

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: "WHAT DO YE ALLOW A BABOON LIKE
THAT ON THE STAGE FOR?": PROTEST,
IRISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY, AND THE
WORKS OF HARRIGAN, HART, AND
BRAHAM

Michelle Granshaw, Master of Arts, 2007

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Theatre

During the 1870s and 1880s, newspapers hailed Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart as one of the most popular nineteenth century vaudeville teams. Performing primarily in variety sketches between 1871 and 1879, Harrigan and Hart began starring in full-length plays in 1879 until the dissolution of their partnership in 1885. My study of Harrigan and Hart's work attempts to find a middle ground between accusation and celebration to highlight the variety of ways Harrigan and Hart's stage Irish types functioned. Using the responses to Harrigan and Hart's shows, my thesis attempts to analyze the complex and nuanced relationship between local and national identities as well as the various classes of nineteenth century Irish-Americans. Using Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s concept of 'Signifyin'', this study argues that Harrigan and Hart's stage Irish characters, despite their low comedy stereotypes, were 'Signifyin'' notions of New York Irish identity within symbols of national Irish-American identity.

“WHAT DO YE ALLOW A BABOON LIKE THAT ON THE STAGE FOR?”:
PROTEST, IRISH-AMERICAN IDENTITY, AND THE WORKS OF HARRIGAN,
HART, AND BRAHAM

By

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Introduction

During the 1870s and 1880s, newspapers hailed Edward Harrigan and Tony Hart as the “most popular team in contemporary variety.”¹ Performing primarily in variety sketches between 1871 and 1879, Harrigan and Hart began starring in full-length plays in 1879 until the dissolution of their partnership in 1885. With the plays and lyrics written by Harrigan and music composed by Harrigan’s father-in-law David Braham, Harrigan and Hart’s most popular shows, the Mulligan Guards Series, depicted New York City tenement life, including lower class Irish, German, Italian, and Chinese immigrants as well as African Americans. Although New York reviews often praised Harrigan’s depictions of the New York Irish as “living breathing human beings who were within the easy comprehension of everybody,” local Irish newspapers in Boston and Chicago suggest a less unanimously positive response to their New York Irish caricatures both inside and outside New York.² For example, in January 1884, the Boston *Pilot* reported that a number of New York Irish boycotted and encouraged others to protest against Harrigan and Hart’s theatre. In the March 1884 Chicago *Citizen*, John Finerty, an Irish nationalist and Chicago congressman, reprinted and endorsed parts of a speech by Reverend John Larkin of New York, encouraging the New York Irish not to attend Harrigan and Hart’s shows. These widely divergent responses among the Irish-American population to the supposedly quintessentially Irish duo form the basis of my study.

In light of these mixed reactions, I suggest that a re-examination of Harrigan and Hart’s work illuminates conflicting local and national Irish-American identities that vied for legitimacy in nineteenth century America, as well as their work’s occasional inability

to “Signify” both within and outside the New York Irish community by 1884. The term “Signify” will be used as defined in Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s *Signifying Monkey*. In his discussion of the term, Gates quotes Claudia Mitchell-Kernan who defines Signifyin’ as “a way of encoding messages or meanings which involves, in most cases, an element of indirection.”³ Mitchell-Kernan explains that Signifyin’ “might be best viewed as an alternate message form...[that] may occur embedded in a variety of discourse.”⁴ From Mitchell-Kernan’s definition, Gates concludes that Signifyin’ “is a pervasive mode of language use rather than a specific verbal game.”⁵ Although Gates uses the term Signifyin’ to describe a vernacular form of African-American expression, I suggest that the term may be applied to the images of Harrigan and Hart’s New York Irish. In my discussion of these images, I focus primarily on Harrigan’s scripts and lyrics and not on Hart’s performances (which have been addressed in other studies.) Instead of assuming a static and uniform construction of the stage Irish type throughout the United States, I suggest that a regional study reveals the local origin and fluidity of these stage Irish types in the late nineteenth century. As indicated in the Boston and Chicago newspaper reports, the controversy over Harrigan and Hart’s stage Irish types also resulted from the increasing class divisions and social pressures within the fairly unified New York Irish community. My study explores these local factors as well as the regional differences that were influenced by current political and economic trends.

The Mulligan Guards

Within this context, my thesis explores Harrigan and Hart’s most famous stage Irish types, which included Dan and Cordelia Mulligan in the Mulligan Guard Series.

Harrigan first introduced New York audiences to Dan Mulligan in the *Mulligan Guards* sketch in 1873. In the 1873 sketch, Dan Mulligan still exhibited all of the stereotypical characteristics of the stage Irish, including the verbal mistakes and the inclination to start brawls and drink alcohol, that made the first depiction of Mulligan as gross of a caricature as any other presented at the time in variety theatre, burlesque, and drama. Harrigan would temper the character in his later full-length plays. The original Mulligan sketch revolved around a three man target company, which included two Irish immigrants and an African American boy. Between the 1830s and the 1870s, New York immigrants, who were denied membership in “the city’s existing militia groups,” formed target companies that paraded in the streets dressed in elaborate costumes, picnicked and drank, and held target practice on weekends.⁶ Burlesquing these familiar companies through “primitive... ‘gags and business’,” Harrigan and Hart achieved popular success and the show’s title song, “The Mulligan Guard” became one of the most widely sung songs of the nineteenth century.⁷ Bands played versions of the song throughout the world and Rudyard Kipling even included an altered version of the song in *Kim* (1901).⁸

Although the later full length plays of the Mulligan Guard Series capitalized on the well-known name and title song of the sketch, the full-length *Mulligan Guard* plays presented a different depiction of the New York Irish, both in the target company and through the character of Dan Mulligan and his wife Cordelia.⁹ Although the target company, whose activities comprised a central role in many of the plays, still picnicked and drunkenly shot targets, Harrigan softened his Irish caricatures to create a new type of character for the New York stage: a character recognized by audiences as distinctly New York Irish. As Irish immigrants who initially settle in a tenement community, both Dan

and Cordelia Mulligan represented “types” familiar to New York audiences. Both exhibit stage Irish characteristics, but for the first time, the plays presented Irish characters as the central, heroic protagonists and depicted the rise of Irish immigrants to the middle class.¹⁰ Reviews of Harrigan and Hart shows reflect the fundamentally local context of the types. In 1883, one reviewer described the shows as “local, presenting the funny side of life (low life more particularly), with which all New Yorkers are more or less acquainted.”¹¹ Another reviewer claimed that Harrigan “put his characters against a New York background, and they were a part of the picture, not thrust into it. Without them, the picture was not; without New York they were not.”¹²

The Events of 1884

Even though Harrigan and Hart performed their most famous Irish types between 1879 and 1885, my study focuses on 1884 a year significant in the careers of Harrigan and Hart and in Irish-American history. In 1884, Harrigan and Hart reached the peak of their popularity and artistic achievement in New York. As a result of their financial success after they began performing full-length shows in 1879, the team built and co-managed their own theatre, the Theatre Comique, on Broadway. Overflowing houses were so common there that ““standing room only”” became “the motto of the Theatre Comique.”¹³ The duo had fourteen shows run for over one hundred performances, which was unprecedented for its time. One of these fourteen shows, *Cordelia’s Aspirations*, opened on November 5, 1883, and ran at the Comique during the 1884 protests against Harrigan and Hart. Significantly, most contemporary critics and scholars agree that *Cordelia’s Aspirations* represents the height of Harrigan and Hart’s artistic achievement.

In her dissertation “A Critical Analysis of Edward Harrigan’s Comedy” (1984), Alicia Kae Koger refers to *Cordelia’s Aspirations* as the “jewel in Harrigan’s comic crown.”¹⁴ Contemporary critics also recognized the artistic achievement of the play, with the *New York Times* referring to it as “quite the best play Mr. Harrigan has written.”¹⁵ Both *Dan’s Tribulations* (April 7, 1884) and *The Investigation* (September 1, 1884) also received high praise as some of Harrigan’s best work. Yet, the fire that destroyed the Theatre Comique on December 22, 1884 irreparably damaged the partnership. Both Harrigan and Hart’s families, who each had family members working in the theatre that night, blamed each other for the fire and financial loss. 1884 was the last year of Harrigan and Hart’s close collaboration before quarrels and family disputes led to the partnership’s dissolution on May 9, 1885.¹⁶

Focusing on the year 1884 also provides the opportunity to examine a historically important twelve-month period for Irish-Americans. In 1884, the Irish nationalist movement was shifting from republican nationalism (which focused on social conditions) to constitutional nationalism (which focused on achieving home rule).¹⁷ This shift resulted from changing priorities after the Land War (1879-1882). In the Land War, the Irish used primarily non-violent forms of resistance to convince the British government to end the landlord system.¹⁸ With the passage of the Land Act in 1882, which addressed the major grievances of the Irish peasantry, concerns of many Irish nationalists shifted towards Home Rule. The Home Rule movement, led by Irishman Charles Stewart Parnell, focused not on the establishment of an independent Irish republic like previous Irish nationalist movements, but on the establishment of an independent government for Ireland within the British Empire. However, the focus on Home Rule after the Land War

exacerbated divisions within the nationalist movement. Some Irish nationalists prioritized further land and social reforms and others wanted complete Irish independence and the establishment of an Irish republic through peaceful or violent revolution.

The Irish-American community in 1884 reflected divisions in the Irish nationalist movement, but for the most part, the Home Rule movement received an overwhelming amount of Irish-American support.¹⁹ Significantly, it was “not until after 1884 that upper-class Irish-Americans came forward to work publicly for Parnell.”²⁰ As a result of upper-class Irish-American attempts to avoid Protestant American accusations of disloyalty, the Irish nationalist movement lacked middle and upper-class Irish-American support before 1884.²¹ The increased support of upper-class Irish-Americans for Irish nationalism and the Home Rule movement suggests shifting class attitudes as well as potentially shifting attitudes towards Irish-Americans in American society during 1884.

Aside from these developments in the Irish nationalist movement, the changing relationship between Irish-Americans and the Democratic Party also makes 1884 an important year to study. Increasing tensions between certain Irish-American nationalists and the Democratic Party throughout the 1870s and early 1880s resulted in a definitive break between the party and some Irish-American nationalists in 1884. This “revolt against the Democrats” further highlights the class issues in Irish-American communities.²² Many prominent nationalist reformers joined the Republican Party and actively campaigned for Republican congressional and presidential candidates in the 1884 election. As a result of a successful campaign of Democrats against his re-election, John Finerty, who ran as an independent, also lost his congressional seat in the election of

1884.²³ Among other objections to the close ties between the Democratic Party and Irish-American communities, some Irish nationalists viewed the “unswerving loyalty of the Irish masses to the Democratic Party... [as] both a symbol and a cause of Irish inferiority.”²⁴ They viewed the relationship as one of “slavery” and complained that the unswerving Irish support of the Democrats gave the party no reason to listen to Irish demands.²⁵ This conflict as well as the Irish-American response to developments in Ireland reflect class issues within the Irish-American community, which in turn, I argue, played an important role in the outburst of protests against Harrigan and Hart in 1884.

Review of Literature and Justification of the Research Question

In the review of literature that follows, I explore the studies that have examined Harrigan and Hart’s impact on the development of American theatre and Irish-American culture. Throughout this discussion, I situate my own study among these scholars, hopefully highlighting the scholarly avenues I explore in my thesis.

As reflected in the numerous studies of musical theatre and Irish-American history and culture as well as the full-length studies of Harrigan and Hart, a critical analysis of Harrigan and Hart and their nuanced relationship to the multiple Irish-American communities of the late-nineteenth century has yet to be written. Not surprisingly, standard histories of New York City such as Lloyd Morris’s *Incredible New York: High Life and Low Life of the Last Hundred Years* (1951) and Edwin G. Burrows and Mike Wallace’s *Gotham* (1999), include only brief references to Harrigan and Hart’s popularity, yet Harrigan and Hart’s fleeting appearances in these sources demonstrate

their impact on the late nineteenth century cultural landscape. General theatre and musical theatre surveys usually provide more biographical and play information. For example, Arthur Hobson Quinn's *A History of the American Drama from the Civil War to the Present Day* (1927) discusses the general development of the team's career and dramaturgy. He lists sketch and play titles as well as brief summaries of plots and characters. Other twentieth century books contain similar career and play summaries, including Weldon B. Durham's *American Theatre Companies 1749-1887* (1986) and Gerald Bordman's *American Musical Theatre: A Chronicle* (1978).

Gerald Bordman's *American Musical Comedy: From Adonis to Dreamgirls* (1982) contains the most thorough discussion of Harrigan and Hart in relation to the development of American Musical Theatre. Aside from recounting the biographical information and play summaries provided in other sources, Bordman also discusses how "Harrigan quietly advanced the art of musical comedy."²⁶ If Harrigan and Braham had included an opening number for each act, "their musical program would have been as large and complete as those of later musical comedies."²⁷ Their songs even had "relevance to the play's dramatic moments."²⁸

As scholars and audiences move further away from the period of Harrigan and Hart's immense popularity, the pages or paragraphs devoted to the team decrease in similar late-twentieth century musical theatre studies. For example, in Raymond Knapp's *The American Musical and the Formation of National Identity* (2005), Knapp lists Harrigan and Hart among other vaudeville performers, but he fails to distinguish between Harrigan and Hart's full-length musical plays and the sketch evenings at Tony Pastor's. John Bush Jones's *Our Musicals, Ourselves: A Social History of the American Musical*

Theatre (2003) only mentions that George M. Cohan wrote his song “Harrigan” in tribute to Ned Harrigan, an older Irish-American entertainer. As one might expect, none of these studies look at Harrigan and Hart within the context of late nineteenth century Irish-American communities, but Harrigan and Hart’s inclusion in these studies, however small, indicates the team’s continued importance in theatre history.

Throughout the twentieth century, books and articles on Irish America have also discussed Harrigan and Hart. Increasingly, most contemporary Irish-American studies downplay the negative aspects of their stage caricatures and discuss Harrigan and Hart as symbols of early Irish-American achievement and pride. For example, William Shannon’s *American Irish* (1963) discusses how Harrigan and Hart’s shows illustrate the shift in Irish depictions on the stage. Despite his limited praise of the pair, Shannon traces the transition in Harrigan’s Irish characters from poor and drunk to middle class and respectable throughout the 1870s and 1880s. Discussing the Irish stereotype as a national type, Shannon presents one of the few studies that recognizes the development of stage Irish types throughout the nineteenth century.

On the other hand, the work of folklorist Mick Moloney and historian William Williams reflect the increasing tendency to reclaim and celebrate the pair as symbols of Irish-American achievement. Yet, by claiming Harrigan and Hart as symbols of a national Irish-American identity, these scholars may overlook inter- and intra-community debates over how the Irish in America were represented onstage. Despite his description of Harrigan and Hart’s Irishmen as “blundering Pat[s]” in a 1982 article, Moloney’s most recent work praises the pair for their “attention...to the positive achievements and character of the Irish in America and to Irish ethnic pride.”²⁹ This 2006 article, “Irish-

American Popular Music,” places Harrigan and Hart in a long line of Irish-American performers and praises Harrigan for being “intimately familiar with Irish-American life and concerns.”³⁰

In *‘Twas Only an Irishman’s Dream: The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920*, William Williams also discusses Harrigan and Hart as part of Irish-American tradition. Focusing primarily on Harrigan’s lyrics, he refers to Harrigan as one of the few late-nineteenth century lyricists who “suggested the more positive qualities of Irishness: generosity, a sense of community, loyalty, and courage, and a simple pride in being Irish.”³¹ He claims that part of Harrigan’s achievement includes “Americaniz[ing] and urbaniz[ing] Paddy” and he celebrates Harrigan as one of the first to “recogniz[e] and...present a positive picture of one of the essential realities of Irish-American life...the Irish urban community.”³² By claiming Harrigan and Hart as part of Irish-American heritage, these studies incorporate the pair into a vision of a national Irish-American identity. Yet, they do not explore the issue in terms of the complicated local and national identities developing in the nineteenth century. The studies also do not go beyond looking at Harrigan and Hart and identity in terms of their close ties with the Irish-American community, the content of the plays, and the supportive Irish American audience response. Despite their valuable reclamation of the positive aspects of Harrigan and Hart’s performances, these Irish-American works highlight the need to connect studies of Harrigan and Hart with the developing historical research on and an analysis of the nuanced relationships of the multiple late nineteenth century Irish-American communities.

Few full-length studies have focused solely on the comic pair. In her dissertation, “A Critical Analysis of Edward Harrigan’s Comedy” (1984), Alicia Kae Koger refers to a manuscript by Sidney Rose entitled “Edward Harrigan and His Plays”(undated) as one of the first works to focus primarily on Harrigan, but it is no longer listed in the collection of the New York Public Library. However, Koger describes the incomplete and unpublished manuscript as containing “preliminary research on Harrigan,” which “chronologically reviews the playwright’s career, summarizing plots and quoting contemporary critics of his work.”³³ E.J. Kahn’s *The Merry Partners: The Age and Stage of Harrigan and Hart* (1955), the first published biography of the two men, provides many amusing anecdotes about the team’s lives both personally and on stage. Yet, Kahn includes no footnotes or bibliography, which makes the work’s credibility questionable.³⁴ Aside from his discussion of Harrigan’s Irish-American characters and the large New York Irish population, Kahn omits in-depth discussion of Harrigan as Irish and he only discusses the audience in terms of their support and loyalty to the two performers.

The next full-length work to focus on Harrigan, Warren Burns’s dissertation, “The Plays of Edward Green Harrigan: The Theatre of Intercultural Communication” (1969), explores how a small number of Harrigan’s plays portrayed different ethnic groups and brought “diverse ethnic groups together into greater mutual understanding.”³⁵ In his chapter entitled, “Harrigan’s Means for Reducing Cultural Barriers,” Burns discusses how Harrigan “dealt fairly and equally” in his depictions of immigrants and provided recognizable characters, realistic dialogue, simple plots and catchy music that new immigrants could easily understand.³⁶ Robert M. Dell’s dissertation, “The

Representation of the Immigrant on the New York Stage, 1881-1910,” draws similar parallels between the real life circumstances of New York City immigrants and their depictions in Harrigan’s shows. Although both works provide valuable information through their comparison of stage types and their historical context, neither work analyzes the role of caricature in relation to the immigrant masses or any negative reaction by the immigrants towards the characters.

Unlike previous biographies of Harrigan which mostly focus on Harrigan as an essentially American entertainer, in its first few chapters, Richard Moody’s meticulously researched and documented biography, *Ned Harrigan: From Corlear’s Hook to Herald Square* (1980), establishes a mystical connection between Ireland and Harrigan. After discussing how Harrigan’s grandfather moved to Canada from Ireland in the eighteenth century, Moody claims that the Harrigans’ link to Ireland, “distant as it was, held Edward and his father bound to Ireland. Irish blood never loses its potency; sometimes it seems to run thicker on foreign soil.”³⁷ Moody continues to refer to this connection throughout his book primarily as a reason for Harrigan’s depiction of the Irish onstage. His book uses sources such as Harrigan’s children’s memoirs and a recording of the Harrigan brothers singing their father’s songs. These sources in combination with interviews with Harrigan’s youngest daughter Nedda and material from her letters allow Moody to create a work with an unprecedented level of detail on Harrigan’s personal life and work. As a result of the biographical nature of his study, Moody provides information on the Irish-American approval of Harrigan and his types, but he does not offer a detailed analysis of Harrigan’s work in relation to the Irish-American community or Irish-American identity.

Alicia Kae Koger's dissertation, "A Critical Analysis of Edward Harrigan's Comedy" (1984) addresses the lack of critical analysis of Harrigan's plays. Koger utilizes the vast collection of Harrigan's manuscripts at New York Public Library and collects evidence of his other productions to classify his plays and sketches into four main categories: variety farces, melodramas, successful well-made comedies, and unsuccessful well-made comedies. Although she provides useful historical information on Harrigan and his period through her textual analysis, in-depth discussion of Irish-American communities falls outside of the parameters of Koger's study.

Aside from these full-length studies, several articles analyze the caricatures created by Harrigan and Hart. James Dormon's "Ethnic Cultures of the Mind: The Harrigan-Hart Mosaic" (1992) concludes that Harrigan created negative stereotypes, reflecting "virtually every characteristic of the stage Irishman that had prevailed on the American stage since the 1840s."³⁸ He describes Harrigan's Irishman as "pugnacious....feisty...ignorant ...deficient in his knowledge and use of standard English...given to excessive drinking... [and] the stereotyped Irish office-seeker."³⁹ Although to some extent Harrigan's work clearly incorporates negative stage Irish characteristics, Dormon omits mention of the respect Harrigan's Irishmen receive in their communities, their rise to respectable middle class citizens, and the cautionary anti-alcohol messages. Ignoring a major difference between Harrigan's Irishmen and the stage Irishmen of previous decades, Dormon also omits discussion of Harrigan's creation of some of the first heroic Irish-American characters in an American setting. As a result, he does not acknowledge the constantly shifting nature of stage Irish characters in the late-nineteenth century.

Dormon's discussion revolves around the danger of stereotypes when audiences perceive them as reality. After citing multiple nineteenth century articles that praise Harrigan for his realism, Dormon claims:

The Harrigan and Hart phenomenon was apparently based in a social-psychological need for people to believe in the reality of the Lower East Side denizens as portrayed by the Harrigan company...ethnic stereotypes served to create the reality demanded by the need to "know" the ways of these essentially foreign folk...Harrigan and Hart...provided compellingly 'realistic' and consistently humorous examples of what true Americans were not.⁴⁰

Instead of citing any studies on Irish-Americans in nineteenth century America, Dormon uses a study of *Amos and Andy* to assume that Irish-Americans enjoyed Harrigan and Hart only because "they were diverting and funny, and to some degree provided recognizable...characters and situations."⁴¹ He claims that "The essentially negative and potentially malignant dimensions of the caricature/stereotypes did not register as such precisely because the Irish viewed these performances from the perspective of a different sensibility."⁴²

This analysis incorporates multiple misinterpretations and assumptions. First of all, to assume that Irish-Americans did not recognize Irish caricatures because of a different "perspective" does not consider other reasons for how or why these caricatures appealed to Irish-Americans. Claiming that Harrigan and Hart appealed more to "native" Americans, Dormon refers to the decline of working class and increase of middle class audience members throughout the 1880s. In the process, he conflates "ethnic" audience members with the working class, omitting mention of the large number of Irish-Americans that moved into the middle class during this period. As a result, Dormon does not take into consideration that the new audience members could still be

Irish audience members. Omitting discussion of how Harrigan's types and plays changed over time, Dormon does not consider how the increase in middle and upper class audience members related to the movement to make American popular entertainment more acceptable to middle class women and children. Although it would be unreasonable to expect Dormon to cover all of Harrigan and Hart's work and the development of the Irish-American community, his omissions simplify and conflate complicated and nuanced aspects of Harrigan and Hart's work and Irish-American history.

In his analysis, Dormon also takes literally the critics' comments about Harrigan's realism without considering potentially different nineteenth century connotations of the word. According to Jon Finson, Harrigan's shows displayed "artistically the social milieu of the working-class poor, not that they conform[ed] precisely to everyday life."⁴³ Compared to the lack of entertainments depicting contemporary life, "Harrigan's willingness to write almost exclusively about tenement dwellers marked him as a realist, as opposed to those writing historical dramas or about the wealthy."⁴⁴ Instead of displaying "everything an American is not" as Dormon claims, it could also be argued that this type of realism allowed Harrigan to display everything that was American, but was often not included onstage. Instead of white-washing American culture, Harrigan celebrated its diversity. For example, in his song "McNally's Row of Flats," Harrigan writes, "It's Ireland and Italy, Jerusalem and Germany,/ Oh, Chinamen and nagers [sic], and a paradise for cats,/ All jumbled up together in the snow or rainy weather,/ They represent the tenants in McNally's Row of Flats."⁴⁵ Despite the ethnic and racial conflicts, the obvious caricatures and imposed dialects, in this song and at the end of each play, his characters find a way to live together. In fact, in each play of

the Mulligan Guard Series, Harrigan's central Irishman, Dan Mulligan, becomes more and more involved in New York City's social and political structure and a model of Irish immigrant success.

Although Dormon's article can be further dissected, overall, his article's primary difficulty results from his selection of evidence to fit Barthes's idea of "codes" and his omission not only of the positive aspects of the Irish-American caricatures, but also the alternate ways that caricatures function in society. A brief look at Irish-American scholarship highlights how Irish-Americans were not merely entertained by Harrigan's types. They have celebrated Harrigan and his work for over a hundred years and not because their particular Irish "perspective" obscures the problematic nature of the depictions. My study of Harrigan and Hart's work attempts to find a middle ground between accusation and celebration to highlight the variety of ways the types functioned. Using the responses to Harrigan and Hart's shows, my thesis attempts to analyze the complex and nuanced relationship between local and national identities as well as the various classes of Irish-Americans in nineteenth America.

Some more recent studies have begun to address this topic, but much still remains to be explored. For example, Lauren Onkey's "'Melee and a Curtain': Black-Irish Relations in Ned Harrigan's Mulligan Guard Ball" (1999) looks at the plays' historical context in relation to the types. Exploring alternate functions of the types onstage, she analyzes how the images of Harrigan's African Americans worked to create a particular image of Irish-Americans onstage. She claims that "Harrigan's work reveals Irish-black relations of the 1860s-70s in all their complexity; the play depicts serious hostilities,

syncretic close ties, and the ultimate--but not complete--triumph of the Irish.”⁴⁶

However, Onkey also assumes a *national* Irish-American identity.

Joyce Flynn’s dissertation “Ethnicity After Sea-change: The Irish Dramatic Tradition in Nineteenth Century American Drama” (1985) comes closest to a discussion of Irish-American identity and Harrigan and Hart’s types. Flynn discusses dramas created by Irish and Irish-American playwrights in the nineteenth century and how these dramas “solaced, cheered, and changed” Irish immigrant communities.⁴⁷ Focusing primarily on plays that depict images of Ireland, she looks at how the dramas “present patterns of values, images, and plot structures that suggest continuity of a deeper sort between the Irish identity in Ireland and that in the new world.”⁴⁸ After her discussion of various Irish dramatists, Flynn discusses the changes to Irish and Irish-American drama as a result of the establishment of the Abbey Theatre in Ireland. Emphasizing the plays’ connection to Ireland, Flynn leaves the relationship between Harrigan and Hart’s work set in America and Irish-American communities uncovered.

In addition, Flynn is also one of the only writers to mention any negative responses by nineteenth century New York Irish audience members to Harrigan and Hart’s caricatures. Few other works discuss the negative reactions to their caricatures. William Williams’s *‘Twas Only an Irishman’s Dream* and Don Meade’s “The Life and Times of Muldoon, the Solid Man” (1997) refer to the same January 1884 incident as Flynn, but both these works misquote Flynn and claim that the Boston Irish, instead of the New York Irish, protested against Harrigan and Hart.⁴⁹ Charles Fanning’s “Robert Emmet and Nineteenth Century America” mentions the anti-Harrigan and Hart editorial by John Finerty, editor of the *Chicago Citizen*.⁵⁰ Other sources briefly discuss the

movements to remove Irish caricatures from the stage, including Paul Distler's "The Rise and Fall of American Vaudeville Comics."⁵¹ Yet, I have found few other sources that discuss the topic, especially outside of the negative reaction of the Irish to the Russell Brothers and productions of *Playboy of the Western World* in the early twentieth century. These studies incorporate Harrigan and Hart and their stage types into a concept of Irish-American identity, but they divorce the stereotypes from their local contexts, which contribute to their construction and perceived meaning. Regardless of the positive or negative qualities of Harrigan and Hart's stereotypes, these scholars often assume a more static and national construction of stereotype, instead of a constantly developing stereotype with possible diverse local points of origin.

Chapter Structure

In Chapter One, I provide background information on New York Irish communities in 1884 and I explore the popular myths presented in Harrigan and Hart's full-length plays depicting New York Irish life. In his article, "Three Meanings of 'Diaspora,' Exemplified Among South Asian Religion," Steven Vertovec discusses how collective identities are "often importantly sustained by reference to an 'ethnic myth' of common origin, historical experience, and some kind of tie to geographic place."⁵² Harrigan and Hart's plays reflect this concept of "ethnic myth." Within the context of the New York Irish community and the mythology of the Irish-American Diaspora, this chapter examines how Harrigan and Hart's images of the New York Irish helped create popular mythology of New York Irish identity through their portrayal of the group's "origins [and]...historical experience," and their ties to their local communities. Using

newspaper accounts and other primary sources, this chapter also explores who accepted the “myths” presented onstage and how these groups viewed Harrigan’s stereotypes.

Chapter Two examines how historians frequently present nineteenth century Irish-American identity as a *national* identity. It then identifies how the protests against Harrigan and Hart highlight problems with national conceptions of Irish-American identity in the nineteenth century. Connecting local identities to conflicts within the Irish-American nationalist movement as well as to intra- and inter-community arguments about the meaning of “Irishness,” the chapter describes the incidents of protest against Harrigan and Hart and relates them to wider debates over identity.

Drawing on the discussion of the previous two chapters, Chapter Three explores the role of local communities, regional identities, and the local origin of Harrigan and Hart’s stage Irish in the formation of the contrasting responses to Harrigan and Hart’s New York Irish characters in New York, Chicago, and Boston. This chapter analyzes whether Harrigan’s types failed to signify in Chicago and Boston communities and whether the New York protests in 1884 reflect a similar development in New York. My discussion highlights these moments of failed signification as rare moments that momentarily shatter the supposedly national symbols of Irish-American identity constructed by Harrigan and Hart.

In order to form a more comprehensive understanding of Irish-American identity and life in the nineteenth century, the historiographical approach that conflates complicated notions of local identity into a monolithic generalized experience must be avoided. Although local studies of Irish-America exist, most studies do not look at it comparatively. My thesis proposes that conflicts of local identity apply to the creation as

well as to the reception of Irish-American stereotypes and performers. It is possible only through a comparative study to unlock the layered meanings of nineteenth century Irish-American stage types. Through this approach, theatre historians can begin to develop a new and nuanced understanding of Irish-American theatre.

Notes

¹ Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Comedy: From Adonis To Dreamgirls* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 36.

² *Leslie's Weekly*, 22 October 1903.

³ Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, qtd. in Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 80.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 80.

⁵ Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 80.

⁶ E.J. Kahn, *The Merry Partners: The Age and Stage of Harrigan and Hart* (New York: Random House, 1955), 81.

⁷ Richard Moody, *Ned Harrigan: From Corlear's Hook to Herald Square* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980), 46; Kahn, 3-6, 81-92. Interestingly, Moody refers to a letter written by Harrigan to Dexter Smith on August 8, 1874, in which Harrigan claims that "his burlesque of a target company excursion was intended to help eradicate a 'New York nuisance.'" Moody, 45. In a letter to Dr. Kent R. Greenfield, Chief Historian of the Department of the Army, written in 1954 by Harrigan biographer E.J. Kahn echoes this idea, with Kahn claiming that the song "The Mulligan Guard" "was credited with having had a lot to do with the decline in popularity of those peculiar institutions." E.J. Kahn to Dr. Kent R. Greenfield, 4 May 1954, E.J. Kahn Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York.

⁸ Moody, 46.

⁹ Dan Mulligan's wife Cordelia did not appear in original *Mulligan Guard* sketch. Yet, Capt. John Hussey, the other Irish member of the Guard, had a wife named Cordelia who would "serve as a model" for Cordelia Mulligan. Moody, 45.

¹⁰ William H. A. Williams, *Twas Only an Irishman's Dream: The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 161.

¹¹ *The Biographer. Illustrated: Edward Harrigan*, May 1883, 62.

¹² Montrose Moses, "Edward Harrigan," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 10, no. 3 (March 1926): 181.

¹³ *Irish-American*, 26 October 1880, 5.

¹⁴ Alicia Koger, "A Critical Analysis of Edward Harrigan's Comedy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 240.

¹⁵ *New York Times*, 19 April 1887, 5.

¹⁶ Moody, 143-51; Kahn, 223-241.

¹⁷ During this time, a "radical" nationalism also developed led by men such as writer and lecturer Henry George and the editor of the *Irish World* Patrick Ford. Radical nationalism endorsed "a variety of

tactics to work an economic as well as a political transformation of the old country.” Radical nationalist rhetoric typically reflected socialist ideas of land nationalization. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy Meagher, “Conclusion,” in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy Meagher (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 540.

¹⁸ Through the Land War, “boycotting became both a successful tactic in the war against landlordism and a new word in the English language.” Land Leaguers applied the concept of a “boycott” first to the estate of Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott. Interestingly, the word was being used only two years after the end of the Land War to describe the New York Irish protests against Harrigan and Hart. Lawrence McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 159.

¹⁹ Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism 1870-1890* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1966), 159-69.

²⁰ Ibid., 169.

²¹ Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 547.

²² Brown, 134.

²³ Ibid., 135-143.

²⁴ Ibid., 135.

²⁵ Ibid., 135.

²⁶ Bordman, 37.

²⁷ Ibid., 44.

²⁸ Ibid., 45.

²⁹ Mick Moloney, “Irish Ethnic Recordings and the Irish-American Imagination,” *Ethnic Recordings in America: A Neglected Heritage*, ed. William Ferris and Mary L. Hart (Washington: American Folklife Center, Library of Congress, 1982), 87; Mick Moloney, “Irish American Popular Music,” in *Making the Irish American: History and Heritage of the Irish in the United States*, ed. J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 391.

³⁰ Moloney, “Irish American Popular Music,” 387.

³¹ Williams, 158.

³² Ibid., 171, 165.

³³ Koger, 10.

³⁴ E.J. Kahn’s papers, located in the New York Public Library, alleviate some of these concerns. Although Kahn fails to include notes and a bibliography in his book, his meticulous notes and the notes of his research assistant highlight his organized and thorough research methods and a plethora of legitimate sources.

³⁵ Warren T. Burns, “The Plays of Edward Green Harrigan: The Theatre of Intercultural

Communication” (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1969), 1.

³⁶ Ibid., 164.

³⁷ Moody, 8.

³⁸ James Dormon, “Ethnic Cultures of the Mind: The Harrigan-Hart Mosaic,” *American Studies* 33, no. 2 (Fall 1992): 25.

³⁹ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 37.

⁴¹ Ibid., 38.

⁴² Ibid., 38.

⁴³ Edward Harrigan, “Holding the Mirror Up To Nature,” *Pearson’s Magazine*, November 1903, 2-6; Jon Finson, “Realism in Late Nineteenth-Century American Musical Theater: The Songs of Edward Harrigan and David Braham,” in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs 1. 1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997), xxii.

⁴⁴ Finson, xxiii.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Lauren Onkey, “‘A Melee and a Curtain’ Black-Irish Relations in Ned Harrigan’s *The Mulligan Guard Ball*,” *Jouvert: The Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 4, no.1 (1999): 9.

⁴⁷ Joyce Anne Flynn, “Ethnicity After Sea-change: The Irish Dramatic Tradition in Nineteenth Century American Drama” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985), 18.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 23.

⁴⁹ Don Meade, “The Life and Times of Muldoon, the Solid Man.” *New York Irish History* 11 (1997): 1-18.

⁵⁰ Charles Fanning, “Robert Emmet and Nineteenth Century Irish-America,” *New Hibernia Review* 8, no. 4 (Winter 2004): 53-83.

⁵¹ Paul Distler, “The Rise and Fall of the Racial Comics in American Vaudeville” (Ph. D. diss., Tulane University, 1963).

⁵² Steven Vertovec, “Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora,’ Exemplified Among South Asian Religions,” *Diaspora* 6, vol 3 (1997): 3.

Chapter 1

“Stars and Stripes and Shamrocks Bright Arrayed”: Harrigan and Hart and New York Irish Identity

On December 1, 1882, *Freund's Daily Music and Drama* inserted a short paragraph in its general news section commenting on Irish-Americans and the theatre. It reported that “the Irish are a curious people from a theatrical point of view. Misrepresent any other nationality upon the stage and there is a public protest immediately; but the Irish seem to enjoy being caricatured. They pay their caricaturists liberally; the worse the libel the greater the Irish popularity of the dramatist and actor.”¹ Though the author’s tone seems ironic, the comment also suggests both his genuine puzzlement at the Irish-American community’s apparent willingness to see itself mocked as well as his view that the stage Irishman negatively depicted Irish-American culture. Yet, I would argue that a more local and nuanced reading of the late nineteenth century stage Irishman – especially as represented by the popular duo Harrigan and Hart – shows how the Irish-American community learned to adapt its identity to the demands of a diasporic culture as well as to the cosmopolitan and often hostile environment of nineteenth century New York. Harrigan and Hart’s musical plays reflect not only knowledge of local New York Irish life, but also a fluid form that smoothly integrated other outside influences. The resultant hybrid “Stage Irishness” might have *appeared* similar to its stage Irish ancestors, but it was in fact much more complex and multi-faceted. Through repeated performance, Harrigan and Hart’s plays and songs synthesized Irish and New York influences into a composite New York Irish character.

In the essay, “The Invention of Ethnicity,” the authors claim that collaboration within and between immigrant communities creates ethnic identities through a process of cross-pollination and contrast. The authors suggest that these interactions compel immigrant communities to create, reinterpret, and renegotiate their symbols of ethnic identity. In his article, “Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora,’ Exemplified Among South Asian Religion,” Steven Vertovec discusses similar interactions in the formation of collective identities. Vertovec emphasizes “common origin, historical experience, and some kind of tie to geographic place.”² While the authors of “Invention of Ethnicity” refer to the creation of identity through ethnic symbols as “invention,” Vertovec concludes that collective identities are “often importantly sustained by reference to an ‘ethnic myth’.”³

Harrigan, Hart, and their composer David Braham’s New York Irish plays and songs identified tangible significant symbols of Irish-American ethnic identity through the creation of “ethnic myth.”⁴ By establishing a sense of history and community and by reestablishing “traditional” Irish male roles, the images in the popular plays and songs of Harrigan, Hart, and Braham reconstructed Irish ethnoculture even while they adapted it to specific New York City living conditions. “New York” Irish identity also incorporated the influence of other ethnic and racial groups. Thus, the “traditional” stage Irishman found his stage patois flavored with the rhythms of his German, African American, and Italian neighbors, or found his recollections of home juxtaposed with similar diasporic longings. “By depicting the compatibility” of the often marginalized and denigrated aspects of Irish-American life and culture, Harrigan, Hart, and Braham’s shows “defuse[d] the hostility” of the dominant Anglo-American Protestant middle and upper classes towards the Irish (and by implication, other immigrant groups as well).⁵ The

attenuation of hostility (illustrated through the shift in both critical attention and audience composition) led to a degree of acceptance for Harrigan's New York Irish.

In this chapter, I explore how Harrigan, Hart, and Braham's musical plays constructed New York Irish identity. In order to understand how these plays and their songs functioned, I investigate the composition of the New York Irish community in Harrigan and Hart's heyday between 1879 and 1885 and I question why the late nineteenth century was a particularly ripe time for identity "invention" among Irish immigrants. I also examine who formed the "dominant" classes that Harrigan, Hart, and Braham's works helped reassure.⁶

Late-Nineteenth Century New York and Irish-America

Who were the New York Irish who attended Harrigan and Hart's performances? Beginning with the Great Famine in 1845, Irish immigration to America consisted primarily of poor Catholic tenant farmers and laborers from Western rural Ireland. After the Famine (1845-early 1850s), the widespread adoption of "impartible inheritance" or primogeniture allowed only the eldest son to inherit and generally, provided only enough extra money for a single dowry. As a result, the younger children of Irish families seldom had the land or money to marry. In a society still dominated by agricultural production, these non-inheriting children faced either a celibate life in a state of arrested adolescence or emigration to cities or countries with greater economic opportunities. Between 1856 and 1921, some family immigration occurred, but, overall, young men and women in their teens and early twenties comprised the majority of Irish immigrants.⁷

Upon arrival in America, these young Irish immigrants needed to establish a new identity to help them fit into their adopted home. The authors of “Invention of Ethnicity” claim that it is a “truism of immigration historiography that the masses of immigrants brought no sense of nationality to America with them, only local identities and allegiances.”⁸ Though this “truism” maybe debatable, it certainly seems to have applied to the experiences of Irish immigrants whose native, social, and economic structures helped to construct strong local, rather than national, identities. Throughout Western Ireland, many Irish rarely traveled outside of a twelve to fifteen mile marriage circle before emigrating. In these small communities, dedication to the community often inhibited the assertion of individual identity. Parents and community leaders expected individuals to repress their own desires, which included marrying for love, to contribute to their family’s well-being and survival.⁹ Although it would be incorrect to suggest that for Irish peasants “an Irish nation was a phrase to which no real meaning was attached,” (as one Irish nationalist claimed in 1883,) the internal focus of Irish communities led to the development of a language of signs and symbols grounded in shared ties of family, marriage networks, and religious traditions strongly influenced by local folkways.¹⁰ Thus, many locally rooted conceptions of Irish identity existed before emigration.¹¹ After emigration to America, Irish immigrants were forced to reconcile their notions of Irish identity with the other visions of Ireland they encountered in their American communities as well as with their new external perspective. This need for reconciliation compelled a new conscious and performative construction of identity.

Once in America, Irish immigrants negotiated their “dual immigrant aspirations of simultaneous identity with homeland and adopted land.”¹² This process required a

delicate balancing act and thus two main markers of Irish-American identity emerged in America, a hybrid Irish-American nationalism that created a kind of bifurcated patriotism and a new brand of Catholicism that greatly influenced the American Catholic Church. To some extent, Irish-American nationalism united Irish immigrants who had been divided by local allegiances. This process of ethnicization occurred for many immigrant groups in America, merging "provincial Old World identities into 'nationalities' in the New World."¹³ For the Irish immigrants, this Irish-American nationalism developed into a passionate dedication to achieving Irish land reform, home rule, and independence from Britain as immigrants applied American patriotic rhetoric and concepts of American agency to their own lives and experience. A "redirection" of this rhetoric and these concepts towards Irish culture created a curiously hybrid Irish-American nationalism that allowed immigrants to simultaneously embrace their new American identity, even while affirming their Irish one. As historian William Joyce notes, Irish-American newspapers, including the *Irish-American* and the *Irish World*, helped construct and propagate this nationalism among immigrants.¹⁴ For example, on January 3, 1878, the *Irish-American* illustrated the contradictory impulses of this nationalist sentiment and immigrants' loyalty to their new home. The paper proclaimed that Irish-Americans owed "a duty to Ireland" and remind its readers that "though American by nationality we are yet Irish by race."¹⁵

In part, the adoption of Irish nationalism and an Irish-American identity depended on the class of the Irish immigrant. In this period (1871-1885), the Irish-American working class provided the most support for the Irish nationalist movement. For example, during the Land War (1879-1882), the Irish used primarily non-violent forms of

resistance, such as the boycott, to convince the British government to end the landlord system.¹⁶ Irish-American workers were responsible for the majority of the donations sent to assist their fighting countrymen.¹⁷ The *New York Times* claimed that “The money that has kept the Land League together has come mostly from the day laborers and servant maids of Americas.”¹⁸

By contrast, until the goals of the nationalist movement shifted in the mid-1880s, few middle and upper class Irish-Americans openly supported the movement. In part, the lack of middle and upper class support for Irish-American nationalism reflected some Irish-Americans’ fear of expressing their Irish ethnicity, an identity perceived at odds with gentility and class mobility.¹⁹ William Carroll, a middle class Irishman, noted that dedication to Irish nationalism “cost a good man serious hours of trial and despondency, to say nothing of wreck of life or fortune.”²⁰ To avoid Protestant American accusations of disloyalty to America, the middle and upper class Irish saw the expression of their ethnicity as “more safely absorbed in a devout Catholic consciousness.”²¹ As a result, expressions of Catholic traditions “threatened to eclipse in popularity more specifically *Irish* celebrations.”²² Although some middle and upper class Irish-Americans, including politicians and Irish-American newspaper editors, supported the nationalist movement, in general, the middle and upper class Irish tried to associate themselves with the “dominant” classes and to detach themselves from their stigmatized lower class countrymen.²³

According to Joyce Anne Flynn’s dissertation, “Ethnicity After Sea-change: The Irish Dramatic Tradition in 19th Century American Drama,” the term “dominant class” refers to the “collectivity within a society which has preeminent authority to function

both as guardians and sustainers of the controlling value system, and as prime allocators of rewards in the society.”²⁴ In the nineteenth century, books and newspapers referred to this community as “natives” and they were the city’s acknowledged arbiters of taste and social privilege. By the 1870s and 1880s, some middle and upper class Irish-Americans had joined the “dominant” class, but, generally, Dutch-American and Anglo-American Protestants who had resided in New York for generations comprised its majority. Occupying the highest political offices and owning the city’s largest companies, the dominant classes held power socially and economically over both middle class and working class Irish.²⁵ Harrigan and Hart’s performances breached the separation between the upper, middle, and lower classes, including the class divisions within the Irish-American community. Although the working class dominated audiences from 1871-9, from 1879 until their separation in 1885, middle and upper class Irish-Americans and the “dominant” classes also began to attend Harrigan and Hart shows.²⁶

Although to some extent, Irish-American nationalism created a national bond between Irish-American communities throughout the country, Irish-American communities followed their own local brand of Irish-American nationalism. These local differences resulted in part from whether the majority of the community supported passive or revolutionary solutions to Ireland’s problems. In many Irish-American communities, the supporters of Charles Parnell’s push for Home Rule conflicted with those that sought independence through more aggressive and often violent means through the secret organization known as the Clan na Gael. For the most part, the visible part of the New York Irish nationalist movement supported the more passive constitutional approach. According to Michael F. Funchion in his article “Irish Chicago: Church,

Homeland, Politics, and Class,” a number of New York nationalist “leaders were quick to denounce the revolutionary brand of Irish nationalism.”²⁷ Funchion attributes this difference, in part, to the role the Catholic Church played in the New York nationalist movement. In New York, most Catholic priests encouraged their parishioners not to support the secret revolutionary organizations and to support Parnell’s Irish Parliamentary Party. They taught that “membership in such [secret] groups was sinful because their required oaths conflicted with one’s religious and civic obligations, and because their revolutionary aims violated the conditions for a just war.”²⁸

An interview with John J. Breslin of the *Irish Nation* published in the *New York Times* illustrates both the divisions within the New York Irish nationalist community, despite the dominance of pro-Home Rule factions, as well as how the Catholic Church influenced many nationalists to support the constitutional effort for reform. In the 1883 article, a *New York Times* reporter attempts to hunt down members of the local Clan na Gael branch called the Emerald Club. Approaching Breslin about his rumored membership in the group, the *Times* reporter asks Breslin about the potential memberships of several other prominent New York Irishmen in the Emerald Club. Breslin admits his membership in the organization and recognizes its presence in New York, but he denies the membership of one man in question, claiming that the man “was too devout a Catholic to join any secret-bound organization. There are a great many nominal Catholics among the Nationalists, but none who goes to confessional and mass can belong to the order [of the Clan na Gael].”²⁹ This conflict between Catholicism and the operations and branches of the Clan na Gael eventually inspired several New York

State Archbishops, including New York Archbishop Michael Corrigan, to attempt to have the Committee of Archbishops condemn the group.³⁰

As this close connection between Catholicism and nationalism implies, in addition to Irish-American nationalism, Catholicism emerged as another symbol of Irish-American identity. The church was so pervasive in Irish diasporic communities that despite a considerable number of Protestant Irish immigrants, to many outside the community, “Irish” in nineteenth century America became synonymous with “Catholic.”³¹ Unifying the Irish in America and assuaging the fears of the dominant classes, Catholicism “became the central institution of Irish life and primary source and expression of Irish identity.”³² According to Lawrence J. McCaffrey in *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*, the church acted as “a means to bridge Old and New Worlds” and “provided a focus for unity in the Irish ghettos, creating an Irish-American community out of a people who arrived in the United States with diverse loyalties to parish, townland, and county.”³³ McCaffrey also argues that the Irish leadership of the American Catholic Church “politically and socially if not theologically liberalized the American Church,” which led to “an accommodation with the dominant, Anglo-American Protestant culture.”³⁴ The dual function of the American Catholic Church as both a means of forging Irish and American identities made it an appealing symbol for all classes of Irish-Americans.

Similar to the symbolic function of Catholicism, Harrigan and Hart’s shows also provided symbols that allowed Irish-Americans to assume both Irish *and* American identities. The “dominant” classes, including many of their wealthier Irish-American members, exercised an implicit and explicit pressure in the Irish-American community to

assimilate into American culture by either excising or conceding those traits, beliefs, or practices that made them discernibly “Irish.” Perhaps what was so revolutionary about Harrigan and Hart and the songs of Harrigan and Braham was that they created a safe public space for the Irish to be Irish in America. Harrigan, Hart, and Braham made Irish-American culture, beliefs, and practices as well as Irish tenement life, into performances of ethnic identity to be celebrated rather than hidden.

The Popularity of Harrigan and Hart

Stage Irish caricatures played a central role in Harrigan, Hart, and Braham’s performances of ethnic identity. While Harrigan’s New York Irish “frequently touched on caricature,” there also existed “a truthfulness and compassion to Harrigan’s portraits that constantly raised them above caricature and made them a rarity on contemporary stages.”³⁵ Reviewers supported this assertion in a variety of newspapers and magazines. *The Illustrated American* claimed Harrigan’s work held a “fidelity to nature” while Montrose Moses in *Theatre Arts Monthly* wrote that “American drama offers no more graphic record of contemporary life than the mass of manuscripts left by Edward Harrigan.”³⁶ The famous critic William Dean Howells echoed these sentiments, praising Harrigan and Hart for depicting “faithful representations of life.”³⁷ Praise for Harrigan’s characters’ “realism” recognized that his work reflected “artistically the social milieu of the working-class poor, not that they conform[ed] precisely to everyday life.”³⁸ However, in the eyes of reviewers, “Harrigan’s willingness to write almost exclusively about tenement dwellers marked him as a realist, as opposed to those writing historical

dramas or about the wealthy.”³⁹ The frequent mention of this quality of Harrigan’s work appears to mark it as unique for its time.

Harrigan and Hart became the “most popular team in contemporary variety” in part because their working class audiences enjoyed watching representations of themselves onstage.⁴⁰ The team’s popularity also made their songs’ New York Irish images visible to large portions of the New York community. Biographer Richard Moody claims that Harrigan and Hart became so inseparable in the public mind that audiences “believed they were named Harriganandhart.”⁴¹ During this time, theatre practitioners called a run of a month “extended,” but fourteen of Harrigan and Hart’s plays “ran for over 100 performances” only to return a few seasons later to more packed houses.⁴² Critics compared Harrigan to Dickens, Hogarth, and Molière, all accepted artists of the “dominant” classes.⁴³

Reviews of Harrigan and Hart’s plays reflected their popularity with New York audiences. For example, the *Irish-American* claimed that “the famous ball of the ‘Guards’ has out rivaled the ‘Pinafore’ mania, and is attended at each performance by packed houses.”⁴⁴ As a result, “it is almost impossible to get a chance to see it unless you secure your ticket a week in advance.”⁴⁵ As the show’s popularity continued, the paper claimed that “the crowded houses that are to be seen there at every performance are the wonder of the town” and that “despite the lateness of the season [May], the audiences show no signs of falling off in point of numbers or enthusiasm.”⁴⁶ Reviews of subsequent *Mulligan Guard* plays record similar audience reactions. Referring to the *Mulligan Guard Surprise*, the *Irish-American* claimed that “it is necessary to go to the Theatre Comique early, and after that you will be sure to go often.”⁴⁷ Consistent

overflowing houses were so frequent that “‘standing room only’” became “the motto of the Theatre Comique.”⁴⁸ Even their non-*Mulligan Guard* plays, such as *McSorley’s Inflation*, drew crowded houses. The *Irish-American* claimed on January 13, 1883, that “the ‘boom’ that the public has given Harrigan’s new local comedy...is unprecedented and from present appearances the play will go on ‘booming’ for months to come.”⁴⁹ As a result of his cleverly constructed scripts and lyrics, Harrigan received much of the credit for this popularity, but Hart’s performances played a critical role in their success as well. A review in the *New York Times* of his performance as Bridget McSorley claimed “it would be hard to suggest how his representation of such a character could be improved.”⁵⁰

The popularity of Harrigan and Hart extended to their music.⁵¹ Based on sheet music sales, six of Harrigan and Braham’s songs made the “All Time Hit Parade” as compiled by David Ewen. These songs included “The Babies on Our Block” (1879), “The Mulligan Braves” (1880), “The Skidmore Masquerade” (1880), “Paddy Duffy’s Cart” (1881), “My Dad’s Dinner Pail” (1883), and “Poverty’s Tears Ebb and Flow” (1885).⁵² During this time, publishing houses sold Harrigan and Hart songsters (small books that contained song lyrics). The vast number of songsters published suggests that their songs “may have been more popular than the shows themselves.”⁵³

Audience behavior at Harrigan and Hart shows highlights the important, pervasive quality of Harrigan and Hart’s music. Newsboys were among the team’s most devoted fans and left work early to ensure front gallery seats for Harrigan and Hart performances. According to Harrigan and Hart biographer E.J. Kahn, “there was scarcely a newsboy in New York who would not gladly forgo a night’s lodging if he could thereby

afford an evening at the theatre.”⁵⁴ On opening night, these boys might also have saved a dime to purchase songbooks with the lyrics of Harrigan and Braham’s newest songs.⁵⁵

The boys often committed the lyrics to memory:

After a Harrigan and Hart show had been running a few days, the newsboys were familiar with the lyrics and didn’t need songbooks [anymore]. As David Braham’s thirteen man orchestra struck up the overture, the gallery fans would attempt shrilly to fit some of the words before them to the tunes emanating from the orchestra pit. This sometimes resulted in a good deal of scrapping, inasmuch as one faction would try to accommodate one set of words to a brand-new tune, while a nearby faction would choose another set.⁵⁶

The entire gallery echoed the newsboys’ enthusiasm for Harrigan and Hart’s music. According to the *New York Times*, the five new songs in *McSorley’s Inflation* “were received by a heel and toe accompaniment in the gallery, which sufficiently indicated their ‘catching measures’ popularity.”⁵⁷ Despite enthusiasm for all of the songs, “The Charleston Blues” became the hit of the night as the audience demanded it “again and again.”⁵⁸ Another review from the *New York Clipper* about *Cordelia’s Aspirations* recorded the “crush at the Theatre Comique on the night of November 5, the fact that it was election-eve having no deterrent effect upon the patrons of this house.”⁵⁹ The reviewer notes that the pleasure of the audience at the new songs was “beyond doubt” since “double and triple encores were common.”⁶⁰ Although the comedy of Harrigan and Hart drew audiences, the popularity of their songs in the theatre contributed immeasurably to the team’s success. Newsboys worked from sunrise to sunset to make an average of fifty cents a day.⁶¹ The New York Irish working class also struggled to make ends meet and often made financial sacrifices to send remittances to families abroad.⁶² Yet, perhaps out of the desire for the community or sense of belonging offered

by the shows' memorable characters and popular songs, the New York Irish willingly sacrificed for the opportunity to attend Harrigan and Hart's shows.

Outside of the theatre, these songs pervaded audiences' lives as well. Harrigan and Hart's songs, both new and old, "were heard everywhere."⁶³ Street musicians played them on hand-organs and bands played them at parties.⁶⁴ Walking through tenement neighborhoods on the Lower East Side, "a playback of Comique highlights was available on the neighborhood corner, or with improvements, in the local saloon."⁶⁵ E.J. Kahn claims, "In the seventies and eighties, it would have been a rare experience to stroll past a row of tenement houses on a summer night without hearing one or another of [Braham's] melodies being soothingly intoned within."⁶⁶ *The New York City American* commented that "in each of these plays there was some one song...which set the town a-whistling."⁶⁷ Writing in *Theatre Arts Monthly*, Montrose Moses declared that "the fickle whistle of the street gamin used to consecrate its breath to the Harrigan songs, so much enamored was the scurvy lip of the newsboy of the tunes of Dave Braham's composition."⁶⁸ Reviews of Harrigan and Hart's plays also mentioned the pervasive nature of their music. The *Irish-American* prophesied that "the music and song 'McNally's Row of Flats,' 'The Charleston Blues,' and 'I Never Drink Behind the Bar,' will quickly gain popularity, and within six weeks will undoubtedly be hummed all over the city."⁶⁹ The prevalence of Harrigan's songs outside of the theatre haunted him on his days off:

A Judge W.E. Horton from Detroit recalled that, when he went to Manhattan Beach with Harrigan on a Sunday afternoon in July, the leader of Gilmore's Band spotted Harrigan and struck up "Babies on Our Block." A dozen bathers joined in immediately and, within fifteen minutes, as the band retraced the melody, "over one thousand were whisking around on the sand, singing the song."⁷⁰

Beyond the Caricature: Harrigan, Hart, and Braham and the Construction of New York Irish Identity

The widespread popularity of Harrigan and Hart's shows created symbols and ethnic myths of New York Irish identity. By negotiating an identity rooted in both Irish and American symbols, the plays and songs of Harrigan and Hart synthesized notions of Irish history and community with the culture of New York's diverse ethnic and racial communities. They assuaged the fears of the "dominant" classes and created a safe public space for the New York Irish. Harrigan and Hart's songs also helped to reconstruct Irish ethnoculture, including Irish history, in New York. Although a variety of social, political, and economic organizations, such as the Irish National League of America and Irish Catholic Benevolent Society, helped Irish immigrants combat the trauma of immigration, loss of family and discrimination from native Americans, Harrigan, Hart, and Braham's musical plays offered the New York Irish a cultural connection to Ireland that also showed them how to synthesize their Irish heritage with their new American identity.

Harrigan, Hart, and Braham's performances, plays, and songs helped establish a sense of Irish heritage and create New York Irish identity based on the characters' relations to their homeland. Throughout their New York Irish plays, Harrigan and Hart's New York Irish characters retain their connection to Ireland, even decades after their emigration, and they transplant vital aspects of their culture to life in New York. For example, in *The Mulligan Guard Ball*, Dan and Cordelia Mulligan speak in Irish to hide

their snide remarks from the German butcher. Cordelia refers to Gustavus Lochmuller as “dirty Dutch” and Dan declares that he will “wipe the floor with [Lochmuller] to-morrow night.”⁷¹ By hiding Dan’s hostile feelings towards the German Lochmuller (exacerbated by his son’s desire to marry Lochmuller’s daughter) the Mulligans maintain semi-amicable relations with Lochmuller (at least for this scene). Ironically, this scene illustrates the maintenance of Irish culture not as an impediment to life in America, but as a method of surviving and negotiating the complicated and often hostile relations in diverse tenement communities.

Throughout Harrigan and Hart’s New York Irish plays, their characters’ nostalgia for Ireland informs their actions in America. Despite the problems that may have encouraged Dan and Cordelia to emigrate, Ireland becomes idealized and nostalgically remembered.⁷² For example, in *Cordelia’s Aspirations*, Dan explains how despite a dispute with his wife, he cannot be angry with her:

[When I look at her] my mind goes back to Tipperary. Where we both carried turf to the same schoolhouse and I fancy I can see her milking the little red cow and myself standing beside her and we talking of the future. There the memory of the day we emigrated and the day we landed and the many hard winters I struggled [...] in America her smiling face was sunshine to my heart.⁷³

Dan’s words contrast an idyllic, rural life in Ireland with the “hard” times spent in America. The survival of his relationship with his wife symbolizes their triumph through the difficult experience of emigration and the obstacles faced by the Mulligans in a New York often hostile to the Irish.

Harrigan and Braham’s songs also contain symbols of Irish heritage. For example, in *McSorley’s Inflation* (1882), Bridget McSorley (originally played by Tony Hart in drag) sings “The Old Feather Bed.” In the song, the bed becomes a site of Irish

tradition, nostalgically recalling ties with home and family left behind.⁷⁴ In the first verse, Bridget establishes her lineage to County Mayo and her connection to past generations through the bed. She sings, “In County Mayo, long, long ago, Me Father himself took a wife/ ‘Twas all understood he would do what he could, / To provide for me mother through life/ His father, old Dougherty, gave all the crockery, / His table to eat of their bread/Her mother, God save her! / Said all she could lave [*sic*] her/As a token of love was her old feather bed.”⁷⁵ Aside from evoking the memory of her grandparents, the bed also reminds Bridget of good times she spent with her family. In the chorus, she remembers, “Me father and mother, me sister and brother, / Me granny and aunty, and big cousin Ted, / Me uncle a sailor, his nephew a tailor, / All slept on the big, bouncing down feather bed.”⁷⁶ Bridget also sings about bringing the bed to America. Throughout the process of emigration and resettlement, it comforted her and her husband. The *bed*’s survival becomes a source of pride that both highlights the transatlantic bonds of family and symbolizes “a triumph over the pressure of immigrant poverty.”⁷⁷

The trio’s plays and songs also establish a sense of community among those immigrants transplanted from Ireland to the tenement communities of New York City. As previously noted, the majority of Irish immigrants came from the Western rural communities of Ireland where community and family took precedence over the individual.⁷⁸ Coming from small communal towns, new young immigrants settled in populous tenements where they often felt anonymous. Additionally, America’s capitalist focus on the individual contrasted with immigrants’ past experiences of a more community-based economic structure.⁷⁹ Harrigan and Hart’s plays and songs established Irish ideas of community in this lonely and threatening New World. Although local

loyalties to “parish, townland, and county” divided Irish immigrants, most Irish immigrants shared the common experience of the tight-knit Irish community.⁸⁰

One of Harrigan and Braham’s most famous songs, “The Babies on Our Block” (1879), provides the best example of how their songs helped to reconstruct Irish community. In the first verse, the character Dan Mulligan sings, “If you want for information, / Or in need of merriment, / Come over with me socially/ To Murphy’s tenement; / He owns a row of houses/ In the First ward, near the dock, / Where Ireland’s represented/ By the Babies on our Block.”⁸¹ The lyrics list the neighbors including, “the Phalens and the Whalens/ From sweet Dunochadee, / They are sitting on the railings with their children on their knee;/ All gossiping and talking with their neighbors in a flock.”⁸² The list of names, along with the gossiping outside the houses, suggests the familiar “sense of community that Harrigan sought to depict.”⁸³ The song becomes playful when Harrigan mentions the children singing songs such as “Little Sally Waters,” a popular street song at the time, and “Gravel Greeny Gravel.”⁸⁴ The other verses also mention the noisy games that resounded throughout the community. The Irish children’s freedom and carefree attitude highlight one main difference between Irish and New York Irish communities. Unlike Ireland, Harrigan’s “block” appears free from generational oppression. This idealized New York Irish neighborhood omits many of the realities of tenement life in New York (such as the other non-Irish immigrants in the neighborhood). As result, the song depicts an idyllic New York version of the rural townland, even mentioning a landlord in the third verse. The third verse describes how “it’s good morning to you, landlord; / Come, now how are you today?/ When Patrick Murphy, Esquire,/ Comes down the alley way,/ With his shiny silken beaver,/ He’s as solid as a

rock, the envy of the neighbors' boys/ A-living off our block.”⁸⁵ Although it is difficult to deduce how this verse was interpreted by the New York Irish, the verse appears to have two meanings. The verse either presents a possible, more prosperous future reality for the singing children and babies, or it transplants a familiar social structure from Ireland to New York. I suggest it may represent both simultaneously. The ambiguous nature of this verse suggests the symbolic nature of these songs. While constructing Irish ethnoculture, the song also creates new images that could be applied to immigrants' everyday lives. This song, as one of the biggest musical hits of the 1880s, was a particularly potent symbol of how the Irish-American community imagined itself in the U.S.⁸⁶

Harrigan and Hart's plays also illustrate how Irish-American nationalism bonded Irish immigrants divided by local loyalties to construct new symbols of Irish-American community. Throughout their plays, Harrigan highlights how the New York Irish sustained local Irish identities and loyalty to their discrete Irish communities in America. For example, in the *Mulligan Guard Ball*, Bridget Lochmuller, the German butcher's Irish wife, encourages her daughter “to marry Walsingham McSweeney, 'cause he's from the same part of Ireland with her.”⁸⁷ In other instances, characters identify other Irish immigrants in terms of their county or home town. In *Cordelia's Aspirations*, Dan becomes suspicious of Cordelia's Irish relative and identifies him as a “Connaughtnian,” (a resident of Connaught.)⁸⁸ The other ethnic and racial groups also identify some of the Irish characters by their *local* Irish origins. For example, the African American maid Rebecca Allup (played in blackface and drag by Hart) mocks an Irish policeman who arrests her for drinking. She complains that the policeman O'Reilly came “over here

from County Cork put on a blue shirt” and makes a point of harassing a “colored lady like me.”⁸⁹ Since Harrigan included these specific references in many of his New York Irish plays, these instances indicate the possibility that Harrigan’s audiences would have understood the references as representative of pre-emigration Irish identities transplanted from Ireland.

Yet, in a manner similar to “Babies on Our Block,” Harrigan uses a symbol of New York Irishness, the Irish-American nationalist movement, to create new myths of New York Irish identity and community. In *The Mulligan Guard Nominee*, Cordelia’s storyline revolves around the mysterious secret women’s organization that she hosts in her back parlor with the German butcher’s Irish wife Bridget Lochmuller. Bridget has recently returned from a trip to Ireland, where she was followed by Oliver Bullwinkle and Wetmore Cinders, detectives and spies for the British Government. Both men come to America to investigate the women’s organization, suspecting the group of planning to attack Canada.⁹⁰ This part of the play’s storyline is a direct reference to the attempted invasion of Canada by the Fenians in the 1860s and 1870s. The Fenians were an Irish-American nationalist group founded by Irish exile John O’Mahoney in 1858. As Thomas Brown discusses in his landmark study on Irish-American nationalism, the group’s membership exploded after the Civil War in support of its attempt to spark “an uprising in Ireland with an invasion launched from the United States.”⁹¹ Through the Fenians’ attempted invasion of Canada from Buffalo, New York and St. Albans, Vermont in 1866 and again from St. Albans in 1870, the group hoped to provoke a war between the United States and Britain, which they believed could end in Irish independence.⁹² Both of these attempts failed miserably and effectively destroyed the Fenian factions of the Irish-

American nationalist movement.⁹³ By evoking these incidents, Harrigan refers to events that were well-publicized and therefore would be familiar to his audience.

The Mulligan Guard Nominee satirizes this episode through Cordelia's plot. After a series of misunderstandings involving a misplaced yellow satchel containing a coded letter believed to describe the ladies' role in moving weapons and supplies for the Canadian invaders, the investigators and women's husbands, including Dan and Gustavus, learn the women's true motives. The deciphered letter reveals that the initials FNA actual stand for the Florence Nightingale Association and that the codes in the letter refer to rubber suspenders, cotton socks, and flannel shirts. When Cordelia, Bridget, and the other Irish women learn that their "plot" has been discovered, they are horrified at their exposure.⁹⁴ Although the conclusion to this storyline appears comic, both for mocking the women's secrecy and the Fenian attempts in the preceding decades, the use of the incident depicts the creation of a particular New York Irish community around the Irish-American nationalist movement. Despite their emigration, the sentiments of the women reflect their continued ties to Ireland and the struggles of the Irish people. Yet, these sentiments were expressed in a fundamentally American manner. According to Brown, "the nationalist leaders in Ireland thought all [of the Fenians' invasion plans were] an American madness."⁹⁵ As a result, Harrigan depicts a unique Irish-American movement and a local New York Irish attempt to engage and support distinct Irish-American goals that related as much to American politics as Irish nationalism.⁹⁶ Undoubtedly, Harrigan's depiction of the Florence Nightingale Association was used primarily for comic effect. Yet, the sentiments of the women in support of Irish independence reflected goals important to many of the Irish in the audience, who also

acted to support various factions of the movement. The antics of Cordelia and Bridget might have created New York Irish community in Harrigan and Hart's audience through laughter or empathy.

Harrigan and Hart's plays and songs, including "My Dad's Dinner Pail" (1883) and "I'll Wear the Trousers Oh!" (1883), also helped establish the role of the traditional Irish male in New York. Irish Studies historians, such as Robert Scally, have argued that emigration shattered familiar notions of Irish masculinity:

The strongest figures, who thought themselves able to defy the power of the law, had been exposed as hopeless and deluded. Parting them from the townland would now strip them of their only remaining claim to authority and respect in the eyes of their dependants and possibly their own. Hunger and fear of eviction had reduced them to secret beseechers and writers of hopeless petitions. In these, the false and resentful humility that would become a permanent part of their demeanor as emigrants was already visible."⁹⁷

This shattered masculinity became characteristic of Irishmen in American popular culture, appearing in later books such as *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* (1943) and in films such as *Little Annie Rooney* (1925). Harrigan's *Mulligan Guard* series of the 1880s provided New York Irish men with a figure (Dan Mulligan) who had not lost his authority or self-respect after his immigration, although like many Irish male immigrants, he also struggled with his masculinity upon arrival in New York.⁹⁸ For example, throughout the *Mulligan Guard* plays, Dan's wife Cordelia often subverts accepted notions of patriarchy through her actions, such as her control of the family finances and her power to make major life-altering decisions for her family. Through Dan's relationship with his stubborn and assertive wife, Harrigan and Braham's songs illustrate Dan's uneasiness with his masculinity, which Dan blames specifically on the alteration of gender roles after emigration.

“My Dad’s Dinner Pail,” sung by Dan Mulligan in *Cordelia’s Aspirations* (1883), establishes a connection between the communal male society of Ireland and the continuation of this tradition in New York.⁹⁹ Despite Dan’s financial success, Dan and his wife Cordelia still live in the Irish tenement community of Mulligan Alley among their friends. After returning from a visit to her family in Ireland, Cordelia decides that their home should reflect Dan’s success, so she sells their house in the alley to buy one on Madison Avenue. Determined to rid herself of any memories of her former station, she holds an auction to sell all of their possessions. When Dan sees the auctioneer approach his dad’s dinner pail, he attempts to save it.¹⁰⁰ Grabbing the pail from the auctioneer, Dan sings of its value and connection to his father back in Ireland. Similar to “My Old Feather Bed,” “My Dad’s Dinner Pail” laments an old family heirloom. Dan pleads, “Preserve that old kettle, so blackened and worn, / It belonged to my father before I was born, it hung in a corner beyant on a nail, / ‘Twas emblem of labor, was Dad’s dinner pail.”¹⁰¹ The lyrics evoke scenes of rural male bonding, family life, and the community’s emphasis on the importance of sharing. For example, when Dan’s father ate lunch, he “ate with the workmen about on the ground, / He’d share wid [*sic*] a la-b’rer... You would ne’er reach the bottom of Dad’s dinner pail.”¹⁰² The song highlights the virtues of the working classes, including their “generosity, patience, solidarity, and industry.”¹⁰³ These lyrics establish a male tradition passed down through the dinner pail. Yet, through Cordelia’s attempt to sell the pail at auction, she participates in the subversion of this Irish male tradition.

A later song, “I’ll Wear the Trousers Oh!,” marks the decision by Dan to reassert manly Irish traditions and take control of his home and life in New York. This song

originally appeared in *The Mulligan Guard Surprise* (1880) and became such an audience favorite that Harrigan had no qualms reusing it in *Cordelia's Aspirations*.¹⁰⁴ While in Ireland, Dan speaks of “wearing the trousers” in his marriage. Yet, in the second verse, Dan sings of how emigration altered his marriage. Dan tells of how “we sailed away to America / My troubles did begin sir...from that day out you’d hear her shout: she’d wear the trousers, oh!”¹⁰⁵ The third verse reiterates this point claiming, “when I complain my wife explain: / she wear [*sic*] the trousers oh!”¹⁰⁶ These verses clearly express the emasculation felt by many Irish men after their emigration. Dan must reassert his dominance by singing “home rule for me/ My wife shall see, / I’ll wear the trousers oh! / I’ll wear the trousers oh! / I’ll wear the trousers oh! / So every man do all ye can to wear the trousers oh!”¹⁰⁷ After Cordelia spends all of their money, Dan heroically steps in and rescues Cordelia. He reassumes his “rightful” position as head of the household, and by so doing reestablishes Irish male tradition as proper behavior in New York.¹⁰⁸

Although up to this point I have focused primarily on the plays and lyrics of Harrigan and Hart’s songs, some mention must be made about Braham’s orchestrations. Like Harrigan’s lyrics, Braham’s music simultaneously evoked the past and created new New York traditions. Although Braham used minstrel, pseudo-spiritual, and cakewalk two-step musical themes, he also used Irish jigs in the construction of his New York Irish songs, especially in those that focused on nostalgia for the Irish homeland.¹⁰⁹ For example, in “Old Feather Bed,” Braham uses the “compound meter and dotted rhythms of a jig, although much slowed in tempo.”¹¹⁰ Similar musical motifs run through “My Dad’s Dinner Pail.” The melody of “McNally’s Row of Flats” resembles “The Irish Riding Car.” Even Harrigan and Braham’s most famous song, “The Mulligan Guard,”

“quotes the Irish folk tune, ‘St. Pat’s Day in the Morning’.”¹¹¹ This borrowing of Irish musical traditions would not have gone unnoticed by recent, second, and even third generation immigrants. Yet, while maintaining Irish musical traditions, Harrigan and Braham also helped pioneer a new American song genre. Their songs were among the “first popular songs from musical shows (as opposed to the vaudeville and minstrel stage) to find success in sheet music.”¹¹² Singing these songs on the streets, audience members not only revealed their Irish past, but also signaled emerging theatrical genres and future of the New York stage.

The trio’s plays and songs also depicted immigrant interaction within an American urban setting. Irish immigrants’ daily interaction with surrounding immigrant groups necessarily influenced the construction of their identities.¹¹³ Harrigan and Hart make this interaction between ethnic groups a fundamental aspect of their plays and music. Despite the centrality of Harrigan and Hart’s New York Irish characters, Germans, African Americans, Jews, Italians, and Chinese stereotypes populate Harrigan and Hart’s shows as well. The characters existed as “relative equals in a Lower East Side neighborhood, cooperating and co-existing despite their cultural differences.”¹¹⁴ For example, *The Mulligan Guard Ball* follows the attempts of Tommy Mulligan to marry Katy Lochmuller, the German butcher’s daughter, and the obstacles the couple faces as a result of their parents’ prejudices. Yet, in the end, the couple marries and eventually the bickering sets of parents accept their children’s decision.¹¹⁵ In *The Mulligan Guard Nominee*, Dan’s campaign for Alderman reflects the interactions between New York immigrant groups that affected notions of New York Irish identity. Despite the large numbers of Irish voters in his district, Dan needs the African American, German, and

Italian vote to win the election. After winning the election, Dan brags about his diverse group of supporters in a way that reflects both his cultural prejudices and the New York Irish's reliance on other immigrant groups:

Huntley: You are not Alderman Mulligan?

Dan: I am by a great majority and plurality of the voice of the people.

Huntley: Thousands of Italian midgets inhabit your district.

Dan: I don't know whether they are midgets, pirates, bandits...They're all wid [sic] me.¹¹⁶

In a similar election storyline in *McSorley's Inflation* (1882), Pete McSorley attempts to win the election by appealing to local groups of African Americans.¹¹⁷ Even though Harrigan fills these two plays with fighting between the ethnic and racial groups, these incidents highlight the importance and inescapability of interaction in New York life.

"McNally's Row of Flats" (from *McSorley's Inflation*) provides the best musical example of the interaction between the New York Irish and surrounding immigrant groups. The chorus discusses the tenants who "occupy the buildings called McNally's Row of Flats."¹¹⁸ It tells of how "it's Ireland and Italy, Jerusalem and Germany,/ Oh, Chinamen and nagers [sic], and a paradise for cats,/ All jumbled up together [sic] in the snow or rainy weather,/ They represent the tenants in McNally's row of flats."¹¹⁹ The second verse places the Irish in direct interaction with these other groups stating, "the great conglomeration of men from ev'ry nation, / the Babylonian tower oh! / It could not equal that; / Peculiar institution, where brogues without dilution, / were rattled off together in McNally's row of flats."¹²⁰ Along with sharing living spaces, these groups also share similar fates. When the tenants fail to pay their rent, the landlord tosses them all out into the street together. As a result, in contrast to "Babies on Our Block," "McNally's Row of Flats" does not idealize the Irish tenement experience as a happy

homogenous Irish community. The song clearly highlights the daily interaction between ethnic and racial groups in New York tenement communities and acknowledges the influence of these groups on the construction of New York Irish identity. Critics echoed these sentiments. One reviewer from *Theatre Magazine* claimed, “the social point of view, if it could be called a point of view, was democratic in the extreme.”¹²¹ Historian William H. A. Williams describes “McNally’s Row of Flats” as representative of “the evolution of a particular kind of American cosmopolitanism so central to the emerging Irish-American culture, combining assimilation – ‘We’re all Americans’ – with strong ethnic identity --- ‘We’re Irish as well.’”¹²²

The ethnic symbols in Harrigan and Hart’s musical plays also deflected “the hostility of the mainstream ethnoculture by depicting the compatibility of the side stream ethnoculture...with American principles and ideals.”¹²³ To some extent, Harrigan’s New York Irish characters encouraged Irish acceptance by the middle and upper classes. Through their plays and song lyrics, Harrigan and Hart depicted the struggle between Irish ethnoculture and Protestant middle and upper class beliefs, particularly around the issue of drinking. Drinking played a central role in Irish and New York Irish social relations and relaxation. In the late nineteenth century, the drunken Irishman was already an established stereotype. Many middle and upper class Anglo-American Protestants, including supporters of the temperance movement, viewed alcohol as one reason for the New York Irish’s lower class status.¹²⁴ Irish-American intellectual elites also advocated against drinking. For example, the *Irish-American* ran a short article entitled, “What Drinking Does,” quoted in part from the *London Times*:

Under the accumulating influence of alcohol...the honest man turns knave, the respectable man suddenly loses principle and self-respect, the wise man is utterly

foolish, the rigidly moral man forgets his mask...some poor wife or friend has long been doing the best that could be done to check, to cure, and at all events, to hide, till the truth would be out...it would be much more to the purpose to take warning and do something toward staying the huge mischief which, in one way or another, confounds us all, and may for we cannot be sure --- crush and ruin any one of us.¹²⁵

The article's inclusion in the *Irish-American* reflects its editors' belief that drinking created problems in Irish-American communities. The inclusion of the article also illustrates the effort of the middle class Irish-American editors to distance themselves from the irresponsible, drunken Irish stereotype and the social habits of the New York Irish working class.

Walking a fine line between constructing legitimate ethnoculture and courting acceptance from the dominant classes, Harrigan's plays and songs negotiated the two views by presenting a combination of both. In some respects, songs such as "The Pitcher of Beer," "John Riley's Always Dry," and "A Night Cap, A Night Cap," reinforce the Irish stereotype of the hard-drinking male in a saloon. "The Pitcher of Beer" places drinking in a family setting reminiscent of a traditional Irish pub. Welcoming friends and visitors to his warm fire to share in his "loaf" and "bone," Dan Mulligan sings of "each night in the week and week in the year, with a heart and a conscience that's clear/I've a friend and a glass for to let the past pass,/ As we drink from our pitcher of beer."¹²⁶ The song centers on the family's hospitality, epitomized by sharing the beer. Other songs such as "John Riley's Always Dry" and "A Night Cap, A Night Cap" do not place drinking in a family context. To some Dutch- and Anglo-Americans, the songs' images showed stereotypical reasons for the Irish community's seeming inability to transcend its lower class associations.¹²⁷ For some middle and upper class New York Irish, the songs

depicted characteristics they did not want to be associated with for fear of losing their hard-earned, respected positions.¹²⁸ For example, “John Riley’s Always Dry” describes Riley and how no drink ever satisfies his “thirst.” The chorus sums the song up nicely, explaining how “Bass’s ale by the pail,/ He would order Rosanna to go out and buy,/ Dublin Stout he would shout,/ Keep drinking and never say die./ Whiskey prime, gin and wine,/ He would hand down a bottle and merrily cry,/ My Rose Ann, fill the can,/ For honest John Riley’s dry.”¹²⁹ “A Night Cap, A Night Cap” similarly celebrates drinking till dawn with friends in the local bar. The chorus calls for “A night-cap, a night-cap, and then we’re off to bed,/ A night-cap, a night-cap,/ ‘Twill fit most any head,/ A night cap, a night cap, the last drink socially,/ Now Jack and Joe, oh here’s a go,/ It’s better, boys, than tea.”¹³⁰ This song, as well as “John Riley,” makes drinking not only something for celebration, but also part of the ritual of life. In addition, the last line of “A Night Cap,” which compares alcohol to tea, can be seen as a jibe at upper class propriety.

Despite these strong statements in favor of drinking, Harrigan also celebrates restraint and highlights the woes of alcoholism. In “I Never Drink Behind the Bar,” Pete McSorley discusses the good times in his old saloon and brags about his skill at mixing drinks. Yet, despite the urgings of his patrons to join them, he repeatedly refuses a drink claiming, “I never drink behind the bar, / but I will take, a mild cigar, / I’ll take a sip of polinar, / I never drink behind the bar.”¹³¹ Constructed so the men on stage, and presumably the audience, would join him in the chorus, this song is a communal drinking song about *not drinking*. It shows a solid business man with an “upstanding character” who retains self control despite all temptations.¹³² “Poverty Tears Ebb and Flow” (1885) treats drinking in a less celebratory manner, highlighting it as the “root of

unhappiness.”¹³³ The last verse describes how “thee [*sic*] wine cup, it’s laden with sin and deceit, / Be careful, my friends how you quaff; / While merry and jolly its bitter is sweet./ There’s a deep hidden sting in its laugh./ Oh man is a fool when drink rides the mind,/ Not knowing a friend from a foe;/ Believing and trusting, he falls on behind, / when poverty’s tears ebb and flow.”¹³⁴ Harrigan and Hart’s Irishmen espouse joy in drinking, but they also demonstrate restraint and awareness of its dangers. By presenting two perspectives on drinking, Harrigan’s Irishmen satisfy two audiences. The songs celebrate Irish immigrant leisure activities and allow the middle and upper classes to respect Harrigan’s Irish for exhibiting characteristics that go against the despised Irish stereotype.

Harrigan wrote his cautionary drinking songs towards the end of his career with Hart. This transition from fun, rowdy drinking songs to cautionary drinking songs highlights Harrigan’s effort to please a new upper class segment of his growing audience. By showing both a fun and respectable side, Harrigan’s Irishmen gained a level of acceptance from the dominant classes. The shift in critical attention reflects this increasing acceptance of Harrigan’s Irishman.

Between 1871 and 1879, immigrants and African Americans from Lower East Side tenement communities had been the primary audience for Harrigan and Hart’s variety sketches. Working class papers and periodicals included reviews and notices of their shows, but upper class newspapers did not review them. After Harrigan and Hart began performing in full-length shows in 1879, papers such as the *Spirit of the Times* began to view and review Harrigan and Hart as “legitimate” theatre or rather as worthy of their attention, unlike other forms of lowbrow entertainment.¹³⁵ After 1879, *The New*

York Times regularly began to review Harrigan and Hart's full length plays and the pair also began receiving reviews from respected theatre critics such as Nym Crinkle, William Winter, and Brander Matthews.¹³⁶ Harrigan and Hart's entertainments received much of their validation as "legitimate" theatre from "the Dean of American literary criticism," William Dean Howells.¹³⁷ Howells praised Harrigan's entertainments repeatedly for their "realism" and "saw in Harrigan's plays the seeds of that new trend in the theatre."¹³⁸ Historian Alicia Koger credits Howells with bringing "Harrigan to the fore as a playwright for all classes of Americans."¹³⁹

Harrigan and Hart's audience moved from a predominantly working class audience to a combination of the working class, middle class, and upper class. This middle and upper class group included Irish-Americans as well as Protestant Dutch- and Anglo-Americans.¹⁴⁰ Reviews of the period repeatedly noted this shift. In 1882, *The New York Times* noted how "the excellent quality of the audience -- at least that part of it which occupied the best seats --- was significant."¹⁴¹ One *New York Times* critic described how "the orchestra was filled by a grade of persons much higher than that usually seen at this theatre... [and] a large measure of ladies."¹⁴² The appearance of ladies indicated the level of respectability that Harrigan and Hart had achieved. Yet, the working classes never abandoned the comic duo and Harrigan and Hart remained loyal to their original audience. Despite popular demand for Harrigan and Hart tickets, Harrigan deliberately kept ticket prices low to enable the working class to attend.¹⁴³ Sidney Rose (who wrote an incomplete and unpublished study of the pair) describes Harrigan and Hart's mixed audience during the early 1880s:

No theatre in New York drew a more miscellaneous clientele. "Society" had not yet recognized the Harrigan plays as formal "functions" and attended them

without ceremony in a spirit of high adventure. It was only with the higher criticism of the literateurs that a larger leaven of the social elect in full regalia began to patronize these performances.¹⁴⁴

An article on Harrigan in *The Biographer, Illustrated* (1883) painted a similar picture:

All sorts and conditions of people are represented in the audience of Theatre Comique, New York. The gallery and the boxes are occupied by persons of the opposite extremes in social positions, and the accommodations intermediate between these are filled by people belonging to the middle classes of society. In this particular of its being a resort and favored by all classes, the Comique is unique among the theatres of the metropolis.¹⁴⁵

Freund's Daily Music and Drama (November 1882) spoke of how *McSorley's Inflation*

“drew a great house at the Theatre Comique, last evening. Every inch of room was occupied. The newsboys hung over the gallery rail; the swells from Delmonico’s filled the private boxes; the aristocracies of Murray Hill and the Fourth Ward mingled in the orchestra and dress circle.”¹⁴⁶ In this quote, *Freund's Daily Music and Drama* highlights the diverse audience of the duo by contrasting one of the richest areas of the city, Murray Hill, home of the Astors and financier John Morgan, with the Fourth Ward, the most densely populated tenement neighborhood in the city (made infamous by Jacob Riis in his book *How the Other Half Lives*.)¹⁴⁷ As these quotes suggest, Harrigan’s theatre was apparently unique for its cross-class audience. Without some mainstreaming of Harrigan and Hart’s images, it is doubtful that their middle and upper class audience would have so drastically increased. The willingness of the rising Irish middle-class to be seen at Harrigan and Hart shows testifies not only to the pair’s “respectability,” but, to a certain extent, to the Irish-American community’s acceptance of Harrigan and Hart’s representation of their experience.¹⁴⁸

The middle and upper classes went to the theatre to hear Harrigan and Hart songs and also brought the songs into their homes. While newsboys had bought Harrigan and Hart songbooks in the 1870s, by the 1880s, the market for their work expanded to include a middle class community, able to afford parlors and pianos and eager to cultivate the pleasures of the private domestic sphere. Sheet music sales for the duo skyrocketed during this period and records suggest that the bulk of the sales were to middle and upper class homes.¹⁴⁹ Harrigan and Hart's best sellers included songs that sentimentalized the life of the New York Irish, including "The Babies on Our Block," "Paddy Duffy's Cart," and "My Dad's Dinner Pail."¹⁵⁰ The image of middle class families singing these songs in their parlors appears as the ultimate symbol of the acceptance of Harrigan's Irishmen. The songs played an important role in the relations between the New York Irish and the dominant class, signaling a new understanding of or appreciation for New York Irish culture. Harrigan and Hart's songs did not eradicate the upper classes' pretense of ethnic and class superiority, but these moments of cross-cultural negotiation began to break down some of the strong ethnic prejudices.¹⁵¹

In part, these songs functioned as effective symbols of New York Irish identity because the trio "invented" them at a time when New York accepted such local symbols. After Harrigan and Hart split in 1885, Harrigan continued to revive his old hits and create new ones. He had his last big success with *Reilly and the Four Hundred* in 1890. Yet, as music historian Jon Finson discusses, Harrigan and his songs fell "out of style" by the 1890s.¹⁵² The images no longer resonated as "the frame of reference for ethnicity changed."¹⁵³ Ethnicity's "scope was no longer local, but national" as "the industry of entertainment entered the national arena."¹⁵⁴ In part, this shift to entertainment on a

national scale occurred with the establishment of Keith and Albee's national vaudeville circuit in the late 1880s and early 1890s.¹⁵⁵ Popular ethnic songs now focused on Irish-Americans in general instead of referring to specific localities such as New York.¹⁵⁶

In the wake of these shifts, Harrigan and Hart's musical plays appear unique for capturing a sense of New York Irish identity before Irish identity became nationally constructed. Yet despite Harrigan and Hart's immense popularity, New Yorkers soon forgot their work as the city's complex racial, ethnic, and class topography continued to shift. At the height of Harrigan and Hart's popularity in the late 1870s and 1880s, the very idea of forgetting Harrigan would have baffled audiences and critics. An article in *Echoes of the Week* claimed, "If anybody should ever run away with the idea that Mr. Harrigan isn't one of the men of the century, that person wants to be stopped and incarcerated until he has time to look over his record and contemplate through his mind's eye what Mr. Harrigan has accomplished."¹⁵⁷ After Harrigan's death in 1911, the *New York City Globe* wrote that "Probably not a man, woman, or child who ever saw Harrigan's plays will forget them, and no one will be unable to recall the famous songs of Dave Braham."¹⁵⁸

Despite the omission of Harrigan or Hart in countless history books on musical theatre, their music and images resonated with their audience long after their disappearance from New York theatres. Isaac Goldberg of *The American Mercury* described this resonance:

Once in a while you meet an old-timer who knew these entertainments in the flesh; he will run his cane across his bended knee as if coaxing the whine out of an androgynous 'cello, and sing you sad and unfamiliar words as if they were songs of Araby. They are songs out of his departed youth; the secret of their appeal to him, however, is precisely the secret of their hold upon the author. At the core of Harrigan's doggerel burns a vitalizing sincerity; these verses, whether

in single example or as a historical collection, depict an era; Harrigan in his unpretentious way, was the folksinger of an epoch, remembering its days and ways and setting them down in simple language.¹⁵⁹

The *New York Times* also noted the impact of Harrigan and Braham's songs:

Odd lines of old songs have been hummed these last few days, springing out of nooks and corners of brains which had hardly suspected their existence for many a year. What a good song Ned Harrigan could write – how catchy a melody Dave Braham could set down to his comrade's lines – what a fine, jovial time that was forty years ago when Harrigan and Hart played a part in the city's life...When Harrigan drew his types they were men and women known to all his audience.¹⁶⁰

Although elderly audience members fondly remembered Harrigan and Hart, Harrigan and Hart's songs no longer represented an identity recognized by subsequent generations. Perhaps this lack of recognition resulted from a shifting sense of identification, with immigrants beginning to identify themselves as Irish-American, instead of "New York Irish."¹⁶¹

Along with changing upper and middle class attitudes towards Irish-Americans as well as the move of many Irish-Americans into the middle class, ironically, the very popularity of Harrigan, Hart, and Braham's musical plays might inadvertently have shortened their "shelf life" in American popular culture. By successfully negotiating a safe public or cultural space for the New York Irish, they helped to mainstream the culture to the extent that it no longer needed the shows and songs as symbols of distinct identity and cultural unity. If the New York Irish plays repeated values and cultural connections firmly established within Irish-American communities by the end of the nineteenth century, perhaps the shows and songs also were no longer needed as symbols of identity and cultural unity. Yet, Harrigan, Hart, and Braham's works appear important precisely *for* their limited period of extreme popularity because they reflect a transition

point for the Irish image in America as well as window into the locally constructed identity of the New York Irish. In the decades before Harrigan and Hart, Irish immigrants were depicted as simian creatures in cartoons, newspapers, and on the American stage. Yet, by the early twentieth century musicals of George M. Cohan, for example, it was no longer contradictory for Irish-American characters to be recognized or star as the quintessential loyal American patriot. Harrigan, Hart, and Braham's work played a vital and often unrecognized role in this transition of the Irish-American image. In the next two chapters, I will further explore this local notion of New York Irish identity performed in Harrigan and Hart's shows and how the varied receptions to the New York Irish types reflected differences in local Irish-American identity in the late nineteenth century.

Notes

¹ *Freund's Daily Music and Drama*, 1 December 1882, 2.

² Steven Vertovec, "Three Meanings of 'Diaspora,' Exemplified Among South Asian Religions," *Diaspora* 6, vol 3 (1997): 3.

³ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁴ Concepts of identity evolved throughout the twentieth century. In the 1950s and 1960s, Erik Erikson helped popularize the term "identity" among scholars in Erik Erikson, *Identity and the Life Cycle* (New York: Intl. Universities Press, 1959) and Erik Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1950). Erikson defines identity as a personal, permanent, inner core of personality. This core, Erikson claims, persists through all of the stages of life. In the 1960s and 1970s, sociologists challenged this psychoanalytical definition by applying emerging theories, including reference group theory, role theory, and symbolic interactionism, to the concept of identity. Although never mentioning the term identity, Richard Merton applied reference group theory to the "insider doctrine," a permanent exclusive knowledge of self, and concluded that this doctrine appeared ethnocentric and racially chauvinistic. Robert K. Merton, "Insiders and Outsiders: A Chapter in the Sociology of Knowledge," in *Theories of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (London: MacMillan Press, 1996), 332-6. Sociologists, such as Nelson N. Foote and Peter L. Berger, built on Merton's ideas to construct identity as dependent on an individual's interaction with his surrounding society. Identity, these sociologists claimed, did not exist as permanent and continuous, but as a process in which identity is continually recreated. An overview of these trends can be found in Philip Gleason, "Identifying Identity: A Semantic History," in *Theories of Ethnicity*, ed. Werner Sollors (London: MacMillan Press, 1996).

In this analysis, the sociologist's definition of identity will be used because it provides a way to include outside influences, such as music, in a discussion of identity. Anthony Smith also discusses how popular entertainment can help to construct identity. Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1991), 93.

The authors of "The Invention of Ethnicity" focus on intra- and inter-immigrant group interaction and immigrant group relations with the dominant Anglo-American classes. They claim that all of these interactions contribute to the creation of the ethnic group and cause it to create, reinterpret, and renegotiate its symbols of ethnicity. Kathleen Neils Conzen and others, "The Invention of Ethnicity," *Journal of American Ethnic History* 12 (Fall 1992): 3-41.

⁵ Conzen, 6.

⁶ This study does not address the accuracy of the images onstage – various accounts have already explored this issue, including Warren T. Burns, "The Plays of Edward Green Harrigan: The Theatre of Intercultural Communication" (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1969); and Robert M. Dell, "The Representation of the Immigrant on the New York Stage, 1881-1910" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1960). This chapter suggests how the types on stage functioned as a result of the combination of truth and stereotype.

⁷ Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 406.

⁸ Conzen, 9.

⁹ Miller, 406.

¹⁰ Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism 1870-1890* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1966), xviii.

¹¹ Miller, 347, 353; Robert James Scally, *The End of Hidden Ireland: Rebellion, Famine and Emigration* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 133-5.

¹² William Leonard Joyce, "Editors and Ethnicity: A History of the Irish-American Press, 1848-1883" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1974), 12. Irish-American songs echoed this dual identity well into the twentieth century. On the CD *Far From the Shamrock Shore*, folklorist, historian, and musician Mick Moloney recreates many Irish-American songs from the nineteenth and early twentieth century. One song, "My Uncle Dan McCann," which was popular in New York in the 1920s and 1930s, tells the story of an Irishman in search of his uncle who immigrated to America in 1851. The last verse clearly reflects an Irish-American loyalty both to America and Ireland:

I found me Uncle Dan McCann/Very prosperous Yankee man/He holds a seat in Congress/And he's leader of his clan/ He helps to write America's laws/His heart and soul in Ireland's cause/And God help the man who opened his jaws to me Uncle Dan McCann./So here's to me Uncle Dan McCann/Typical bit of a Galway man/ He fought all through the Civil War back in '61/He was supple and limber in every joint/He wasn't afraid of the bayonet's point/He fought with the Fightin' 69th, me Uncle Dan McCann.

"My Uncle Dan McCann," on Mick Moloney, *Far From the Shamrock Shore: The Irish-American Experience in Song*, Shanachie, 2002, CD and CD insert. For many "native" Americans, the loyalty of Irish immigrants to their homeland symbolized their inadequacy to perform their duties as American citizens and residents. Discussing the arrival of Irish nationalist leaders to America to raise funds, a *New York Times* reporter claimed that "America, the real America, therefore, has no welcome for these men. But it is unfortunate that the class to which they will appeal, while exceedingly numerous, is so entirely distinct and separate from the mass who think and feel as Americans, and so little shares its sentiments, that their mission is likely to be successful." He continues by describing the qualities of the Irish in America. Although the writer claims to believe that the Irishman "is not without love for his adopted country, but it is a passion which moves him little. He cares no more for the American eagle than an owl...The name of WASHINGTON has no meaning to his ear, but ST. PATRICK is a living and potent reality." "The Irish in America," *New York Times*, 24 June 1881, 4. With these images and sentiments frequently repeated in the press, the choice of many Irish-Americans, especially those in the middle and upper classes, to ignore their heritage in hopes of assimilation clearly reflects a response to many native Americans' harsh prejudices and disbelief in the reality of a dual identity. For more information on Irish-Americans and their struggles with this dual identity in relation to Irish nationalism, see Brown 22-4, 74, 168-171.

¹³ Russell A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *The American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (April 1995): 439.

¹⁴ Joyce, 74-5.

¹⁵ *Irish-American*, 3 January 1878, 4.

¹⁶ Lawrence McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997), 159.

¹⁷ Miller, 548.

¹⁸ *New York Times* 1881, quoted in Miller, 548.

¹⁹ Brown, 169.

²⁰ William Carroll, to John Devoy, 1879, quoted in Miller, 544.

²¹ Miller, 547.

²² Ibid., 547.

²³ Ibid., 547.

²⁴ Joyce Anne Flynn, "Ethnicity After Sea-change: The Irish Dramatic Tradition in Nineteenth Century American Drama" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985), 10.

²⁵ Edwin Burrows and Mike Wallace, *Gotham: A History of New York City to 1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 712-730, 1156.

²⁶ E.J. Kahn, *The Merry Partners: The Age and Stage of Harrigan and Hart* (New York: Random House, 1955), 17.

²⁷ Michael F. Funchion, "Irish Chicago: Church, Homeland, Politics, and Class – The Shaping of an Ethnic Group, 1870-1900," *Ethnic Chicago: A Multicultural Portrait*, ed. Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A. Jones (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 70.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ "The Irishmen in America," *The New York Times*, 21 April 1883, 1.

³⁰ Funchion, 70. The source of the conflict between Catholicism and the Clan na Gael resulted from a clash of beliefs. According to Funchion, many Catholic clergy "agreed with traditional Catholic teaching that membership in such groups was sinful because their required oaths conflicted with one's religious and civic obligations, and because their revolutionary aims violated the conditions for a just war."

³¹ Miller, 525-6.

³² Ibid., 526.

³³ McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*, 7.

³⁴ Ibid., 9.

³⁵ Gerald Bordman, *American Musical Comedy: From Adonis To Dreamgirls* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 46.

³⁶ *Illustrated American*, 1891, Edward Harrigan Papers, *T-Mss 1941-003, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 398; Montrose Moses, "Edward Harrigan," *Theatre Arts Monthly* 10, no. 3 (March 1926): 176.

³⁷ William Dean Howells, "Edward Harrigan's Comedies," *Harper's Weekly* (July 1886), quoted in Alicia Koger, "A Critical Analysis of Edward Harrigan's Comedy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 147.

³⁸ Edward Harrigan, "Holding the Mirror Up To Nature," *Pearson's Magazine*, November 1903, 2-6; Jon Finson. "Realism in Late Nineteenth-Century American Musical Theater: The Songs of Edward Harrigan and David Braham," in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs I. 1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997), xxii.

³⁹ Finson, xxiii.

⁴⁰ Bordman, 36.

⁴¹ Richard Moody, *Ned Harrigan: From Corlear's Hook to Herald Square* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980), 32

⁴² Finson, 1; Koger, 5.

⁴³ Koger, 5-6.

⁴⁴ *Irish-American*, 22 February 1879, 5. Gilbert and Sullivan's *HMS Pinafore* began an English comic opera sensation in America and opened two nights after Harrigan and Hart's first full length *Mulligan Guard* play, *The Mulligan Guard Ball*, in 1879. Bordman, 37.

⁴⁵ *Irish-American*, 22 February 1879, 5.

⁴⁶ *Irish-American*, 3 and 24 May 1879.

⁴⁷ *Irish-American*, 28 August 1880, 5.

⁴⁸ *Irish-American*, 26 October 1880, 5.

⁴⁹ *Irish-American*, 13 January 1883, 5.

⁵⁰ *New York Times*, 28 November 1882.

⁵¹ Koger, 173. For more on how Harrigan and Braham's songs functioned in the plays, see Koger's analysis of song in what she refers to as Harrigan's "variety farces." See Koger 174-9.

⁵² David Ewen, *American Popular Songs* (New York: Random House, 1966), Appendix, "The All Time Hit Parade."

⁵³ Koger, 175. Even the *titles* of these songs suggest Harrigan and Hart's ability to synthesize traditional Irish culture with the New York immigrants' experience ("Babies on our Block" and "Poverty's Tears Ebb and Flow").

⁵⁴ Kahn, 17.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁵⁷ *New York Times*, 28 November 1882.

⁵⁸ "Cordelia's Aspirations," *New York Clipper*, 10 November 1883.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Kahn, 18-19.

⁶² Miller, 292.

⁶³ Moody, 77.

⁶⁴ *Illustrated American*, 397.

⁶⁵ Moody, 77.

⁶⁶ Kahn, 153.

⁶⁷ “Ned Harrigan dies at 65,” *New York City American*, 7 June 1911.

⁶⁸ Moses, 177-8.

⁶⁹ *Irish American*, 28 November 1882, 5.

⁷⁰ Moody, 87.

⁷¹ Edward Harrigan, *The Mulligan Guard Ball* (1879), in *Dramas from the American Theatre: 1762-1909*, ed. with Introductory Essays by Richard Moody (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 552. The text of the play does not include the actual Gaelic, just the stage direction that the characters “Speak Irish.” Yet, in order for this part of the scene to play out, the butcher Lochmuller needs to not understand the Mulligans’ comments because he questions “Is dat de Russian or de Greek language what you speak?” Dan replies, “No, that’s the real Gaelic.”

⁷² Harrigan does not write a play that depicts Dan and Cordelia’s emigration, but he reveals information about their emigration and early life throughout the series.

⁷³ Edward Harrigan, *Cordelia’s Aspirations*, 1883, Play Manuscript, Edward Harrigan Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, 63.

⁷⁴ Williams also refers to the importance of this connection through “Old Feather Bed.” He claims “Harrigan’s songs [represent how] family ties spread down through the generations represented by some object.” William H.A. Williams, *’Twas Only an Irishman’s Dream: The Image of Ireland and the Irish in American Popular Song Lyrics, 1800-1920* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1996), 167.

⁷⁵ Edward Harrigan, “The Old Feather Bed,” in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs II. 1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997). Harrigan biographer Kahn claims that “no possession was dearer to Irish women of that era than their beds.” He tells a story about Harrigan driving a “wagon...containing his grandmother and her featherbed” as a boy and suggests that this childhood experience inspired the song “The Old Featherbed.” Kahn, 105-6.

⁷⁶ Harrigan, “The Old Feather Bed.”

⁷⁷ Williams, 167

⁷⁸ Miller, 125.

⁷⁹ Burrows and Wallace, 1112.

⁸⁰ McCaffrey, *The Irish Catholic Diaspora in America*, 7; Miller, 347, 353; Scally, 133-5.

⁸¹ Edward Harrigan, “The Babies on Our Block,” in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs II. 1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Williams, 164.

⁸⁴ Finson, xxv.

⁸⁵ Harrigan, "The Babies on Our Block."

⁸⁶ Ewen, Appendix, "The All Time Hit Parade." Williams also credits Harrigan as one of the first to "recognize working-class Irish America as a community." Williams, 164.

⁸⁷ Harrigan, *The Mulligan Guard Ball*, 553.

⁸⁸ Harrigan, *Cordelia's Aspirations*, 42.

⁸⁹ Edward Harrigan, *Mulligan Guard Picnic*, 1880, play manuscript, Edward Harrigan Papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, 23.

⁹⁰ Edward Harrigan, *The Mulligan Guard Nominee*, 1880, typescript, Edward Harrigan Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York. The play reflects current developments in the Irish nationalist movement as well. For example, Rebecca Allup refers to the Home Rule Movement. In an aside, she states that "We'll soon have an Irish exodus. Dey're hollering for home rule and dey ought to go home and rule it." Harrigan, *The Mulligan Guard Nominee*, 15.

⁹¹ Brown, 39.

⁹² Ibid., 39-40. Non-Irish newspapers also widely reported the failed Fenian invasions. See the *New York Times*, *New York Herald*, and *New York Tribune* for the years 1866 and 1870.

⁹³ Ibid. The violent factions of the Irish-American nationalist movement would re-form into the Clan na Gael.

⁹⁴ Harrigan, *The Mulligan Guard Nominee*.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 40.

⁹⁶ According to Brown, the presidential administrations of Johnson and Grant feared the political power of the Fenians and often used the group as a bargaining chip in British negotiations. The Fenians also exploited the American politicians in the pursuit of their goals. For more information, see Brown, 40.

⁹⁷ Scally, 160.

⁹⁸ Harrigan, *Cordelia's Aspirations*.

⁹⁹ Koger, 240. Some scholars, including Koger and Gerald Bordman, refer to *Cordelia's Aspirations* as Harrigan's masterpiece.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Edward Harrigan, "My Dad's Dinner Pail," in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs 1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

¹⁰² Ibid.

¹⁰³ Finson, xxvii.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Harrigan, *Mulligan Guard Surprise*, 1880, play manuscript, Edward Harrigan Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York.

¹⁰⁵ Edward Harrigan, "I'll Wear the Trousers Oh!," in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs II. 1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Harrigan, *Cordelia's Aspirations*.

¹⁰⁹ Finson, xxxiii-xxxiv.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., xxvii.

¹¹¹ Ibid., xxvii.

¹¹² Williams, 163.

¹¹³ Conzen, 4-5.

¹¹⁴ Koger, 170.

¹¹⁵ Out of all Harrigan's full-length comedic works, the cultural intolerance of Harrigan's characters appears the most pronounced in *The Mulligan Guard Ball*. Yet, his sketches and variety shows depicted even more insulting stereotypes and chaos in immigrant communities. For example, see *The Mulligan Guard* sketch (1873).

¹¹⁶ Harrigan, *The Mulligan Guard Nominee*, 132.

¹¹⁷ Edward Harrigan, *McSorley's Inflation*, 1882, play manuscript, Edward Harrigan Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York. See the sheet music for "Mulligan's Promises" from *The Mulligan Guard Nominee* for an example of a song that reflects Dan's reliance on various ethnic and racial groups in his election.

¹¹⁸ Edward Harrigan, "McNally's Row of Flats," in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs II. 1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Koger, 170.

¹²² Williams, 169. Dan reflects a similar sentiment in *The Mulligan Guard Ball*. When decorating the hall for the ball, Dan insists on “get[ting] a row of American flags on the right hand, with the Irish flags blending between them.” Harrigan, *The Mulligan Guard Ball*, 555.

¹²³ Conzen, 6.

¹²⁴ Koger, 33; Burrows and Wallace, 1156. A common criticism of the Irish, even until the present day, has been that they lack “the Puritan virtues of thrift and sobriety as much as those of application and forethought.” E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1961), 435.

¹²⁵ “What Drinking Does,” *Irish American*, 4 February 1882, 5.

¹²⁶ Edward Harrigan, “The Pitcher of Beer,” in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs II.1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

¹²⁷ Burrows and Wallace, 1156; Thompson, 434-435.

¹²⁸ Miller, 544-547.

¹²⁹ Edward Harrigan, “John Riley’s Always Dry,” in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs II.1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

¹³⁰ Edward Harrigan, “A Night Cap,” in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs II.1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

¹³¹ Edward Harrigan, “I Never Drink Behind the Bar,” in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs II.1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

¹³² Finson, xxviii.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, xxviii.

¹³⁴ Edward Harrigan, “Poverty’s Tears Ebb and Flow,” in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs II.1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

¹³⁵ Koger, 18-19.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁴⁰ Kahn, 15-26.

¹⁴¹ *New York Times*, 10 January 1882, 4.

¹⁴² *New York Times*, 18 February 1880, 5.

¹⁴³ Moody, 123.

¹⁴⁴ Sidney Rose, *Edward Harrigan and His Plays*, quoted in Koger, 131.

¹⁴⁵ *The Biographer Illustrated: Edward Harrigan*, May 1883, Edward Harrigan Papers, *T-Mss 1941-003, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts, 62.

¹⁴⁶ *Freund's Daily Music and Drama*, 28 November 1882.

¹⁴⁷ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901); Reprint (New York: Penguin Books, 1997).

¹⁴⁸ Rose, quoted in Koger, 131.

¹⁴⁹ Dale Cockrell, "Nineteenth Century Popular Music," *The Cambridge History of American Music*, ed. David Nicholls (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 189.

¹⁵⁰ Ewen, Appendix, "The All-Time Hit Parade."

¹⁵¹ Finson, xxix. Other newspapers and periodicals of the period reflected the unique composition of Harrigan and Hart's audience. Dillon claimed "It was significant that the audience at their opening, at least those in the orchestra seats and boxes, included many of the best known society people in the city, and within a week all Fifth avenue was singing." Dillon, 1; A review of *The Mulligan Guard Ball* described how "All these fine ladies and gentlemen who on Monday took their ease in its orchestra chairs had certainly never seen Dan Mulligan in his prime were now listening for the first time to the original version of 'The Babies on Our Block' which an Arctic correspondent said he heard played in the wilds of Kamtchatka." "The Drama," 338; Stephen Fiske of the *Art Amateur* explained how "*Investigation* at the Theatre Comique, has achieved the customary popularity of Edward Harrigan's local vaudevilles and draws the usual mixed audiences of bootblacks and millionaires, Five Pointers and Wall Streeters, the beauty and the fashion of Mulberry Street and Murray Hill." Stephen Fiske, "Dramatic Fruilleton," *The Art Amateur: A Monthly Journal Devoted to Art in the Household*, October 1884, 94.

¹⁵² Finson, xxi.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, xxi.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, xxxvii.

¹⁵⁵ Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 110.

¹⁵⁶ Finson, xxxvii.

¹⁵⁷ "Somebodies at Home –IV.: The Dickens of the New York Stage," *Echoes of the Week*, 5 March 1891.

¹⁵⁸ *New York City Globe*, 6 June 1911.

¹⁵⁹ Issac Goldberg, "Harrigan and Hart --- and Braham," *The American Mercury: A Monthly Review* 26, no. 2 (Feb 1929): 205.

¹⁶⁰ "In the Good Old Days of Harrigan and Hart: The Death of Edward Harrigan Brings Back to the Older Theatregoers Recollections of the Most Famous Comedians of their Time in NY," *New York City Times*, 11 June 1911.

¹⁶¹ Finson, xxxviii.

Chapter Two

Questioning Irishness: The 1884 Protests Against Harrigan and Hart

As J.J. Lee notes in his introduction to *Making the Irish American* (2006), “it remains true that Irish America emerged relatively slowly as an object of systematic scholarly inquiry.”¹ Even when Irish-American history received more scholarly attention as the twentieth century progressed, many studies of nineteenth century Irish-Americans present Irish-American identity, as “national” or regional. Writers, including William Shannon in *The American Irish* and Kevin Kenny in *The American Irish: A History*, often acknowledge the differences between communities, but subsume these nuances under a broad label of Irish-American.² Other historians, such as Lawrence McCaffrey, Stephen Thernstrom, JoEllen Vinyard, among others, generalize about regional identities, primarily in terms of “east” and Midwest, or “Irish on the urban frontier.”³ For example, according to Lee, “McCaffrey, looking east from the Midwest in 1976, would lump New York with Boston as part of a single ‘east coast’ Irish-American identity.”⁴ These regional categories appear particularly problematic when historians draw generalizations based on individual community experiences. As historians Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy Meagher explain, these regional categories “oversimplif[y] the pattern of opportunity available to the Irish in America and obscure its critical causes.”⁵ For example, in the mid-twentieth century, for years Oscar Handlin’s studies *Boston Immigrants* and *The Uprooted* dominated scholarly discussions of American immigration and the Irish-American experience. As a result, many used Handlin’s discussion of Boston immigration, and especially the Boston Irish, as a basis for American immigrant and Irish identity.⁶ Yet, as Meagher among others highlight, the experience of one city does not

necessarily define the experience of the Irish in the entire state, let alone an entire region.⁷

I argue that these studies highlight important concepts within the Irish diaspora, but do not necessarily recognize the nuances involved in everyday symbols of identity shared by multiple communities. Some Irish-American scholars have highlighted the importance of the local in the creation of Irish-American identity. As Meagher points out, “to argue for sensitivity to local variations in the Irish-American experience is not to overlook the fact that the histories of these individual Irish communities share some common themes.”⁸ Meagher, who edited a collection of essays on local Irish-American communities, concludes that the study illuminates the “importance of probing beneath simple classifications of Irish-American experience by broad regional categories, in order to investigate the unique traditions and environments of individual Irish communities.”⁹ This attempt to avoid simplifications has encouraged historians to create local Irish-American histories of Philadelphia, Boston, Butte, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Lowell, New Orleans, San Francisco, New York, and St. Louis. Yet, there exist few *comparative* studies of local Irish-American identity. Bayor and Meagher include a section in their conclusion to *The New York Irish* entitled “The New York Irish and Irish-Americans in Other Cities.”¹⁰ However, since the section is only eight pages long, it does not address the local distinctions in depth. *From Paddy to Studs: Irish American Communities in the Turn of the Century Era, 1880-1920* provides a collection of essays on local Irish communities, but the brief remarks in the introduction and conclusion do not present a thorough comparative synthesis of the essayists’ findings.

An example from Lawrence McCaffrey's edited collection of essays on the *Irish in Chicago* highlights the necessity for a comparative perspective in discussions of Irish-American identity. McCaffrey argues for the Chicago Irish's distinctiveness as a result of their "mix[ing] with other nationalities [in their neighborhoods]...unlike those in the eastern United States."¹¹ However, this point can be debated, at least in reference to New York. Scholarship on the New York Irish has long highlighted the interaction between the Irish and other ethnic groups. Graham Hodges's "'Desirable Companions and Lovers': Irish and African Americans in the Sixth Ward" and John Kuo Wei Tchen's "Quimbo Appo's Fear of Fenians: Chinese-Irish-Anglo Relations in New York City" as well as Tyler Anbinder's *Five Points* note that while the Irish often lived in close-knit communities, they could not avoid mixing with the other ethnic and racial groups of the city.¹² In *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), Jacob Riis even comments that, "The Irishman is the true cosmopolitan immigrant. All-pervading, he shares his lodging with perfect impartiality with the Italian, the Greek, and the 'Dutchman'."¹³ Historian John Kuo Wei Tchen supports Riis's assertion, observing that "The creolized, international culture of Lower Manhattan at once dissolved national boundaries unexpectedly to be hyphenated Irish-American ethnics by 'descent' and denizens of a very mixed port neighborhood."¹⁴ Without a comparative perspective, historians face the danger, as in McCaffrey's case, of incorrectly framing qualities of one community as unique especially when comparing local communities to regional categories.

Studies of late nineteenth century representations of Irish America reflect a similar notion of a specific, general identity that many applied to Irish immigrants and their descendants. Part of this generalized notion incorporated ideas of an Irish "race."

As defined by Kevin Kenny in his article, “Race, Violence, and Anti-Irish Sentiment in the Nineteenth Century,” “race” in the nineteenth century could be defined as “a particular mode of social perception and representation that casts the world and its peoples in terms of fixed hereditary group characteristics, discernible in physical appearance, which can explain and predict behavior.”¹⁵ Between the 1840s and 1880s, one particular definition of the Irish race, which translated into a public conception of Irish identity, incorporated notions of the Irish as a “simian Celt.”¹⁶ Transplanted from Britain, this caricature of the Irish “race” gained “a higher facial angle and a bigger, squarer jaw en route, and became as closely identified with corruption, clericalism, and organized violence in America as in the British Isles.”¹⁷ Thomas Nast’s cartoons in *Harper’s Weekly* epitomize the visual representation of this type of racial caricature in America. This racial type provided a consistent visual reference for Americans of Irish “identity,” which stage types reinforced. In his most racist form, the stage Irishman speaks bulls and blarney with a thick brogue. He has red hair and a “face...of simian bestiality, with an expression of diabolical archness written all over it.”¹⁸ Despite their positive characteristics, Harrigan and Hart’s stage characters derived from this stage image that was still prevalent both on stage and in print during the height of their popularity. Harrigan even established a connection between the race-based cartoons and his main New York Irishman, Dan Mulligan. When Cordelia, Dan’s wife, comments that Dan “went out to have his picture taken to be put up in the City Hall,” the African American character Palestine Puter declares, “He’d make a good picture for *Puck*,” a British magazine that printed famous cartoons with Irish caricatures.¹⁹ As a result of the assumption that all Irish-Americans looked, sounded, and acted alike, the visual and

performative aspect of these racial characteristics by native Americans constructed a general and “national” perception of Irish-American character for Americans.

Yet, the factions within the nationalist cause, the unstable meaning of “Irishness” in the nineteenth century, and the protests against Harrigan and Hart effectively defy both general nineteenth century racial conceptions of Irish-American identity as well as oversimplified conceptions created through more recent historiographical trends. Throughout his study of Irish-American nationalism, Thomas Brown highlights primarily the factions within the Irish-American nationalist movement for the Irish-American National League’s failure to function smoothly and unify Irish-Americans. As discussed in Chapter One, Charles Parnell led the Irish movement for land reform in Ireland and the Irish in America formed the Irish National Land League of America as an affiliate of Parnell’s Land League. After the Kilmainham Treaty of 1882 between British Prime Minister William Gladstone and Parnell which conceded to some land reform, Parnell shifted the movement’s focus from land reform to Irish self-government. This shift eventually led to the abolition of the Irish National Land League of America and the creation of the Irish National League of America in 1883. Like the Land League, this group also provided moral and monetary support for the Irish nationalist movement and Irish-Americans supported it with a similar enthusiasm. Brown emphasizes the connection between the “weakness of the American League’s central organization” and nationalist factions, but what extent did local identity play in the inability of the Irish to form a strong national organization representative of a *national* Irish-American identity in the late nineteenth century?²⁰

To an extent, Bayor and Meagher deny the role of regional differences in the nationalist movement. They claim that “there was no clear regional cast to the support for these clashing visions in America.”²¹ Yet, although no particular region espoused a specific type of nationalism and factions of all segments of the nationalist movement existed in American cities, I suggest that it may be possible to conceptualize locally inflected conceptions of each faction. Therefore, the conflict may not be solely Clan na Gael versus the Home Rule movement, but it may be possible to conceive of the divisions such as the Chicago Clan na Gael versus New York Clan na Gael. Although historians, especially Michael Funchion in his studies of Chicago Irish nationalism, have argued for local conceptions of the Irish-American nationalist movement, these studies have yet to be placed within a wider context of the difficulties faced by nineteenth century Irish-America in forming a “national” Irish-American identity. A brief discussion of these local divisions within the Irish-American nationalist movement provides one way of looking at the wider problem of identity represented by the Harrigan and Hart protests of 1884.

Although the three main segments of the movement and their various factions existed in Boston, New York, and Chicago, for the most part, Boston and New York contained strong constitutional nationalist movements and in Chicago, the Clan na Gael dominated nationalist activities. In his various works on Chicago politics and Irish nationalism, historian Michael Funchion discusses the involvement of the Irish nationalist group, the Clan na Gael, in Chicago politics on an unprecedented level in other cities.²² Branches of the Clan na Gael participated in Boston and New York politics, but according to Funchion, “in no other city was the Clan so deeply entrenched in the

machine system as in Chicago”²³ Even the Irish National Land League of America and the Irish National League of America, two organizations that “officially” championed constitutional nationalism, “supported the policy of the Clan na Gael” in Chicago.²⁴

This dominating presence of the Clan na Gael in Chicago reoriented the relationship between Catholicism and Irish-American nationalism that existed in east coast cities. In New York and Boston, according to Funchion, the Catholic clergy “for the most part strongly opposed [the] secret revolutionary organizations.”²⁵ The clergy proclaimed that membership in the Clan na Gael “conflicted with one’s religious and civic obligations.”²⁶ Yet, unlike the revolutionary Irish in New York and Boston, Ellen Skerrett highlights that “Chicago’s Irish were not forced to choose between their religion and their nationalist beliefs.”²⁷ Michael Funchion argues that the lack of such a decision and “The amicable relationship between clerics and Clan na Gael was clearly the major reason Chicago lacked a constitutional nationalist movement.”²⁸ He claims:

There was no encouragement from the Chicago pulpit to leave the Clan and support nonviolent Irish nationalism, as there was in New York...Although Irish Chicago suffered from a certain degree of factionalism, no spilt ever developed between the church and the Clan, nor did the nationalist movement ever divide along constitutional-extremist lines. In this respect, at least, the Irish in Chicago manifested a level of solidarity absent in cities in New York and New England.²⁹

Other Irish scholars have highlighted that this participation in the nationalist movement by the clergy reflected the Chicago clergy’s more secular concerns.³⁰

These nuances in the nationalist movement, especially among the Chicago Irish who ironically, dominated the peaceful Irish American National League, reflect divisions that not only relate to nationalist factions, but also to local relationships to the Catholic Church, politics, and the other nationalist factions within the city. The local connotations

of the Irish-American nationalist factions need to be further explored in comparison to other fractures between local Irish-American communities.

The meaning of “Irishness” was not only unstable as a result of these conflicting local manifestations of national Irish-American symbols, but also because of a conscious questioning of Irishness within the Irish-American community. This questioning reflects the attempts of Irish-Americans, especially the increasing numbers entering the middle class, to exercise some control over their ethnic image. From one perspective, the protests against Harrigan and Hart can be similarly interpreted as a censoring of images that do not align with a particular definition of Irishness. The protests would not be the only stage for this debate. For example, composed of Catholic Irish immigrants or men of Irish descent, the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) provided fraternal events, benefits to the sick and upon death, and charity to the unemployed or those facing other financial difficulties. Like other segments of the Irish-American population mentioned in the Introduction, the group faced internal conflicts during 1884. Although certain divisions wanted to loosen membership restrictions to admit members with only one, instead of two, Irish parents, the New York division claimed the change would dilute the “‘national and religious spirit’ of the organization.”³¹ Like other clashes between local Irish communities in 1884, this conflict reflects disagreements over who or what represents or composes Irish-American identity.

Another influential organization, the Irish Catholic Benevolent Union (ICBU), experienced a crisis of identity in the 1880s. With mainly working class members and middle and upper class Catholic leaders, the ICBU attempted to inform new immigrants about America and to encourage the formation of Irish-American colonies in the West.

The group also assisted immigrants and settled Irish-Americans with financial matters and tried to establish a national insurance program.³² In its September 1880 issue, the *Celtic Monthly* printed a short section addressing “a clique of some kind or other...[that] affect[s] to be scandalized at the retention of the word ‘Irish’ in the [group’s] title.”³³ This clique the writer claims, “[is] working [to expunge] the objectionable adjective.”³⁴ This indicates that some members of the community thought that the word Irish was harmful to the organization. Even though the *Celtic Monthly* writer praises the Irish Catholic Benevolent Society for being one of the “most popular and influential of the benevolent organizations in the country,” he rails against the clique, questioning “Has it ever occurred to those high-toned ‘reformers’ that when expunging the word Irish, it would only be in keeping with consistency to throw out the Irish members also.”³⁵

This effort to remove the word “Irish” from the organization’s title implies a variety of possible concerns or changes within sections of the Irish-American community. For example, did the clique believe it had assimilated into American culture and it no longer identified itself as Irish? Did it think that including the word “Irish” in the title adversely affected the group by associating it with the often negative connotations of the word in the nineteenth century? Or did class play a role in the clique’s complaint? As I have noted, middle and upper class Irish-Americans often attempted to gain respectability by denying or downplaying their Irishness and relying on Catholicism as the main expression of their ethnicity.³⁶ It seems likely that this class conflict may have played a role in the Irish Catholic Benevolent Society argument of 1880.

Although the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Irish Catholic Benevolent Society experienced crises of identity over their Irish associations and strength of blood

ties to the homeland, some groups in this period began to identify their Irishness through the development of linguistic, artistic, and cultural ties to Ireland. Groups, such as the Philo-Celtic Society, advocated for the preservation and celebration of Irish culture. Founded in Brooklyn, New York, by Michael J. Logan in 1875, “the father of the Irish language movement,” the Philo-Celtic Society established classes to teach the Irish language in an attempt to “preserve ‘Irish ideas and Irish nationality in their integrity.’”³⁷ By 1884, New York, Boston, and Chicago each had established their own Philo-Celtic societies.³⁸ Yet, according to Kenneth E. Nilsen, even united by common goals, “a certain sense of rivalry grew up among many of these groups.”³⁹ For example, David O’Keeffe, founder of the New York Philo-Celtic Society in 1878, “raised serious questions about Logan’s command of Irish.”⁴⁰ To some extent, through the questioning of Logan’s language skills, which the societies’ focused on as a central part of their identity, O’Keeffe also questioned Logan’s Irishness.

Among the major symbols of Irish-American identity, the image of the Irish in politics manifests itself in three distinct ways in Chicago, Boston, and New York that also question the meaning of “Irishness.” For example, the first Boston Irish Catholic mayor illustrates how some of the major Boston Irish political leaders “lost” part of their Irishness to gain political clout. In part, this loss may be attributed to the delicate truce between the Yankee leadership and Boston Irish politicians. For example, unlike many Irish-American office holders in New York and Chicago, Boston’s first Irish Catholic mayor, Hugh O’Brien (elected in 1884), did not directly appeal to Boston’s Irish Catholic population for support. In “Curley of Boston: The Search for Irish Legitimacy,” Charles H. Trout characterizes O’Brien as “a man who balked at public works projects that would

have employed immigrant laborers.”⁴¹ Over his four terms as mayor, as a result of his conservative policies, Trout considers O’Brien “indistinguishable from his Yankee counterparts.”⁴² O’Brien’s actions may have quelled Yankee fears of rising Irish political power, but he was ironically forced to leave the Irish behind to become a public Boston Irish politician.

This public image of O’Brien contrasted with the image of the New York Irish politician. The tendency of the New York Irish to consistently support the Democratic ticket made Tammany Hall, the New York Democratic political machine, a symbol of Irish-American political power. When in office, New York politicians catered to the needs of their constituents by often trading working class jobs for Democratic votes. Dan Mulligan, Harrigan’s main New York Irishman, reflected this public image of the Irish politician. In *The Mulligan Silver Wedding*, Dan provides his friend McSweeney with a job as a cab driver. Yet, toward the end of the play, McSweeney is charged with “obstructing the railroad track with a horse and blockading the cars and mail wagon” as well as with fast driving and cruelty to his horse.⁴³ When McSweeney tells Dan about his troubles, Dan claims that he will make the problem disappear through “diplomacy.”⁴⁴ This instance highlights both Dan’s nepotism as well as his willingness to use his political position to help his Irish friends. These characteristics reflected the characteristics associated with New York’s Democratic Tammany Hall, one of the most visible symbols of Irish political power, which included its infamous reputation for corruption and scandal in the late nineteenth century.⁴⁵

The role of the visible New York politician reflected the particular relationship between the New York Irish and their political system. Historian Anthony Gronowicz

argues that proportionately, more New York Irish were involved in the Democratic political machine in 1844 than 1884. He discusses how “in 1884, thirty percent of all party’s activists were Irish, while the Irish comprised over forty percent of the population.”⁴⁶ He claims that “Clearly, the structural impact of immigration upon the party was less in the 1880s than in the 1840s.”⁴⁷ Gronowicz argues that in spite of their decreasing numbers within the party ranks, the Irish became strongly identified with the party in the late nineteenth century because of their high percentage in visible, civic offices. Out of one hundred and one top officials, “forty two percent were Irish...thereby giving the Irish their only plurality in any sector of the party.”⁴⁸ As a result, Gronowicz concludes that “since the most publicly visible sector of the party was predominantly Irish, the opposition press could readily focus upon Irish men as powerful mishapers of urban policy.”⁴⁹ For example, starting in 1871 with John Kelly, Irish Catholics became the “boss” of Tammany Hall and in 1880, New York elected its first Irish Catholic mayor, William Grace. As a result, the public, as illustrated through Dan Mulligan, tied New York Irishness to a very public political image.

In contrast, the political image of the Chicago Irishman was primarily grounded in his work behind the political scenes. Chicago did not have a centralized Democratic political machine like New York, but rather a decentralized system of multiple “mini-machines” often controlled by Irish ward bosses, nor did the Chicago Irish have a significant impact on the Chicago political system until after the Civil War.⁵⁰ In contrast to the New York Irish, historian Michael Funchion claims that the Chicago Irish were not only willing, but also desired to stay behind the scenes in politics. He attributes this to the apparent reluctance “to consider the nomination of one of their own as mayor...Only

once, in 1893, was an Irishman nominated for mayor.”⁵¹ As a result, unlike the Boston or New York Irish politicians, the link between Irishness and politics was not necessarily related to a public performance of Anglo-conformity or Irish ethnicity.

The protests against Harrigan and Hart reflect a similar diverse reaction based on location and a questioning of what constituted Irishness. The protests only further illuminate the problems with nationally constructed notions of Irish-American identity in the nineteenth century. Harrigan and Hart enjoyed widespread popularity and success among Americans and immigrants of all classes and ethnicities. Although the press did not absolve Harrigan and Hart from any criticism, the articles covering the duo convey almost complete audience support and idolization. Harrigan and Hart biographers Richard Moody and E.J. Kahn as well as the newspaper articles of the period emphasize the almost universal emotional attachment of the audience to the team and the respect accorded to their work as a “realistic” reflection of tenement life. For example, in the early twentieth century, one eighty-five year old audience member commented to Kahn that “You could hardly exaggerate the reaction [when Harrigan and Hart separated in 1885]. I could cry right now if I allowed myself to think about it very much.”⁵² Although this reaction is clearly influenced by nostalgia for the past, it reflects the audience’s attachment to the performers and the cultural nostalgia that pervades much of the scholarship on Harrigan and Hart.

As a result of the unwillingness of many scholars to rupture this nostalgic image as well as the lack of comparative studies on Irish-American theatre, the protests against the duo have received little scholarly attention. When writers mention any complaints or protests, the protests are often dismissed and excused. For example, Kahn mentions one

argument between Harrigan and Hart and a priest who wanted to lecture the audience during intermission. No other source mentions this argument and Kahn uses it merely to introduce a section on Harrigan's "relative immunity" to complaints from the pulpit.⁵³ Kahn explains this "immunity" by claiming that Harrigan's work included less offensive material than others in the period. As a result, three incidents of anti-Harrigan and Hart protest reported in 1884 appear worthy of notice because of their supposed rarity.⁵⁴ In addition, all three incidents connect *directly* to the image of the Irish on stage and the Irish-American community, which makes these protests relevant in a discussion of Harrigan and Hart and the creation of Irish-American identity. After briefly discussing two previous protests, the remainder of this chapter will examine a March 1884 protest against Harrigan and Hart by a New York priest. The analysis of the 1884 protests reflects similar fractured notions of Irish-American identity along both local and class lines.

Before the March 1884 protest against Harrigan and Hart, the press reported two other incidents in which Irish-Americans responded negatively to the works of the pair. Both protests received only one mention in the press (that I have been able to locate thus far). The Boston *Pilot* reported one incident in January 1884. The *Pilot* refers to "the attempt of some Irishmen in New York to boycott Harrigan and Hart's Theatre because they 'made fun of the Irish'."⁵⁵ The article provides no detailed information on the complaints or the identities of the New York Irishmen. The article's writer dismisses the complaints as "too ridiculous to be seriously noticed."⁵⁶ He even claims that the protests of the New York Irishmen against Harrigan betrays an insecurity of the Irishmen in their ethnic identities. The writer claims that "The Irishman who could be offended at 'The

Mulligans' or 'Cordelia's Aspirations' is not sure of himself or his people... Nobody can enjoy it so keenly as an Irishman."⁵⁷ He acknowledges the existence of a negative stage Irishman who must be eliminated from the stage, but he does not classify Harrigan's Irishmen as part of the dangerous stereotype. My research did not uncover any other reference to this particular protest and it remains an incident to be further explored. However, this report appears significant for reflecting a curious trend in the press that would continue throughout the other major March 1884 protest. Even though the incident occurred in New York, the only paper that reported the event was from *outside* of New York, in this case from Boston.

Despite the Boston *Pilot*'s dismissal of Harrigan and Hart's critics, the article's tone implies that there is a negative stage Irish image that Harrigan and Hart do not depict in their plays. Interestingly, a few years earlier in 1878, the Boston *Pilot* reported on a Providence production of Boucicault's *The Shaughraun* that according to historian Joyce Flynn, caused "mob reaction and missile throwing."⁵⁸ Flynn concludes that the difference in the 1878 and 1884 *Pilot* articles reflects an inconsistency in opinions of the stage Irish. I argue that it implies a fundamental difference between Harrigan and Boucicault's stage Irish types. The *Pilot* article criticizes *The Shaughraun*'s wake scene as "a foul blemish on an otherwise excellent play. The only persons amused by it are those who ridicule everything Irish, and have no eye for anything in Irish character but the grotesque."⁵⁹ The leader of the March 1884 protest would not only criticize Harrigan and Hart, but would echo this complaint about Boucicault's *The Shaughraun*. It is worth noting that the writer acknowledges a problem with the way Boucicault depicts the wake scene, which has religious connotations. Did the *Pilot* writer and the audience in

Providence criticize this scene in *The Shaughraun* because they felt it degraded an important symbol of Irish-American identity - Catholicism? Was the *Pilot*'s dismissal of the Harrigan and Hart critique related to the duo's almost complete omission of Catholicism from its plays? It is possible that the pair avoided offending audiences by not parodying an importance symbol of Irish-American identity. Interestingly, it is also the Irish-American types that the *Pilot* accepts and the caricature from Ireland that the paper rejects. This highlights that there might have been more of a separation between the Irish-American and Irish culture than many recent Irish-American scholars acknowledge or that the image Boucicault presents of the Irish homeland does not reflect the mythic Ireland created through Irish diasporic imagination after emigration.⁶⁰

Several days after the March 1884 protest, the *New York Times* reminded its readers of a second protest against Harrigan and Hart that had occurred several years earlier and the *Times* connected the event to the recent outrage against another Irish comic, Pat Rooney. The article highlights the importance of location in the perception of the Irish types, stating, "occasionally that which passes for genuine genius in Gotham is not appreciated here [in Scranton], especially in aesthetic Irish comedy."⁶¹ The article connects the current protests against Rooney to Rooney's performance in Scranton two years earlier. According to the article, Rooney caricatured Scranton Policeman Patrick Golden. If Rooney altered his performance to incorporate local references to Scranton residents two years earlier, this occurrence implies that Irish-American performers may have altered their shows to local contexts, effectively making their performances more relevant to their audiences. When Rooney arrived in 1884, various segments of the Scranton community complained about Rooney's "burlesque of the Irish character" and

his presentation of “low libels on the Celtic race in the shape of the so-called stage Irishman.”⁶² The phrasing of this comment highlights how performers use the stage Irish as a *vehicle* for libel and how the Irishman on stage is not an *inherently* insulting figure. When Rooney went to Scranton’s Mayor Powderly about the complaints against him, the Mayor echoed the grievances and even claimed that “Few Americans had time or inclination...to read Irish history, and their impressions were generally formed by what they saw on the stage.”⁶³ This comment reflects the Mayor’s belief that the stage Irishman played a central role in the formation of the Irish image in the public mind and that performers needed to be responsible in their performances since they were representing the Irish people.

The article’s writer concludes this story by relating a similar incident that occurred when Harrigan and Hart visited Scranton several years earlier while touring one of their “greatest New York hits.”⁶⁴ As the author notes, “while the fun was at its height, a storm of hisses broke out all over the house. The hissing was kept up for five minutes and threatened to demoralize the performance.”⁶⁵ Although my research has not revealed the name of the play or the specific date of the performance, this comment highlights the difference in perception of the New York writer and the Scranton audience.

Interestingly, the article implies that the working class, usually Harrigan and Hart’s strongest supporters, played a pivotal role in this protest. The article claims that after five minutes of hissing, “a little fellow in the gallery, [where the working class usually sat], stood up and shouted, ‘It’s no use, Harrigan: we can keep this thing up till morning!’”⁶⁶ A change of scene removed the objectionable aspects from the stage and apparently the “humor was a solemn and serious sort the remainder of the evening.”⁶⁷ This exact article

was reprinted in the *Irish World* several weeks later with a brief introduction that suggested “it only needs an organized effort to make the business of misrepresentation unprofitable.”⁶⁸

A brief hint in the article allows for some guarded speculation on at least the protestors’ identities. The mention of the “fellow” in the gallery highlights the role of the working class in this protest. The working class in Scranton contained a high percentage of Irish-Americans who labored in the coal mines so it is highly likely that the theatre contained a large percentage of Irish-American audience members.⁶⁹ Harrigan had even commented on the high concentration of Irish in Scranton during an earlier visit to Pennsylvania. According to a September 8, 1875 letter, Harrigan referred to the “whole town” as “Irish” and stated that it was ““was the worst governed placed I was ever in...with two mayors three chiefs of police and lord knows how many supervisors.”⁷⁰ This Scranton incident highlights the question of why some Irish viewed Harrigan and Hart’s caricatures as misrepresentations while others, including many Irish in New York and the Boston *Pilot* writer, viewed them as “realistic.” The comment also highlights Harrigan’s own anti-Irish biases. Possible clues to the basis for the Scranton Irish’s objections to Harrigan and Hart may be located in the details of another protest that occurred in March 1884.

On Sunday, March 2, 1884, Father John Larkin, the pastor of the Church of the Holy Innocents on Thirty-Seventh Street in New York, denounced the Irish caricatures in Dion Boucicault’s *The Shaughraun* and in the works of Harrigan and Hart. On its front page, the *Kansas City Star* reprinted a portion of Father Larkin’s speech. Larkin declared:

“The Shaughraun” is a disgrace to the Irish race. It pretends that the Irish priests are so depraved that they don’t know the difference between whisky and the milk in their tea. In the wake he presents the Irish dancing. The anathemas of the church should fall upon Boucicault and his place. No church member in good standing will go to see it; and those men, Harrigan and Hart, are of the same sort, and all of their plays tend to degrade the Irish. Don’t go near them. All they care about the Irish is for the Irishman’s dollar.⁷¹

This portion of the speech is the only known quote of Larkin’s protest against the comic duo. Larkin’s association of Harrigan and Hart’s characters with a degraded image of the Irish is supported by the only other joint reference to Harrigan, Hart, and Father Larkin in John Finerty’s Irish Chicago *Citizen* several days later. After referring to Larkin’s speech, Finerty writes, “Of Harrigan and Hart The Citizen can have nothing to say. The men are evidently from the slums, and not the product of any race or decent order of intelligence, but from an abortive condition of civilization which surrounded them. They and their ‘plays’ are for the vulgar and inane.”⁷² Unlike his comments on Harrigan and Hart, Finerty claims that Larkin protests too much over Boucicault’s plays, but concedes that they contain images detrimental to the Irish national character. Similar to Larkin, he insists that “the Kippeen and the bottle, the tattered coat, the caubeen and the dudeen must be vanished from the stage, as national characteristics. Hiss the actor that vulgarly and ignorantly presents either.”⁷³

Finerty’s comments reflect a questioning of “Irishness” in the 1880s that reflects the other fractures within the Irish-American community. During the early 1880s, middle class Irish Americans involved in the Irish-American nationalist movement attempted to prevent Britain from shipping Irish paupers to America. In his discussion of Irish Chicago, Funchion claims that Finerty “probably expressed the attitudes of many... ‘respectable’ Irish when he advised Irishmen to stay in Ireland, claiming that in

America the Irishman, 'is nothing but a poor emigrant, who is left to paddle his own canoe the best he may, and who, however delicately nurtured at home, must take, at last, to the pick and shovel, perhaps to the recruiting office, or become a charge upon the country.'"⁷⁴ This rhetoric appeared in newspapers all over the nation, including Boston, New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia, which all had large Irish-American populations. It also appeared in Irish-American as well as non-Irish newspapers. For example, the New York *Irish-American* claims "[Forced emigration] should meet with the sternest opposition from every patriotic Irishman both here and at home. There is room enough in the Old Land for all her children."⁷⁵ The article exclaims:

Who that was in New York during that period of the 'exodus,' in 1851 and '52 can ever forget the shiploads of miserable, hunger-wasted wrecks of humanity that were dumped out upon our docks by the agents...to die by the hundreds in the fever sheds of Ward's Island, and fill the Potter's Field with their bones...And this includes only the physical sufferings entailed by the extermination of our people, and take no account of the moral ruin and destruction that too often supplement them⁷⁶

The *Boston Republic* also reflected these sentiments. A letter in the *Boston Republic* "beg[s]" the editor for "space in your esteemed paper to suggest a means of checking Irish emigration...in the majority of cases Irishmen could live happier at home than here."⁷⁷ It appears safe to assume that in most cases, these writers, similar to the editors who published their works, were middle class. Through their protests against the enforced emigration of paupers, the writers separate themselves as Irish-Americans from the images of the poor, working class Irish-American.

The concerns of the Irish-American community over forced legislations caused Alexander Sullivan, a Chicago Irishman and current president of the Irish National League of America, along with other prominent Irishmen from around the nation to speak

with President Arthur. They asked Arthur to enforce the current immigration laws that only allowed for an immigrant's entry if she could take care of herself "without becoming a public charge. After the June 1883 meeting, according to President Arthur, "[Those suspected of becoming future public charges] shall not be permitted to land."⁷⁸ Sullivan also used class rhetoric to explain why the League sent representatives to Arthur. He claimed that he only opposed "enforced emigration. The people who came to the United States of their own accord came with a fixed purpose and determination, and as a result of investigation and preparation."⁷⁹ This rhetoric connects the undesirably Irish candidates for emigration to America with the poor and working class immigrants who would live in the tenement communities represented in Harrigan and Hart's plays. In light of this negative attitude towards the lower class Irish by the middle class Irish, Finerty's comments about Harrigan and Hart and their characters appear to reflect this wider class issue within the Irish-American community. The lack of Irish ghettoization in Chicago, unlike New York and Boston, adds a potential local conflict to the situation as well.⁸⁰

Finerty was not the only one to report on Larkin's speech in his paper. Yet, these two articles in the *Kansas City Star* and *Chicago Citizen* would be the only two to mention Larkin's protest against Harrigan and Hart. New York newspapers remained silent on any objection to Harrigan and Hart's stage types in Larkin's speech. However, the *New York Times*, *New York Herald*, *Life*, and the *Chicago Daily Tribune* all reported on Larkin's criticism of Boucicault and Boucicault's public response.⁸¹ One Irish-American paper based in New York, Patrick Ford's *Irish World*, commented on Larkin's protest. Yet, Ford also only refers to Larkin's comments on Boucicault. As the only

writer to comment on any effect of Larkin's speech, Ford claims, "Father Larkin opened out on the Irish caricature business with good effect – 'miserably slim' audiences greeting the professional libelers of Irish character in New York."⁸² Yet, no other records of the New York 1883-4 theatre season, including other New York newspapers or George Odell's *Annals of the New York Stage*, indicate any decrease in Harrigan and Hart or Boucicault's business. This implies either that the protests against Boucicault and Harrigan and Hart were ineffective or that they targeted other Stage Irish performers seen as less genuine. Both possibilities are suggestive, since the first means that Boucicault and Harrigan and Hart had such a strong local following that audiences were willing to ignore the church and press; the second reveals that Boucicault and Harrigan and Hart had become established purveyors of Irish-American identity, while other performers were seen as "fake."

The protest against Harrigan and Hart's work could not have surprised the popular performers. Harrigan's awareness of the tension surrounding the stage Irishman and the New York Irish community appears in his 1881 play *The Mulligan Silver Wedding*, which played in New York, Boston, and Chicago. Toward the end of the play, Dan Mulligan and his cousin Dennis attend a vaudeville show at the Criterion Concert Hall where they watch "Mr. Bryan and Mr. McQuirk, the celebrated Irish character delineators."⁸³

(Bell heard at back. Music of Irish song heard, musicians playing...Curtain rises, McQuirk appears in knee breeches, stick, sings Irish song, "Roving Irish Blade")

Dan: He's degrading the Irish character
Dennis: He's making game of me

Dan: Get out of that [*sic*] (Business of throwing popcorn at McQuirk, Dennis throwing popcorn too. McQuirk keeps sing[ing]. When Dan throws basket, McQuirk bows and exits. Curtain descends.)...

Dan: What do ye allow a baboon like that on the stage for?⁸⁴

Ironically, this scene portrays Irish-American caricatures rejecting other Irish caricatures. Dan clearly stands as a defender of the New York Irish character, which his presence on stage simultaneously also derides. At the same time, Harrigan and the character make a distinction between the dreaded stage Irishman and Harrigan's New York Irishmen. The stereotypical costume, Irish song, as well as any behavior portrayed in performance mark McQuirk as a different character from the Mulligans. Ironically, this contrast may have highlighted the "realism" of Harrigan's types that the press frequently heralded.

In spite of Harrigan's clear awareness of issues with the stage Irishman as depicted in this scene, only the *Kansas City Star* reported any specific response from Harrigan. In Boucicault's letter to Cardinal McCloskey, which various papers across the country reprinted, he defends his Irish characters as distinct from the stage Irishman.⁸⁵ However, Harrigan's response in the *Kansas City Star* does not attribute any truth to Harrigan and Hart's characters:

Mr. Harrigan, when asked about Father Larkin's attack, said it was nothing new to him. He had been denounced by the Land League meetings and the Irish newspapers, but the theater was crowded nightly with people looking for a wholesome laugh, and he thought he served a worthy purpose. Indeed, he had letters from Catholic clergyman indorsing [*sic*] his play, and priests often came to see him and Tony Hart act. He had not intended any offense to the Irish race any more than to the Germans, whose peculiarities he had ridiculed in his plays.⁸⁶

Harrigan's response appears noteworthy for his referral to other groups, other fundamentally *Irish* groups, that denounced his work. Yet, when did these newspapers and Land Leagues denounce him? Irish-American newspapers not only fall silent on the

subject, but when they mention Harrigan, they refer to him with praise.⁸⁷ Harrigan's mention of the Land League also appears significant, for both Father Larkin and John Finerty were linked by their leadership roles in their local Irish nationalist movements.⁸⁸ No link between Finerty, Father Larkin, and any previous nationalist protest against Harrigan and Hart can be established.

The reporting of these protests in newspapers outside of New York as well as the relation of the two known protesters to the Irish-American nationalist movement begs the question of whether the protests in 1884 resulted from a conflict between local identities and "diaspora consciousness," which involves an "*awareness of multi-locality*" that "stimulates the need to conceptually connect oneself with others, both 'here' and 'there,' who share the same 'routes' and 'roots'."⁸⁹ Did the caricatures signify within New York Irish communities, but not when Harrigan and Hart toured the nation? Yet, if Harrigan and Hart's caricatures conflicted with local notions of identity, why were the protests a rarity in the careers of the comic duo? These questions of local identity will be further explored in Chapter Three.

Notes

¹ J.J. Lee, "Introduction: Interpreting Irish America," in *Making the Irish American*, ed. J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 47.

² William Shannon, *American Irish* (New York: MacMillan Company, 1963); Kevin Kenny, *The American Irish: A History* (Harlow: Pearson Education, 2000).

³ Lee, 12. Lee discusses the divide among scholars on the regional issue. See Lee 11-15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵ Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy Meagher, "Conclusion," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy Meagher (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 535.

⁶ Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1959); Handlin, *The Uprooted* (Boston: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1973). For more on Handlin and his role in immigration studies, see Lee, 11-12; and Russell A. Kazal, "Revisiting Assimilation: The Rise, Fall, and Reappraisal of a Concept in American Ethnic History," *American Historical Review* 100, no. 2 (April 1995): 440-51, 454-5, 463;

⁷ Timothy J. Meagher, "Conclusion," in *From Paddy to Studs: Irish American Communities in the Turn of the Century Era, 1880-1920*, ed. Timothy J. Meagher (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 181-8; Lee, 13.

⁸ Meagher, 183.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 181.

¹⁰ Bayor and Meagher, 534-542.

¹¹ McCaffrey, "The Irish-American Dimension," in *The Irish in Chicago*, ed. Lawrence J. McCaffrey (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 7. Instead of the ghettoized neighborhood, Ellen Skerrett argues that the parish was the main center of the Irish-American community in Chicago. See Ellen Skerrett, "The Catholic Dimension," in *The Irish in Chicago*, ed. Lawrence J. McCaffrey (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 22-60.

¹² John Kuo Wei Tchen, "Quimbo Appo's Fear of Fenians: Chinese-Irish-Anglo Relations in New York City," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996); Graham Hodges, "'Desirable Companions and Lovers': Irish and African Americans in the Sixth Ward," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996); Tyler Anbinder, *Five Points* (New York: The Free Press, 2001).

¹³ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 10 (page citations are to the reprint edition).

¹⁴ Kuo Wei Tchen, 140.

¹⁵ Kevin Kenny, "Race, Violence, and Anti-Irish Sentiment in the Nineteenth Century," in *Making the Irish American*, ed. J.J. Lee and Marion R. Casey (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 365. For more information about the relationship between race and ethnicity, especially in the twentieth century, see Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States From the 1960s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 1986), 1-24.

¹⁶ L. Perry Curtis Jr., *Apes and Angels: The Irishman in Victorian Caricature* (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997), 64.

¹⁷ Curtis, 64. For the discussion of the debate over parts of Curtis's interpretation of visual caricatures, see Kenny, 365-9. Some opposing studies of Irish caricatures suggest that the real issues of nativism involved "anything but race." Kenny, 365. For visual references during the heyday of Harrigan and Hart, see *Harper's Weekly* 1879-85. Curtis also includes a wide variety of examples of the racial caricatures from both America and Britain throughout his book.

¹⁸ Maurice Bourgeois qtd. in Maureen Murphy, "Irish-American Theatre," *Ethnic Theatre in the United States*, ed. Maxine Schwartz Seller (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1983), 222.

¹⁹ Edward Harrigan, *Mulligan Silver Wedding*, 1881, Manuscript, Edward Harrigan Papers. Manuscripts and Archives Division. The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, 6.

²⁰ Thomas N. Brown, *Irish-American Nationalism 1870-1890* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1966), 110.

²¹ Bayor and Meagher, 540.

²² Michael Funchion, "Irish Chicago: Church, Homeland, Politics, and Class – The Shaping of an Ethnic Group, 1870-1900" in *Ethnic Chicago: A Multicultural Portrait*, ed. Melvin G. Holli and Peter d'A Jones (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 74; Funchion, "The Political and Nationalist Dimensions," in *The Irish in Chicago*, ed. Lawrence J. McCaffrey (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 80.

²³ Funchion, "The Political and Nationalist Dimensions," 74.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

²⁵ Funchion, "Irish Chicago," 70-1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 70-1.

²⁷ Skerrett, "The Catholic Dimension," 41.

²⁸ McCaffrey, "The Irish-American Dimension," 11; Funchion, "Irish Chicago," 66, 70-1. Chicago would not develop a strong constitutional nationalist movement until the early twentieth century. Funchion, "The Political and Nationalist Dimensions," 76.

²⁹ Funchion, "Irish Chicago," 70-1.

³⁰ McCaffrey, "The Irish-American Dimension," 12. This discussion merely touches upon some of the nuances involved in the formation of the symbol of local Irish-American identities, which in and of themselves, were composed of many distinct factions and internal divisions.

³¹ Funchion, "Ancient Order of Hibernians in America," *Irish American Voluntary Organizations*, 54.

³² Funchion, "Irish Catholic Benevolent Union," *Irish American Voluntary Organizations*, 150-7.

³³ “Editorial Department,” *Celtic Monthly* 4 (September 1880): 379.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 379.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 379.

³⁶ Kerby Miller, *Emigrants and Exiles* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 547.

³⁷ Funchion, “Gaelic League,” *Irish American Voluntary Organizations*, 131.

³⁸ *Ibid.* For more on the Philo-Celtic Society, see Funchion, “Gaelic League,” *Irish American Voluntary Organizations*, 131- 133. See also the *Irish World*, which printed a Gaelic Column throughout the 1870s and 1880s.

³⁹ Kenneth E. Nilsen, “The Irish Language in New York: 1850-1900,” in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 270.

⁴⁰ Nilsen, 270.

⁴¹ Charles H. Trout, “Curley of Boston: The Search for Irish Legitimacy,” in *Boston 1700-1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics*, ed. Ronald P. Formisano and Constance K. Burns (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), 166.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 166.

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⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁴⁵ Hasia Diner, “‘The Most Irish City in the Union’: The Era of the Great Migration, 1844-77,” in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 96-7.

⁴⁶ Anthony Gronowicz, “The Irish and the Democratic Party: 1798-1884,” *The New York Irish* 2 (1987): 31.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁵⁰ Funchion, “Irish Chicago,” 72.

⁵¹ Funchion, “Irish Chicago,” 74; Funchion, “The Political and Nationalist Dimensions,” 80; For more information on Chicago Irish politics and Chicago Irish nationalism, see also Michael F. Funchion, “Chicago’s Irish Nationalists, 1881-1890” (Ph.D. dissertation, Loyola University, 1973).

⁵² Eighty-five year old man, quoted in Kahn, 238.

⁵³ Kahn, 162.

⁵⁴ Writers usually address the protests against the Russell brothers and *Playboy of the Western World* in the early twentieth century when discussing the negative reaction to Irish types. For more information, see the introduction to Joyce Anne Flynn, "Ethnicity After Sea-change: The Irish Dramatic Tradition in Nineteenth Century American Drama" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1985) and Paul Distler, "The Rise and Fall of the Racial Comics in American Vaudeville" (Ph. D. diss., Tulane University, 1963), 177-81, 185-8, 191-3.

In Francis Robert Walsh's dissertation, "The Boston Pilot: A Newspaper for the Irish Immigrant, 1828-1908," Walsh cites two Boston *Pilot* articles as support for the disappearance of the stage Irishman in the 1880s. According to Walsh, "change was in the air, according to the *Pilot*; doors long closed, were opening and the Celts beginning to make their mark. One striking result was the '...position of the Irish in America. They are no longer laughed at.' Gone was the stage Irishman, 'Paddy...who laughed and jested at every turn of fortune, who loved a fight for its own sake, and whiskey...In his place we have the common sense Irishman'." Francis Robert Walsh, "The 'Boston Pilot': A Newspaper for the Irish Immigrant, 1829-1908" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1968), 217. Although certain characteristics of the stage Irishman softened in this period, it cannot be denied that the stage Irishman still thrived on the American stage, particularly in vaudeville. For more information see Distler, 111-136, 177-195; In the original context of the *Pilot* articles, these comments reflect more on the image of the working class Irish in society and refer to the increasing ability of Irish Americans to enter the respectable middle and upper classes. The use of the name "Paddy" refers to the working class Irish and *not* to the stage Irishman. For example, one of the articles cited by Walsh from the November 5, 1881 *Pilot* actually states that negative portrayals of the Irish "still exist on the stage and in the fanciful portraiture of divers caricaturists" and emphasizes that the articles refers to the actual living breathing Irish. The writer continues, claiming, "as an actual factor in human affairs, the too utterly grateful Irishman is dead as a dodo." Boston *Pilot*, 5 November 1881, 4. Walsh appears to make a similar misinterpretation with the May 6, 1882 article in the *Pilot*. The occurrence of the protests against Harrigan and Hart and Dion Boucicault for their Irish caricatures throughout the period also appears to contradict with Walsh's statements.

⁵⁵ Boston *Pilot*, 5 January 1884, 4.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid. The writer, potentially John Boyle O'Reilly, defends Harrigan and even recommends that his readers visit Harrigan and Hart's theatre. He even goes so far as to echo non-Irish papers' and Harrigan's claims that his characters have a basis in reality. He writes:

Mr. Harrigan, an Irish-American, proud of his race, makes fun of certain New York Irish types because the fun is really there waiting to be drawn out...The art of Harrigan and Hart is not satirical or unjust: it is racy, natural, good-natured, and inimitably funny...It is probably, the most natural dramatic outcome of New York life yet seen. Instead of disapproval, it deserves very serious attention as a most distinct artistic expression. "The Stage Irishman" is an offensive libel, and ought to be driven off the stage by Irish people who respect themselves. The way to drive him off is to keep away from him. He lives on public money and the Irish in this country are a large portion of the theatre-going public. But Mr. Edward Harrigan is no cockney play-jobber. He presents what he knows, sees, has lived amidst. He studies in the streets of the city, and among classes with which he is personally acquainted. He is a great comedian; and he has the higher power of seeing and seizing types. One of the treats of a visit to New York is to go to Harrigan and Hart's Theatre.

⁵⁸ Flynn, 36.

⁵⁹ *Pilot* 1878, quoted in Flynn, 36.

⁶⁰ Recent trends in Irish-American scholarship strongly emphasize the transatlantic experience as central in the creation of Irish-American identity. Kerby Miller's *Emigrants and Exiles* is often credited as one of the first major studies in this vein. For more on the development of transatlantic Irish-American historiography, see Lee, 46-9; and Lawrence McCaffrey, "Diasporic Comparisons and Irish-American Uniqueness," *New Perspectives on the Irish Diaspora*, ed. Charles Fanning (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 15-27. Scholars have also tied the later twentieth century protests against *Playboy of the Western World* with a presentation of an image incompatible with the emigrant's mythic image of their homeland. See Miller, 498; and Murphy, 228-30;

⁶¹ "Pat Rooney in Trouble," *New York Times*, 10 March 1884, 4.

⁶² "Pat Rooney in Trouble," *New York Times*, 10 March 1884, 4.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ "'The Stage Irishman': None of the Caricaturists Wanted in Scranton," *Irish World*, 22 March 1884, 5.

⁶⁹ See Shannon.

⁷⁰ Letter from Edward Harrigan, 8 September 1875, quoted in notes, E.J. Kahn Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York. Harrigan's letters have been missing from the collection of his papers at the Billy Rose Theatre Collection at the New York Public Library for at least the past two years.

⁷¹ "Denounced by a Priest," *Kansas City Star*, 5 March 1884, 1. In the *Chicago Citizen*, John Finerty also quotes the Boucicault sections of Larkin's speech with only minor and inconsequential differences. He does not quote the section that refers to Harrigan and Hart. John Finerty, *Chicago Citizen*, 8 March 1884, 4.

Little information could be located that refers to Larkin. One early twentieth century book refers to him as "an administrator of high rank, united in himself a wit of the keenest and a strength of purpose that often produced consequences." John Talbot Smith, *The Catholic Church in New York: A History of the New York Diocese From Its Establishment in 1808 to the Present Time*, Volume 1 (New York and Boston: Hall and Locke Co., 1905), 304. The short paragraph that mentions Larkin in Smith's book discusses mainly his speech in March 1884, but similar to many newspaper accounts of the incident, it only refers to his protests against Boucicault. Smith claims, "He attended Dion Boucicault's play of *The Shaughraun* at the Park Theatre one Saturday evening, to satisfy himself that its wake scene was as objectionable and as slanderous of Irish character as report made it; and the next day on the altar he gave it a severe and well-deserved criticism." Smith also credits Larkin as the "first to use the electric light for church illumination at a time when the authorities hesitated, expecting a rebuke and prohibition from the Congregation of Rites for the innovation." Smith, 304.

Protests by priests against the theatre were not unusual. In his lecture "The Press, The Pulpit, and The Stage: A Lecture Delivered at Central Music Hall," J.H. McVicker, a comedian and theatre owner in Chicago, complained about the frequency of priests' protest against the theatre. Some of his comments reflect the situation of Larkin and his protests against Harrigan and Hart. McVicker claims:

...the deacon returns, after collection, with empty plates, and the preacher pitches into the stage --- the standing sensation of the pulpit. Many a preacher had made himself known to the community [by speaking] against theatre-going, which might otherwise have remained in obscurity all its life long...The stage is of more value to these notoriety-seeking ministers than the old orthodox hell, -- for the devil and his pitchfork have come to be regarded, even in the church, as mythical, -- but the theatre, and its viciousness are real, terribly real, to the poor trembling soul that fears it cannot mourn sufficiently in this life to claim eternal happiness in the life to come. Then the theatre is so popular that the preacher is sure, that in addition to drawing a large congregation, his sermon will be reported in the papers of the next day if he takes the stage as a topic, and so he sacrifices his professional modesty for the good of the flock.

J.H. McVicker, "The Press, the Pulpit, and the Stage: A Lecture Delivered at Central Music Hall," Chicago, November 28, 1882 (Chicago: The Western News Company, 1883), 13-4. Although no monetary gain for Larkin has been implied in any article, McVicker's claim that the sermon of a priest against the theatre will be covered in many newspapers appears correct, with newspapers all over the country covering Larkin's sermon. His claim that these speeches lead to notoriety for priest appears correct as well, with the Smith's history of the Catholic Church discussing primarily Larkin's speech in its short paragraph on the priest.

⁷² Finerty, 4.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Funchion, "Irish Chicago," 79-80.

⁷⁵ "The Emigration Policy," *Irish-American*, 6 January 1883, 4.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁷ "Irish Emigration," *Boston Republic*, 19 January 1883, 3.

⁷⁸ President Arthur, quoted in "Arthur and Irish Pauper Immigration," *Macon Weekly Telegraph*, 24 June 1883, 1.

⁷⁹ "Sullivan and the League," *Columbus Ledger-Enquirer*, 30 June 1883, 1.

⁸⁰ McCaffrey, "The Irish-American Dimension," 7.

⁸¹ "Criticizing 'The Shaughraun,'" *The New York Times*, 4 March 1884, 5; "Boycotting 'The Shaughraun,'" *The New York Herald*, 3 March 1884, 3; "The Drama," *Life*, 13 March 1884, 3, 64; "Article 11- No Title," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 March 1884, 4.

⁸² "The Stage Irishman," 5.

⁸³ Harrigan, *Mulligans' Silver Wedding*, 69.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 70.

⁸⁵ For excerpts of Boucicault's letter, see "Boycotting 'The Shaughraun,'" 3; "Criticizing 'The Shaughraun,'" 5; Richard Hogan, *Dion Boucicault* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 81.

⁸⁶ “Denounced by a Priest,” 1.

⁸⁷ See the *Irish American*, 1879-1885, and the *Irish World*, 1879-1885.

⁸⁸ *New York Times*, 1884.

⁸⁹ Steven Vertovec, “Three Meanings of ‘Diaspora,’ Exemplified Among South Asian Religions,” *Diaspora* 6, vol 3 (1997): 8.

Chapter Three

Performing the Local within the National: Harrigan and Hart at the Intersection of Text and Performance

Although Harrigan and Hart enjoyed widespread popularity throughout the 1880s, the sporadic protests against them reveal the challenges inherent in creating a “national” Irish-American identity among the disparate communities across the United States. These protests highlight moments of failure in Harrigan and Hart’s coding of the local within national symbols of Irish-American identity. Critics’ comments on local representations of the Irish, on the nuances of Harrigan’s Irish accents, and most particularly on performances of Harrigan and Hart’s *Cordelia’s Aspirations*, reveal the ways in which Harrigan’s Irish characters “Signified” to his specific New York Irish audience, even while they were at times unintelligible to populations outside the city. However, despite these instances of opacity, Harrigan and Hart’s accomplishment in the late nineteenth century remains the ways in which they created national symbols of Irish-American identity regardless of their characters’ local connotations. Few other performers or national Irish-American organizations were able to create symbols with comparable success.

Overall, the reaction to Harrigan and Hart’s performances in Boston and Chicago reflect similar critical praise and audience approval to the New York reviews discussed in Chapter One. Although these reviewers had similar complaints as New York critics about Harrigan’s ability as a playwright, they generally praised his performances and his New York Irish characters. One *Boston Daily Globe* reviewer claimed that Harrigan and Hart had “won approval in many cities.”¹ While the duo performed the *Mulligan Guard*

Ball in Boston, another reviewer claimed that the show “appears to be one of the most successful of summer season entertainments, and, after three weeks of crowded houses, the audiences are still large and enthusiastic.”² A few days earlier a reviewer had described how “The audience is irresistibly impelled to laugh the instant the curtain rises and Ned Harrigan is discovered as Daniel Mulligan in his own home, and from the moment until the curtain drops on the last scene there is no relaxation of the fun.”³ A Chicago critic of the *Mulligan Silver Wedding* echoed this praise, explaining that “Harrigan and Hart have been favored with large audiences at Hooley’s Theatre, and will extend their engagement over another week... There is a series of them, already running up to eight, and to be continued, unless all signs fail, until the crack of doom.”⁴ The same reviewer harshly criticized Harrigan’s writing, but declared that “Dan Mulligan is a genuine creation.”⁵ Reflecting the general praise of Harrigan and Hart’s shows and the overall tenor of the reviews, one Boston reviewer explained that their shows “are rich in a loud but not offensive sort of humor.”⁶ As a result, the protests against Harrigan and Hart appear not only rare, but also inconsistent, with past and contemporary praise outside of New York as well. When this praise fails, complaints do not address specific aspects of the text, but rather issues with the *performance* of Irish-American identity. This chapter examines the intersection of text and performance and the gap between the two in an effort to locate these moments of conflict. A close look at these moments highlights how *local* issues of identity tie directly to audience anxiety.

After reading through Harrigan’s surviving manuscripts, locating the unique “New York” identity through the text presents multiple problems. The most prominent challenge is that a modern reader might not recognize the distinctively New York

characteristics. It also appears that part of the “New York” flavor of their shows was conveyed in the performance, not in the text. As Patrice Pavis highlights in his *Languages of the Stage*, “it is not because the text remains the same [that performance contains]...the same meaning...On the contrary, it is the speaking of the text in a given staging, the way in which it presuppositions, its unspoken elements and its enunciations are brought out that will confer on it a particular meaning.”⁷ This disjunction presents a problem to all theatre historians who only have a writer’s text. Yet, Harrigan’s remaining manuscripts cannot even be taken as the definitive texts of his performances. He often updated his plays when his company revived them and had to rewrite some of them from memory after the Theatre Comique burned down in December 1884.⁸ As a result, it appears reasonable to question how much performance contributed to the shows’ successes. The manuscripts of Harrigan’s works, as discussed by Alicia Kae Koger in her dissertation “A Critical Analysis of Edward Harrigan’s Comedy,” had a loose and occasionally incomprehensible plot. Harrigan acknowledged this fault. Harrigan explained that his “only trouble was in getting up a plot to hold [a play] together.”⁹ Harrigan even declared, “I wish a fellow could make a play without a plot.”¹⁰ Critics did not hesitate to highlight this fault. One Chicago reviewer commented that Harrigan “was not a dramatist – that much was certain.”¹¹ In a mock dialogue, another reviewer emphasized the appeal of the performance over any specific plot:

“What is the new play all about?” asks a friend.
 “The same old thing,” you reply. “Braham’s songs, Hart’s brogue, Harrigan’s jokes, Wilde’s dances.”
 “And the plot?”
 “Plot? It has none.”¹²

As this dialogue illustrates, performance played an equal, if not dominant, role in audience enjoyment of Harrigan and Hart shows. As a result, it is important to look at any surviving evidence of performance to understand how the stage Irish types functioned on the nineteenth century stage.

Yet, what role did performance play in conveying a coded notion of New York Irish identity? Reading Harrigan's manuscripts and critical reviews illuminates a disconnect between the texts available to modern readers and the performance "text" presented to nineteenth century audiences concerning issues of New York Irish identity. Reviews stress a particularly potent concept of local identity created by performance. New York Irish papers, such as the *Irish-American* and *Irish World*, as well as other New York papers refer to their works as "local" plays.¹³ In an article entitled, "Edward Harrigan and the East Side" (1891), Richard Harding Davis explained that Harrigan "has been reproducing and delineating New York, so that New Yorkers can come and look at themselves and their flats and their elevated roads and their shops and their tenements."¹⁴ Interestingly, Boston and Chicago reviewers also often highlighted the fundamentally New York flavor of Harrigan and Hart shows. A *Boston Daily Globe* reviewer described Harrigan and Hart's work as "genuine local dramas, presenting characters the counterparts of which are to be easily found in Gotham, and who move amid scenes that are familiar to most of the patrons of the Comique."¹⁵ In particular, reviewers perceived Harrigan's depiction of Dan Mulligan's involvement in politics as reflective of New York. The *Chicago Daily Tribune* claimed that "as a type of New York politician, [Mulligan] is perfect."¹⁶ The *Boston Post* celebrated the way in which New York's "political peculiarities receive many a wit-feathered dart."¹⁷ As these last few comments

illustrate, Boston and Chicago audiences enjoyed the local New York Irish types in part out of a rivalry with New York. Harrigan created characters that allowed the Boston and Chicago Irish to celebrate their Irishness, while simultaneously rejoicing at their communities' superiority over the corruption and foibles of their New York counterparts. As a result, the local nature of the shows contributed to their success both within and outside of New York. One *New York Times* critic connected their tremendous success to the local character of Harrigan's plays, explaining that "The entertainment is novel and essentially local, and is always, therefore, a successful entertainment."¹⁸

Harrigan also commented on a disjunction between his plays and Boston and Chicago audiences. Harrigan writes:

[When] I introduced the Mulligans to Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston audiences. They met only with a fair reception. I then concluded that my New York local work would never be understood by the outside cities. I was mistaken, for since that time the above named places have undergone the same changed conditions and the types that I then presented, as well as new ones, are now recognized in those cities fully as quickly as they are in New York.¹⁹

Harrigan's commentary and the critical reaction to his plays emphasize how much performance contributed to the labeling of the team's shows as New York plays. This crucial role of performance enabled Harrigan and Hart to implicitly and explicitly signify through their New York Irish characters.

The difficulty for the theatre historian is how to identify and analyze these potential moments of Signification. Robert Darnton provides one relevant approach that may help the theatre historian breach the gap between text and performance. As Darnton discusses in *The Great Cat Massacre*, "When you realize that you are not getting something – a joke, a proverb, a ceremony – that is particularly meaningful to the natives,

you can see where to grasp a foreign system of meaning in order to unravel it.”²⁰ The Harrigan and Hart protests as well as the other rare inconsistencies in the otherwise rather repetitive and celebratory reviews of the comic pair provide an opportunity similar to Darnton’s eighteenth century French cat massacre. It is not possible to analyze the successful moments of Signification since there is no other record of performance other than the text, but analyzing moments when Signification possibly *failed*, allows the historian a chance to reconstruct ideas of how the characters, however simple and typical of low comedy, conveyed a layered notion of Irish-American identity through performance. The failure of the “code” leaves a mark in the historical record through the instances’ discussion in local newspapers within and outside of New York. Harrigan’s varied use of accent, both on and off stage, as well as the reaction to *Cordelia’s Aspirations*, the show playing at the Theatre Comique during the protests, provide the opportunity to locate aspects of local New York identity that otherwise might have existed as successfully coded and therefore hidden from the eyes of an uninitiated audience member.

The accent used by Harrigan’s New York Irish characters provides one way in which his characters could have Signified. As I discussed in my introduction, the term Signifyin’ in this study refers to Henry Louis Gates Jr. concept in *The Signifying Monkey*. He quotes Claudia Mitchell-Kernan’s definition of Signifyin’ as “a way of encoding messages or meanings which involves, in most cases, an element of indirection.”²¹ Through an analysis of accent, it becomes possible to see how Harrigan’s attempt to perform a “New York Irish” accent indirectly conveyed notions of New York Irish

identity to particular members of his audience, while other members in his audience heard nothing more than an “Irish” accent.

Various studies have discussed the connection between language, accent, and identity. In

“‘I’ve Called ‘em Tom-ah-toes All My Life and I’m Not Going to Change!’: Maintaining Linguistic Control Over English Identity in the U.S,” Katharine W. Jones discusses the connection between language, accent, and identity, claiming, “Individual speakers...express their identities through linguistic practices.”²² She explains:

The flexibility and subtlety of language makes it a useful device to examine the vagaries of identity construction by individuals. Language enables us to attend to the diverse meanings given to identities, and the ways in which participants draw upon, ignore or reconstruct their identities. We can see how individuals use language to tease out the variations in identities, as they move from one situation to another, draw on one set of meanings or another, or react to one set of interlocutors or another.²³

The central role of language in the construction of identity appears important in relation to Harrigan and the New York Irish. The extent to which his New York Irish characters used accent and language representative of his audience’s own experiences ties directly to the extent to which the New York Irish viewed Harrigan’s types as symbolic of their own lives and identities.

As Angelo Chia-yi Pao explains in his article, “False Accents: Embodied Dialects and the Characterization of Ethnicity and Nationality,” very few nineteenth century actors worked with coaches on their accents and as a result, “it had largely been left to the aptitude or the imagination of the actor to reproduce the phonetic alterations and variations in stress, pitch and intonation that typically characterized various regional dialects or foreign accents.”²⁴ Without someone to coach him on language, Harrigan

took it upon himself to learn the language of the people that he presented onstage.

Throughout his career he spread stories of his adventures observing the “types” of New York’s low life. Newspaper articles, including *The New York Herald*’s “Hunting ‘Types’ in the Slums with Harrigan,” *Harper’s Weekly*’s “Edward Harrigan and the East Side,” and *Leslie’s Weekly*’s “How Edward Harrigan Finds His ‘Types’ in Real Life” among others as well as main Harrigan biographers Richard Moody and E.J. Kahn repeat these stories.²⁵ The stories reflect Harrigan’s concern not only with the characters and appearances of immigrant life on the Lower East Side, but also a concern with language. When one *New York Herald* reporter followed Harrigan on one of his trips around the New York slums to find characters for his stories, Harrigan explained his attitude toward local language. He declared, “Slang! Oh, they call my theatre a ‘slang shop’...So it is. I am always looking out for new slang. Slang works come and go, get into popularity with a jump and get out of it equally suddenly.”²⁶ Earlier in the article, the reader “sees” a moment of Harrigan’s investigation into local language when he speaks to a “particularly damaged looking individual” and learns the phrase “a game o’ talk.”²⁷ Although Harrigan never discusses learning accents, his son William explained to Harrigan biographer E.J. Kahn that his father distinguished between his Irish accents. According to William, in Harrigan’s show *Reilly and the Four Hundred* (1890), Harrigan “used two accents, a New York City Irishman in the first act, a Dublin gentleman in the third (or second?)”²⁸

Although it is not possible to confirm that Harrigan consistently performed his New York Irish characters with a specific New York Irish accent, it appears likely that Harrigan paid attention to creating genuine accents onstage as part of his attempt to

perform “realistic” characters. For example, a frequently repeated story, both in newspapers and in subsequent biographies, explains how Harrigan found his costumes. Harrigan described how “Sometimes I buy a coat off a man’s back in the street whenever I find what I want. Newly landed immigrants have furnished me with a good many clothes. They wear striking costumes sometimes as you have doubtlessly noticed. It’s apt to surprise a man to offer to buy the suit he is wearing. Often I have had to use a good deal of diplomacy in doing it.”²⁹ William Harrigan’s comment indicates that Harrigan may have paid the same attention to detail in his use of language that he did to his costumes. At the very least, the praise that Harrigan received for portraying local New York life onstage provided him with an added financial incentive to depict the New York Irish with some accuracy.

Assuming that Harrigan used some form of New York Irish accent in performance, it becomes possible to consider whether Harrigan Signified through his use of accent. Although she does not use the term Signifyin’, Jones discusses the possibilities of coding through accent:

Code-switching, or the juxtaposition of different linguistic systems in the same conversation, is often a way to ensure that only those who share one’s background can understand...Speakers may engage in code-switching as a way to present different personae or identities to an audience... Likewise, Hansell and Ajirotutu (1982) and Gumperz (1982) analyzed the ironic use of Black American English by African-American men to express meanings that would bypass speakers unfamiliar with the style of Black English. Speakers, then, may play with language, distancing themselves from certain speech styles, embracing others, satirizing or mocking still others, often as a way to make identities explicit. Scholarship like this implicitly points to the vested interest people have in manipulating their speech styles, often to enhance their sense of solidarity with those they perceive as sharing their identity.³⁰

As Jones highlights, it is possible to encode accent in a way that conveys a sense of identity to some, while simultaneously conveying a different meaning to others.

Aside from the performance of the accent, the aural experience of the accent presents another essential variable in the process of Signification. In “Acoustic Culture of Yiddish,” Ari Y. Kelman examines “listening as cultural practice.”³¹ According to Kelman, “recent studies into listening suggest that the ways in which we listen are deeply social, that they change over time, and that they reveal significant characteristics about the particular social situations in which people are listening.”³² Kelman illustrates this point in his discussion of Yiddish performance:

Performers in the 1920s and 1930s snuck audible Jewishness into their performances...These audible clues would have been immediately recognizable as "Jewish" to Jewish audiences...These performances, like those on Yiddish radio, weren't hidden performances at all but quite overt ones in which Jewishness became an additional harmonic layer for the enjoyment of audiences who knew how to hear it...The Jewish language remained partially hidden to those members of the audience that could not recognize Jolson's *kol nidre* or Cantor's *freygish* improvisation; but for Jews its appearance within the broader context of mainstream culture signaled another set of possibilities for Jewish identification if you knew where and how to listen.³³

I argue that Harrigan's performances of the New York Irish contained similar coded meanings.

The responses to Harrigan's accent both on and offstage reflect how important it was for audiences to recognize themselves. Repeatedly, during interviews and chance meetings, the press referred to Harrigan's Irish accent. An interviewer from the *New York Herald* claimed that Harrigan spoke with “just the tinge of a brogue.”³⁴ Yet, while visiting Harrigan at his summer home on Schroon Lake, Margherita Hamm described

Harrigan's voice as exhibiting the "clear enunciation of the Irish gentleman."³⁵ During his interview, *New York Daily News* writer Philip Robert Dillon did not claim that Harrigan had an Irish accent, but did note that he "had unconsciously lapsed into the character of Dan Mulligan, with the resonant, rich Irish brogue."³⁶ Samuel Hopkins Adams, who once interviewed Harrigan for the *Sun*, described Harrigan's accent more generically, writing that "my mental picture of him is that of a jovial, hearty chap, quite determinedly Irish in speech and manner."³⁷ Although no record exists of Harrigan and Hart's audience and their impressions of Harrigan's accent in performance, the varied perception of Harrigan's Irish accent by interviewers highlights the possibility of similar disjunctions in listening between audience members and the existence of layered and Signified meaning through accent.

Two comments in Boston newspapers highlight moments when Harrigan and Hart's characters' accents failed to Signify to audiences outside of New York. In the *Boston Post*, a reviewer of the *Mulligan Silver Wedding* explained the pronunciation of Dan Mulligan's last name, explaining it is "(pronounced Mewligan)"³⁸ This clarification highlights that, in the reviewers opinion, Harrigan's pronunciation of "Mulligan" would not be readily intelligible to his readers. Since the stage Irish stereotype and its heavy brogue had already been around for decades in Boston theatres, this indication that his audience would not necessarily recognize Harrigan and Hart's accent illustrates the possibility that the New York Irish accent was inflected with local nuances that were not obvious to Harrigan's Boston audience. Another article entitled "Boston Ideas" (1894) emphasizes the educational experience of Harrigan and Hart's performances. Claiming that the shows are filled with the language of the Bowery, the writer describes language

and dialect as “rich and forcible far beyond the utmost belief of the uninitiated, an evening with Mr. Harrigan will mean more than a month’s study of glossary and lexicon.”³⁹ This comment further highlights the local distinctiveness of Harrigan’s language as perceived by a non-New Yorker. Yet, overall, out-of-town reviewers do not mention any audience difficulties in comprehending Harrigan and Hart’s accents or language. These circumstances suggest that Harrigan might have been speaking with an Irish accent that denoted a general Americanized Irish accent to his broader audience, but had the capacity to signify a New York Irish accent when he played in New York or when particular listeners had the knowledge to locate evidence of difference. Though it is outside the scope of this study, this complicated negotiation, Harrigan’s use of accent, and local identities provide occasion for further exploration of what an “Irish accent” technically meant to third and fourth generation Irish-Americans as well as to those in the middle and upper classes.

Aside from the use of accent, the production of *Cordelia’s Aspirations*, which played at the Theatre Comique during the 1884 protest by Larkin, illustrates another instance when the local connotations of Harrigan and Hart’s characters temporarily destabilized their status as symbols of national Irish-American identity. As a result of the different associations with class and the opportunity for Irish mobility in New York, Boston, and Chicago, *Cordelia’s Aspirations*, which deals with the Mulligans’ move from Mulligan Alley to Madison Avenue, and the reaction to and around the production highlight the production’s ability to Signify. Contemporary and twentieth century critics frequently referred to *Cordelia’s Aspirations* as one of Harrigan’s best plays. For example, the *New York Times* labeled it “quite the best play that Mr. Harrigan has

written.”⁴⁰ It “is hardly less comical than its predecessor, and it has a coherent purpose.”

⁴¹ In his *Annals of the New York Stage*, George Odell comments that “Harrigan had another great success, possibly the greatest of his career (certainly the most famous), in *Cordelia's Aspirations*.”⁴² Alicia Kae Koger claims that it “far surpassed the haphazard structures of the plays which preceded it.”⁴³ Comparing Harrigan’s work to a well-made comedy, she argues that it is “evidence of Harrigan’s increasing awareness of the techniques of classic comedy.”⁴⁴

As briefly mentioned in Chapter One, *Cordelia's Aspirations* also received widespread audience support within and outside of New York. The New York production established a new record for Harrigan, running for 176 performances.⁴⁵ In Boston, one critic observed that the show “will please and attract its welcome dollars. The latter must have burdened the [Boston] Museum strong box last evening for a very large audience was in attendance to welcome and enjoy the first performance.”⁴⁶ Odell explained the impact of the show years later, claiming, “Old boys still talk of it fifty years later.”⁴⁷

Yet, despite the critical praise in New York and in some Boston papers, another reviewer in Boston had a different opinion. He claimed that *Cordelia's Aspirations* “is not the best of the series of plays that has made Edward Harrigan famous.”⁴⁸

Interestingly, he primarily criticizes the unrealistic depiction of the Irish in upper class life, using language inflected with classist rhetoric:

The further the author wanders from the natural atmosphere of Mulligan Alley, the more unreal seem his creation, and the incongruities that ought to amuse, incline to weary. In the attempt to depict high life, distorted as it naturally would be by the blunders and misconceptions of an ignorant woman, he innocently introduces elements altogether impossible, in fact so out of place, as to preclude any idea that a satire was intended. He seems to tread on unfamiliar ground when

he steps into a reception room on Madison Avenue. So the fun loses color by being force by being too highly colored.⁴⁹

Although my research did not reveal a Chicago production of *Cordelia's Aspirations* during Harrigan and Hart's heyday, John Finerty's complaints about Harrigan and Hart and their shows also contain class rhetoric. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, Finerty claimed that the comic pair was "evidently from the slums" and the "abortive condition of civilization which surrounded them. They and their 'plays' are for the vulgar and inane."⁵⁰ Even though Father Larkin criticized Harrigan and Hart for degrading the Irish character, unlike Finerty and the reviewer in Boston, his criticism from New York was not inflected by issues of class.⁵¹ As a result, *Cordelia's Aspirations* provides an interesting inconsistency in the criticism directed against Harrigan and Hart and therefore an opportunity to question how class impacted the Signification of Harrigan and Hart's New York Irish characters.

Different reactions to class issues on stage may be attributed to the variations in Irish class structure and mobility in Chicago, Boston, and New York. For example, in Chicago where Finerty lived and published his newspaper, Irish and Irish-American scholars such as Lawrence McCaffrey, Michael Funchion, and Ellen Skerrett have argued that there was no real "ghettotization" of the Irish.⁵² As William Shannon highlights in his classic work, *The American Irish*, when the Irish settled in Chicago in the mid-to-late nineteenth century, the Chicago Irish "had the advantage of growing up with their city."⁵³ Lawrence McCaffrey claims that the "urban frontier" allowed the Irish to be more "confident" and "open... than in Boston or New York."⁵⁴ Independent scholar Ellen Skerrett contrasts these Irish Catholics to those on the eastern seaboard, claiming that "In the 1880s, then, the Chicago Irish were not wholly middle class, but neither were they

poverty-stricken immigrants.”⁵⁵ She highlights the move of the Irish families to the neighborhoods surrounding Chicago as one sign of the “improving economic status of Irish Catholic families.”⁵⁶ In the *Irish in Chicago*, Lawrence McCaffrey supports Skerrett’s idea of the Chicago Irish’s comparatively greater social mobility. He states:

They did emerge from the unskilled working-class more rapidly than most of the eastern variety...the Midwest and West had dynamic, expanding economies and fluid social structures. Economic necessity had priority over nativism. Immigrants and their children who wanted to work could find jobs and experience social mobility.⁵⁷

As McCaffrey highlights, the lack of a strong nativist movement in Chicago created fewer obstacles for the Chicago Irish in their pursuit of respectability than their east coast counterparts.

By contrast, the Boston Irish faced tremendous obstacles in class mobility as a result of their position as the only major immigrant group in Boston. Large numbers of Irish immigrants who began arriving in Boston during the Great Famine of the 1840s composed the first large group of immigrants to arrive in the city. According to Shannon, “for the next forty years they were the only alien, immigrant group in Boston’s midst.”⁵⁸ The Irish had almost no foundation in the city prior to the Famine, unlike the New York Irish, who already had a number of Irish in the city as a result of prior gradual immigration.⁵⁹ As a result, a well-defined economic and political conflict of “epic proportions” developed between the Yankee Boston natives and the Boston Irish.⁶⁰ With less fluid economic and social structures than Chicago and New York, the Boston Irish faced many difficulties in their attempts to rise above their working class status, including stringent nativism. Even when the Irish became a powerful voting block, the large

numbers of Boston Irish did not guarantee political success for Irish candidates. When the Boston Irish did succeed in politics, according to McCaffrey, “it was not always accompanied by economic advance or social respectability.”⁶¹ Yet, in his list of “over two hundred Boston Irish who held property worth over fifteen thousand dollars” in 1877, Boston *Pilot* editor John Boyle O’Reilly attempted to illustrate that social advancement may be difficult, but was not impossible for the Boston Irish.⁶²

New York represented a middle ground between Chicago and Boston. By 1884, some “forty percent of New Yorkers were of Irish extraction” and like the Chicago Irish, many had begun to rise above the poverty line.⁶³ Jacob Riis highlights this move and its connection to politics, stating “The Irish hod-carrier in the second generation has become a bricklayer, if not the Alderman of his ward.”⁶⁴ Harrigan’s central New York Irish character Dan Mulligan reflects this social mobility of the Irish in New York through his transformation from a poor Irish emigrant to a wealthy New York Alderman. Yet despite the opportunity for some New York Irish to move into the middle and upper classes, poverty and crowded tenement life still characterized the lives of a significant portion of the New York Irish population, especially in the Fourth Ward, Gas House District, Chelsea, and Hell’s Kitchen.⁶⁵

These separate development trajectories for the Boston, Chicago, and New York Irish provide a social context that may have influenced their different perceptions of class and, in Boston and New York, of *Cordelia’s Aspirations*. As a result of the difficulties the Boston Irish faced in rising above the working classes in the late nineteenth century, the *Boston Post’s* comments on *Cordelia’s Aspirations* take on a new meaning. The writer notes that the further the characters moved from their tenement communities, the

more unrealistic and “out of place” they appear.⁶⁶ He also claims that, as a result, the satire is not funny. Yet, I have noted, those who viewed the performances in New York laughed at the jokes and thought that Harrigan had achieved an unprecedented level of coherency. It is possible that the Boston writer had difficulty reading the comedy in the situation because his previous social experience did not allow for the Irish to reasonably move into the upper class. The “unrealistic” circumstances may have prevented him from finding humor in the situation.

Harrigan’s repetition of comedic devices, scenes, and songs from previous shows further highlights the importance of the show’s class context in its Boston reception. For example, in the *Mulligan Silver Wedding*, which appeared in Boston in 1881, Cordelia famously attempts to commit suicide by drinking rat poison. Her attempt fails because Dan previously emptied out the poison and filled the bottle with alcohol. A drunken comedy scene played by Anne Yeamans as Cordelia ensues. When Harrigan reused the gag in *Cordelia’s Aspirations*, the scene received rave reviews as one of the funniest moments in a Harrigan play and Odell comments that New Yorkers still talked about the scene decades later.⁶⁷ Especially since Harrigan recycled the gag from a previously successful show, it seems likely that the context of the jokes in the play influenced their varied reception in Boston on their second appearance.

In Chicago, the condemnation of Harrigan and Hart and their characters may also be connected to the social milieu surrounding the Chicago Irish. Harrigan’s Irish were not “realistic” as Harrigan boasted, but despite the low comedy stereotypes and contrived loose plots, the situation of his characters in New York tenements did reflect conditions that would not be foreign to his New York audiences. Without similar ghettoization in

Chicago, the depiction of the New York Irish in the wretched conditions of tenement life may have appeared as degradation, instead of a dramatized depiction of real life conditions for the New York Irish. Finerty's comments also betray a sense of superiority, especially in his reference to the "abortive condition" surrounding the duo. This attitude implies a sense of competition between the communities and the Chicago Irish's potential feelings of superiority over the New York Irish for achieving more widespread acceptability and respectability within their city. Finerty's comment also highlights the possibility that Finerty thought himself superior to the working class Irish in New York. Although it is difficult to speculate further with the scant evidence available, this indication of possible inter-city prejudices provides one future question in the study of local Irish-American communities and identity.⁶⁸

Other examples of possible Signification or coded/double meaning in Harrigan's shows need to be further explored, especially since Harrigan, like many nineteenth century comedians, frequently played on words and utilized puns for comedic effect. Biographer E.J. Kahn comments that "Harrigan was inordinately addicted to puns of the most primitive qualities, and so were his audiences."⁶⁹ Harrigan's manuscripts reveal his playful use of language. For example, in *Mulligan Guard Surprise*, Cordelia remarks to an African American woman, Rebecca Allup (played by Tony Hart), that she "must give Mr. Mulligan his power," implying that she must give him his medicine "for his cough." Yet, Rebecca replies, "I wouldn't give Mr. Mulligan powder, he'd shoot somebody on the boat."⁷⁰

Yet beyond simple plays on language, Harrigan's puns worked to Signify complex double meaning to his New York Irish audience members. One song that

appears in both *Mulligan Guard Surprise* and *Cordelia's Aspirations* offers a particularly useful example of Harrigan's use of language. In *Mulligan Guard Surprise* and *Cordelia's Aspirations*, Dan Mulligan sings "I'll Wear the Trousers Oh!" One repeated line in the song reads, "home rule for me/ my wife shall see/I'll wear the trousers oh!"⁷¹ The phrase "home rule" would have evoked multiple meanings, especially in the period of heightened Irish-American nationalism during the 1880s. Within the context of the drama, the phrase refers to Dan regaining control in his marriage. Yet, "home rule" was also the phrase used by constitutional Irish-American nationalists to explain their campaign for self-government. At the end of *Cordelia's Aspirations*, Cordelia and Dan have lost their money and Cordelia concedes that Dan was right in opposing their move uptown, therefore allowing Dan to once more "wear the trousers."⁷² Dan's New York Irish friend McSweeney shouts "Home Rule forever!"⁷³ Although this clearly refers to the resolution of the plot, it also could be seen as a rallying cry to the New York Irish and other politically aware New Yorkers in the audience.

Despite the potential for Signifyin' revealed by these inconsistencies and ambiguities, the unusual occurrence of the 1884 protests against the comic duo suggest that even if their performances Signified to their New York audience members, the Signification did not prevent others from enjoying their shows. As a result, by analyzing the dialogue that Larkin's protest created, or in Harrigan and Hart's case, that it *did not* create, it is possible to consider how the pair's New York Irish symbolized a layered concept of Irish-American identity. If the team Signified, the Signification was embedded in a symbol of national Irish-American identity that, for the most part, appealed to Irish-Americans despite their local differences. The behavior of Harrigan

and Hart as well as the content of their shows contributed greatly to this inter-community appeal, especially through their pattern of response to protests as well as in their characters' carefully negotiation of other important symbols of Irish-American identity.

The absence of reply from Harrigan and Hart in the weeks following Father Larkin's forms part of their pattern of not responding to complaints. As I noted in Chapter Two, various groups protested against Harrigan and Hart throughout their career and each instance received scant newspaper coverage. The earliest protest in Scranton, the January 1884 protest described in the *Boston Pilot*, and the protests by the Land League mentioned by Harrigan and some Irish newspapers all go unacknowledged by the duo in the public record. Although the newspaper reports of the Scranton protest claim that the pair moved on to a less objectionable scene in response to audience's hissing, there is also no evidence that Harrigan and Hart ever defended their characters on the stage. Even though Harrigan spoke to a reporter whose article appeared in the *Kansas City Star*, he does not defend his New York Irish characters. As I mentioned in Chapter Two, he states that he believes his shows serve a "worthy purpose." He claims that Catholic priests have attended his shows before, and he explains that he "had not intended any offense."⁷⁴ He does not repeat the specific charges of Larkin or Finerty nor does he claim that his characters are *not* stage Irishmen. In the Kansas City article, the writer explicitly states that he *asked* Harrigan about the incident. Harrigan's neutral and careful response suggests that he had become adept at dodging controversy.

Compared to Boucicault's impassioned response to Larkin's attack, Harrigan and Hart's sedate comments and lack of public defense hardly appear newsworthy. All of the newspaper articles uncovered in my research not only refer to Boucicault, but the

majority also discuss, if not reprint, his response. In contrast to Harrigan and Hart's reaction, Boucicault "*repl[ies]*" [emphasis mine] to the protest.⁷⁵ *Life*, the *New York Times*, *New York Herald*, *Kansas City Star*, and the *Irish World*, all reprinted or paraphrased portions of Boucicault's letter to Cardinal McCloskey in which Boucicault defends his play.⁷⁶ In the letter, he claims that Larkin clearly did not see his show because the attacked scenes "do not exist and never have existed in the work."⁷⁷ He mentions the statuette awarded to him by the Irish-Americans in New York, quoting the inscription engraved on it. He concludes stating that he "submit[s] with humble confidence, my long literary and artistic career as a vindication of my love and respect or the Irish race."⁷⁸ He even graciously claims that he "feel[s] sure [Larkin] will be glad to amend" the situation, once he has the "correct" information.⁷⁹ Another of Boucicault's public replies appears in the *New York Daily Tribune*. In the article printed in the *Tribune*, Boucicault attacks Larkin more directly, stating that "he is young, I believe, and has been misinformed."⁸⁰ He also claims that "some individual, whose name I have forgotten" unlawfully produced his shows in the West and inserted objectionable scenes.⁸¹ Yet, "heroically," when Boucicault realized the problem, he insisted that the old scenes be put back in the piece, which was subsequently received with "enthusiasm."⁸²

In both of these instances, Boucicault places the blame for the priest's attack on a mysterious informant, on the priest himself, and an unknown man who stole and altered his plays. In no instance does he admit any culpability or offer any comments on his own stage Irish portraits. This response caused enough of a controversy for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* to comment that "Boucicault is enjoying the free advertising which an

overzealous priest of New York has been instrumental in procuring for him and the ‘Shaughraun’.”⁸³ This press undoubtedly resulted from Larkin’s need to further elaborate on his criticism of Boucicault to a reporter at an unspecified time after his Sunday sermon. Finerty quotes this second attack on Boucicault in length in the *Citizen*.⁸⁴

In comparison to this sensational exchange between Boucicault and Larkin, Harrigan and Hart’s lack of response seems somewhat unexciting (as well as puzzling). Yet, by not responding to Larkin’s charges, the pair avoided controversy by refusing to take a side or attack a major Irish-American institution. Especially since Harrigan and Hart’s audience contained New Yorkers and Irish-Americans of all classes, attacking the church (even in “self-defense”) would alienate not only Larkin’s Catholic audience members, but also their newer middle and upper class Irish-American audience who looked to the Catholic Church as the main respectable, public expression of their Irish identity.

Unlike Boucicault who often dealt openly with issues of Irish nationalism, the duo also avoided controversy by the sensitive way in which they portrayed the two major symbols of Irish-American identity: Irish-American nationalism and Catholicism. Harrigan makes almost no reference to religion in his plays. As biographer Moody comments, “except for a few incidental references, he allowed his dramatis personae privacy in their communion with church and God.”⁸⁵ This helped Harrigan avoid the contentious religious problems that often erupted between the Irish Catholics and Irish Protestants. Although after his heyday he would address Irish-American nationalism more specifically in plays such as the *O’Reagans* (1886), the only major reference to the Irish-American nationalist movement appears in the incident in the *Mulligan Guard*

Nominee. Harrigan pokes fun at the failed Fenian invasion of Canada, but *Nominee* was produced over a decade after the event, by which time ridicule of the events within the Irish-American community was already widespread. The jokes at the expense of the movement avoid siding with either the revolutionary or constitutional nationalists. For example, in *Nominee*, the black character Rebecca Allup comments, “We’ll soon have an Irish exodus. Dey’re hollering for home rule and dey ought to go home and rule it.”⁸⁶ By not declaring a strong position in the movement that dominated discussion and divided local Irish communities, Harrigan and Hart gave Irish audiences passionate about the nationalist cause no reason to boycott their shows.

Instead, the pair placed politics, another major Irish-American symbol, at the center of their plays, with Dan Mulligan elevating his class status through his election to Alderman. Yet, for the most part, the Irish-American community stood united behind the Democratic Party and Tammany Hall, and therefore would see no major conflict in Harrigan’s depiction of Dan as a Tammany man. The Democratic Party would also be viewed as a symbol of Irish-American identity in Boston and Chicago without conflict, which would help the duo further avoid inter-community conflict.

Harrigan and Hart’s tendency to avoid creating controversy both on and offstage allows their myth to be seen as universal, despite its potential ability to signify simultaneously. Unlike Boucicault who played a part in the Irish nationalist movement, Harrigan and Hart’s more muted stance on nationalism and Catholicism also allowed their public personas to appear less objectionable to various Irish factions.⁸⁷ It seems curious that the Irish-American newspapers did not report on Harrigan and Hart’s involvement in Larkin’s protest. Since they were prominent figures and since they were

also questioned directly about the incident, I suggest that it is likely that they made a deliberate choice to stay out of the public debate. Nor did my research reveal a public record of any complaints against Harrigan and Hart by the newspapers and Land League. Therefore I suggest that it is possible that the objections were conveyed in private (as one might expect, given the duo's popularity and the eagerness of the League to avoid an open rupture within the Irish community). Thus, there is evidence for speculation that Harrigan and Hart may have created one of the few symbols of Irish-American identity that did not publicly divide the late nineteenth century Irish-American community.

This incident provides a good illustration of the importance of a comparative perspective in discussions of Irish-American identity. Without looking at the repercussions of the local protest by Larkin against Harrigan and Hart in Irish-American communities outside of New York, a theatre historian would find little evidence to tie the pair to Father Larkin's March 1884 sermon. Yet, through a comparative perspective, it becomes possible not only to place Harrigan and Hart within a complicated inter-community debate on local Irish-American identity, but also to form insights into the private dynamics of the New York Irish community for which there remains little record. A comparative approach applied to other forms and performers of Irish-American theatre may provide similar avenues of research and new perspectives on into nineteenth century Irish-American communities.

Notes

¹ “‘Squatter Sovereignty’ at Howard,” *Boston Daily Globe*, 22 October 1882, 4.

² “Entertainments,” *Boston Post*, 21 June 1879, 3.

³ “Entertainments,” *Boston Post*, 9 June 1879, 3. A review of the *Mulligan Silver Wedding* claimed that “These jovial twins of comic impersonation, Messrs. Harrigan and Hart are reaping a rich harvest in their season at the Globe with ‘Mulligan Silver Wedding.’ Larger or more appreciative audiences have seldom faced these exponents of the funny side of the world than those of the present week.” Entertainments,” *Boston Post*, 5 May 1881, 3.

⁴ “Harrigan and Hart,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 June 1881, 19.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ “Entertainments,” *Boston Post*, 13 June 1879, 3.

⁷ Patrice Pavis, *Language of the Stage: Essays in the Semiology of the Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1993), 18.

⁸ Richard Moody, *Ned Harrigan: From Corlear’s Hook to Herald Square* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980), 135; E.J. Kahn, *The Merry Partners: The Age and Stage of Harrigan and Hart* (New York: Random House, 1955), 30; According to a scrapbook in Kahn’s papers, Harrigan rewrote *Dan’s Tribulations* from memory after the fire. Scrapbook, E.J. Kahn Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, 47.

⁹ Charles Darnton, “Edward Harrigan Touches on the Irish Harp” Unidentified Clipping, Dec. 1908, Robinson Locke Scrapbook, n. pag. quoted in Koger, 139. For more on Harrigan’s writing in what Koger refers to as Harrigan’s “variety farces,” see Koger, 138-146.

¹⁰ Harrigan quoted in Kahn, 265.

¹¹ “Harrigan and Hart,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 12 June 1881, 19.

¹² “The Drama,” *The Critic*, 11 August 1883, 80.

¹³ *Irish-American* and *Irish World*, 1879-1885.

¹⁴ Richard Harding Davis, “Edward Harrigan and the East Side,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 21 November 1891, 210.

¹⁵ “‘Squatter Sovereignty’ at the Howard,” 4.

¹⁶ “Harrigan and Hart,” 12 June 1881, 19.

¹⁷ “Entertainments,” 5 May 1881, 3.

¹⁸ “Amusements: The Theatre Comique,” *New York Times*, 7 August 1883.

¹⁹ Edward Harrigan, “The Play’s the Thing,” unidentified clipping, Edward Harrigan Papers, *T-Mss 1941-003, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

²⁰ Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 78.

²¹ Claudia Mitchell-Kernan, qtd. in Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Signifying Monkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 80.

²² Katharine W. Jones, "'I've Called 'em Tom-ah-toes All My Life and I'm Not Going to Change!': Maintaining Linguistic Control Over English Identity in the U.S.," *Social Forces* 79, no. 3 (March 2001): 1064.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1063.

²⁴ Angelo Chia-yi Pao, "False Accents: Embodied Dialects and the Characterization of Ethnicity and Nationality," *Theatre Topics* 14, no.1 (March 2004): 356.

²⁵ "Hunting 'Types' in the Slums with Harrigan," *New York Herald*, 12 July 1891, 21; Richard Harding Davis, "Edward Harrigan and the East Side," *Harper's Weekly*, 21 November 1891; Eleanor Franklin, "How Edward Harrigan Finds His 'Types' in Real Life," *Leslie's Weekly*, 22 October 1903.

²⁶ "Hunting 'Types'," 21.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁸ Notes from William Harrigan at lunch with E.J. Kahn, 23 September 1953. E.J. Kahn Collection, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York.

²⁹ "Hunting 'Types'," 21. This section of the article is entitled "Costumes that are real." The costume story is repeated in both Kahn and Moody. Despite the insistence of Harrigan and many of his critics that his characters were lifelike, others also acknowledged that the types were "touched up" for the stage. See Alicia Koger, "A Critical Analysis of Edward Harrigan's Comedy" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 149-50.

³⁰ Jones, 1065.

³¹ Ari Y. Kelman, "The Acoustic Culture of Yiddish," *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies* - 25, no. 1 (Fall 2006): 129.

³² *Ibid.*, 129-30.

³³ *Ibid.*, 137-8.

³⁴ "Hunting 'Types'," 21. The performance of "Irishness" by Harrigan will be a topic of one of my future projects.

³⁵ Margherita Hamm, *Eminent Actors in their Homes: Personal Descriptions and Interviews* (New York: James Pott & Co, 1902), 101. Harrigan also repeats a similar story in the clipping, "The Play's The Thing."

³⁶ Dillon, 1.

³⁷ Samuel Hopkins Adams, Letter to E.J. Kahn, 14 July 1953, E.J. Kahn Collection.

³⁸ "Entertainments," 5 May 1881, 3.

³⁹ "Boston Ideas," March 1894, quoted in E.J. Kahn Papers.

⁴⁰ "Theatre Comique," *New York Times*, 8 November 1883, 5. Other positive reviews of *Cordelia's Aspirations* are included in the *New York Clipper*. The play only receives brief mention in Irish-American papers, the *Irish-American* and *Irish World*. The comments do not refer to content, but rather to the show's popularity with audiences.

⁴¹ "Theatre Comique," 8 November 1883, 5.

⁴² George C.D. Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage, Vol. 12: 1882-1885*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1940), 301.

⁴³ Koger, 240.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 236. For more on *Cordelia's Aspirations* as a well-made comedy, see Koger 235-274.

⁴⁵ Moody, 135.

⁴⁶ "Cordelia's Aspirations," *Boston Post*, 3 June 1885, 3.

⁴⁷ Odell, 301.

⁴⁸ "Cordelia's Aspirations," *Boston Post*, 3 June 1885, 3.

⁴⁹ Ibid., *Boston Post*, 3 June 1885, 3.

⁵⁰ John Finerty, "The So-Called Irish Drama," *Chicago Citizen*, 8 March 1884, 4.

⁵¹ "Denounced by a Priest," *Kansas City Star*, 5 March 1884, 1;

⁵² Ellen Skerrett, "The Catholic Dimension," in *The Irish in Chicago*, ed. Lawrence J. McCaffrey (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987).

⁵³ William Shannon, *The American Irish* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1964), 183.

⁵⁴ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, "The Irish-American Dimension," in *the Irish in Chicago*, ed. Lawrence J. McCaffrey (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 13.

⁵⁵ Skerrett, 38.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 38.

⁵⁷ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, "Conclusion," in *The Irish in Chicago*, ed. Lawrence J. McCaffrey (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 150.

⁵⁸ Shannon, 182-3.

⁵⁹ Anthony Gronowicz, "The Irish and the Democratic Party: 1798-1884," *The New York Irish* 2 (1987): 30-2.

⁶⁰ Ronald P. Formisano and Constance K. Burns, "Introduction," in *Boston 1700-1980: The Evolution of Urban Politics*, ed. Ronald P. Formisano and Constance K. Burns (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1984), 5. In part, Shannon claims, these divisions made it hard for the Boston Irish to identify "with Yankee heroes and achievements of the past." Shannon, 184. Shannon states that the large numbers of Boston Irish in relation to the rest of the city's population made it distinct from New York and Chicago. He discusses how "In New York and Chicago, the Irish in the nineteenth century enjoyed brief periods of numerical hegemony, but very quickly they had to fall back upon their special advantages of language and early arrival and all their highly developed skills of political leadership to maintain themselves as first among their equals in the immigrant community. In Boston, the Irish could rely upon the sheer strength of numbers alone." Shannon, 182-3.

⁶¹ McCaffrey, "The Irish-American Dimension," 7.

⁶² Francis Robert Walsh, "The 'Boston Pilot': A Newspaper for the Irish Immigrant, 1829-1908" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1968), 217.

⁶³ Lawrence J. McCaffrey, "Forging Forward and Looking Back," in *The New York Irish*, ed. Ronald H. Bayor and Timothy J. Meagher (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 216.

⁶⁴ Jacob Riis, *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1901, reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 8 (pages refer to the reprint edition).

⁶⁵ McCaffrey, "Forging Forward and Looking Back," 217.

⁶⁶ "Cordelia's Aspirations," 3 June 1885, 3.

⁶⁷ Odell, 301; "Theatre Comique," 8 November 1883, 5; "Cordelia's Aspirations," *The New York Clipper*, 10 November 1883.

⁶⁸ Despite Harrigan's celebration of the working class Irish, his work is no less influenced by intra-New York class conflicts and prejudices. For example, Harrigan betrays his prejudices in one of his articles published in *Harper's Weekly*. Harrigan writes:

Polite society, wealth, and culture possess little or no color and picturesqueness. The chief use I make of them is as a foil to the poor works and the great middle class...[the common people's] trials and troubles, hopes and fears, joys and sorrows, are more varied and numerous than the Upper Ten...human nature is very much the same the world over. It thins out and loses all strength and flavor under the pressure of riches and luxury. It is most virile and aggressive among those who know only poverty and ignorance. It is also then the most humorous and odd. *Cordelia's Aspirations* gain what value they have because they are couched in the dialect of the poor emigrant, and flavored with the aroma of want. A cultured, refined, and beautiful millionaire, Cordelia, aspiring to be numbered among billionaires, talking faultless English, and exhaling an atmosphere of good-breeding, would excise not the shadow of a smile, but simply pity and disgust.

The Mulligans' return to Mulligan Alley at the end of the play reflects Harrigan's notion that an Irish-American in the upper class is not interesting dramatic material. Although Harrigan shows the Mulligans' rise from working to middle class, these comments clearly reflect the boundaries and prejudices that still existed for Irish-Americans who attempted to gain positions of wealth and power. Edward Harrigan, "American Playwrights on the American Drama." *Harper's Weekly*. 2 February 1889, 98.

⁶⁹ Kahn, 212.

⁷⁰ Edward Harrigan, *Mulligan Guard Surprise*, 1880, Play Manuscript, Edward Harrigan Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, 21.

⁷¹ Edward Harrigan, "I'll Wear the Trousers Oh!," in *Edward Harrigan and David Braham: Collected Songs 1873-1882*, ed. Jon W. Finson (Madison: A-R Editions, Inc., 1997).

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Edward Harrigan, *Cordelia's Aspirations*, 1883, Play Manuscript, Edward Harrigan Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, 229.

⁷⁴ "Denounced by a Priest," 1.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 1.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 1; "The Drama," *Life*, 13 March 1884, 3, 63; "Criticizing 'The Shaughraun,'" *New York Times*, 4 March 1884, 5; "Boycotting the Shaughraun," *New York Herald*, 3 March 1884, 10; "'The Stage Irishman': None of the Caricaturists Wanted in Scranton," *Irish World*, 22 March 1884, 5. The article in *Life* quotes Boucicault's response as "I am an Irishman of the best stripe and I wear the green."

⁷⁷ "Boycotting the Shaughraun," *New York Herald*, 3 March 1884, 10.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ "A Talk with Dion Boucicault," *New York Daily Tribune*, 5 March 1884, 5. A third, different response by Boucicault was printed in Robert Hogan's biography of the playwright. In this response, Boucicault claims that his Irish peasant was disappointing to the Catholic congregation because his characters were so different from the stage Irishman. Hogan does not cite the primary source for the comment. Dion Boucicault qtd. in Robert Hogan, *Dion Boucicault* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 81.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ "Article 11 – No Title," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 March 1884, 4.

⁸⁴ Finerty, 4. In the section quoted by Finerty, Larkin describes in detail the objectionable priest scenes in *The Shaughraun*. To some extent, this counters Boucicault's claim that Larkin did not see the show, but was just "misinformed."

⁸⁵ Moody, 115.

⁸⁶ Edward Harrigan, *The Mulligan Guard Nominee*, 1880, typescript, Edward Harrigan Papers, Manuscripts and Archives Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations, New York, 15.

⁸⁷ See Moody, Kahn, Koger, *The New York Times*, *Irish-American*, and *Irish World*.

Epilogue

In his dissertation “The Rise and Fall of the Racial Comics in American Vaudeville,” Paul Distler describes how twentieth century Irish-Americans rid the theatre of the stage Irishman. Using their “sheer strength of numbers,” the Irish utilized “catcalls, hisses, boos, stomping of feet, and singing of Irish songs” along with “eggs, vegetables, stones, bricks, and theatre seats” to chase “offending vaudevillians” offstage.

¹ After the dissolution of Harrigan and Hart’s partnership in 1885, Hart’s death in 1891, and the decline of Harrigan’s popularity in the 1890s, Harrigan continued to revive his New York Irish plays, but he took no part in the twentieth century protests. Interestingly, Irish-Americans still remembered and celebrated Harrigan, Hart, and Braham’s work as quintessentially Irish-American. For example, at the Hippodrome in 1917, the New York Irish celebrated St. Patrick’s Day with songs such as “Dad’s Dinner Pail,” “Babies on Our Block,” and “Maggie Murphy’s Home.”² Formed in 1910, the Ned Harrigan Club met once a year for ten years to celebrate the writer with “raucous songfests” and the “occasional clambake.”³ These gatherings also fondly connected Harrigan, Hart, and Braham to symbols of Irish-American identity, with members decorating for one September 1914 picnic by covering a deck with “patches of green” and “anything that could pass for an Irish flag.”⁴ Despite the increase in protests against the stage Irish in the twentieth century and despite Harrigan and Hart’s clear use of caricature, their New York Irish still symbolized aspects of New York Irish and Irish-American identity.

When viewed through the protests against Harrigan and Hart in the 1880s, the twentieth century’s simultaneous celebration and rejection of the stage Irishman does not

appear as paradoxical. As I have argued, Harrigan and Hart's work provided symbols of New York Irish identity through their songs and plays that offered the New York Irish something beyond the caricature when they attended the team's shows at the Theatre Comique. In a period of unstable national Irish-American identity that involved conflicts between local Irish-American identities, Harrigan, Hart, and Braham managed to create characters that potentially Signified New York Irish identity while simultaneously presenting national symbols of Irish-American identity. As a result, the protests in 1884 contain layered meanings beyond Irish-American disgust at stage caricatures. The existence of resonant symbolic meaning or Signification may explain Harrigan, Hart, and Braham's continued popularity among a select group of twentieth century New York Irish. The twentieth century anti-stage Irish protests should be re-analyzed with a focus on local identities and communities to reveal the potential Signified meaning or lack of Signified meaning involved in the twentieth century caricatures. This approach may provide new insights into why audiences that had strongly supported vaudeville acts in the late nineteenth century rejected them only three decades later.

The protests against Harrigan and Hart also provide a new perspective on the generally accepted history of protests against Irish stage types. Historian David M. Emmons claims that there was no "organized resistance to the stage Irishman" until "after 1900."⁵ Yet, although anti-stage Irish societies may not have existed, other organizations within late nineteenth century Irish-American communities fulfilled an analogous role. If the Land League and Irish newspapers conveyed their complaints to Harrigan and Hart in private, there existed some type of Irish-American mobilization in the protests, even if the organizations chose not to take their issues public. The difference between the late

nineteenth and early twentieth century protests may not be the issue of organization, but rather, who is protesting and through what methods.

This distinction highlights the importance of further examining Irish-American caricatures and the alternate ways that Irish-Americans organized against them. Exploring why nineteenth century organizations chose to privately, instead of publicly complain, as well as the relationship between performers and Irish-American organizations may reveal more about the development of Irish-American caricatures as well as the relationships within and between Irish-American communities. As a result, it becomes possible to see Harrigan, Hart, and Braham's shows as more than works to be celebrated or denounced and to use their history to provide insight into the formation of late nineteenth century Irish-American identities.

Notes

¹ Paul Distler, "The Rise and Fall of the Racial Comics in American Vaudeville," Ph. D. diss., Tulane University, 1963, 191.

² "Ireland's night in celebration of St. Patrick's Day," 18 March 1917, Program, Edward Harrigan Papers. *T-Mss 1941-003, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.

³ Richard Moody, Ned *Harrigan: From Corlear's Hook to Herald Square* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1980), 3.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁵ David M. Emmons, *The Butte Irish: Class and Ethnicity in an American Mining Town* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 117.

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