsex” her, the theater critic cautioned Dean that she too risked losing her intrinsic feminine identity if she continued to play roles in which the character shed her essential sexual nature.⁴⁹ Indeed, the critic implies, if she played a character such as Lady Macbeth who takes on traits traditionally associated with masculinity, such as a thirst for

⁴⁸ “The Drama—Julia Dean—Mr. Hield,” *Mobile Daily Advertiser*, 1853, Clipping, Julia Dean Theater Papers, Box 1 of 2, Missouri Historical Society.

⁴⁹ Lady Macbeth calls on the spirits to “unsex” her in John Philip Kemble’s stage version of the play and in the popular reading versions of the day as well. See *Macbeth* (Hanmer), 1.7.41, p. 488; *Macbeth* (Johnson), 1.7.43, p. 394; *Macbeth* (Kemble Promptbooks, ed. Shattuck, 1.5.43, p.16.

power and a desire for revenge, she might come perilously close to confusing her own gender identity and forfeiting her extraordinary popularity. Making sure to clarify cultural definitions of femininity, the writer listed those traits of “woman’s nature” that the lead characters in Knowles’s and Lytton’s plays so aptly exhibit, but in making his list, he failed to recognize that men could also possess those attributes. Furthermore, the critic could see that by enacting a variety of characteristics aligned with both genders, performers such as Dean confounded the notion of essential gender identity and attested instead to its social construction.

The Mobile theater critic was not alone in his sentiments. After Dean played a series of tragic roles during the pre-Christmas 1854 season in New Orleans, the *Daily Picayune* asked plaintively, “Are we not to have this fair lady in comedy this engagement?” “Such features, such a voice, such youthful buoyancy,” the paper complained, “should not be enforced to the simulation of the sterner passions but be allowed play in their more natural and appropriate element.”⁵⁰ Though Dean satisfied her reviewer’s protests by appearing as Julia in *The Hunchback* on Christmas Day and Pauline in *The Lady of Lyons* on December 30, she reclaimed her hard-hitting tragic persona with Lucretia Borgia on New Year’s Day.⁵¹ An alluring adulteress who is also a cold-blooded, calculating assassin, Lucretia is nearly the opposite of the demure Julia or the contrite Pauline, and if those women represent the “natural and appropriate element” of femininity that the New Orleans theater critic missed on stage, then Lucretia stands for all that is unnatural and inappropriate. She finds fulfillment in an affair outside of her

⁵⁰ “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 28 December, 1854.

⁵¹ “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 25 December, 1854; “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 30 December, 1854; “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1 January, 1855.

loveless marriage, and she pays a group of retainers to maintain her safety and power. In short, she possesses agency: she knows what she wants, and she does what she must to obtain those desires, even when her actions hurt others who get in the way.

Adapted for stage by J. M. Weston, stage manager of James Caldwell's New Orleans St. Charles Theatre, *Lucretia Borgia* was "a triumphant success" from its first performance in 1844. Casting about for a crowd-pleasing melodrama that would sell many tickets and put a failing treasury in the black, Weston decided to try his hand at transforming Victor Hugo's popular and sensational novel into a stage drama. His efforts paid off, and the play found a place within the standard repertory offerings of Julia Dean Hayne and Mary Farren, the local actress who played the lead role in the play's opening run.⁵² Since nineteenth-century theatergoers and reviewers tended to associate performers with the traits embodied in the characters they enacted, playing Lucretia, who rejected the womanly virtues that southerners treasured, took great daring. Mary Farren might have felt secure enough in her standing as a revered native of the Crescent City to play the part, however, for the local newspaper frequently lauded her integrity. "She is an artiste of versatile talent and discriminating judgment," the *Daily Picayune* proclaimed in March 1844, and the following year, the paper pronounced her "a lady exemplary in manners."⁵³ Spectators might also have responded well to Farren's portrayal of Lucretia Borgia, since the lascivious and domineering villainess ultimately repents of her misdeeds and poisons herself when she realizes she has mistakenly killed her own son in a power play gone awry. In the same way that Mrs. Haller in Augustus von Kotzebue's *The Stranger* likely occupied a cautionary place in the dramatic repertory by warning

⁵² Weston, *Lucretia Borgia*, 3.

⁵³ "Mrs. Farren's Benefit," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 23 March, 1844; "Mrs. Farren's Benefit," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 22 January, 1845.

women not to stray outside the bonds of marriage, Lucretia could have filled a similar space and likewise admonished women to curb their sexual appetites and their social ambitions.

Despite critics' desires to see Julia Dean Hayne play demure, comic roles, she too might have felt safe performing *Lucretia* because of the play's moralistic ending.

Whether or not Lucretia's demise appealed, the *Daily Picayune* commended Dean for successfully playing the "arduous" part with much "spirit and effect" in her 1855 New Year's Day performance, and the audience must also have responded well, for she repeated the offering when she returned to the city at the end of February the same year.⁵⁴ Indeed, the newspaper announced her dramatic choice with great anticipation and encouraged spectators to come see her in "the powerfully drawn character."⁵⁵ Even if Hayne and Farren played Lucretia because the ending made the play acceptable to spectators, the bulk of the drama presents a self-assured character who embraces her sexuality and who attains a powerful public position on her own. The epitome of voluptuous, feminine allure, she is a lurid combination of promise and danger at the same time.

Actresses such as Hayne and Farren who played the highly sexualized Lucretia embodied what Robert Allen calls "the rise of feminized spectacle" that began early in the nineteenth century with the appearance of European ballet dancers, continued with the creation of *tableaux vivants* or living pictures, proceeded with equestrian drama, and culminated late in the century with sexualized burlesque. Ballet dancing became popular in antebellum theaters soon after Charles Gilfert, manager of New York's Bowery

⁵⁴ "St. Charles Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 2 January, 1855.

⁵⁵ "St. Charles Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 18 February, 1855.

Theater, brought the French ballerina Madame Francisque Hutin to dance between acts of *Much Ado About Nothing* in 1827. Southern theaters followed suit and began booking other European dancers, such as Madame Celeste and Fanny Elssler, for their own stages. Though ballet dancers displayed their agility and supple bodies on stage, they carefully cultivated romantic, ethereal stage personas that partly assuaged spectators who might have worried about the morality of attending such explicitly physical performances.⁵⁶

Adah Isaacs Menken drew on this tradition when she began her career in the fall of 1856 in Opelousas, Louisiana. Employed as a singer, dancer, and stock actress with James S. Charles's Varieties Company, Menken performed a rendition of *La Cachuca* and a "Fancy Dance" among other "drawing room entertainments" for the citizens of Opelousas.⁵⁷ These offerings mimicked the high-brow dancing of Madame Celeste and Fanny Elssler, but the sensuous numbers also foreshadowed the eroticism that Menken would bring to the highly sexual roles such as Mazeppa and the French spy that she later became so well known for playing. Meanwhile, standard repertory parts that celebrated feminine chastity and fidelity such as Julia in Sheridan Knowles's *The Hunchback* and Pauline in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Lady of Lyons* constituted the dramatic fare that Menken and the Charles Company offered to the citizens of Opelousas. Though Menken received sporadic critical approbation for her performances of these and other repertory favorites with stock companies in Cincinnati, Columbus, Memphis, Nashville, and New Orleans in the early years of her career, she did not gain the frenzied public attention that

⁵⁶ Robert C. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 88-89.

⁵⁷ "Opelousas Varieties," *Opelousas Patriot*, 1 November, 15 November, and 29 November, 1856.

characterized most of her professional life until she debuted as the male title character in *Mazeppa* at the Green Street Theatre in Albany, New York on June 6, 1861.⁵⁸

Menken's role as Mazeppa transformed her from a little known regional stock actress into one of the most famous and highly paid international actresses of her day. Tantalizing spectators with the illusion of nudity in one spectacular scene, and titillating them with her cross-dressed body throughout the entire play, Menken drew on the sexual appeal she had begun to cultivate as a performer with the Charles Company in her early career. Adapted by Henry M. Milner from the poem by Lord Byron, *Mazeppa* tells the story of a Tartar soldier and spy who is discovered by his Polish enemies, stripped, strapped to a wild horse, and sent out into the wilderness to die. Stripped of her overgarments, Menken appeared in a revealing flesh-colored body suit and tightly fitting trunks that simultaneously thrilled and scandalized spectators. The opportunity to see her athletic but curvaceous body brought audience members to the theater in droves, as did the presence of real danger, for after she was stripped, Menken rode a live horse up a forty-foot incline against the backdrop of a moving panorama that suggested a lengthy ride through wild country side. The scene culminates with the horse's collapse and Mazeppa's discovery by a young Tartary girl who brings help for the wounded hero—but only after she has taken time to look in horror at the “cruel thongs” that bind the soldier's body to the steed.⁵⁹ The use of violent, physical force intertwined with the powerful sexual allure vested in Menken's nearly nude body imbued the scene with sadomasochistic overtones that may have simultaneously drawn and repelled audience

⁵⁸ Sentilles, 7, 26, 32-34, 44.

⁵⁹ Henry M. Milner, ed., *Mazeppa*, 1831, adapted from the poem by Lord Byron (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1874; *Literature Online*, 1997), 2.3.161, p. 46 of 70, via Galileo online database, (accessed 11 November, 2003).

members. Furthermore, as biographer Renée Sentilles asserts, the scene was suggestive of rape as the soldiers tied Menken to the horse in spread-eagle fashion, thereby emphasizing her “sexual vulnerability.”⁶⁰ Whether the actress’s sexual attraction or her degradation drew spectators, the drama made Menken into a rich and famous celebrity.

After Menken debuted as Mazeppa in Albany in 1861, she commenced a two-year national tour during which she played the infamous part alongside a few other sensational roles such as the title characters in *The French Spy* (1837) and *Joan of Arc* (1837).

Menken performed in New York, Boston, Washington, D. C., Milwaukee, Baltimore, St. Louis, Louisville, and Cincinnati.⁶¹ In each city, she packed theaters despite the moral outrage of many drama critics and social reformers who feared that her performances would incite unchecked licentious behavior. Indeed, Menken’s portrayal of the Tartar prince revived the tired old drama that had originally debuted in 1833 at New York’s Bowery Theatre. Theatrical companies had long exhausted most of the play’s spectacular appeal with showy moving scenery, throngs of supernumeraries, striking sound effects, and elaborate costumes; but the sheer novelty of seeing a woman perform the lead role, which had not just been played by a man but by a dummy during the stunt scene, extended the life of the show for several more years.⁶²

Performance theorists agree that different audiences interpret dramatic productions in different ways, so northern and southern theatergoers likely brought a variety of understandings to Menken’s appearances in *Mazeppa*.⁶³ In particular, her explicitly sexual performances would have taken on charged meanings in the South, for

⁶⁰ Sentilles, 108.

⁶¹ Ibid., 152.

⁶² Meserve, *Heralds*, 139; Sentilles, 91; Garff B. Wilson, 71.

⁶³ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), 1-31; Frances Teague, *Shakespeare’s Speaking Properties* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991), 1-34.

antebellum white women, the carefully guarded reproductive vessels of their male family lines, were expected to keep their bodies modestly covered, especially from the waist down. Philosopher Michel Foucault explains that deviance procures power for the non-deviant. Furthermore, members of entrenched power structures define and create the aberrance that perpetuates their positions of power.⁶⁴ Hence, when Menken performed in southern cities, her semi-nude appearances could have shored up demands for female chastity by demonstrating that without male supervision, women would stray all too quickly into promiscuous behavior.

As Renée Sentilles points out, however, Menken was taking the country by storm just when it became embroiled in the Civil War. She could bring nudity to America's middle-class theaters because the war was reconfiguring the country's moral, social, and cultural landscape into a "topsy-turvy place" with many new convoluted dips and bends.⁶⁵ While white southerners tenaciously clung to antebellum social codes and practices, they simultaneously saw many of their cherished mores and institutions crumbling under duress. As slaves began to break away from masters, so too did daughters and wives begin to elude the tight grip that fathers and husbands often had on their lives. Judith Butler asserts that when people diverge from constructed gender norms, they can seize agency, contest accepted conventions, and open the door to change.⁶⁶ In this light, Menken's performances in southern cities could also have exposed the artificial construction of gender norms and paved the way for women to break out of the strictures that bound them.

⁶⁴ Foucault, 101-2; 183-84.

⁶⁵ Sentilles, 93.

⁶⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 185-88.

Menken certainly broke these bonds while playing a six-month engagement in Baltimore that began in January 1863. During that time, she thrilled audiences with her performances of *Mazeppa*, *The French Spy*, and a new play entitled *Three Fast Women*. She also won local hearts when she was arrested as a Confederate spy in July 1863, after publicly professing sympathy for the southern cause. Yet these political leanings seemed anachronistic, for when the war began, Menken was living in New York City and published a poem entitled “Pro Patria” that professed Union sympathy. While she was southern by birth, she had lived and worked outside the South for much of her career, and in 1861, she may have felt little connection to the region of her birth. Always willing to reinvent herself to fit new surroundings, Menken might also have gauged the political mood and written the poem to suit the circumstances and simultaneously garner public approbation. Adopting a pro-southern stance in Maryland would likewise enhance her image, for rebel sentiment ran so high in this border state that Lincoln had to impose martial law to stop its secession. Indeed, seeing Menken as a southern Rebel may have allowed spectators in border cities to accept her as a sexual rebel more readily.⁶⁷

By transgressing against antebellum sexual codes and rebelliously showing her body off in public, Menken may have turned the Civil War stage into a place of female agency, but ironically, the theater also became a site of oppressive objectification as spectators came not so much to watch her histrionic skills as they did to see her body. In this way, Menken’s role as *Mazeppa* prefigured the development of sexualized burlesque, which would emerge full blown within a decade and remain an important dramatic form through the 1940s. Initially a popular form of comedy marked by exaggeration and distortion, burlesque had long been featured by antebellum theaters in forms ranging

⁶⁷ Sentilles, 93, 110-11, 166-171.

from parodies to farces to travesties. These offerings might treat a serious subject trivially or a trivial subject seriously; they frequently presented an inverted social order, and they often made fun of sensitive class and gender signifiers. When Laura Keene opened her New York Variety Theatre in 1856, she gave burlesque a primary place, but she also featured women in low-necked dresses and tightly fitting outfits. Keene's shows were the first to merge female spectacle with travesty, thereby paving the way for Menken, who transported *Mazeppa* into the realm of burlesque. Menken inverted the play's melodramatic tradition by usurping the lead part, which had always been played by men, but her faux-nude appearance as the Tartar prince further complicated the performance and introduced the sexual element that would come to characterize the dramatic genre over the next seventy years.⁶⁸

While Menken's staged eroticism attracted playgoers in Baltimore, Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis, her sexually charged performances stood at odds with the virginal images crafted for and by many actresses who performed in other southern cities during the Civil War. Drawing on antebellum ideals that upheld the region's traditional sexual mores, newspapers lauded female performers whom they perceived as simultaneously beautiful and chaste, in their everyday lives and in their stage performances. Thus, the *Montgomery Daily Mail* praised Ida Vernon as an "accomplished and beautiful tragedienne" who upheld a "pure standard of morality" and encouraged readers to attend her performances when she visited Alabama in the fall of 1862. In the same article previewing the dramatic season, the paper promised readers that Eloise Bridges "is model in her character and wins our hearts whilst she enchants our

⁶⁸ Allen, 26-9, 102-8; Harmon and Holman, 72; Sentilles, 16; Garff B. Wilson, 188.

gaze.”⁶⁹ The *Macon Daily Telegraph* echoed these sentiments and pronounced her “entertainments chaste, instructive and amusing.”⁷⁰ And prior to an 1863 performance by the Queen Sisters, the *Southern Field and Fireside* of Augusta, Georgia, noted that the beautiful girls in this family were “respected and esteemed in private life.” Moreover, the reviewer expected “that they will bring with them upon the stage the sterling qualities on which their social standing is based, and that their virtue and excellence will shed their influence on all their dramatic associations. Here, in this Troupe,” he rhapsodized, “we recognize the nucleus of a purifying and elevating power which . . . will prove the inauguration of a new era in the dramatic literature of our young republic.”⁷¹

None of these publications saw any contradiction in praising the physical charms of female performers while simultaneously applauding their chaste modesty, but the refusal to acknowledge the passions and desires that drive the body reflected the heightened confusion that actresses’ public appearances fostered in southern viewers during the turbulent war years. In short, many southern papers praised actresses who they believed continued to uphold conventional, pre-war gender roles. As an 1863 article on the front page of the *Daily Picayune* contended, a good performer and a good play “should incite and awake in the beholder the noblest passions of his soul, and . . . lead the thoughts in an honorable direction.”⁷²

The entertainment that Adah Isaacs Menken offered did not lead the thoughts of her spectators in the honorable direction that the *Picayune* writer had in mind, for she diverged drastically from the Old South’s womanly ideal celebrated in so many

⁶⁹ *Montgomery Daily Mail*, 15 November, 1862, quoted in Fife, 211.

⁷⁰ “The Southern Star,” *Macon Daily Telegraph*, 30 July, 1862.

⁷¹ “Dramatic,” *Augusta Southern Field and Fireside*, 10 January, 1863.

⁷² “Dramatics,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 11 February, 1863.

newspaper pages. Indeed, Menken contrasted with women such as Bridges, Vernon, and the Queen Sisters for her staged sexual shenanigans, her seductive physical appearance, and her private sexual exploits. So notorious were her escapades that some actresses would not risk appearing with her on stage. For instance, New Orleans actress Mary Farren wrote to Sol Smith that she “positively refused to act with her” when the two women were performing in Cincinnati during April of 1863.⁷³ While biographers agree that Menken married several times and took many lovers during her life, they also note that many facts of her personal life are famously murky. As Gregory Eiselein, editor of her poetry and collected letters, *Infelicia and Other Writings*, observes, “when sorting through the facts about her life, an alert skepticism is handy, though perhaps no amount of historical rigor could infallibly separate the facts from the legends that swirl about her.”⁷⁴ The facts have mixed with legend partly because Menken herself promoted different versions of her life and partly because some records simply are not extant. She married five or six times, not always having procured a divorce prior to each new marriage, and she took many lovers, including the poet Charles Swinburne and the novelist Alexandre Dumas, *pere*.⁷⁵ Hence, the sexual freedom that Menken exhibited in her private life paralleled her uninhibited physical performances on stage. Deviating from the ideals expressed by many of the other actresses popular on the South’s stages during the war, Menken drew fascinated theatergoers through a combination of personal scandal and public spectacle. Her appeal confirms that the turmoil of the period

⁷³ Mary Farren to Sol Smith, 4 April, 1863, Sol Smith Collection, Box 4 of 6.

⁷⁴ Gregory Eiselein, ed., Introduction to *Infelicia and Other Writings* by Adah Isaacs Menken (Ontario: Broadview Press, Ltd., 2002), 15.

⁷⁵ Noreen Barnes-McLain, “Bohemian on Horseback: Adah Isaacs Menken” in *Passing Performances: Queer Readings of Leading Players in American Theater History*, eds. Robert A. Schanke and Kim Marra (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), 63-79, see especially p. 65; Eiselein, 17-21; Sentilles, 7, 24-25, 50-51, 124, 162, 229.

produced complex and varying attitudes in the region toward women's sexuality, which the stage in turn reflected in its multiplicity of offerings.⁷⁶

Staging Sex: Acting Masculine

“Again, I stand erect, again assume the godlike attitude of freedom, and of man.”

Mazeppa, *Mazeppa* (1831), 2.5.24, Henry M. Milner

Each time Adah Isaacs Menken played the male role of Mazeppa, she declared herself a man in her lines, in her clothing, and in her actions. By playing a breeches role, or a part originally written for a man, Menken laid bare the fiction of intrinsic or essential gender identity and revealed the porousness of socially constructed gender categories, for the part allowed her to enact characteristics of masculinity while inhabiting a female body. Menken's performances as the Tartar prince grew out of a tradition that stretched back to the English Restoration when theaters had accepted cross-dressing for women in comic roles. Many of these parts were disguise roles (such as Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*) in which a character of one sex takes on the appearance of the opposite sex in hopes of accomplishing an otherwise unattainable goal. Like breeches roles, disguise roles allowed an actress to break the binaries that defined gender categories by enacting characteristics of both femininity and masculinity, for she moved transparently back and forth between the male and female personas of two characters during one play. Tragic cross-dressing gained acceptance in the 1830s, and by the 1840s, well-known actresses such as Ellen Tree and Charlotte Cushman had begun to incorporate tragic breeches roles such as Romeo and Hamlet into their repertoires. On the South's antebellum stage, Julia Dean Hayne and Anne Sefton followed their examples when they

⁷⁶ Sentilles, 21.

too played Romeo.⁷⁷ Southern actresses further collapsed the polarities between femininity and masculinity by playing androgynous stage roles and by displaying liminal sexual attributes in their personal lives.

Though Adah Isaacs Menken's semi-nude appearances as the Tartar prince largely drew spectators interested in ogling her body, Renée Sentilles points out that she also gave them a chance to see a woman unfettered by a corset who could move freely in her guise as a man. Without the physical constrictions of skirts and tightly binding undergarments, theatergoers could also see a woman set free from social constrictions. This liberated stage image mirrored the reality of both northern and southern women's lives as they began to take over tasks that had belonged to husbands and fathers who left for war once it broke out in 1861. Her commanding stage presence as the tenacious Prince Mazeppa, who survives torture, rallies his people, and leads them to victory against the Polish enemy, likely served as an inspiration to the women in the northern and southern audiences who were suddenly faced with the hardship of carrying out their men's work in addition to their own. Seeing another woman succeed in a man's position might have given others hope that they too could prevail against the hardships that faced them.

By divesting herself of a woman's clothing, Menken also stripped herself of garments that Sentilles says "outwardly signified piety, purity, and domesticity, [thereby] leaving only the essential difference of the sexual body beneath the clothing."⁷⁸ That sexual body took on a particularly blurry quality for Menken in her personal life. In

⁷⁷ Koon, *Gold Rush Performers*, 84; Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix, *Wearing the Breeches: Gender on the Antebellum Stage* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 2-6; "New American Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune* 16 December, 1842; Anne Russell, "Gender, Passion, and Performance in Nineteenth-Century Women Romeos," *Essays in Theatre* 11.2 (1993): 153-166, see especially pp. 153-4.

⁷⁸ Sentilles, 105.

1861, she became a part of New York's bohemian intelligentsia, which included the sexually ambiguous poet Walt Whitman and the essayist Ada Clare, who cultivated a masculine persona in her work. During this time, Menken tried to initiate a same-sex relationship with poet Hattie Tyng, and she was also getting involved with newspaper critic Robert Newell.⁷⁹ These off-stage adventures sent mixed messages that paralleled and underscored the confusion generated by her erotic on-stage performances. Though many other actresses who performed on the South's stages portrayed conservative antebellum sexual mores despite changes in gender roles wrought by the war, audiences still came out in droves when Menken passed through the region to watch her sexually charged performances that inverted gender norms and questioned sexual identity. This eager reception once more revealed the complexity of gender relations and theatrical fare in the region during the Civil War.

Menken also used her sexuality to appeal to spectators through illustrations and photography, and she promoted varying printed images of herself, some that emphasized femininity, some that accentuated masculinity, and some that stressed androgyny. In short, Menken performed in photographs and illustrations, just as she did on stage, and she created an array of likenesses that allowed her admirers to choose the image they liked best. Most nineteenth-century theatrical handbills used print in a variety of sizes to attract prospective theatergoers, but advertisements for Menken's breeches performances of *Mazeppa* all pictured her clad in the infamous flesh-colored tights and tightly fitting trunks while strapped to the large black horse. In her case, printing the image was a necessity, for Menken sold her corporeality as much as she sold her stage skills. Thus, the picture appeared along with an announcement for the play in the Louisville

⁷⁹ Barnes-McLain, 63-79; Sentilles, 138-165.

newspaper prior to her performance there in 1862, and the illustration's inclusion marked the first time the paper had ever printed a picture of an actress with a theatrical handbill.⁸⁰

Menken also used professional photography to sell herself. She was one of the first American entertainers to pose for *cartes de visite* or photographic visiting cards that measured approximately six by eight centimeters, which Paris photography studios first introduced in 1854 and sold for the equivalent of twenty-five cents a piece. The technology spread to America by the end of the decade, and Menken scheduled her first photo shoot in 1859, for which she posed as a very androgynous looking French spy in a soldier's uniform. By 1861, American trade in *cartes de visite* had taken off, and studios began mass-producing images of celebrities for consumers to purchase. At the beginning of 1864, fans could purchase at least four different poses of Menken, ranging from a more feminine version of the French spy taken while she was dressed in tights and toga in 1862, to a sensual and exotic Mazeppa shot just before she traveled west in 1864.⁸¹

During Menken's time out west, she had several more *cartes* taken, and these reflect the masculine persona that she adopted offstage while performing in California and Nevada. She continued to blur the boundaries between sexes on her western tour, however, as her onstage performances of *Mazeppa* and *The French Spy* emphasized more than ever her femininity. In the three years that had passed since she began playing *Mazeppa*, Menken had transformed from a boyishly slim girl into a voluptuous young woman, and she took advantage of this change in her body to sell her sexual appeal to the largely male audiences that attended her western shows. Offstage, however, Menken could not compete with the many prostitutes who sold sexual favors, so she chose instead

⁸⁰ Dietz, 92.

⁸¹ Sentilles, 231-9.

to seize the freedom men enjoyed by wearing the breeches when she was not performing. She took to frequenting saloons and gambling halls, and the cross-dressed poses in the *cartes* taken of her during this period reflect the ease with which she passed back and forth between genders, revealing once again that gendered identity offers a range of possibilities rather than a strict binary choice.⁸²

When Menken returned east in May 1864, she stopped briefly in New York before traveling to Europe. She would come back to America for a brief engagement at Woods' Theater in 1866, but she soon set sail once again for the continent. Her second European voyage was her last, for she died on August 10, 1868, in Paris from a hemorrhaging abscess, which she had developed over several years from a series of falls from her horse.⁸³ Though Menken had amazed audiences in several upper South cities during the Civil War with her spectacular stunts, her edgy performances, and her transgressive personal behavior, she never returned to the region after her western tour. Menken had tasted national stardom, and she also wanted to establish herself in the international constellation of performers. While Menken only acted on the South's border-city stages over a three-year period, the ambiguous sexual identity that she cultivated both on and off stage added to the section's social and political turmoil during the Civil War.

Several antebellum actresses had preceded Menken by confusing gender polarities in their stage performances and everyday lives. When these women embodied both physical beauty, which southerners associated with femininity, and intellect, a trait aligned with masculinity, theatergoers had difficulty knowing just how to define them.

⁸² Ibid., 173, 235.

⁸³ Ibid., 255.

For instance, a reviewer for the *Daily Picayune* hardly knew what to make of Anne Waring Sefton's beauty, which was rivaled by her "commanding" presence, self-assured voice, and "cast of mind [which is] of an order almost masculine."⁸⁴ The wide range of roles that she played further complicated her image. For instance, during the 1843 and 1844 New Orleans seasons, she appeared in several parts that shored up feminine obedience including Julia in James Sheridan Knowles's *The Hunchback*, Pauline in Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *The Lady of Lyons*, Juliana in John Tobin's *The Honey Moon*, and Queen Anne in Colley Cibber's version of Shakespeare's *Richard the Third* (1700).⁸⁵ Yet Sefton also performed roles that countered the antebellum feminine ideal. For example, as Shakespeare's Beatrice in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Sheridan's Lady Teazle in *The School for Scandal*, she played verbally able women who could outspar their partners word for word in any argument. Similarly, she enacted Helen, who serves as a foil to Julia, in *The Hunchback*. Helen urges the shyer, more reticent woman to break out of her sheltered surroundings and embrace adventure.⁸⁶

Perhaps the most masculine woman that Sefton played during her two seasons on the New Orleans stage, however, was Helen Macgregor in Isaac Pocock's dramatic adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's novel, *Rob Roy Macgregor*.⁸⁷ Though she does not appear until the third act, Helen figures prominently in the play. Wife of the title character, she leads the Scottish clansmen into battle when the English capture her rebel

⁸⁴ "Mrs. Sefton," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1 March, 1843.

⁸⁵ Although Colley Cibber trimmed many scenes and characters in Shakespeare's *Richard the Third*, he left Queen Anne, King Edward's vulnerable and grieving widow, who emphasizes Richard's malignant and evil character. The ambitious Richard pays suit to Anne over Edward's dead body but later arranges her death. See 2.1, pp.18-25. Notices of Anne Sefton's performances as Queen Anne and other female characters appear in the *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 22 December, 1843; American Theatre advertisements, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 6, 28, 29 February, 4 March, 1844.

⁸⁶ American Theatre advertisements, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 20 December, 1843, 16 February, 5, 20 March, 1844.

⁸⁷ "American Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 8 February, 1844.

husband. Her wisdom, guidance, and steeliness win the day as well as attain the safe return of her spouse. Helen makes a startling first appearance as she bounds on to stage with “a brace of pistols in her belt and wearing a man’s bonnet and tartan plaid.”⁸⁸ Her manly costume sets the tone for her subsequent behavior. After an unsuccessful attempt at negotiation with her English enemies, Helen prepares her clan for the fight and orders them to put all captives to death. During the battle, she joins in the combat alongside her men and gives directions on when to fire. Then, after they have won, she obtains her husband’s release by threatening to send home the enemy captain “bundled in a plaid and chopped into as many pieces as there are checks in the tartan!”⁸⁹

Frances Denny Drake and Jane Placide, who was Anne Waring Sefton’s aunt, also played Helen Macgregor during their careers, so clearly the role resonated with antebellum southerners despite the part’s opposition to the region’s expectations for womanly comportment.⁹⁰ Sefton and her contemporaries might have appealed to theatergoers who likely identified with the beleaguered Scots and saw the actresses who portrayed Helen as champions of southern nationalism. Regional sentiment had begun to run particularly high for southerners in 1819 when New York Representative James Tallmadge proposed an amendment to ban slavery in the new state of Missouri even though more than 2,000 slaves already lived there. Others joined Tallmadge in speaking out against slavery, and white southerners felt their way of life threatened. Henry Clay averted a national crisis in 1820 with the Missouri Compromise, which allowed Missouri to retain slavery and brought in Maine as a free state, but thereafter, southerners fought zealously to maintain a representative balance of free and slave states in Congress. So

⁸⁸ Pocock, p. 77 of 110; see the stage directions.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 3.1.249-50, p. 86 of 110.

⁹⁰ Burroughs, 104; Smither, 37.

while Anne Waring Sefton and the other women who played Helen Macgregor diverged from the antebellum feminine ideal, they could have gained acceptance with theatergoers who ironically saw the actresses as defenders of the region's traditions and values. In Sefton's case, the irony was particularly keen since she grew up in the Northeast and returned home at the end of the 1844 season. Nevertheless, she did possess southern family ties, since her mother, Caroline Placide Waring Blake had grown up in Charleston, and these bonds might have mitigated the possibility of such contradictions.

As manager of the American Theatre during the two seasons she acted in New Orleans, Anne Sefton not only performed masculinity on stage, but also in her daily life. Though the theatrical world offered women more opportunities for advancement than any other nineteenth-century profession, only a few ever rose to the ranks of management. Thus, the mere associations of her job description endowed Sefton with masculine qualities that most other actresses lacked.⁹¹ The *Daily Picayune* registered its bewilderment with her anomalous position when the paper complimented Sefton's excellent management skills but simultaneously marveled at her "rare ability."⁹² By exhibiting traits that southerners perceived as masculine, Anne Sefton exposed the performative nature of gender in her personal life and once again showed the malleability of constructed gender categories.

Charlotte Cushman also drew southerners' attention to the interconnectedness of femininity and masculinity when she toured the region in 1851. Like Anne Sefton, Cushman played a variety of roles that left drama critics reeling in their attempts to characterize her style and to define her sexuality. "Nothing could be more different," the

⁹¹ Mullenix, 103.

⁹² "Mrs. Sefton," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 23 April, 1844.

Daily Picayune remarked, “than Miss Cushman’s appearance as the elegant, witty, splendidly dressed *Lady Teazle* and the terrific hag, shrouded in rags, *Meg Merrilies*.”⁹³ As theater historian Lisa Merrill points out, though, this elusiveness functioned as one of Cushman’s primary assets, for she could hold different meanings for different people. With her numerous female characterizations, she could satisfy those who retained notions of women’s inherent goodness, virtue, and moral influence, but she could also please those who admired female independence and intellect. Cushman’s breeches roles layered even more meanings on her stage persona, for by playing parts written for men, she confused boundaries between maleness and femaleness and simultaneously brought the tension of same-sex desire into her performances. Cushman’s personal sexual orientation as a lesbian further complicated these stagings, although people frequently viewed romantic relationships between women as chaste since they lacked the element of heterosexual desire.⁹⁴

Cushman’s female roles allowed for a multiplicity of interpretations, including some that were conventional and some that were not. As Queen Katherine in Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII* (1613), she played the wronged and long-suffering wife who is thrown aside by her unfaithful husband, while in James Sheridan Knowles’s *The Hunchback*, she acted the pliant and willing daughter, and in Henry Hart Milman’s *Fazio* (1815), she performed the double-crossed Bianca who exposes her husband’s dishonesty and trickery. In each character, which she played while visiting the South in 1851, Cushman embodied the antebellum ideal of womanliness.⁹⁵ With her portrayal of other

⁹³ “Miss Cushman’s Benefit,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 9 February, 1851.

⁹⁴ Lisa Merrill, *When Romeo Was a Woman: Charlotte Cushman and Her Circle of Female Spectators* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), xv-xvii.

⁹⁵ Advertisements for the St. Charles Theatre, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1, 6 February, 1851.

female characters, however, Cushman presented a contrary view of womanhood, which nonetheless intrigued and fascinated her southern audiences. As Meg Merrilies, the old gypsy woman in *Guy Mannering*, for example, she simultaneously personified the nurturing mother and the powerful, knowing mystic. Cushman gave this once minor role major force by endowing Meg with unrelenting energy and by emphasizing the character's supernatural abilities.⁹⁶ The *Daily Picayune* recognized the vibrancy that Cushman brought to the part when its drama reviewer commented on her "forcible style and deep toned manner" and urged readers not to let the chance slip past them to see Cushman in one of her "principal characters."⁹⁷ Her performance elicited a more visceral reaction from a Mobile theatergoer who was enthralled with Cushman's Meg and identified her character with an old vagabond woman named Fifinia. An outcast Other, who foraged along local byways and made her home in the woods, this local vagrant "was the terror of children." Her "ravings [and] her wild demoniac glare would make the blood freeze in the veins," the Mobile spectator declared. "In the character of Meg Merrilies," he marveled, "I can see her [Fifinia] now."⁹⁸

Cushman also gained great renown for her portrayal of Lady Macbeth, who easily rivaled Meg as a frightful character and similarly drew theatergoers attracted by the force of her interpretation. Indeed, the *Daily Picayune* warned spectators prior to a February 1851 performance that Cushman's "idea of the Scotch Medea may not please certain tender hearted listeners and lookers on." Nevertheless, the paper contended that "we think the terrible energy and life she throws into the part . . . far preferable to the

⁹⁶ Faye E. Dudden, *Women in the American Theatre: Actresses and Audiences, 1790-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 87-88.

⁹⁷ "The St. Charles Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 28 January, 1851.

⁹⁸ "Meg Merrilies," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1 February, 1851.

meaningless, imitative, namby-pamby, gingerbread performances that modern stars have too often inflicted on us.”⁹⁹ The downfall that Lady Macbeth suffers might have mitigated Cushman’s commanding performance for her southern audience, or theatergoers may have simply thrilled to watch her murderous antics. As a *Daily Picayune* reviewer noted, in her personations of both Lady Macbeth and Meg Merrilies, “she reigns as mistress of the terrible, the awful, [and] the deep earnest concentration of the wildest passions that burst or craze the brain of man.”¹⁰⁰ While the reviewer used the word man as a generic signifier for humanity, the term is still revealing, for Cushman invested the part with qualities then associated with masculinity. She dominated the stage with her commanding presence and even made some male performers uncomfortable with what they perceived as her lack of femininity. Actor Edwin Forrest, who prided himself on his virility and manliness, for example, particularly disliked Cushman’s interpretation of the Scottish noblewoman, though he asked for her to support him at Princess’s Theatre when the two were acting in London during 1845.¹⁰¹

Cushman also enacted masculinity when she played parts that had been written for men, and these breeches roles won her surprising critical acclaim from audiences in both the North and the South. Acceptance in England, where she made her first cross-dressed appearance as Shakespeare’s Romeo in 1845, likely aided her positive critical reception when she later returned to America in 1849.¹⁰² Whatever prompted the approbation she received in the United States, her breeches roles allowed her to push

⁹⁹ “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 7 February, 1851.

¹⁰⁰ “Miss Cushman’s Benefit,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1 May, 1851.

¹⁰¹ Merrill, 89-91; Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage*, 91.

¹⁰² Merrill, 112-119; Shattuck, *Shakespeare*, 91; Denise A. Walen, “‘Such a Romeo as We Had Never Ventured to Hope For’: Charlotte Cushman,” in *Passing Performances: Queer Readings of Leading Players in American Theater History*, eds. Schanke and Marra, 41-62, see especially pp. 41-2.

rigid gender boundaries even farther than did her portrayal of masculine women. As theater historian Marjorie Garber says, transvestite roles destabilize, question, and invert the norm. Performers who enact cross-dressed characters reveal the fiction of essential identity and show the constructed nature of gender. By putting on another gender, they show that the original one is already an act. They also challenge binary ideas of sexuality and call into question traditional gender categories such as female and male, gay and straight. Instead, cross-dressed roles open what Garber calls “a space of possibility” that both shapes and perplexes culture. Additionally, transvestite parts reveal that gender is contingent upon historical time and place for meaning.¹⁰³ And for women, cross-dressed roles offer a way of appropriating male power and calling for social and political change.¹⁰⁴

With her breeches roles, Cushman accomplished all of these ends, but her masculine-looking physique encouraged audiences to take her seriously and positioned her as an advocate of feminine independence. A tall woman with square shoulders, a robust frame, thick legs, a broad forehead, a prominent chin, and piercing eyes, Cushman lacked the delicate body, the willowy limbs, and the elongated, symmetrical face that nineteenth-century Americans saw as the epitome of feminine beauty. Indeed, actor Joseph Jefferson described her as “tall and commanding in person, with an expressive face, whose features might have been called plain but for the strength and character in them.”¹⁰⁵ Though titillation had drawn plenty of spectators to breeches performances in the early years of the century, Cushman’s mannish and relatively unattractive body

¹⁰³ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 174-75; Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross-Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 10-11, 16-17, 133-34, 147-49; Mullenix, 7-11; Russell, 154.

¹⁰⁴ Mullenix, 2, 12.

¹⁰⁵ Jefferson, 413.

deterred audience members from attending her performances for the promise of glimpsing shapely legs or ankles.¹⁰⁶

Among the many cross-dressed roles Cushman played, three Shakespearean parts stand out as her most famous: Romeo, Hamlet, and Cardinal Wolsey.¹⁰⁷ Since actors impersonated women in female roles on the early modern stage, Cushman's assumption of these characters seems particularly appropriate. Of the three, Romeo was decidedly her most famous part. She appealed to theatergoers as the lovesick lad for a variety of reasons, and this multiplicity of meanings turned Cushman into what Anne Russell calls a "site of contradictions."¹⁰⁸ A teenager who straddles boyhood and manhood, Romeo embodies immaturity, an attribute frequently aligned with nineteenth-century femininity. He cannot contain his passions, amorous or violent, and he acts impulsively.¹⁰⁹ Noah Ludlow remarked that this boyishness made Cushman a fitting choice for the part, and he credited her display of these characteristics with the success she enjoyed while playing Romeo during her 1851 southern tour.¹¹⁰ Romeo, like Hamlet, is also ineffectual, another trait stereotypically associated with nineteenth-century women.¹¹¹ He fans the fires of an on-going feud between his family and the Capulets; he bungles sword fights, and he brings about his own death and that of his lover. Though many theater companies added a surprise happy ending to David Garrick's adaptation and allowed both Romeo and Juliet to live, Cushman chose to follow William Charles Macready's example and restore the original tragic ending, thereby retaining the emphasis on Romeo's

¹⁰⁶ Garff B. Wilson, 96; Johnson, *American Actress*, 114-118; Merrill, 111, 124; Walen, 41.

¹⁰⁷ Merrill, 130-34; Shattuck, *Shakespeare*, 95.

¹⁰⁸ Merrill, 126; Russell, 163.

¹⁰⁹ Koon, *How Shakespeare Won the West*, 98; Merrill, 122; Russell, 161-162.

¹¹⁰ Ludlow, 316.

¹¹¹ Russell, 157-59.

ineffectiveness.¹¹² Again, this trait must have appealed to southerners, for the *Daily Picayune* encouraged theatergoers to “give themselves an intellectual treat” by seeing her perform the part.¹¹³

The New Orleans article provides further insight into Cushman’s appeal as a cross-dressed Romeo, for the paper applauded the amorous “fervor” that she brought to her portrayal of Romeo and noted that she made the play “not only enduring but [also] attractive.” The paper’s language implies that Cushman’s performances could sexually arouse her audiences and suggests her portrayal of the star-crossed lover could even elicit same-sex desire, since spectators included both men and women. Even though women enjoyed close friendships with one another that sometimes included physical affection such as kissing and hugging, many nineteenth-century Americans could not separate women’s sexuality from reproduction and were largely unconscious of the physical intimacy that characterized lesbian relationships.¹¹⁴ This ignorance does not mean that same-sex relationships did not exist, however, nor does this lack of knowledge discredit the covertly erotic appeal of cross-dressed roles.¹¹⁵ After all, an actress such as Cushman may have been costumed as a man, but she was still a woman making love to another woman. Theater historians and drama theorists such as John Berger, Faye Dudden and Laura Mulvey have argued that the mere presence of female performers—on stage or on film—turns them into objects of male sexual fantasy and scopophilic or visual pleasure.¹¹⁶ More recently, however, scholars such as Amy Kaplan and Judith Mayne

¹¹² Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage*, xi, 92.

¹¹³ “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 25 January, 1851.

¹¹⁴ D’Emilio and Freedman, 121-126.

¹¹⁵ Garber, 70; Merrill, 136; Walen, 56.

¹¹⁶ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972), 64; Dudden, 2-8, 64; Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Feminism and Film*

have pointed out that the view of female audience members makes what earlier writers had termed the “male gaze” a misnomer.¹¹⁷ Thus, acknowledging a female gaze allows for recognition of lesbian overtones in Cushman’s acting and opens her performances to broader interpretation. In later work, Laura Mulvey concedes that she originally overlooked the implications of female spectator presence and acknowledges that erotic portrayals of actresses can make some women in the audience “restless” and uncomfortable by forcing them to become same-sex voyeurs.¹¹⁸

Women’s attendance at the antebellum theater rose slowly from small numbers in 1800. Nevertheless, their presence allowed female spectators to experience same-sex scopophilic pleasure in watching actresses such as Charlotte Cushman perform on stage. Theater historian Richard Butsch explains that women constituted a large part of the colonial theatrical audience; but during the Jacksonian age, many playhouses became masculine spaces, and the few women who attended were prostitutes interested in snaring customers from the male clientele. Claudia Johnson agrees with Butsch, but she says that in some places, “the guilty third tier” began to pass out of existence as early as 1831, and by the 1850s, most theaters had done away with this phenomenon. Rosemarie Bank corroborates Johnson’s conclusions and asserts that some of the unescorted females who attended the theater in Jacksonian American were working-class women who were confused with prostitutes because they could not afford to buy tickets outside of the third tier. Faye Dudden further muddies the picture by noting that some respectable women

Theory, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 57-68, see especially pp. 62-67; Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 14-26.

¹¹⁷ E. Ann Kaplan, “Is the Gaze Male?” in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 119-138, see especially p. 122; Judith Mayne, “Lesbian Looks: Dorothy Azner and Female Authorship,” in *Feminism and Film*, ed. E. Ann Kaplan, 159-180, see especially, p. 170.

¹¹⁸ Laura Mulvey, “Afterthoughts on ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ Inspired by *Duel in the Sun*,” in *Feminism and Film Theory*, ed. Constance Penley (New York: Routledge, 1988), 69-79, see especially p. 79.

did attend the theater in the early century, and even though they were outnumbered by men, their presence turned the playhouse into “a contested arena where men were dominant but never in control.”¹¹⁹ Ludlow and Smith’s desire to draw a more respectable patronage to their St. Louis theater corroborates Dudden’s argument. The managers not only banned women of the evening from their theater, but they also built a retiring room for escorted ladies in 1837. During the first three decades of the nineteenth century, however, most women of good standing only attended the theater when accompanied by chaperones, and they usually sat in reserved boxes, avoiding both the low-cost pit, which drew rowdy, lower-class spectators as well as the third-floor gallery.¹²⁰

To attract more respectable women and thereby upgrade their public reputations, theaters began reconfiguring their interiors in the 1840s to make them more appealing. They renamed the working-class pit the parquet and replaced the moveable benches with seats, which were bolted to the floor and could not be moved around at random. Theaters also began calling the gallery the family circle, banned prostitutes, and called for more decorum and polite manners during performances. Moreover, they introduced matinee performances in the 1850s, which appealed to women, who could not go out unescorted at night. All of these measures increased female theater attendance, but as an 1862 complaint in Atlanta’s *Southern Confederacy* reveals, the changes could not always ensure the desired effect. “Frequently there has been seen at the [Crisp’s] Atheneum,” lamented the paper, “Cyprians seated about promiscuously in the audience, and

¹¹⁹ Dudden, 5.

¹²⁰ Rosemarie K. Bank, “Staging Gender: Women Audience Members in the Antebellum American Theatre,” *Theatre Symposium* 9 (1993): 65-73; Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 66-80; Johnson, “That Guilty Third Tier,” 575-84.

sometimes on the same seat with respectable and unconscious families.”¹²¹ The editor’s solution was to resurrect the guilty third tier for the licentious women who insisted on attending alongside the respectable clientele. Though prostitutes openly attended some theaters during the Civil War, in the post-bellum period, theaters redoubled their efforts to reach out to respectable women, and by the late 1860s, women began to outnumber men at some performances.¹²²

Faye Dudden attributes this audience shift to the widespread popularity and fame of actresses such as Charlotte Cushman. Robert Butsch suggests that even controversial actresses such as Adah Isaacs Menken and later, Lydia Thompson, drew women to their performances because they admired their “voluptuous beauty” and “new assertive femininity.”¹²³ Even regional actresses attracted a loyal female following. For instance, the New Orleans *Picayune* reported on an “array of beauty and fashion” seen at one of Charlotte Barnes Conner’s 1837 performances at the St. Charles Theatre, and when the same theater was rebuilt in 1843, the paper noted that “a large number of ladies” turned out to watch Mary Farren and Caroline Chapman in *The Honey Moon*.¹²⁴ Farren continued to draw well, for the *Daily Picayune* assured readers that “many ladies were present” at her November 30 benefit in 1850, and among these were many of her old friends.¹²⁵ Traveler Anton Reiff confirmed architectural changes made theaters more welcoming for women spectators when he attended the opera in New Orleans on a visit there in 1856 and observed “ladies in the theatre were dressed magnificently” and seated

¹²¹ *Atlanta Southern Confederacy*, 29 August, 1862, quoted in Fife, 168.

¹²² Butsch, 66-80.

¹²³ Butsch, 77; Dudden, 77.

¹²⁴ “Miss Charlotte Barnes,” *New Orleans Picayune*, 11 February, 1837; “New St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 19 January, 1843.

¹²⁵ “Mrs. Farren,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 30 November, 1850.

in the “parterre,” a balcony tier adjacent to the private boxes.¹²⁶ A similar remodeling of the Mobile Theatre in 1841 caused the *Commercial Register and Patriot* to boast that “The dress circle is better suited to receive our lovely belles and dames, our dashing beaus and intelligent citizens, than that of any theatre we have seen in the South.”¹²⁷ While actresses might have elicited only a benign admiration in some women who attended Old South theaters, they might have aroused same-sex desire in others, particularly when performers such as Charlotte Cushman cross-dressed and enacted breeches roles.

The same-sex eroticism that imbued Cushman’s portrayal of Romeo and other breeches characters reflected her personal sexuality manifested in the long-term relationships she sustained with other women during her life. Rosalie Sully was her first love. The daughter of portrait artist Thomas Sully, Rosalie was also an artist, and Cushman met her at the Sully home in 1843 when she visited there for a series of portrait sittings. The two maintained a deeply intimate relationship until Rosalie’s death in 1849. Charlotte was performing in England at the time, but a passionate correspondence documents their deep feelings and reveals the difficulty they had living apart when Cushman went abroad. After Sully died, Cushman met and fell in love with another actress, Matilda Hays. The two lived together in what Elizabeth Barrett Browning disapprovingly called a “female marriage” for ten years before their relationship fell apart and they separated.¹²⁸ Emma Stebbins, a sculptor whom Cushman met in Rome, proved to be the actress’s most stable companion, for the two maintained a committed twenty-

¹²⁶ Anton Reiff Journal, Mss. 3274, Booklet 2, Hill Memorial Library Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana, p. 22 (hereafter cited as Reiff Journal)

¹²⁷ *Mobile Commercial Register and Patriot*, 11 November, 1841, quoted in Bailey, 45.

¹²⁸ Mullenix, 225.

year relationship that ended only with Cushman's death in 1876.¹²⁹ Cushman's off-stage desire for other women may have prompted her to play roles that allowed her to express a similar desire on stage. As Elizabeth Mullenix contends, "Through Romeo, Cushman could express her passion for women without condemnation."¹³⁰

Cushman not only cross-dressed as a man on stage, she also dressed as a man off stage occasionally, and this desire to experience life from the perspective of both sexes allowed her to create what Elizabeth Mullenix calls a third, androgynous sex.¹³¹ Yet her androgyny endowed her with a subversive liminality, which limited her not just to the representation of two or three sexes but allowed her to embody a range of sexes all at once. The *Daily Picayune* described her portrayal of Lady Gay Spanker in Dion Bouicault's *London Assurance* (1840) as "half masculine [and] half feminine," but as an androgyne, Cushman could cross otherwise unassailable boundaries.¹³² She once said that playing Romeo gave her a chance to fight a "real duel," and in the same way, dressing as a man in daily life gave her the opportunity to play the part of a "real" man.¹³³ But of course, she was actually a woman in man's clothes, and if her on-stage transvestism implicitly called attention to the contingency of sex and gender, her off-stage cross-dressing explicitly suggested that women could rewrite the scripts that governed their lives and allow them to be whatever they wanted.¹³⁴ Some people found this message so threatening that Cushman sometimes suffered public censure, as an 1849 letter to Ludlow and Smith from W. Corbyn, a Philadelphia theater manager, indicates.

¹²⁹ Walen, 52-3.

¹³⁰ Mullenix, 228.

¹³¹ Ibid., 187.

¹³² "London Assurance," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 2 February, 1851.

¹³³ LaSalle Corbell Pickett, *Across My Path: Memories of People I Have Known* (New York: Brentano's, 1916), 23.

¹³⁴ Mullenix, 100.

Corbyn warned the partners that while performing in the city of brotherly love, Cushman had been “abusively attacked” not only for her dress but also for her unorthodox social life.¹³⁵ Her subsequent success on the English stage must have mitigated any fears the southern managers had for bringing the star to their own theaters, however, and Ludlow later wrote in his autobiography that she turned out to be the “great card of the [1851] season.”¹³⁶

While Charlotte Cushman’s on- and off-stage cross-dressing clearly signified her same-sex desires, Marjorie Garber cautions against assuming that all stage performers who take on transvestite roles are gay, and her caveat holds true for many other actresses who wore the breeches in the antebellum South.¹³⁷ While an actress’s heterosexual status does not erase the possibility that she can arouse same-sex desire in female audience members, many straight actresses who wore the breeches also used their transvestite performances to arouse and excite male audience members through the risqué show of their bodies in male clothes. Others foreshadowed Cushman in using their cross-dressed parts to establish themselves as legitimate performers of male roles, but all who wore the breeches on stage in some way or another used their male roles to gain a measure of independence and liberty for themselves.

Eliza Arnold Poe was one of the first actresses to bring cross-dressed roles to the southern stage when she performed Little Pickle in *The Spoiled Child* at the Charleston Theatre in November 1797. An unruly prankster who plays a string of practical jokes on his family and friends, Little Pickle dominated the farce with his shenanigans and was

¹³⁵ W. Corbyn to Ludlow and Smith, 20 November, 1849, Ludlow-Field-Maury Papers, Box 4 of 17.

¹³⁶ Ludlow, 713.

¹³⁷ Garber, 5, 69, 131.

therefore a highly sought-after role for actresses to play. Though Eliza Arnold Poe first performed the part in the South, a line of distinguished actresses had played the character in London and New York, including Maria Therese De Camp Kemble and Clara Fisher Maeder. Despite some press criticism for the “uncouthness of [her] costume” and concern that Eliza Poe belonged to “a class of beings termed hermaphroditical,” she gave the role a central place in her repertory, for audiences responded with resounding approval, the part was substantial, and it showcased her comic acting skills.¹³⁸ Critical disapproval for Poe’s transvestite role reveals, however, that portrayals of ambiguous sexuality could unsettle and challenge conventional ideas of the sexes as polar opposites. Speculation that Poe was actually an hermaphrodite, or an intersexual who possessed the physical attributes of both Hermes and Aphrodite, representative male and female Greek deities, underscores this anxiety but simultaneously shows the spectrum of sexual identities that one actress could represent. Clearly approbation for her part in *The Spoiled Child* prevailed, for even after she ventured into tragedy and began to play more conventional, female roles such as Ophelia, Cordelia, and Juliet, Eliza kept Little Pickle in her offerings.¹³⁹

Jane Placide followed Eliza Poe by combining feminine and masculine attributes in her stage roles. When she first began acting for James Caldwell’s New Orleans theatrical company in 1823, she played the manly Helen Macgregor in Isaac Pocock’s *Rob Roy Macgregor* as well as Volante, who disguises herself as a boy, in John Tobin’s *The Honey Moon*.¹⁴⁰ She also undertook an array of breeches roles in minor

¹³⁸ Mullenix, 269.

¹³⁹ Prince Hoare, *The Spoiled Child* (London: John Miller, n.d.), see remarks, pp. 3-11, microopaque (New York: Readex Microprint, 1982); Mullenix, 41-7; Silverman, 4; Gedde Smith, 24, 38.

¹⁴⁰ Playbills for *The Honey Moon* (1827) and *Rob Roy Macgregor* (1827), Kuntz Collection.

melodramas, including Paul in Mordecai M. Noah's *The Wandering Boys* (1821) and Edmond in William Dunlap's *The Blind Boy* (1808). Over the next few years, she added Florio in Thomas Dibdin's *Forest of Bondy* (1777) and Theodore in John Poole's *Frederick the Great* (1821), as well as Aladdin in the George Soan's opera (1826) by the same title.¹⁴¹ Given Placide's sexual appeal to Edwin Forrest and James Caldwell, her appearance in man's clothing likely titillated the spectators who came to see her in these breeches roles, but her business acumen and independence also give credence to the possibility that she played these parts for the independence they brought her.

The French ballerina, Madame Celeste, next exposed antebellum southerners to cross-dressed characters when she played male leads in two pantomime dramas entitled *The French Spy* and *The Moorish Page* (n. d.) when she toured the region during 1837 and 1839.¹⁴² Since Celeste's work as a dancer emphasized her body, so too did her pantomime breeches roles. Nevertheless, she brought to her male roles the same romanticism that made her ballet dancing nymph-like and ethereal, thereby playing down the explicit sexual appeal of her act.¹⁴³ Celeste's use of her body to appeal to spectators, while failing to transgress against conventional mores, earned her the approbation of Noah Ludlow, who was an outspoken critic of breeches roles. He called them "monstrosities" and "objects of repugnance" in his autobiography; yet he praised Celeste as "the most gifted lady in her peculiar line of work," and he even noted without negative comment an occasion when she appeared as Myrtillo, another minor breeches part, while

¹⁴¹ Burroughs, 36-39, 62-63, 85.

¹⁴² Advertisements for the Mobile Theatre, *Mobile Commercial Register*, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 14 April, 1837; Advertisements for the New Orleans St. Charles Theatre, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 7, 8, 12, 19 March, 1837, 9, 14, 19, 23, 26, March, 1839, 24 April, 1839.

¹⁴³ Allen, 89-90.

visiting Louisville in 1829.¹⁴⁴ Though Madame Celeste strove to endow her cross-dressed pantomime characters with the same innocence and sexlessness that characterized her female ballet parts, both sorts of roles still relied on her body for their appeal. Her work helped prompt the rise of sexualized burlesque, which Adah Isaacs Menken also precipitated when she played male characters from plays such as *The French Spy* that Celeste had first made popular.

At the same time that Madame Celeste was playing spies and pages and offering southern audiences glimpses of her legs, Charlotte Barnes was giving them the chance to see hers in the guise of a pirate. The Barnes family unveiled Charlotte's drama *Lafitte, the Pirate of the Gulf* at the St. Charles theater in New Orleans during the spring of 1837, and Charlotte herself chose to play the title role.¹⁴⁵ Since the Barneses staged *Lafitte* for their benefit, their decision to cast Charlotte as the male lead was not quite so unusual, as performers frequently selected daring plays or parts that would attract many spectators and ensure a large profit. Charlotte's performance must have resonated particularly well with theatergoers, however, for she reappeared as Lafitte the next month and then again three times when the family returned in April of 1840.¹⁴⁶ Writing and starring in a play about the exploits of the famed buccaneer might have been a way for Charlotte to seize some personal agency and escape the confining guidance and control of her parents. Moreover, in her role as the swash-buckling seaman, she confused the feminine persona that accompanied her portrayal of characters in plays such as *The Hunchback*, *Love*, *The Honey Moon*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *The Belle's Stratagem*.

¹⁴⁴ Ludlow, 462; 362.

¹⁴⁵ Advertisement for the St. Charles Theatre, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 16 April, 1837.

¹⁴⁶ Advertisements for the St. Charles Theatre, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 25 April, 1837; 21, 22, 24 April, 1840.

Ellen Tree Kean also disoriented traditional definitions of female sexuality by exhibiting both feminine and masculine traits in the three decades that she visited the Old South's stages. Her repertory consisted of a variety of roles, including both disguise and breeches parts. When Tree debuted in 1822 at Covent Garden as Viola in *Twelfth Night*, she was seventeen years old. Over the next sixteen years, she tried playing verbally witty parts in sparkling Restoration comedies such as Lady Teazle in Richard Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, but she found more success performing young, idealistic characters, male or female, who enchanted audiences with depictions of heartfelt romanticism. Tree's performances of these character types, which included Viola, Rosalind, Romeo, and her signature Ion, the title male character in the play by Thomas Talfourd (1835), brought her overwhelming success when she first toured America in 1838.¹⁴⁷ An Oedipus-like character who heroically leads a successful uprising against a despotic king, Ion learns too late that the tyrant is his father and tragically kills himself at the end of the play.¹⁴⁸

Tree possessed the qualities that southerners associated with feminine beauty, and though she also played male roles, she invested them with a feminine quality that endeared her to antebellum playgoers. She chose to play Pauline in *The Lady of Lyons* for her opening performance of 1839 in New Orleans, and the *Daily Picayune* encouraged theatergoers to see for themselves this "exquisitely feminine" actress who was also "electrifying" in the energy she brought to her acting.¹⁴⁹ The same conventional femininity that infused Tree's Pauline also permeated her Viola, Ion, and Romeo when

¹⁴⁷ Joy Reilly, "Miss Ellen Tree (1805-1880): An Actress Overlooked of the Noble Art of Suffering," *Theatre Studies* 26-27 (1979-80 / 1980-81): 21-34, see especially pp. 21, 28-29.

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Noon Talfourd, *Ion* (London: A. J. Valpy, 1835; *Literature Online*, 1994), via Galileo online database (accessed 3 September, 2004); Reilly, 28.

¹⁴⁹ "Ellen Tree," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 16 January, 1839.

she brought these characters to the Crescent City stage.¹⁵⁰ Mobilians received her just as enthusiastically a month later. The *Commercial Register and Patriot* not only praised her beauty but also her talent when the paper likened her to a “true glass that throws back from its polished surface every curve and tint the most delicate and minute of objects.”¹⁵¹

Though Ellen Tree wore the breeches on stage but still upheld southerners’ most cherished ideals of femininity, she shattered that illusion by metaphorically wearing the breeches off stage. While still unmarried, Tree made most of her own engagement arrangements for her 1838 tour, and when she returned home to England as an international star in 1839, she negotiated a significant pay increase for herself, moving from twenty-five pounds a week to twenty-five pounds a night. After she married Charles Kean in 1842, Ellen continued in her role as self-appointed manager and handled many of the couple’s business arrangements. She frequently corresponded with theater managers to arrange tour schedules and to bargain for pay terms. Ellen also used her considerable renown to promote her husband’s career, and she exercised great influence over his acting style and repertory.¹⁵²

Eliza Logan Wood confused notions of fixed gender identity by including a few breeches roles in her repertory, but her cerebral style and her large physique further muddled distinctions between femininity and masculinity. Aside from playing the usual melodramatic and Shakespearean roles then popular for women, Logan followed the example of Eliza Arnold Poe and occasionally played Little Pickle, but more often, she

¹⁵⁰ Advertisements for The St. Charles Theatre, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 22, 23 January, 23, 27 February, 1839.

¹⁵¹ *Mobile Commercial Register and Patriot*, 16 February, 1838, quoted in Bailey, p. 80.

¹⁵² Ellen Tree Kean to Sol Smith, 10 August, 1848, Mss. Y.C. 402 (41), Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C.; Reilly, 21, 29.

emulated Ellen Tree Kean by performing Ion.¹⁵³ Though Ellen Tree originally played the part to show off her youthful form, Eliza Logan took on the character for its tragic appeal. Logan was fat, and her corpulence simply precluded attracting an audience with the promise of a bodily show. Logan's father railed against spectators' penchant for pretty faces at the expense of dramatic talent when he saw how readily his lovely daughter Celia was received by spectators when she debuted in 1852. "How different from poor Eliza," he recounted, "who had to toil step by step, fighting manfully against physical defects until with incredible labor she has reached her present position."¹⁵⁴ The manful nature that Eliza's father so admired and the physical defects that he could overlook were more objectionable to others, as Noah Ludlow revealed when he bluntly recalled that "she was too short and had an inclination to be fat that hindered her from being a great tragedienne."¹⁵⁵ Eliza Logan's great success in the 1850s undercut Ludlow's assessment of her talent, but her father's lamentations still convey the pain caused by spectators who were fixated on women's corporeality. Summing up this frustration concisely, Cornelius ranted, "Alas that beauty should prevail over genius!"¹⁵⁶

Actresses continued to muddle southerners' views of gendered identity by playing cross-dressed roles during the war, and sometimes actors in their troupes joined in the antics. While Adah Isaacs Menken was dressing up as Mazeppa for spectators in border-state cities, other performers were confounding theatergoers in New Orleans, Mobile, Savannah, and Augusta with their male personations. Mary Provost and Mary Gladstone,

¹⁵³ Advertisement for The St. Charles Theatre, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 23 November, 1854; Blackburn, Appendices B, C; Yeomans, 127.

¹⁵⁴ C. A. Logan to Sol Smith, 2 September, 1850, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

¹⁵⁵ Ludlow, 718.

¹⁵⁶ C. A. Logan to Sol Smith, 2 September, 1850, Sol Smith Collection, Box 5 of 6.

local New Orleans stock actresses, and the men in the Waldron family all took on disguise roles as part of their standard repertory offerings.

Mary Provost performed at The St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans during the winter of 1865 played the lead in a play called *Robert Brierly* (n. d.) several times in January, and the *Daily Picayune* recognized her sexual flexibility when the paper called her a “versatile actress” with “Protean abilities.”¹⁵⁷ Provost also employed that protean skill when she played the Countess in Sheridan Knowles’s *Love*. Like Julia Dean Hayne before the war, Provost revealed the precarious nature of gendered identity through this character, for the Countess disguises herself as another woman, Catherine, who in turn dresses as a man so that she can gain the confidences of her prospective suitors and learn their true motives for winning her hand. Though spectators know her guise is a ruse, the Countess’s successful impersonation of the cross-dressing Catherine still challenges the rigidity of gender categories.¹⁵⁸ The *Daily Picayune* revealed that myopia can obscure this understanding when the paper advertised Provost as “nature’s great delineator,” but if she delineated nature, she could not portray two people at once, especially if one were a man and one a woman.¹⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the trite accolade reflected the Aristotelian view of art as mirror to nature that theatergoers still frequently cherish, and the proclamation allowed spectators to dismiss any unsettling confusion brought about by Provost’s jumbled pictures of gendered identity.

¹⁵⁷ “Amusements,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 18, 20 January, 1865.

¹⁵⁸ Knowles, *Love*, 5.1, pp. 82-99 of 99. A February 13, 1855 broadside for a performance of *Love* at The New Orleans St. Charles Theatre lists Julia Dean Hayne starring as the Countess; see St. Charles Theatre Broadside, Mss. 586, Hill Memorial Library Special Collections, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

¹⁵⁹ “Amusements,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1, 5 January, 1865.

While Mary Gladstane, another popular Crescent City actress who performed at the Varieties Theatre throughout the war, never performed breeches roles, she still blurred lines between masculinity and femininity with the contrasting characterizations that she included in her repertory. Gladstane played many traditional feminine melodramatic roles that featured loving and obedient wives, such as Parthenia in Friedrich Halm's *Ingomar the Barbarian*, romantic and mythic female characters such as the Naiad Queen in a drama by the same name, and repentant womanly parts such as Mrs. Simon Lullaby in Silas Sexton Steele's farce, *A Conjugal Lesson* (1859) or Mrs. Haller in Kotezebue's *The Stranger*.¹⁶⁰ Yet she also played the manly Helen Macgregor in *Rob Roy Macgregor* as well as parts in three military dramas, Charles Reade's *The Ladies' Battle* (1859), Dion Boucicault's *Jessie Brown, or The Relief of Lucknow* (1858), and John Maddison Morton's *The Midnight Watch* (184?).¹⁶¹ Moreover, Gladstane crossed gender boundaries when she played the changeable Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, though the *Daily Picayune* did assure readers that she was "more heartily womanly" in this part than in any other role she regularly performed.¹⁶²

These reassurances of Gladstane's womanliness might have reflected southerners' bewilderment in the face of changing gender roles and presaged rhetoric that advocated women's return to domesticity even though some businesses and the Confederate government relied more and more on female labor as the war progressed. The March 25, 1865, *Daily Picayune* nicely illustrates this contradiction. While the front page

¹⁶⁰ Advertisements for the Varieties Theatre, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 11, 13, 20 January, 1863; "The Varieties," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 1, 7 February, 9 March, 1863; "The Varieties Last Night," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 8 January, 1863.

¹⁶¹ Advertisements for The Varieties Theatre, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 8, 15 January, 3 February, 1863; "The Varieties," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 25 January, 3, 6, 20 February, 1863.

¹⁶² "Amusements," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 4 February, 1865; "Mrs. Gladstane's Benefit," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 8 March, 1863; quotation in "The Varieties Last Night," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 14 March, 1863.

pronounced that “woman is never so amiable as when she is . . . engaged in the useful offices of homes and family,” an article on page two announced that the Confederacy would now pay women as much as men to work as clerks in the clothing branch of the quartermaster’s department, to serve as ward matrons and nurses in hospitals, and to manufacture cartridges.¹⁶³ Ideals of feminine behavior died hard, but necessity compelled a different reality. Like their stage counterparts, the women who took men’s jobs befuddled conventional notions of gendered identity and unsettled champions of a mythical Old South in which men and women occupied separate spheres and possessed intrinsic natures unaffected by social, economic, or political forces.

Two of John Hill Hewitt’s plays performed by the Waldron family further illustrate the contingency of gender during the war. *The Marquis in Petticoats* and *The Battle of Leesburg* both feature men who cross-dress as women to accomplish political ends. The Waldrons first performed *The Marquis in Petticoats* for theatergoers in Augusta and Savannah in the spring of 1863.¹⁶⁴ The play features a nobleman who dresses as a woman to spy on a prospective mate for his sovereign, whereas *The Battle of Leesburg*, which they staged in Richmond the previous year, includes a Confederate sympathizer who disguises himself as a woman to escape from a Union prison. While donning a woman’s clothes would generally signify emasculation for a southern man, the characters in Hewitt’s plays did not seem to have suffered this stigma in the eyes of spectators. Reviewing the troupe’s rendering of *The Marquis*, for example, The *Savannah Daily Morning News* reported that “the evening went off to the perfect

¹⁶³ “Female Labor,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 25 March, 1865.

¹⁶⁴ Fife, 231-32, 237-240.

satisfaction of the audience.”¹⁶⁵ The nobleman in the play uses his female garb to provide his country with an unsullied vessel who can guarantee the continuation of a legitimate paternal royal line, a goal that most white southerners would have found admirable. Likewise, Arthur Snowden, the Confederate prisoner in *The Battle of Leesburg*, would have generated sympathy rather than ridicule when he put on his womanly clothing to escape the hated Yankee enemy. In the same way that cross-dressing actresses unsettled traditional notions of gender and sexuality, though, so too did transvestite actors. Even if theatergoers did not consciously recognize the subversion of identity that occurred when the Waldron men performed in clothing belonging to the opposite sex, an inversion still took place and implicitly made pliable gender roles that southerners had viewed as stiff and unbending.

When the Waldrons dressed up as women in 1862 and 1863, they did not know that their performances would foreshadow the experience of Confederate President Jefferson Davis, who was reportedly wearing his wife’s cloak when he was captured on May 10, 1865, by the Michigan Cavalry in rural South Georgia. A dispatch describing the event in *The New York Times* five days later unleashed a flood of cartoons that depicted Davis dressed in women’s garments that ranged from crinolines to hoopskirts to a petticoat and bonnet as he met his Union captors. Northerners relished the images, for as historian Nina Silber says, they proved the falseness of southerners’ manly courage and military prowess and gave them an opportunity to laugh at their bumbling southern enemies. While the pictures of Davis made the region a laughing stock, however, they nicely mirrored the confusion of sexuality that women had been portraying on the antebellum stage since the beginning of the century. The cross-dressed cartoons of the

¹⁶⁵ “Theatre,” *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 24 March, 1863.

president also underscored the tension that characterized relationships between men and women as gender roles fell into disarray and confusion during the war.¹⁶⁶

Conclusion

The shifting representation of sexuality that actresses brought to the South's antebellum and Civil War stages implicitly confronted viewers with the fiction of gendered identity by showing that masculine and feminine roles are corporeal styles, which people put on and outwardly enact through repeated performative gestures. Actresses' multiple manifestations of staged sexuality also unveiled the fiction of traditional binaric sexual classifications by showing that sexual identity spans an infinite number of possibilities. While the charged sexuality that many actresses brought to their performances made them objects of spectator fantasy, objectification did not necessarily limit their agency. By enacting modes of behavior associated with particular constructions of sexuality, Judith Butler says individuals can control and contest the stereotypes aligned with gendered identity.¹⁶⁷ Actresses who performed on the South's antebellum and Civil War stages bear out Butler's contentions, for they enacted themselves both on and off stage as sexual beings who defied the region's constructions of sexual identity.

Antebellum and Civil War actresses who used their sexuality to procure personal agency and autonomy prefigured post-bellum actresses who performed in vaudeville halls and sexually charged, all-girl burlesque reviews. Vaudeville acts played daily in theaters that emphasized their respectability and changed their offerings once a week; these performances attracted middle-class spectators who saw themselves as morally upright,

¹⁶⁶ Nina Silber, *The Romance of Reunion: Northerners and the South, 1865-1900* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 29-38.

¹⁶⁷ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, xxiv, 187-88.

whereas burlesque acts took place in more questionable venues and drew audiences that represented a wider range of classes.¹⁶⁸ Since women who acted in vaudeville shows and burlesque reviews established themselves as passive objects of desire while simultaneously asserting their individuality and relishing their sexuality, these performances, like those Old South and Civil War plays that had emphasized female sexuality, acted dually as sites of repression and agency. Thus, vaudeville and burlesque actresses followed the example of antebellum actresses by allowing themselves to become objects of a prurient male (or female) gaze while concurrently asserting independence and command over their own bodies.¹⁶⁹

Though Sarah Bernhardt was a performer of elite, high drama rather than vaudeville or burlesque, historian Susan Glenn contends that she stands out as the most transgressive of all post-bellum actresses, for Bernhardt helped to form the imagination of late nineteenth-century Americans by consciously resisting traditional ideas of femininity and defying gendered conventions. Like her predecessors, Adah Isaacs Menken and Charlotte Cushman, Bernhardt appealed to spectators through her sexually explicit performances and mesmerizing dramatic techniques. Critics praised Bernhardt for her portrayal of womanly, feminine parts, but she confounded this perception by enacting masculinity, for she also won acclamation with her portrayal of cross-dressed roles, especially her rendition of Hamlet. Bernhardt's on-stage gender-bending recalled Menken's and Cushman's, but her off-stage behavior paralleled theirs as well, for she was also known as a sexual libertine and an outspoken social critic. Bernhardt toured the

¹⁶⁸ Steve Goodson, *Highbrows, Hillbillies, and Hellfire: Public Entertainment in Atlanta, 1880-1930* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 2002), 69-70.

¹⁶⁹ Glenn, 3-7.

Southeast on her first American tour in 1881, but her fame had spread to the region well before her arrival, and southerners packed theaters to see her.¹⁷⁰

Though she was French, Sarah Bernhardt raised new and exciting possibilities for American women, who came to admire her beauty and revere her independence on the many tours she made between 1881 and 1905; in short, she encapsulated the idea of the “New Woman,” the popular term given to women who rejected traditional gender roles and social codes as they were advocating for women’s rights and working for social reform.¹⁷¹ Writer Kate Chopin helped introduce the “New Woman” to southerners with her fiction, which centered around women who desired an equal and active part in public life. Chopin’s novels *At Fault* (1890) and *The Awakening* (1899) feature strong-willed female protagonists who break away from the controlling men who govern their lives, begin to make their own decisions, and take control of their sexuality. While many reviewers found Chopin’s fiction shocking and vulgar, her work, like the dramatic presentations of Bernhardt and her mass-cultural sisters in vaudeville and burlesque, continued the trajectory begun by actresses who had performed on the antebellum and Civil War stages by confronting the region with its stultifying view of sexuality and treatment of women.

¹⁷⁰ Glenn, 11-32; Goodson, 32.

¹⁷¹ Glenn, 6.

CHAPTER 5: ACTING RACY

“Sometimes I think you may have had another one to love than Miami—
one of your own race.”

Miami, *The Green Bushes* (1845), 2.1.119, John Baldwin Buckstone

Though white actresses dominated women’s roles on the nineteenth-century southern stage, they enacted a variety of racial identities through the many parts that they performed. In the antebellum period, for instance, white women played parts as African Americans, Native Americans, and indigenous people from faraway places and times such as medieval Tartary and seventeenth-century Kashmir in central Asia. Performing racial alterity had varying effects, sometimes contradictory ones. Given nineteenth-century American attitudes toward race, staging color raised connotations of exoticism and confirmed for white theatergoers the Otherness of people whose skin was darker than their own. Relegating different ethnic groups to outsider status on stage in turn affirmed their inferior treatment off stage. Antebellum whites could thereby justify the enslavement of African Americans and the forced removal of Native Americans in their midst, whereas post-bellum whites could defend the inequitable treatment of both groups. Nevertheless, enacting different racial identities not only asserted distinctions between races but also blurred racial lines, thereby reflecting more honestly, though sometimes unintentionally, the mixed-race composition of the South both before and after the Civil War.¹ Moreover, when white performers acted like African-Americans, Native-

¹ Jan Ellen Lewis and Peter S. Onuf, eds., introduction to *Sally Hemings & Thomas Jefferson: History, Memory, and Civic Culture*, (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1999), 1-16, see

Americans, and Asians, or when they enacted their own whiteness, they exposed as a fabrication the assumed connection between inner and outer attributes and attested to the social construction of race.

While actors and actresses may have revealed the social formation of race through their performances, most nineteenth-century Americans believed race was an intrinsic, biological quality that was transmitted through familial bloodlines. In the antebellum South, elite families strove to preserve the purity of those bloodlines by professing belief in what literary scholar Timothy Powell calls monoculturalism when they actually lived within the context of multiculturalism. The disconnection between the “monocultural subtext” of many nineteenth-century texts and the “multiplicity of contesting voices” belies a deep “cultural aporia” that Powell explores in his study, *Ruthless Democracy*.² Progeny from the intimate sexual relations that regularly took place between white men and black slave women in the antebellum South gave the region a mixed-race character that similarly revealed a “cultural aporia,” for aristocratic white women were supposed to guard their virginity to hold intact their bloodlines for the production of an unsullied race.

The discovery of DNA in 1953 shattered nineteenth-century beliefs that blood transmits physical traits; instead, evolutionary biologists have shown that genes pass down bodily attributes. In addition, scientists have proven that an insufficiency of variations exists between groups of people to divide them into “sub-lineages” or races. While genetic differences among people exist, these alterations are relatively minor and generally govern external attributes such as skin tone, eye shape, and hair texture. In

especially p. 10; McMillen, 26; Wyatt-Brown, 95-98, 105-115; Joel Williamson, *New People: Miscegenation and Mulattoes in the United States* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1995), 1-4.

² Timothy B. Powell, *Ruthless Democracy: A Multicultural Interpretation of the American Renaissance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 4-11, quotations on pp. 4, 10.

contrast, internal organs retain a similarity that allows for organ transplants and reproduction across all ethnicities.³ Widely divergent social customs of the many countries that possess genetically variable populations further illustrate the social formation of racial identity.⁴

The genetic and cultural studies of the last half century that have dismantled the fiction of race as an essential attribute were preceded by a tradition of early nineteenth-century anthropological and biological scholarship that generally subscribed to a biological theory of race and asserted the superiority of whites over peoples of color. The anthropologists fell into two schools, the monogenists and the polygenists, or those who believed in a single species of humans and those who believed in many. The monogenists followed the lead of John Bachman, a minister at St. John's Lutheran Church, in Charleston, South Carolina, and an amateur naturalist who collaborated for ten years with John James Audubon on *Quadrupeds of North America*, which was published in three volumes between 1849 and 1854. As early as 1837, Bachman contended that inferior and superior varieties made up one race of humanity, a theory that he formally set forth in his book *The Doctrine of the Unity of the Human Race* at a meeting of the

³ Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States: From the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 55-56; Alan R. Templeton, "Out of Africa Again and Again," *Nature* 416 (2002):45-51.

⁴ F. James Davis notes for example, the children of American soldiers and Vietnamese or Korean women have suffered as outcasts in the wake of wars fought in both Asian countries, whereas Mexico's Mestizos, those Indians who mixed with the Spanish and became rulers when Spanish control was overthrown, have taken pride in their Hispanic ancestry and their whiteness. Other countries have given a more variable status to hybrid groups: countries such as Brazil and Colombia base racial classification not so much on ancestry but on a combination of physical appearance and class status. Then Hawaii, where a range of people from all over Asia, Indonesia, and Polynesia live equitably with one another, contrasts with the rest of the United States, where whites have fought alternately to maintain "racial purity" or to encourage the assimilation of any outside minority. See his *Who Is Black? One Nation's Definition* (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2001), 18; 82-3; 87-91; 99-101; 109-111; 117. See also, Barbara J. Fields, "Ideology and Race in American History," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, eds. J. Morgan Kousser and James M. McPherson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), 143-177.

American Association for the Advancement of Science in 1850. Though Bachman functioned as the unofficial leader of a group of Charleston naturalists, the other five members ascribed to the polygenist theories of the famous Swiss naturalist, Louis Agassiz, who became a professor at Harvard in the 1850s. He maintained that different human species were analogous to the varying floras and faunas originating in different geographic regions around the world. Agassiz introduced the Charleston group to his theory in 1847 and returned for annual discussions between 1849 and 1853.⁵

Charles Darwin's 1859 theory of evolution perhaps slowly ended the controversy between the monogenists and polygenists, but as historian Thomas Gossett notes, Darwin did not change the argument that some groups of people are superior to others. By the late nineteenth century, scientists, social theorists, and theologians merely began to see Darwin's theory of natural selection at work between classes, races, and nations. They interpreted the people who emerged triumphant and dominant from conflicts with one another as superior beings selected by nature to ensure what the English social theorist Herbert Spencer called "survival of the fittest." The primary promoter of Social Darwinism, and the father of modern sociology, Spencer believed dominant races overrun inferior ones intellectually and physically. William Graham Sumner, a professor of political science at Yale and Spencer's principal American adherent, compared society to a human organism and used Social Darwinism to combat labor organizers, populists, and suffragists. Ministers also applied Darwin's theories to religious thought, and the

⁵ George Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1917* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1971), 71-75; Thomas F. Gossett, *Race: The History of an Idea in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 54; 59-63; Lester D. Stephens, *Science, Race, and Religion in the American South: John Bachman and the Charleston Circle of Naturalists, 1815-1895* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), xii, 39-59, 166, 173.

Social Gospel was born. Social Gospel clergy such as Washington Gladden and Josiah Strong preached that fundamental race inequality simply illustrated God's Almighty hand at work in the world; for example, white Americans should see the gradual extinction of the Indian as the will of providence in preparing the land for a better race. This line of thought, as Gossett points out, paralleled that of the Puritans and the early explorers who saw native people sometimes as heathens in need of conversion or sometimes as nuisances to exterminate.⁶

Upon first glance, many of the dramatic offerings popular on the nineteenth-century southern stage further confirmed the period's notions of racial superiority, but closer scrutiny shows that some of these plays also subversively dismantled this ideology and revealed the social fabrication of race. When white performers enacted characters of different ethnic backgrounds, for instance, they undermined race as an intrinsic biological quality. Similarly, when white actors and actresses used other ethnicities to define their own whiteness, they exposed the social construction of racial identity. Because antebellum theater offerings reflected the multi-racial population of the American South, they confronted an integral connection between race and sex that many southerners preferred to ignore. The theater provided a safe forum for facing uncomfortable truths, and in the process, audiences could even abandon themselves to the pleasures of enjoying racy dramas.

⁶ Gossett, 66-7, 145-6, 153-4, 178.

Acting White

“Ev’n now, ev’n very now, an old black ram is tuppung your white ewe.”

Iago, *Othello* (1603), 1.2.88-89, William Shakespeare

Antebellum southerners who owned or had access to popular reading editions of Shakespeare would have known Iago’s insidious lines that contrast the polar opposites of black and white and that draw a graphic image of Desdemona and Othello as animals engaged in an act of frenzied copulation. When the same readers of Shakespeare attended theatrical productions of the play, however, they would not have heard those lines, for most nineteenth-century stagings of *Othello* excised the sexually explicit references in the drama. The English actor and manager, William Charles Macready began the fashion for performing a chaste *Othello* at Covent Garden in London, and subsequent actors of renown followed his lead. Edmund Kean, Edwin Forrest, James Wallack, and Edwin Booth all catered to what literary historian Virginia Mason Vaughan calls the “delicate feelings” of their Victorian audiences and delivered more modest interpretations of the play.⁷ While dropping references to sheets, beds, going to bed, adultery, and sex might have mollified theatergoers who were concerned with appearances, the excisions did not change the drama’s emphasis on miscegenation, adultery, sexuality, desire, and jealousy. Despite these charged themes, *Othello* found a secure place in the repertory of Old South theaters. Scholars have long debated this

⁷ Vaughan, quotation on p.146; see also 135-153. The Hanmer and Pope reading editions include Iago’s line, but John Philip Kemble’s promptbook leave it out. Macready based his performances on Kemble’s books. See Shakespeare, *Othello* (Hanmer), 1.2. 8-9, p. 442; *Othello* (Johnson), 1.2.8-9, p.324; *Othello* (Pope), 1.2.8-9, p. 478; *Othello* (Kemble Promptbooks, ed. Shattuck), 1.1, pp. 5-9. See especially p. 7. Iago does warn Brabantio that his “daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs,” but Vaughan seems to think that managers likely struck even this line.

appeal; some say playgoers were drawn by an intrinsic anti-miscegenation theme, while others contend that spectators simply enjoyed the pathos of the tragedy.

Whatever the attraction, the actors and actresses who played in *Othello* enacted ideas of blackness and whiteness that affirmed and established norms for both racial groups. Thus, the antebellum stage became a crucial producer of racial identity; since whites sat at the top of the racial hierarchy, however, theatrical productions helped impose whiteness as a cultural norm. Theaters thereby filled the role that the cinema and television would come to occupy in twentieth-century American culture.⁸ On stage, performers enacted their whiteness in characters like Desdemona. Their racial identity was defined in opposition to blackness (or redness or yellowness) and aligned with qualities of racial purity, rationality, order, privilege, and power. As film scholar Richard Dyer asserts, however, talking explicitly about whiteness is difficult, for though white encompasses all other colors, it seems colorless. Hence, viewers take whiteness for granted, and seeing the color takes a particular effort. This invisibility lends an elusiveness to whiteness that literary critic Valerie Babb says attests to its cultural and historical creation.⁹

As European explorers came into contact with people who looked different from themselves, they began to form implicit ideas about their own white racial identity in addition to more explicit notions about the other races of people they met. Though explorers ventured forth from Spain, Portugal, and England, they shared similar views about the savageness and barbarity of the native peoples they encountered in their travels

⁸ Gwendolyn Foster, *Performing Whiteness Postmodern Re/Constructions in the Cinema* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 2.

⁹ Valerie Babb, *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 16; Richard Dyer, "White," *Screen* 29.4 (1988), 44-64, see especially pp. 45-6.

and held common assumptions about their own white civility, which they recorded in journals, logs, and letters. Historian Scott Malcomson says that when the English settlers established themselves in America, their whiteness functioned as one trait to unite them, and over time, a mutual (though mythic) Anglo-Saxon heritage bound the white immigrants of America together, regardless of their diverse ancestral origins.¹⁰ Valerie Babb further observes that throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, printed material worked to aggregate this fictional white heritage: newspapers, novels, stage productions, and songs all “enshrined” whiteness, associating the imagined ethnicity with hard work, piousness, civility, intelligence, and physical attractiveness. Babb draws on the work of Benedict Anderson who calls all nations “imagined communities.” Members who can never all know one another constitute these communities that are founded on imaginary language, which surfaces in political documents and cultural products, including the range of literature that Babb discusses.¹¹

The cultural product that touched more people in the urban antebellum South, the popular repertory of the southern stage, inscribed whiteness as the regional norm. White actresses played a particularly important role whenever they appeared in dramatic productions, for their white skin represented the epitome of Anglo-Saxon female racial purity and stood for the hope of maintaining an uncontaminated race. Implicitly, their whiteness raised fears of racial mixing, for as film scholar Gwendolyn Foster notes, fear of hybridity entrenches whiteness. In short, the bodies of white actresses became the

¹⁰ Scott L. Malcomson, *One Drop of Blood: The American Misadventure of Race* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2000), 290.

¹¹ Anderson, 6, 141; Babb, 18-19; 22; 37-38; 41; 87-88; 169-170; quotation on p. 88.

nexus of race and sex, and this connection was never more poignant than when they performed across from actors who were playing men of color.¹²

Almost every southern theater included Shakespeare's *Othello* and Frederick Halm's *Ingomar the Barbarian* (c1851) in its repertory during the antebellum period, and both plays rely on the contrast between a white woman and a man of color to define whiteness. As Toni Morrison explains in *Playing in the Dark*, "the fabrication of an Africanist persona is reflexive," deflecting back onto white characters their own fears and desires and allowing them to define themselves as what they are not. Following this line of thought, the colorlessness that Richard Dyer ascribes to whiteness finds its actual multi-colored content solely in contrast to blackness. Whiteness comes into existence only when the nonwhite is there in the background.¹³

Thus, when antebellum actresses played white women such as Desdemona or Parthenia across from white actors who were enacting black men such as Othello or Ingomar, the whiteness of the actresses was heightened. So too, however, was their sexuality, for as historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown explains, relationships between black men and white women were taboo in the Old South. Pure white women were the only guarantee white men had of passing on intact their lineage and wealth, and they expected complete fidelity from their wives and daughters. Martha Hodes reveals in *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* that this ideal was not

¹² Foster, 33.

¹³ Dyer, 48-9; Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992), 17.

always attained, but when taboos were broken, more often than not, they were the exception and not the rule.¹⁴

Thus, antebellum southerners who went to see *Othello* knew that they were viewing an unusual sequence of events involving the white Desdemona and her blackamoor husband. Whether or not Othello appeared to playgoers as sooty black, tawny and bronze, or just lightly tanned, depended upon which actor played the part and perhaps when he played the role, but any contrasting shade created the duality necessary to establish Desdemona's whiteness (and thereby her sexual vulnerability). Historians James Dormon and Tilden Edelstein claim that actors who played Othello throughout the antebellum period lightened their skin tone more and more so that by the 1850s, southerners would have watched a performer who was hardly black at all. Dormon and Edelstein trace the careers of several famous actors who played Othello and contend that their considerable influence in the acting world would have caused widespread imitation. English actor Edmund Kean initiated the trend for altering Othello's appearance in the 1820s when he began playing the part with bronze-colored skin, an exotic turban, a flowing robe, and metal wrist-bands, a costume that made him look more like an Arab from Morocco than a man with black skin from the heart of Africa. Edwin Forrest, whose name became synonymous with the fictional Native-American dramatic hero that he made famous, *Metamora*, not surprisingly gave his Othello an Indian look when he further lightened the character in the 1830s and 40s. Finally, Edwin Booth, who played Othello for the first time in 1849, became the lightest Othello ever, and wore just the

¹⁴ Martha Hodes, *White Women, Black Men: Illicit Sex in the Nineteenth-Century South* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 4; Wyatt-Brown, 95-100.

slightest touch of tan makeup along with sumptuous Persian robes that transformed him into an aristocratic Oriental suitor.¹⁵

When Thomas Abthorpe Cooper played Othello at the St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans across from leading stock actress Jane Placide in 1827, he did not follow the trend to lighten his makeup begun by Edmund Kean earlier in the decade. Cooper prided himself on his traditional acting techniques and disdained Kean's willingness to experiment with new dramatic approaches. In contrast, the young Junius Brutus Booth greatly admired Kean and had emulated his stage manner in England before making his way to America in 1821. Hence, when Booth performed with Placide in *Othello* at the St. Charles Theatre in March of 1829, his skin tone might have appeared swarthier, though he had played the Moor as black-skinned in an 1822 Savannah performance. Edwin Forrest's skin certainly looked tawny rather than coal-black when he starred opposite Placide just a month later and again when he returned to New Orleans in 1839, playing Othello to Mary Ann Duff's Desdemona. By the time Julia Dean was playing Desdemona in the early 1850s, Edwin Booth was carefully holding his body so that his thinly applied beige makeup did not besmirch the whiteness of the actresses who performed with him in *Othello*, and in an 1852 performance, a strolling player in Macon, Georgia had to play the lead role "nearly white" so as not to displease the citizens. By 1860, actor James Wallack backed out of playing Othello in Mobile when the play disagreed with playgoers' sense of propriety.¹⁶

¹⁵ Dormon, 276-77; Tilden G. Edelstein, "Othello in America: The Drama of Racial Intermarriage," in *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward*, 179-197, see especially pp. 183-86.

¹⁶ Burroughs, 68; Dormon, 277; Edelstein, 186; Hostetler, 128-9; Koon, *Gold Rush*, 83-4; Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage*, 22-25, 42-50; St. Charles Theatre Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune* 6 April, 1839.

Literary scholar Charles Lower counters the views of Dormon and Edelstein, contending instead that southerners would not have allowed racial views or politics to contaminate their appreciation of great art. He cites numerous stage productions of the play throughout the antebellum period, ranging from Charleston to Memphis to New Orleans, and he quotes several sympathetic play reviews that never mention Othello's race. Such evidence, Lower says, shows that southerners would not have objected to watching a black Othello and discredits the notion that playgoers would have seen the play as an anti-miscegenation drama. Indeed, he asserts that reviews excising explicit discussion of Othello's color but referring to him as the "Moor" implicitly affirmed southerners' preference for his portrayal as a black man, thereby emphasizing the distinction between art and life. Of course, reviewers may not have been troubled by a lighter-hued Othello, either. Lower does concede that Edmund Kean lightened his skin tone and that makeup instructions, memoirs, paintings, and lithographs "provide considerable evidence of tawny Othellos," but he maintains that a preponderance of black-skinned Moors also peopled the stage. His list includes William Charles Macready and Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, who did favor darker tones, but he also names Edwin Forrest and Edwin Booth, who were both known for their lighter-skinned portrayals of Othello.¹⁷ Virginia Mason Vaughan similarly observes that William Charles Macready elicited no negative reactions from his slave-owning audiences in the South on his antebellum tours throughout the region, and she goes on to note a trend for whitening post-bellum Othellos, a tradition that reflected the heightened racial tensions and the increasingly rigid sexual taboos between races.¹⁸

¹⁷ Lower, 199-228, quotation on p. 205.

¹⁸ Vaughan, 53.

Proving Lower and Vaughan or Dormon and Edelstein right becomes a rather futile task finally, for as Lower asserts, historians can too easily simplify the view from afar just to prove a certain set of rigid assumptions. By focusing instead on the complexity of *Othello*'s shifting representations, greater insights into antebellum race relations, particularly attitudes toward miscegenation, can be gained. Edelstein says that for three centuries, *Othello* has essentially become "a forum" for Americans to work out their feelings toward race in their culture. Philip Kolin agrees.¹⁹ He calls the play a "cultural seismograph" and notes that *Othello* has been interpreted as a white Venetian, an Arab, a blackamoor, a Spaniard, and a sub-Saharan African, depending on how various actors and audiences have used his character to respond to the upheavals of gender, race, and class concurrently at work in their culture.²⁰ Playgoers who attended the play in the Old South, then, may have seen lighter or darker skinned actors performing the part of the Moor, but any hue would have contrasted with the whiteness of the actress's skin who played Desdemona. Viewers, who were already attuned to the slightest subtleties of skin variation in their racially stratified society, would have been very sensitive to staged portrayals of skin tone, particularly as the Civil War approached and racial tension increased.

Even people who lived outside of the South and expressed abolitionist views could not always see the play in color-blind terms. John Quincy Adams, for example, saw Desdemona as a wanton hussy and wrote in 1831, "The great moral lesson of *Othello* is that black and white blood cannot be intermingled without gross outrage upon the law

¹⁹ Edelstein, 194.

²⁰ Philip Kolin, "Blackness Made Visible: A Survey of *Othello* in Criticism, On Stage, and On Screen," in *Othello: New Critical Essays*, ed. Philip C. Kolin (New York: Routledge, 2002), 1-88, quotation on p. 1.

of Nature and that, in such violations, Nature will vindicate her laws” His views were similar to those expressed by his mother thirty-five years before when she observed after a performance, “I could not separate the African color from the man, nor prevent the disgust and horror which filled my mind every time I saw him touch the gentle Desdemona.” The Adamses’ reactions likely reflected those of many Americans, including southerners, who viewed the play as an anti-miscegenationist warning. Desdemona, the paragon of white virtue, fails to uphold her filial duty and then misfires in her attempt to tame and control the racial Other she has chosen for her lover and husband. In the end, she pays with her life.²¹

Parthenia, the lead female character in *Ingomar the Barbarian*, another play that focuses on a relationship between a white woman and a man of color, diverges from Desdemona, for she succeeds in civilizing her savage Other and manages to demonstrate parental devotion, actions that bring her great approbation within her Greek community, Massillia. When Parthenia first encounters Ingomar, who is described as an Alemannian warrior, he has captured her father, and she bravely offers herself in his stead so that he may go free. During her captivity, Parthenia and Ingomar fall in love, but once he realizes that she will never forsake her home and family to live with his people, he agrees to go with her. Ingomar’s speech pledging to leave behind his “rough ways” and embrace the refined traditions of his newly adopted culture ironically belies the social construction of race, for he observes, “. . . ’tis the soul that makes the man and not his outward seeming.” Ingomar’s words cast doubt on those cherished nineteenth-century

²¹ Edelstein, 179-180, quotation on p. 190, and Adams quotations on pp. 182, 185; Lower, 201; Williamson, 62.

assumptions that aligned exterior and interior attributes. Later, he extends this theme when he implores Parthenia's father, "Teach me among Greeks a Greek to be."²²

When *Ingomar* burst upon the dramatic scene around 1851, actors may have had the same difficulty in determining how to represent the lead character that they had in portraying Othello. Like the ethnic designation Moor, the sub-title term for Ingomar, Barbarian, carried Muslim associations and referred specifically to people from the Barbary coast of North Africa. Generally, the word raised connotations of foreignness, exoticism, and varying degrees of darkness. Historian Nabil Matar explains that the English first began to classify Muslims as Barbarians in the early modern period. "Just as the association with barbarity denigrated the American Indians in the discourse of the New World," contends Matar, "it was now brought into use to denigrate the Ottomans and the inhabitants of the 'Barbary' States."²³ In contrast, the designation Alemannian, a corruption of the French word for German, *Allemond*, denoted that Ingomar came from a confederation of Germanic tribes dwelling in a remote corner of Bavaria. Thus, spectators could have seen Parthenia as a pretty white woman taming a dark-skinned barbarian or alternately—and ironically—as a swarthy Greek maiden taming an early member of the white master race. In either case, Parthenia, like Desdemona, would contrast with this variety of Ingomars, but apparently her role as civilizer and dutiful

²² Frederick Halm, *Ingomar the Barbarian*, c1852, trans. Maria Lovell, in *French's Standard Drama*, vol. 89 (New York: Samuel French, c1872), microopaque (New York: Readex Microprint, 1982), 4.1.202, 204-5, 277, pp. 46, 48.

²³ Nabil Matar, *Turks, Moors, and Englishmen in the Age of Discovery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 15.

daughter mitigated uneasiness for her position as miscegenist lover, since the play was a hit from the start in the South.²⁴

Though published around 1872 in French's series of *Standard Drama*, the front matter of *Ingomar* mentions two successful performances that took place in New York during December of 1851, and the play began to appear on southern stages the following year. Eliza Logan probably introduced the drama to southerners when she and her father opened the Mobile theater season with *Ingomar* in the winter of 1852, and Anna Cora Mowatt followed their lead when she brought the play to Louisville that summer. Julia Dean included the production in her repertory when she visited Mobile in 1853 and when she performed in New Orleans during the winter season of 1854-55. Eliza Logan had such success with the play that she scheduled it for her farewell benefit at the end of her first visit to Savannah in March of 1854, and the *Daily Morning News* reported that her performance as "the charming Grecian maiden" brought out the largest houses at the Atheneum Theatre all season. Spectators showered her with garlands of flowers, and the reviewer pronounced the evening "her noblest triumph" of her engagement.²⁵ *Ingomar* retained its popularity throughout the decade, for manager Ben DeBar scheduled a traveling company passing through New Orleans on the eve of the Civil War to perform the play in January of 1860.²⁶

Though *Ingomar* clearly appealed to antebellum actresses and audiences, Anna Cora Mowatt did report fielding criticism that the play was "a covert woman's rights

²⁴ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd edition, s.v. "Alemannic," via Galileo online database (accessed 29 December, 2004); Ibid., s.v. "Barbarian," (accessed 26 August, 2004,); Ibid., s.v. "Barbary," (accessed 26 August, 2004); Ibid., s.v. "Moor" (accessed 2 September, 2004).

²⁵ "Miss Eliza Logan's Farewell Benefit, *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 6 March, 1854.

²⁶ Dietz, 56; Dugger, 83, 85; St. Charles Theatre Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 29 December, 1854; "St. Charles Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 14 February, 1855; St. Charles Theatre Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 24 January, 1860.

drama.” She laughed off the charges and assured the detractor that the devoted Parthenia hardly intruded on any man’s “sphere of action.”²⁷ Her critic’s fear clearly shows concern for women who defied traditionally inscribed gender roles; his worries also demonstrate again the salient connection between the subordination of white women and slaves, for both groups were essential to upholding the region’s social and economic structure. If elite women questioned their positions, they might also begin to question slavery.²⁸ Thus, playgoers could see a drama such as *Ingomar* that featured a strong-willed woman who shows sympathy for the racial Other as subversively supporting not only women’s rights but also those for people of color.

Parthenia’s initial scorn for Ingomar and his barbaric background combined with her diligence in civilizing him, in reshaping his image after her own, might have quelled concerns that audience members had for her role in the play. In the end, she tames the savage Alemmanian, patiently instructs him in acquiring white morals and manners, and succeeds in re-crafting his racial persona. Her actions paralleled those of upper-class plantation mistresses, who bore the responsibility of overseeing the moral, spiritual, and intellectual development of both their children and slaves.²⁹ These women gave their children instruction on appropriate social behavior, while they instilled the importance of displaying self-effacing in their slaves. Likewise, elite mistresses, who were educated themselves, taught their children how to read, and they ensured that their offspring knew the rudiments of the Bible. In contrast, few slaves learned to read, as literacy empowers,

²⁷ Mowatt, 409.

²⁸ Peter W. Bardaglio, *Reconstructing the Household: Families, Sex, and the Law in the Nineteenth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 23-27; Kierner, 7; McMillen, 9.

²⁹ Marli F. Weiner, “Mistresses, Morality, and the Dilemmas of Slaveholding: The Ideology and Behavior of Elite Antebellum Women,” in *Discovering the Women in Slavery: Emancipating Perspectives on the American Past*, ed. Patricia Morton (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 278-298.

but mistresses might provide some form of spiritual instruction or at least allow its pursuit amongst their slaves if they didn't give it personally. Likewise, Parthenia teaches Ingomar proper etiquette and works to correct those "rough ways" he has agreed to lose. Though Ingomar recognizes and names the behaviors they seek to refine as external, cultural markers, however, Parthenia expresses a belief in essential racial identity by employing the noble savage trope. "I would not have thee other than thou art—Honest, pure, and true," she assures him. "Yet even the candor of a noble soul requires restriction," she warns.³⁰ Ingomar will always have to resist the inborn impulse to do homage to his bloodthirsty mountain gods if he wants to succeed in becoming a Greek, Parthenia cautions. Her essentialist racial ideology reflected nineteenth-century scientific and anthropological thought, just as her participation in the training and direction of a racial Other mirrored the activities of middle- and upper-class slave-owning women in the antebellum South.

Actresses Jane Placide and Mary Ludlow also occupied similar positions in their lives, for both women controlled racial Others in their lives by owning slaves. When New Orleans actress Jane Placide died in 1835, her estate included "a mulatress slave named Letty, aged 28, valued at \$500."³¹ Placide, a wealthy woman who had accrued \$42,000 in real estate, books, and a large dramatic wardrobe, could easily have afforded the services of a personal maid both at home and at the theater. That she chose to own her maid comes as little surprise, especially given her location in New Orleans, a hub of slave trade in the antebellum South. In addition, Placide grew up in Charleston, another

³⁰ Halm, 5.1. 165-68; p. 55.

³¹ Hostetler, 251.

city well-known for its slave traffic.³² While Placide may have followed the prevailing social practices of her region by purchasing a slave, she stood apart from the *status quo* as a female slave owner. Since a woman's property moved to her husband when she married, most women did not hold title to their own assets, so Placide and the few other single women who did have money and property departed from the norm. Though middle- and upper-class white men owned most of the slaves in the antebellum South, historian James Oakes says that the master class consisted of a more diverse group than the popular view has allowed. Native Americans, free blacks, mulattos, urban merchants, and women, also represented a small percentage of the Old South's slave holders.³³ With her purchase of Letty, Jane Placide contributed to this complexity.

Though Mary Ludlow was married, she too diverged from standard antebellum expectations by taking an active part in the buying and selling of her families' slaves. She used the money from a series of particularly successful benefits to buy a woman named Betsy, but in 1850, when years of Betsy's constant "bad conduct" finally proved too much for Mary to endure, she sold her. Had Mary chosen to sell Betsy's son, Rosco, along with his mother, Noah Ludlow might not have objected to his wife's decision, but when he received word of his wife's transaction, he angrily questioned her humanity and urged her to sell Rosco to the same buyer if she could. Mary defended herself on two counts. First, she had given Betsy ample warning, so the recalcitrant slave was to blame. "Betsy was well aware of the consequences of her bad conduct," she exclaimed. Second, Betsy was Mary's property, to be disposed of as she saw fit:

³² Wade, 198.

³³ James Oakes, *The Ruling Race* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), 40-65.

“I know you consider Betsy as your property—she is not tho . . . you gave me the money from my benefits when I was on the stage for one year and told me I might take it and do what I pleased with it. I saved it on that assurance to buy me a little girl with—you were present when I bought the girl—had the bill of sale made in my name and had it and the girl delivered me.”³⁴

The first argument skirted Noah’s accusation that Mary had dealt with Betsy and Rosco inhumanely, especially in light of Mary’s own agonized query about the health of two ill children in another section of the same letter. And the second simply drew on the liberal logic of property rights that James Oakes notes slaveholders frequently fell back on to buttress slavery.³⁵ Another motive may have played into Mary’s decision to sell Betsy, though. Owning an obstreperous maid whom she could not control might have invited the disapproval of her neighbors and risked the loss of some social standing for Mary. Even if she sold Betsy without Rosco, she would save face for being too soft, and she could buy another woman with her profits.

Mary did not hesitate to give her opinion over the sale of a slave, even when she held no legal title to the individual involved. Eight years before Mary sold Betsy without Noah’s knowledge, she sought to head off his sale of her favorite slave, Vic, by encouraging her husband to sell another in her place. “Vic is so sweet—so delicate and so handy for her age,” Mary implored, and then she asked, “Why not sell Ned? He will bring you much more at this time than Vic!”³⁶ Ostensibly guarding the family finances, Mary was also looking out for her own needs by heading off the possibility of an increased domestic work load, which would certainly result if she lost her “handy”

³⁴ Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 3 March, 1850, Box 4 of 17, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection.

³⁵ James Oakes, *Slavery and Freedom* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1990), 56-79.

³⁶ Mary Ludlow to Noah Ludlow, 1 May, 1842, Box 3 of 17, Ludlow-Field-Maury Collection.

female slave. Keeping Vic who was “so delicate” may also have been crucially important to Mary Ludlow in 1842 when she and Noah were still working to establish themselves as members of Mobile’s upper-middle class. The adjectives that Mary used to describe Vic certainly indicated that the slave’s skills and beauty were assets to her mistress and likely enhanced her local social standing.

Mary’s participation in the sales of the Ludlows’ slaves bears out the contention made by historians Elizabeth Fox-Genovese and Jean Friedman that no sisterhood existed between white and black women in the Old South. Indeed, elite white women were complicitous in an unjust system that rigidly divided women by their skin color.³⁷ Slaveholding women reaped many benefits from the black women they owned: slave women alleviated the physical burdens of their mistresses in the house and garden, and they helped with child rearing. Perhaps more important, though, their blackness enhanced the whiteness of their owners—and thus ensured their class status—in much the same way that black characters brought attention to actresses’ whiteness on stage.

During the Civil War, plays continued to inscribe whiteness. Acting companies performed many of the old favorites, including *Othello* and *Ingomar*, but they added some new dramas as well. The Crisp family, known primarily as Shakespearean actors before the war, included *Othello* in their 1862 and 1863 Mobile seasons, and Mrs. Gladstane, “a prime favorite in the Crescent City” during the war, played Desdemona across from a Mr. Ryer’s “sooty Moor” in what the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* called “a powerful portraiture” of the play.³⁸ She also played Parthenia to Ryer’s *Ingomar* and

³⁷ Fox-Genovese, 35; Friedman, 87.

³⁸ Fife, 196, 306; “The Varieties,” New Orleans *Daily Picayune* 3 April, 1863; “Musical and Dramatic,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 19 February, 1865.

presented a “pleasing picture of the loving, gentle, yet heroic Greek maiden.”³⁹ The Crisps brought the play about the civilized barbarian to Columbus, Georgia, and then Wilmington, North Carolina in 1864.⁴⁰

In 1863, John Hill Hewitt wrote a travesty of Halm’s *Ingomar*, which he called *Lingomar, the Semenole* [sic]. As the title suggests, he transferred the action of the play to the American Southeast by substituting a Seminole Indian for the Barbarian of the original play. Hewitt’s replacement confirms Nabil Matar’s contention that simultaneous English encounters with Muslims and American Indians brought about a superimposition of alterity on the two groups, who came to be seen as interchangeable by some writers. In the spirit of a travesty, which ridicules and mocks an original, noble subject or presents a serious subject capriciously, Hewitt set *Lingomar* in tortured rhyming couplets but followed the original plot and theme of taming the racial Other. Probably written for and performed by the Waldron family, who favored Hewitt’s southern nationalist dramas, *Lingomar* likely appealed to the company for its denigration of a prominently rebellious southeastern Indian tribe and its deification of Parthenia’s white equal, Marthenia.⁴¹

While quickly penned war dramas that dripped with Confederate loyalty found enthusiastic audiences throughout the war, a special genre of these plays that featured patriotic, white female protagonists became especially popular and further endorsed whiteness as the region’s racial norm. Eloise Bridges impressed New Orleans audiences with her performance in a play called *The Soldier’s Daughter*, during October of 1861, and theatergoers in Wilmington were equally enthusiastic about her play, *Our Cause; or*,

³⁹ “The Varieties,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune* 1 February, 1863.

⁴⁰ Fife, 398; Keller, 155

⁴¹ Harmon and Holman, 526; John Hill Hewitt, *Lingomar, the Semenole: A Travesty in Three Acts*, 1863, Hewitt Papers; Matar, 16-17.

The Female Rebel, which she scheduled for her benefit on December 2, 1864.⁴² The Waldron family found success with John Hill Hewitt's *Vivandiere* throughout the war, and Mrs. Gladstane received rave reviews for her portrayal of Pauline, the long-suffering wife of a war-scarred veteran in John Morton's drama *The Midnight Watch*, which she played for New Orleans theatergoers in January of 1863.⁴³ Since New Orleans had fallen to the Union Army in 1862, staging productions with themes that explicitly espoused loyalty to the Confederacy was not wise. Hence, *The Midnight Watch* took place during the French Revolution, but associating Pauline with a patient and enduring Confederate wife would not have been very difficult for an imaginative or patriotic southern audience.

Historian Laura Edwards reminds her readers that unlike Pauline, many white women grew dismayed and disenchanted with the war as the fighting dragged on and as their lives grew more and more difficult. Left without husbands, fathers, and sons to plant fields and oversee slaves if they lived in the country or to tend businesses if they lived in the city, most women soon wanted their men to come home. Nevertheless, they did not lose the principles that led them to support the Confederacy at the start of the conflict. Instead, most white women retained their beliefs in the innate inferiority of African Americans and continued to embrace a system that relied on the darkness of their slaves to buttress the superiority of their own whiteness.⁴⁴ For instance, historian John Inscoe relates the story of Mary Bell, the wife of a Franklin, North Carolina dentist, who wrote to her husband in the Confederate Army on March 11, 1864, to tell him that she had "made a nigger trade." As Inscoe observes, Bell's trade shows how the war

⁴² Fife, 436; Kendall, 486.

⁴³ "The Varieties," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 8 January, 1863; "Amusements," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 9 January, 1863.

⁴⁴ Edwards, 79-84.

empowered women at home, for Mary controlled the finances in her husband's absence. Low prices and her need for domestic help played a large part in Mary's decision, but so too did her desire to join her community's "very slim ranks of slaveholders."⁴⁵ In the same way that audiences needed to contrast Desdemona with a darker Othello (whatever his hue) and Parthenia with a darker Ingomar, Mary needed the blackness of her slave family to bring her position and prestige—in short to solidify her position within the white community. After Reconstruction, the same plot would play out in uglier and uglier form throughout the South, but the Othellos and Ingomars would find themselves victims of lynchings acting out their deaths on impromptu stages made of tree limbs for audiences consisting of frenzied mobs gathered on roadsides or in town squares.

Acting Black

"That is the ineffacable (*sic*) curse of Cain. Of the blood that feeds my heart, one drop in eight is black—bright red as the rest may be, that one drop poisons all the flood."

Zoe, *The Octoroon* (1859), 2.1.138-40, Dion Boucicault

White actresses also enacted blackness on the South's antebellum and Civil War stages, and Zoe's description of herself in Dion Boucicault's play, *The Octoroon*, shows that their roles frequently focused on racial identity. While white women did not participate in the minstrel show phenomenon that began to sweep the country in the 1840s, they did periodically personify Africanist stage characters, ranging from an exotic Moorish page to the light-skinned Zoe to Topsy, who played a key comic role in the parodies of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* that popped up throughout the antebellum South after the drama became a hit on northern stages in 1852. Toni Morrison says that an Africanist

⁴⁵ John C. Inscoe, "The Civil War's Empowerment of Appalachian Women: The 1864 Slave Purchases of Mary Bell," in *Discovering the Women in Slavery*, 61-81, quotations on pp. 61-62.

presence has always reflected the hopes and fears of America's white writers, who have imagined and invented black characters as a way to explore what is forbidden in American culture.⁴⁶ Literary theorist bell hooks concurs with Morrison but asserts that white writers also create and use racial images to control the Others in their midst.⁴⁷ The insights of both writers apply to antebellum southern theatrical offerings, which explored taboos imposed on interracial sexual relations and upheld notions of racial inferiority, thereby assuring whites of their own superiority and enabling their freedom. The presence of black audience members in part provided what hooks calls an "oppositional gaze" that allowed them to seize some agency, for most theaters designated balcony space for segregated seating.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, whites still controlled the stage and performed their interpretation of blackness, and their renditions were almost always self-serving.

While newspaper accounts did not mention that the French ballerina and pantomime artist, Madame Celine Celeste, blackened her skin on March 19, 1837, when she played the male lead in *The Moorish Page*, New Orleans theatergoers must have responded enthusiastically to whatever guise she chose, for Celeste repeated the selection when she returned to the Crescent City on tour again in 1839.⁴⁹ Mobile spectators also enjoyed her rendition of the character, since she played the part twice when she stopped there after her New Orleans visit in 1837.⁵⁰ Whether or not she used dusky makeup, Celeste still played a character who, like Othello, hailed from the northern coast of Africa

⁴⁶ Morrison, 35, 66.

⁴⁷ bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 2, 170.

⁴⁸ Advertisement for the St. Charles Theatre including prices for Quadroons, *New Orleans Daily Picayune* 22 November, 1860; Bailey, 19, 42-3; Bloodworth, 72-3; Butsch, 82, 86-7; Dormon, 233-36; hooks, 116.

⁴⁹ "Celeste Takes a Benefit," *The Daily Picayune*, 19 March, 1837; St. Charles Theatre Advertisement, Celeste's Benefit," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 23 March, 1839.

⁵⁰ Theatre Advertisements, *Mobile Commercial Register*, 8, 10 April, 1837.

and raised romantic connotations of exoticism and darkness in the minds of her spectators. Toni Morrison explains that Africanist portrayals such as Celeste's Moorish role were a hallmark of romanticism, for such representations provided whites a means to explore the fabulous and dangerous from a safe place.⁵¹

Celeste's part as the Moorish page also appealed to the racy sensibilities of theatergoers, as her sensuous portrayal of the youth was inextricably bound up with the character's ethnicity. The *Daily Picayune* promised readers in 1837 that the famed dancer would not only "perform a speaking part," but that she would also "come out in some of her best dances" during the show.⁵² Since audiences largely attended Celeste's performances for the promise of viewing her attractive body, which her tights and tutu clearly revealed, the acting part worked to endow her with alterity, to establish her as the Moorish page of the title. By becoming the Other, Celeste made her blatant sexual appeal acceptable to southerners, who associated irrepressible sensuality and sexual drive with African-American women. As historian Bertram Wyatt-Brown explains, this stereotype allowed white men to rationalize their sexual abuse of black women and let many white women make excuses for their wayward husbands' behavior.⁵³

Celeste's performances also paralleled the white male minstrel shows then becoming popular on both northern and southern stages and reflected the ambivalent interest in black cultural practices that Eric Lott asserts these racist lampoons frequently revealed. In her guise as the Moorish page, she not only played a character of color but also a male character of color. Lott recognizes that minstrelsy bears a long history of "reactionary nostalgia that desperately needs debunking," but he further maintains that

⁵¹ Morrison, 36-7.

⁵² "Celeste Takes a Benefit."

⁵³ Wyatt-Brown, 96-98.

when whites appropriated and ridiculed African-American entertainment forms, they betrayed a deep “investment in ‘blackness’.” Minstrel performances reached their height between 1846 and 1854, years when debate raged over the extension of slavery and when the Fugitive Slave Law came into existence. The first minstrel shows appeared in the early 1830s, and though Lott says the genre gained more popularity in the North, southern audiences also clamored to attend the shows.⁵⁴ In 1838, the year between Celeste’s two appearances as the Moorish Page, the *New Orleans Daily Picayune* predicted that “an overwhelming house” would turn out for a “Jim Crow” show at the Camp Street Theatre, and by 1842, the St. Charles Theatre was advertising “nigger dances and break-downs to kill!”⁵⁵ Minstrel performances like these promised a rousing evening of toe-tapping music and high-stepping dance numbers, but they also offered whites a way to maintain symbolic control over the black Others in their midst whom they perceived as threatening and dangerous. This metaphorical domination became particularly charged when the white minstrel performers played women, for their female guises stripped away the masculinity of the black minstrel roles, leaving symbolically castrated African-American men dancing and singing for the pleasure of the white audience. Lott explains that white men had developed an idea of a mythic and “rampageous” black penis, which they simultaneously feared and coveted. At the same time, white men harbored anxiety over female sexual power, which they saw as more vigorous in black women, and these multiple apprehensions manifested themselves in

⁵⁴ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 3-12, quotations on pp. 7 & 9.

⁵⁵ “Jim Crow’s Benefit,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune* 11 March, 1838; “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune* 1 January, 1842.

minstrel performances.⁵⁶ Hence, when Celeste's role as the Moorish Page similarly aligned blackness and femininity, her audience would have been familiar with the conflation of politically and socially excluded identities.

Dion Boucicault's portrayal of a doomed mixed-race romance, *The Octoroon, or Life in Louisiana*, also brought the connection between sexuality and race to the attention of theatergoers when the play debuted at New York's Winter Garden Theatre on December 6, 1859. Boucicault wrote his play based on his experience living in Louisiana during 1855 when he managed the New Orleans' Varieties Theatre, which he called the Gaiety under his tenure. Boucicault left his position after a year to oversee his wife's more successful career, but the two continued to act on southern stages and were familiar with the region's culture.⁵⁷ In *The Octoroon*, Boucicault treated miscegenation, which was particularly widespread around Charleston and New Orleans. Indeed, the title of his play refers to the racial composition of the lead character, Zoe, whose blood is supposed to be one-eighth black, since she is the daughter of a white plantation owner, Judge Peyton, and a quadroon slave woman, who is one-fourth black. The artificial labels designating the racial variation of the female characters reveal the minute distinctions that white southerners used to set themselves apart from people of color and reflected their deep fears of racial mixing despite their willingness to engage in intimate physical relationships with racial Others when they desired. Boucicault's willingness to confront southern interracial sexual relations so openly brought him the ire of some regional critics

⁵⁶ Lott, 25-28, 161, quotation on 25.

⁵⁷ Dormon, 227; Peter Thomson, Introduction to *Plays by Dion Boucicault*, ed. Peter Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 1-19, see especially pp. 8-9, 17.

who saw the characters as "ridiculous," and *The Octoroon* was not staged in the South until the end of the Civil War. Then, however, the play received high praise.⁵⁸

In his book on miscegenation in the Old South, historian Joel Williamson explains that the immigration of many West Indian plantation owners to the coastal areas around Charleston and New Orleans established a culture in the lower South that was open to forced sexual liaisons between white slave owners and their black female slaves. A paucity of white women in the West Indies had contributed to this practice, which continued unabated when many of these men moved to America. As the relationship between Thomas Jefferson and his slave, Sally Hemings recalls, however, miscegenation also occurred unchecked on some plantations in the upper South as well.⁵⁹ Thus, Boucicault's drama brought the experiences of shadow families into the light and showed that black women's bodies became play things that white men could exploit to shore up their own dominance and hegemonic power.

The Octoroon also mirrored the whitening of slavery, which occurred as more white men mated with the black women they owned. Indeed, Joel Williamson says that between 1850 and 1860, mixed-race slaves increased from 7.7 percent to 10.4 percent of the South's total slave population. Since children assumed the racial status of their mothers, offspring born to slave women and white men, regardless of their father's identity or their light skin, became slaves themselves. Historians Peter Bardaglio and Jennifer Brody join Williamson in exploring the insidious nature of this law by noting that fathers thereby enslaved their own children and fueled their own apprehensions over

⁵⁸ Dion Boucicault, *The Octoroon* (1859) in *Plays by Dion Boucicault*, 133-69; Watson, *Antebellum Charleston Dramatists*, 145.

⁵⁹ Williamson, 14-21, 24, 29, 44-45.

the loss of white racial purity by helping to blur the very boundaries between races that they wanted to keep intact.⁶⁰

Though slavery whitened as the antebellum period progressed, public antipathy for miscegenation mounted, and Boucicault's play registers this hostility. Zoe herself reflects the antagonism that the mixed-race character of slavery received in the Old South when she calls herself an "unclean thing" in the process of explaining her racial content to her white suitor, George.⁶¹ Zoe's language reveals that southerners aligned blackness with dirtiness and inhumanity. She, like Othello, internalizes the language of color and turns it self-destructively upon herself, but other characters contribute their racist observations as well. Mrs. Peyton, Zoe's step-mother, urges George to marry a rich woman who lives on an adjoining plantation rather than her step-daughter. This match would not only save Terrebonne, the family's heavily indebted estate, but explains Mrs. Peyton, the alternative arrangement would also keep George from marrying Zoe, "who is only an Octoroon!"⁶²

Salem Scudder, the overseer, remarks that Mrs. Peyton has raised her husband's illegitimate daughter "as if she'd been her own child," but her words to George show that she still sees Zoe as an inferior being of mixed-race status.⁶³ Mrs. Peyton's comment also displays an under-current of animosity toward her step-daughter, who is a daily, physical reminder of Judge Peyton's past infidelity. Finally, M'Closky, the unscrupulous creditor who schemes to foreclose on Terrebonne and its possessions (including Zoe), muses on the lustiness he is sure lurks beneath the surface of Zoe's white façade: "That

⁶⁰ Bardaglio, 49-55; Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 48; Williamson, 63.

⁶¹ Boucicault, 2.1.143, p. 147.

⁶² Ibid., 3.1.106, p. 152.

⁶³ Ibid., 1.1.110, p. 137.

one drop of black blood burns in her veins and lights up her heart like a foggy sun I'll have her if it costs me my life!"⁶⁴ M'Closky's fantasy about Zoe's sexual desires springs from the myth of the lascivious black woman, despite her virginal white appearance. Reduced to this status in his mind, Zoe becomes an object that M'Closky can violently use for his own physical pleasure.

While aversion to miscegenation grew during the antebellum period, Zoe's whiteness appealed to theatergoers, who found the enslavement of a white woman anathema. Boucicault himself sympathized with "the Quadroon and Octoroon girls [who] revolted from union with blacks" as they were so proud of their white blood.⁶⁵ Jennifer Brody notes that Boucicault's sentiments paralleled those of northerners and southerners alike: slavery repelled, especially when it was suffered by "white" women.⁶⁶ Literary scholar Barbara McCaskill agrees and contends that stories of white slavery "mesmerized" nineteenth-century audiences. She cites a notorious mid-1840s New Orleans court case in which a German woman named Salome Muller claimed that she had been wrongfully enslaved for twenty-five years. She won her case to large public outcry. Ellen Craft, the light-skinned Georgia slave who dressed as a man and escaped with her husband who posed as her valet in 1848, achieved similar notoriety for escaping to freedom. She often received credit for her ingenuity and acumen as a result of her "white blood."⁶⁷

Historian Stephan Talty similarly cites William Lloyd Garrison and Henry Ward Beecher as examples of northern abolitionists who used white slavery to gain support for

⁶⁴ Ibid., 2.1.163-64, p. 148.

⁶⁵ Quoted in Brody, p. 47.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 48.

⁶⁷ Barbara McCaskill, Introduction to *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom* by William Craft and Ellen Craft, 1860 (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1999), vii-xxv, quotations on p. xx.

their cause. Garrison frequently employed a rhetorical device that he dubbed “imaginative substitution” in his speeches. This strategy called upon listeners to imagine slaves as white so that they could generate more direct sympathy for those in bonds. Garrison rationalized this technique by contending that white Americans had to imagine the life of black captives from the inside, but his scheme still denied slaves the validity of their skin color and stripped them of their dignity as African Americans. He first discovered the power of the trope in a speech given at the Park Street Church in Boston on July 4, 1829. “Imagine that the slaves’ skin suddenly became white,” he enjoined his listeners, “would you then ignore their suffering and continue to talk about constitutional guarantees and slave owners’ rights? No.” Instead, he said, “Your voice would peal in the ears of the taskmasters like deep thunder.”⁶⁸

Henry Ward Beecher used a comparable approach to raise money for the abolition movement in his northeastern congregations. He came to church with young, mulatto girls who were so light-skinned that they looked white, and he listed the atrocities that these innocent white children would face if forced to return south to captivity. The girls’ whiteness elicited fevered reactions from his church members: “women wailed, grew hysterical . . . tore off their jewelry—rings, bracelets—and piled them in the collection plates that passed through the crowd. Men’s hands trembled as they tore the money out of their pocketbooks or unhooked their gold watches.”⁶⁹ Garrison and Beecher would not have met with as much success if they had focused on the blackness of their subjects, and this emphasis guaranteed the favorable reception of Boucicault’s play as well.

⁶⁸ Stephan Talty, *Mulatto America* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2003), 5-7, quotation on p. 7.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

Actor Joseph Jefferson, who played the overseer Salem Scudder in *The Octoroon*'s New York debut, recalled that the audience's positive reaction to the drama stemmed from sympathy for the fair-skinned Zoe, first performed by Agnes Robertson. A famous actress and the wife of Dion Boucicault, Robertson had come to America in 1853 from England, where she had acted at London's Princess Theatre under the management of Charles Kean. She was a petite woman with fair skin, black hair, and blue eyes, an appearance that would have buttressed Zoe's whiteness in *The Octoroon*.⁷⁰ When Dora, the wealthy neighboring plantation owner who is in love with George, offered to buy Zoe to remove her from the clutches of M'Closkey, Joseph Jefferson recalled that "the audience cheered for the South." When the plot shifted, and the creditor won Zoe after all, however, the spectators "cheered for the North as though they had said, 'Down with slavery!'"⁷¹ While the New Orleans playgoers who saw the drama for the first time on April 5, 6, and 7, 1865, almost certainly diverged in their political views from their northern counterparts, Zoe's whiteness most likely elicited their empathy. The *Daily Picayune* reported that "good houses" attended the play, and that "the piece went off amidst a fair accompaniment of applause."⁷²

Stephan Talty observes that African ethnicity had to be evident in light-skinned mulattos for their auctions to be successful in the antebellum South, and though slavery had met its demise by the end of the Civil War when New Orleanians had their first viewing of *The Octoroon*, pre-war ideas about race had changed little in the South. The sale of light-skinned slaves had flourished in antebellum New Orleans, which was

⁷⁰ H. W. Wilson Web, s.v. "Agnes Kelly Robertson," via Galileo online database (accessed 13 September, 2004).

⁷¹ Jefferson, 214-15.

⁷² "Amusements," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 7 April, 1865; Watson, *Antebellum Charleston Dramatists*, 145.

especially well known for its “fancy-girl” auctions. These sales took place in the rotunda of the St. Louis Hotel or the lobby of the St. Charles Hotel, so Crescent City residents were personally familiar with the dynamics of the climactic scene in Boucicault’s play. Nevertheless, the women whom they saw sold possessed enough dark skin pigmentation that they could not pass as white. Theater historian Joseph Roach shows these auctions became so popular that they took place alongside dramatic offerings, circus acts, minstrel shows, musical concerts, dance programs, and the variety of other popular amusements that diverted people from their mundane, everyday lives. Fancy-girl auctions, says Roach, appealed to spectators who enjoyed the festive atmosphere: managers hired bands to play music and provided exotic costumes for the slave women to dress up in before they ascended to the auction block. The spectacle of beautiful, tawny women clad (often scantily) in fancy clothing and displayed in sumptuous surroundings in turn titillated the white male attendees, who gained an immediate sense of power and gratification when they spent their money to possess the attractive female flesh on view before their admiring eyes.⁷³

Newspaper advertisements for slave auctions frequently ran alongside billings for theatrical offerings and further defined these events as performances within the world of popular entertainment. B. Loring ran a notice for the sale of a seventeen-year old house-servant that appeared on the same page as the Camp Street Theatre’s advertisement for Charlotte Barnes’s *Octavia Brigaldi* on May 22, 1838, in the *Daily Picayune*, and the St. Charles Theatre’s announcement for the performance of *The Lady of Lyons* sat next to Thomas Spear’s card advertising a large sale of slaves and real estate on April 4, 1840. Benjamin Kendig and Company announced the sale at the St. Louis Exchange of a

⁷³ Roach, 211-220; Talty, 6-7.

mother, Delia, and her two daughters, Dolly and Mary, in the March 15, 1842, *Daily Picayune*, and again, the advertisement ran alongside the theatrical notices.⁷⁴ Similar juxtapositions could be found on most days throughout the antebellum period and showed that white southerners thought no more about attending a slave auction than they did the theater.

In contrast, outsiders who had never witnessed a slave sale often reacted to them with the repugnance that Zoe's auction elicited in viewers of *The Octoroon*. Traveler Anton Reiff recorded his dismay over watching a thirty-five year old woman sold away from her owners in Mobile in 1856: "This auction to me was the worst place in which I have seen slavery—to see human beings (with a soul) sold—together with Steamboats, Horses—seems absolutely horrible."⁷⁵ Zoe also experiences commodification, but because she occupies an in-between space as a woman of mixed-race status and was played by white actresses, her mere presence worked to question the binaries of blackness and whiteness in a culture that rigidly organized itself around those polarities. Literary theorist Homi Bhabha notes that displacement of the dominant culture occurs only from the emergence of "the interstices."⁷⁶ From that interstitial position, Boucicault's Zoe won acclaim with northern and southern audiences alike; the former saw her as an abolitionist heroine, while the latter viewed her as a tragic white slave.

As an abolitionist drama, *The Octoroon* built on the foundation that dramatizations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had begun laying in 1852. Adapted for the stage by George L. Aiken, the stage version of Stowe's book was a

⁷⁴ "Negro Girl for Sale," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 22 May, 1838; "A Card," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 4 April, 1840; "Slaves!—Slaves!" *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 15 March, 1842.

⁷⁵ Reiff Journal, 42.

⁷⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1-2, 13.

smash hit with northern audiences and initiated a craze for the play that spawned dozens of other dramatic renditions. In contrast, the novel and play outraged southerners, who quickly responded with anti-Uncle Tom books and dramas that portrayed a region populated by benevolent masters and happy, faithful slaves. Thomas Bangs Thorpe's *The Master's House* (1854), William Gilmore Simms's *Woodcraft* (1852), and Mary Eastman's *Aunt Phillis's Cabin* (1852) were all published within two years of Stowe's book, and according to literary historian Thomas Gossett, they bear great resemblance to the many pro-slavery pamphlets published during the years before the Civil War. Cardboard characters and sketchy plots provided the means to deliver the southern nationalist response. Similar criticism has been made of Stowe's work, but the pervasive political and cultural influence of the novel and the plays it spawned makes their study important. As Eric Lott says, "the terrific conflicts among and within the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* plays roots us in the national struggles of the 1850s."⁷⁷

The anti-Tom plays popular in southern theaters bore some similarity to the novels that quickly appeared, but they also drew on the blackface minstrelsy tradition that had long been a mainstay on southern stages. Eric Lott notes that each region had its tone and politics of racial representation, which in turn manifested themselves in different versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. For white southerners, blackface stage lampoons of the abolitionist novel and its serious dramatizations (which northern audiences also took pleasure in attending) were simply an extension of the minstrel shows they had always enjoyed.⁷⁸ No scripts survive; however, excerpts and newspaper descriptions reveal that

⁷⁷ Thomas F. Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985), 212, 263-68; Watson, *Antebellum Charleston Dramatists*, 49, 58-59, 145; Garff B. Wilson, 202-7; Lott, 233.

⁷⁸ Lott, 211-216.

many of the burlesques omitted the St. Clare and Legree sections and solely focused on the Shelby plantation in Kentucky. These excisions placed the emphasis on Tom, George, and Eliza's lives while they were living with kind owners who cared for their well-being. Even though the plot was cut up into a series of musical numbers, the loyalty of the three slaves to their good white master shone through.

George Kunkel's Nightingale Ethiopian Opera Troupe began the penchant for the theatrical rebuttals when the group performed in Richmond and Charleston in October 1853. The production featured a slave who returns voluntarily to his home in the sunny South after experiencing life among northern bigots. Actor and playwright Joseph M. Field, who was married to actress Eliza Riddle Field, carried on the anti-Tom tradition when he introduced the genre to New Orleanians in February 1854 with his *Uncle Tom's Cabin: or Life in the South as It Is*. He advertised the drama's author as "Mrs. Harriet Screecher Blow" and peppered the production with sentimental scenes wherein homesick, freed slaves sing songs like "Carry me back to Old Virginny" and "The Old Folks at Home." Field's play ended in high minstrel tradition with a gang of black characters performing a dance called the "Juba." His version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* played to full houses for six nights and was followed the next month by another rebuttal by William T. Leonard called *Uncle Tom in Louisiana*. Actor and singer Dan Rice featured the play at his Crescent City Amphitheatre for twenty-three consecutive nights. The smash hit featured Tom singing about Shelby's forgiveness after he foolishly tried to run away and was one of the most popular productions ever staged in New Orleans.⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Grimsted, 237; Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 276, 280-81; Watson, *The History of Southern Drama*, 61, 64-67.

Like *The Octoroon* and *The Moorish Page*, the anti-Tom plays also exposed the link between race and sex in the antebellum South. When burlesques removed the Louisiana scenes, no Topsy character could entertain audiences with her high jinks and pranks, and with her loss came the elimination of a very headstrong black female. Cutting the Mississippi sections also resulted in the exclusion of the sexually abused, mixed-race character, Cassie. Nevertheless, Eliza is also a mulatto woman, and though she does not endure daily rape by a psychotic master as does Cassie, her skin color shows that she is a product of physical violence inflicted by a white man, her father, upon her mother. That this man could be her “kind” and “caring” master, Mr. Shelby, emphasizes further the horror of her situation. While a white actress would have played Eliza’s part in serious southern versions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* such as Henry J. Conroy’s 1854 play or George Heilge’s 1861 hit, *Parlor and Cabin*, more common were the minstrel renderings in which men performed even the women’s roles.⁸⁰ By playing the part of mixed-race women, white men asserted their symbolic control of black female sexuality and proclaimed their own dominance in a culture that valued white male authority.

Though most southern reviewers were scandalized by Stowe’s novel, particularly to what many perceived as the author’s unnatural interest in sex, a few critics praised the book and the dramatic renditions that followed.⁸¹ Most of these were anonymous commentators or private journal writers such as Mary Boykin Chesnut, who commented on the credibility of the scenes portraying the depraved Simon Legree and the sexually assaulted Cassie. “Mrs. Stowe did not hit the sorest spot,” observed Chesnut, “She makes him a bachelor. . . . Oh, I knew half a Legree, a man said to be as cruel as Legree—but

⁸⁰ Fife, 58; Gossett, 274-6.

⁸¹ Ibid., 185-196.

the other half of him did not correspond. He was a man of polished manners. And the best husband and father and member of the church in the world.”⁸² For Chesnut, the hurt inflicted upon the white wives and children of the men who kept shadow families outweighed the damage done to their slave victims. Earlier in her journal, she had called slavery “a curse to any land,” but her sentiments stemmed from the conviction that the institution encouraged sexual immorality in white men by surrounding them with libidinous black women. Though she was unafraid to recognize the existence of miscegenation and its seriousness, Chesnut vilified the victim rather than the oppressor: “We live surrounded by prostitutes,” she complained.⁸³ Chesnut did not wholly excuse white women, however. She observed that a lady could tell the father of mulatto children in other people’s homes, while those in her own seemed to have dropped from the clouds. Southerners similarly displayed willful blindness when they attended the anti-Tom plays popular on their stages in the 1850s, for the presence of Eliza and the absence of Cassie confronted them with the inter-racial sexual activity that regularly took place within their midst.

Anna Cora Mowatt also notes the presence of antebellum miscegenation in her autobiography, though she only brought the sexual custom inadvertently to the attention of her Savannah audience in an 1852 production of *The Stranger*. Though somewhat mythic, the story still makes a good point. Missing the necessary juvenile actor and actress to play Mrs. Haller’s children, Mowatt accepted her mulatto dressing attendant’s offer to use her children, who could pass as white to play the walk-on parts. Somehow the stage set spooked the sleepy children who cried out in dialect, thereby alerting the

⁸² Mary Boykin Chesnut, *Mary Chesnut’s Civil War*, ed. C. Vann Woodward (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 168.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 29.

highly amused audience to the youngsters' mixed-race identity.⁸⁴ While the appearance of the light-skinned children nearly turned a serious play into a comedy, their presence showed once again the artificiality of external racial characteristics as well as the connection between race and sex.

This link was further underscored during the Civil War when the term miscegenation came into existence and when white actresses eschewed playing African-American roles. David Goodman Croly and George Wakeman, two journalists who worked for the *New York World*, an anti-abolitionist newspaper, coined the word miscegenation when they used the expression in the title of a political pamphlet that they published anonymously as a joke in 1863. The 72-page pamphlet entitled “Miscegenation: The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and the Negro” satirically argued that racial mixing produced stronger nations and that America should give up its ideas of racial purity and instead embrace amalgamation. Though the abolitionist movement missed the intended satire and loudly praised the pamphlet, aggressive advertisement of the little booklet produced a new word. A combination of the Latin prefix *misce*, to mix, and *gene*, race, the new term quickly found a place in the language.⁸⁵ The creation of the word reflects the growing intolerance toward racial mixing that historians Joel Williamson and Martha Hodes say mounted at the end of the antebellum period. Rather than reducing this tension, the Civil War fueled racial conflict, which continued to increase during Reconstruction. White men particularly worried about losing white women, their unsullied vessels of reproduction, to the clutches of black men. But Hodes draws on the work of Frederick

⁸⁴ Mowatt, 244-47.

⁸⁵ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition, s.v. “Miscegenation,” via Galileo online database, (accessed 13 September, 2004); Talty, 70-72.

Douglass and Ida B. Wells to point out that white men also accused black men of sexual transgressions to strip them of their newfound political power.⁸⁶

The absence of African-American roles in actresses' repertoires during the Civil War years further attests to the rising social disapproval for miscegenation. Actresses cast themselves instead as beautiful belles in the mold of the pure, though mythic, white Anglo-Saxon southerner, and newspapers eagerly picked up on this image. For instance, the Mobile *Sunday Republic* touted Ida Vernon as the "first lady of the Confederate Theatre," while the Wilmington *Daily Journal* lauded her beauty and grace and asserted that "Miss Vernon unquestionably stands at the head of the profession in the South."⁸⁷ Ella Wren won similar accolades when the *Southern Illustrated News* called her "a glittering star in the dramatic firmament," and the *Macon Daily Morning News* heaped comparable praises on Eloise Bridges, a "noble lady" endowed with both talent and charm.⁸⁸

These designations are ironic as only Ella Wren possessed the ideal Anglo-Saxon heritage necessary to gain her the superior status she enjoyed. The daughter of English actors who came to America in 1847, Wren embodied the "dominant stock" that historian George Fredrickson says southerners glorified when they imagined the ideal ethnic character of their region. In contrast, Ida Vernon was the daughter of an English father and French mother, while Eloise Bridges came from New Orleans, a place known for the diversity of its white population. Immigrants from France, Germany, Canada, the Caribbean, and England made this city and its environs home to a multi-cultural white citizenry, which was complemented by other ethnic groups including a varied African-

⁸⁶ Hodes, 1-6; Williamson, 3, 61-65; 91.

⁸⁷ Quoted in Fife, 205-6, 399.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 276, 338.

American and native-American populace.⁸⁹ Nonetheless, white actresses represented for southerners during the Civil War the epitome of racial purity as they played favorite roles from the traditional antebellum repertory or new ones that portrayed them as aristocratic belles. Most of these were penned by John Hill Hewitt and featured a lovely young woman such as the character Laura Mason in *The Battle of Leesburg*, whose whiteness stands out starkly against the blackness of her loyal slave Jerry.

White women did not refrain from enacting blackness on southern stages for long. Lydia Thompson's British Blondes cashed in on the immense popularity of male minstrel shows and staged their own unique burlesques of these performances. They also worked up dramatizations of exotic stories such as *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves* and *Sinbad the Sailor*. In all of these plays, the women darkened their skin and played the traditional male parts but left their platinum blonde hair to contrast with their dusky—and skimpily clad—bodies. Southerners responded with wild approval to these risqué performances: the New Orleans *Daily Picayune* gushed over “the fair bevy of graceful, beautiful women, conscious of their charms and wielding a spell so potent with [so] telling an effect” after a performance of *The Forty Thieves* in December, 1869, and the following year, the same paper marveled at the mesmerizing effect of Thompson's “graceful witchery.”⁹⁰ Historian Steve Goodson notes that burlesque shows did not always receive a welcome invitation in southern cities during the post-war years, for the elite worried about the unrefined cultural image such performances would foster.⁹¹ Nevertheless,

⁸⁹ Fife, 138-9, 141, 338; Fredrickson, 99-101; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, “The Formation of Afro-Creole Culture in Colonial New Orleans,” in *Creole New Orleans: Race and Americanization*, ed. Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 58-90, see especially pp. 61-65.

⁹⁰ “St. Charles Theatre,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 30 December, 1869; “Academy of Music,” *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 8 January, 1870.

⁹¹ Goodson, 56.

audiences' appetite for these shows revealed a continued connection between race and sexuality as the Blondes frequently aligned their sexiness with blackness. In the same way that southerners could admire Celeste's racy portrayal of the Moorish page for its exoticism, they could appreciate Lydia Thompson's Ali Baba for its Otherness.

bell hooks contends that mass culture frequently brings commodification of racial Others while maintaining white supremacy.⁹² By enacting blackness, both Thompson and Celeste contributed to this process at very different times in the nineteenth-century South. When Agnes Robertson Boucicault played the mulatto Zoe, and when other white actresses played the light-skinned Eliza in anti-Uncle Tom dramas, they too participated in dominating the African-American population. And though Civil War actresses seemed to escape such charges, they too helped perpetuate an inequitable system through their avoidance of blackness.

Acting Red

“Tho’ of dark complexion, she is well-favour’d both in form and feature, of admir’d carriage / courteous and discreet in discourse.”

John Rolfe, *Pocahontas* (1830), 1.3.107-8,

George Washington Parke Custis

John Rolfe's description of Pocahontas in the play by George Washington Parke Custis shows that actresses enacted redness in addition to blackness as part of their standard antebellum repertory offerings. Some roles featured native women who embodied white values, thereby shoring up and defining the whiteness of the actresses who played the parts. Both Pocahontas in George Washington Parke Custis's 1830 play and Miami in John Baldwin Buckstone's *The Green Bushes* (1845) fulfilled this role.

⁹² hooks, 21-3.

Other roles juxtaposed white women with Native American characters and used the contrast to emphasize the women's whiteness. For instance, Caliban's depraved native presence underscores Miranda's civilized whiteness in Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1611). Though presented as half-man, half beast in most nineteenth-century stage productions, Alden and Virginia Vaughan note that literary critics were connecting this monstrous being with American natives by the end of the late eighteenth century. Textual commentators on the play began to remark on references to Bermuda as well as etymological similarities between Caliban's name, the word "cannibal," and the tribal name "Carib."⁹³ Other stock plays such as Richard Sheridan's *Pizarro* aligned white women with romanticized native characters, and the popular *Metamora* featured a native princess, Nahmeokee, who played the female counterpart to the title character's noble savage role. Like many antebellum repertory selections depicting African Americans, the dramas that featured native characters frequently revealed more about the white characters, and they also reflected the volatility that characterized relations between the two groups.

The roles portraying Indians in popular nineteenth-century plays also joined a long line of distorted images that Europeans created from their first contacts with Native Americans. Historian Robert Berkhofer notes that aside from coining the generic term "Indian" for the hundreds of different indigenous peoples he met, Columbus also established simplistic binary descriptions for the natives he encountered. They were "guileless" and "giving" but also "ferocious" and "fierce." Subsequent explorers expanded on these binaries, which reflected their own conceptual categories and moral

⁹³ Alden T. Vaughan and Virginia Mason Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 26-32, 36-43, 118-123.

values. Inventing Indians as “heathens,” “barbarians,” “savages,” and “pagans,” reinforced notions of European civility, refinement, superiority, and Christianity.⁹⁴ As a steady stream of settlers followed the trickle of explorers, transplanted Europeans began to identify themselves as Americans, and their new sense of identity and nationalism grew in part out of defining themselves as different from the native peoples who preceded them.⁹⁵ Yet white colonists in the South appropriated Indian costumes at Saint Tammany Day festivities in Savannah, while their northern counterparts usurped native dress to engage in civil protests such as the Boston Tea Party and the Mast Tree Riot. Historian Kenneth Silverman contends that the Indian clothes acted simultaneously as “disguises and as assertive revelations of new identities” for the colonists.⁹⁶ Philip J. Deloria says that in dressing up as natives, the whites “could imagine themselves as both British citizens and legitimate Americans protecting aboriginal customs.” After the American Revolution, Americans continued to “play Indian,” but the functions of their play shifted according to the circumstances of real Native Americans.⁹⁷

Early American art, literature, and drama reflected white perceptions of Indians and continued to portray native people in binaric terms. Robert Berkhofer explains that artists drew on the trope of the noble savage to depict a friendly, hospitable, modest, and honest Indian, while his opposite was violent, fiendish, sexually promiscuous, deceitful, and conniving. As Americans began to establish a tradition of *belles lettres*, they searched for suitable native subjects and seized upon the noble savage image (along with

⁹⁴ Robert F. Berkhofer, *The White Man's Indian: Images of the American Indian from Columbus to the Present* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 1-24.

⁹⁵ Malcomson, 61, 289.

⁹⁶ Kenneth Silverman, *A Cultural History of the American Revolution* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 249.

⁹⁷ Philip J. Deloria, *Playing Indian* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 34, 43.

the American forest) to serve as a national symbol for the original innocence and innate goodness of the continent. In the same way that Montaigne had used his essay about Brazilian natives, *On Cannibals*, to accuse Europeans of committing even greater atrocities than his South American subjects, American writers and artists such as Philip Freneau, James Fenimore Cooper, George Catlin, and Charles Bird King used their work on the vanishing Indian to criticize the march of westward expansion. As Scott Malcomson asserts, however, to become a unified white nation, America had to lose its sense of nomadic freedom and the native people who exemplified that life. The Romantic art that honored the noble savage but killed its polar opposite accomplished this goal.⁹⁸

Early nineteenth-century stage portrayals of Shakespeare's Caliban in *The Tempest* featured a disfigured, bestial, and sub-human creature that hardly fit the profile of the noble savage, and this characterization might have contributed to the play's spotty staging in contrast with such popular plays as *Richard the Third*, *Catharine and Petruchio*, or *Romeo and Juliet*. When theaters did schedule *The Tempest*, they presented the truncated Dryden-Davenant version entitled *The Enchanted Island*, which greatly reduced Caliban's part and aligned him with the bawdy, bumbling seamen, Stephano, Mustacho, Trinculo, and Ventaso.⁹⁹ Often played as a howling, drunken, and fur-covered monster, this Caliban's portrayal coincided with the medieval figure of the Wild Man, whom Stephen Greenblatt says lived untouched by civilization and frequently could not speak. Though Prospero and Miranda teach Caliban how to speak and how to live in human company, Caliban unabashedly points out that his only profit from their tutelage

⁹⁸ Berkhofer, 28, 73-76, 86-89; Malcomson, 62-3.

⁹⁹ Vaughan and Vaughan, *Shakespeare's Caliban*, 173-77.

has been learning how to curse. “The red botch rid you for learning me your language,” he shouts.¹⁰⁰ Fully aware that they have used his understanding of their language to enslave and exploit him, Caliban strikes out verbally in anger. He has also shown similar frustration by trying to rape Miranda, and in Shakespeare’s original text, she flings derogatory labels at him that Greenblatt says John Dryden and his contemporaries found “disturbingly indelicate.”¹⁰¹ As a result, Dryden gives these lines to Prospero rather than besmirching Miranda’s purity by allowing her to call Caliban an “abhor’d slave” and a “hag seed.”¹⁰² John Philip Kemble followed Dryden’s lead when crafting his productions of *The Tempest*. Eighteenth-century textual editors Thomas Hanmer and Samuel Johnson followed suit as well, although Alexander Pope left the words with Miranda. Whoever hurled the invectives in the other texts then added a string of slurs to the short list in the Dryden-Davenant version: Caliban became a native “savage” and “a thing most brutish” spawned by “a vile race” and therefore “deservedly confined” in a rock.¹⁰³

Thus, when Rosalie Somers played Miranda in a New Orleans Varieties Theatre production of *The Tempest* in 1854, theatergoers could have seen Prospero or Miranda herself insulting Caliban.¹⁰⁴ If the cast used a text that placed the words of invective in Prospero’s mouth, the audience likely approved of a father defending his daughter from sexual violation and fending off the possibility of ruining his reproductive line with

¹⁰⁰ William Davenant and John Dryden, *The Tempest, or the Enchanted Island* (London: Henry Herringman, 1674), 1.2.248, p.12.

¹⁰¹ Stephen Greenblatt, “Learning to Curse: Aspects of Linguistic Colonialism in the Sixteenth Century” in *First Images of America: The Impact of the New World on the Old*, Vol 2, ed. Fred Chiappelli (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), 561-580, quotation on p. 569.

¹⁰² *The Tempest* (Dryden-Davenant), 1.2.239, 250, p. 12.

¹⁰³ *The Tempest* (Hanmer), 1.4.38-44, p. 19; *The Tempest* (Johnson), 1.4.35-50, pp. 22-23; *The Tempest* (Kemble Promptbooks, ed., Shattuck,) 1.1.304, p.14. *The Tempest* (Pope), 1.4. 38-44, p.18.

¹⁰⁴ Varieties Theatre Playbill for *The Tempest*, 1854, Rogers Family Papers, Collection 724, Tulane Special Collections, Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, Varieties Theatre Folder: 1854-1858.

mixed-race progeny. If instead, they used a text that gave the words to Miranda, however, playgoers might have been just as approving, for they could have seen her as a young woman protecting her virginal status and obediently cleaving to her father. Caliban's threat to Miranda's sexual purity would have raised a seminal fear for southerners, and in this way, literary critic Paul Brown says, *The Tempest* "again demonstrates the crucial nexus of civil power and sexuality in colonial discourse."¹⁰⁵

Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *Pizarro* makes this connection as well, but this drama about a dictatorial Spanish conquistador whose alluring white mistress, Elvira, prevents his mission to vanquish Peru employs a very different plot to draw the correlation. A promiscuous woman who occupies a prominent position of power, Elvira uses her public place and her body to lobby for the civil rights of the dispossessed and occupied Incans. Allying herself with three native characters, Rolla, Cora, and Alonzo, she speaks out against colonial greed: "I abhor the motive, means, and ends of your pursuits," she declares to Pizarro.¹⁰⁶ When her lover refuses to listen and when physical seduction will not change his mind either, Elvira decides to plot his murder. Though Pizarro's wild and adventurous deeds had drawn Elvira, in much the same way that Othello's exploits had attracted Desdemona, the Spanish mistress distances herself from him and embraces instead "the innocent race" that needs protection from her people's exploitation. Clothed in this moral mantle, Elvira directs her Spanish brethren to go home and "assure your rulers, they mistake the road to glory or to power—Tell them, that

¹⁰⁵ Paul Brown, " 'This Thing of Darkness I Acknowledge Mine': *The Tempest* and the Discourse of Colonialism" in *Political Shakespeare: New Essays in Cultural Materialism*, eds. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985; Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 48-71, quotation on p. 62.

¹⁰⁶ Sheridan, *Pizarro*, 1.1.49-50, p. 6 of 114.

the pursuits of avarice, conquest, and ambition, never yet made a people happy, or a nation great.”¹⁰⁷

Southerners relished attending *Pizarro*. The Charleston Theatre staged the play more than any other between 1800 and 1816, and it was the most popular drama on the Cincinnati and Lexington stages between 1810 and 1835. Even when Shakespeare’s *Richard the Third* and Bulwer-Lytton’s *The Lady of Lyons* surpassed the drama in number of yearly performances at the three theaters, they still frequently performed *Pizarro*.¹⁰⁸ The sustained popularity of the play meant that every major antebellum actress had to include Elvira in her repertory. Eliza Poe added the part to her expanding list of characters in 1807, and Elvira joined Ophelia, Helen M’Gregor and Fair Star (the lead in a popular melodrama entitled *Cherry and Fair Star*) as one of the four roles Jane Placide returned to most often throughout her career. She played the role across from James Caldwell, Charles Kean, and Edwin Forrest in addition to the many lesser known stock actors who visited New Orleans during her tenure there. Julia Dean Hayne included the role in her repertory from the inception of her career, Anna Cora Mowatt played the part on her tour of the South in 1846, and Eliza Logan played the role during her 1854 stay in Savannah.¹⁰⁹

Pizarro likely appealed to southerners on many levels: the spectacle that permeated the play, the noble depiction of the native characters, the air of moral superiority southerners felt when they watched the cruel Spaniards whom they perceived as so different from themselves, and Elvira’s moral reformation all worked to attract a

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 5.4.39-42, p.112 of 114.

¹⁰⁸ Langworthy, 146; Garff B. Wilson, 127.

¹⁰⁹ Atheneum Theatre Advertisement, *Savannah Daily Morning News*, 11 January, 1854; Bailey, 160, 359; Blackburn, Appendix B; Burroughs, 83, 100, 104; Dietz, 43-44, 49, 54; Duggar, 44, 164-65; Hostetler, 103-4; Ludlow, 659; Geddeth Smith, 97.

consistent stream of theatergoers throughout the antebellum period. Sensational scenes punctuate Sheridan's drama, and southern managers gave particular emphasis to these scenes as audiences consistently responded to thrills and excitement. Aside from action-packed battle scenes between the Spanish conquistadors and the Peruvian Incans, *Pizarro* features a child's abduction and breathtaking rescue, as well as the climactic murder of the title villain. The most spectacular scene occurs before all of these, however, and depicts a solemn ceremony in the Incan Temple of the Sun. The stage directions note that the scene "represents the magnificence of "Peruvian idolatry," and give instructions for presenting a grand ritual march that includes all the warriors and king.¹¹⁰

Managers Sol Smith and William Abbott decided to add to the pageantry of the Temple scene by using real Indians when they scheduled performances twenty years apart in Columbus, Georgia, and Charleston, South Carolina. Abbott's experience in 1858 went off without a hitch, and he was probably quite gratified with the \$1200 that his Seminole performers brought in, but Sol Smith likely rued his decision to hire local Creek Indians to add to the panache of his play. Smith recalled in his autobiography that the Creeks got so carried away with their stage antics that no one could stop them: "The Indians kept up their song and war dance for full half an hour, performing the most extraordinary feats ever exhibited on a stage, in their excitement scalping King Ataliba (taking off his wig), demolishing the altar, and burning up the sun!" Smith went on to note that the play basically came to a halt, for the actresses (who included his wife) playing the worshipping virgins and the lead female parts beat a quick retreat to the dressing rooms, where they locked themselves in for the evening. The Indians had not finished appropriating the white actors' stage, however, for they returned the following

¹¹⁰ Sheridan, *Pizarro*, p. 33 of 114.

day asking to play walk-on parts again that evening. Smith declined their offer since the company was performing *Macbeth*, and he did not think native warriors would fit into the Scottish setting of that play. Like Anna Cora Mowatt, Smith might have embellished his remembrance, but the tale makes for a good story and reveals white southern stereotypes about native comportment both on and off stage.¹¹¹

Southerners might have liked *Pizarro* for its noble depiction of the Incans as well. The scenes focusing on Cora and Alonzo present pictures of domestic bliss as the loving parents dote on their infant child, and when the Spaniards steal the baby, Cora blames herself for leaving her child unattended momentarily. Rolla worries for Elvira's safety when she pledges to help his people, and he sacrifices his life for hers when he battles and kills Pizarro, sustaining a wound in the process. In short, the Peruvians represent the noble savages celebrated by the American Romantic imagination. That they had suffered long ago and far away made them a safe group with whom to sympathize.

On the other hand, the Spaniards represented inhumane and cruel oppressors to whom white southerners could contrast themselves and build a false sense of their own compassion, even though the two groups bore an uncanny similarity. While Old South theatergoers were sympathizing with the poorly treated Peruvians in *Pizarro* during the first three decades of the nineteenth century, they were systematically reducing the land that the five civilized tribes of the Southeast occupied and working to move these native people west of the Mississippi River. The Choctaw expulsion began in 1820, and the Indian Removal Act of 1830 guaranteed that the Cherokees, Chickasaws, Creeks, and Seminoles would soon follow. The distance and exoticism of the Incans allowed

¹¹¹ Hoole, *The Antebellum Charleston Theatre*, 41; Langley, 6-7, 11; Sol Smith, 79-80.

southerners to forego making connections with the native Americans in their midst just as they failed to draw any correlation between themselves and the Spanish.

Finally, *Pizarro* probably appealed to southerners for its portrayal of Elvira's moral reformation. She begins the play as an unabashedly promiscuous woman who delights in passions of the body, but she puts aside her own physical desires to become an advocate for the Incan people. As she lobbies the inflexible Pizarro and realizes the extent of her personal sacrifice, her love quickly sours. "Have I not for thee quitted my parents, my friends, my fame, my native land?" she asks.¹¹² When Elvira realizes that Pizarro cares no more for her than he does his Incan enemies, she makes her split from him complete. Finally, she seeks her absent family's pardon for her "ruin'd honour" by joining a convent, and the play ends with her vows "to atone the guilty errors, which . . . have long consum'd my secret heart."¹¹³ Elvira's penitence and benevolence would have appealed to southerners who saw women as the moral guides of their culture, though she might also have born a stigma of Otherness as a Roman Catholic.

While Elvira comes from Spain and could be played with tan or bronze skin tones, reviews do not designate how actresses chose to depict her on Old South stages. The use of Native Americans in the Charleston and Columbus productions suggest that theater companies conceived of the Incans as darker skinned characters, however, so actresses who played the Incan Temple virgins and the motherly Cora probably used some tan makeup when they performed. The alliance of Elvira with these tanned characters raises another irony, for their intrinsic goodness molds her. Unlike Desdemona, Parthenia, and Miranda, she does not become whiter through her association

¹¹² Sheridan, *Pizarro*, 3.2, 286-87 p. 68 of 114.

¹¹³ Ibid., 4.3.48, p. 91 of 114, 5.4.27-28, p. 111 of 114.

with the Incans; rather, Elvira grows darker—and at the same time, more virtuous. While the play offered theatergoers excitement and exoticism, *Pizarro* was also quite an aberration, for the drama starred a fallen woman who allied herself with people of color, boldly called for social justice, and decried racial bondage in a time and place when white women were only expected to uphold the status quo.

John Augustus Stone's wildly popular play, *Metamora, or The Last of the Wampanoags* also features a woman who calls for peace between warring factions, but unlike Elvira, the acquiescent Nahmeokee obediently backs away from her stance at the behest of her husband, the title character of the play. Native American scholar Louis Owens says that white writers use Indian characters to imagine themselves, and the roles in Stone's play bear out this contention.¹¹⁴ Written for actor Edwin Forrest, the lead part emphasized the handsome actor's muscular physique and portrayed him as a stoic and noble red man who fights and dies heroically for his people. While these traits defined the noble savage, they also personified the loyal American patriot, a popular figure in the early years of America's burgeoning democracy.¹¹⁵ Even as tensions began to build between northerners and southerners, the figure of the rebellious patriot striking out against oppression continued to resonate with playgoers in the South.

As *Metamora*'s adoring and soft-hearted wife, Nahmeokee too exemplified the white antebellum ideal of wifely femininity. She makes their home into a quiet refuge where *Metamora* gratefully retreats at the end of each day, and that idyll becomes an even greater sanctuary for him in the midst of the strife of battle. Like Cora in *Pizarro*,

¹¹⁴ Louis Owens, "As If an Indian Were Really an Indian: Native American Voices and Postcolonial Theory," in *Native American Representations: First Encounters, Distorted Images, and Literary Appropriations*, ed. Gretchen M. Bataille (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 11-25, see especially p. 15.

¹¹⁵ Garff B. Wilson, 116.

Nahmeokee is also a fiercely devoted mother who worries about the needs of her child before her own. Indeed, when the tribe can no longer fight off its white enemies, Nahmeokee agrees with Metamora that she and their son should die before they face imprisonment and harm at the hands of their adversaries. Similar to Imoinda in Aphra Behn's novel, *Oronooko* (1688), Nahmeokee allows her husband to kill their child and then herself.¹¹⁶ Metamora's words following the murders reveal his motive has paralleled that of Othello and Oronooko: "She felt no white man's bondage—free as the air she lived—pure as the snow she died!"¹¹⁷ Thus, Nahmeokee dies undefiled by any other man, and Metamora not only preserves her virtue but also by extension, his honor, which is vested in the promise of his wife's pure body. Since audience members could view Metamora as a husband acting out of love for his family, however, they likely did not disapprove of his killing Nahmeokee or their son. In addition, right after he commits the murders, Metamora absolves himself by running into enemy fire and bringing about his own death.

Theater historian Charles Shattuck says that Stone wrote *Metamora* in response to Forrest's desire for plays about America that "would express the ideals of democracy in action" and that "would advance the great cause of human liberty."¹¹⁸ To encourage native playwrights, Forrest sponsored a contest, which Stone's play won. At first glance, *Metamora's* focus on persecuted native characters and their cruel white oppressors seems an odd choice for a play representing the country's democratic ideals. A closer look reveals, however, that the native characters provide the drama with legitimacy. Based on

¹¹⁶ Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko*, 1688, ed. Joanna Lipking (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997).

¹¹⁷ John Augustus Stone, *Metamora*, 1829, in *On Stage, America!*, ed. Walter J. Meserve (New York: Feedback Theatrebooks & Prospero Press, 1996), 5.5. 56, p. 88 .

¹¹⁸ Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage*, 71.

the Massasoit tribe of New England, Stone's imaginary Wampanoags draw on a real native presence from American history for the plot. Furthermore, as the prologue and epilogue show by playing on the word native, the drama depicts whites embracing their own liberty by becoming the new natives in America. They shall take up their "native pens" to create a "new hall of fame" for their new "native bard" and "a native actor too!"¹¹⁹ That they do so at the loss of liberty to another native people is part of the play's tragedy, but since the prologue speaker assures spectators that *Metamora* and the Wampanoags are only "a blighted race," watching their ensuing destruction might not have been too hard for viewers to stomach.¹²⁰ Further assuaging the audience, the epilogue speaker assures playgoers that *Metamora* can live on, with the playwright, as long as theaters re-stage the drama.

Southern theaters scheduled performances of *Metamora* frequently, or at least whenever Edwin Forrest toured the region, but reactions to the play were not always consistent. Spectators at an 1831 production in Augusta, Georgia, found Forrest's portrayal of the Indian hero too forceful and criticized the actor for misplaced sympathies, while Noah Ludlow said that in 1839, St. Louis theatergoers "screamed with delight" at the actor's histrionic display.¹²¹ New Orleans and Mobile audiences also must have responded well to the play in 1843, for Ludlow and Smith booked Forrest again in 1844, when he performed the trademark drama among other repertory favorites.¹²² Theater historian Walter Meserve notes, however, that *Metamora* began to lose popularity after John Brougham penned a burlesque called *Met-a-mora, or the Last of the*

¹¹⁹ Stone, prologue, ll. 38, 42, p. 51, epilogue, l. 7, p. 89.

¹²⁰ Stone, prologue, l. 9, p. 50.

¹²¹ Dormon, 247, 275.

¹²² Ludlow, 581-82, 599-600.

Pollywogs in 1847. Audiences began to demand the new comic version rather than the original tragedy.¹²³

At the height of its popularity, though, *Metamora* offered southern audiences the opportunity to watch their favorite stock actresses play an exotic role as a Native-American woman opposite from the famously handsome Edwin Forrest. Since Forrest performed his part with the same tan skin tone that he used to portray Othello, actresses such as Mrs. Greene and Mary Ann Duff, New Orleans performers who played Nahmeokee in 1839, likely appeared with similar complexions.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, enacting redness only emphasized their whiteness, for Nahmeokee embodied white gender ideals and she shared these traits with her white counterpart, Oceana. Daughter of a colonial mayor, Oceana has been betrothed to Lord Fitzarnold, a visiting English aristocrat, to secure a political alliance for her father. In love with a poor American without any family ties, Oceana disdains her arranged marriage but finds herself a victim of her father's will. A surprise plot twist allows her story to end happily, for Fitzarnold loses his life in hand-to-hand combat with *Metamora*, thereby clearing the way for Oceana and Walter to marry without disobeying her father. While she and Nahmeokee appeared before antebellum audiences with different skin tones, they shared more in common by submitting to the men who dominated their lives. Their similarities show how ethnic creations of a white author can embody values that govern the writer's culture and not those of the imagined ethnicity.

¹²³ Meserve, *Outline*, 75-79.

¹²⁴ Camp Street Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 7 February, 1839; St. Charles Theatre Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 5 April, 1839.

Though *Metamora* appeared less often on southern stages after 1847, the play still surfaced some in the 1850s, and the Crisp Company revived the drama during the Civil War with great success. Likewise, they included *Pizarro* in their standard repertory as they traveled during the war.¹²⁵ Both plays had been part of their offerings in the antebellum period and reflected the racial tension that historian Theda Perdue says festered and grew between whites and Native Americans throughout the Southeast during that time. The two plays feature native characters who affirm whiteness, reflecting the higher standing that southerners gave to “mixed blood” Indians versus those who possessed “full blood.” Perdue notes that Native Americans and whites had intermingled in the Southeast since the earliest Europeans had arrived, but she also points out that the mixed-race offspring of these unions had grown up within their Native-American tribes, where their racial composition did not alter or lessen their kinship status. In contrast, white southerners grew more and more conscious of race as they fought to preserve slavery. Though many whites saw the willingness of the five southeastern tribes to adopt “civilized” customs such as commercial agriculture, Anglo-American dress, and republican political governance as a positive sign of assimilating whiteness, the South’s Indians could not combat the racism that ultimately forced their removal west of the Mississippi.¹²⁶ Despite growing intolerance for their native neighbors, however, Old South theatergoers still enjoyed attending plays that depicted whiter Indians, especially when they distanced themselves from their native heritage and demonstrated allegiance to their white neighbors.

¹²⁵ Fife, 169, 308-9, 401; Yeomans, 41.

¹²⁶ Perdue, 9-32, 81, 86-87, 90, 97, 102-3; quotations on p. 87.

John Baldwin Buckstone's *The Green Bushes* features this plot, which centers on Miami, a mixed-race Indian princess from the Mississippi River Valley who embraces the aristocratic heritage of her French father and uses her new wealth to atone for a past transgression. When she was a young married woman, Miami suddenly learned that her Irish husband, Connor, had previously married but never divorced. His first wife, Geraldine, comes from the old country to live with her husband, and in a fit of jealousy, Miami shoots and kills Connor. Though written by the English Buckstone to show off the talents of Fanny Fitzwilliam and Madame Celine Celeste at London's Adelphi Theatre in 1845, *The Green Bushes* became popular on southern stages when Celeste included the play in her 1851 tour of America. Celeste had begun her career in the 1820s as a dancer, but she soon began to cultivate her acting talents as well. Unable to speak English when she began touring in the United States and England, pantomime offered her an attractive entrée to drama, but Celeste learned English quickly and started to add small speaking parts to her repertory. By 1845, she was ready to take on the lead role in Buckstone's play. London theatergoers loved the drama, and southerners also thrilled to Celeste's portrayal of Miami's conversion from wild, transgressive native woman to upper-class, contrite white woman when she performed the part on the Mississippi and Missouri circuits after the play's successful run in England.¹²⁷

Celeste's changing costumes indicated her shifting ethnic allegiance as the play progressed. When she first appeared as Miami, a hand-colored print in *Lacy's Dramatic Costumes* shows that Celeste carried a gun and wore moccasins, black leggings, a blue-black hunting shirt over a knee-length red petticoat, a yellow sash across her chest

¹²⁷ Ludlow, 513-14; "Madame Celine Celeste in *The Green Bushes*," *Touring West: 19th Century Performing Artists on the Overland Trails*, an online exhibition, The New York Public Library, http://www.nypl.org/west/tw_travel5.shtml (accessed 26 February, 2005).

embroidered with blue and red diamonds, a hunting horn, a yellow and red beaded headband with a feather, and beaded arm bands. Celeste's slightly tanned skin, combined with the exotic outfit, allied Miami with her mother's uncivilized Native-American heritage, whereas the costume descriptions for her second and third appearances, when she had reinvented herself as Madame St. Aubert, associated her with the refined white European ancestry of her father. In the later appearances, she wore, "a black velvet pelisse, trimmed with sable fur, [and] a small black hat," and then a "white merino dress, trimmed in black with ruffles."¹²⁸ To top off the new image of elegance and sophistication, the stage directions add that her hair was to be styled in a chignon. Toning down some of her skin makeup would have allowed Celeste to emphasize even further Miami's transformation from native to white woman.

George Washington Parke Custis's *Pocahontas: or The Settlers of Virginia* joined *Pizarro*, *Metamora*, and *The Green Bushes* in portraying a white image of a mythic native character who embraced white customs and appealed to viewers for her acceptance of "civilized" ways and ideas. Mostly popular on northern stages when it first appeared in the 1830s, the New Orleans Varieties Theatre staged *Pocahontas* to great acclaim several times in December 1860, and brought the play back several times during the Civil War.¹²⁹ Though references to Pocahontas's "dark" and "tawney" skin pepper the text, she surpasses Nahmeokee and Cora in her representation of white cultural values.¹³⁰ Her speech consistently denigrates the beliefs and intellect of her own people, whom she sees

¹²⁸ John Baldwin Buckstone, *The Green Bushes* (London: Webster and Company, 1845; *Literature Online*, 1997), p. 3 of 95, via Galileo online database (accessed 29 October, 2004).

¹²⁹ Varieties Theatre Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 8 December 1860; "Varieties Theatre," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 9, 18 December, 1860; "Varieties," *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 16 January, 1863.

¹³⁰ George Washington Parke Custis, *Pocahontas: or, The Settlers of Virginia* (Philadelphia: Alexander, 1830; *Literature Online*, 2004), 1.3.104, 107, p. 14 of 59, via Galileo online database (accessed 27 September, 2004).

as inferior to the worldly and accomplished English. A creation of a white writer indirectly descended from America's first president, Pocahontas is a white fantasy. She abjures native beliefs for the Christian faith, which has saved her "benighted soul," and she prefers to marry John Rolfe, an Englishman, over Matacoran, an Indian Prince, as Rolfe displays qualities of mercy that her vengeful native suitor lacks.¹³¹

A final climactic scene in which Pocahontas throws herself on explorer John Smith to save him from execution fully aligns her with the colonists and establishes them as the settlers of Virginia proclaimed by the play's sub-title. Historian Emory Thomas observes that "Confederate southerners often compared themselves to the American revolutionaries of 1776."¹³² Drew Gilpin Faust concurs and says that by identifying with the original colonists, Confederates could cloak themselves in American nationalism and claim that history was on their side.¹³³ Pocahontas's melodramatic move would have underscored this alliance for playgoers. Thus, Mrs. Leighton and Mrs. Gladstane, the stock actresses who played the lead role in Custis's play, became patriots fighting for the liberty and rights of their region when they performed in New Orleans during 1860. Jessie Crisp Clarke and Ida Vernon took on similar roles when they played the Indian princess for Mobile and Montgomery theatergoers in 1863 and 1864.¹³⁴ The playwright himself died in 1857, but his daughter Mary, who was married to Robert E. Lee, may have seen her father's drama performed during the war. Even if she did not, she would have known the play and probably appreciated its themes.¹³⁵ That a play which should

¹³¹ Ibid., 1.2.42, p. 8 of 59.

¹³² Thomas, 1.

¹³³ Faust, *The Creation of Confederate Nationalism*, 14.

¹³⁴ Fife, 217, 202, 329.

¹³⁵ Watson, *The History of Southern Drama*, 19-24.

have recounted the early subjugation of America's native people came instead to celebrate whiteness and to symbolize the righteousness of state's rights is a sad irony.

Acting Yellow

“Across the wilds of Tartary there whirls a demon form

His voice is not of this world and mingles with the storm . . .”

Song of the Volpas, *Mazeppa* (1831), 2.3.104-5, Henry M. Milner

Each time Adah Isaacs Menken played Mazeppa, her wild getaway ride on the huge black stallion in act 2 was followed by the appearance of a group of trembling shepherds who sang about seeing the ghostly Volpas, a fiend that rides a “fiery courser” and indiscriminately harms anyone who crosses his path.¹³⁶ The peasants do not realize that they have actually seen their own Prince Mazeppa, who has escaped from his Polish enemies and returned to the safety of his homeland. Their error serves an important function, though, for the song of the Volpas establishes many Oriental stereotypes associated with the play's setting in seventeenth-century Tartary. Now the modern state of Mongolia, located northwest of China, this area is the ancient home to several nomadic steppe tribes, including the Mongols, Merkits, Kereyids, Tartars, Naimans, and Oirots. Constant warfare over the grasslands and forests that the tribes inhabit has created for them a rough and violent image of irritability and intractability that has been difficult to shed into the present.¹³⁷ Mazeppa bears out this characterization in his determination to rout the Poles and establish an inviolate empire for himself.

¹³⁶ Milner, 2.3.114, p. 45 of 70.

¹³⁷ Erik Hildinger, Introduction to *The Story of the Mongols Whom We Call the Tartars* by Friar Giovanni DiPlano Carpini, 1252 (Boston: Branden Publishing Company, 1996), 6-29, see especially pp.6-7; *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd Edition, s.v. “Tartary” and “Tartar,” via Galileo online database (accessed 26 August, 2004).

The Polish people have demonstrated similarly unfavorable qualities, but their oversights fade by the end of the play when the focus has shifted to Mazeppa and the Tartars' desire for domination. Edward Said, the postcolonial theorist who says that Oriental stereotypes in western art forms shores up European superiority, believes that the pursuit of empire motivates the inclusion of Orientalist images in novels, poetry, music, drama, and physical art. Said contends that empire has caused an interconnection of cultures, which has long gone unrecognized. "All cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure; all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinary, differentiated, and unmonolithic," he says."¹³⁸ Early nineteenth-century American dramatic repertory bears out Said's contention, for theaters staged many British and European plays in the absence of dramas written by American playwrights. Many of these plays contained Orientalist images, which appealed to American audiences who saw the representations as exotically romantic. In addition to viewing the hackneyed Asians that these dramas often featured, playgoers in the Old South were also used to seeing other people of color—African Americans and Native Americans—similarly stereotyped. By enacting yellowness, which Said aligns with Orientalism, performers in turn buttressed the portrayal of redness, blackness, and whiteness. While actors represented the supposed backwardness and degeneracy of "Oriental" people, actresses such as Menken exemplified the reputed sensuality, irrationality, and mystery associated with them.¹³⁹

Timour the Tartar (1811) was a popular play by Matthew Gregory Lewis, a British author best known for *The Monk*, whose father was a Jamaican plantation owner. The lead characters in *Timour* possess the Orientalist stereotypes that Said describes: the

¹³⁸ Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), xxv.

¹³⁹ Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 119, 205-7.

title character, a power-hungry Afghan khan, wages war to usurp the throne of a neighboring prince and will stop at nothing to obtain his goal. Indeed, his father observes that his “terrible son spares neither friend nor foe, neither men, women, nor children”¹⁴⁰ Timour meets his match, however, in the Amazonian Zorilda, mother of the overthrown Prince Agib. Zorilda disguises herself, seduces Timour, marries him, and secretly assembles troops that ultimately best Timour’s in a rousing final scene. If Timour stands for the irrational and incoherent Oriental despot who will hurt his own people in his zealousness to attain his desires for power and prestige, Zorilda represents an exotic and unnaturally strong eastern woman who can make herself at home in a public world of men and horses. She ultimately confuses the traits associated with the masculine civic world, however, for a womanly compassion overtakes her in the last moments of the play when she saves Timour’s life by ordering his imprisonment rather than his execution. This combination of masculinity and femininity in Zorilda may have attracted southern theatergoers, but the lavish costumes, the use of real horses, the melodramatic plot, and the exotic setting would have worked to appeal to spectators as well.

Whatever the attraction, southerners clearly enjoyed *Timour the Tartar*. James Caldwell used the play when he opened his first New Orleans season in 1820, and he featured the drama twice in 1827. He played the lead in the first two productions, while Ben DeBar performed the part the third time. A Mrs. Tatnall played opposite Caldwell in 1827, and Mary Farren acted across from Ben DeBar. Ludlow and Smith included the drama in their 1839 St. Louis and New Orleans repertories, and William Forbes booked

¹⁴⁰ Matthew Gregory Lewis, *Timour the Tartar* (London: Lowndes and Hobbs, 1811; *Literature Online*, 1996), 1.1.47-48, p. 7 of 66, via Galileo online database (accessed 17 August, 2003).

the Robinson Equestrian Company to stage *Timour* along with *Mazeppa* when the troupe played at the Charleston Theatre in 1844.¹⁴¹

Though reviews do not mention performers using makeup for productions of *Timour*, they could easily have darkened their skin to portray the characters from ancient Tartary, since the people who live in Mongolia generally possess tan skin and dark eyes. Yet actors and actresses could also have relied on exotic costumes to contribute an aura of eastern Otherness to their portrayals. In the same way that nineteenth-century depictions of Moors vastly differed, so too were characterizations of Tartars likely to vary.

Southerners further demonstrated their enjoyment for exotic performances representing western ideas of middle-eastern culture when they flocked to ten consecutive performances in March 1837 of an “operatic ballet” entitled *The Maid of Cashmere* that the celebrated French dancer Madame Celeste performed at the New Orleans St. Charles Theatre during her twenty-two day stay in the Crescent City. Although no extant text remains for the production, the title indicates that the show likely focused on the experiences of a woman from Kashmir, which lies west of China and north of India. Celeste no doubt impersonated this character in a costume that conjured up stereotypical eastern images but also revealed her attractive and fit dancer’s body. She further emphasized her Oriental Otherness when she played “a wild Arab boy” in a performance of *The French Spy* and when she played Yelva in *The Orphan of Russia*. The eastern-most European country, Russia’s borders with China and the middle-eastern countries to its south give it an eastern feeling that Celeste could easily have emphasized

¹⁴¹ Durham, 32, 157, 310; Playbills for *Timour the Tartar* from the New Orleans American Theatre, Kuntz Collection.

in her performance of this play. In addition, she would have relied on the sexual attraction generated by playing breeches roles in both *The French Spy* and *The Orphan of Russia* to appeal to playgoers. Viennese dancer Fanny Elssler's desire to follow her predecessor and include *The Maid of Cashmere* in her repertory when she came to New Orleans in 1841 affirms the selection's initial popular reception and shows the attraction that southerners had for entertainment with an eastern flair.¹⁴²

Charlotte Cushman also emphasized Oriental Otherness with her portrayal of Meg Merrilies in *Guy Mannering* on her 1851 southern tour. Adapted for the stage by Daniel Terry from the novel by Sir Walter Scott, the play traces the restoration of an ancient landed family to its Scottish estate, but without Meg Merrilies, an old and prophetic Gypsy woman, their return could not occur. Meg foresees the abduction of the young Ellangowan heir, Henry Bertram, by the ambitious rival highlander leader, Glossin, and she spirits the boy away to India, where she arranges for his upbringing. When Henry turns eighteen, Meg engineers his successful return and ascension to his rightful position as family patriarch. Before community members realize that Meg has acted as Henry's surrogate mother, however, their imaginations run rampant, and they accuse the outcast Gypsy woman of practicing witchery and devilry on the vulnerable little boy.¹⁴³

Though Eastern Europeans had first privileged Gypsies, or the Roma, as fine blacksmiths and equine care takers when the ethnic group migrated from northern India into the countries now known as Bulgaria and Hungary in the Middle Ages, that favored status began to decline with the Turkish defeat of the Hungarians in 1526. Thereafter, in

¹⁴² St Charles Theatre Advertisements, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 7, 21, 31 March, 1837; St. Charles Theatre Advertisement, *New Orleans Daily Picayune*, 31 March, 1841.

¹⁴³ Daniel Terry, *Guy Mannering; or The Gypsy's Prophecy*, adapted from the novel by Sir Walter Scott (London: John Miller, 1816), microopaque (New York: Readex Microprint, 1965), 2.4.213, p. 47.

Hungary, Gypsies were seen as Turkish spies, and severe restrictions on their activities forced them into a nomadic way of life. In Bulgaria, which came under Ottoman rule, the Turks relegated the Roma to the lowest social rank and enslaved many in an abusive system. Thus, a people that had initially been admired for its craftsmanship became one of Europe's most hated, outcast groups.¹⁴⁴ Myths and stereotypes quickly grew up around the Roma to support their alterity. They were equated with dark skin and dark hair, which historian Colin Clark asserts connoted associations with the "primeval unknown, disease, death and decay, poverty, sorcery, evil and death" in medieval Europe. He points out that these connections have persisted tenaciously into the present, however, and cites the 1993 *Oxford English Dictionary*, which describes Gypsies as people with "dark tawny skin and black hair."¹⁴⁵ Clark lists other stereotypes associated with the Roma. Stories tell of a mythic aristocracy that rules their culture; tales link Gypsies with the occult and supernatural as well as with crime and thievery, and finally, their uninhibited and libidinous sexuality has grown to be legendary.¹⁴⁶

Meg's outsider status in *Guy Mannering* confirms that this distrust for gypsies had waned little in three hundred years. Only after Meg makes the ultimate sacrifice and gives her life to save Henry, do the townspeople come to accept her fully. Thus, she plays the same role that Gayatri Spivak says Bertha occupies in Charlotte Bronte's novel *Jane Eyre*, for Jane gains her autonomy at the expense of the mixed-race woman's self-

¹⁴⁴ David A. Crowe, *A History of the Gypsies of Eastern Europe and Russia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994), xi-xii, 235.

¹⁴⁵ Colin Clark, "'Severity Has Often Enraged But Never Subdued a Gypsy': The History and Making of European Romani Stereotypes," in *The Role of the Romanies: Images and Counter-Images of 'Gypsies'/Romanies in European Cultures*, eds. Nicholas Saul and Susan Tebbutt (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004), 226-246, see p. 230 for quotation.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 230-235.

immolation.¹⁴⁷ Similarly, Henry attains his safety when Meg, who supposedly possesses Indian ancestry, throws herself in the line of fire, deflecting the bullet intended for her young charge, and allowing their attendants time to seize the enemy Glossin. With the demise of the Gypsy woman, the white Bertram family regains its preeminence. The dark makeup that Charlotte Cushman used to depict herself as the old Gypsy woman emanated from and simultaneously fed the long-standing Roma stereotype. Her altered skin tone combined with the red turban, the outlandish dress of torn rags, and the russet sandals of her costume lent a foreign feeling to her interpretation of Meg Merrilies that further emphasized the character's middle-eastern heritage.¹⁴⁸ Nevertheless, the wide acclaim that Cushman received when she played the role on her southern tour of 1851 attests to the pleasure that southerners took in viewing the portrayal of yellowness, especially when they could leave theaters with their own whiteness affirmed.

The southerners who lived in the border state cities that Adah Isaacs Menken visited when she made them a part of her northeastern tour in 1862 and 1863 also relished her performance of yellowness in *Mazeppa*. Although Menken did not darken her skin to depict the middle-eastern heritage of the Tartar character she played, she wore a flamboyant costume that elicited exotic Orientalist images, which Renée Sentilles points out originated in the minds of westerners rather than in the Islamic Asian world they supposedly illustrated. Menken's ornately embroidered silk jacket, Turkish trousers, and turban conjured up pictures of a distant land filled with elaborate palaces that housed huge harems and naked slaves. These Oriental images heightened Menken's desirability

¹⁴⁷ Gayatri Spivak, "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism," *Critical Inquiry* 12 (1985): 242-261.

¹⁴⁸ Gary Jay Williams, "Guy Mannering and Charlotte Cushman's Meg Merrilies: Gothic Novel, Play and Performance," in *When They Weren't Doing Shakespeare*, eds. Fisher and Watt, 19.

and further emphasized the highly sexualized image established by the strip scene when she appeared in flesh-colored tights and shorts. Thus, playing the foreign role, Sentilles says, allowed Menken to visit “the dark side,” to consort with the “unknown, the ethnically and racially different.”¹⁴⁹ Yet *cartes de visite* taken of her in costume indicate she did all of this without changing her skin tone, so she enhanced her whiteness by playing yellowness connoted only by her guise.

Menken’s own ambiguous ethnic identity paralleled that of her stage persona. As she moved from place to place, Menken recreated herself to fit her surroundings and appeal to her audiences. She claimed Creole, Jewish, Irish, Cuban, Spanish, and African ancestries at different times in her life, but she never worried about crafting an inconsistent image, as ambiguity cultivated an aura of mystery and sparked public interest. Indeed, Menken encouraged confusion about her identity; she published three different autobiographies and gave many interviews that were full of colorful but conflicting personal information. Renée Sentilles says this discontinuity paralleled the cultural disorder created by the Civil War and made possible Menken’s success. The actress who became a Union supporter when she played in New York and a Confederate sympathizer when she performed in Baltimore could do so only because of her uncertain parentage. Sentilles also points out, however, that Menken’s success in so many guises and on stages in both the North and the South affirmed the diversity of a seemingly united nation.¹⁵⁰ Menken pitched her performances and her changing identities to appeal to the different desires of her regional audiences, and their range of reactions to her and

¹⁴⁹ Sentilles, 90, 109, 152, quotation on p. 109.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 11-20, 124.

her portrayal of the Tartar prince revealed more about the different ways that Americans actually defined themselves.

In conclusion, theatrical productions mirrored a steady deterioration in southern race-relations between the Civil War and the end of the century. Tension between blacks and whites markedly escalated after Reconstruction as state and local governments solidified segregation through Jim Crow laws and as racial violence skyrocketed. Theaters followed social trends and designated inferior, upper balcony seats for black patrons while they reserved choice seats for whites. While no regulations dictated where women sat, social codes prohibited respectable white women from sitting near the section reserved for blacks. Hence, stratified seating arrangements not only reflected the racial divisions that tore the social fabric of the region, but they also mirrored fears of racial mixing that continued to plague many white southerners. In the same way that southerners disapproved of inter-racial relations off stage, so too did they object to commingling between blacks and whites on stage. For example, Atlantans loudly protested an 1895 performance in which Sissieretta Jones, the African-American concert singer better known as “the Black Patti,” appeared with an all-white company. A soprano with the Tennessee Jubilee Singers, Jones attained international fame for her talent, but her visit to Atlanta caused such consternation that many whites boycotted her performance despite reassurance from the *Journal* that “she knew her place” and did not intend to offend the city’s art patrons.¹⁵¹

While southerners took exception to inter-racial performances like Jones’s, they enjoyed minstrel shows that white actresses began to put on in the late nineteenth century. Following the lead of Lydia Thompson’s *British Blondes*, southern actresses co-

¹⁵¹ Goodson, 39.

opted black-face minstrelsy, an exclusively male entertainment genre before the Civil War, as a means of promoting themselves and attracting larger audiences.¹⁵² Local troupes also staged plays that treated inter-racial relationships such as *The Octoroon* or its Kentucky variant entitled *The White Slave* to great acclaim.¹⁵³ As male minstrel acts and plays addressing mixed-race relations in the antebellum period had shown an ambivalent admiration for black cultural traditions, so too did the female acts that arose in the midst of the New South's turbulent race relations. These performances also aligned femininity with the exotic, but more specifically, they associated the exotic with the erotic, a parallel that had its roots in the fancy girl auctions and quadroon balls of the antebellum period. Moreover, as antebellum actresses had blurred racial boundaries and exposed the social construction of race when they enacted women of color, so did female performers in the latter part of the century.

¹⁵² Glenn, 51; Goodson, 69-70.

¹⁵³ Playbills for the New Orleans Grand Opera House and the Avenue Theatre from The Performing Arts Scrapbook, 1886-1888, Mss. 91-15-L, The Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, Louisiana.

CONCLUSION: ACTING WITH AGENCY

“I thank God that I can work, and I feel that the kind and charitable will always sustain those who are worthy.”

Mrs. Lee, *The Soldier's Wife* (1862), 1.1.42-3, *A Lady of Atlanta*

Mrs. Lee, the main character in a didactic melodrama written by “A Lady of Atlanta” for the Atlanta Amateurs in 1862 to raise money for the city’s hospital fund, represents the model of the selfless, patriotic antebellum woman who willingly sends her husband off to war. Mrs. Lee naively trusts that God and good people will help her provide for herself and her children, but hard times and villainous men prevent her from succeeding. She spends months looking for work without any luck, and finally, her slimy landlord, aptly named Fishback, evicts the poor woman when she cannot pay her rent. Mrs. Lee and her children wander starving in the winter cold and finally die from exposure. Meanwhile, Mr. Lee, having heard of his wife’s plight, has deserted his Army post to come to his family’s aid, but he arrives too late to help.¹

While Mrs. Lee exemplifies the antebellum womanly ideal, she also shows that this model of perfection did not constitute the reality of women’s lives in the Old South. Before Mr. Lee left for war, she assured him, “As for me and the little ones, we will not suffer so long as I can obtain employment.”² Her remark shows that she has been used to hard work, perhaps for pay, prior to the outbreak of the war. In addition, her comment

¹ *A Lady of Atlanta, The Soldier's Wife* (Atlanta: Wood, Hanleiter, Rice, & Co., 1862). The John Hay Library at Brown University holds a copy of this play. All quotations come from this edition. I am grateful to John Inscoe for bringing this play to my attention.

² *Ibid.*, 1.1.40-42, p. 2.

illustrates that women had to take on all sorts of new duties, including public work, in the absence of their husbands during the Civil War. Mrs. Lee's willingness to search for work also prefigures the "New Women" who arose in the post-bellum period to embrace a new autonomy and personal freedom. Since Miss F. Whitney, who played Mrs. Lee in *The Soldier's Wife*, was an amateur, she might not have experienced her character's plight, but the professional actresses who performed on the South's antebellum and Civil War stages knew well the difficulties of finding work. Once employed, these women also knew the burdens that came with scrutiny of their performances as they enacted gender, class, sex, and race.

Antebellum actresses both upheld and tore down the region's traditional gendered norms by playing conventional and unconventional social scripts in their personal lives and by enacting textual scripts on stage that simultaneously questioned and buttressed those same standards. They began learning to enact scripted feminine behavior in their personal lives and on stage from the time they were young girls. As young women traversing the traditions of courtship and marriage, they learned to perform another set of gender-specific manners, which they also played out in their daily lives and dramatic roles. In turn, actresses transmitted these performative scripts when they became mothers, either in their own lives or on stage. Finally, when faced with death in everyday life or within the context of a play, they learned that women once again deport themselves in certain ways. Trained to improvise when necessity demanded, however, actresses did not always adhere to the play scripts handed to them or to the social scripts expected of them. Indeed, abiding by and transgressing against the region's traditional

gender norms, antebellum and Civil War actresses occupied a liminal status. They were neither members of the status quo, nor were they outcasts.

As members of a small, though substantive, group of women in the Old South who worked for pay, actresses enacted class and traversed the civic and domestic realms. In public, they were professional performers, but in private, they were daughters, lovers, wives, and mothers. Moreover, by enacting the private in public, actresses further deflated the polarities between the two domains. Actresses also contributed considerably to the South's economy, for they generated significant revenue by attracting admiring playgoers to performances. In turn, many achieved widespread regional renown and were well paid for their efforts. Even those who simply made solid names for themselves on local stages made enough to support themselves and their families. In addition, actresses could use their histrionic skills to influence spectators, thereby molding the region's social and cultural landscape.

Actresses participated in shaping the South's attitudes toward sexuality whenever they performed, for they made a living by displaying themselves in public and capitalizing on the attractiveness of their bodies. Furthermore, their stage offerings revealed that sexual identity offers a range of possibilities. Spectators not only relished polar portrayals of female sexuality, they also delighted in a range of other sexual possibilities when actresses took on disguise and cross-dressed roles. Indeed, performing parts written for men brought the tension of same-sex desire to the South's antebellum and Civil War stages. Breeches roles also introduced the potential for a myriad of sexual identities outside the rigid categories of male and female, and they exploded the myth of sexual suppression that has arisen to explain nineteenth-century sexuality.

When white actresses enacted mixed-race characters, they disclosed the connection between race and sex that many antebellum and Civil War southerners preferred to ignore. Because antebellum theater offerings reflected the multi-ethnic population of the American South, these selections sometimes confronted audiences with uncomfortable truths. Furthermore, when white players performed characters of different ethnic backgrounds, they undermined race as an intrinsic biological quality. Similarly, when white actors and actresses used characters of other ethnicities to define their own whiteness, they exposed the social construction of racial identity.

While Mrs. Lee does not act across from a character of a different ethnicity, her whiteness still occupies a central place in the plot of *The Soldier's Wife*, since she has sent her husband to fight for the perpetuation of racial slavery. As the speaker of the epilogue reminds playgoers, "The soldier leaves his humble home / . . . To battle for all that makes life sweet."³ As the basis for the South's economy, slavery, and not states rights or liberty, was the key element that made life in the region sweet, at least for upper-middle class whites. By supporting the fight to preserve African-American bondage, Mrs. Lee, in effect, works against the liberation that she simultaneously seeks for herself, since white female servitude went hand in hand with black slavery. She struggles to find a job in a poor economy, but she also faces disapproval from men like her landlord. Mrs. Lee's need to work lowers her in Fishback's esteem, and when she cannot find a job, he believes that she is an indolent, "poor tenant" who is simply trying to take advantage of him.⁴ Participation in the public world of work lowers Mrs. Lee's class status and turns her into a woman of questionable worth.

³ Ibid., epilogue, 35-44, p.17.

⁴ Ibid., 1.3.3, p.5.

Since *The Lady of Atlanta* used the most popular theatrical genre of the day and crafted *The Soldier's Wife* as a melodrama, the villainous Fishback receives his due and ultimately loses his business. The play also appealed to spectators who revered Shakespeare. Before she dies, Mrs. Lee compares Fishback to Shylock, the Jewish moneylender in *The Merchant of Venice* who will have his pound of flesh if he doesn't get paid the three thousand ducats he wagers with Antonio. Perhaps gratuitous, the reference nonetheless endowed the play with cultural capital and associated performers as well as spectators with the gentility and morality affiliated with Shakespeare.

In the same way that the Hallam troupe had appealed to its audiences by carefully selecting genres, playwrights, and themes popular in its time, so too did the Atlanta Amateurs. Several of the dramas that the Hallams staged passed out of the repertoires of subsequent acting companies, while others, many of them Shakespearean, endured. These plays recurred again and again but took on an array of meanings as new companies performed them in different theaters for audiences that were never the same at different times throughout the South. When the Hallams arrived in America, for instance, they first staged *The Merchant of Venice*. Sarah Smythies Hallam played Portia, the character who calls for community solidarity over private accumulation. The *Virginia Gazette* reported that the "numerous and polite audience [gave] great applause," so spectators seemed to receive Hallam's depiction of Portia favorably.⁵ Since Portia not only finds the law that prevents Shylock from taking his pound of flesh, but also locates the statute that strips him of his wealth and livelihood, she becomes a vindictive participant in casting out this Jewish Other from Venice.

⁵ Quoted in Hornblow, 83.

Watching *Merchant*, white colonial southerners could similarly justify the expulsion of native American Others in their midst, while white antebellum southerners could rationalize the marginalization of their African American slaves. This implicit validation of slavery might have accounted for the Crisp family's frequent stagings of *Merchant*. They performed the play in the fall of 1854 while visiting Columbus, Georgia, and repeated it on another trip four years later. They also included the drama in their 1858-59 New Orleans and Mobile repertory, and Mobilians again saw *Merchant* when the Crisps leased the city's theater during the Civil War.⁶ Even truncated references resonated with southerners as *The Soldier's Wife* attested.

In the same way that plays took on new meanings for colonial and antebellum southerners, they continued to acquire different significations in the post-bellum period. International actresses and performers such as Sarah Bernhardt, Adelina Patti, and Lydia Thompson visited the South and found different ways to interpret race, class, sex, and gender on stage. Regional performers like Sissieretta Jones also emerged, while others like Clementine DeBar Booth and her daughter Blanche DeBar Booth reestablished their footing after the war and continued to explore these social constructions through performative roles in their everyday lives.

Like Mrs. Lee in *The Soldier's Wife*, actresses who performed on the South's stages throughout the century embraced hard work, though the most successful players adopted more independent perspectives and learned to depend on their own resources, rather than relying on "the kind and charitable" for sustenance. Eighty-five years after The Lady of Atlanta wrote *The Soldier's Wife*, Tennessee Williams created the nostalgic southern heroine, Blanche Dubois in *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947). As she submits

⁶ Fife, 310; Keller, 122, 126; Yeomans, 42, 73, 100-1.

to the doctor and nurse, who have come to commit her to a mental hospital at the end of the play, Blanche echoes Mrs. Lee when she declares, “I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.”⁷ By making this proclamation, however, Blanche can wrest some control over her fate. Rather than surrendering passively, she actively asserts some power over her future by requesting kind treatment from her new caretakers. Though Blanche resorts to verbal manipulation, she does the best she can, having lost the support of her family. The twentieth-century movie actress Vivien Leigh, who played Blanche in the 1951 film directed by Elia Kazan, Miss F. Whitney, the amateur player who enacted Mrs. Lee, Sarah Smythies Hallam, who performed Portia, and the antebellum actresses like Frances Denny Drake, Julia Dean Hayne, Jane Placide, and Eliza Logan Wood, who played the many other characters popular on the Old South’s stages, also showed through their experiences that they could successfully seize the necessary agency to stage a variety of performances and to play a diversity of performative roles in their daily lives.

⁷ Tennessee Williams, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, 1947, in *The Norton Anthology of American Literature*, ed. Nina Baym (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), l. 158, scene 11, p. 1860.

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