

ABSTRACT

Title of dissertation: OUT OF THE FORREST AND INTO THE BOOTH:
 PERFORMANCE OF MASCULINITY ON THE
 AMERICAN STAGE, 1828-1865

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My dissertation seeks to understand how and why the performance of American masculinity changed so dramatically from 1828 to 1865 and the gradual process of transition from Edwin Forrest's rugged masculinity to Edwin Booth's almost effete intellectualism. Within the scope of my dissertation, I seek not merely to construct an isolated theatrical history but rather a history of cultural formations inextricably linked to the dynamic political, cultural, and social changes of this period.

In Chapter One, I examine evolutions in manly rhetoric and oratory, and a brief survey of nineteenth-century advice literature, to better understand the performance of masculinity in the public sphere. In the second chapter, I investigate the masculine performance of Edwin Forrest (America's first great actor) on- and off-stage and examine his adaptation of Robert T. Conrad's *Jack Cade* as an example of his consciously constructed manly identity. In Chapter Three, I explore the wide range and variety of actors between Forrest and Booth (artistically and chronologically), as

well as performances and representations of immigrant, Indian, Black, and working-class males as alternate visions of masculinity. In Chapter Four, I look at the Astor Place Riot (May 19, 1849) as a theatrical and political spectacle that suggests the incompatibility of working-class individualism and the gentility of the emerging middle class and elite. In the final chapter, I explore Booth's restrained image of masculinity and passive acceptance of personal tragedies as a reflection of the "invisible," middle-class performance of ideal manhood.

In the forty-year period that marked the complex evolution from Forrest's debut to Booth's triumph as Hamlet, the American definition of masculinity fragmented along lines of class, race, and politics. I suggest that the national stage not only mirrored but magnified this process through the creation of physical characters upon which contemporary ideals of masculinity could be inscribed. Each splintered group demanded the reflection of their own values and models of behavior unique to their respective situations, and each searched for a sense of masculine, communal belonging.

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by

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INTRODUCTION

“Out of the Forrest and Into the Booth: Performance of Masculinity on the American Stage, 1828-1865” questions how theatre manipulated and reflected transformations of the American masculine ideal between 1828 and 1865. The greatest stars of this forty-year period, Edwin Forrest and Edwin Booth, embodied diametrically opposing ideals of masculinity. My work seeks to understand how and why the performance of masculinity changed so dramatically during this period and the gradual process of transition from Edwin Forrest’s rugged masculinity to Edwin Booth’s almost effete intellectualism. Within the scope of my dissertation, I seek not merely to construct an isolated theatrical history but rather a history of the cultural formations inextricably linked to the dynamic political, cultural, and social changes of the period.¹ Thus my work explores not merely theatrical representations of the masculine ideal, but places them in the broader context of the nineteenth-century discourse on masculinity.

I will explore the following questions: What antebellum models of masculine behavior were presented, and who most persuasively performed them? In what ways were the governing voices of the nation attempting to dictate or guide the ideal behavior of the republican man? As industrialization became a rival mode of

¹Bruce McConachie, in his cultural study of nineteenth-century melodrama, places “the dynamics of melodramatic production, formulaic diversity, and audience reception within the context of social history.” He focuses on the reciprocal relationship between theatrical performance and the society out of which this performance emerges: “the mutual elaboration over time of historically specific audience groups and theatre practitioners participating in certain shared patterns of dramatic and theatrical action” (Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* [Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992], x, xii).

production in the 1820s, and the growing population was increasingly located in new urban centers, in what ways were the widening class rifts (and the seeming incompatibility of good citizenship and individuality) addressed in a supposedly democratic society? With the distinctive pioneer spirit of the growing West, the slave culture of the South, and the industrialization of the North, how did the nation attempt to create either a unified American or masculine identity? Just as these issues played out in the political arena and in the public sphere, they emerged on the nation's theatrical stages. I suggest that an examination of the performance of masculinity on the nineteenth-century American stage will reveal the ways in which theatre reflected and shaped diverging images of ideal manhood.

While Edwin Forrest frequently has been identified as a theatrical personification of ideal Jacksonian manliness, and many have noted that Edwin Booth supplanted Forrest as the quintessential American star of the stage by the Civil War, theatre's overall reflection, construction, and manipulation of American masculinity during this period has escaped serious study. Scholars have also not attempted to make a direct connection between the discourse on masculinity and the theatrical progression from the rough frontier spirit of Forrest (supposedly representing the essence of all American men) to the fragmentation of the nation, in which the gentility of Booth could claim to reflect only the conservative middle ground.² While other studies may have touched on the intersections of theatre and the formation of

² McConachie and Lawrence W. Levine [*Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988)] indirectly make this link between changing visions of national masculinity and transformations in theatrical preferences and practices.

masculine identity, perhaps focusing on the masculinity of individual characters (i.e., Metamora or Spartacus), I am making it the central focus of my work and using it as a means of exploring and explaining changes both in American culture and its theatre.

My dissertation will join a recent proliferation of discourse on the nature and construction of masculinity in America, and I will be drawing on a number of scholars' work in the field. As Nancy Cott notes, while the lives of great men have been assiduously studied in traditional texts: "'men's history' must be about the social construction of masculinity and manhood rather than simply about men as a group."³

David G. Pugh's study of nineteenth-century American manhood examines the young country's quest to establish and maintain a uniquely American masculine identity:

Indeed, the roots of a masculinity cult in America lay in the anxious efforts of men in the Age of Jackson to define their social, political, and economic positions within a nation attempting to do the same things in the broader community of nations... [T]he Jacksonian movement allied itself with the anxieties of the time and focused its energy in struggles... against various presumed enemies.⁴

Pugh's thorough study privileges political and especially economic factors, and the ways in which they created a need for great manly figures and masculine models, largely ignoring social and cultural elements. In Chapter One, I use Pugh's work to understand the nation's fascination with the Founding Fathers, the emergence of

³ Nancy F. Cott, "On Men's History and Women's History." In *Meanings for Manhood: Construction of Masculinity in Victorian America*, ed. Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 206.

⁴ David G. Pugh, *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America* (Wesport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 3-4.

Jackson as an ideal of manhood, and the importance of biography as an inspiration for exemplary masculine behavior.

E. Anthony Rotundo describes “self-made manhood” as the dominant nineteenth-century construct, at the root of which was “an economic and political life based on the free play of individual interests,” and in which “a man’s work role... formed the essence of his identity.”⁵ Rotundo’s definition of the evolving phases of nineteenth-century American manhood, to be detailed in Chapter One, provides a foundation for my exploration into nineteenth-century audiences’ evolving preferences in theatrical models of masculinity.

Michael Kimmel sees masculinities as primarily homosocial constructions and sees the history of American manhood as a constant struggle to validate self-worth and prove masculinity. Kimmel examines the “tension between the multiplicity of masculinities that collectively define American men’s actual experiences and this singular ‘hegemonic’ masculinity that is prescribed as the norm.”⁶ I explore a portion of this range of masculinities outside of the dominant hegemony in Chapter Three, and in Chapter Four I view the Astor Place Riot as a struggle between masculine groups vying for the right to dictate normative behavior.

Dana D. Nelson connects evolving attitudes of nation, race, and gender to the ideological formation of fraternal, white, national manliness in antebellum America:

⁵ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 3.

⁶ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 6.

National manhood erects an abstracting, atomizing circuitry that charges white men for market competition in the name of national unity. White men are promised relief from the anxieties of economic competition in the warm emotional space of civic fraternal sameness, of “brother moderation.” But over and over national manhood’s competitive individualism and hollowing logic of representivity vitiates the anticipated pleasures of fraternal exchange.⁷

Nelson identifies an anxiety and alienation inherent in the simultaneously democratic and anti-democratic nature of white masculinity that I build on in my examination of nineteenth-century advice literature in Chapter One, Chapter Four’s discussion of the Astor Place Riot, and my study into the insecurities of middle-class men in Chapter Five.

Other works on American manhood place gender roles within historical contexts, but most of these works, in their approach to nineteenth-century American masculinity, inexplicably move from the Age of Jackson directly to the Gilded Age, often ignoring the multitude of tumultuous social, political, and economic shifts occurring in the decades leading up to the Civil War and the subsequent, post-War struggles to establish alternate masculine identities.⁸

As the Civil War approached and the “fraternal sameness” of the nation began to disintegrate, obvious social, political, and economic divisions exposed a national fragmentation. A growing number of political parties, capitalizing on the

⁷ Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), x.

⁸ Two anthologies of essays addressing American manhood provide further interesting glimpses into the evolving identity and ideals of national manliness: Mark C. Carnes and Clyde Griffen, eds., *Meanings for Manhood: Constructions of Masculinity in Victorian America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990); Mary Chapman and Glenn Hendler, eds., *Sentimental Men: Masculinity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999).

apprehensions and prejudices of splintered groups, began to forge masculine images that could legitimately rival or *replace* the Jacksonian ideal. Growing immigrant and African-American populations also required models of manhood that reflected their unique needs and experiences.

My dissertation will examine the multitude of ways in which masculinity was performed, both on- and off-stage, between 1828 and 1865. In most cases, the theatricalization of the male during this nearly forty-year period actively supported and propagated the ideology of dominant hegemonies. However, as alternate ideologies and conflicting images and models of acceptable male behavior emerged to challenge the supposedly straight-forward and clear masculine image embodied by Edwin Forrest, some plays and actors worked to subvert the vision of the strong and independent frontiersman by actively encouraging other possible models. These alternative masculine images reflected in Nelson's "competitive individualism" operated as a form of protest against the dominant, and supposedly national, norm. The ever-changing face of American manhood before the Civil War can be viewed as a cultural palimpsest – like a text or parchment that has been written on many times in order to make room for alternate messages, the previous text having been imperfectly erased and remaining, therefore, still partly visible.

Chapter Structure

In Chapter One, I will examine evolutions in manly rhetoric and oratory from 1828 to 1865 better to understand the performance of masculinity in the public sphere: "In its political rhetoric the period wavered between images of the simple, self-

sufficient, republican yeoman and of the ambitious, enterprising liberal capitalist...” united by “the common ideal of the free individual.”⁹ I argue that the highly theatrical performance style of the era’s public speakers both helped to establish standards for theatrical performance and borrowed from those techniques already popular on stage:

A speaker would present to an audience a personality that was recognizable yet idealized and thus would invite them each to become their own versions of that better self..., making public discourse a drama through which spectators define themselves as an assemblage of autonomous individuals.¹⁰

Through an observation of some of the most important male figures on the nation’s social and political stage, the major trends in the transformation of rhetorical culture, and a brief survey of nineteenth-century advice literature, I will begin to address the changing faces of national masculinity and suggest how this quest for American manhood would be carried out on the theatrical stage. Later in this introduction, I will offer a brief overview of the period leading up to what was the most significant emergence of male role models on the national stage.

Though much has been written of Forrest’s tremendous impact on American acting styles, few studies have traced the links between his popular performance style and the evolving rhetorical traditions of the period. In the second chapter, I will investigate Forrest’s masculine performance on- and off-stage through an analysis of

⁹ Theodore P. Greene, *America’s Heroes: The Changing Models of Success in American Magazines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 13.

¹⁰ Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran, “Introduction: Transformations of Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University, 1993), 14. A number of actors published works on the art of elocution, the most important was probably James E. Murdoch’s *Analytic Elocution: Containing Studies, Theoretical and Practical, of Expressive Speech* (Cincinnati: Van Antwerp, Bragg, and Company, 1884).

diaries, memoirs, and contemporary reviews of productions, examining and comparing both theory and practice.¹¹ Forrest was the first true American actor and the biggest star of this period. He also exerted a great deal of political influence over predominantly working class audiences, and provided a theatrical template of the ideal Jacksonian male. A close examination of Robert T. Conrad's *Jack Cade*, which Forrest adapted for performance, will provide insights into the ways that Forrest consciously constructed an image of manhood in harmony with the prevailing American conception of masculine identity.

Though, for many, Forrest's dynamic style defined masculine identity for the nearly fifty years he dominated the stage, other significant performers of the mid-nineteenth century offered "alternate" visions of masculinity that reflected subtle shifts in the discourse on masculinity. In Chapter Three, I examine the masculine models presented by British actors preceding Forrest on the American stage, as well as surveying, both chronologically and artistically, the wide range and variety of actors between Forrest and Booth. I will also explore performances of immigrant, Indian, Black, and working-class males as both alternate visions of masculinity and parodies

¹¹ I am particularly intrigued by the contrast of theory and practice – attempting, through an examination of reviews, eye-witness accounts, and promptbooks, to somehow reconstruct the essence of the performance. In terms of acting, does what they think they are doing or what they claim to be doing correspond to the actual performance? While an in-depth study of this nature lies outside the scope of this study, it will be useful to look briefly at some of these practice vs. theory issues. Perhaps the most thorough study of this kind is Charles H. Shattuck's *The Hamlet of Edwin Booth*, which traces the evolution of Booth in his most famous role and painstakingly goes through the play nearly line-by-line to understand his interpretation.

of manhood, stigmatizing portions of the population because of race, class, social standing, or political affiliation.

In Chapter Four, I examine the Astor Place Riot (May 19, 1849) as a showdown of conflicting masculinities. Within the growing social, political, economic, and sectional tensions of the middle of the nineteenth century, American men sought the reassurance of strong models of manhood and each class passionately defended the dominance of its ideal. In the differing behaviors and modes of communication of Forrest and British actor William Charles Macready, as well as the audiences who supported them, I suggest the incompatibility of rough, exuberant working-class individualism and the gentility of the emerging middle class and elite. I also argue that it is impossible to read the Astor Place Riot without seeing it as both a theatrical and political spectacle. The riot manifested growing tensions about how discontent was expressed that were very much fueled by and reflected in the anti-slavery movement.¹²

In the final chapter, I explore Booth's subdued, genteel image of masculinity as a reflection of the middle class' "invisible" performance of ideal manhood. Booth's quiet, passive acceptance of personal tragedies taught the bourgeois audience the importance and power of emotional restraint and suppression, while suggesting the possibility of greatness bubbling beneath a placid exterior.¹³ In comparing Forrest and

¹² Rhetoric on sectionalism, slavery, Union, and class during this period connected to the rhetoric and actions of the riot. "Immediatists," who in the abolition movement believed change must be achieved by any means necessary, provided a striking contrast to "gradualists."

Booth, I argue that the public was an active participant in the creation of these masculine ideals, seeing within the theatrical star what they so desperately wished to see within themselves. By the Civil War, each of these manly models (as well as countless others) could meet only the needs and expectations of the specific audience they served.

Contrasting Manhoods in Colonial America and the Early Republic

In his study of eighteenth-century theories and practices of rhetoric, Jay Fliegelman discusses attempts to theorize and implement a natural spoken language:

The elocutionary revolution made the credibility of arguments contingent on the emotional credibility of the speaker. Preoccupied with the spectacle of sincerity and an intensified scrutiny of the body as an instrument of expression, the quest for a natural language led paradoxically to a greater theatricalization of public speaking, to a new social dramaturgy, and to a performative understanding of selfhood.¹⁴

Fliegelman places the beginning of this blurring of the natural and theatrical in America (especially applied to Jefferson's "Declaration of Independence") with the beginnings of professional theatre – "[an] awareness of the impossibility of separating the doing of things for effect from the doing of things to effect, the doubleness, that is, of being an effectual historical 'actor' in both the general sense of agent and the

¹³ Booth's restraint reverted on a superficial level to the neoclassical model of masculinity that Washington embodied, but the genteel masculinity of the mid-nineteenth century contained a stronger element of repressed emotional vulnerability and insecurity that the masculine models of the Founding Fathers would likely have seen as weakness rather than sensitivity.

¹⁴ *Declaring Independence: Jefferson, Natural Language, and the Culture of Performance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 2.

specific sense of performer.”¹⁵ Jefferson used the “natural” language of a gentleman to communicate the necessity of independence.

In *Common Sense* (1776), Thomas Paine implemented a more fully realized version of this theoretical “natural” language – at sharp variance with the carefully constructed, elevated language of Washington, Adams, and Jefferson – that communicated to the artisans rather than the elite: “And however our eyes may be dazzled with show, or our ears deceived by sound; however prejudice may warp our wills, or interest darken our understanding, the simple voice of nature and of reason will say, it is right.”¹⁶ The contrast and tension between Paine’s use of simple language and the exclusionary nature of traditional oratory suggested a split in masculine expression that would grow wider throughout the nineteenth century. As *The Massachusetts Spy* (a Revolutionary newspaper) stated, “common sense in common language is necessary to influence one class of citizens, as much as learning and elegance of compositions are to produce an effect upon another.”¹⁷

The theatre in colonial America, largely an institution of the economic elite, mirrored the deferential hierarchy and social separation of the British model of box, pit, and gallery.¹⁸ Theatre audiences were primarily composed of gentry, including

¹⁵ Ibid., 89, 94.

¹⁶ Thomas Paine, *Common Sense and Other Writings*, ed., Gordon S. Wood (New York: Modern Library, 2003), 8.

¹⁷ Quoted in Fliegelman, *Declaring Independence*, 45.

¹⁸ The most useful (although outdated) book on theatrical performance before the Revolution remains Hugh F. Rankin, *The Theater in Colonial America* (Chapel Hill:

women, with servants and slaves typically relegated to the gallery.¹⁹ Tradesmen, artisans, and laborers, while not excluded from the playhouse, certainly were not a substantial presence. Actors sought the patronage of the gentry – indicating a subservient social position and suggesting that they were incapable of providing a viable masculine model outside the theatre.²⁰ Theatres were associated with the British aristocracy, and as anti-British sentiments grew, the perceived aristocratic extravagance of theatre became a target.

In the early Republic, however, theatre was a comparatively popular amusement, more fully representing the full social spectrum. New playhouses like the Chestnut Street Theatre (1794) in Philadelphia featured an enlarged pit and a reduction in the number of boxes, and ticket prices decreased dramatically, making the theatre

University of North Carolina Press, 1960). See also Jared Brown, *The Theatre in America During the Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

¹⁹ Women were reasonably active in the playhouses of the early Republic – their segregation was more of a nineteenth-century phenomenon. Susan Branson discusses the political role that women played in the theatres: “Women on both sides of the stage played a larger role in public life as a result of the opportunities created for them by theaters reopening in the 1790s and by political partisans encouraging them to participate in the battle for control of the nation’s identity. The Federalists and Democratic Republicans, who encompassed women in their demonstrations of political ideology in the street, also expected female audience members to contribute to demonstrations of party sentiment” (*These Fiery Frenchified Dames: Women and Political Culture in Early National Philadelphia* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001], 123).

²⁰ By the turn of the century, the actor became a more attractive figure and gained increasing social cachet. The most popular “American” actor of the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Thomas Abthorpe Cooper, married prominently (Mary Fairlie of New York in 1812), his daughter wed the son of President Tyler, and he was made inspector of the New York Customs House by President Polk. The best resource on the life and career of Cooper remains Joseph N. Ireland, *A Memoir of the Professional Life of Thomas Abthorpe Cooper* (Boston: Dunlap Society, 1888).

more accessible to working-class audiences. The new arrangements were considered less hospitable to respectable ladies, and in the early nineteenth century women were increasingly relegated to the domestic sphere. Audiences from different sections of American culture (perhaps most significantly, the artisan class) were newly aware of the role that theatre could play as an increasingly politicized tool and in establishing social dominance and legitimacy.²¹ Dramas such as *Cato*, *Andre*, and *Gustavus Vasa* attracted masculine interest, because male spectators had a vested interest in identifying themselves or their group with the positive traits embodied by the hero. A properly regulated theatre had the potential power “[to] inculcate an observance of the moral and social duties, or in some shape tend to better the heart, without vitiating the understanding by an overstrained address to fancy.”²²

In his 1801 parody of audience behavior, Washington Irving (writing as Jonathan Oldstyle) detailed the social behavior of three distinct masculine groups in the playhouse. First, the working class in the gallery: “The noise in this part of the house is somewhat similar to that which prevailed in Noah’s ark... stamping, hissing, roaring, whistling,... and groaning in cadence.”²³ In the boxes, “the votaries of

²¹ See Heather Shawn Nathans, “‘All of the Federalist School?’: Choosing Sides and Creating Identities in the Boston Theatre Wars,” *New England Theatre Journal* 11 (2000): 1-18. Nathans argues that competition between the Federal Street Theatre (associated with the Boston Tontine Association) and the Haymarket (sponsored by the Boston Mechanics) reflected growing class tensions: “the competition among the early Boston theatres points to a broader struggle within Boston society, a struggle to determine who would control its social and cultural development in the years to come” [13].

²² *National Gazette* (Charleston), 6 March 1793.

fashion... the beaux of the present day... They even *strive* to appear inattentive.”²⁴

And finally, “the honest folks in the pit... a host of strapping fellows, standing with their dirty boots on the seats of the benches.”²⁵ Obviously these three groups sharing the playhouse operated under entirely different codes of masculine conduct and responded to separate models of behavior.

These three competing masculine types – the rowdy, the dandy, and the honest man – were at the heart of the first American-written comedy, Royall Tyler’s *The Contrast* (1787).²⁶ First, Billy Dimple, the effete, Anglophilic rake set to marry the virtuous Maria - a duplicitous, foppish would-be Lord Chesterfield: “a depraved wretch, whose only virtue is a polished exterior; who is actuated by the unmanly

²³ “Audiences,” in *The Morning Chronicle*, reprinted in *The American Theatre as Seen by its Critics, 1752-1934*, ed. Montrose J. Moses and John Mason Brown (New York: W.W. Norton, 1934), 40.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 40, 44. Irving spent the least amount of time speaking about the men in the pit, likely because he was surveying the spectacle of the playhouse as one of them and also because they inspired less fascination than the gallery gods or the beaux critics, the extremes of the masculine spectrum. Irving appears to deliberately invoke an “us vs. them” mentality.

²⁶ A number of excellent essays have been written on *The Contrast*: John Evelev, “*The Contrast*: The Problem of Theatricality and Political and Social Crisis in Postrevolutionary America,” *Early American Literature* 31 (1996): 74-97; Richard S. Pressman, “Class Positioning and Shays’ Rebellion: Resolving the Contradictions of *The Contrast*,” *Early American Literature* 21 (1986): 87-102; Lucy Rinehart, “A Nation’s ‘Noble Spectacle’: Royall Tyler’s *The Contrast* as Metatheatrical Commentary,” *American Drama* 3 (1994): 29-52; Donald T. Seibert, Jr., “Royall Tyler’s ‘Bold Example’: *The Contrast* and the English Comedy of Manners,” *Early American Literature* 13 (1978): 3-11; Roger B. Stein, “Royall Tyler and the Question of Our Speech,” *New England Quarterly* 38 (1965): 454-74.

ambition of conquering the defenseless.”²⁷ Maria places Dimple’s suitability as an appropriate mate below unappealing masculine models marked by “awkwardness,” “deformity,” “poverty,” and even weakness.²⁸ Dimple was likely associated in the minds of the audience with the vanquished royalists – a symbol, in fact, of all that the new American man should seek to avoid: “Dimple and Jessamy [the servant who apes his master’s sophistication] are controlling figures, characters whose verbal dexterity allows them to act as standards in a society that willingly throws itself into a culture of performance.”²⁹

Next, Jonathan was the naïve, rustic bumpkin whose wit and pragmatism endeared him to the gallery gods and established the stage Yankee as a fixture of the American drama for the next hundred years: “I am a true blue son of liberty... no man shall master me.”³⁰ Jonathan demanded to be known as a waiter rather than a servant to his Colonel: “Why, I swear we don’t make any great matter of distinction in our state between quality and other folks.”³¹

²⁷ Royall Tyler, *The Contrast*, in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 17.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ Jeffrey H. Richards, *Theater Enough: American Culture and the Metaphor of the World Stage, 1607-1789* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 273. I will expand on this discussion of the dangers of a polished speech and behavior leading to social success in Chapter One. Dimple appears to be something of a backcountry rustic until he learns to ape (badly) English ways and to despise his homeland.

³⁰ Tyler, *The Contrast*, 25.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

Finally, Colonel Manly, a hero of the Revolution, was the staunch, if somewhat stiff, defender of honor and country, personifying the nation's patriotic ideal: "I have learned that probity, virtue, honour, though they should not have received the polish of Europe, will secure to an honest American the good graces of his fair countrywomen, and I hope, the applause of the public."³² While Jonathan spoke the simple common sense of Paine, Manly invoked the elevated eloquence of the Founding Fathers.

Neither Jonathan's rustic rowdiness, Dimple's effete aristocratic pretensions, nor Van Rough's obsessive social and economic self-interest were presented as completely appealing models of heroic male behavior for the American stage. I will focus primarily on the independent, hard-working, and honest spirit of Manly. Tyler's naming of his hero suggested the desire for a new, uniquely American model of masculine behavior.³³ The *Pennsylvania Journal* praised the play "for exhibiting in such true colors the pernicious maxims of the Chesterfieldian system, of all others the most dangerous to the peace of society" - suggesting that from the nation's first significant dramatic effort, America's emerging republican male was consumed by the desire to separate from the perceived calculated manipulation of British manhood and

³² Ibid., 57. Actually, a fourth masculine model exists in Maria's father, Van Rough, the self-made urban businessman with social aspirations who spouts the cautious admonishment - "it is money makes the mare go; keep your eye on the main chance" (Ibid., 15).

³³ Naming characters to match their dominant attributes was an established convention of British dramatists - e.g., the Teazles, Sneerwell, Candour, and Backbite in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*.

the social pretensions of America's aristocratic elite.³⁴ If, however, Manly was a cry for something uniquely American, it was a lone voice in the theatrical wilderness, because of the scarcity of American drama during this period and a real mistrust of the fledgling American aesthetic and cultural standards.

The principal problem in establishing a distinct masculine identity was that men of the nation did not know how to define themselves separate from the British model – the only model with which they were familiar. Following the Revolution, men exhibited a substantial fear of falling prey to the dangerous spell of effeminacy cast by the British aristocracy. Samuel Adams, in the January 1785 *Massachusetts Sentinel*, provided historical justification for this concern: “[If] we consult the history of Athens and Rome, we should find that so long as they continued their frugality and simplicity of manners, they shone with superlative glory; but no sooner were effeminate refinements [i.e., theatre] introduced amongst them, than they visibly fell from whatever was elevated and magnanimous, and became feeble and timid, dependent, slavish and false.”³⁵ As American minister James Dana warned in 1779, “Nothing hath a darker aspect on rising states than effeminate manners.”³⁶

According to Crèvecoeur's *Letters from an American Farmer* in 1782, membership in the imagined community of American masculinity required, “leaving

³⁴ Quoted in Richard Moody, *Dramas From the American Theatre, 1762-1909* (Cleveland: World Publishing, 1966), 31.

³⁵ *The Writings of Samuel Adams*, ed. Henry Alonzo Cushing, vol. 4 (New York: Putnam: 1908), 236.

³⁶ James Dana, *A Sermon, Preached before the General Assembly* (Hartford: n.p., 1779), 27.

behind him all his ancient prejudices and manners, receiv[ing] new ones from the new mode of life he has embraced, the new government he obeys, and the new rank he holds. The American is a new man who acts upon new principles... Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men."³⁷ These new principles for America's masculine code focused on the simultaneous advancement, restraint, and freedom of the individual and the faith that free competition would ultimately reward the hard work and abilities of the truly worthy, regardless of social position.

William Dunlap, often called the Father of American drama, presented George Washington as a masculine model in two plays. The better known, *Andre* (1798), presented Washington as a staunch defender of the nation's honor, but he exuded a somewhat cold, forbidding presence (only showing emotion or uncertainty when alone) in his harsh resolve to execute the condemned British spy:

I likewise am
A soldier; entrusted by my country.
What I shall judge most for that country's good
That shall I do.³⁸

Dunlap's lesser-known play, an interlude entitled *Darby's Return* (1789), features an Irish rustic (played by comic actor Thomas Wignell, a favorite of George Washington and the creator of the role of Jonathan in *The Contrast*). The play included a description of the president:

A man who'd fought to free the land from woe,
Like me had left his *farm a-soldiering* to go;

³⁷ J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Albert Stone (New York: Penguin, 1981), 69-70.

³⁸ William Dunlap, *Andre*, in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 90.

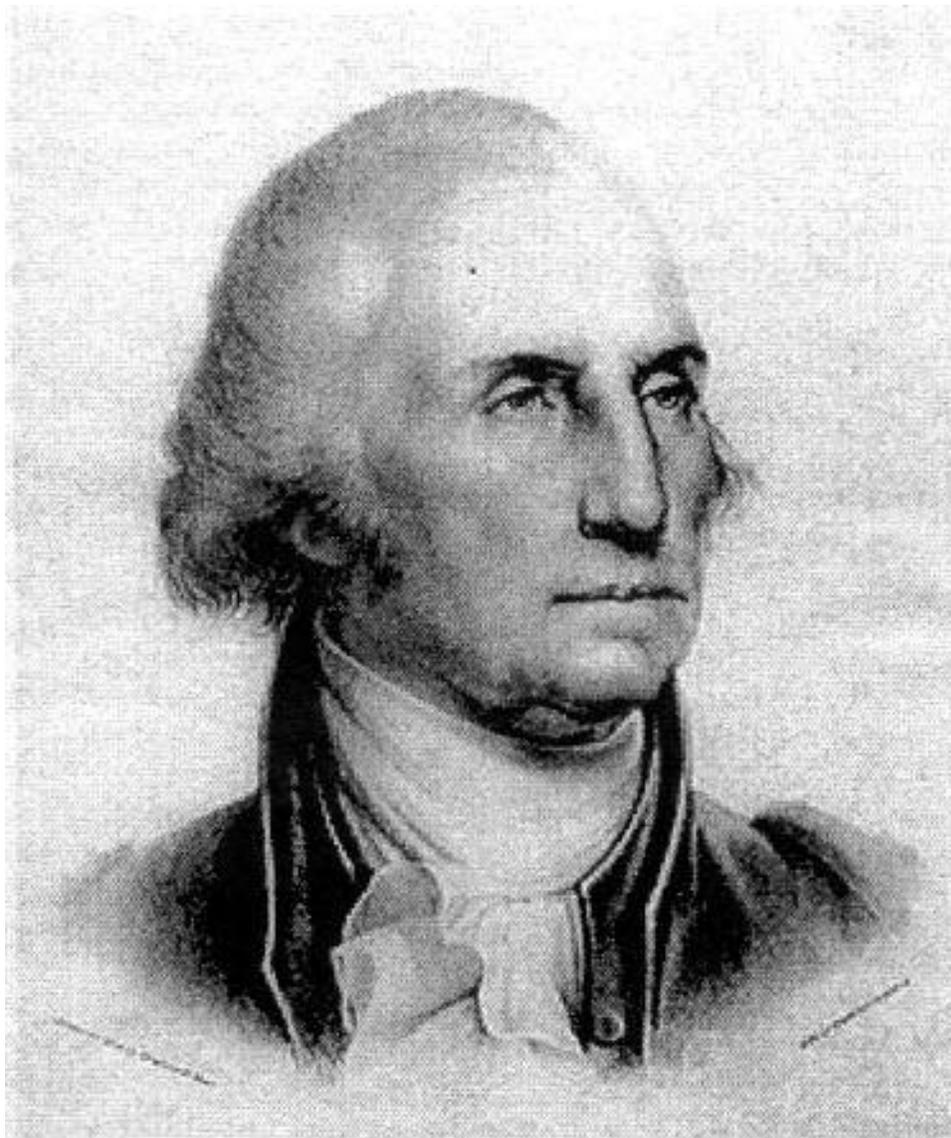


Fig. 1. George Washington, Portrait by Rembrandt Peale



Fig. 2. Thomas Wignell as Darby in *Darby's Return*

But having gain'd his point, he had, *like me*,
 Return'd his own *potatoe ground* to see.
 But there he couldn't rest; with one accord
 He's called to be a kind of – not a lord;
 I don't know what: he's not a great man, sure,
 For poor men love him, just as he was poor!
 They love him like a father or a brother.³⁹

Dunlap presented Washington as a model of masculine behavior in both pieces, yet in both works it is an idealized, unattainable model. Even in the comic piece, the repeated “like me” merely underscored the impossibility of comparing the mythic image of Washington to a common man.

Dramatists of the early Republic did not attempt to create a uniquely American, realistically attainable, and emotionally compelling model of ideal manhood, because they were entirely focused on *citizenship* as the defining characteristic and ultimate goal of masculine behavior. *Andre* argued that no matter how charismatic or compelling the individual, nothing was more important than the state, and so all of those dangerous and demagogue-like characteristics were subsumed. Dunlap and Tyler in the characters of Washington and Manly crafted heroes of noble sentiment and impeccable behavior but they were without weakness

³⁹ Quoted in Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of the American Drama From the Beginning to the Civil War* (New York: Harper, 1923), 77. Washington was in the audience for the premiere of the work and apparently felt uncomfortable with the praise, until Wignell as Darby responded to the question, “How look'd he, Darby? Was he short or tall?:”

Why sure I didn't see him. To be sure,
 As I was looking hard from out the door,
 I saw a man in regimentals fine,
 All lace and glitter, botherum and shine;
 And so I look'd at him till all was gone,
 And then I found that he was not the one. [78]

Washington apparently laughed heartily. This description again underscored the unpretentious performance of American masculinity.

and ultimately lacked the humanity and the dramatic fire that would draw a passionate response from the audience. In fact, of the four masculine models previously discussed in *The Contrast*, Manly was certainly the most admirable but likely the least compelling – described by a comic coquette as, “the essence of everything that is *outré* and gloomy.”⁴⁰ Manly’s similarity to Washington was hardly coincidental – when the character first appears on stage, he states, “I have humbly imitated our illustrious WASHINGTON, in having exposed my health and life in the service of my country, without reaping any other reward than the glory of conquering in so arduous a contest.”⁴¹

A European play and character in a neoclassical vein that read strongly as American, and would forever be associated with Washington, was Irishman Henry Brooke’s *Gustavus Vasa, The Deliverer of his Country* (1739).⁴² Vasa is chosen to lead Sweden to victory against Christian II (King of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark) but allows the Danes to return to their country. Vasa (now King Gustav I) is presented as both a patriotic and patriarchal hero:

Come, come, my Brothers all! Yes I will strive
 To be the Sum of ev’ry Title to ye,
 And you shall be my Sire, my Friend reviv’d,
 My Sister, Mother, all that’s kind and dear,
 For so *Gustavus* holds ye – Oh I will
 Of private Passions all my Soul divest,
 And take my dearer Country to my Breast.
 To publick Good transfer each fond Desire,

⁴⁰ Tyler, *Contrast*, 24

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

⁴² Brooke’s play was the first drama banned under the Licensing Act in England, because it was seen as a thinly veiled attack on the government.

And clasp my *Sweden* with a Lover's Fire.
 Well pleas'd, the Weight of all her Burdens bear;
 Dispense all Pleasure, but engross all Care.
 Still quick to find, to feel my People's Woes;
 And wake that Millions may enjoy Repose.⁴³

Audiences saw this selfless devotion to country embodied in their own American "King," Washington. A 1778 Philadelphia printing of the play was "Inscribed to His Excellency General Washington Commander in Chief of the Forces of the Thirteen United States of America." In the early Republic, *Gustavus Vasa* became a theatrical fixture performed in many theatres on patriotic occasions and to commemorate the birthday of the country's champion.

Because of the dearth of American plays, actors of the early Republic typically had to look to European dramas to showcase their abilities and their suitability as exemplars of the American masculine ideal. Apart from the standard Shakespeare canon (and stepping slightly away from neoclassical models and heroes toward an expression of self-made manhood that Forrest's dramas would embrace), *Douglas* (1756), written by Scotch clergyman John Home, was one of the more popular vehicles for young male actors, serving as a proving ground for histrionic ability and masculine sentiment. In the story, Lady Douglas has lost her husband and son and remarried Lord Randolph, who is rescued in battle by the brave Young Norval ("stamp'd a hero by the sovereign hand of nature!").⁴⁴ Norval, raised by a shepherd,

⁴³ Henry Brooke, *Gustavus Vasa, The Deliverer of his Country* (London: R. Dodsley, 1739), 81.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Richard Moody, *Edwin Forrest: First Star of the American Stage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 16. Douglas was based on the Scotch ballad *Gil Morrice*.

turns out to be Lady Randolph's lost son, Douglas. Lord Randolph is turned against Douglas and helps murder him, and Douglas dies in his mother's arms. The role not only provided dramatic opportunities for heroism, bravery, and tragic death, but also underscored the inherent value of unpolished, native worth, placing it within a more theatrically viable frame.

Conclusion

1828 appears a logical date to begin my study because the election of Andrew Jackson over John Quincy Adams reflected a masculine changing of the guard. 1828 also marked the year that Forrest solidified his reputation as America's greatest actor and began his playwriting competitions as a means to promote nationalism and create distinctly American, masculine characters. I end in 1865 with the end of the Civil War and the death of Lincoln, a national turning point and an event that forever changed perceptions of Edwin Booth's career.

I should here qualify my comments on America's theatrical audiences of the nineteenth century. Specific statistics on the composition of audiences do not exist and must be constructed on limited (and often contradictory) data, accounts, and surmises. Significant scholarly debate continues on the ratio of class and gender within any theatre audience. Because few working-class viewers wrote about their experiences in the playhouse, their responses were expressed frequently by critics of different classes and perspectives.

I should also note that while I do acknowledge contradictions within each of the dominant masculine models I discuss, I often appear to suggest a simple, binary

view of manly extremes. While Forrest and Booth (as well as many of the other men I discuss) were far more similar than a cursory glance would suggest, audiences read these visions of manhood as opposites. I argue that these intentionally reductive views of complex masculinities emerged from an audience desire to clarify and simplify their own social positions and masculine aspirations.

A challenge inherent in this study is resisting the impulse to see the changes in masculine performance as a teleological progression or decline in values, behaviors, or abilities. It is sometimes difficult not to describe the shift from Forrest to Booth as a linear development toward national refinement and theatrical naturalism or to discuss the changing tastes of a monolithic audience. One ideal of manhood did not supplant the other; a multitude of masculinities simultaneously fought for dominance and recognition. I hope to reveal a journey of masculine transformation, which “fragments what was thought unified,” without assigning praise or blame to the participants.⁴⁵ I argue that it is possible to find a much more fluid and nuanced picture of masculine identities in the antebellum theatre if we try to read them both through and against the experience of the audience outside the playhouse.

⁴⁵ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NJ: Cornell University Press, 1977), 147.

CHAPTER ONE
 Learning to Play the Man:
 Images and Rhetoric of “Reconstructed Manhood”¹

The American founders aspired to create a republic of men. Their problem was that a democratic distemper infected the men of their time, resulting in disorderly conduct that threatened the republic’s birth, health, and longevity. The founders addressed this problem by employing hegemonic norms of manhood to stigmatize and bring into line disorderly men, reward responsible men with citizenship, and empower exceptional men with positions of leadership and authority... [T]he founders employed a “grammar of manhood” to encourage American men to reform themselves, to restore order to the hierarchical ranks of men, and to foster social stability, political legitimacy, and patriarchal power.²

As America woke from its “unmanly slumbers,” declaring its independence from the patriarchal protection and the aristocratic control of the English crown, it boldly stated “all men are created equal.”³ The idealism of the colonial representatives, soon to be the Founding Fathers, established democratic and egalitarian guidelines and laws for self-government. In the wake of the American Revolution, however, both the nation and its citizens faced a crisis of identity, as the newly, and somewhat precariously, united states sought a character distinct from their British past and unique to their

¹ Henry Ward Beecher, *Yale Lectures on Preaching* (New York: J.B. Ford, 1872-1874), 6.

² Mark E. Kann, *A Republic of Men: The American Founders, Gendered Language, and Patriarchal Politics* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1. On the nation’s centennial, Hezekiah Niles unsuccessfully attempted to collect stirring speeches of the revolutionary period: “The patriots of the revolution did not make speeches to be unattended by their brethren in Congress and fill up the columns of newspapers. They only spoke when they had something to say, and preferred *acting to talking*” [*Principles and Acts of the Revolution in America* (New York: A.S. Barnes, 1876), 12].

³ Thomas Paine, “Common Sense,” in *The Life and Major Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: Citadel Press, 1961), 23; “Declaration of Independence.”

singular nature: “What, then, is the American, this new man? He is neither an European nor the descendant of an European; hence that strange mixture of blood, which you will find in no other country.”⁴ The country’s masculine identity was torn between the comfortable familiarity and fixed hierarchical structure of an aristocratic model and the uncharted territory of a true democracy.

In this chapter I explore the theatricalization of the newly American male and the ways in which he performed and perceived the inextricable nature of his nationality and gender in the public sphere, establishing a context in which to understand the ways that masculinity would be performed on the American stage. In order to establish a vocabulary and framework to discuss evolving ideals of American manhood, I will examine the nation’s rhetoric of masculinity from 1828 to 1865, focusing on contemporary perceptions of, and responses to, selected prominent speakers and masculine models, rather than analyzing rhetorical theories.⁵ Through a survey of antebellum advice literature (many essentially manuals of masculine performance), I will place the gradual transformations of rhetorical style and the

⁴ J. Hector St. John de Crevecoeur, *Letters from an American Farmer*, ed. Albert Stone (New York: Penguin, 1981), 69.

⁵ This work cannot presume to cover thoroughly the entirety of masculine rhetoric during this period and will not attempt a survey of this vast literature. Volumes have been written on the subject in general, and a number of excellent studies have examined the rhetoric and oratory of America’s greatest speakers of the period. The following are the most thorough and helpful overviews of the period’s rhetorical culture and oratorical practice, as well as its most significant speakers: Bernard K. Duffy and Halford R. Ryan, eds., *American Orators Before 1900: Critical Studies and Sources* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987); Warren Choate Shaw, *History of American Oratory*, 2 vols. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979); William Norwood Brigance, ed., *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1943; reprint New York: Russell and Russell, 1960); Robert T. Oliver, *History of Public Speaking in America* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1964).

prescribed language and behavior used to establish constantly shifting borders of proper male conduct within the context of shifting social, cultural, and political forces of the period.

Masculinity's Evolution

In his study of the cultural invention of American masculinity, E. Anthony Rotundo suggests three successive phases of national manhood during the nineteenth century that are directly connected to transformations in rhetorical theory and practice and that are reflected in the performance of masculinity on the nineteenth-century stage. The *communal manhood* of the colonial period, in which “a man’s identity was inseparable from the duties he owed to his community,” encouraged self-restraint and self-sacrifice in a rigid hierarchical and patriarchal social structure (mirroring the male, stronger of body and mind than the female, as unquestioned head of household) that diminished the importance and relevance of individualism.⁶ The next phase, *self-made manhood*, was inspired by an egalitarian government, the growth of a market economy, and the dominance of an emerging middle class. In learning to focus his “base” male passions, “a man took his identity and his social status from his own achievements, not from the accident of his birth.”⁷ The *passionate manhood* emerging in the middle of the nineteenth century embraced and encouraged distinctly masculine

⁶ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: Basic Books, 1993), 2. There was no room for individuality in a monarchy – that’s one reason that in the colonial period little emphasis was placed on a single person (except the King).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 3.

qualities and emotions (competitiveness, aggression, toughness, sexual desire, etc.): “a man defined his identity not just in the workplace but through modes of enjoyment and self-fulfillment outside of it.”⁸

Developing an American Masculine Speech

Because the young nation placed a premium on free speech, American oratory “assumed a character peculiar to its new environment,” one that “reflected the nation’s struggle to achieve cultural and political independence.”⁹ Nineteenth-century rhetorical theory “was essentially synthetic, being derived from the integration of classical elements with eighteenth-century belletristic and epistemological approaches.”¹⁰ The ability to persuade through public speaking was an essential skill, vital to success in the democratic republic:

Oratory was esteemed the first attribute of superior minds, and was assiduously cultivated. There were few newspapers, and the press had not attained the controlling power over the public mind as now. Political information was disseminated chiefly by public speaking, and every one aspiring to lead in the land was expected to be a fine speaker.¹¹

⁸ Ibid., 6.

⁹ Bernard K. Duffy and Halford R. Ryan, “Introduction,” in *American Orators Before 1900: Critical Studies and Sources* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), xvi.

¹⁰ Nan Johnson, *Nineteenth-Century Rhetoric in North America* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991), 14-15.

¹¹ W. H. Sparks, *The Memories of Fifty Years* (Philadelphia: Claxton, Remsen and Haffelinger, 1870), 22. Oratory was a potentially powerful tool of the self-made man – an opportunity for him to publicize his “superior mind” and expose his facility for leadership, setting himself above the common rabble.

In their introduction to *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric*, Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran present an outline of the transformations in the rhetorical theory and practice of nineteenth-century United States that corresponds with the previously discussed transitions in nineteenth-century masculine ideals, as well as theatrical representations of masculinity.

Clark and Halloran suggest that at the beginning of the nineteenth-century, America's oratorical culture was based on "the traditional principle of collective moral authority... to preserve and articulate a moral consensus... on the established values of the culture... for application by citizens in the public forum."¹² By mid-century, "American concepts of self became increasingly individualistic and autonomous," and the oratorical culture "asserted the moral and political autonomy of the individual conscience."¹³ Later in the century, liberal individualism was incrementally eclipsed in the increasingly complex nation by the specialization and commodification of knowledge, leading to "the authority of the expert and... [a] new public morality of

¹² Gregory Clark and S. Michael Halloran, "Introduction: Transformations of Public Discourse in Nineteenth-Century America," in *Oratorical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America: Transformations in the Theory and Practice of Rhetoric* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993), 3, 7, 2. Clark and Halloran make a conscious effort not to privilege any single oratorical culture, but their description of the early nineteenth-century describes a communal, collaborative nation of people working toward a common goal that appears, at times, too idyllic. Clark and Halloran later acknowledge that the American Revolution itself was "a rejection of traditional institutional authority" and that in the early years of the republic "individual moral authority was directed... toward communitarian ends," in which "shared individual values... would support common, cooperative action" (11). Yet even that caveat fits within the parameters of the theatrical comparison detailed later.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 10, 12.

expertise that defined the professional culture,” creating “the need for a rhetoric of morally neutral and exclusionary discourse.”¹⁴ This progression invariably encouraged social and intellectual rifts between classes, which became increasingly obvious as the nineteenth century progressed.

These corresponding transformations in masculine identity and the rhetoric of oratory, from communal manhood and articulation of a moral consensus to self-made manhood and individual autonomy to passionate manhood and commodification of knowledge, were mirrored on the nineteenth-century American stage and even in the structure of America’s early theatre companies.¹⁵ Theatre of the colonial period and the early Republic revolved around the independent stock company, a community of actors presenting a vast repertoire of theatrical entertainments (primarily Shakespeare, British comedies and farces, and successful European plays in translation).¹⁶ These performers not only satisfied the entertainment demands of their primarily elite male audiences and benefactors but also supported and validated the values and beliefs of

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3, 21.

¹⁵ Rotundo’s notion of passionate manhood relates to Clark and Halloran’s ideas of professionalism and specialization through the privileging of the self. Rotundo sees this change as an uninhibited expression of a distinctly masculine nature and the application of male passions toward self-fulfillment. Clark and Halloran see this change as a channeling of a man’s interests and desires into an area of specialization that highlights and celebrates the uniqueness of the self.

¹⁶ The most prominent example of the stock company in the colonial period was the Hallam-Douglass Company (known as the American Company as early as 1763, and later the Old American Company). In the early Republic, the company split and the Wignell-Reinagle Company was also enormously successful.

the town's residents. Each company had its featured actors, but the resident stock company, a rigidly patriarchal group, was still the basic theatrical unit.¹⁷

Mirroring the nation's transition to self-made manhood and individualism, Edwin Forrest, the first native star of the American stage, offered himself as a representative personality – a larger-than-life masculine ideal that initially appealed across class boundaries as a shining example of the young, robust, and vigorous republic: “The *masses are with him*; and if acting, as an art, is supposed to be an exponent of nature, Mr. Forrest, in thus conciliating the suffrages of the million, must have touched the chords which vibrate in the breasts of men as a body, or he could not obtain that supremacy over the feelings of his auditors he has so long and so triumphantly exercised.”¹⁸ The urban, working-class male audience especially embraced Forrest, loudly applauding the egalitarian message of the American dramas he encouraged.

Marking America's transition to passionate manhood and specialization, Edwin Booth provided a model of genteel, restrained masculine behavior that masked suppressed emotions and desires:

His execution... was marvelous for concentration of intellect, grace of action, symmetry of molding, growth of emotional experience and condition, thrilling flashes of frenzy, and perfect precision in utterance and method. The processes of art have long since become to him a second nature; and he represents this character [Hamlet] with such consummate ease that only in the retrospect will a critical observer appreciate the splendid poise and firm touch

¹⁷ Visiting English stars, beginning with George Frederick Cooke in 1810, toured from company to company, temporarily pushing the company's leading actor to a supporting role. Because these tours proved lucrative to both star and theatre owner, most of the major British stars toured the United States

¹⁸ *Albion* (New York), 2 September 1848.

with which all the beautifully complex mechanism of the work has been conducted... [He] is made so pitiable an object that no man with a heart in his bosom can see him without tears.¹⁹

Booth did not necessarily inspire within his middle-class family audience the vehement level of personal identification that surrounded Forrest. And the plays in which Booth performed did not attempt to dictate directly the behavior of his devotees or steer the course of the nation. He was, however, an expert, a sensitive but flawless technician, reveling in the expression (or often the repression) of a full range of emotions and specializing in partially illuminating the intangible nature of the intellect and soul.

Transformations in masculine identity, oratorical practice, and theatrical personalities were all invariably manifestations of social, economic, and political changes. The American male, within the framework of these structures, sought the necessary tools for social acceptance and a foundation for appropriate masculine performance.

The Presidential Election of 1828: A Masculine Revolution

The War of 1812 (often perceived as a second war of independence) and the “Era of Good Feeling” (roughly 1815-1825) were marked by a “unity-building rhetoric,” reviving the superpatriotism of the Revolution and masking the country’s

¹⁹ *New York Daily Tribune*, 21 November 1876. Forrest and Booth were the most striking theatrical embodiments of their respective phases of manhood. In Chapter Three, I will more fully explore the full masculine spectrum.

growing social, political, and sectional divisions.²⁰ Escalating tensions between and within the political parties of the 1820s, aggravated by the “corrupt bargain” associated with the presidential election of 1824, culminated in a drastic shift in political rhetoric for the election of 1828.²¹

The 1828 election pitted sharply contrasting opponents – the incumbent John Quincy Adams, whose aristocratic comportment, direct hereditary link to the nation’s founding fathers, eloquent calls to expand the power of federal government, and neoclassical style of oratory differed in almost every way from the rough-hewn image, frontier war heroism, impassioned demands for Democratic egalitarianism and unpolished yet charismatic oratorical style of Andrew Jackson: “[T]he rise of Andrew Jackson... was widely regarded as the ascension of self-made men... That humble origins – actual or alleged – were all the rage in the era of ‘Tippecanoe and Tyler too,’

²⁰ Ronald F. Reid, *Three Centuries of American Rhetorical Discourse* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1988), 207.

²¹ In a break from nomination of candidates by congressional caucuses, the major candidates for the presidential election of 1824 (Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, Henry Clay, and John C. Calhoun) were nominated by states legislatures (the caucus, which was poorly attended and derided as undemocratic, nominated William H. Crawford, who was plagued by health problems). Calhoun was the overwhelming choice for Vice-President. Adams and Jackson (who claimed the largest percentage of the popular vote) were the front-runners for President but neither could muster a majority of votes. The House of Representatives, voting by state, were to choose the President from the three highest candidates (Adams, Jackson, and Crawford – Clay was forth in electoral votes), and Speaker of the House Clay held much influence with the vote. With Clay’s support, Adams decisively won the House vote, and Adams appointed Clay Secretary of State (considered a natural stepping stone to the presidency – Adams, Monroe, and Madison had all been Secretary of State immediately before their presidential elections). Jacksonians condemned the appointment as a “corrupt bargain.” In 1825, the Tennessee legislature selected Jackson as their presidential candidate for the next election, and Old Hickory began his 1828 campaign three years before the next election.

was a sign that the people would no longer settle for leadership by an elite. Tom, Dick, and Harry insisted on leaders in their own image.”²²

John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) professed an elegant and dignified oratorical style self-consciously patterned on classical Roman models.²³ Adam’s mode of speech reinforced a hierarchical separation, which privileged the intellectual elite:

When eighteenth-century linguists located linguistic authority in the speech of gentlemen, this might or might not have been well suited to the creation of reasoned and civil public debate, but it certainly wrote off the language of at least nine tenths of the human race as ‘vulgar’ and not to be taken seriously... This neoclassical standard was intimately connected to the traditional division between the few and the many, a division that excluded ‘the many’ from any systematic contribution to public debate.²⁴

Adams’ oratorical philosophy, which was really a descendent of eighteenth-century Federalism and harmonized with the Whigs’ public agenda until the election of 1840,

²² Edward Pessen, *Jacksonian American* (Homewood, IL: Dorsey Press, 1969), 40.

²³ John Quincy Adams was Harvard’s first Boylston Chair of Rhetoric and Oratory (1804), and his lectures [*Lectures on Rhetoric and Oratory*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Hilliard and Metcalf, 1810; reprint, New York: Russell and Russell, 1962)] were the first significant writings on the subject in the country’s young history. In the conclusion to his inaugural Boylston oration (12 June 1806), Adams spoke of the power and importance of eloquence in a democratic society: “Under governments purely republican, where every citizen has a deep interest in the affairs of the nation, and, in some form of public assembly or other, has the means and opportunity of delivering his opinions, and of communicating his sentiments by speech; where government itself has no arms but persuasion; where prejudice has not acquired an uncontrolled [sic] ascendancy, and faction is yet confined within the barriers of peace; the voice of eloquence will not be heard in vain... So shall your country ever gladden at the sound of your voice, and every talent, added to your accomplishments, become another blessing to mankind” [30-31]. While Adams reasoned effectively, the coldness of his oration frequently failed to inspire.

²⁴ Kenneth Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence: The Fight Over Popular Speech in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: William Morrow, 1990), 15.



Fig. 3. John Quincy Adams.

suggested that as the mind must govern the body's baser passions, the learned leadership of a nation must guide the commons:

Rhetoric provided an intermediate language by which rational and moral ideas... could be transposed into emotional, metaphorical, even sensual images, palpable to each individual's animal faculties and therefore comprehensible at the inferior levels of the social order.²⁵

Adams' patriarchal, if not patronizing, approach to government, and the aloof image of privileged, educated aristocrat he exuded, jarred with the mood of the perceived democratic nature of American society.

Adams strongly committed himself to controversial issues, as when he spoke against the proposed "gag rule" in 1835 that would prevent the House of Representatives from discussing the petitions relating to slavery:

What will be the consequences then? You suppress the right of petition; you suppress the freedom of speech; the freedom of the press and the freedom of religion; for, in the minds of many worthy, honest, and honorable men – fanatics if you please so to call them – this is a religious question, in which they act under what they believe to be a sense of duty to their God.²⁶

Adams' arguments were intellectually persuasive, as when he was threatened with censure for violating the "gag rule" in 1837, but the cold, elevated formality of his speech often failed to connect emotionally with his audience: "I should deem it to be

²⁵ Alexander Saxton, *The Rise and Fall of the White Republic: Class Politics and Mass Culture in Nineteenth-Century America* (London: Verso, 1990), 46. Jackson's was the comparatively liberal Democratic party. The conservative opposition was first called the National Republicans and by 1836 were known as the Whigs (the patriotic party that had supported the Revolution). The Whigs sought to place expansive power for social improvement in the hands of the federal government (Jackson championed states' rights). The Whigs pushed for economic expansion and protective tariffs and privileged the power of the legislature over the presidency.

²⁶ Quoted in *Great Debates in American History*, ed. Marion M. Miller, vol. 4 (New York: Current Literature, 1913), 105-6.

the heaviest calamity which has ever befallen me in the course of a life checkered with many vicissitudes if a vote of censure from this House should pass upon my name or upon any action of mine in this House.”²⁷ His stubborn resolve, staunch individualism, and unwillingness to compromise may have earned him grudging admiration but also alienated many of listeners and likely undermined his persuasive power: “I disclaim not one particle of what I have done; not a single word of what I have said do I unsay; nay, I am ready to do and say the same again tomorrow.”²⁸

In his largely ineffective presidential term, Adams sought to implement a policy of internal improvements – “the adaptation of the powers, physical, moral, and intellectual, of this whole union, to the improvement of its own condition.”²⁹ But Adams, unable to overcome widespread popular discontent with the government, was marked by a stubborn individualism that did little to strengthen his reputation or the position of his party (the National-Republicans, later to become the Whigs): “Mr. Adams during his administration failed to cherish, strengthen, or even recognize the party to which he owed his election; nor, so far as I am informed, with the great power he possessed did he make a single influential friend.”³⁰ This self-destructive

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 122. In the gage rule and other Congressional fights, Adams less wished to persuade than to goad quietly his Southern opponents into so over-reacting they made fools of themselves; he succeeded.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

²⁹ John Quincy Adams, “Address on the Breaking of Ground for the Chesapeake and Ohio Canal” (1828), quoted in *U.S. Presidents as Orators: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Halford Ryan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 62.

individualism spoke strongly of Adams' character, but his unwillingness to cater to others' desires hurt him politically.

Throughout his presidency, Adams was constantly on the defensive against Jacksonian charges of aristocratic privilege and impropriety: "the grass roots of American political life... shifted, with Andrew Jackson's 1828 defeat of John Quincy Adams, from the centralized and patrician leadership of an elite to the decentralized and democratic leadership of the common man."³¹ It thrust Old Hickory into the brightest portion of the national spotlight and validated a new, and "truly democratic," masculine model: "Jackson, who was born in the South, who went West as a pioneer, and settled in the East..., united in his person the entire American identity."³²

The 1828 election marked an abrupt shift in what had to date been a gradual transformation toward authority of the individual:

³⁰ Thurlow Weed, *The Life of Thurlow Weed*, ed. H.A. Weed, vol. 1 (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1883), 178. Weed campaigned for Adams' election and was severely disappointed to receive no political favors in return.

³¹ Clark and Halloran, *Oratorical Culture*, 13. Suspicion of the New England elite dated back to the Federalist party in the War of 1812. Much of New England had opposed the war, yet they profited significantly by it (British forces did not blockade the region in order to encourage disloyalty). At the "secret" Hartford Convention in 1814, they revised the Constitution to allow states to deny federal actions that infringed on the states' constitutional rights. The Federalist party disbanded soon after.

³² Thomas M. Lessl, "Andrew Jackson," in *U.S. Presidents as Orators: A Bio-Critical Sourcebook*, ed. Halford Ryan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 66. Lessl employs "a somewhat fanciful personification, that the East is the mind of America, the South its soul, and the West its spirit" (66). Jackson was probably no more "democratic" than Adams had been, but Jackson presented himself as a man rising from the people. As is often the case in political life, the *perception* of contrasts is far more important than genuine ones.

[W]ith Andrew Jackson's 1828 defeat of John Quincy Adams, [the foundation of American political life shifted] from the centralized patrician leadership of an elite to the decentralized and democratic leadership of the common man... Jackson defeated Adams by presenting himself to the voters as a representative personality, using rhetoric that addressed its audience not as citizens... but as spectators observing a version of themselves.³³

Jackson's perceived accessibility not only provided a sharp contrast in manner and bearing to the haughty Adams; but, also, a distinction between Jackson's native wit and genius and Adams' cold intellectualism:

That he [Adams] is learned we are willing to admit; but his wisdom we take leave to question... We confess our attachment to the homely doctrine...:
 That not to know of things remote
 From use, obscure and subtle, but to know
 That which before us lies in daily life,
 Is the prime wisdom.
 That wisdom we believe Gen. Jackson possesses in an eminent degree.³⁴

The 1828 election was presented as a masculine contest of the cold intellect of aristocracy versus the native wit and decisive action of democracy. In an 1833 diary entry, Adams referred to Jackson as, "a barbarian and savage who can scarcely spell his own name."³⁵

Jackson reacted against a firmly entrenched tradition of rhetoric in the young republic that demanded elevated and refined comportment and speech:

He arrives at conclusions with a rapidity which proves that his process is not through the tardy avenues of syllogism, nor over the beaten track of analysis, or the hackneyed walk of logical induction. For, whilst, other minds, vigorous

³³ Clark and Halloran, *Oratorical Culture*, 13-14.

³⁴ *Address of the Republican General Committee of Young Men of the City and County of New York* (New York: A. Ming, Jr., 1828), 41.

³⁵ *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of his Diary from 1795 to 1848*, ed. Charles Francis Adams, vol. 8 (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1969), 547.

and cultivated, are pursuing these routes, he leaves them in the distance, and reaches his object in much less time, and with not less accuracy.³⁶

As British orator William E. Gladstone articulated, the style of public speech was invariably a product of its time and determined by the needs of the listeners: “He [the orator] cannot follow nor frame ideals; his choice is to be what his age will have him, what it requires in order to be moved by him, or else not to be at all.”³⁷ The increasingly egalitarian nature of society required a democratizing of culture and rhetoric that combined elements of language and decorum both high and low, refined and rustic, elevated and vulgar: “[E]galitarianism (and thus much of popularized Jacksonianism) stated that each man had the right to be like all other men, while at the same time it tormented him with the implication that to be only a part of the masses and nothing more – to be ‘common’ – was a sure sign of weakness and complacency in a dynamic, growing republic, whose hallmark was an unprecedented rate of change.”³⁸

Kenneth Cmiel refers to the aspiring classes struggling in this dichotomy between refinement and vulgarity as a “middling culture, people who cultivated

³⁶ *New York Times*, 8 October 1834.

³⁷ *Studies on Homer and the Homeric Age*, vol. 3 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1858), 107. One can find elements of the low, vulgar, rustic, and colloquial in Jackson’s everyday conversation, but not in his formal rhetoric or messages, almost all penned by others. What was new in Jackson’s messages was his move toward a touch of melodrama – bombast of absolute purity versus absolute vice – that connected with Forrest’s roles.

³⁸ David G. Pugh, *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 25.

refinements but who were not refined.”³⁹ While simple, clear divisions between high and low were becoming ever more rare in the rhetorical culture of the mid-nineteenth century, marked social and political divisions of class and education still existed as tensions between democratic primitiveness and gentlemanly education continued to run high: “Mass democracy meant mass education; and by the 1820s, the diffusion of basic linguistic skills undermined all coherent efforts to exclude people or ‘middling culture’ from public debate. Everywhere you looked – the popular press, political oratory, courtroom forensics, and religious homiletics – the story was the same: All combined the refined and crude.”⁴⁰ Jackson was an “acceptable compromise between a stifling aristocracy and a vulgar, rabid democracy... that helped to form the modern American identity.”⁴¹

The oratory of Andrew Jackson (1767-1845) combined elements of straightforward, and often homely, harangues and more traditional political diplomacy. Although he expunged from Presidential speeches his most colloquial tone, perhaps in an effort to combat an illiterate barbarian image encouraged by his rivals, he maintained the oratorical rage of a soldier when crossed: “If a single drop of blood is shed in defiance of the laws of the United States I will hang the first man I lay hands on engaged in such treasonable conduct upon the first tree I can reach.”⁴²

³⁹ Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 58.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴¹ Pugh, *Sons of Liberty*, 27.

⁴² Quoted in Amos Kendall, *Autobiography*, ed. William Stickney (Boston: Lee and Shepard), 1872), 631. Jackson was responding to the threat of nullification.

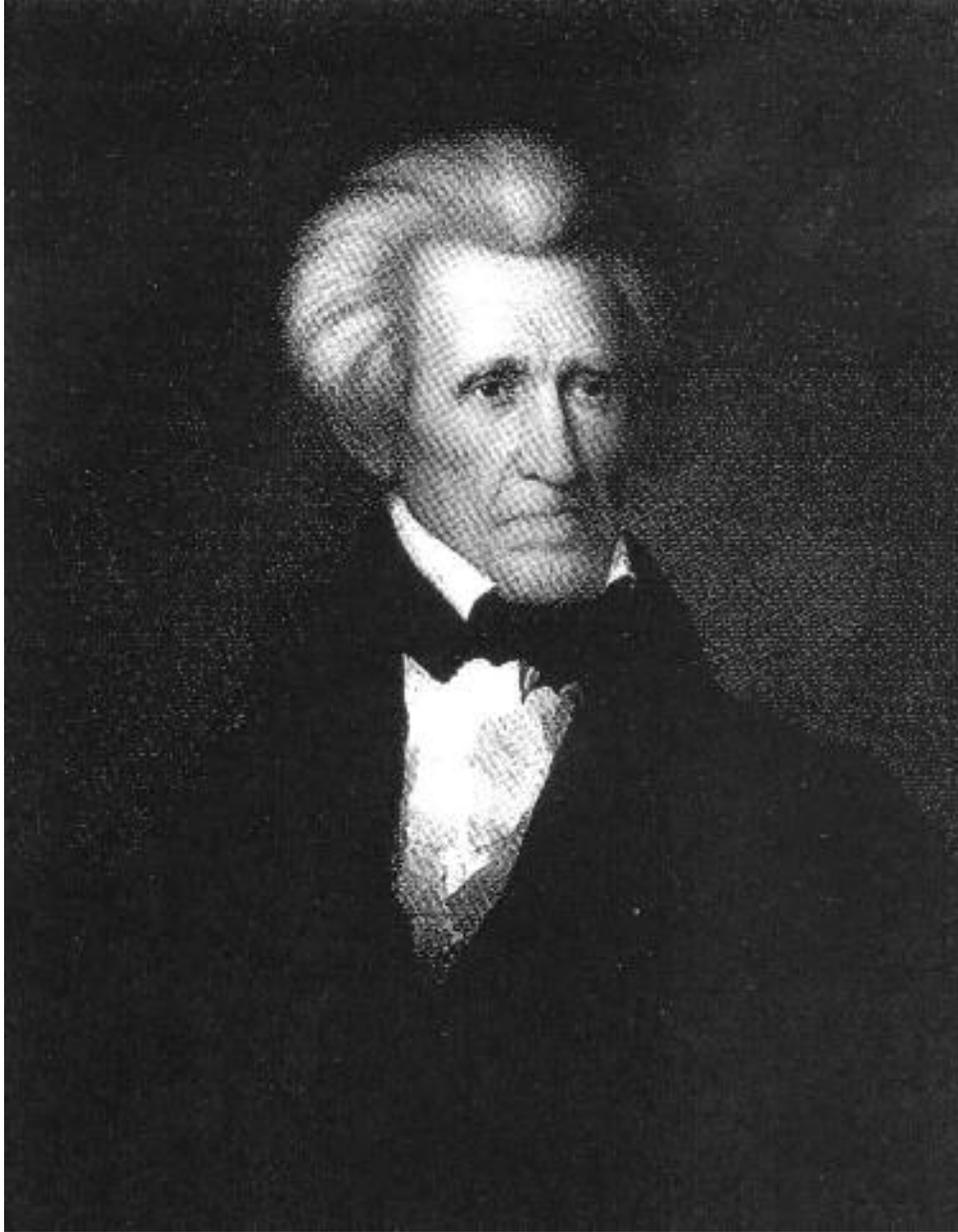


Fig. 4. Andrew Jackson.

Jackson spoke plainly, passionately, and often combatively in support of democratic freedoms.

It is to be regretted that the rich and powerful too often bend the acts of government to their selfish purposes. Distinctions in society will always exist under every just government. Equality of talents, of education, or of wealth cannot be produced by human institutions. In the full enjoyment of the gifts of Heaven and the fruits of superior industry, economy, and virtue, every man is equally entitled to protection by law; but when the laws undertake to add to these natural and just advantages artificial distinctions, to grant titles, gratuities, and exclusive privileges, to make the rich richer and the potent more powerful, the humble members of society – the farmers, mechanics, and laborers – who have neither the time nor the means of securing like favors to themselves, have a right to complain of the injustice of their government.⁴³

Jackson pledged equal access to opportunity, presenting himself as a representative champion of the interests and rights of the working-class man by curtailing preferences to the wealthy, yet simultaneously defended social and economic inequality as natural.

While Jackson's *message* was one of simplicity, his style of language was *not*. It was, in fact, very similar to that used in the Declaration of Independence. This style of speech also bears strong resemblance in rhetorical style to the Jacksonian dramas of Edwin Forrest – as in Spartacus' speech against the tyranny of the Romans:

[I]f Romans had not been fiends, Rome had never been great! Whence came this greatness, but from the miseries of subjugated nations? How many myriads of happy people... how many myriads of these were slain like the beasts of the field, that Rome might fatten upon their blood, and become *great*?... There is not a palace upon these hills that cost not the lives of a thousand innocent men; there is no deed of greatness ye can boast, but it was

⁴³ Andrew Jackson, quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Vintage, 1948), 57. Jackson is speaking of his veto of the re-chartering of the Bank of the United States in 1832.

achieved upon the ruin of a nation; there is not joy ye can feel, but its ingredients are blood and tears.⁴⁴

This oratorical style, inspired by Jackson's mixture of high and low and used effectively by the era's most powerful speakers, was adopted in both content and structure by performers and playwrights seeking to sway the same audiences: "In patriotic speeches and performances of heroic melodramas, orators and actors built their axiomatic and image-laden language into formalized arrangements of aural and visual signs. Antebellum orators strove for a cadenced flow of sound, punctuated occasionally by broad gestures and building majestically toward a climactic conclusion... By emphasizing the pattern and climactic arrangement of the verse in his plays, Forrest conformed to the conventions of oratory in Jacksonian America."⁴⁵

While Jackson's public image encouraged the idea of the President as a man of the people, his speeches were often authoritative and paternal: "[L]et me not only admonish you as the first magistrate of our common country, not to incur the penalty of its laws, but to use the influence that a father would over his children whom he saw rushing to certain ruin."⁴⁶ Note the juxtaposition of high and low in Jackson's proclamation. In this single sentence, Jackson blends elevated language with a simple, homely metaphor, deliberately illustrating the dual nature of the role he performed –

⁴⁴ Robert Montgomery Bird, *The Gladiator* (1831), in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin, 1997), 179-80.

⁴⁵ Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theater and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 112.

⁴⁶ "Antinullification proclamation, Washington, D.C., December 10, 1832," in *The Statesmanship of Andrew Jackson as Told in his Writings and Speeches*, ed. Francis Newton Thorpe (New York: Tandy-Thomas, 1909), 232-36.

both the exalted leader and the familiar father. Nowhere did Jackson more strongly fashion himself as the nation's patriarchal figure than in his dealings with the American Indians, claiming their actions, "compelled your Father the President to send his white children to chastise and subdue you, and thereby give peace to his children both red and white."⁴⁷

Jackson sought to appeal to all classes of men; his language reveals an ability to make himself accessible to a wider spectrum of the population than the Whigs.⁴⁸ Jackson was able to manipulate his persona to correspond to the values of a range of audiences, while the Whigs of the 1820s and 1830s were unable to rid themselves of the image of impersonal formality.⁴⁹ Capitalizing on overwhelming support of working-class men, the public's trust in the selflessness of his motives, and the skills he possessed in oratorical persuasion, Jackson overrode his political opponents and

⁴⁷ Andrew Jackson, quoted in Paul Michael Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Vintage, 1975), 199.

⁴⁸ James Fennimore Cooper (1789-1851) implemented a similar mixture of high and low in his *Leatherstocking Tales* [*The Pioneers* (1823), *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), *The Prairie* (1827), *The Pathfinder* (1840), and *The Deerslayer* (1841)]. Natty Bumppo's speech combines high and low language, yet every chapter begins with a quotation from an "elevated" source (Shakespeare, the Bible, Sir Walter Scott, as well as comparatively obscure poets like William Somerville), suggesting a simultaneous accessibility to multiple audiences.

⁴⁹ The cool logic of Adams' oratory compared to the colloquial passion of Jackson is reminiscent of the speeches of Brutus and Anthony over Caesar's body in *Julius Caesar*. The first is the epitome of rational, intellectual reasoning and the other is the epitome of human compassion. In both cases, the stronger emotional connection to the masses dictates victory.

successfully pushed through his agenda, “creating a public confederation of support.”⁵⁰

The mythical proportions of Jackson’s character and the public perception of his life and accomplishments enhanced his appeal across social and economic class boundaries:

[O]ften determined by his ability to maintain a delicate blend of westerner and aristocrat... [B]ecause he was far more than a country bumpkin, Jackson did not alienate all but the farmer and the frontiersman, and the fact that he was many things to many people goes some way toward explaining the massive appeal of the mystique in 1828. At various times an aristocrat and egalitarian, rich and poor, friend of the small farmer and land speculator, he could approach public concerns from several points of view.⁵¹

Jackson’s presence and charisma, and the extent to which many of the lower and middle classes identified with him, provided a salve to their insecurities and a personification of their wished-for strength, bravery, frontier independence, and fierce nationalism.

While Jackson did not necessarily conform to the “rules” for oratory like Adams, he was able to create a very distinct style – one that ultimately made him both impossible to challenge and impossible to copy.⁵² Adams, Clay, Calhoun, and Webster, on the other hand, successfully and compellingly embodied the classical

⁵⁰ Thomas M. Lessl, “Andrew Jackson,” in *American Orators Before 1900: Critical Studies and Sources*, ed. Bernard K. Duffy and Halford R. Ryan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), 242.

⁵¹ David G. Pugh, *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth Century America* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 30-31.

⁵² Edwin Forrest’s career was marked by a similar personal uniqueness that was often imitated but rarely with complete success. Rival actors could ape superficial physical and vocal traits but were unable to duplicate the intangible fire that attracted the public’s passionate devotion. I expand on this discussion in Chapters Two and Three.

rules, and through the power of their speech and personalities, elevated the practice to an art form.

Competing Masculinities of the “Great Triumvirate”

The “Great Triumvirate” of Henry Clay, Daniel Webster, and John C. Calhoun dominated political oratory between 1812 and 1852. Each passionately – and unsuccessfully – campaigned for the Presidency and was charged with political self-interest by detractors.⁵³ Although all three joined forces against the perceived tyrannies of Andrew Jackson, the triumvirate actually represented a broad range of rhetorical styles, which shifted according to their strengths, personal desires, and regional demands, and employed differing methods of achieving their goals: “Calhoun could surpass Webster in subtlety and firmness of logical concatenation; Clay could always surpass either of them in attractive delivery and popular appeal. Webster’s

⁵³ Clay, Webster, and Calhoun were party leaders responsible for developing policies and articulating positions on major issues. All three ardently campaigned for their respective party’s support and nomination for over twenty years and were subsequently charged with political self-interest by detractors – although this was a fairly standard charge. Calhoun was an early Presidential contender in 1824 and was elected Vice-President (he was also elected Vice-President to Jackson in 1828). Clay was also a nominee in the 1824 election, and charges of the “corrupt bargain” with Adams hurt Clay’s future presidential hopes, who also lost to Jackson in 1832. Webster was one of a trio of Whig candidates to lose to Van Buren in 1836. Clay narrowly lost to Polk in 1844. It is interesting to note that, for all three figures, their lives and careers were driven by a burning ambition at odds with a sincere self-doubt. The self-made man’s life appears to have been marked by a consuming drive to excel through fear of failure, and an often arrogant, ambitious confidence that masked profound insecurity. An egalitarian society promised equal opportunities for all and suggested that desire and perseverance will guarantee success. Frustrations over the inequality of actual experience often stood at the root of the conflicted self, as well as feeding the emerging and growing class tensions.

superiority lay in comprehensiveness and strength of intellect and... imagination.”⁵⁴

While eloquently articulating devotion to the Union and fighting to avert the approaching devastation of civil conflict, each was inextricably linked with the region they embodied and so ardently championed: Calhoun with the South, Webster with New England and the East, and Clay with the West. The Compromise of 1850 marked the disappointing end of their brilliant careers.

“The Great Nullifier,” John C. Calhoun (1782-1850), exuded an aristocratic air and frequently was accused of cold logic and metaphysical reasoning, which he used rationally to arrange facts in such a way as to make indisputable conclusions:

[T]hat power which reduces the most complex idea into its elements, which traces causes to their first principle, and, by the power of generalization and combination, unites the whole in one harmonious system - ... it is the highest attribute of the human mind. It is the power which raises man above the brute.⁵⁵

While skilled as a logician, Calhoun also exhibited a passionate defense of the South, as in his response to the “Force Bill” providing a “measure of peace” to the sectional crisis of 1833:

Yes, such a peace as the wolf gives to the lamb – the kite to the dove! Such peace as Russia gives to Poland, or death to its victim!... It is to South Carolina a question of self-preservation; and I proclaim it that should this bill pass, and an attempt be made to enforce it, it will be resisted at every hazard – even that of death itself. Death is not the greatest calamity: there are others still more

⁵⁴ Wilbur Samuel Howell and Hoyt Hopewell Hudson, “Daniel Webster,” in *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, vol. 2, ed. William Norwood Brigance (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1943), 677.

⁵⁵ Quoted in John S. Jenkins, *The Life of John Caldwell Calhoun* (Auburn: James Alden, 1858), 277. Calhoun’s use of abstract logic was thought to alienate much of the general public.



Fig. 5. John C. Calhoun.

terrible to the free and the brave, among which may be placed the loss of liberty and honour.⁵⁶

Calhoun skillfully equated states' rights with protecting the democratic freedoms of the individual. Charges of cool detachment, an audience awareness of craft, and affecting moments of passion paralleled popular and critical responses to many popular actors of the "classical" school (including Murdoch, Davenport, and Barrett) to be discussed in Chapter Three and bore striking resemblance to comments of both fans and foes of William Charles Macready, which will be detailed in Chapter Four.

Calhoun fought a losing battle in his major causes: the defense of slavery and the rights of the South:

I am no panegyrist of slavery. It is an unnatural state, a dark cloud which obscures half the luster of our free institutions. But... would it be fair, would it be manly, would it be generous, would it be just, to offer contumely and contempt to the unfortunate man who wears a cancer in his bosom because he will not submit to cautery at the hazard of his existence?⁵⁷

Calhoun's Hamlet-like reasoning cleverly and persuasively defended the South's interests through calls for nullification and secession: "If he could but talk with every man, he would have the whole United States on his side."⁵⁸ He framed the sectional crisis as an issue of a minority having the right to co-exist independent of a majority's

⁵⁶ Quoted in Arthur Styron, *The Cast Iron Man: John C. Calhoun and American Democracy* (New York: Longmans, Green, 1935), 199-200. The "Force Bill" was designed to allow the use of troops to enforce tariffs in the South

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁵⁸ John Wentworth, *Congressional Reminiscences: Adams, Benton, Calhoun, Clay, and Webster* (Chicago: Fergus Printing, 1882), 35. Wentworth was an abolitionist congressman.

will: “The Union, next to our liberty the most dear.”⁵⁹ Reacting against the “Union first” mentality of the North, Calhoun’s emphasis of individual freedom consciously capitalized on the strengthening shift from communal to self-*made* manhood.

“[T]all, careworn, with furrowed brow, haggard and intensely gazing, looking as if he were dissecting the last abstraction which sprung from metaphysician’s brain,” the austere passion of the era’s most skilled logician helped postpone the inevitable, violent conflict between the states.⁶⁰ But perceptions of his cold logic and imposing figure often intimidated (especially in his ultimately hopeless defense of slavery) rather than inspired, doing little to encourage a sympathetic or emotional bond with his audience.

The magnetic personality of Henry Clay (1777-1852) embodied the spirit of Whig tradition, as evinced in his powers of persuasion even over Jacksonians: “I am willing to do my duty when I can, but I’m damned if I can listen to Henry Clay speak and believe he is wrong.”⁶¹ His conservatism and moderation frequently operated as a peace-keeper between various political, economic, social, and sectional tensions:

⁵⁹ Calhoun to Andrew Jackson (1830), quoted in Warren Choate Shaw, *History of American Oratory* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979), 179.

⁶⁰ Henry Clay speaking of Calhoun, quoted in Hofstadter, *American Political Tradition*, 74. Clay mocked Calhoun in 1838 in the debate over the Bank, although this description matches contemporary perceptions. This description of Calhoun sounds much like Hamlet, and it would be intriguing to look at Calhoun as a tragic figure who sacrificed his personal ambitions on the political stage for his country’s (the South’s) cause on the national one. On one level, this description of Calhoun as a harried, real-life tragedian sounds a little like later portrayals of Edwin Booth to be discussed in Chapter Five.

⁶¹ Joseph M. Rogers, *The True Henry Clay* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1905), 286. A Jacksonian Democrat justified his reason for being absent from the House except when votes were taken.

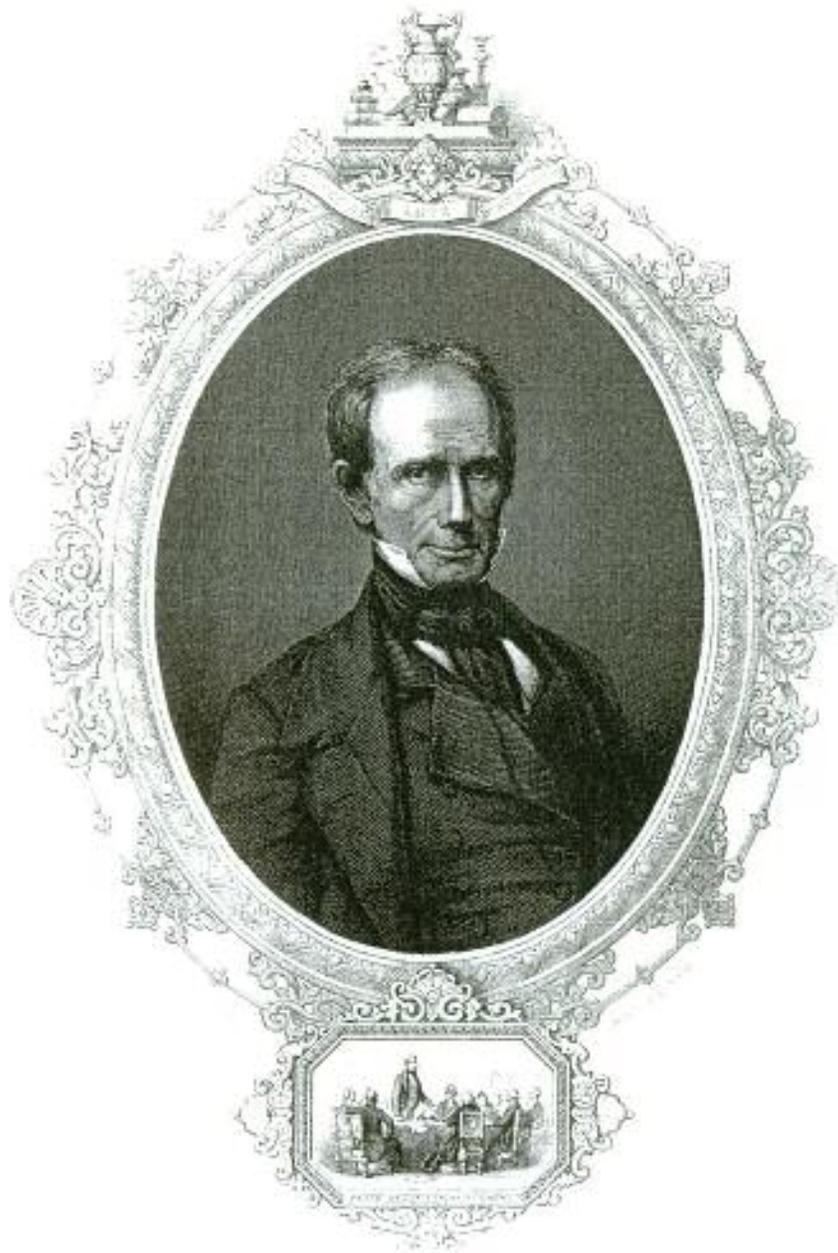


Fig. 6. Henry Clay. The smaller picture underneath the portrait reads, "Peace Negotiations at Ghent," highlighting Clay's identity as a peacekeeper.

I go for honorable compromise whenever it can be made. Life itself is but a compromise between death and life, the struggle continuing throughout our whole existence, until the great destroyer finally triumphs. All legislation, all government, all society is founded upon the principle of mutual concession, politeness, comity, courtesy; upon these everything is based. I bow to you today because you bow to me. Let him who elevates himself above humanity, above its weaknesses, its infirmities, its wants, its necessities, say, if he pleases, I never will compromise, but let no one who is not above the frailties of our common nature disdain compromise.”⁶²

Clay coined the term self-made man in 1832: “[A]lmost every manufactory known to me is in the hands of enterprising, self-made men, who have whatever wealth they possess by patient and diligent labor.”⁶³

Clay was praised often by both North and South as an exemplar of fervent nationalism and selfless patriotic virtue: “[I]f we desire to know the truth, to be taught the right to be kept from delusion, to be set in the way in which we ought to walk for our country’s good, and to be supported in the noble race, then Henry Clay is the true guide.”⁶⁴ A pragmatic speaker who lacked substantial formal education, Clay was tall, thin, and “not handsome,” yet he comported himself like a well-bred gentleman and enjoyed great power of oratorical persuasion: “[I]t is to this practice of the art of all

⁶² *The Works of Henry Clay*, ed. Calvin Colton, vol. 6 (New York: Henry Club Publishing, 1897), 412.

⁶³ Quoted in Irvin G. Wyllie, *The Self Made Man in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1954), 10. Clay was speaking to the Senate, defending a protective tariff. Clay defined “self-made” manhood primarily in terms of the right to hold property, rather than social mobility.

⁶⁴ George D. Prentice, *Journal* [Louisville], n.d., quoted in *Niles’ Weekly Register* 73, 11 September 1847. Clay was held in great affection by a majority of his listeners, yet there was also an underlying suspicion that he was motivated by political self-interest.

arts [eloquence] that I am indebted for the primary and leading impulses that stimulated my progress and have shaped and moulded my destiny.”⁶⁵

Although detractors accused him of political opportunism, he was willing (or at least willing to threaten) to sacrifice his reputation in defense of the Union:

While we would vindicate the federal government, we are for peace, if possible, the Union and liberty. We want no war, above all, no civil war, no family strife. We want to see no sacked cities, no desolated fields, no smoking ruins, no streams of American blood shed by American arms... I have been accused of ambition in presenting this measure. Ambition! Inordinate Ambition!... Low, groveling souls, who are utterly incapable of elevating themselves to the higher and nobler duties of pure patriotism – beings who, forever keeping their own selfish aims in view, decide all public measures by their presumed influence or their aggrandisement – judge me by the venal rule which they prescribe to themselves... Pass this bill, tranquilize the country, restore confidence and affection in the Union, and I am willing to go home to Ashland and renounce public service forever.⁶⁶

Clay was generally well liked, but his perceived hypocrisy and reluctance irrevocably to commit to any issue ultimately provided an improper model of masculine behavior. He inspired affection but never awe or unqualified respect: “[T]here were thousands who voted against Clay on grounds of his moral delinquency.”⁶⁷

Clay’s gentility, courtesy, and efforts not to offend are reminiscent of qualities shared with Edwin Booth. But the strength of Clay’s magnetic personality, his lack of

⁶⁵ Henry Clay, quoted in Charles H. Peck, *The Jacksonian Epoch* (New York: Harper, 1899), 17.

⁶⁶ *Works of Henry Clay*, vol. 7, 566-67. Clay spoke in 1833 on eliminating a tariff on South Carolina before Jackson sent troops in to enforce it. Fortunately for Clay, no one “called his bluff” and demanded that Clay fulfill his promise, in the heat of the moment, to leave office when the bill passed

⁶⁷ Ernest J. Wrage, “Henry Clay,” in *History and Criticism of American Public Address*, vol.2, 612. Clay was charged – not without foundation – of gambling, womanizing, and intemperance. Also his participation in the “corrupt bargain” that brought Adams to office forever stigmatized him as a political opportunist.

formal training, his need for public adulation, and his reputation for excessive self-indulgence bear striking similarity to the self-destructive extremes of “romantic” stars (including A. A. Addams and John Wilkes Booth) to be discussed in Chapter Three - although Clay’s conciliatory nature allowed him to enjoy a much longer life in front of a generally favorable public eye.

Daniel Webster (1782-1852), “the greatest of American orators,” was often described as ponderous and accused of oligarchic motives.⁶⁸ His oratorical style, however, was noted for its simplicity, clarity, noble sentiment, and skillful use of repetition, as shown here in a debate with Calhoun:

Secession as a revolutionary right, is intelligible; as a right to be proclaimed in the midst of civil commotions, and asserted at the head of armies, I can understand it. But as a practical right, existing under the Constitution, and in conformity with its provisions, it seems to me nothing but a plain absurdity; for it supposes resistance to government, under the authority of government itself; it supposes dismemberment, without violating the principles of union; it supposes opposition to law, without crime; it supposes the total overthrow of government without revolution.⁶⁹

This calculated use of repetition in oratorical persuasion finds a dramatic parallel in Mark Anthony’s speech (“Brutus is an honorable man”) over Caesar’s body.

Webster’s great speeches were constructed with an eye toward posterity:

True eloquence, indeed, does not consist in speech... It must exist in the man, in the subject, and in the occasion... It comes, if it comes at all, like the outbreaking of a fountain from the earth, or the bursting forth of volcanic fires, with spontaneous, original, native force... The clear conception, out running

⁶⁸ Shaw, *History of American Oratory*, 119. Shaw’s praise of Webster is not given justification ample enough to warrant the level of effusiveness: his “fame rivals that of Demosthenes, of Cicero, of Chrysostom, of Bossuet, of Chatham, and of Burke, the most brilliant speakers of all ages in the world’s history” (119).

⁶⁹ *The Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, vol. 6 (Boston: Little, Brown, 1903), 211.

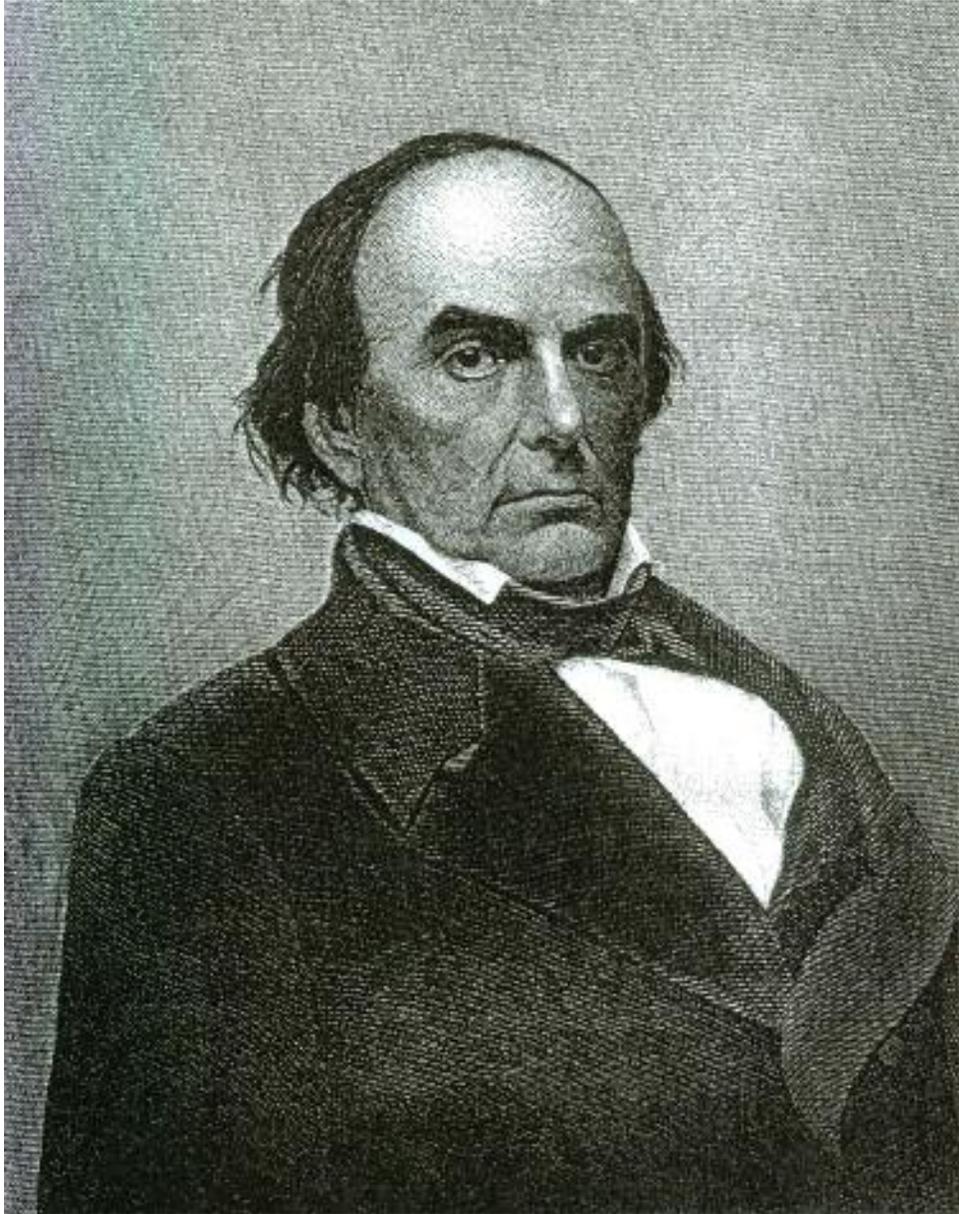


Fig. 7. Daniel Webster.

the deductions of logic, the high purpose, the firm resolve, the dauntless spirit, speaking on the tongue, beaming from the eye, informing every feature, and urging the whole man *onward*, right ONWARD to his object, - this, this is ELOQUENCE; or rather it is something greater and higher than eloquence – it is ACTION – NOBLE, SUBLIME, GODLIKE ACTION.⁷⁰

Webster’s description of masculine eloquence suggested the appearance of spontaneity rather than planning was the key to successful oratorical persuasion: “Webster was...an orator whose skills exemplified all that was technically expert and intellectually and morally admirable.”⁷¹

This idea of calculated spontaneity in the style of speaking in vogue in the period corresponds to our perceptions of the great actors performing in America in the first half of the nineteenth century – George Frederick Cooke, Edmund Kean, Junius Brutus Booth, and Forrest.⁷² The imposing magnitude of Webster’s physical and vocal presence actually suggests comparison to Edwin Forrest. In fact, as a practical

⁷⁰ “Webster’s *Description of the Eloquence of John Adams From His Eulogy of Adams and Jefferson, August 2, 1826*, quoted in Shaw, *History of American Oratory*, 134-35. As Emerson states, the speech of an orator “is not to be distinguished from action. It is the electricity of action. It is action, as the general’s word of command or chart of battle is action” (Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Complete Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, vol. 7 [Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1903-4], 115). Webster’s oratory could be disappointing if the subject or occasion did not fully arouse his interest and passion.

⁷¹ Johnson, *Rhetoric in North America*, 270.

⁷² Webster, in a manner similar to actors of the period, even suggested a direct observation of life as inspiration for oratorical performance: “Their minds [those of intelligent men], in conversation, come into intimate contact with my own mind; and I absorb certain secrets of their power, whatever may be its quality, which I could not have detected in their works. Converse, *converse*, CONVERSE with living men, face to face, and mind to mind – that is one of the best sources of knowledge” (Quoted in Edwin P. Whipple, *The Great Speeches and Orations of Daniel Webster* [Boston: Little, Brown, 1897], xxv).

model of masculine performance, Webster, more closely than Jackson, matches Forrest.

Webster's style of performance – and his oratory was certainly as detailed and calculated a theatrical presentation as any of these great actors – was not based on spontaneous improvisation, but all of these skilled public figures could exude the passionate air of immediate, creative genius: “I know to whom I am speaking. I know for whom I am speaking... I know where I am, under what responsibility I speak, and before whom I appear.”⁷³ Through oratorical calculation, Webster could suit the speech to meet the expectations of his specific audience. His masculine performance was based on the *illusion* of responding instantly to the unimpeded, honest promptings of the heart rather than the cool, detached shrewdness of the brain.

Referred to as “the godlike Daniel,” Webster possessed a deep, unaffected voice:

[W]ith no impression but the unencumbered profoundness of its truth..., as monotonous as thunder – but it is because thunder has no need to be more varied and musical, that Webster leaves the roll of his bass unplayed upon by the lightning that outstrips it.⁷⁴

Again, emphasis was placed and praise was heaped on the natural gifts of the performer and the uncalculated impact upon his auditors. “Unencumbered profoundness” suggests an innate sense of truth and an artless sincerity. Described as large and imposing, with broad shoulders, a massive brow, and dark, deep-sunken

⁷³ *Writings and Speeches of Daniel Webster*, vol. 4, 243.

⁷⁴ Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Hurry- graphs: or, Sketches of Scenery, Celebrities and Society, Taken from Life* (Auburn: Alden, Beardsley, 1853), 191.

eyes, “Webster was an awesome sight to look upon, a magnificent human being.”⁷⁵

Webster used the forcefulness of his presence, his substantial oratorical skills, and his political influence in passionate defense of the Constitution and the prevention of civil war: “And now, Mr. President, instead of speaking of the possibility or utility of secession, instead of dwelling in those caverns of darkness, instead of groping with those ideas so full of all that is horrid and horrible, let us come out into the light of day; let us enjoy the fresh air of Liberty and Union.”⁷⁶

Although all three of the Great Triumvirate swayed their individual, regional audiences, each failed to reach the presidency he so ardently sought. By the middle of the nineteenth century, success in America meant a flexibility of image to meet the varied demands of the full spectrum of a democratic public and the “increasing permeability of a once rigid social structure.”⁷⁷ This need for fluid masculine images to meet the needs and expectations of diverging audiences also prompted a proliferation of acting styles. By 1850, Forrest was forced to share the stage with a wide range of imitators and rivals (as did Clay, Webster, and Calhoun). During a period in which personality frequently reigned over principle, these three spokesmen for their respective territories were unable fully to adapt to the country’s varied

⁷⁵ Edgar Dewitt Jones, *Lords of Speech: Portraits of Fifteen American Orators* (Chicago: Willett, Clark, and Company, 1937), 38. Jones makes an interesting claim (without citation or documentation): “Next to that of Cuvier, the naturalist, Webster’s brain was the largest ever known” (37).

⁷⁶ Quoted in *Great Debates in American History*, ed. Marion M. Miller, vol. 4 (New York: Current Literature Publishing, 1913), 219. Webster was speaking in defense of the Fugitive Slave Act in order to prevent war in 1850.

⁷⁷ Brigance, *American Public Address*, II:606.

concerns and were unable to gather the range of political and popular support needed to achieve their ultimate goal. The failure of all three persuasive orators to win the trust and approval of the entire country suggests that no single masculine model could fully embody the divergent expectations of a nation increasingly fragmented along sectional, social, economic, and political lines.

Lincoln: An Unlikely Masculine Model

Following the Compromise of 1850, issues related to the “peculiar institution” dominated the political stage, and the sectional positions on slavery and secession had become so polarized, that oratorical powers alone were insufficient to affect change.⁷⁸ The magnitude of the issues dwarfed the personalities and rhetorical powers of the speakers. Between the administrations of Jackson and Lincoln, no American president made a lasting rhetorical impression: “In fact, during what is generally accepted as America’s ‘Golden Age of Oratory’ from the 1830s to the Civil War, one remembers for their oratory Senators Daniel Webster, Henry Clay, Thomas Hart Benton, and John C. Calhoun, but no U.S. president, save John Quincy Adams, Andrew Jackson, and Abraham Lincoln, comes to mind for oratorical prominence.”⁷⁹ Each of the other presidents suffered from a perceived deficiency in passionate charisma or forcefulness

⁷⁸ Space does not allow an exploration into the rhetorical impact of such potent political speakers as Thomas Hart Benton, Stephen Douglas, Jefferson Davis, Wendell Phillips, Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Martin Delany, and Charles Sumner, among others. Further study on this topic might explore the impact of Douglas and Davis on Civil War and post-Civil War notions of Southern masculinity, for example.

⁷⁹ Ryan, *U.S. Presidents as Orators* xiv.

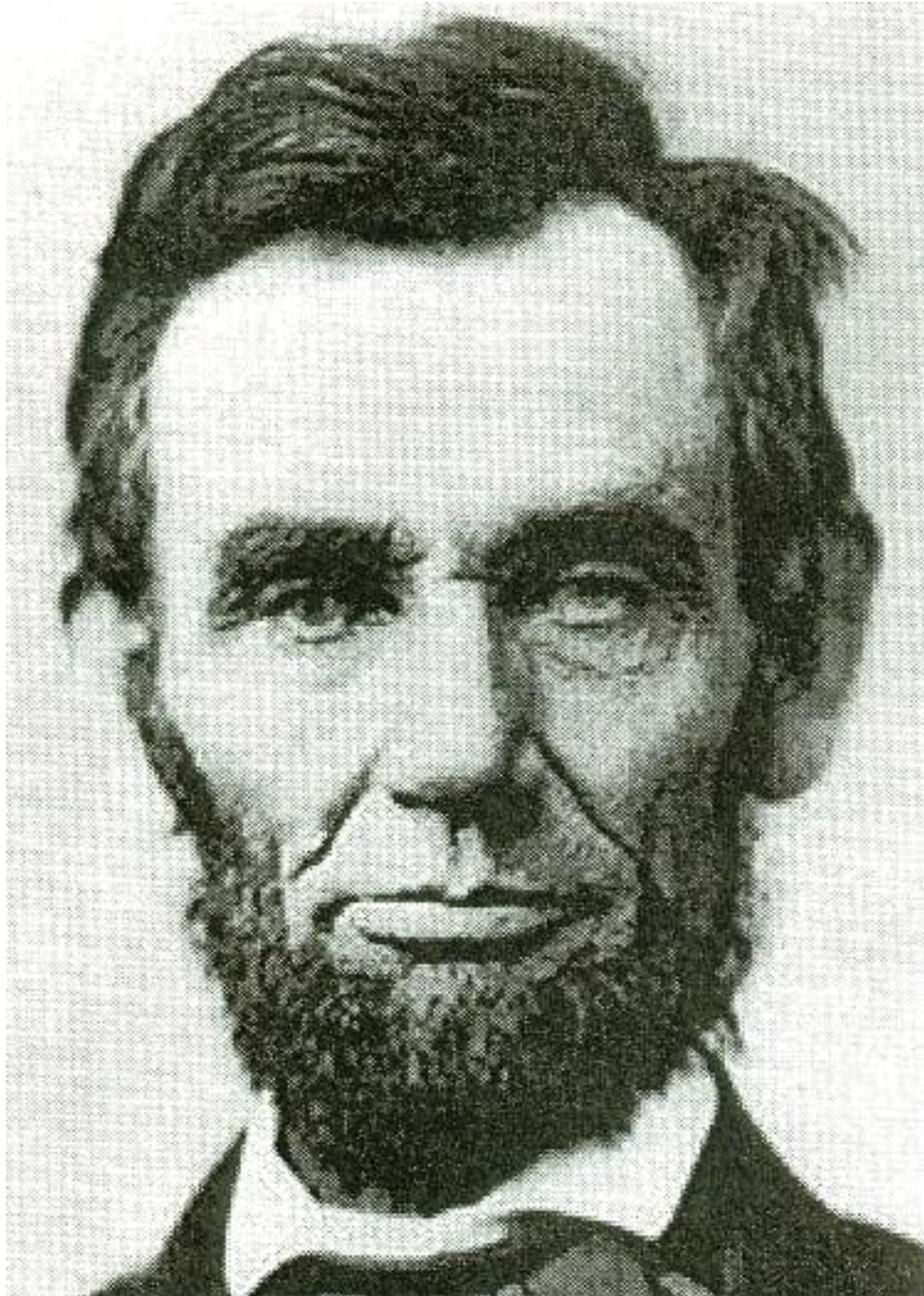


Fig. 8. Abraham Lincoln.

of character required to overcome the country's misgivings and divisiveness. Van Buren, Harrison, Tyler, Polk, Taylor, Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan lacked the words to assuage the country's agitation and were often compelled to seek a middle ground that would salve the burning social and political issues and avert disunion. By the 1860s, as in the election of 1828, the country had reached an impasse that words alone could not overcome.

After the thrills of Jackson and even Adams, such a swing towards the "pedestrian" or the ordinary may seem puzzling. I would suggest that after Jackson we see a *fear* of charisma. There is some safety in the *unexciting* – especially in a nation that was already on the verge of imploding. Did these candidates, like some actors to be discussed in Chapter Three (such as John McCullough), successfully embody a *non-threatening* masculinity that was morally upright without being challenging, revolutionary, or confrontational?

Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865) was not considered a skillful orator by contemporary American critics, and many of the speeches now most noted were not deemed brilliant by rhetoricians, newsmen, or the general populace until praised by foreign presses.⁸⁰ Lacking the "elocutionary perfection" and oratorical flourishes of

⁸⁰ Neither Lincoln's Gettysburg Address or the Second Inaugural Address received much attention from the American press and public. British critics (who, it must be remembered, were generally in favor of the Civil War), however, lavishly praised both speeches, calling the Gettysburg Address "an address without a parallel since the eulogy by Pericles on the heroic dead of the Peloponnesian War" (*Edinburgh Review*, quoted in *History of American Oratory*, [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979], II:398). Lincoln's national fame as an orator was not secured until after his death. The efficacy of his pre-presidential speeches was far more immediate and pronounced; they were designed to persuade and prompt a specific action. His presidential

the era's great speakers, Lincoln's vocal delivery was marked by a high and often unpleasant tone - described as "fife and shrill."⁸¹ His figure, unusually tall, thin, and awkward, was hardly prepossessing:

On his head he wore a somewhat battered "stovepipe" hat. His neck emerged, long and sinewy, from a white collar turned down over a thin black necktie. His lank, ungainly body was clad in a rusty black dress coat with sleeves that should have been longer... His black trousers, too, permitted a very full view of his large feet... I had seen, in Washington and in the West, several public men of rough appearance; but none whose looks seemed quite so uncouth, not to say grotesque, as Lincoln's.⁸²

The *Amboy Times* described him as "crooked-legged, stoop-shouldered, square-built, and anything but handsome in the face... It is plain that nature took but little trouble in fashioning his outer man, but a gem may be encased in a rude casket."⁸³

In the Illinois Senatorial debates with Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln appeared to encourage and cultivate this "grotesque" performance in order to heighten the sharp contrast with his more aristocratic opponent and to enhance his ties to the common people. As early as 1839, a Democratic paper accused Lincoln of intentionally cultivating a ridiculous image:

Mr. Lincoln... has, however, a sort of *assumed clownishness* in his manner which does not become him. It is *assumed* – assumed for effect. Mr. L will sometimes make his language correspond with this *clownish* manner, and he can thus frequently raise a loud laugh among his Whig hearers; but this entire

addresses were far more literary and likely were composed and delivered with an eye toward posterity.

⁸¹ *Boston Daily Journal*, 29 February 1860.

⁸² Carl Schurz, *Reminiscences of Carl Schurz* (New York: McClure, 1909), II:90. Schurz's description was based on his recollection of Lincoln during the Douglas debates in 1858.

⁸³ 24 July 1856.

game of buffoonery convinces the mind of no man, and is utterly lost on the majority of his audience.⁸⁴

At a Republican rally in 1860, Lincoln was still called “a unique specimen of the human family... – long, lank and awkward...the real Yankee... These oddities and peculiarities which would seem to detract from the efficiency of an orator all go to gain the sympathy of his hearers.”⁸⁵ The comparison of Lincoln to the true “Yankee” invites a comparison with the socially awkward Jonathan character, a dramatic fixture on the American stage, who similarly speaks plainly and has no idea what to do with his hands and feet. Even in his bid for reelection in 1864, the *Comic Monthly* derided his awkwardness: “His anatomy is composed mostly of notes, and when walking he resembles the off-spring of a happy marriage between a derrick and wind-mill... His hands and feet are plenty large enough and in society he has the air of having too many of them.”⁸⁶ Yet Lincoln’s humor was never naïve or foolish, but a sharp device undercutting his opponents’ – and audiences’ – prejudices.

Although self-educated and of humble beginnings, Lincoln was a powerful storyteller, stump speaker, and courtroom lawyer:

⁸⁴ *Illinois State Register*, 23 November 1839. This remark was not typical. While Lincoln’s image was frequently mocked, his sincerity was generally acknowledged. The fact that the Whigs in the audience were responding to Lincoln’s “assumed clownishness” may suggest that he was playing the foolish democrat (making fun of the other party) and that only the Whigs were getting the joke.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Elwin L. Page, *Abraham Lincoln in New Hampshire* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1929), 39.

⁸⁶ Reprinted in Mildred Freburg Berry, “Abraham Lincoln: His Development in the Skills of the Platform,” in *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, ed. W. Norwood Brigance, vol. 2 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1943), 829.

He is the statesman whose tenacity, forbearance, and legal wisdom held the Union together through and beyond the Civil War. And he is the man whose life experience between 1809 and 1865 was a rise from the earthiness of poverty and obscurity on the frontier to the heights of political power and transcendental understanding.⁸⁷

He was an influential Illinois Whig, until that party dissolved due to sectional tensions and divisions, and was an important figure in the fledgling Republican Party.

Early in his national visibility, Lincoln set himself against slavery and argued the incompatibility of slavery and democracy: “‘A house divided against itself cannot stand.’ I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other.”⁸⁸ In dealing with such an inflammatory subject, Lincoln sought a quality that was simple and logical but also resolute.

In his first inaugural address, Lincoln found a tone of conciliation that attempted to absolve the men of the South from responsibility for what seemed like the impending conflict, placing the blame on events and institutions rather than on individuals:

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Albert Furtwangler, *Assassin on Stage: Brutus, Hamlet, and the Death of Lincoln* (Urban: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 75.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Shaw, *History of American Oratory*, 383.

Contrasting this speech to Clay's speech on compromise quoted earlier, Lincoln's straightforward brevity combined with an affecting plea communicated a similar message, but Lincoln more clearly appealed to both logic and emotion. Lincoln's speeches were noted for their simplicity and poetry, idealism and humility, folksy humor and compelling argument:

[A] statesman who feels profoundly that his people are sound at heart, and will assuredly one day do full justice... Mr. Lincoln incessantly appealed to the consciences of his audience, to all that part of human nature which is kindly, which is just, which is noble.⁹⁰

Lincoln, far more than Clay, eschewed the most obvious and theatrical rhetorical pyrotechnics in favor of a simplicity and earnestness that more profoundly affected his audience. This sense of communicating honest sincerity, while internalizing seething passions, corresponded to the change in acting style from Forrest to Booth to be discussed later.

Despite his physical awkwardness, Lincoln possessed extraordinary powers of persuasion over the working classes because he frequently was identified as emerging from humble beginnings, furnishing the urban worker with an illusory connection to

⁸⁹ Quoted in John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, vol. 3 (New York: Century Company, 1890), 343. These authors present an earlier draft of this conclusion written by William H. Seward that illustrates Lincoln's efforts to simplify language, while retaining poetic elements [327-44].

⁹⁰ Harriet Beecher Stowe, *The Life and Deeds of our Self-Made Men*, revised and edited by Rev. Charles E. Stowe (Boston: Estes and Lauriat, 1889), 43, 44. The worshipful praise of Lincoln's abilities and persona perhaps are best illustrated by Warren Choate Shaw, who described an oratorical magnetism "that led captive rich and poor, learned and unlearned, in a way that challenges comparison with the preaching of Christ in the parables or in the *Sermon on the Mount*" [*History of American Oratory*, vol. 2, 376].

his frontier-pioneer “roots.” He provided a living example of self-made success - without the trappings of wealth or position - purely propelled by hard work and native wisdom: “He may not have been, and perhaps was not, our most perfect product in any one branch of mental or moral education, but taking him for all in all, the very noblest impulses, peculiarities and aspirations of our whole people – what may be called our continental idiosyncracies – were more collectively and vividly reproduced in his genial and yet answering nature than in that of any other public man of whom our chronicles bear record.”⁹¹

Throughout his life, Lincoln at least outwardly retained the image and behavior of a simple, honest, country man – unspoiled by success. “Honest Abe” was sympathetic and empathetic to the nation’s concerns, experiences, and aspirations, and in his martyred death he was lionized as a saint of liberty:

Four years ago, oh Illinois, we [the nation] took from your midst an untried man, and from among the people. We return him to you a mighty conqueror. Not thine any more, but the Nation’s; not ours, but the World’s... Ye people, behold a martyr whose blood, as so many articulate words, pleads for fidelity, for law, for liberty.⁹²

Henry Ward Beecher suggests that Lincoln was selected almost arbitrarily. He rose to greatness because the country required greatness, and Beecher’s speech tacitly

⁹¹ *New York Herald*, 17 September 1865. “Taking him for all in all” is borrowed from Hamlet’s reminiscences on his late father: “He was a man, take him for all in all, I shall not look upon his like again.” Obviously this remembrance of Lincoln was colored by his recent assassination.

⁹² Henry Ward Beecher, “Memorial Sermon on Abraham Lincoln – April 23, 1865,” in *History of American Oratory*, edited by Warren Choate Shaw (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1979), II:440. Lincoln was not well-known nationally until campaigning began for the election of 1860. Supporters began referring to him then as “Rail Splitter” and “Honest Abe,” presenting him as a simple laborer that would appeal to the growing population (and increasing votes) of the West.

intimates that any man capable of sacrifice and devotion could attain the same heights of masculine greatness:

It was the distinction of Lincoln – a man lacking in much of the knowledge which statesmen are supposed to possess, and capable of blundering and hesitation about details – first, that upon [constitutional] questions like these he was free from ambiguity of thought or faltering of will, and further, that upon his difficult path, amid bewildering and terrifying circumstances, he was able to take with him the minds of very many very ordinary men.⁹³

Book-ending this political period, Jackson and Lincoln were strongly connected to the needs of the American people, and arguably no other presidents of the nineteenth century established stronger or more intimate connections with the common man.⁹⁴ Both ultimately were constructions of their respective periods, answering the fearful calls of desperate nations. Jackson provided the country with a mythic hero, although not universally admired, and with security and a sense of direction as it foundered in search of national identity, reclaiming the egalitarian freedom idealistically suggested by the Founding Fathers. Lincoln was firm but

⁹³ Lord Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Holt, 1916), 121. Charnwood, a British biographer, attempted a balanced view of Lincoln and the Civil War from a constitutional standpoint.

⁹⁴ It is interesting to note that of the twenty-one speakers covered in *U.S. Presidents as Orators*, only five (Jefferson, Madison, Adams, Jackson, and Lincoln) of the nineteenth century were chosen, and it is not until the dawn of the twentieth century, with the popular appeal of Theodore Roosevelt, that another president is deemed worthy of recognition. Jackson was something of a political and cultural aberration, out of place in a formerly exclusive presidential line of elevated and distinguished statesmen, and his success inspired several candidates and presidents who copied Jackson's masculine template. From the mid-1840s through the 1850s, however, with candidates like Polk and Pierce, it was often the conservative and safe political figure that was propelled into the presidency as the country studiously avoided conflict over the slavery question. Because these statesmen likely felt the need to avoid controversy, they may have diluted, either consciously or not, the power and passion of their rhetoric.

humane in leading the nation through the devastation of the Civil War. In his “theology of agony,” he ultimately provided the nation with a selfless martyr, sacrificed in atonement for slavery’s (and the nation’s) offences against God and man.⁹⁵

Jackson ruled forcefully, fiercely championing state and individual rights. Lincoln led through compassion, sensitive to the insecurity of the fractured country. Rather than attempting to assert authority over the country as Jackson had done, a role for which Lincoln was temperamentally unsuited and hardly in a position to fulfill, he exuded a comparatively sympathetic and empathetic air.⁹⁶ Although lacking Edwin Booth’s physical grace, Lincoln seemed to possess all of his intellectual capacity, and like Booth, the tragedy and sorrow surrounding his life and career (as well as his perceived sensitivity) lent itself to identification with the role of Hamlet.

For both Jackson and Lincoln, the humble beginnings of a log cabin were a vital part of their ethos - providing living illustrations that the privileges of noble birth and a college education were not necessary to achieve strength of character, moral fortitude, and, with earnest devotion and self-sacrifice, lofty position. Both leaders

⁹⁵ The phrase “theology of agony” is used by Waldo W. Braden to describe Lincoln’s frequent use of biblical references to explain the war as the nation’s punishment by God for the evils of slavery. “Abraham Lincoln,” in *American Orators Before 1900*, 266.

⁹⁶ The South, of course, did not view Lincoln in such a favorable light: “And yet, notwithstanding all these distinguishing, amiable and high qualities of his private character, he is by the general consent of mankind looked upon as the destroyer of the liberties of Rome!” [Alexander Hamilton Stephens, *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States; its Causes, Character, Conduct and Results. Presented in a Series of Colloquies at Liberty Hall*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: National Publishing, 1868-70), 447]. Stephens was the vice president of the Confederate States.

emanated proud nobility while remaining true to the essence, or at least the perception, of their essentially rustic and simple natures and exuding the social and intellectual accessibility of an attainable masculine model. Lincoln and Jackson *humanized* politics and oratory, giving the impression that a man of common birth and little formal education could achieve greatness; yet, their accomplishments did not guarantee similar success to all but rather presented motivation towards a seemingly attainable goal.

Henry Ward Beecher: A Softer Religion and Manhood

While Jackson and Lincoln fought to sway votes, Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) sought to save souls, and in the process redefined manly Christian citizenship as an active, vital role of masculine identity, integrally connected to the life of the nation. Born into an important but poor family, Beecher crafted an approach to preaching and oration that transformed the country's perceptions of religion's role in life: "The thing the preacher aims at all the while is *reconstructed manhood* [emphasis Beecher's], a nobler idea in his congregation of how people ought to live and what they ought to be."⁹⁷

Beecher's "American gospel of humanity" provided a sharp contrast to the harsh and unforgiving Puritanical history of Jonathan Edwards' "Angry God" and the "Calvinistic Moloch" that dominated eighteenth century religion:

To tell me that back of Christ there is a God, who for unnumbered centuries has gone on creating men and sweeping them like dead flies – nay, like living ones – into hell, is to ask me to worship a being so much worse than the

⁹⁷ Beecher, *Yale Lectures on Preaching*, 6.



Fig. 9. Henry Ward Beecher. The environment of Beecher's pose is similar to that of John Quincy Adams in Fig. 3, but Beecher exudes a comparative softness and ease.

conception of any mediaeval devil as can be imagined; but I will not worship the devil, though he should come dressed in royal robes and sit on the throne of Jehovah.⁹⁸

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), the most famous minister of the Great Awakening that peaked in the 1740s, represented the quintessential doctrine of punishment and retribution that dominated the Puritan ideology: “Puritanism was not only a religious creed, it was a philosophy and a metaphysic; it was an organization of man’s whole life, emotional and intellectual, to a degree which has not been sustained by any denomination stemming from it.”⁹⁹ It provided an anchor for colonial America and demanded an inflexible moral code – with horrific, eternal damnation awaiting those who failed to live up to religious or societal expectations. After the Revolution and the transition to a more sentimental age, religion became more “emotional,” as the revival frenzies of the Second Great Awakening (beginning in the 1790s and continuing through at least the late 1830s) suggested, creating a sense of personal salvation coupled with social belonging and “deliberately using theatricality to

⁹⁸ Beecher, quoted in Harry Emerson Fosdick, *The Power to See It Through* (New York: Harper, 1935), 64. The phrase “American gospel of humanity” was created by Michael Pupin, a professor at Columbia who, in his youth, was greatly influenced by Beecher’s preaching [*From Immigrant to Inventor* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1926), 107].

⁹⁹ Perry Miller, *The Puritans* (New York: American Book Company, 1938), 4. Miller argues that the Puritan tradition provided the foundation for the “American mind,” as well as its religion, politics, and social theory: “if we should attempt to enumerate these traditions, we should certainly have to mention such philosophies, such ‘isms,’ as the rational liberalism of Jeffersonian democracy, the Hamiltonian conception of conservatism and government, the Southern theory of racial aristocracy, the Transcendentalism of nineteenth-century New England, and what is generally spoken of as frontier individualism” [1].

promote conversion.”¹⁰⁰ One hundred years after Edwards’ death, social ostracism replaced hell’s fire as threatening incentive for proper behavior – religion became a refuge rather than a threat.

Beecher presented a God with “the power of loving erring creatures,” and his preaching did not focus on theological dogma but rather on a non-sectarian freedom, tolerance, and universal salvation – the Gospel of Love:

[A] social philosophy constructed by Henry Ward Beecher to make sense and order out of a society that had experienced a shattering breakdown of social institutions [family, church, slavery, polity, etc.]. Beecher’s ideas... justified that breakdown while at the same time substituting a system of social bonding between individuals who had been most affected by it [and providing] a rationale for individualism and mobility.¹⁰¹

Beecher was a large, robust man (“a physique that filled the eye”), who spent time working outdoors on his farm and exuded even temper, confidence, and “robust health.”¹⁰² He possessed a rich, versatile, and melodious voice. He often spoke extemporaneously, disregarding rhetorical structure or symmetry and sympathetically responding to the needs of his audience: “[W]hat the preacher wants is the power of having something that is worth saying, and then the power of saying it. He is to hold

¹⁰⁰ Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 238. Butler argues that a religious eclecticism (defined as a “belief in and resort to superhuman powers, sometimes beings, that determine the course of natural and human events”) marked nineteenth-century American religion – “a widening range of spiritual alternatives... turned antebellum American into a unique spiritual hothouse” (2-3).

¹⁰¹ From a personal letter, quoted in Stowe, *The Life and Deeds of our Self-Made Men*, 568; Altina L. Waller, *Reverend Beecher and Mrs. Tilton: Sex and Class in Victorian America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1982), 148.

¹⁰² Lionel Crocker, “Henry Ward Beecher,” in *History and Criticism of American Public Address*, vol. 1, 280.

the light up so that a blind man cannot help feeling that it is falling on his orbs. He needs to put the truth in such a way that if a man were asleep it would wake him up; and if he were dead, it would give him resurrection for the hour.”¹⁰³

Beecher effectively wove elements of humor and illustrations from contemporary life to reinforce his message:

If I know my own business – and the presumption is I do – it is to hunt men and to study them. Do you suppose I study old, musty books when I want to preach? *I study you!*... When I want to know what is right and what is wrong, I see how *you* do [emphasis Beecher’s]; and I have abundant illustration on every side.¹⁰⁴

Beecher was respected by his middle-class followers for taking an active social role, as when he held his “slave auctions” in order to buy the freedom of escaped slaves or when he raised money to send rifles (“Beecher’s Bibles”) to Kansas in order to fight for the abolitionist cause. Detractors, however, charged that he was overstepping his bounds and that these actions were self-serving – criticisms suggesting that Beecher’s performance was not wholly effective, unable to persuade audiences outside the reach of his church.

Hailed by middle-class America as the *vox populi* of the mid-nineteenth century, Beecher’s oratory became increasingly secular and political, and through a synthesis of oratorical styles, he exerted significant influence over the emerging middle class:

¹⁰³ *Lectures on Preaching*, 186-87.

¹⁰⁴ N. A. Shenstone, *Anecdotes of Henry Ward Beecher* (Chicago: R.R. Donnelley, 1887), 434. Beecher’s holding a mirror up to nature as an inspiration for his orations is quite similar to the approach taken by actors of the period preparing for a role. The significance of this similarity will be discussed later.

Nineteenth-century middling styles encouraged people to shift back and forth across linguistic registers, a process that confused social perception, at least at the middle and top of the social order. Also, middling rhetoric reached beyond the middle class at both ends of the spectrum... Middling rhetoric actively and happily adjusted its tone to appeal to as wide an audience as possible... The conscious effort to reach out to the crowd, so explicitly discussed by Henry Ward Beecher..., marked a real change in the nineteenth century. It indicated how popular communication would proceed in a culture that no longer practiced classical deference.¹⁰⁵

Beecher became a powerful and influential spokesman for religious liberalization, moral and social reform (including women's rights and temperance), Victorian values, nationalism, and antislavery. Beecher's antislavery lectures to the working class in Great Britain in 1863 were said to have positive impact on the popular support of England's siding with the North.¹⁰⁶

Beecher thrived on the power of persuasion he possessed, referring to the orator's voice as "the bell of the soul, or the iron and crashing of the anvil. It is a magician's wand, full of incantation and witchery; or it is a scepter in a king's hand, and sways men with imperial authority."¹⁰⁷ Beecher instilled a sense of the theatrical into his speeches and consciously manipulated the design of Plymouth Church in Brooklyn (built in 1849), where he served for forty years, in order to maximize his power over the congregation: "I want the audience to surround me, so that they will

¹⁰⁵ Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 17-18.

¹⁰⁶ Paxton Hibben in a rather harsh portrayal of Beecher provides evidence that Beecher's lectures had little effect, because England had already decided to support the North [*Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait* (New York: Press of the Readers Club, 1942), 161-63]. Beecher's own well-publicized reports of winning over hostile crowds were likely exaggerated.

¹⁰⁷ Quoted in Constance Mayfield Rourke, *Trumpets of Jubilee* (New York: Harcourt and Brace, 1927), 177.

come up on every side, and behind me, so that I shall be in the center of the crowd, and have the people surge all about me.”¹⁰⁸ Beecher, in referring to his worshippers as an audience, suggests an awareness of performance in both the style and substance of his preaching. More than any of the other orators I have mentioned thus far, Beecher was interested in studying and reflecting his audience back to itself.

Beecher’s use of the theatrical for social improvement and (at least indirectly and probably not accidentally) for personal gain suggests a connection to the temperance dramas so popular in the middle of the century. Dramatic, moral allegories like William W. Pratt’s *Ten Nights in a Barroom* (1858) and William H. Smith’s *The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved* (1844) presented a fallen hero reclaimed to sobriety and social respectability: “What gratitude do I not owe this generous, noble-hearted man, who, from the depths of wretchedness and horror, has restored me to the world, to myself, and to religion.”¹⁰⁹ Smith’s hero thanks the saintly temperance philanthropist who rescued him, a man not unlike Beecher. These dramas largely absolved the fallen from responsibility, placing the blame on the dangers of temptation: “To succumb to temptation was to demonstrate weakness and poor guidance rather than malice, and also to provide a model to whom the average reader or listener could easily relate.”¹¹⁰ William H. Smith, a well-publicized former drinker,

¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Lionel Crocker, “Henry Ward Beecher,” in *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, vol. 1, 274.

¹⁰⁹ William H. Smith, *The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved*, in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin, 1997), 295-96.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey D. Mason, *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 73. Mason’s chapter on the temperance melodrama (60-87)

originally played the title role in his drama, providing the impression that he “was playing his own life” and offering his own “sin” and “failings” as a model of masculine reformation to his audience so that they could learn from his mistakes.¹¹¹

P.T. Barnum revived the play in 1850 – it performed for a then record one hundred consecutive performances at his American Museum in New York – combining moral reform and capitalistic gain, while bringing members of genteel society to the theatre.¹¹²

Beecher capitalized on the magnetic power of his words and personality:

Here gather, twice on every Sabbath of the year... about twenty-five hundred people, and the audience sometimes numbers three thousand. It is not unusual for the capacious body of the church, the broad galleries, the second elevated gallery, the several aisles, and all vacancies about pulpit and doors to be occupied by eager listeners, and sometimes hundreds turn away, unable to find footing within the audience-room. Its persistence imparts to it the dignity of a moral phenomenon. It is unprecedented in the history of audiences, whether religious, literary, political, or artistical... from two to three thousand people centre to an unchanged attraction. No dramatic genius, no melodious voice, no popular eloquence has ever done so much as that. Neither Macready, Garrick, nor Jenny Lind, nor Rachel, nor Gough, nor Clay, nor Choate has done it. The

provides an excellent overview of drinking in America, the temperance movement, and the effectiveness of moral reform drama. See also Michael R. Booth, “The Drunkard’s Progress: Nineteenth-Century Temperance Drama,” *Dalhousie Review* 44 (1964): 205-12; Jill Siegel Dodd, “The Working Classes and the Temperance Movement in Ante-Bellum Boston,” *Labor History* 19 (1978): 510-31.

¹¹¹ Maud Skinner and Otis Skinner, *One Man in His Time: The Adventures of H. Watkins, Strolling Player, 1845-1863, from His Journal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1938), 70. Another actor of the Jacksonian period, John Bartholomew Gough, quit drinking also and became a temperance lecturer [John Marsh, *Temperance Recollections* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1866), 127-28].

¹¹² P.T. Barnum, *Struggles and Triumphs: or, Forty Years’ Recollections* (Hartford: J.B. Burr, 1869; reprint, New York: Arno, 1970), 264-65.

theatre must change its “Star” monthly, the singer must migrate often, the orator must make “angel visits” to concentrate three thousand people.¹¹³

Comparing Beecher’s “star power” not only to the principal speakers of his time but also to the greatest actors, suggests an awareness of his overwhelming, hypnotic charisma as a performance. Beecher’s manly performance corresponded to a “blend” of Forrest, who wept for his dead child in *The Gladiator* and *Jack Cade*, and Booth, who appealed to the middle class and intelligentsia. The melding within Beecher of dramatic genius, melodious voice, and popular eloquence – not to mention humble economic beginnings and a non-threatening Gospel of Love – created an almost irresistibly seductive masculine attraction. Beecher’s congregational audience enjoyed the dual thrill of moral uplift and theatrical titillation, absent the taint inevitably linked with the playhouse.

Not all people, of course, were as delighted with Beecher’s powers of persuasion and the overtly theatrical nature of his supposedly religious character. Sinclair Lewis crowned him “a combination of St. Augustine, Barnum, and John Barrymore.”¹¹⁴ Paxton Hibben, a rather critical biographer, suggested Beecher’s conscious manipulation of the self: “the dramatization of Henry Ward Beecher, played

¹¹³ Henry Fowler, *The American Pulpit* (New York: J.M. Fairchild, 1856), 141. One would assume that Fowler’s amazement would have been magnified exponentially were he to have known that this passionate following were to continue unabated for another thirty years.

¹¹⁴ Paxton Hibben, *Henry Ward Beecher: An American Portrait*, with a foreword by Sinclair Lewis (New York: George H. Doran, 1927; reprint, New York: Readers Club, 1942), vii. Lewis was born two years before Beecher’s death, so his observation was not a first-hand account.

by Henry Ward Beecher.”¹¹⁵ Beecher deliberately created a masculine image designed to satisfy societal expectations and calculated to manipulate his audience. He showed that a man could have refined feelings and compassion – could weep for the plight of the slave, was not threatened by the power of women (he campaigned for them to get the vote), and, most of all, that a “real” man was able to express his emotions openly, rather than concealing them as Washington does in *Andre*.

Teaching Nationality and Manhood: The Growing Importance of Nineteenth-Century Advice Literature

Up to this point, I have suggested that male role models could be found both in politics and the pulpit – but neither of those realms offer a realistic guide for how a “man” should conduct himself on a day-to-day basis. Where then could the average American citizen turn for advice? This question became even more critical in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, which fundamentally transformed the urban landscape, and brought new groups of men into contact with each other. The advice literature of the nineteenth century could offer them some help in establishing new parameters and patterns of manly behavior.

America’s victory in the War of 1812 confirmed the nation’s independence and “infected many with protoromantic patriotism... ‘Americanize’ was to be their watchword. It was a time for heroes and hero-worship.”¹¹⁶ This fervent nationalism

¹¹⁵ Ibid, 19.

¹¹⁶ Gordon M. Marshall, “The Golden Age of Illustrated Biographies: Three Case Studies,” in *American Portrait Prints: Proceedings of the Tenth Annual American*

was coupled with an insecurity caused by the social destabilization of a changing political, economic, and geographic climate.

From the 1820s to the 1850s, the nation experienced the Industrial Revolution, western expansion, as well as a series of economic depressions, and during that time, the wealth of the country was gradually consolidated into the hands of a very small minority. Yeomen farmers and tradesmen were forced to embrace industrialization and a market economy. With relocation of much of the rural workforce to the city and increased immigration, urbanization reconfigured the national landscape:

Overall, the urban population of the United States increased from 7.2 percent in 1820 to 19.8 percent in 1860, with the cities of the Northeast increasing by almost twice that rate. In New York, for example – the fastest-growing city in the country – the population increased by more than half again as much during each decade from 1790 to 1860, rising from a mere 30,000 to over 800,000 by the Civil War.¹¹⁷

The young, urban male, often separated from the stability of the patriarchal home environment, lacked traditional masculine guidance.¹¹⁸

As George Washington remarked following the war for independence, new Americans were “peculiarly designated by Providence for the display of human

Print Conference, ed. Wendy Wick Reaves (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984), 29.

¹¹⁷ McConachie, *Melodramatic Formation*, 32.

¹¹⁸ For discussion of the evolving role of the young man in the nineteenth-century urban environment see Richard Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity and Youth in Antebellum New York City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990); Sean Wilentz, *Chants Democratic: New York City and the Rise of the American Working Class, 1788-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984).

greatness and felicity.”¹¹⁹ Reassuring real-life models of behavior helped to assuage the insecurities surrounding this social and economic instability:

One means of convincingly connecting altruism, exemplary character, and success is the use of biographical role models, [which] offer the life stories of great Americans... as evidence that conformity to established principles of good conduct and Christian living naturally lead to success in life [and] demonstrating... the formula for success through such life stories.¹²⁰

Middle-class readers often found strong models of masculine behavior within the increasingly popular biography genre: “[O]nly when it [history] deviates into biography, in portraying the actions of some extraordinary man, does it afford those practical models of conduct, or exhibit the consequences of ill regulated ambition, the consideration of which teaches philosophy by examples, and is truly the ‘school of life.’”¹²¹ True-life stories provided a source of inspiration: “Nothing excites more powerfully to virtuous deeds, than the examples of those whom they have rendered conspicuous. Man generally desires what he finds applauded in others.”¹²²

While the middle and upper classes were reading “improving” biographies, the lower classes were drawn to the “true-life” adventure stories printed in the dime novel and the story paper.¹²³ These stories were highly sensationalized – meant to provide

¹¹⁹ *The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799*, ed. John C. Fitzpatrick, vol. 26 (Washington: U.S. Government Print Offices, 1938), 484-85.

¹²⁰ Sarah E. Newton, *Learning to Behave: A Guide to American Conduct Books Before 1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994), 55.

¹²¹ *Analectic Magazine* 1 (January 1820): 462.

¹²² *Columbian Magazine* 5 (January 1846): 35.

manly adventure and escapist entertainment to an audience confined to one setting, one job, and one fate.

Theodore P. Greene, who examines the changing vision of American masculine heroes through popular magazines, details three functions of biographies in the young republic:

In the face of foreign aspersions or self-doubts about the quality of a new people, the lives of eminent Americans could be offered as testimony to the caliber of American society. In the light of a tradition which viewed biography as an ideal means for teaching morality by example, a highly moral people could find examples from their own ranks for this respected form of education. And finally for anxious members of 'the higher orders' of the community, tributes to their fellow citizens who exemplified 'genius, learning, honour, virtue, piety' and the other threatened distinctions could appear as bulwarks against an encroaching egalitarianism.¹²⁴

The elevated figures presented in biographies tantalized men with the possibility of achieving social and economic greatness, while simultaneously ensuring hierarchical separation.

Bruce McConachie discusses a similar fragmentation of audience on nineteenth-century American stages:

Elite males enjoyed fairy-tale melodramas produced by paternalistically run stock companies between 1820 and 1835. From 1830 into the mid 1850s, stars combined with stock companies to entertain male Jacksonians of all classes with heroic melodramas. In a subformation of this historical type, native-born workers supported apocalyptic melodramas between 1835 and 1850.

¹²³ See Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America* (New York, Verso, 1987).

¹²⁴ Theodore P. Greene, *America's Heroes: The Changing Models of Success in American Magazines* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 41-42. Greene's covers the early republic up to 1820 but then oddly skips to the end of the century through World War One. He claims that the nineteenth century has already been adequately covered.

Beginning about 1845, a new formation emerged centering on moral reform melodramas and an audience of respectable Protestant families.¹²⁵

These subgenres of melodrama all fulfilled roughly the same function in catering masculine images for, as well as validating the beliefs and values of, their respective audiences: “And the melodramatic form itself embodied much of this democratic society’s attitude toward morality and nature, its enthusiasm for democracy and domesticity, its tacit separation of the world into spheres of the practical and the transcendent, its desire to see ordinary lives taken seriously and yet be charged with excitement, and its faith in and doubts about progress and providence.”¹²⁶

In addition to the biographies of great American figures, the dime novels that provided models of manhood for the working class, and the melodrama that reflected a range of masculinities, portraiture and photography also provided templates of masculine morality, inspired by “the noble traits beaming from those faces and forms.”¹²⁷ Daguerreotypes, portraits, engravings, and *cartes-de-visite* allowed American males to fashion identities that reflected their individuality as well as their sense of national belonging:

¹²⁵ McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, xii.

¹²⁶ David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968; reprint, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), xvii.

¹²⁷ Marcus Root, *The Camera and the Pencil* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1864; reprint Pawlett, VT: Helio, 1971), 27. While outside the range of this study, political cartoons provide an interesting perspective on competing masculine images. Just as theatrical burlesques mocked or exaggerated the performance styles of the major actors of the day, caricatures undermined and deflated the carefully constructed manly performances of major political figures, providing a stark contrast between the “real” self that men hoped to create in portraits and the “real” self that newspapers or cartoonists revealed.

[T]he emergence of visual culture helped people to redefine themselves and their communities. Chronic social change typically involves a new emphasis on the present and future, a replacement of past identities for fragmented, diffused, and changing self-conceptions, and a newfound unwillingness to accept hypocrisy, and to discover a more stable and enduring reality. The question “Who am I?” loomed large on a national scale, and Americans often answered that question with pictures.¹²⁸

Portraiture dominated American art in the middle of the nineteenth century, and demand for images of prominent figures was insatiable: “viewing portraits of the nation’s elite could provide moral edification for all its citizens who needed to learn how to present themselves as good Americans in a quest for upward mobility.”¹²⁹

This “quest for upward mobility” was the driving force behind the explosion of etiquette manuals, conduct books, and advice literature in the mid-nineteenth century, which provided guidelines for social advancement and rules of decorum.¹³⁰ These

¹²⁸ John Stauffer, *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 50.

¹²⁹ Barbara McCandless, “The Portrait Studio and the Celebrity,” in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Martha A. Sandweiss (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1991), 49. According to the *Connecticut Courant*, a Hartford newspaper, in 1849, the Kellogg company presses ‘run off daily from 3000 to 4000 copies of various popular prints... More than 100,000 copies have been sold from a single design. The portrait of Washington takes the lead and next to him stands Old Rough and Ready.’” Quoted in Wendy Wick Reaves, “Portraits for Every Parlor: Albert Newsam and American Portrait Lithography,” in *American Portrait Prints: Proceedings of the Tenth Annual American Print Conference* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1984), 85.

¹³⁰ “From the late 1820’s [sic] on, this literature poured forth in a never-ending stream. An incomplete enumeration shows that... twenty-eight different manuals appeared in the 1830’s, thirty-six in the 1840’s and thirty-eight in the 1850’s – an average of over three new ones annually in the pre-Civil War decades” [Schlesinger, *Learning How to Behave*, 18]. It should be noted also that a marked increase in the middle class interest in reading for pleasure, as well as advances in printing and transportation, heightened the demand for conduct literature and allowed for faster and cheaper dissemination of the material (Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 37-43). The study of the transformations

books served as ideological manuals of performance, intended to maintain a hierarchical structure: “[E]stablished codes of behavior have often served in unacknowledged ways as checks against a fully democratic order and in support of special interests, institutions of privilege, and structures of domination.”¹³¹

From the start of the Revolution, American men sought a unique masculine image. As the young nation groped towards a murky future, the new American citizen faced a similar crisis of identity. English rules of personal conduct, social deference, and the well-defined parameters of reasonable personal ambition were out of place in an egalitarian society. American men struggled with the inherent conflict in a democracy that claimed to support social leveling while simultaneously encouraging emulation of specific masculine ideals in order to achieve upward mobility.

I have suggested the first American-written stage comedy, Royall Tyler’s *The Contrast* (1787), showed the nation’s struggle to perform a “Manly” identity independent of British models. Until the early nineteenth century, however,

in social practices, niceties, and identities, the historical importance of which was largely unrealized until twenty years ago, have been most thoroughly undertaken in the following: Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990); C. Dallett Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities: A History of Manners in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). Useful and effective studies that specifically address etiquette manuals, conduct books, and advice literature include: Arthur M. Schlesinger, *Learning How to Behave: A Historical Study of American Etiquette Books* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1947); Andrew St. George, *The Descent of Manners: Etiquette, Rules and The Victorians* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993); Sarah E. Newton, *Learning to Behave: A Guide to American Conduct Books Before 1900* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1994).

¹³¹ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 3.

behavioral models and moral guidance were imported largely from England; but, because the democratic nature of American society differed fundamentally from the British hierarchical system of inherited status, manuals dictating social behavior needed to reflect America's egalitarian ideals.¹³²

With Jackson's political triumph as a validation of popular government and an example of the viable success of the self-made man, therefore, the nation required American manuals of decorum suited to the country's unique and changing social structure: "[I]n America,... manners were being made up as the country defined itself... The progress of manners books, behaviour guides and etiquette books in nineteenth-century America showed a society amalgamating new forms of thinking and behaviour."¹³³

The nineteenth century was marked by a suspicion of and a significant resistance to all forms of codified behavior and formal etiquette, condemned as foreign and false:

All the wisdom needed for the career of the ordinary republican aspirant can be condensed into three rules which he may write down on his reversible paper cuff: 1. Keep out of fine society; 2. Be cleanly, simple, and honest; 3. Never be ashamed of a blunder. Everything beyond this is vanity.¹³⁴

¹³² Arthur M. Schlesinger claims that the formation and implementation of a distinctly American set of manners and etiquette was "hampered historically" by five conditions: the colonies were settled by outcasts from the best society; the country lacked a "native hereditary aristocracy" to establish social standards; the wilderness had to be tamed before issues of cultivation became a priority; the population included a sizable portion of immigrants that were forced to learn unfamiliar language and customs; and women, the "principal guardians of decorum," formed a minority of the young country's population. [*Learning How to Behave*, viii.]

¹³³ St. George, *Descent of Manners*, xix.

Yet the popularity of conduct manuals suggested the readers' reluctant recognition of the necessity of transforming their manner and speech for social and economic success:

Telling people to speak [and act] one way instead of another is a way of telling them to be a certain kind of person, of saying that certain skills and practices are valued while others are not. The nineteenth-century debate over language was a fight over what kind of personality was needed to sustain a healthy democracy... By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the very decorum that 'gentlemen of the old school' saw as essential to principled behavior was viewed by large segments of the democratic republic as 'aristocratic.'¹³⁵

Paralleling this discussion of "learned" manners versus republican simplicity, Anna Cora Mowatt's *Fashion; or, Life in New York* (1845) revealed the potential hypocrisy inherent in social climbing. As the author stated in her preface to the London edition, "The Comedy of *Fashion* was intended as a good-natured satire upon some of the follies incident to a new country, where foreign dress sometimes passes for gold, where the vanities rather than the virtues of other lands are too often imitated, and where the stamp of *fashion* gives currency even to the coinage of vice."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Review of *Bazar Book of Decorum*, by Robert Tomes, reprinted in *Atlantic Monthly* 26 (July 1870): 122.

¹³⁵ Cmiel, *Democratic Eloquence*, 14.

¹³⁶ Anna Cora Mowatt, *Fashion; or, Life in New York*, in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin, 1997), 311. The play provides two models of ideal American manhood in the aptly named Trueman and Colonel Howard. A range of inappropriate masculinities includes Mr. Tiffany, the social-climbing husband who has been tempted into dishonesty; Snobson, Tiffany's clerk lacking a stable moral guide to shape his character, who is blackmailing his boss; Twinkle, a poet callously attempting to marry into wealth; Zeke, the colored servant, whose attempts at proper behavior highlights the ridiculous behavior of his white masters; Fogg, a member of one of America's "old" families, who is disagreeable to all; and the false Count Jolimaitre who provides the dangerous foreign model of "proper" manliness.

Mowatt's play suggests that Americans were not unaware of their own social "inadequacies" – but they were equally mistrustful of those who tried to persuade them that "manners only" made the man.

Foreign condemnations of American manners and etiquette fed the nation's fear of being seen as inferior to their European counterparts.¹³⁷ Fanny Kemble's *American Journal* (1835) and Frances Trollope's *Domestic Manners of the Americans* (1832), among others, attacked Americans' coarse lack of decorum and preposterous attempts at gentility:

To doubt that talent and mental power of every kind, exist in America would be absurd; why should it not? But in taste and learning they are woefully deficient; and it is this which renders them incapable of graduating a scale by which to measure themselves. Hence arises that overweening complacency and self-esteem, both national and individual, which at once renders them so extremely obnoxious to ridicule, and so peculiarly restive under it.¹³⁸

This attack on American taste and learning could well have been directed at then-President Jackson. The free mingling of the classes – lacking a European hierarchy of manners, a respect for social deference, and a dearth of "appropriate" models of

¹³⁷ The inaugural celebration of Jackson reportedly was marked by "a rabble, a mob," showing complete disregard for both the White House and the President and causing a great deal of personal and property damage (Margaret Bayard Smith, *The First Forty Years of Washington Society*, ed. Gaillard Hunt [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1906], 295-97). This outburst certainly underscored the need for decorum and the social dangers of egalitarian government, as well as a complete failure of native etiquette, although Jackson's critics were surprised to find that the President generally maintained suitable dignity and restraint while in office.

¹³⁸ Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, ed. Donald Smalley (1832; New York: Knopf, 1949), 263-64.

behavior - made the nation vulnerable to the charge that Americans saw “Rudeness and Republicanism as synonymous terms.”¹³⁹

The nation struggled to establish social rules, free of the superfluous remnants of eighteenth-century aristocratic favoritism: “We should be glad to see a distinctively American school of good manners, in which all useless etiquettes were thrown aside, but every politeness adopted or invented which could promote sensible and easy exchanges of good will and sensibility.”¹⁴⁰ Advice literature authors defended their precepts as “based on science” and nature. They instilled a fear of social and moral ostracism if the laws of conduct were violated: “every genuine and valuable rule of behavior may be referred to some principle of natural law; so the observance of what may seem at first glance a matter of trifling etiquette, may be a moral duty; and a breach of decorum a crime.”¹⁴¹

Advice literature writers sought to create a system of social behavior that would reflect the country’s democratic equality, as well as its ambition: “True republicanism requires that every man shall have an equal chance – that every man

¹³⁹ Margaret C. Conkling [“Henry Lunettes”, pseud.], *The American Gentleman’s Guide to Politeness and Fashion* (New York: Derby and Jackson, 1857), 330. “Classical” actors, such as James E. Murdoch and E.L. Davenport, provided masculine models of moral uprightness and gentlemanly conduct, gradually enhancing the social acceptance of actors in the nineteenth century – although many social-climbing actors, such as Edwin Forrest, were excluded from the elite ranks. Interestingly, comic actors like James H. Hackett and William Evans Burton, who lampooned the behavior of immigrant and working class characters, most successfully entered respected society. The actors will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three.

¹⁴⁰ Nathaniel Parker Willis, *Hurry-graphs: or, Sketches of Scenery, Celebrities and Society, Taken from Life* (Auburn: Alden, Beardsley, 1853), 300.

¹⁴¹ Robert De Valcourt, *The Illustrated Manners Book and Manual of Good Behavior and Polite Accomplishments* (New York: Leland, Clay, 1855), 14.

shall be free to become as unequal as he can.”¹⁴² This uneasy contradiction within the fledgling American system of etiquette, this *freedom to become unequal*, supposedly was designed to allow everyone the freedom to excel, but it also prevented a sizable portion of the population from free and equal participation in society, reflecting a national dichotomy – a flaw within the idealistic egalitarianism.

Because a vast majority of nineteenth-century advice literature was gender-oriented, I will focus primarily on the efforts of the authors of conduct manuals to define American manliness and a code of moral behavior that comprised the “Cult of True Manhood.”¹⁴³ With the breakdown of the apprenticeship system, which had theoretically provided the young man with the security and moral instruction inherent to the system, conduct manuals sought to fill the gap in instruction for young men entering the complex world of the growing metropolitans. Built upon the tensions between pragmatism and altruism, industry and frugality (often associated with Benjamin Franklin), American men were to maintain traditional virtues of commitment to self-education, hard work, self-discipline, temperance, morality, and piety, but also to be constantly watchful for opportunities to prosper and thrive in an uncertain, competitive society: “the ideal man is the man of moral strength and

¹⁴² Samuel Robert Wells, *How to Behave: A Pocket Manual of Republican Etiquette* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1856), 124.

¹⁴³ Sarah E. Newton, in *Learning to Behave*, claims that 90 percent of the texts she surveyed sought to provide gender role instruction (10). Barbara Welter coined the phrase “Cult of True Womanhood” to describe the gender expectations for women during this period. Elements of a corresponding male study have been attempted but a more thorough study is needed. Barbara Welter, “The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860,” in *The American Family in Social-Historical Perspective*, ed. Michael Gordon (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1978), 313-33.

determined action who, while pursuing success in life, never forgets that its wellsprings are industry, frugality, honesty, and temperance.”¹⁴⁴

American advice literature condemned the pretensions and privileges of a European inherited aristocracy, while it unavoidably reinforced the class hierarchy built on an industrial capitalistic society that necessarily excluded the unsuccessful:

Etiquette is the barrier which society draws around itself as a protection against offenses the ‘law’ can not touch – it is a shield against the intrusion of the impertinent, the improper, and the vulgar – a guard against those obtuse persons who, having neither talent nor delicacy, would be continually thrusting themselves into the society of men to whom their presence might (from the difference of feeling and habit) be offensive, and even insupportable.¹⁴⁵

The brutal honesty of this social stratification, plainly labeling an inferior class of people, belied the democratic order and generally was avoided in preference of a less threatening, more attainable, approach: “Social intercourse... is every day being based more and more on the laws of common sense, of kindness and of respect for the innate dignity of every man, than on the accidents of rank.”¹⁴⁶

In attempting to eliminate completely the vertical hierarchical social structure that so intimidated the image-conscious middle class, advice writers often imagined an

¹⁴⁴ Newton, *Learning to Behave*, 10, 46. While some authors boldly proclaimed the freedom of social mobility and equality of opportunity, the fluid egalitarianism that society promised often was at odds with the capitalist system that privileged the middle class and established a hierarchy that excluded the social participation of the lower classes: “Americans were actually experiencing two revolutions – the democratic and the market revolutions – and these pulled in different directions. While the political revolution held out the promise of equality, the economic revolution fostered inequality” (Hemphill, *Bowing to Necessities*, 130).

¹⁴⁵ Charles William Day, *Hints on Etiquette and the Usages of Society* (Boston: Otis Broaders, 1844), 3.

¹⁴⁶ Charles Godfrey Leland, *The Art of Conversation, with Directions for Self Education* (New York: Carleton, 1864), 8.

impossibly lateral world – a world with a lower class to be dominated and excluded but without an upper class to dominate the middle – that created unrealizable expectations: “Always be polite to your inferiors, and it naturally follows that you will be politeness itself with your equals. A gentleman has no superior.”¹⁴⁷ Etiquette manuals “built the inequities as well as the opportunities of life in a democratic capitalist society into the minute structures of everyday conduct.”¹⁴⁸

In a manual dictating correct behavior for a democratic republic, the advice writer had to tread carefully over issues of privilege in order to avoid charges of snobbery: “In this free land, there are no political distinctions, and the only social ones depend on character and manners. We have no privileged classes, no titled nobility, and everyone has the right, and should have the ambition to be a gentleman.”¹⁴⁹ The sentiments in this behavioral guide, published one year after *Fashion*’s debut, echo the admirable Trueman’s concluding response in Mowatt’s play to a claim that America had no nobility:

Stop there! I object to your use of that word. When justice is found only among lawyers – health among physicians – and patriotism among politicians, *then* may you say that there is no *nobility* where there are no titles! But we *have* kings, princes, and nobles in abundance – of *Nature’s stamp*, if not of

¹⁴⁷ Mortimer Delano and Reginald Harvey Arnold, *Simplex Munditiis: Gentlemen* (New York: De Vinne Press, 1891), 170.

¹⁴⁸ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 7.

¹⁴⁹ *The Art of Good Behavior; and Letter Writer on Love, Courtship, and Marriage: A Complete Guide for Ladies and Gentlemen, particularly those who have not Enjoyed the Advantages of Fashionable Life* (New York: C.P. Huestis, 1846), viii-ix. Even the titles of advice literature sought to alleviate the insecurity of the social-climbing classes, while simultaneously reminding the readers of their disadvantages and their exclusion.

Fashion's – we have honest men, warm -hearted and brave, and we have women – gentle, fair, and true, to whom no *title* could add *nobility*.¹⁵⁰

Mowatt showed the etiquette book in action; advice literature and theatrical melodrama were using indistinguishable language to preach an identical message.

Etiquette manuals provided social guidance to an ambitious, uncertain, and a predominantly middle-class readership: “those bent on self-improvement and, in many cases, social mobility and metropolitan fluency, or, to put the matter less positively, those seeking to overcome real or imagined ‘disadvantages’ of birth, class, and training, and to avoid social uncertainty, embarrassment, and ineptitude.”¹⁵¹ The advice in etiquette and conduct literatures was remarkably consistent, dictating similar social rules and providing a unified view of civilized behavior: “The etiquette writers’ very investment in social conventions... led them to minimize particularity and novelty,” preserving “an extraordinary continuity of advice in the period from 1830 to the beginning of the twentieth century.”¹⁵²

What is the drawback to advice manuals? That they educate those for whom gentlemanly behavior is not a natural gift *and* they reveal the “coded language” that will allow strangers into the inner circle. It was impossible to identify clearly the motivations of men (most of whom were strangers) in the impersonal metropolis, and

¹⁵⁰ Mowatt, *Fashion*, 366.

¹⁵¹ Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 54.

¹⁵² Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility*, 52-53. Schlesinger claims that “these treatises played pretty much the same tune in pretty much the same way” [*Learning to Behave*, 21]. Hemphill states, “[t]here may have been competing practices among subgroups in the population... but only one set of rituals was sufficiently dominant to be codified” [*Bowing to Necessities*, 4].

the genteel performance of model behavior could be so easily counterfeited, that the nineteenth century was marked by a fear of hypocrisy and insincerity. Transparent, natural, and sincere behavior within the self-restraint and regimented form of proper etiquette became the goal of conduct manuals: “The sentimental ideal of unconstrained manners was exemplified in the republican concept of the *natural gentleman*, who possessed attributes without artificially cultivated refinements.”¹⁵³ As *Fashion*’s Trueman states, “When you open your lips let your heart speak. Never tell a lie! Let your face be the looking-glass of your soul – your heart its clock – while your tongue rings the hours!”¹⁵⁴

Young men were cautioned to exhibit open, honest, republican behavior and were taught to prize reputation and character above all. As Henry Ward Beecher cautioned, “you should be doing a much more important thing [than the pursuit of wealth], namely, you should be gaining an inward integrity; training yourself to be a man of upright dealing, establishing a character for the strictest rectitude.”¹⁵⁵

Moderate and genteel decorum was linked inextricably, however, to financial gain and

¹⁵³ Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, 101. These social suspicions and misgivings at odds with the need for proper social conduct are most thoroughly explored in Halttunen’s book. Conduct literature was often attempting to find an acceptable balance between a call for “natural” behavior and a Chesterfieldian series of specific, yet arbitrary, social conventions.

¹⁵⁴ Mowatt, *Fashion*, 333.

¹⁵⁵ Henry Ward Beecher, *Twelve Lectures to Young Men on Various Important Subjects* (New York: George H. Doran, 1879), 196.

social position: “politeness is power, and... for the ambitious man there is no surer road to the highest places... than through good manners.”¹⁵⁶

The young man was responsible not only for his own success and the unstained integrity of his character but also for the reputation and progress of the burgeoning nation:

[Y]ou are coming forward to live and act in a nation unharnessed and free, – where the whole machinery is planned with a view to have men make their own rulers, – to make every man a lord in the sphere which he occupies... Hence it is, that our young men are coming on the *stage of action*, in circumstances which compel them not only to look to themselves for all that they are to be,... but they have to share the responsibility of the mighty destiny of at least a continent.¹⁵⁷

The great onus of this responsibility instilled the importance of establishing the order and authority of proper models of masculine behavior, with “no stage effect,” tempering ambition and self-restraint, individualism in service of a community, as an anchor in the danger and uncertainty of the turbulent republican seas.¹⁵⁸

But while “stage effect” was to be avoided at all costs, no one denied the “stage of action” on which the performance of desirable masculine behavior took place:

In societies built on the promise of social mobility, high demands for control over bodily and facial expressiveness made necessary a division of living space

¹⁵⁶ Maurice Francis Egan, *A Gentleman*, 2nd ed. (New York: Benziger Brothers, 1893), 15.

¹⁵⁷ John Todd, *The Young Man: Hints Addressed to the Young Men of the United States* (Northampton: J.H. Butler, 1845), 22, 33.

¹⁵⁸ Conkling, *American Gentleman's Guide*, 145. The idea of proper etiquette as a genteel, effortless, theatrical performance is common among historians, and vocabulary of the theatre is often used to describe the preparation, setting, and presentation of proper decorum.

into front regions and back regions. In the front regions, firm social discipline holds in place a mask of manner and expressive control is maintained. In the back regions, the mask can be lowered and expressive control relaxed.¹⁵⁹

The ideal performance of gentility and masculinity was the “invisible” one, performed so seamlessly that the audience was unaware that they were seeing an actor, rather than a genuine human being. The theatrical embodiment of this idea was most fully realized in Edwin Booth, who was so identified with the role of Hamlet (to be discussed in Chapter Five), that the audience almost appeared unaware that they were seeing a character, a crafted performance. Consciously cultivating the appearance of natural spontaneity was the goal of masculine performance on the political and oratorical stage, as well as the theatrical.

For white, middle-class, American men, advice manuals instilled the vital importance of the single-minded commitment to action and hard work, linking diligence to financial gain and elevated social position: “while idleness leads to poverty, wretchedness, and, generally to a life of immorality and licentiousness, industry leads to a rich and ample harvest, to wealth, and to an honorable and desirable position in the best classes of society.”¹⁶⁰ A man needed to apply his energy toward a laudable aim and his worth essentially was defined by his occupation:

A man with no Employment, nothing to do, is scarcely a man. The secret of making men is to put them to work, and keep them at it. It is not study, not instruction, not careful moral training, nor good parents, nor good society that

¹⁵⁹ Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 104. Halttunen is building on the ideas of Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).

¹⁶⁰ Rev. J.W. Kasey, *The Young Man’s Guide to True Greatness* (Big Springs, KY: J.W. Kasey, 1858), 224.

makes men. These are means; but back of these lies the grand molding influence of men's life. It is Employment.¹⁶¹

Self-government and strict control of emotions were essential to success: "The man who is liable to fits of passion; who cannot control his temper, but is subject to ungovernable excitements of any kind, is always in danger. The first element of gentlemanly dignity is self-control."¹⁶² In addition to emotional restraint, men were encouraged to pursue physical fitness, in order to "discipline the body to obey the will."¹⁶³

Men were cautioned to do nothing in public that would draw attention to themselves and not to focus too closely on anyone else: "singularity is to be avoided."¹⁶⁴ Positive singularity was allowed only in great men who naturally, effortlessly transcended the unseen norm. Strategic loss of control in great men – such as Beecher's weeping or Jackson's rages – was acceptable but only because these men seemingly operated on a more intense, grander plane of experience.

Along with social and public invisibility, advice literature called for iron discipline and warned of the dangers of straying from morality and giving in to the

¹⁶¹ George Weaver, *Aims and Aids for Girls and Young Women* (New York: Fowler and Wells, 1856), 122.

¹⁶² De Valcourt, *Illustrated Manners Book*, 205. Genteel men made a distinction between control of emotions versus control of *anger*. A real man could weep with compassion; he could not, however, fly into an ungovernable rage – it lowered his status.

¹⁶³ Harvey Newcomb, *How to Be a Man* (Boston: Gould, Kendall, and Lincoln, 1847), 101.

¹⁶⁴ Eliza Ware Farrar, *The Young Lady's Friend* (Boston: American Stationers' Company, 1837), 102.

temptations and dissipations of frivolous, fast city living, including the theatre, alcohol, and gambling: “Your feet stand on slippery places, whence in due time they shall slide, if you refuse the warnings which I raise... Too late you shall look back upon life as a MIGHTY GAME, in which you were the stake and Satan the winner.”¹⁶⁵ Moral reform melodramas like *The Drunkard* provided object lessons that warned of the emasculating dangers of excess:

Is this to be the issue of my life? Oh, must I ever yield to the fell tempter, and bending like a weak bulrush to the blast, still bow my manhood lower than the brute? Why, surely I have eyes to see, hands to work with, feet to walk, and brain to think, yet the best gifts of Heaven I abuse, lay aside her bounties, and with my own hand, willingly put out the light of reason... Rum! Eternal curses on you! Had it not been for your infernal poison..., I had been still a man.¹⁶⁶

With the future of his country, the security of his family, the maintenance of his character, if not the security of his immortal soul, at stake, the pressure on the middle-class man to succeed within the confines of seemingly arbitrary social laws, while shackled by a demand for rigid self-discipline, was often debilitating. These life-and-death stakes exacerbated the irresolvable internal conflict of driving ambition and capitalism versus selfless placidity and egalitarianism.

Advice literature and etiquette manuals promised social success to those who followed the precepts of social expectations. Frustration and confusion invariably resulted when the harsh reality of self-serving capitalism was contrasted with the idealistic moralizing. Etiquette served as an isolating social and physical barrier: “It is like a wall built up around us to protect us from disagreeable, underbred people who

¹⁶⁵ Beecher, *Twelve Lectures*, 123. Beecher seems inspired by Jonathan Edwards’ “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.”

¹⁶⁶ Smith, *The Drunkard*, 275, 289.

refuse to take the trouble to be civil.”¹⁶⁷ The societal demands on the confident, determined, self-reliant man were constantly at odds with the passive, restrained, community-bound gentleman: “The more free the individual felt himself to be, the more isolated and lonely he actually became until he craved to forsake his solitude in order to surrender his self to the new invisible authority of society itself.”¹⁶⁸

Conclusion

Though a comprehensive overview of the evolution of America’s rhetorical style is beyond the scope of this study, I have selected and described the most prominent, influential, and diverse examples of public role models available to American men in the years before the Civil War. I have also begun to point out the ways in which those models were reflected in the performances of some of the theatre’s greatest stars, or in the content of some of its best-known dramas. In so doing, I have suggested that there were *multiple* visions of masculinity that proliferated in the antebellum period, and that those visions often operated in uneasy partnership, if not outright animosity.

In the following chapters, I turn my attention to a more detailed examination of the theatricalization of manhood in the playhouse. I will look at a number of the

¹⁶⁷ Abby Buchanan Longstreet, *Social Etiquette of New York* (New York: D. Appleton, 1887), 9.

¹⁶⁸ John Patrick Diggins, “The Three Faces of Authority in American History,” in *The Problem of Authority in America*, ed. Diggins and Mark E. Kann (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981), 24. In the years surrounding the Civil War, middle-class men identified with the melancholy isolation of Edwin Booth’s Hamlet, which I will discuss in Chapter Five.

nation's principal actors and examine masculine performance in both the public and private sphere and how their popularity with various audiences reflected a mutual construction of manly ideals, ultimately reflecting a further splintering of American masculinities.

CHAPTER TWO
 “A Glorious Image of Unperverted Manhood:”
 Edwin Forrest as America’s Masculine Ideal¹

The Forresterian Ethos

There was no man more typical of his age than Edwin Forrest; his was a nature that needed not so much interpretation as diagnosis, for in him are to be traced all those restless stirrings which characterized the nation, where growth, expansion, opportunity, sensitiveness, confidence, indomitable industry, and faith in a new destiny resulted in a phenomenal development in the experiment of self-government.²

Born in Philadelphia, the birthplace of American democracy, just thirty years after the Declaration of Independence, Edwin Forrest was the public, theatrical fulfillment of self-made manhood and embodied “the nation’s vigorous fulfillments and its youthful inadequacies,” at a time when the fledgling union was fighting to establish its collective identity:

Edwin Forrest represents more than an actor playing to those who gave him adoration and support. He was built and molded out of the social ideals of his time. A review of his sixty-six tempestuous years, to be complete, means a review of sixty-six years in a nation’s life.³

Born to a Scotch immigrant father and second-generation American mother of German descent, Edwin Forrest was raised in an urban, working-class home. While clearly not impoverished, the family struggled financially. In later years, Forrest’s poverty (like Andrew Jackson’s) was exaggerated and romanticized: “From the

¹ William Rounseville Alger, *Life of Edwin Forrest, The American Tragedian* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1877; reprint, New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972), 251.

² Montrose J. Moses, *The Fabulous Forrest: The Record of an American Actor* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1929), 19.

³ *Ibid.*, 343-44.

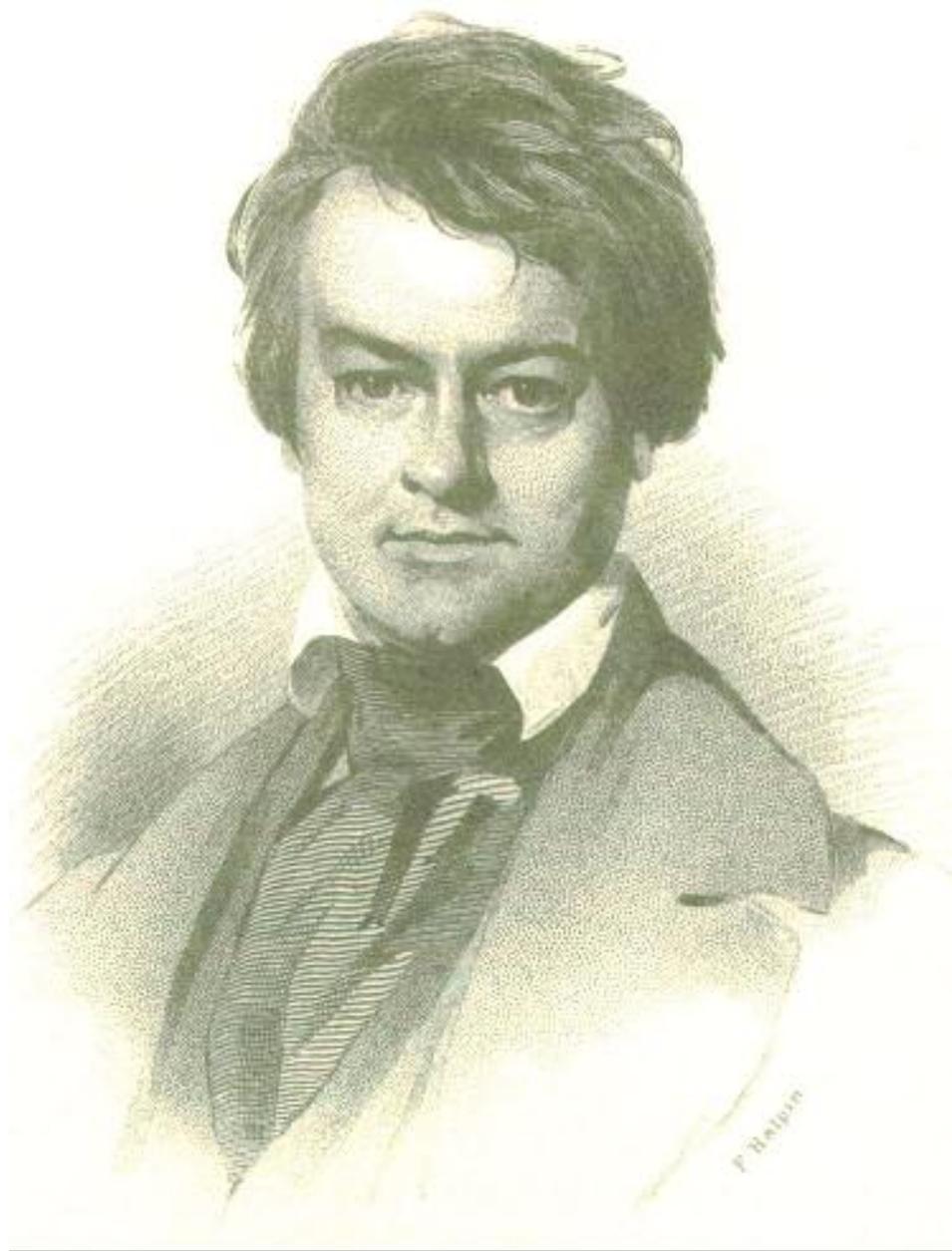


Fig. 10. Edwin Forrest at 21 (1827).

humblest beginnings, and through more of discouragement and opposition than most men have been called to encounter, he has steadily climbed to the highest pinnacle of histrionic distinction and excellence.”⁴

Forrest’s masculine image was a cultural product of his society, mutually constructed, privileging a natural meritocracy that inevitably led to social and economic success. Forrest’s performance of manhood served not only as a model of behavior, but also as a form of manipulation that validated and intensified a communal identification, responsibility, and sense of purpose. While Jackson’s ethos clearly preceded Forrest’s, the actor’s public and private performance provided a practical template of the masculine behavior touted in the advice literature previously discussed:

We reach here the very principle of myth: it transforms history into Nature. We now understand why, *in the eyes of the myth consumer*, the intention, the abomination [sic] of the concept can remain manifest without however appearing to have an interest in the manner: what causes mythical speech to be uttered is perfectly explicit, but it is immediately frozen into something natural; it is not read as a motive, but as a reason.⁵

Barthes’ idea of myth suggests the motivated communication of an arbitrarily imposed meaning that distorts reality. In this case, Forrest built on the Jacksonian ideals of the self-made man, which suggested that hard work and natural gifts alone would naturally lead to social and economic success in a system that actually discouraged class mobility. Through the values implicit in the dramas that Forrest encouraged (such as *Jack Cade*, which I will discuss later in the chapter), he modeled selfless,

⁴ *The Boston Daily Bee*, 10 November 1856.

⁵ Roland Barthes, “Myth Today,” in *A Barthes Reader*, ed. Susan Sontag (New York: Hill and Wang, 1996), 116.

heroic behavior while encouraging the tacit acceptance of his audience. Perhaps Forrest's greatest success was creating a market for "myth consumers" and then feeding them exactly what they thought they wanted. His audience did not have to be *like* him; they could live *through* him.⁶

All of the Forrest biographies and an overwhelming majority of his favorable contemporary press (including "puff" pieces as well as more critical reviews) lionize him and describe him in remarkably similar terms, demonstrating the efficacious ideology of the dominant hegemony, the pervasiveness and consistency of his publicity machine, and Forrest's skill in exploiting and manipulating contemporary images of masculinity to advance his career.

Forrest's cachet as a self-made man not only served as a model of theatrical distinction but also resulted in social prominence and material gain: "That great artist... was once a poor boy – a very poor and unknown boy – with scarcely a friend to say 'God speed you.' But he knew that industry and perseverance would help him onward to wealth and fame."⁷ His father's ongoing illness and eventual death from consumption, coupled with an economic depression, forced Edwin to end his formal schooling at thirteen to help support his family: "His early days of adversity taught

⁶ Although the social structure and political system of nineteenth-century America prevented all but a very fortunate few from enjoying Forrest's mythical success, these social and political impediments were viewed as the necessary and reasonable obstacles of a supposedly "natural" and "just" system that the truly dedicated would inevitably overcome.

⁷ Quoted in Richard Moody, *Edwin Forrest: First Star of the American Stage* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf), 250. The speaker supposedly was one of the workers on Forrest's Fonthill castle, praising the humble tragedian at the "roofing ceremony."

him the value of money, and his first ambition, after gaining an honorable name, was to acquire wealth.”⁸

Forrest’s triumph over humble beginnings was seen as an inspiration, providing a role model for the similarly disadvantaged: “His success is indeed an incentive to the young men of the country who are struggling with adverse circumstances – and is typical of our free, go-ahead and ‘universal Yankee nation.’”⁹ Forrest was a product of capitalist democracy, which ensured freedom of competition but also allowed greatness to be recognized and rewarded: “the naturally energetic man possesses the prerogative of breaking from the trammels of common regulation and of creating new laws for others to obey, new models for others to copy.”¹⁰

The “deservedly triumphant capitalist” portion of the Forrest ethos was a product of a shifting trope in the creation of masculine identity. As I suggested in Chapter One, capitalism was validated and transformed into a system – framed within a rhetoric of moral “logic” based on democratic and Christian ideals - that “naturally” rewarded the just: “[M]any antebellum Americans saw their increasing prosperity as a sign of God’s favor, this transformation of the old Puritan idea wherein the elect might

⁸ *The History of Edwin Forrest, the Celebrated American Tragedian. Written by an individual who has known him from his boyhood* (New York: n.p., 1837), 19. Forrest’s first job was as a print shop apprentice for the *Aurora*, one of Philadelphia’s leading Republican periodicals of the period [*Encyclopedia of American History*, ed. Richard B. Morris (New York: Harper, 1953), 581].

⁹ *Dayton Journal*, 30 September 1865.

¹⁰ *New-York Mirror*, 8 March 1828.

be known by the virtue of their economic behavior.”¹¹ It was not an asset to the Founding Fathers to come from humble beginnings, but changes in political and economic practices required a corresponding shift in the national psyche that measured and celebrated what a man was able to achieve on his own.

Forrest’s life and career were marked by a contrast (clearly visible in retrospect) between the proclaimed desire for the simplicity of yeoman virtues and the consuming drive for public acclaim, monetary gain, and social prestige. Like Jackson, Forrest pursued and embodied both democratic and aristocratic ideals. Normally clothed in a plain black frock coat, Forrest cultivated and consciously performed an image of austere, accessible simplicity:

He was of the people, and with the people. The arrangement of his carelessly tied neck-tie, the broad collar, and wide black ribbon to which his watch was attached, were democratic – plain and indicative of the man’s disposition. He was in no sense of the word a “society” man.¹²

This costume was strangely at odds with a man who was also capable of “extravagant narcissism” in paying \$10,000 dollars for a statue of himself as Coriolanus.¹³ While he condemned the oppressive greed of aristocratic excess, Forrest built Fonthill Castle on the banks of the Hudson for himself and his bride.¹⁴

¹¹ Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992) 32.

¹² John Carboy, “Theatrical Reminiscences: Edwin Forrest,” Harvard Theatre Collection.

¹³ Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 346-47. The statue, by Thomas Ball, was commissioned in 1863 and completed in 1867. It stood for many years in the lobby of the Forrest Home for “decayed” actors and currently looms over the lobby of the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia.

Echoing the suspicions and cautions of the nineteenth-century conduct manuals, throughout his nearly fifty-year career, Forrest amassed enormous wealth but loudly maintained a persistent distrust and contempt for high society. He “never courted popularity; he never flattered power. Importuned a thousand times to enter society, he rather avoided it.”¹⁵ He encouraged the public perception that he privileged the applause of the masses over fashionable patronage: “Mr. Forrest would at any time be more flattered by the honest yell of a ‘Bowery b’hoy,’ than the approving smirk of England’s proudest duke.”¹⁶

While his vociferous, public condemnation of privileged society endeared him to young, white, working-class male audiences, his dislike of cultured crowds was at least partially due to an insecurity and unease in their presence and a thinly masked jealousy of, and desire to be embraced by, the elite: “Forrest was conforming to the ideas of the cultured class, however much he might profess democratic sympathies.”¹⁷ His circle of close friends was a small one, mostly comprised of the wealthy and the intellectually and culturally privileged, although in the wildness of his youth he cultivated relationships with an assortment of less socially desirable characters. His marriage to a socially superior Englishwoman, Catherine Sinclair, was jarringly

¹⁴ Forrest never lived in the castle, although he did stay briefly in the gardener’s cottage, because he separated from his wife before it was completed. It was subsequently sold to the College of Mount Saint Vincent and was used as their library.

¹⁵ *Forney’s Weekly Press* (Philadelphia), 21 December 1872.

¹⁶ “American Actors in England,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 19 (September 1846): 187.

¹⁷ Moses, *Fabulous Forrest*, 119.

incongruous with his professions of simple, democratic, American virtues. This ill-fated union ended in a widely publicized, scandalous divorce and accusations of Forrest's social climbing.

Yet despite these allegations, throughout his career, both fans and critics lauded Forrest as a fearless champion and representative of his nation:

As an American by birth and sympathy, trained in an exclusively American school, we are proud of Mr. Forrest as an index of American progress, and an illustration of what American genius may accomplish in one of the highest, purest, and noblest fields of art.¹⁸

Forrest's passionate defense of his country and himself, which in the minds of Forrest and his fans were often interchangeable, eventually led to violent conflict.

Similar to the dominating presences of Daniel Webster and Henry Ward Beecher, Forrest's most striking qualities as an actor and a man were the overpowering size and strength of his voice and body: "it would have seemed ridiculous that he should be cast for any parts except the greatest: the other actors, even those who were taller, looked insignificant beside him, and their voices, when strongest, seemed thin, and... juiceless, in the comparison."¹⁹ Forrest's stature gave

¹⁸ *Boston Daily Bee*, 10 November 1856.

¹⁹ John Foster Kirk, "Shakespeare's Tragedies Upon the Stage: Remarks and Reminiscences of a Sexagenarian," *Lippincott's Magazine* (June 1884), 604. It is interesting to note that, although Forrest primarily appealed to lower-class audiences, he did seem to possess a number of the performance characteristics also ascribed to Beecher and Webster, suggesting what was being seen on the stage really was what was being seen on the political platform and in the pulpit. It is impossible to determine who was borrowing from whom, but these similarities do suggest a consistency in masculine behavior. The primary difference appeared to be in both the audience that Forrest sought and the ways in which he attempted to "direct" his manly powers.



Fig. 11. Edwin Forrest as Spartacus. This portrait most effectively captures the stature, strength, and dignity of Forrest.

substance to the country's pride in its seemingly boundless geography, while simultaneously reinforcing the idea that natural, inherent qualities would lead to greatness. As Fanny Kemble famously remarked upon first seeing Forrest, "What a mountain of a man!"²⁰

The dancer Fanny Elssler described Forrest as "a fit representative of those classic heroes of antiquity, whose splendid *physique* throws the more effeminate figure of our day into ludicrous contrast."²¹ Just as the flowery speech of foppish aristocrats was condemned in the political world of plain-spoken Jacksonian democracy, physical appearance also acted as a gauge of masculine worth.

Reportedly a thin and sickly child, Forrest's physique was the result of physical training and a strict health regimen. The well-publicized image of self-disciplined and self-made manhood showed Forrest literally constructing his body as well as figuratively building a successful career from humble beginnings.

His vocal power could match his physical presence. Although condemned by detractors as a "bovine bellow," Forrest (like Beecher) supposedly commanded great vocal range and expression:

His voice is full, round and sonorous, and capable of expressing all the tones by which the passions and emotions of the heart and mind are shown to the world. It can hurl defiance at the tyrant and wrong-doer, plead in tones of tenderness for the weak and erring, and pour into the ear of beauty those dulcet strains which make earth a paradise and bring back Eden times to a cold, heartless world.²²

²⁰ Quoted in Charles T. Congdon, *Reminiscences of a Journalist* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1880), 190.

²¹ Quoted in Moses, *Fabulous Forrest*, 195.

²² Congdon, *Reminiscences*, 190; *The Age* (Philadelphia) 11 October 1872.



Fig. 12. Cartoon of Edwin Forrest as Spartacus, exaggerating the size of his muscles and his “wild” stage aspect.

While he indeed may have possessed this range, his fame and popularity (like Webster's) stemmed from far less subtle use of his instrument: "he was making the wings tremble and shaking the dust from the flies overhead."²³

Winning acclaim for his stage portrayals and the inspiration of his physical presence, Forrest presented an idealized model of American masculinity: "He was everything they had been told a man should be... [H]is robust, statuesque appearance mirrored the ideals of the illusory democratic Athens and the virility of American manhood which defined masculine beauty in his time."²⁴ Forrest's awesome physical presence and the overpowering dynamism of his stage persona combined to create a tantalizing and seemingly attainable masculine ideal:

[W]hat a glorious image of unperturbed manhood, of personified health and strength and beauty, he presented!... As he stepped upon the stage in his naked fighting-trim, his muscular coating unified all over him and quivering with vital power, his skin polished by exercise and friction to a smooth and marble hardness, conscious of his enormous potency, fearless of anything on the earth, proudly aware of the impression he knew his mere appearance, backed by his fame, would make on the audience who impatiently awaited him, – he used to stand and receive the long, tumultuous cheering that greeted him, as immovable as a planted statue of Hercules. In the rank and state of his physical organism and its feelings he had the superiority of a god over common men.²⁵

²³ Lisle Lester, "Edwin Forrest. His Art and Manhood," *Leslie's Popular Monthly* (December 1887), 686.

²⁴ Sally Leilani Jones, "The Original Characters of Edwin Forrest and His American Style" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1992), 73-74.

²⁵ Alger, *Life of Edwin Forrest*, 251-52. It is tempting to read a homoerotic tone into this passage. Ginger Strand's "'My Noble Spartacus:' Edwin Forrest and Masculinity on the Nineteenth-Century Stage" (in *Passing Performances: Queer Readings of Leading Players in American Theater History*, ed. Robert A Schanke and Kim Marra [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998], 19-40) suggests a "queer" reading of portions of Forrest's career and specifically his longtime friendship with James Oaks. While this interpretation likely reads too literally into Forrest's masculine

This sensual language, bordering on the pornographic, suggested a sexually charged and seductive masculine image. These descriptions take the celebration of the simultaneously self-made and “natural” man to an extreme, presenting a sharp contrast to the reserved, cerebral style of traditional, British actors. Forrest’s onstage persona added an overtly physical and sexual component to the Jacksonian masculine model.²⁶

Forrest’s larger-than-life persona instilled a sense of wonder, pride, and admiration in an audience and nation looking for grand models. From his first moments on stage, the sense of recognition, identification, and emotional connection “at once struck like an electrical cord of harmony from the actor to the audience.”²⁷

The perception of Forrest’s almost inhuman power made him the perfect personification of the conquering barbarian rebel, while his grand and tragic stature matched the Founding Fathers’ desire to re-create the classical ideal:

Standing before them in his colossal strength of form, his chiseled and massive features the indices of an iron will, he seems the type of that American man

imagery, it highlights the unabashed sensuality of the sexually charged celebration of his manhood.

²⁶ It is interesting to note that what is most absent from the manly examples I have given up to now is any hint of sexuality. Beecher perhaps comes closest in his ability to seduce (most famously the Beecher/Tilton scandal of the early 1870s, in which he was charged with adultery). Did Forrest raise a question onstage that none of the orators had to deal with (because Forrest was performing masculinity in a different context) – what does a man do with his sexual ability and potential? If Clay, Webster, Jackson, et al., drove that urge underground – what difference would it make in imagining a male identity when it was allowed to be expressed? What do we get when we add a sexual component to Jacksonian manliness? I would argue that it becomes more dangerous, and the potential for unbridled sexuality may have been part of what scared off (at least on a subliminal level) some of Forrest’s upper-class audience.

²⁷ Charles Durang, “Life of Edwin Forrest,” Harvard Theatre Collection, 11. Durang wrote his brief biography between 1864 and 1869.

before whose indomitable energy the wilderness of the New World has receded, and from whom have come a race of giants always rushing forward to conquests over the physical and moral world. The moment the eye rests on him the mind accepts him, by instinct, as embodying visibly those ideas of strength and grandeur out of which the fables of antiquity shaped the stories of Theseus or of Hercules, and which inspired the Grecian chisel to express in the poetry of marble the form of demi-god and hero.²⁸

This myth image, simultaneously presenting Forrest as unbridled conqueror and exalted god, may explain his *initial* appeal across class lines, as his urban audience members were able to perceive their respective ideals in Forrest's stature and strength.

As Forrest appeared to give free rein to his passionate impulses on stage, so in life he seemed ungovernable, incapable of self-restraint, and unable to forgive or forget a perceived slight. In the eyes of middle-class viewers, Forrest's inability to control his temper suggested a flaw in his manliness, as I discussed in my survey of etiquette books.²⁹ In his youth he had trained in the "manly art" of boxing, and he remained a fighter through every aspect of his life.³⁰ He sued for divorce, lost, and continued vocally and legally to contest the decision for eighteen years; he publicly beat a man for criticizing him in the newspaper; he sued a newspaper for defamation of artistic character; and he (at least indirectly) caused the biggest theatrical riot in the country's history.³¹ Biographer Richard Moody described Forrest's iron resolve as "a

²⁸ *Sunday Times* (New York), 22 September 1860.

²⁹ Forrest's masculine performance went too far, and so ultimately was perhaps less effective or less *manly* that it might have originally appeared. At least by middle-class standards, he may have been categorized as little more than a bully.

³⁰ For a discussion of prize fighting and its relation to nineteenth-century masculine identity, see Elliot J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

pathological inability to accept defeat.”³² Like his own stage characters, Forrest suffered personal tragedies (such as his inability to have children and his lengthy, public divorce), and he bullied anyone necessary for public vindication.

Such an overwhelming amount of rhetoric about Forrest’s manliness exists, that theatre historians tend to take it for granted without interrogating *why* it was so important to distinguish him in that way. As I suggested earlier, the country sought great figures to represent and define a vibrant, uniquely American masculine image, and the theatrical stage provided an outstanding showcase and proving ground. Working class audiences applauded Forrest’s fighting spirit on stage through the 1830s and 40s, but by the time of his public battles in the 1850s and 60s, much of the country’s middle-class population embraced a more genteel societal norm and began searching for a less violent, more sensitive model.

Strenuous Realism: Forrest’s Acting Style

Edwin Forrest was America’s first native-born star, and even in his earliest amateur performances critics recognized, “the germ of tragic greatness.”³³ The

³¹ The Forrest-Sinclair divorce case of the early 1850s was one of the most sensational and scandalous events in the country, each accusing the other of repeated adultery, and was written about extensively in the nation’s newspapers. Forrest lost the case but appealed at various court levels for the next eighteen years before finally giving up. Forrest caned N.P. Willis, a journalist and friend of his estranged wife, for writing a series of articles criticizing Forrest for the marital problems and accusing him of social pretension in marrying Catherine Sinclair. In 1868 Forrest sued the Philadelphia Dispatch for defamation of character for burlesquing some of his more obvious characteristics. The Astor Place riot of 1849 was caused by the personal and professional feud of Forrest and William Charles Macready, the leading English actor. All of these events will be covered in more detail in chapter four.

³² Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 44.

promise of this “germ,” fulfilled in the blossoming of Forrest’s eventual stage dominance, also hailed the birth of American performance. Critics and theatre audiences immediately recognized Forrest’s successful New York debut – exhibiting “rapid advancement... towards professional eminence” as an Othello “superior to any in this country except Kean’s” - as a hallmark of American acting: “Forrest came upon us with all the genius – the spirit and power of the great Edmund Kean. He came – we saw – and he conquered!”³⁴ His meteoric rise to stardom, for many, helped legitimize the American theatre, providing an answer to charges that the United States had produced no actors of worth:

Before Mr. Forrest’s success, the poor American who dared attempt to tread the boards, was pressed down as an object of pity and contempt, by the haughty English manager, and insolent player, who dreaded a rival talent. But Forrest came like a blazing meteor, and proved to the United States, that genius was as powerful here, as on the other side of the Atlantic.³⁵

³³ Ibid., 15-16. Colonel John Swift, later mayor of Philadelphia, made this remark to eleven-year-old Forrest. It is extremely difficult to distinguish Forrest’s myth from the facts of his biographies – it often really is too good to be true, and all seems a little too pat and easy. Forrest certainly was not the first American actor to be compared in favorable terms with a British star. Because of the overwhelming popularity of the dime novel fiction and the biographies of great figures I discussed in Chapter One, Forrest’s biographers (and Forrest himself) constructed a similar rags-to-riches narrative.

³⁴ *New York Mirror*, 1 July 1826; Charles Durang, “Life of Edwin Forrest,” Harvard Theatre Collection, 11. Durang personally witnessed Forrest’s debut.

³⁵ *History of Edwin Forrest*, 18. In Sydney Smith’s oft-quoted attack on American culture, he asked, “In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? Or goes to an American play?... [Where are] their Siddonses, Kembles, Keans, or O’Neills?” (*The Edinburgh Review, Or Critical Journal* 23 [January 1820], 79). When Forrest debuted in Boston seven years later, the *New England Galaxy* (16 February 1827) responded, “certainly the gentleman, whose name appears at the head of this article [E.Forrest], gives glorious promise of a splendid career, and justifies the hope of saying – Here! when asked, ‘Where is our Kemble?’”

Forrest's emergence in the 1820s as the "first" great American actor was strategically timed; following the War of 1812, the nation had the sense of having finally shaken off the British yoke. While the effusion of his biographers was overblown, and his acting style may not have been the original creation often supposed, Forrest did present a grand and tragic figure to rival his European counterparts.

The term "strenuous realism" has been used to characterize Forrest's performance style, although strenuous melodramatics may be more accurate, as most critics noted his intense passion in morally simple roles.³⁶ Although he is often credited as the founder of an original American acting school, his acting theory (like that of his contemporaries) was based largely on the direct observation of the great actors of his time. The two primary acting approaches of the period, embodied by the stately elocution and intellectualism of John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) and the unpredictable and fiery passion of Edmund Kean (1788?-1833), clearly influenced Forrest's performance. Inspired early in his career by a Kemble disciple, Thomas Abthorpe Cooper (1776-1849), Forrest maintained elements of the intelligence, dignity, and clarity of the "Classical" school throughout his career. Ultimately, however, Forrest shared the stage with Kean and was more strongly influenced by the sensationalism, unpredictability, and wild extremes of the "Romantic" school.³⁷

³⁶ Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 396.

³⁷ While it certainly was not a direct correlation, the differences and tensions between these two schools of acting in many ways mirrored the evolving social and political world, which held onto elements of the traditional hierarchical, patriarchal structure while simultaneously being drawn toward the freedom and social leveling of republicanism.

Forrest did not undergo a lengthy or extensive apprenticeship in the theatre and, unlike many famous actors of the period, did not come from a theatrical family.³⁸ His only formal training was in elocution, although he continued training himself in this area for many years.³⁹ Forrest's first significant performance experience was in the theatres of the West, in which strong gesture and bold interpretation was favored in order to hold the attention of unsophisticated audiences: "The acting of Forrest was natural, impulsive and ardent, because he was not so well trained as his English rivals in what may be termed a false refinement."⁴⁰ Forrest's comparative lack of training and etiquette, considered a virtue by many, drew attention to his "natural" talents and abilities: "He possessed a fine, untaught face, and good, manly figure, and, though unpolished in his deportment, his manners were frank and honest, and his uncultivated taste, speaking the language of truth and Nature, could be readily understood."⁴¹ The natural quality that Forrest brought to his stage speech and performance was a product of – or at least co-evolutionary with – the changing style of public speaking and the

³⁸ His early appearances on the stage appear to have been prompted by a desire to be noticed, and this need for attention was to follow Forrest throughout his career.

³⁹ Forrest's father provided Edwin with elocution lessons from Alexander Wilson, 'the father of American ornithology,' and Professor Lemuel G. White of Philadelphia. [Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 16] Forrest's father died when Edwin was thirteen and the family (six children in all) was frequently described as financially insolvent. Either the family must have made significant sacrifice to provide Edwin with this experience, or their poverty was exaggerated.

⁴⁰ James Murdoch, *The Stage* (Philadelphia: J.M. Stoddart, 1880; reprint New York: Benjamin Blom, 1969), 294-95. Murdoch (1811-1893) was a successful actor and contemporary of Forrest.

⁴¹ Joe Cowell, *Thirty Years Passed Among the Players in England and America*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1844), 74.

performance of masculinity discussed in Chapter One, as the perceived detached intellectualism of John Quincy Adams and John C. Calhoun gave way to the comparatively impassioned exhortations of Henry Ward Beecher.

Forrest sought to make his acting true to life, but definitions of “nature” in acting have always been relative to people’s beliefs and experiences in any given period. Spontaneity on stage was typically an illusion, as Edmund Kean, whose unbridled passion was considered the exemplar of Romantic acting, explained:

These people [critics] don’t understand their business; they give me credit where I don’t deserve it, and pass over passages on which I have bestowed the utmost care and attention. Because my style is easy and natural they think I don’t study, and talk about the ‘sudden impulse of a genius.’ There is no such thing as impulsive acting; all is premeditated and studied beforehand. A man may act better or worse on a particular night, from particular circumstances; but, although the execution may not be so brilliant, the conception is the same.⁴²

Joseph R. Roach, who places the historical study of acting within evolving understandings of physiology and psychology from the seventeenth to the twentieth century, describes the difference between perceptions of spontaneity – “coming freely without premeditation or effort, growing naturally without cultivation or labor” – and the ways in which artists consciously employed technique – “a coincidence of meaning that evokes not the free overflow of emotions but their progressive canalization into habit... Reflection shapes memory into an expressive illusion – an illusion of feelings spontaneously overflowing as if for the first time. This is not Nature, then; it is second nature.”⁴³ Successful actors needed to recreate exactly the

⁴² Quoted in *Actors on Acting*, ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (New York: Crown, 1970), 327-28.

passion and inspiration of their great dramatic roles. This craft under the guise of nature, which David Garrick (1717-1779) put into practice on the English-speaking stage and Diderot explained in *Le paradoxe sur le comédien* (1773), was a hallmark of nineteenth-century Romantic acting.

Similar to Beecher's impulse to study his audience and base his performances on observations of their behaviors and his understanding of their needs, Forrest also incorporated observations from life into his acting. He spent months with an Indian tribe out West and supposedly used his observations on stage in *Metamora* to great effect.⁴⁴ His lifelong obsession with *King Lear* led him to many asylums to study the mentally ill, and his portrayal of the character was said to be one of his most effective. Devotees, of course, praised his acting as startlingly lifelike, passionately defending the magnitude and power of Forrest's dramatic incarnations against charges of melodramatic excess:

Are the wonderful figures of Michael Angelo [*sic*] melodramatic because they are so strongly outlined? Is Niagara unnatural and full of trick because it is mighty and thunders so in its fall?... Whenever I saw him act I used to feel with exultation how perfectly grand God had made him. How grand a form! how grand a mind! how grand a heart! how grand a voice! how grand a flood of passion, sweeping all these to their mark in perfect unison!⁴⁵

⁴³ Joseph R. Roach, *The Player's Passion: Studies in the Science of Acting* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1993), 162-63.

⁴⁴ Forrest developed a friendship with Chief Push-ma-ta-ha and apparently embraced the simple values of the Native Americans. Forrest spent a couple of months with the tribe during a period of depression, theatrical frustration, and financial need. [Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 40, 47-48]

⁴⁵ Gabriel Harrison, quoted in Alger, *Life of Edwin Forrest*, 543. Harrison was a friend and acting contemporary of Forrest, who claimed to have watched him act over four hundred times.

Detractors of Forrest's muscular and bombastic style saw little of nature or originality in his work:

The sum of criticism upon it [Forrest's performance] seems to be that the acting is a boundless exaggeration of all the traditional conventions of the stage... You have seen and heard exactly the same thing a hundred times, with more or less excellence... The life of "the stage" was never more adequately depicted. It is the sock-and-buskin view of nature and emotion. And it has a palpable physical effect.⁴⁶

Even critics, however, could not discount (again exhibiting a magnetism similar to Beecher) the enormous emotional impact and connection that Forrest achieved with his audiences: "Edwin Forrest possessed more animal magnetism than has ever been seen or utilized before or since upon the American stage."⁴⁷

The passion of his acting elicited passionate responses, both positive and negative: "To criticise it as acting is...useless... That human beings, under any conceivable circumstances, should ever talk or act as they are represented in the Forrest drama...is beyond belief."⁴⁸ The *Knickerbocker Magazine*, appealing to an intellectual elite, attacked Forrest's attempts at Shakespearean originality, mocked his intellectual justifications for a non-traditionally jocular Richard III, and dismissed his performance as: "a sort of artificial thunder, without the lightning."⁴⁹

⁴⁶ "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's Magazine*, November 1863. Of course these observations were made thirty-six years after Forrest's theatrical debut and well after whatever novelty Forrest brought to the stage had faded.

⁴⁷ Lisle Lester, *Leslie's Popular Monthly*, December 1887, 686.

⁴⁸ "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's Magazine*, December 1863. The *Harper's* editor, catering to the genteel, middle-class reader, admittedly was writing well after Forrest's professional zenith, long past the time when Forrest's artistic "innovations" had been institutionalized.

Even the most positive of Forrest's biographers, Reverend William Rounseville Alger (Forrest's hand-selected, "official" biographer), acknowledged two major faults in Forrest's acting: an "excess...of physical and spiritual force in the expression of...destructive passion" and a "lack of souplesse, physical and spiritual mobility." Alger, however, staunchly defended "the honest massiveness and glow of his delineations...by a studious and manly art unmarred with any insincere trickery."⁵⁰ Montrose J. Moses, the most critical of the biographers, ultimately arrived at the same conclusions (likely inspired at least in part by his study of Alger) – praising Forrest's applied study and the sincere vigor of his passion but condemning the lack of imagination and character empathy, as well as the "absurd excess, especially where physical realism took the place of spiritual insight."⁵¹

Forrest was always recognizable as Forrest on stage – either unable or unwilling to hide himself in the character: "He was in all things marked and distinctive. His obtrusive personality often destroyed the harmony of the portrait he was painting."⁵² While many actors after the era of Cooke and Kean prided

⁴⁹ *Knickerbocker Magazine*, December 1837.

⁵⁰ *Life of Edwin Forrest*, 260-61.

⁵¹ Moses, *Fabulous Forrest*, 334. This criticism lies at the heart of the difference between Forrest and Edwin Booth, which will be discussed in detail in chapter five. Obviously this biographer was writing at a time when Booth's approach had been judged correct, obvious, and natural when compared to Forrest.

⁵² Lawrence Barrett, "Edwin Forrest," in *Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States*, ed. Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton, vol. 4 (New York: O.M. Dunham, 1886), 45. Barrett, early in his career, played with Forrest and later acted extensively with Edwin Booth. Forrest, in his "recognizability," very much resembled

themselves on their ability to lose themselves within a role (representation rather than presentation), Forrest maintained a “vitalized individuality,” that no character or costume could hide or diminish: “not only did he not seem to lose his own individuality, but he did not seem to find it in that of any personage that he represented.”⁵³ John Foster Kirk, an acting contemporary, suggested Forrest unsuccessfully sought identification in his characters and was unable to find a dramatic role with which he was completely congruous – one that managed to live up to the lofty expectations of his own masculine code.

Unable to relinquish his carefully constructed masculine identity on stage, he also appeared unwilling to drop the character of Edwin Forrest in real life: “He was always posing, always striking attitudes, always trying his powers... always storing away bits of knowledge in the belief they would give him the culture and refinement he never quite grasped or made his own.”⁵⁴ Forrest’s desperate attachment to a clearly defined, albeit illusory and self-constructed, American manhood mirrored the nation’s need for confident masculine models.

Forrest as Political Animal and Champion of the Masses

Throughout his career, Forrest exerted substantial political influence over predominantly working class audiences, and provided a theatrical template of the ideal

the great orators of the day, such as Clay and Webster. People often would come to hear them talk because of who they were and how they spoke – never mind the topic.

⁵³ *The Age* (Philadelphia), 13 December 1872; Kirk, “Shakespeare’s Tragedies,” 615.

⁵⁴ Moses, *Fabulous Forrest*, 134. Forrest appears to have bought into the idea that there was some form of “code” to be cracked in order to gain access to middle-class and elite masculine identities and acceptance.

Jacksonian male. Forrest was a staunch Democratic Republican – a friend and fan of Andrew Jackson, actively campaigning for him and others of his party throughout his life. Forrest spoke at a national convention for Jackson’s successor, Martin Van Buren, and even received an offer from the New York Democratic Republican Nominating Committee to run for state representative.⁵⁵ As late as 1860, after one of several retirement announcements, he was mentioned as a potential and viable presidential candidate.⁵⁶ His political views echoed Jackson’s, praising and supporting a system that had allowed him to prosper and calling for a freedom and equality of opportunity anticipating Darwin’s survival of the fittest: “strength must ever have an advantage over weakness.”⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Van Buren, while in political harmony with Jackson, was a comparatively “effeminate” opposite of Jackson’s manly image.

⁵⁶ *The New-York Herald*, 11 September 1860.

⁵⁷ “Oration Delivered at the Democratic Republican Celebration, Fourth of July, 1838” (New York: Jared W. Bell, 1838), 23. It was rumored that William Leggett penned Forrest’s speech.



Fig. 13. Edwin Forrest at 45 (1851). Note the similarity to Andrew Jackson's portrait (Fig. 4).

Possibly Forrest's most important guiding political watchword was simplicity, "the invariable characteristic of truth... The grand elementary principles of whatever is most valuable to man are distinguished by simplicity."⁵⁸ This homage to the uncomplicated was reflected in the way he viewed social issues as black-and-white binaries and fueled the nationalistic tensions that led to the Astor Place riot, suggesting that Forrest apparently had no *real* grasp of politics. He could perform the rhetoric that Jacksonians espoused but probably without any understanding of the serious issues at stake. He was a charismatic figurehead without the skills (or the script) to sustain any kind of political role offstage.

Echoing the uncomplicated nature of Jackson's oratory, simplicity also guided Forrest's acting style, perhaps flattening emotional dimension within some roles, but certainly necessitating strong, clear, unwavering interpretations, which were clearly understood by all audience members:

His delineations are not mere cartoons... They are pictures with unmistakable color, acute expression of form, and a single, unerring meaning. Their simplicity is such that if not grand they would be shallow and feebly commonplace: just as it is but a step from Doric majesty to unrelieved plainness and squat ugliness.⁵⁹

While critics attacked this approach as reductive and unsophisticated, it is possible to see how Forrest's vigor and passion would have balanced the simplicity of his

⁵⁸ "Oration," 8.

⁵⁹ John McCullough, Scrapbook, Robinson Locke Collection, New York Public Library at Lincoln Center. McCullough began his career touring with Forrest and later became one of the country's more popular actors. His career will be discussed further in chapter three.

portrayals and why actors who attempted to imitate the fire of Forrest's passion were often unsuccessful.

Throughout his entire career, he remained the masculine ideal of the urban working class, who admired his rough physicality. The very fact that working-class audiences embraced Forrest so enthusiastically, however, eventually distanced more discerning audiences:

Having had an opportunity of witnessing his unschooled efforts, I strongly urged his engagement at the Park [Theatre]; but, while the dollars and cents were under consideration, Gilfert [manager of the Bowery Theatre] secured the prize, and, cunningly enlisting the natural national prejudices of the Americans in the cause, Forrest filled the coffers of the Bowery treasury, and received the unthinking, overwrought, enthusiastic admiration of his countrymen, which, after years of unceasing study and practice, he now so justly merits from all admirers of genuine talent."⁶⁰

It was clear, however, that "admirers of genuine talent," presumably referring to elite audience, never did fully embrace Forrest, whether or not he deserved it. Joe Cowell, an acting contemporary of Forrest's, implied that Forrest could just as easily have succeeded at the comparatively elite Park Theatre with a little more dedication to his craft early in his career. Forrest took the "easy road" by tailoring his performance to the "unthinking, overwrought, enthusiastic" working-class male audience, making an irreversible choice (if it was indeed a choice) in artistic style and patronage.

The increasingly conservative and genteel middle classes, however, deplored Forrest's vulgar display of muscularity: "by the standards of a squeamish politeness it [superlative developments of physical beauty] is considered something low and

⁶⁰ Joe Cowell, *Thirty Years*, vol. 2, 74.

coarse.”⁶¹ As the emerging middle classes – “externally cool and controlled, internally anxious and conflicted” – placed an increasing premium on social anonymity, Forrest’s massive, thunderous stage presence offended the delicate sensibilities of the refined, decorous behavior that marked genteel masculinity.⁶² The genteel rejection of Forrest’s dangerous charisma bears an interesting relation to the seemingly unexciting presidential candidates between Jackson and Lincoln, discussed in Chapter One. It is possible that anxiety about a magnetic, theatrical performance of masculinity frightened middle-class viewers in the same way voters were intimidated in the presidential arena. Also, when brute force was no longer seen as a viable solution to the increasingly complex problems facing the nation in the mid-nineteenth century, the middle and upper classes frequently turned to less dynamic but more sensitive and intellectual models.

Forrest’s personal life was often at odds with the regulated ideals of genteel decorum. Middle-class behavior, “aimed to assemble a self out of the virtues of ‘character’ (intimately associated with the sturdy nouns *citizenship*, *duty*, *integrity*, *morals*, and *manners*) rather than those of ‘personality’ (associated with the glittering adjectives *attractive*, *fascinating*, *magnetic*, *forceful*).”⁶³ While Forrest harbored a desire for widespread social acceptance and celebrity, the very nature of his success in

⁶¹ Alger, *Life of Edwin Forrest*, 159.

⁶² John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 7.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 257.

personal and professional life was based on glittering personality and passionate, emotional expression.

Throughout his career, Forrest became more strongly connected to lower class audiences, effectively alienating many of the more educated and wealthy elite.⁶⁴

Forrest's emotional connection to, and identification with, working class Americans earned their vociferous adulation:

[H]e stands forth as the very embodiment...of *the masses* of American character. Hence his peculiarities. Hence his amazing success. And further, Mr. Forrest in his acting is not merely the embodiment of national character, but he is the beau ideal of a peculiar phase of that character – its *democratic idiosyncrasies*. Of this, both physically and in his artistical execution, he is a complete living illustration... Mr. Forrest has got the heart, nay, the “very heart of hearts,” of *the masses*, however he may have failed to conciliate the full approbation of the strictly critical and the fastidious.⁶⁵

I will extend this discussion of the class divisions separating Forrest's supporters from his detractors, and the struggle for masculine dominance that led to the Astor Place Riot, in Chapter Four.

Support for Forrest in the romantic melodramas and the democratic ideals they embodied extended to a personal identification with Forrest as a masculine representation of the nation. As *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* noted, “We take interest in Mr. Forrest because we see in him, elemental qualities,

⁶⁴ Elite audiences and critics rejected Forrest as an inappropriate masculine model as early as the 1830s, but Forrest never did anything overt or intentional to estrange a genteel audience – perhaps holding out hope that he could somehow woo them. Forrest was drawn to working-class audiences because of his temperament and acting style. He would not have amassed his fortune playing to the elite.

⁶⁵ *Albion* (New York), 2 September 1848.

characteristic of the country; and we feel therefore any slight put upon him, is in its essence, a wound directed at the country itself.”⁶⁶

Forrest as a Father of American Drama

Forrest demanded roles that showcased his strengths and allowed him to define himself as a symbol of American nationalism (even though he never played a white American on stage): “Accordingly, all his favorite parts were expressions of a high-souled manhood.”⁶⁷ His simple, rugged on-stage persona consistently featured a rebellious republican hero fighting against the oppression of a callous aristocracy for the good of the exploited commons: “He loved to stand out in some commanding form of virtue, heroism, or struggle, battling with trials that would appall common souls, setting a good example, and evoking enthusiasm.”⁶⁸ Through the strength of his indomitable will and love of liberty, as well as the keen perception of the potential for monetary gain, Forrest’s “deeply rooted patriotic fervor demanded that he force the theatre to serve the cause of democracy.”⁶⁹ Forrest essentially played the drama of the Jacksonian regime onstage:

⁶⁶ “Mr. Forrest’s Second Reception in England,” *The United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 16 (April 1845), 386.

⁶⁷ Alger, *Life of Edwin Forrest*, 260.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 259.

⁶⁹ Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 87. Forrest’s connection to Jacksonian Democracy and its influence on his stage work is most effectively discussed in Bruce A. McConachie’s “The Theatre of Edwin Forrest and Jacksonian Hero Worship” in *When They Weren’t Doing Shakespeare: Essays on Nineteenth-Century British and American Theatre*, ed. Judith L. Fisher and Stephen Watt (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1989), 3-18.

Forrest's prize plays rode the coattails of American enthusiasm for 'Old Hickory' and for the Democratic attack on aristocratic privilege in defense of 'natural' rights... For the Democrats, the Second Bank of the United States came to symbolize all that was unnatural and aristocratic in the present economic and political order. When President Jackson slew 'the Monster' in 1832, fellow Democrats applauded him like a stage hero in a melodrama.⁷⁰

Thus, Forrest's audience might see Jackson's struggle against the corrupt banking system mirrored in Forrest's struggle to free the slaves in *The Gladiator*.

Capitalizing on the democratic fervor and hearty nationalistic sentiment that elected Jackson to his first term, Forrest announced the first of his American drama competitions in 1828. Responding to the failure of the nation to cultivate American "native geniuses" in the theatre, Forrest's competitions were designed to nurture a truly American drama: "To the author of the best Tragedy, in five acts, of which the hero or principal character shall be an aboriginal of this country, the sum of five hundred dollars, and half of the proceeds of the third representation, with my own gratuitous services on that occasion."⁷¹ Forrest held nine such contests, eventually raising the prize to a thousand dollars and lifting the restriction in subject matter – ultimately taking stage as the great benefactor of American drama.

The patriotic appeal of drama with a strong nationalistic flavor, a drama of passion and action, possessed the potential for almost limitless profit: "Say that your play is American, talk of the 'new school,' 'native talent,' 'patriotic attachments,' 'intelligent people,' etc., and deprecate any criticism as cruel, and having a tendency

⁷⁰ McConachie, "Theatre of Edwin Forrest," 4, 5.

⁷¹ *The Critic* (New York), 22 November 1828. This weekly review was edited by William Leggett.

to crush the ‘rising drama of America.’”⁷² Forrest certainly reaped substantial financial rewards from the performance of the native plays that emerged from the competitions: “the bulk of Mr. Forrest’s fortune [was] derived from the original plays.”⁷³

The simplicity and patriotic appeal of Forrest’s American dramas particularly suited the tastes of working class audiences: “Give him a hero fired with democratic passions who slashed out at a tyrant, and he could rouse an audience to shouting.”⁷⁴ A young Walt Whitman praised Forrest for making “the hearts of the masses swell responsively to all those nobler manlier aspirations in behalf of mortal freedom.”⁷⁵

The literary merit and substance of these works, however, was often questioned: “The Public Taste! – On Tuesday evening, Forrest played LEAR to a beggarly account of empty boxes; - Metamora, last night, drew an overflowing house. – Such is the critical discernment of the Literary Metropolis!”⁷⁶ A rival newspaper’s immediate defense of the audience suggested that Forrest’s temperament and abilities perhaps were better suited to less-demanding native products: “Perhaps the true solution of the wonder is that nobody supposes Forrest is capable of performing the

⁷² *The New-York Mirror*, 8 March 1834.

⁷³ Cornelius Matthews, *The Sun* (New York), 5 July 1881.

⁷⁴ Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 396.

⁷⁵ *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 26 December 1846.

⁷⁶ *Boston Daily Atlas*, 7 November 1833.

character of Lear, with propriety or discrimination – and he is known to play the Indian Chief to the life.”⁷⁷

The plays Forrest encouraged and popularized – most importantly the works of three Philadelphians: John Augustus Stone’s *Metamora* (1829), Robert Montgomery Bird’s *The Gladiator* (1831), and Robert T. Conrad’s *Jack Cade* (1835) – provided a model of acceptable male roles in society.⁷⁸ Rather than focusing on the middle classes, who already had viable heroes and roles models in the public sphere, Forrest’s plays presented accessible exemplars of male behavior which appealed to the previously ignored lower classes – steadily growing in size and influence.

Jack Cade, Forrest’s penultimate contest winner, provides an interesting case study of Forrest’s self-constructed masculine identity. A close observation of the careful crafting of *Jack Cade*’s dramatic hero will allow a glimpse into Forrest’s “man-making machine.” Through an analysis of the changes Forrest made to Conrad’s script, we can see the ways in which Forrest shaped his dramatic material and rewrote history to suit his notions of masculinity. Though a textual treatment of this play may *seem* tangential to the performance of masculinity, such an analysis will suggest the degree of craft and calculation that entered into *every* aspect of creating a male persona on the nineteenth-century stage. A close examination of *Jack Cade*

⁷⁷ *New England Galaxy*, 9 November 1833.

⁷⁸ Forrest successfully performed many non-American plays as well, including several Shakespearean roles – most notably Lear, Othello, Richard III, and Macbeth. But even in these roles, he was recognized and praised as embodying the strength and passion of the indomitable frontier spirit of America.



Fig. 14. Edwin Forrest as Jack Cade.

reveals as well, a great deal about the *choices* Forrest made in his “self-constructed manhood.”

Jack Cade: A Case Study

In its new dress, this drama [*Jack Cade*] has been one of the most successful ever written by an American, not only attracting crowded houses, but extorting the good word of our best critics.

– Edgar Allan Poe, *Graham’s Magazine*, 1841

Poe’s praise is not in reference to what is undoubtedly the most well-known dramatization of the Jack Cade Rebellion. For most contemporary theatre historians, mention of the rebellion recalls only the famous line from Shakespeare’s *Henry VI*, Part 2, “The first thing we do, let’s kill all the lawyers.” Shakespeare presents Cade (in what is actually a combination of the most sensational elements of the Peasant Rebellion of 1450, led by Jack Cade, and Wat Tyler’s Peasants’ Rebellion of 1381) as a rustic buffoon and ridiculous pretender to the throne – a pawn and thug trying to destroy the monarchy. Comprising most of the fourth act, the Cade subplot initially serves as comic relief but eventually turns dark and serious, illustrating the danger of ambition, disorder, and anarchy.

Robert T. Conrad’s *Jack Cade* has garnered what little scholarly attention it has received through its connection to Edwin Forrest.⁷⁹ *Metamora* and *The Gladiator*

⁷⁹ It is perhaps ironic that the play was originally written for the actor considered to be the only legitimate rival to Forrest’s claim as the greatest American tragedian, Augustus A. Addams. Addams, too drunk to perform *Jack Cade* on its opening in 1835, briefly and unsuccessfully played the role in 1836 (T. Allston Brown, *A History of the New York Stage From the First Performance in 1732 to 1901*, vol. 1 [New York: Benjamin Blom, 1903], 105-06; Francis Courtnay Wemyss, *Twenty-Six Years of*

have both received significantly more scholarly attention than Conrad's play, yet *Jack Cade* was enormously popular in its day and is worthy of further attention. Forrest's performances of *Jack Cade* represented more than one-fourth of his total appearances on Philadelphia stages from 1841 to 1855 (69 of 263) and, in fact, it was his most performed role, surpassing the combined performances of *Metamora* and *The Gladiator* during that period (30 and 36, respectively).⁸⁰ Forrest's depiction of Jack Cade connected with urban working class male audiences on a profound level:

The Jack Cade of Forrest stirred the great passions in the bosom of the people, swept the chords of their elementary sympathies with tempestuous and irresistible power...Jack Cade was his incarnate tribuneship of the people, ...inflamed by personal wrongs and inspired with a...desperate love of liberty. In it he was a sort of dramatic Demosthenes, rousing the cowardly and slumberous hosts of mankind to redeem themselves with their own right hands.⁸¹

Jack Cade is the only one of Forrest's contest-winning plays that had received prior production, having won the award in 1841 after an at least moderately successful initial run in Philadelphia. Conrad adapted the play under Forrest's guidance.⁸²

the Life of an Actor and Manager [New York: Burgess, Stringer, and Co., 1847], 244). Addams will be discussed in greater detail in chapter three.

⁸⁰ Arthur Herman Wilson, *A History of the Philadelphia Theatre, 1835-1855* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968).

⁸¹ Alger, *Life of Edwin Forrest*, 361.

⁸² *Jack Cade* opened 9 December 1835 for a three show run, averaging a fully respectable \$290 per night (Wemyss, 249), and was revived the following year for three consecutive performances. The initial production had a rough and interesting journey to the stage, which is far too involved to detail here. This journey is thoroughly covered in Wemyss' *Twenty-Six Years of the Life of an Actor and Manager*, 245-50.

Summarily dismissed by the few scholars that address it as merely another one of Forrest's prize-winners restating the ideals of Jacksonian democracy and republican freedom, *Jack Cade* has been universally lumped together with the other two plays. Montrose J. Moses, Gary A. Richardson, Richard Moody, and many others comment on the similarities in the plays, making few distinctions, beyond cosmetic, between them.⁸³ Two unpublished dissertations study the three plays in a bit more detail with widely varying degrees of success; but, ultimately, their conclusions do not prove any more satisfying or illuminating.⁸⁴ Bruce McConachie traces the repetitions in form within these romantic and heroic melodramas and the influences of Forrest, both direct and implied, on the adaptations of the dramatic texts. McConachie, however, essentially sees each play as little more than a superficial redressing of the ideals of Jacksonian democracy.⁸⁵

⁸³ Montrose J. Moses, ed., *Representative Plays by American Dramatists From 1765 to the Present Day*, vol. 2, 1815-1858 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1925), 427-430. Gary A. Richardson, "Plays and Playwrights: 1800-1865," in *The Cambridge History of American Theatre*, vol. 1, *Beginnings to 1870*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth and Christopher Bigsby (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 267-270. Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 90-91.

⁸⁴ Eric Ray Marshall's bewildering "Playwriting Contests and Jacksonian Democracy, 1829-1841" (USC, 1983) saw these three plays, as well as others, capitalizing on "political disorder by placing a Jacksonian-like character in the middle of the dilemma" (224). Marshall's study, poorly written and researched, contains a multitude of factual and logical errors. Sally Leilani Jones' "The Original Characters of Edwin Forrest and His American Style" (University of Toronto, 1992) is, in sharp contrast, an excellent study which ultimately only disappoints in its seemingly obvious conclusion. Essentially, she argues the plays were a vehicle for Forrest's rugged individuality, whose charismatic personality was indistinguishable from and interchangeable with the roles he played, creating "the archetypal 'self-made' American actor and man" (300).

⁸⁵ McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 97-110.

Yet a close examination of the two versions of Conrad's text (distinguished as Conrad's *Aylmere* and the Forrest-dictated *Jack Cade*) placed within the context of the significant political, economic, and social changes from 1835, when the play was written, to 1841, when Forrest made it so enormously popular, will provide insights into the essence of Forrest's self-constructed manhood.⁸⁶

Between the 1835 and 1841 productions, the script underwent significant changes that transformed it from a piece of Whig propaganda that reflected a strong Gothic influence, to a simplistic ode to Jacksonian manhood. Edwin Forrest's on-stage persona and his influence on working class audiences and Robert T. Conrad's political affiliations and literary efforts will illuminate the ways in which history was theatrically manipulated to forward specific political or social agendas within this complex period in antebellum America.

The United States was undergoing significant political, economic, and social changes from 1835 to 1841. The 1830s had shown a strong surge of American nationalism. The increasingly prominent working class, a group previously ignored politically and socially, idolized Andrew Jackson. 1835 was the end of Jackson's second term as president and the termination of his reign as "King Andrew the First." The presidency of Martin Van Buren (Jackson's Vice President and successor) saw the Panic of 1837, the most severe economic depression that had yet occurred in the country.

⁸⁶ Earlier versions of this discussion appeared in the following articles: Karl Kippola, "'The Battle-Shout of Freemen': Edwin Forrest's Passive Patriotism and Robert T. Conrad's *Jack Cade*," *Journal of American Drama and Theatre* 13 (Fall 2001): 73-86; Karl Kippola, "Suppressing the Female Voice: Edwin Forrest's Silencing of Women in *Jack Cade*," *Theatre Symposium* 10 (2002): 8-19.

The political dominance of the Democrats through the 1830s stigmatized the Whigs as effete aristocrats out of touch with the desires of the general population: “a type that kept the manners and aspirations and prejudices of an aristocratic class without being able to retain its authority.”⁸⁷ The election of 1840 found the Whig party, previously unable to create an acceptable alternative model of masculinity, desperate to drop the sheen of aristocracy. Thus they borrowed a page from the Democrats and presented their candidate, the Indian-fighting William Henry Harrison, as the embodiment of all rustic and rural virtues. The Whigs, who had been almost exclusively associated with the wealthy and elite, reincarnated themselves as the self-appointed champions of democracy, vowing to save the people from the evils of Van Buren’s privileged aristocracy.

The figure of Jack Cade appears to have entered the American consciousness (at least of those who were neither historians nor Shakespeare enthusiasts) on December 18, 1834. An article in the *Courier and Enquirer*, a conservative Whig New York morning paper, condemned newspaper editor William Leggett (1801-1839), whose strong anti-Bank and anti-monopoly views showed him a proud, staunch, and outspoken Jacksonian, as “the Jack Cade of the *Evening Post*.” Leggett provided a spirited counter-attack in his own paper, turning the insult into a compliment:

It then ill becomes republicans, enjoying the freedom which they [those who fought for the liberty of the United States] achieved, admiring ...their conduct, and revering their memory, to use the name of one who sacrificed his life in an

⁸⁷ Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), 400.

ill-starred effort in defence of the same glorious and universal principles of equal liberty, as a by-word and term of mockery and reproach.⁸⁸

Leggett severely criticized Shakespeare's representation of Cade, inspired by the "prejudice, bigotry and servility" of the chroniclers, and praised the leader of the rebellion as an inspiring and noble champion of liberty fighting against a "rapacious monarch...and licentious and factious nobles."⁸⁹ Leggett claimed Cade as the quintessential republican American hero. Robert T. Conrad's adaptation of the rebellion clearly follows Leggett's outline, even though Conrad claims not to have read Leggett's defense of Cade until after his play was already in production.⁹⁰

Robert T. Conrad (1810-1858), popularly known as Judge Conrad, trained for a legal career but had a profound interest in both journalism and literature.⁹¹ He co-edited the *Philadelphia Gazette* - a highly respected and influential Whig periodical.⁹²

⁸⁸ *Evening Post*, 18 December 1834. Reprinted in *A Collection of the Political Writings of William Leggett*, vol. 1, ed. Theodore Sedgwick, Jr. (New York: Taylor and Dodd, 1840), 132-33.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁹⁰ Robert T. Conrad, *Aylmere, or The Bondman of Kent; and Other Poems* (Philadelphia: E. H. Butler, 1852), 282.

⁹¹ Biographical information on the life of Conrad is taken primarily from the following sources: Montrose J. Moses, introduction to *Jack Cade*, by Robert T. Conrad, in *Representative Plays by American Dramatists From 1765 to the Present Day*, vol. 2, 1815-1858 (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1929), 427-438; *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 4 (1930), s.v. "Conrad, Robert Taylor," 355-56; Joseph Jackson, *Literary Landmarks of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: David McKay, 1939), 70-73; Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *The Literary History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs, 1906), 246-49.

⁹² Joseph Jackson, 62-64.

Following the success of his first play, *Conrad, King of Naples* (1832), and the overwhelming response to *Jack Cade* (1835/41), Conrad became an editor of the *North American*, “an increasingly popular Philadelphia daily newspaper which was to become one of the nation’s leading Whig journals,” in 1845.⁹³ In 1848, he became co-editor of *Graham’s Magazine*, an important journal that gave opportunities for the development of American literature and which “sought to find a mean between the uninteresting and severe literature that only Tories read and the namby-pambyism which was the ruling note of the age.”⁹⁴ He edited an abridged version of John Sanderson’s seven-volume *Biography of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence* (originally published 1820-27) and collected materials for Joseph Reese Fry’s *Life of General Zachary Taylor*, both in 1847.⁹⁵ His most popular play and his various poems were published in 1852 as *Aylmere, or The Bondman of Kent; and Other Poems*.

Judge Conrad became the first elected mayor of the newly consolidated Philadelphia in 1854, running as a candidate for the combined Whig and American parties, and strongly supporting the nationalistic policies of the Know-Nothing Party (which required the policemen of the city to be native-born Americans). Although he encountered bitter resistance to his strict administration of law, Conrad was praised for

⁹³ J. Albert Robbins, “George R. Graham, Philadelphia Publisher,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 75 (July 1951): 287.

⁹⁴ Oberholtzer, 264.

⁹⁵ After Taylor’s election to the presidency in 1848, this work was reprinted and retitled (*Our Battles in Mexico*) in 1850.



Fig. 15. Robert T. Conrad. Note the similarity in his pose to the intellectual, “elite” images of John Quincy Adams and Henry Ward Beecher.

his skill in guiding Philadelphia through the difficulties associated with consolidation.⁹⁶ Called “something of a genius as a poet and dramatist,” Conrad was said to occupy “the first place among our Philadelphia *literati*,” exposing his strong connection with a privileged audience.⁹⁷

Forrest had initially asked his friend, William Leggett, to adapt the story of Jack Cade for the stage in 1837, but Leggett refused ostensibly for fear of an unfavorable comparison to Shakespeare. Three months after Leggett’s death in 1838, Forrest requested a copy of Conrad’s adaptation and after correspondence, negotiations, and preparations, Forrest presented Conrad’s *Jack Cade* (initially under the title of *Aylmere*) at New York’s Park Theatre on May 24, 1841.⁹⁸

The most significant challenge in comparing the two versions of the text lies in attempting to differentiate between changes made purely to streamline the play for production and parts removed, added, or altered because they either may have been at odds with the Jacksonian message or did not fit within the parameters of Forrest’s narrowly defined masculine image.⁹⁹ In the introduction to his published version of

⁹⁶ *Dictionary of American Biography*, 356. Conrad’s efforts in coordinating and unifying the disparate boroughs into a cohesive city were largely administrative and organizational.

⁹⁷ Joseph Jackson, 70. Edgar Allan Poe, 281.

⁹⁸ Wemyss, 245-50. Conrad’s play was originally produced as *Aylmere; or, The Bondman of Kent*. Forrest also initially performed the play under that title (to a mediocre reception) but, at the encouragement of theatre manager Francis Courtney Wemyss, quickly changed it to *Jack Cade; or, The Noble Yeoman*, and it was under that title that the play achieved its significant national popularity.

⁹⁹ I will not address many of the changes that appear irrelevant to the stated intentions of this essay. Direct references to “God” are changed to “Heaven” or “Religion,”

the original play, Conrad publicly thanked Forrest for his guidance in preparing the work for performance:

The tragedy, as originally written and now presented to the reader, comprises much that was not designed for, and is not adapted to, the stage... To the judgment and taste of Mr. Forrest he is indebted for the suggestions which prepared "Aylmere" for the stage; and to the eminent genius of that unrivalled tragedian and liberal patron of dramatic literature, its flattering success at home and abroad may be justly ascribed.¹⁰⁰

No evidence suggests that *Aylmere* was written for any reason other than to be presented on stage. In fact, the play already had enjoyed moderate theatrical success. However, Conrad did not choose to adopt any of Forrest's suggestions for the published form, presumably feeling that the complete, unedited version had the strength to stand on its own.¹⁰¹ By the time of this publication (1852), the play was an

which is fairly common in drama of the period. Most overt religious references, both the worshipful and the profane, are eliminated. *Jack Cade* also tones down some of *Aylmere*'s more gruesome descriptions of famine, whipping, immolation, death, and spearing babies -- most likely out of sensitivity to the women in the audience. Many of the changes appear to be random and without any artistic justification. One glaring example -- as *Aylmere* is rhapsodizing on the beauty and joy of Italy in his exile, he goes into a brief exultation of the four seasons. *Jack Cade* cuts off the speech in the middle of Summer, completely eliminating Autumn and Winter [Robert T. Conrad, *Aylmere; or, The Kentish Rebellion*, "Property of Edwin Forrest," *Marked for Mr. Forrest by D. A. Sarzedas, Prompter, Park Theatre May 24th 1841 New York* (University of Pennsylvania, Forrest Collection), 25]. For ease of reference, Forrest's acting version will subsequently be abbreviated as *Jack Cade*.

¹⁰⁰ Conrad, *Aylmere*, vii-viii.

¹⁰¹ Nearly all changes in the dramatic text were cuts. There are remarkably few additions to *Jack Cade* of any real substance or significance. Only one addition, in fact, is over one line long. Act three of *Aylmere* ends with Cade's capture and he learns of his son's death as the curtain comes down. *Jack Cade* adds a short exchange between Cade and Say, in which Cade begs to once more kiss his lifeless child: "A poor, a sinless child, whom thou hast driven/To famine and to death." Say refuses, and Cade is dragged off stage vowing revenge for the death of his father, mother, and child. This addition, requested by Forrest, was a relatively minor concession to

enormous success; and the popular title, *Jack Cade*, would have been far more marketable. The ultimate result of Conrad's choice was to separate his work as a dramatist from Forrest's stage production. Conrad's published play and poems catered to a more educated and elite reader than "the masses" which predominantly composed Forrest's audience.¹⁰² The plot of both versions of the play is roughly similar. Before the action of the play, Cade's father (a bondman) is tortured and killed after striking the evil Lord Say. Young Cade strikes Lord Say in retaliation and flees to Italy. The plot of Conrad's 1835 version begins ten years later with Cade's return to Kent (disguised as Dr. Aylmere), vowing to free the cruelly oppressed bondmen. Cade's mother is killed by Say; Cade's son starves to death when the family is forced to hide in the forest; and Cade's wife goes mad and is imprisoned after killing an aristocratic would-be rapist. Cade leads the rebel forces into London, demanding the surrender of Lord Say and a signed charter, freeing the bondmen. Cade kills Say, but not before being struck by Say's poisoned dagger. Cade's mad wife dies in his arms and, as the sealed charter is delivered, he dies.

Forrest's desire to show paternal strength and passion, as he did in *The Gladiator* and other productions.

¹⁰² Many of the cuts and changes suggested by Forrest and incorporated into *Jack Cade* significantly mar the meter of the verse. The frequent breaks in the scansion disrupt the flow of the poetic line, giving the language a stop-and-start feel, almost as if someone was awkwardly winding up a music box. An educated audience would likely find these disruptions to the poetic flow jarring. These changes, often dropping a word or short phrase from a line, can clearly be attributed to Forrest. (The script in which Forrest marked cuts and asked for changes, including a few brief notes to Conrad, is in the Forrest Collection at the University of Pennsylvania Library.) Even though it is puzzling that Conrad, a successful poet, would have been so willing to allow this ham-handed treatment of his text, this study will only focus on significant changes in meaning and tone rather than largely aesthetic choices.



Fig. 16. Cartoon of Andrew Jackson defeating the United States Bank. Jackson's pose is very theatrical and reminiscent of Forrest triumphantly holding up the charter freeing the bondmen at the conclusion of *Jack Cade*.

The second scene of *Aylmere* begins comically with a young, soon-to-be-married couple in a mock argument. The scene quickly turns serious as the bondmen discuss Say's attempt to stop the wedding, and Friar Lacy (a friend of Cade's and one sympathetic to the bondmen's cause) forces the village men to acknowledge the hopelessness of their submissive situation:

The curse is on us all. What though you be
A yeoman born? Go to, you are not free.
You may nor toil nor rest, nor love nor hate,
Nor joy nor grieve, without your baron's leave.
Free quotha! Ay, free as the falcon is
That flies on high, but may be caged again.¹⁰³

This impotent call to action needs a rallying point to unite the hearts and wills of the common men, and the disguised Cade is soon to appear. The entire scene is cut in Forrest's version of *Jack Cade*. There are at least three possible explanations for its removal. First, from a practical standpoint, the scene delays the entrance of the title character. Second, the lighter elements of the scene, and there are very few in the play, would not have been in keeping with the purely tragic tone that Forrest may have hoped to achieve. Finally, the poetic and impassioned call for freedom, even though it was not fully heeded, did not come from the title character. Friar Lacy plays a stronger and more forceful role in *Aylmere* -- in many ways reminiscent of *Romeo and Juliet*'s Friar Laurence. The size and importance of the role are decidedly diminished in *Jack Cade*. Also, the common bondmen in this scene show a more obvious discontent and a stronger willingness to take action than in the first scene of the play,

¹⁰³ Conrad, *Aylmere*, 22. The shifts in tone within the scene from comic to serious and back to comic (the scene ends with Lacy giving the prospective bridegroom marriage advice) seem very Shakespearean; the scene could easily have come almost directly out of one of his romances, like *The Winter's Tale*.

in which they appear truly helpless. The men in the cut scene are more in need of a catalyst than a leader. A later scene, also cut from Forrest's version, shows the bondmen, led by a weapon-wielding Friar Lacy, bonding together and planning to rescue Cade after he has been captured by Say. Again, it seems to be the commons' willingness and ability to act on their own, without being led by the hero, which prompted the scene's omission.

Forrest was understandably wary of passages that attacked, condemned, mocked, or questioned the intelligence of the commons too harshly. Lord Say, presented in the play as a villain without any redeeming qualities, attacks the fickle character of the bondmen:

They but ask fair words -- fair words.
Hail them as gods, and you as worms may crush them,
Knead them with the spurning heel into the dunghill:
But when they bow before some fungous idol.
Or rush, like worried herds o'er some dread cliff,
Into a certain ruin, -- seek to save them --
Speak, strive, strike, struggle, die for them -- and
 they --
While your spent heart gasps out its latest drops,
For them -- *for them* -- will trample on it!¹⁰⁴

This mockery of, and frustration over, the stupidity of the commons was cut from *Jack Cade*. Forrest may have been afraid of offending his audience. Because of the blind and passionate adoration that he engendered in working class audiences, it is also possible that he did not wish the masses to think too clearly or critically about the idol before which they bowed.

¹⁰⁴ Conrad, *Aylmere*, 44

The hero of *Jack Cade* never presents the plight of the masses as completely hopeless. The entire story speaks of their oppression, but there is a tangible devil with which to do battle. In Conrad's *Aylmere*, the feeble outrage of the poor against an invisible and all-powerful foe is hopeless:

Knows the poor wretch a joy? they find it out!
 A pride? they crush it! Doth he sweat to win
 Some comfort for his cot? their curse falls on it!
 Yearneth he o'er some holy sympathy
 For wife or child? they tear the golden thread
 From out the rugged texture of his fate,
 And leave his desolate.¹⁰⁵

For Forrest, this sentiment is too bleak. The poor, weary, and oppressed must always have some refuge. As Conrad's hero starves in the forest, helplessly watching the meaningless death of his son, he questions what he has done to merit his harsh desserts:

I am not thwart in form, nor is my soul
 Distempered; shame sits not upon my brow,
 Nor has wrong soiled my hand; why, Heaven, am I
 Spurned from the general feast thou has provided?¹⁰⁶

There can be no answer to this question. The only possible responses: hopeless despair or immediate and violent action. The hard-working people in Forrest's audience, who likely felt they had committed no great sin to justify their situation, cannot be left without an answer, so the question cannot be asked.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 104.

¹⁰⁷ Conrad's use of such stark imagery, reminiscent of *King Lear*, imitated Shakespeare's tragic form in an age in which Shakespeare's tragedies were no longer palatable to audiences and were frequently revised, giving happy endings to plays such

This fear of bitter questions and discontent among the commons who compose Forrest's audience may well explain his desire to temper the complaints of his bondmen. *Jack Cade* moderates their outrage. Cade's decision to steal, if necessary, in order to save his son from starvation is downplayed in Forrest's version, rather than the bitter rage underlying his justification in Conrad's original:

I'll buy it with blood!
 Why should the perfumed lordling roll in gold,
 And thou, wan child of sorrow, die for that
 Which he throws careless to his cringing lacquey?
 Each laced and lipping fool is rich; whilst I –
 Oh, shame on justice! – watch my infant starving! –
 No, 'tis no crime – no crime!¹⁰⁸

Forrest's elimination of this passage indicates a fear of popular uprisings; if he had chosen to play this scene as written, there might well have been a danger in his being too convincing.¹⁰⁹

Forrest was reluctant to have characters other than the noble, selfless Cade instigating action. Conrad's hero demanded nothing less than armed rebellion against the tyranny of their aristocratic oppressors:

Think not she's [Liberty's] won
 With gentle smiles, and yielding blandishments:
 She spurns your dainty wooer;
 And turns to sinewy arms and hearts of steel.
 The war-cloud is her couch; her matin hymn
 The battle-shout of freemen.¹¹⁰

as *King Lear* and *Romeo and Juliet*. Forrest's modification of Conrad's original text made the play more in keeping with the general trend.

¹⁰⁸ Conrad, *Aylmere*, 106-07.

¹⁰⁹ It is ironic that only eight years after Forrest's successful opening of *Jack Cade*, that his goading of the New York audiences, capitalizing on a growing class rivalry and desperate nationalistic fears, would lead to the Astor Place riot.

The hero of *Jack Cade* encouraged a softer, less desperate defiance. Once the Cade-led rebellion has taken London, the bondmen in *Aylmere* call for Cade's coronation, the march of their army onto France, and further glories. This section was also eliminated in *Jack Cade*, perhaps because it revealed the tremendous potential for danger and excess should the masses ever realize their power, essentially echoing Shakespeare's warning of the danger of popular uprising:

'Tis a flame,
That like the glorious torch of the volcano,
Lights the pale land, and leaves it desolate!¹¹¹

Jack Cade was a historical figure co-opted by both Whigs and Democrats between 1834 and 1841 – claimed as a Jacksonian hero championing republican freedom by newspaper editor William Leggett, given a new identity as a working-class-supportive Whig through Conrad's theatrical manipulation, and restored as a charismatic, Napoleonic Jacksonian at Forrest's insistence. Forrest's interpretation of *Jack Cade*, perfectly tailored to suit the tastes of the masses, appealed to the republican interests of his working class male audience and preached a safe, controlled rebellion – a passive patriotism. Tocqueville commented on this strange lack of strong individual expression in the character of American manhood: "I found very few men who displayed that manly candor and masculine independence of opinion which frequently distinguished the Americans in former times, and which constitutes the leading feature in distinguished characters wheresoever they may be found. It seems,

¹¹⁰ Conrad, *Aylmere*, 83.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 149.

at first sight, as if all the minds of the Americans were formed upon one model, so accurately do they follow the same route.”¹¹² In the world of *Jack Cade*, Forrest presented the model of behavior, directing the response of his working-class followers. If the oppressed commons were a simmering pot, Forrest acted as the lid, agitating them to a boil but always releasing the pressure before the seething rage could boil over.

Conrad, on the other hand, kept the lid down tight, daring it to explode. His drama called the public to action without waiting for a charismatic hero to lead the way. Conrad’s play, reacting against the domination of Jacksonian Democracy in the mid-1830s, encouraged the masses to unite and fight the ruling powers and also helped to re-invent the Whigs as champions of the common man. Conrad anticipated the Whig strategy in the 1840 election – create a masculine hero who *is* one of the people, rather than one who will reach *down* to them.

Yet beyond this overt political message, the differences between the 1835 and 1841 texts provide insights into the construction and treatment of women on the nineteenth century American stage that further illuminate perceptions of the masculine ideal. In particular the treatment of Mariamne and Kate, both of whom face would-be rapists with courage and defiance in Conrad’s original script and both of whom are comparatively silenced in Forrest’s version of the play. This “silencing” reflects the triumph of aggressive Jacksonian masculinity over submissive women who require protection and domination.

¹¹² Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 1 (New York: Knopf, 1945), 266-67. Tocqueville was writing in the early 1830s.

I also suggest that the concept of rape held different, yet vital, symbolic meanings for Forrest and Conrad, and that changes made to the script reveal divergent interpretations of the act. In Conrad's *Aylmere*, threatened sexual violation connotes the destruction of the community. Kate and Mariamne, in their acts of resistance, inspire and empower those around them. The women's sexual identity and individuality remain significant elements of the story. In Forrest's *Jack Cade*, on the other hand, the women are reduced to ciphers and the rapes to symbolic efforts to "emasculate" the Jacksonian hero, Jack Cade, by victimizing and destroying his sexual "property."

An important subplot follows the wedding of a young local couple - Will Mowbray, a young yeoman, and Kate Worthy, daughter of a blacksmith. Lord Say's steward, Courtney, who also woos Kate, threatens their happy nuptials and convinces Say to forbid the wedding:

I'd force this blacksmith knave give up his daughter,
If but to teach him that he is my thrall,
Even yeoman though he be.¹¹³

As the village defiantly continues with the wedding plans, a drunken Courtney attempts to rape Kate, but her father beats Courtney to death with his blacksmith hammer. This attack on Kate galvanizes the bondmen, sparking the revolt.

In the world of Conrad's play, women are presented as strong, vocal, and active members of the community. The attempted rapes of the drama's principal

¹¹³ Conrad, *Aylmere*, 72. A great deal of pride existed in the yeoman title during this period, reflecting the real or imagined Arcadian values of Jeffersonian republicanism, "which emphasized community solidarity, family honor, and manly independence" [McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 66].

women, Mariamne and Kate, serve as catalysts to inspire rebellion against the tyranny of aristocratic rule. The perceived class distinctions between the seducer and the seduced (Kate is a child of the villein class and Mariamne, although socially elevated, is disguised as a woman of the village) underscore the injustice of the social and political system and parallel the domination of the lords over the bondmen.¹¹⁴ While emphasizing these class distinctions, Conrad was not supporting the antebellum's class-based view of womanhood which attributed promiscuity to the lower classes, but he was playing into nineteenth-century notions of "seduction" which characterized seduction as a high to low relationship.¹¹⁵ Mariamne and Kate are both presented as strong, noble, and virtuous.

Forrest's 1841 version cuts the scene that introduces Kate – a light and comic pre-nuptial celebration, reminiscent in tone of the pastoral shepherd scenes in Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale* – and which presents Kate as a less educated, but more spirited, personification of Perdita. Her impish teasing of the prospective bridegroom ("I must ever have my way!"), in which she interprets the marriage contract as free license to disruptive behavior, subtly parallels the bondsmen's demands for their rights under the charter:

¹¹⁴ The villein was a partly free citizen of the feudal system who was essentially a slave to their landowner or lord but considered free and equal to everyone else.

¹¹⁵ The following works discuss nineteenth-century views of prostitution and female promiscuity: Rodney Hessinger, "Victim of Seduction or Vicious Woman?: Conceptions of the Prostitute at the Philadelphia Magdalen Society, 1800-1850," *Exploration in Early American Culture* 66 (1999): 202; Christine Stansell, *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982). Patricia Cline Cohen discusses the class-based nature of seduction [*Helen Jewett*, 205-29].

Will, remember!
 'Tis i' the contract that I shall be shrewish.
 If there be murmuring, thou shalt be so spur-galled!
 I'll beat thee, Will, i' faith!¹¹⁶

Forrest's elimination of this introduction reduces the initial impression of Kate at the wedding festival to that of a bland and passive victim. Her single protest against her marriage to Will in the following scene, without the context of her earlier comic objections, is vaguely disconcerting – suggesting the marriage is truly against her will and indicating that she may be a victim of the village villeins as well as the aristocratic villains. The bondmen praise her simple goodness and condemn Courtnay's lecherous advances. But Kate is no longer presented as a strong, vibrant young woman who will not be dominated; instead she becomes almost an afterthought – little more than a plot device providing a rallying point, a catalyst for the dissatisfaction of the bondmen against the unnatural privileges of the aristocracy, and a symbol of the pure and passive Jacksonian ideal of womanhood, needing the protection of the dominant male. When Say and Courtnay interrupt the marriage festival, Forrest removes the most forceful of her efforts to restrain her father and bridegroom, "Thou'lt not deny me now. I know thou wilt not."¹¹⁷ Kate is reduced to a weak, pleading damsel in distress.

In both versions of the text, Kate is stunned into silence after Courtnay's attempted rape and his brutal murder. In Conrad's *Aylmere*, the killing of the carefree, vital spirit within the "merry madcap" is tragic. This death of hope and happiness

¹¹⁶ *Aylmere*, 20. Conrad freely mixes the comic with the serious throughout a bulk of the play. Forrest generally eliminates the lighter moments, providing a more consistently elevated tragic tone; but these adjustments also allow for less dimension in characterization and flatten the dramatic situations.

¹¹⁷ *Aylmere*, 36.

makes an armed rebellion against the aristocracy a moral imperative. The men of the village will fight to the death to avenge this outrage. In Forrest's *Jack Cade*, the violence silences a woman whose voice has already been muted. Rather than driving the bondmen into vengeful action, the attack on the purity of their silent daughter fills them with impotent rage. In Forrest's revision, the rape of Kate is used as a tool to show the degeneration of society and the necessity of a great Jacksonian commander, a hero personified in Forrest, to pull the passionate but powerless bondmen out from under their oppressive yoke and lead them to freedom.

Cade's wife, Mariamne, is not silenced to the same extent as Kate Worthy, but her role is similarly diminished in size, strength, and significance in Forrest's version. In Conrad's *Aylmere*, Mariamne's voice is first heard in a private discussion with Cade in which she questions his devotion to her in the face of his firm resolve to free the bondmen, "Ere we grew/Sad of love's gentle troubles." She expresses her concern for his safety and the bondmen against the armies of the aristocracy, "In the wild war,/Thou and thy friends are kindling." Conrad's Mariamne fights to overcome Cade's stubborn resolve, appealing to the husband and father of her son who brought her into this strange land, and she expresses a premonition of the danger to come:

Trifle not with my fears. I am alone,
Nor kith, nor country have I, hope nor stay,
Save thee, my husband. Ponder not so wildly
On these stern doings!¹¹⁸

The strength behind these arguments and warnings is eliminated from Forrest's *Jack Cade*. Mariamne is left to pine for their happy, carefree days in Italy and weakly

¹¹⁸ *Aylmere*, 55-58.

plead with him to run from danger: “Fly with me from this place and these wild projects!” Her submission to his decision is the same in both versions, but without the passion of her earlier resolve to rescue her husband and family, the surrender of Forrest’s heroine appears vapid and inane:

‘Twere delight to share
A peaceful lot with thee; but if fate wills
The storm should gather o’er thee, – be it so,
By thy dear side I’ll think it sunshine, Aylmere!¹¹⁹

Because she does not provide a substantial obstacle to his single-minded quest for freedom, Forrest’s Cade is presented as an unquestioned master of both his family and his country.

When Mariamne is first accosted by Clifford, her aristocratic would-be rapist, she defends herself and her honor by showing a strength in resolve and spirit that betrays the privileged nature of her station:

Pass on in thy base hunt!
Here thou’lt find pride even prouder than thine own,
And scorn to which thy scorn is lowliness!¹²⁰

This passage is removed from Forrest’s adaptation, so Mariamne’s self-defense is reduced to a plea for gentleman-like behavior and respect for womanhood: “that name entitled to/Each true man’s courtesy.”¹²¹ This weak plea, inevitably ignored by the callous aristocrat, serves to reinforce the image of women as helpless victims.

¹¹⁹ Conrad, *Jack Cade*, 30, 31.

¹²⁰ *Aylmere*, 66.

¹²¹ *Jack Cade*, 36.

Clifford initially sees Mariamne as little more than a rustic conquest: “The flower I’d cull/Is fresh and fair and coy.” When Mariamne rebukes him, presenting herself as a woman of stature and substance, his ardor only grows: “If in thy cloud I thought thee bright, forgive me,/That now, thou shin’st undimmed – I worship thee.” He is exhilarated, defying the taboo of seducing a woman of his class under the guise of sport with a country wench. As he prepares to accost Mariamne in prison, Conrad presents Clifford’s only significant moment of pause: “Will not my name/Rot in the foulness of this villain deed?”¹²² Forrest’s elimination of this passage diminishes the significance and atrocity of the rape while strengthening the class-based view of women as inconsequential and submissive victims.

When the lustful Clifford attempts seduction by force, Mariamne kills him with the knife her husband has given her. In Conrad’s play, Aylmere gives her the knife to allow her to save herself from potential danger in his absence: “Be it, what I cannot be – thy protector!” In Forrest’s version (*in a speech rewritten by Forrest himself*), he presents the knife as a tool to free her from the lurking danger of dishonor by turning it on *herself*: “In peril’s hour, be it thy refuge!”¹²³ Conrad’s Cade places Mariamne’s personal safety, security, and well being above all; Forrest requires death before dishonor. *Her* death before *his* dishonor.

In Conrad’s *Aylmere*, Mariamne plunges the knife into her would-be rapist shouting, “This for Aylmere!...For mine honour, this - and this!” Forrest discards the

¹²² *Aylmere*, 44, 67, 120.

¹²³ *Aylmere*, 119; *Jack Cade*, 61.

second half of her outcry; and in the final line of the scene, as the last words she utters before descending into madness, Forrest adds, "'Twas for thy [Aylmere's] honour, I did strike the blow."¹²⁴ Rape is no longer presented as a devastating physical and emotional nightmare for Mariamne but rather as a blow to Cade's honor. Mariamne's personal investment in the act is diminished, if not eliminated. No events are allowed to have any consequence outside of the impact on the psyche or aspirations of the male hero. Conrad's version of the play intimates that a woman's honor rests within herself and is her own to defend, while Forrest assumes a masculine proprietorship of female virtue, suggesting that the act of marriage relinquishes a woman's right not only to her virtue but also her ability and right to defend it.¹²⁵

The mad scene in which Mariamne escapes from Lord Say's camp is entirely cut from Forrest's *Jack Cade*. This omission likely is caused because it is a show-stealing feature for the actress that would inevitably take focus from the plight of the hero. Also, the loss of this scene does not significantly mar the overall construction of the plot. There are, however, some intriguing references within the delirium of her madness. Early in the scene she fantasizes about her home in Italy: "Its breath/Visits

¹²⁴ *Aylmere*, 125; *Jack Cade*, 66.

¹²⁵ Bruce A. McConachie details Forrest's strong views on the role of women and his divorce from Catherine Norton Sinclair in 1850 because of her alleged infidelity, which "was more a matter of public honor than private trust." Forrest saw women as "inferior...and hence dependent upon men," while his upper-class wife felt "men and women were natural equals and should work together for moral progress." Even though no evidence directly connects Forrest's reduction of the women's roles in *Jack Cade* to the personal struggles in his marriage, it is an interesting speculation [McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 71-72].

my forehead like a mother's kiss." And later, after her attendants have run off, she exclaims:

Now this is joyous! No eye gazes on me!
 My spirit-loves, my mother and my sisters,
 Will now come to me. – Men say I am mad:
 I, mad! A merry thought. (*Laughs.*) Come, mother,
 come
 And speak to me!¹²⁶

Madness is presented as a male constructed horror that can only be combated or assuaged through a connection with the female, and Mariamne is systematically stripped of her feminine bonds and the various aspects of her feminine identity. She has watched the Widow Cade, her only mother figure, beaten and burned to death. (Forrest even eliminated a brief scene early in the play between Mariamne and the Widow Cade that established a soft and emotional family bond.) Mariamne has watched her son slowly die of starvation, and his death terminates her maternal identity. The attempted rape has challenged the essence of her femininity and social reputation: her virtue. And she was forced to defend herself by killing, in a decidedly masculine manner, the one who would have taken her womanhood. Although Mariamne has lost all connection to the feminine, both internal and external, the madness-inducing terror of this realization exists only in Conrad's world.

Conrad constantly uses the suffering and dishonor of women as a catalyst for male action. The martyred immolation of the Widow Cade incites Cade into active rebellion against the aristocracy. The attempted rape of Kate sparks the first murder of an aristocrat at the hands of a bondman and spurs the village men to action. The

¹²⁶ *Aylmere*, 137.

attempted rape, subsequent madness, and eventual death of Mariamne serve to strengthen Cade's resolve, justifying what might otherwise be considered harsh or unjust behavior. Cade even callously goads a reluctant and peaceful bondman with the memory of his recently deceased wife to force him into joining the fight: "I could weep for thee,/And thy wife murdered, save that tears kill not." The response? "The tears shed for her shall be red and heart-drawn!"¹²⁷

Conrad created strong, complex female characters that are marginalized and diminished on Forrest's stage. Conrad's original play presented heroines in a Shakespearean mold; his story centered around women who are empowered through their struggle against aristocratic foes. Forrest's adaptation purged these elements and reduced the women, psychologically and dramatically, to stock melodrama characters, refocusing the anguish of the rape experience on the man rather than the woman. Women served as a commodity, as chattel - a source of male honor, and a key to male domination.

During the antebellum period, responses to rape and seduction depended entirely on the status and reputation of the victim – "a seduced rich girl suffers more damage."¹²⁸ Women of the upper classes were rarely even asked to testify in rape cases, keeping their reputations intact, while women of the lower classes ran a serious risk of humiliation and loss of reputation and could expect little sympathy or legal redress. The Philadelphia Magdalen Society, founded in 1800 to address the problem of prostitution and reflecting social and legal views of seduction, initially viewed their

¹²⁷ *Aylmere*, 80.

¹²⁸ Cohen, *Helen Jewett*, 210.

female charges (most of whom had working class backgrounds) as victims of lechery: “Women were now construed to be the victims of seduction, not complicit participants.”¹²⁹ By the 1840s, however, there was “a complete inversion of the initial discourse of the Society’s founders” who “justified their work with prostitutes not as a means to save vulnerable young women, but as a means to help young men whom prostitutes placed at risk.”¹³⁰

Seduction novels of the period, in which seduction was seen as a product of the male’s animal lust – “a wholly masculine prerogative, an activity that enhanced male mastery and power” - and the female’s innocence and “passionlessness,” featured “women victims [primarily of the upper classes] who typically suffered from madness or death after lustful men ruined them.”¹³¹ Seduction was invariably presented as a crime against both the woman and the family, if not the entire community.¹³² As Cathy N. Davidson so persuasively argues in her analysis of the earlier seduction novel, *The Power of Sympathy*:

¹²⁹ Ibid. Cohen discusses the increase in court actions in defense of “jilted brides and desolate or pregnant lovers,” from 1815 to 1830.

¹³⁰ Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *Ladies, Women, and Wenches: Choices and Constraint in Antebellum Charleston and Boston* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 143; Hessinger, *Victim of Seduction*, 214.

¹³¹ Cohen, *Helen Jewett*, 229; Nancy F. Cott, “Passionlessness: An Interpretation of Victorian Sexual Ideology, 1790-1850,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 4 (1978): 220; Cohen, *Helen Jewett*, 228.

¹³² Rodney Hessinger, “‘Insidious Murderers of Female Innocence:’ Representations of Masculinity in the Seduction Tales of the Late Eighteenth Century,” in *Sex and Sexuality in Early America*, ed. Merril D. Smith (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 275.

But it must also be emphasized that seduction...is a metaphor not just of women's status in the Republic but of a range of problems, all of which might be reduced to the same structure or seduction plot -- that is, a range of problems that arise when moral value and social responsibility are outweighed by the particular desires, no matter how basely self-serving, of privileged individuals or classes.¹³³

Forrest's reduction of the importance of women and the significance of their molestation ultimately rechanneled the violation, focusing exclusively on the consequences for men, while Conrad's version admitted women into the Republican community. Forrest transformed the play into the painful struggle of one man against insurmountable odds, rather than Conrad's outrage of a united community.

The passion, strength, and Jacksonian masculinity of Forrest's performances (of this story and others) created very clear binaries between good and evil, man and woman, leader and follower – essentially eliminating the need for the audience to take action or think in complex ways about a particular problem. This reductive storytelling may explain why so many historians lump Forrest's plays together. Jacksonians had a strong and clear conception of ideal masculinity and two alluring, dominant, and inspiring models in Jackson and Forrest.

The Whigs, however, lacked this clear masculine definition and searched for a strong male identity distinct from, if not opposite to, their Jacksonian rivals. Following the election of 1827, the Whigs were in an awkward transitional moment. The early Republic had placed the country in the hands of a wealthy and educated elite. The first generation of America's leaders could always invoke their immediate

¹³³ Cathy N. Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), 108.

connection to the myth of George Washington as the father of the country; but once that generation died, the Whigs were unable to maintain their connection to (or rather patriarchal power over) the evolving identity of the urban worker. Also, Washington's quintessential father figure no longer fulfilled the new requirements of manhood, which demanded a man of the people rather than an elevated patriarch.

The Whigs could not create or assume a masculine identity in stark contrast to the strength and indomitable spirit of the Democratic Republicans that did not condemn the Whigs as effete, ineffectual, and hopelessly disconnected from the people.¹³⁴ The Whigs lacked a truly masculine role model, which may explain why Conrad's version of the story asserted the *community* as hero, rather than relying on a solitary Napoleonic figure - ultimately encouraging a more truly egalitarian world.

It is only through suppressing the female voice and quelling the active participation of the common man that *Jack Cade* achieved its phenomenal success in the Jacksonian period, becoming one of Forrest's most performed roles and among the period's most popular plays. Once *Jack Cade* was reconfigured to conform both to Forrest's presentation of Jacksonian masculinity, as well as the shifting notions of

¹³⁴ The author would like to thank Albrecht Koschnik for his comments and suggestions on the question of Whig masculinity and direct the reader to his excellent study of young Federalist identity: "Fashioning a Federalist Self: Young Men and Voluntary Association in Early Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Exploration in Early American Culture* 4 (2000): 218-257. Women in the early Republic also struggled for identity after being at least partially integrated into civil polity through the necessities of the Revolution and "began to invent an ideology of citizenship that merged the domestic domain of the preindustrial woman with the new public ideology of individual responsibility and civic virtue." It is in no way implied that Conrad was championing the rights of women through his play, but there are at least surface similarities between the quests for identity in both women and Whigs during this period. Linda K. Kerber, *Women of the Republic: Intellect and Ideology in Revolutionary America* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980), 269.

female virtue, it “spoke” to a working-class male audience – silencing the women who were already essentially barred from active participation in the theatrical event. His manipulation of Conrad’s text brings to vivid life the warning of Abigail Adams: “Remember all Men would be tyrants if they could.”¹³⁵

Conclusion

According to Bruce McConachie, the masculine image constructed by Forrest as a model of antebellum male behavior was built upon a seemingly insurmountable contradiction:

On the one hand, this imagined hero, by maintaining his roots in the soil of an Arcadian past, preserved his republican simplicity, virtue, and independence. This is the Forrest who does his work “brawnily” and spurns the entrapments of luxury and decadence in “society.” On the other hand, the young actor had “capitalized” on the “fire of genius within” to vault above his humble beginnings and achieve international renown. But why would a virtuous republican want to become a protocapitalist star?¹³⁶

This contradiction was compounded by Forrest’s avaricious business sense and narcissism, clearly at odds with the selfless, man-of-the-people image he worked so hard to project. Forrest essentially modeled a kind of natural meritocracy of masculinity, transforming the capitalist reward into a moral one. Reflecting the desired results of the advice manuals discussed in Chapter One, Forrest was living proof of the maxim: be virtuous and riches will follow.

¹³⁵ *Adams Family Correspondence*, vol. 1, ed. L. H. Butterfield (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1968), 370.

¹³⁶ McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 89.

Hard-working, selfless republicans were obligated to fight aristocratic tyranny in defense of democratic freedom, and the heroes of Forrest's American dramas did just that. But in *Jack Cade*, Forrest ultimately encouraged a working-class passivity that relied on an honorable and charismatic hero as big as a mountain and thundering like the great Niagara: "What, then, was to insure that this embodiment of Niagara would not trample the republican rights of other Americans in his desire to maintain his honor?"¹³⁷

Forrest's dramas imagined a world in which the strong and intelligent, regardless of wealth or status, would rise to power, leading the weak and abolishing tyranny. Unfortunately, in such a process there is only room for one hero at the top, and once aristocratic oppression has been eliminated, how can democracy be (re)established? Forrest's American dramas encouraged a dual masculinity – a communal manhood built on the self-restraint and self-sacrifice of the working class, as a backdrop and support system for the self-made manhood that would allow the strong to triumph – socially, politically, and economically. Two distinct masculine models operated in tandem, and Forrest implied a kind of natural meritocracy of masculinity.

Forrest's dramatic world was inhabited by an adoring mass of rough, honest men who would gladly follow him to death or glory and faithful, obedient women who placed the value of their husband's honor over their own insignificant lives. If Forrest, in a moment of life imitating art, had led the Bowery B'hoys on their charge of the Astor Place Opera House and died a martyr's death – with his grieving, faithful wife

¹³⁷ Ibid., 90.

poisoning herself in their grand castle on the Hudson – he might have lived up to his own impossible expectations of masculine behavior.

In reality, however, Forrest, whose model of masculinity was ultimately doomed to fail because it left no room for compromise, merely instigated the riot behind the scenes, and the leaderless rabble died an ultimately meaningless death – except that “suddenly” the country realized it had a class problem, and the riot participants became martyrs to the cause of equality. In reality, the infamy of his divorce and his role in the Astor Place riot forever changed him in the eyes of the nation:

The first gave to his private life a notoriety which will ever be remembered to his discredit; the last identified him in his professional life with the passions of a mob, and served to increase the prejudice already felt in refined society against his too emphatic democracy. The high place to which Forrest’s genius had raised him demanded some sacrifice on his part of his personal feeling; and in his lamentable hastiness he outraged good taste and public opinion.¹³⁸

This judgment privileged the triumphant refinement of a middle-class perspective that disdained and feared the “too emphatic” actions of an out-of-control democratic rabble.

Forrest remained a popular attraction through the 1850s well into the 1860s, as *Vanity Fair* observed: “Ed draws like a six-ox team.”¹³⁹ He rose to popularity primarily through the fervent adoration and unwavering support of working class audiences: “The masses are with him,” and they remained with him throughout the rest of his career.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Lawrence Barrett, *Edwin Forrest* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1881), 153.

¹³⁹ 15 December 1860.

Toward the end of his life, Forrest was something of a curiosity, a faded icon of a distant time. He was unable or unwilling to change with the times. Forrest's character interpretations, as well as his repertoire, remained unchanged, even as audiences were drawn to more sensational or intellectual pleasures. Often compared to the magnificence of the godlike Daniel Webster – “What Mr. Webster's appearance was in the Senate, at the bar and upon the forum, Mr. Forrest's was and is upon the stage” – Forrest suffered a similar rigidity of image that would not allow him to meet the changing needs of the dominant bourgeois: “His was the dilemma of an entire generation of leaders reared to rule in a traditional world and forced to function in the modern one.”¹⁴¹

¹⁴⁰ *Albion*, 2 September 1848.

¹⁴¹ *The Evening Express* (Boston), 19 October 1861; Sydney Nathans, *Daniel Webster and Jacksonian Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1973), 6.

CHAPTER THREE

Imitators and Innovators: The Spectrum of Masculine Models

Edwin Forrest's masculine presence looms over the stage in the first half of the nineteenth century to such a degree that he tends to obliterate all other theatrical figures of the period. His biographers have generally portrayed him as a figure who sprang to life fully formed. In this chapter, I will attempt to "deflate" the Forrestian myth by showing him as part of a complex array of masculine models. Although Edwin Forrest's passionate muscularity defined the rougher aspect of America's masculine identity for the nearly fifty years he trod the stage and the sensitive intelligence of Edwin Booth reflected the masculine values of the growing middle classes at mid-century, they merely represent ends of the spectrum. In fact, most actors of the nineteenth century fell somewhere between the artistic extremes of Booth and Forrest, reflecting significant and widening social divisions. These performers of the mid-nineteenth century offered "alternate" visions of masculinity that provided reflections of or responses to the dominant figures, suggesting subtle shifts or conflicts within the discourse on masculinity. In this chapter, I explore the lives and careers of some of the lesser known, but no less intriguing models of masculinity on the nineteenth-century stage.

An examination of theatrical figures outside the comfortable range of white masculinity may clarify further how theatrical images of the ideal male were validated through the creation and manipulation of the behaviors and perceptions of the "other."

In variety entertainment such as the extremely popular minstrel shows, performers presented a rather skewed view of an even wider array of potential masculine models.

The State of the Art: Romantic vs. Classical Acting

As I noted in Chapter Two, a variety of acting approaches co-existed and co-evolved throughout the nineteenth century. The changes in acting theory and practice were gradual – providing only finely nuanced variations on dominant models. One school or style of acting did not supplant another; rather, the range of acting approaches, differing from one another both subtly and radically, provided a rich and evolving tapestry of acting methods and masculine ideals.

An “American” style of acting, if such a separate category truly existed, emerged from the established tradition of British acting models in colonial America. The nation’s exposure to these exemplars was limited to a handful of prominent figures representing the range of acting (and masculine) ideals. I will identify the two dominant strains of acting throughout the period as “classical” (noted for a declamatory and elevated style) and “romantic” (based on tempestuous passions intended to simulate nature).¹ While most actors predominantly fell into one or another of these schools of acting, the categories were not rigid, and the qualities noted in individual actors often melded elements from both acting styles.

¹ “Natural” acting is a relative term (“true to life” or “realistic” also are common) used to describe performances that go all the way back to the Greeks. The qualities that comprise what is considered natural continually evolve. As with our contemporary cinema, when we now watch acting considered viscerally true to life only fifty years ago, it now appears stilted and unnatural.

Although a range of audiences patronized and enjoyed both acting schools, and classical and romantic actors frequently and freely shared the same stage, as the nineteenth century progressed, theatrical patronage increasingly continued to divide along class lines. The reserved dignity of the classical actor drew the upper class and growing middle class, eager to separate themselves from the vulgarities of the working class, who emerged as an undeniable social and political force viscerally connected to the fervor of the romantics:

As the traditional spatial distinctions among pit, gallery, and boxes within the theater were undermined by the aggressive behavior of audiences caught up in the egalitarian exuberance of the period and freed in the atmosphere of the theater from many of the demands of normative behavior, this urge gradually led to the creation of separate theaters catering to distinct audiences and shattered for good the phenomenon of theater as a social microcosm of the entire society.²

While the ennobling sentiments and declamatory style of classical acting were the dominant theatrical form, and most closely matched the reserved temperament of the ruling audience, the fire of the romantics was a welcome novelty and initially appealed across class lines to America's rugged pioneer enthusiasm and less rigid social structure. Even the eccentricities of the actor, so long as he knew and was able to maintain his place, could be appreciated as a sort of mad genius, although no question existed of positive social acceptance, let alone any role as a serious model of behavior.³

² Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 60.

³ I will discuss specific examples throughout the chapter. George Frederick Cooke was a prime example of acceptable eccentricity, while Edmund Kean's perceived lack of respect alienated American audiences.

From the eighteenth century through the first quarter of the nineteenth century the elite classes comprised the greatest proportion of theatre audiences and dictated the theatrical fare and acceptable modes of performance. By the 1840s, however, the popular sovereignty enjoyed by the urban working class drove elite American audiences from the very theatres they helped build: “Persons more distinguished in fortune and position do not make theatergoing a habit; only something out of the ordinary will attract them there – for example, the presence of a celebrated guest actor.”⁴ Walt Whitman saw this enthusiasm for new, “puffed” faces as a very real danger to the future of the American stage:

One of the curses of the Park (excepted... in the charge of vulgarity, because the audiences there are always intelligent)... is the *star* system. Some actor or actress flits about the country, playing a week here and a week there, bringing as his or her greatest recommendation, that of *novelty* – and very often indeed having no other. – In all the intervals between the appearance of these much trumpeted people, the theatre is quite deserted.⁵

Attending the popular theatre, in fact, became a social danger: “The respectable and virtuous will not visit [the theatre] unless impelled thither in fashionable crowds by some extraordinary genius.”⁶ Upper-class urban audiences had sought refuge from the

⁴ Gustave De Beaumont, *Marie, or Slavery in the United States* [1835], trans. Barbara Chapman (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1958), 231. De Beaumont was one of Tocqueville’s traveling companions. His perhaps over-simplified audience analysis was based on the observation of Philadelphia audiences in the 1830s.

⁵ Walt Whitman, “Miserable States of the Stage,” in *The American Theatre as Seen by its Critics, 1752-1934*, ed. Montrose J. Moses and John Mason Brown (New York: W.W. Norton, 1934), 71-71. Whitman’s article originally appeared in *The Brooklyn Eagle*, 2 February 1847.

⁶ George Foster, *New York by Gaslight* (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850), 86-87. Foster wrote in the “lights and shadows” genre: “The proliferating ‘dark’ and ‘secret’ enclaves of vice were conventionally contrasted with the ‘sunshine’ or

lower classes in both venues and entertainments that they knew the laboring poor could not penetrate.

The upper classes gradually withdrew from “popular” entertainments like the theatre, to more refined cultural forms like opera. This exclusionary form was derided as an “aristocratic” entertainment, never appealing to working class audiences.⁷ Opera houses like the Astor Place Opera House, built by one hundred and fifty of New York’s elite in 1847, presented entertainment catering to the tastes of the upper class and suitable for the enjoyment of women. Astor Place kept out the working-class audience through higher prices and a prevailing style – “freshly shaven faces, evening dress, fresh waistcoats, and kid gloves for gentlemen.”⁸ Lawrence Levine, who discusses opera as a popular art form, ultimately acknowledges the growing class separation: “The tendency to describe audiences at Italian and other foreign language operas as ‘the galaxy of fashion and beauty,’ the ‘beauty, taste, and fashion of the

‘daylight’: the most public and visible realms of changing city life, preeminently the central business and shopping districts, the ‘downtown’ most frequented by middle-class residents and visitors. Both the ‘light’ and the ‘dark’ regions, of course, were manifestations of the expansive industrial capitalist economy – and of its social costs” [John F. Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth-Century Urban America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1990), 80]. The lives of the abject poor held a morbid fascination for elites – further emphasizing an emotional separation between the classes.

⁷ Karen Alhquist, “Opera, Theater and Audience in Antebellum in New York” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1991), 161-64; Jay Teran, “The New York Opera Audiences: 1825-1974” (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1974), 9-13.

⁸ Bruce McConachie, “New York Opera-going, 1825-1850,” in *American Music* 6 (Summer 1988), 184. I will discuss the exclusionary tactics of Astor Place in much greater detail in Chapter Four.

city,' the 'better class, the most refined and intelligent of our citizens,' the 'high-minded, the pure and virtuous,' accelerated as the century progressed."⁹

Richard Butsch details, if not slightly exaggerates, the democratizing evolution of American audiences:

During the colonial period theater was a place for gentry, during the early republic a place for political debate and contest between classes, but in the Jacksonian era, roughly 1825 to 1850, theater belonged to the common man... These young men exercised sovereignty... through vocal expression of their will and enforcement through physical assault... They participated in collective action more than public debate... The privileged increasingly sought refuge in more exclusive gatherings.¹⁰

This growing audience fragmentation, in conjunction with increased industrialization and the country's subsequent urbanization – not to mention that fact that admission prices were drastically reduced in the 1820s – led to a concentration of working class males in urban centers fully able to sustain the growing number of theatres dedicated to entertaining this new and demanding audience.¹¹

⁹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 101. Lawrence Levine claims, "opera was an art form that was *simultaneously* popular and elite" (86). He goes on to discuss a division (primarily class-based), however, between opera performed in its original tongue and performed in English (93). Levine also throws together much of popular song and minstrel performance in the same category as opera, even though it typically played in different theatres and in front of different audiences.

¹⁰ Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 44.

¹¹ Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of the American Drama From the Beginning to the Civil War* (New York: Harper, 1923), 199. Richard Butsch, *American Audiences*, 45. Butsch provides tables that trace changes in Admission Prices for Stage Entertainments (298-99), and Population and Income (301). "During the colonial period, theater was too expensive for artisans and laborers, although they might have attended on rare occasion. The cheapest seats in the gallery cost a half-day's wages for an artisan and more than a full day's for a laborer. During the early republic,

The nation's theatre center shifted from Philadelphia to New York in the late 1820s due to debilitating theatre wars in the former and stable management and the geographical primacy of the latter: "New Yorkers had six theatres to choose from in 1827: the Park, Niblo's, the Lafayette, Chatham Gardens, the Richmond Hill, and the Bowery."¹² The opening of New York's Bowery Theatre in 1826 challenged the supremacy of the Park Theatre, which largely catered to the city's elite audiences. The Bowery's fashionable location suggested an intention to play to the upper class, but desperation for patronage and the subsequent lowering of admission prices, established it (under the management of Thomas S. Hamblin) as a working class theatre that would rival the Park for decades to come. Philadelphia's Arch Street Theater (in 1831) and Walnut Street Theater (in 1834) and Boston's Tremont Theater (originally built for the upper class in the 1830s) followed the Bowery's lead, catering to working class audiences in admission prices, entertainment offered, and the stars appearing.

It is important to note, of course, that no one class or social group during this (or any) period was entirely homogenous – nor did they automatically operate in concert. This lack of cohesion was especially true of the lower classes, where the constant infusion of new immigrants changed the dynamic of this group throughout

admission became more affordable, the gallery being about a third of a laborer's daily wage. The pit where an artisan might be expected to sit cost about a third of his daily wage. General admission to minstrel shows in the 1840s and 1850s was twenty-five cents, a little less than a third of a laborer's wage and about a sixth of a day's pay for an artisan" (296).

¹² Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 22.

the century. These groups were looking for a cohesive identity and at times had one artificially imposed on them – but it was an ongoing process of negotiation.

Working-class audiences reveled in their sovereign control over the urban playhouse. The *New York Mirror* (1833) reported on the problems caused as this audience interacted with “respectable” patrons:

A great want of order and respectability [exists] in the conduct of the pit audience... A dirty-looking fellow a few nights since, taking it into his head that the pit was hardly comfortable enough for him, coolly stepped into the dress-circle, and there seated himself very much to the discomfort of some well-dressed females in the same box... while his comrades in the pit, seeing that he was not to be moved, gave him three cheers.¹³

This story suggests that the working-class *male* audience would no longer be ruled or confined, physically or behaviorally. It also pointed to the incompatibility of the unbridled exuberance of the lower classes and the refinement and safety of “proper” women and the upper classes. Performers and theatre managers willingly, if somewhat fearfully, conceded to the demands of this working-class mob:

We determine to have the worth of our money when we go to the theatre; we made Blangy dance her best dances twice; we made Mrs. Sequin repeat ‘Marble Halls,’ ...and tonight we are going to encore Mrs. Kean’s ‘I don’t believe it’ in *The Gamester*. We hope she’ll prove agreeable and disbelieve it ~~twice~~ for our sakes. Perhaps we’ll flatter Mr. Kean by making him take poison twice.¹⁴

¹³ Quoted in Butsch, *Making of American Audiences*, 46. Beginning in the 1820s, the *New York Mirror*, under the editorship of George Pope Morris, championed American drama and actors, while also serving as an arbiter of social behavior: “There is not sufficient attention paid to the cultivation of a nice taste” (25 March 1826). For a discussion of the *Mirror*’s impact on the development of New York theatre see Francis Hodge, *Yankee Theatre: The Image of America on the Stage, 1825-1850* (Austin: University of Texas, 1964), 32-36.

¹⁴ *Spirit of the Times*, 24 October 1846.

While this account likely provided an exaggerated parody of the power of the working-class audience, the rowdy insistence on exerting their influence could not be ignored.¹⁵

The theatre provided perhaps the only forum where the views and desires of the lower classes were clearly heard, affirmed, and empowered. Their enthusiastic embrace of the muscular excesses of the romantic actor and their vehement rejection of anything with a hint of pretension underscored the middle class desire for civility and separation from the rough and rowdy behavior of the working class and the masculine models they embraced.

The Bowery Theatre, renamed the American Theatre in 1830, capitalized on the boisterous nationalism of its primary audience and specialized in well-known tragic heroes and patriotic melodrama, featuring romantic actors noted for their physical and passionate style of acting. Ironically, the dramatic repertoire and artistic proving ground of both acting schools (of dramatic actors) was similar – largely Shakespearean with a smattering of other proven theatrical warhorses and an occasional contemporary effort based on these earlier models, as well as a few new American works premiered and encouraged by popular actors such as Forrest or James H. Hackett.¹⁶ Performing the major roles in Shakespeare marked the standard by

¹⁵ David Grimsted states that the soon-to-be common practices of demanding favorite songs, curtain calls, and encores began in the 1820s [*Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 64].

¹⁶ George C. Odell's fifteen volume *Annals of the New York Stage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927) details all of the major New York productions of the period. David Grimsted also has compiled appendices and tables categorizing the most performed plays [*Melodrama Unveiled*, 249-61].

which the “legitimate” actor was judged, and the British star remained the seemingly unattainable theatrical ideal.

Founding Fathers of American Acting: British Stars in America’s Heavens

I have suggested that theatre managers were well-aware of the demands of their audiences, and that they adjusted ticket prices and repertoires accordingly. How did the male *performers* of the day respond to the audiences’ demands? How did they transform their art to fit the prevailing tastes of the period?

Before the first native-born star (Edwin Forrest, of course) received national acclaim, the actors most admired on the American stage were English. Most were at best second-tier actors, playing supporting roles in London with occasional starring opportunities in the provinces. All were willing to risk the danger, uncertainty, and stigma of traveling to the New World for the chance of theatrical acclaim and the opportunity to make their fortune. The effect of British actors on the nation’s theatre practice and influence on masculine images was an unexpected by-product of moves made primarily for monetary reasons. It was not until after the Revolutionary War that actors with established reputations trod the American boards, providing a backdrop and inspiration for the actors I will be discussing in this chapter.¹⁷

¹⁷ A thorough study of eighteenth century actors is outside the scope of this study, but a cursory examination of the three most acclaimed tragic actors of the early republic will underline the scarcity of masculine models and the limitations imposed on the theatre as a persuasive tool.

Lewis Hallam, Jr. (1740-1808), who sailed over with his family (the first significant company of professional actors to appear in the New World), became manager of the American Company in the 1780s. His acting was of the English Old

Thomas Abthorpe Cooper (1776-1849), considered America's leading actor until Edwin Forrest, debuted successfully as Hamlet at Covent Garden in London but was unable to capitalize on this success and agreed to try America (debuting in Baltimore in 1796). His acting style was clearly influenced by the idealized poeticism

School (untouched by the David Garrick's "natural" approach), with rigid, formalized posturing and a stylized, declamatory vocal delivery. The first American Hamlet, he was praised for versatility, playing both comic and tragic roles, although his abilities were thought unequal to the roles in which he cast himself. In addition to developing an unpleasant reputation for jealousy and dishonesty, the *New York Daily Advertiser* (2 May 1787) detailed Hallam's unsuitability as an inspiring masculine model: "His battered looks, and shrunk carcass looks the debilitated rake but the soul, the animation, the fire, had left the withered body" (Quoted in Hugh F. Rankin, *The Theatre in Colonial America* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1960], 196). When, in 1793, he married a much younger wife, a young Philadelphia law student confided: "Damn the old Scrawny boned wretch how I should like to [cuckhold] him" (Ibid., 197). Hallam on-stage and off was no longer a respected masculine figure but rather an object of pity and mockery.

John Hodgkinson (1767-1805) was another singularly unpleasant figure, who had enjoyed moderate success at England's Bath Theatre but shamelessly exaggerated his own accomplishments. William Dunlap, in his *History of the American Stage*, categorized Hodgkinson as one of the actors, "in an uncommon degree the slaves of their passions," and that, "his ignorance of all beyond theatrical limits was profound," although, "as an actor he deserved great praise" (vol. 1 [New York: J. Harper, 1832], 181-91). Although admirers praised his "manly dignity" on-stage, he was a suspicious, if not ridiculous, figure off-stage.

James Fennell (1766-1816), the country's greatest Othello (who had also enjoyed at least moderate success in London), performed only sporadically: "We have only to lament that our stage is so seldom honored with the performance of this admirable actor; and that those talents, fitted to command respect and admiration, should so seldom shine, or shine only on those who know not their worth" (*New York Commercial Advertiser*, 2 May 1799). Critics surmised that if Fennell had devoted all of his energies to acting that he would have been the nation's greatest actor. Primarily interested in making a quick fortune, he spent years swindling potential investors in his process to extract salt from salt water. He spent time in jail and only acted from financial necessity. Dunlap described his life as a "short-sighted system of dishonest extravagance... We shall often have occasion to mention this singular man, who abused the gifts of his Creator, and the cares bestowed upon his education by his father... and exhibited the powerless remains of what God had made man, and vice had debased to a wretched driveller" (Dunlap, *History of the American Theatre*, vol. 1, 232-33). Far from a masculine model, Fennell became an object lesson – born with advantages and squandering his personal potential.



Fig. 17. Thomas Abthorpe Cooper.

of John Philip Kemble – elegant deportment, grand declamation, and formalized gesture: “Cooper depended upon a certain imposing bearing and the power of his well-modulated voice.”¹⁸ Cooper, lacking Kemble’s studious attention to detail, had a tendency to rely on his natural gifts and the power of his apparently considerable personal magnetism: “His person, countenance, voice, gesture and manners, were admirably calculated to impress on the audience the liveliest realization of the personage he represented.”¹⁹ Later in his career, however, critics often perceived a “haughty demeanor and rudeness.”²⁰

Extremely popular on-stage into the 1820s, Cooper was also admired off-stage for his charm, vitality, and courage, and American audiences embraced him as a native son: “the pride and boast of the America stage... whose style of declamation was held up as worthy of imitation, both by the pulpit and the bar.”²¹ Cooper’s social success – his daughter married the son of President Tyler, and President Polk appointed him Inspector of the New York Customs House – was rare for anyone associated with the theatre.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, Cooper alone possessed the stature that American audiences sought as a model:

We look for something uncommonly attractive or imposing, in a hero. How much soever we may have rationally persuaded ourselves that greatness of

¹⁸ James E. Murdoch, *The Stage* (Philadelphia: J.M. Stoddart, 1880), 87.

¹⁹ *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 2 March 1798.

²⁰ Francis Courtney Wemyss, *Twenty-Six Years in the Life of an Actor and Manager* (New York: Burgess, Stringer, and Company, 1847), 75.

²¹ *Ibid.*

character is not appropriate to this or that size, we always experience something like disappointment in finding nothing remarkable in his appearance of whom we have heard much and often. Few performers will permit the spectator to depart with so little disappointment of this kind, as Mr. Cooper.²²

Off-stage, he was admired for physical courage and athleticism: “The physical powers of endurance of this eminent actor were most remarkable... He frequently played at the Park Theatre, New York, and at the Walnut Street Theatre, Philadelphia, alternate nights in the week,... [He journeyed on horseback,] which was considered through the heavy sand roads of New Jersey a Herculean performance.”²³ Audiences, perhaps subconsciously, sought an actor who embodied the magnitude and unbridled passion of the country: Cooper was the closest thing that the early Republic would see.

Cooper acted as a transitional figure from the British stock companies who toured the early republic to Edwin Forrest, who was praised for many of the same virtues (charisma, athleticism, etc.). Cooper essentially served as a prototype of Forrest’s muscular masculinity. While fledgling dramatic attempts by Tyler, Dunlap, and others (discussed in the introduction) sought to establish a masculine character that was uniquely American, most of the actors available were only able to bring them to life superficially. With the possible exception of Cooper, they lacked either the force of personality or the physical or moral stature effectively to embody and reinforce the noble characters they portrayed.

²² *New York Commercial Advertiser*, 2 March 1798.

²³ Henry Dickinson Stone, *Personal Recollections of the Drama; or, Theatrical Reminiscences* (Albany, NY: C. Van Bentuysen, 1873), 207.

George Frederick Cooke (1756-1812), a legitimate rival to Kemble in England agreed to tour America in 1810.²⁴ In contrast to the regulated, declamatory style and noble sentiments of Kemble's performance, Cooke's acting was marked by a feverish attack and sudden shifts in tempo and pitch, perceived by contemporary audiences as a radical advance toward "natural" acting. Cooke's performance was noted for "the actor's mastery over his voice and his skill in adapting it to the play of feature and bodily action in the familiar expression of every-day life and character."²⁵ While praised for his energetic portrayal of stage villains – "[H]is unassumed personal malignity was the crowning-point of artistic delineation" – alcohol, ill health, and irresponsible behavior often marred Cooke's performances, and he died unexpectedly from drink and a prolonged, untreated illness.²⁶

Cooke was not admired as a *man* – but as a performer. He was the first major British star to visit America, and his debut marked the biggest theatrical sensation yet experienced: "reiterated plaudits expressed the fullness with which expectation had been realized and taste and feeling gratified."²⁷ Audiences loudly applauded Cooke as a star, and his arrival provided the American theatre with some much-needed cultural status. Audiences embraced Cooke's American debut in 1810 because, in spite of his instability, on-stage he exuded the stature of a masculine hero – a figure perhaps truly

²⁴ For the most detailed detailed biography of Cooke see Don B. Wilmeth, *George Frederick Cooke: Machiavel of the Stage* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

²⁵ James E. Murdoch, *The Stage* (Philadelphia: J. M. Stoddart, 1880), 79.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁷ William Dunlap, *Memoirs of George Frederick Cooke*, vol. 2 (New York: D. Longworth, 1813), 157.



Fig. 18. George Frederick Cooke. Note the similarity to Peale's portrait of Washington (Fig.1).

capable of embodying the grand masculine presence that the nation so desperately wished to see.

Edmund Kean (1787-1833), the leading actor of the English stage, made his American debut in New York in 1820. Although in the country for a relatively short period of time, he exerted more influence than any other individual on the early American stage. Hailed as the theatrical personification of romantic naturalism, his performances often were uneven but imbued with a violent intensity, passion, and power, through which Kean's distinctive personality was always present: "[His] acting is like an anarchy of the passions, in which each upstart humor, or frenzy of the moment, is struggling to get violent possession of some bit or corner of his fiery soul and pigmy body."²⁸ Obviously, this physical description (which was not atypical) did not suggest a conventional or terribly appealing masculine image. The diminutive Kean idolized Cooke and shared many of his excessive, self-destructive behaviors.

Kean's rejection of England's fashionable society should have made him popular with a democratic audience.²⁹ Indeed, in his debut, Kean's greatness was recognized instantly: "[W]e saw the most complete actor... that ever appeared on our boards... We are desirous that all should witness the exhibitions of Kean, because we believe he will introduce a new and better taste in acting... and thus materially improve

²⁸ William Hazlitt, *Hazlitt on Theatre*, ed. William Archer and Robert W. Lowe (New York: , 1957), 8. Hazlitt composed twenty-one reviews of Kean's performances from 1814 to 1820.

²⁹ Kean biographer Harold Hillebrand suggests that reports of Kean's arrogance and his attack against the Kemble style of acting practiced by Cooper (America's adopted son, who had friends in high places), poisoned America's response to Kean [*Edmund Kean*, New York: AMS Press, 1966), 201].



Fig. 19. Edmund Kean as Richard III.

the judgment of the public.”³⁰ Audiences initially responded with equal enthusiasm, but, when Kean refused to play to a small house in Boston, he was vilified as an “insolent pretender,” an “inflated, self-conceited, unprincipled vagabond.”³¹ Although this attack obviously uses the language of the elite, Kean offended across class lines. The upper class chastised him for stepping above his station, and the lower class condemned him as a conceited Englishman. Ultimately, the showdown between Kean and the middle- and upper-class men of Boston amounted to an affair of “honor.”

Kean’s erratic life-style and a well-publicized affair with the wife of a London alderman also contributed to his unappealing masculine image. Sexual prowess was a desirable masculine trait but apparently only when it was implied rather than sordidly advertised. The uninhibited and unschooled fire and passion of his dramatic portrayals, however, was in harmony with the American sensibility: “The drudgery of his early life had given a pliability to his muscular powers that rendered him the most dexterous harlequin, the most graceful fencer, the most finished gentleman, the most insidious lover, the most terrific tragedian.”³² Like his idol Cooke, Kean was a masculine model on-stage only, and then only when his personal life did not distract and detract from his theatrical image.

³⁰ *The New York Evening Post*, 30 November 1820.

³¹ *Boston Galaxy*, 26 May 1821. Growing tensions on Kean’s second trip to America eventually led to the nation’s most violent theatre riot (21 December 1825) up to that time.

³² John W. Francis, *Old New York, or, Reminiscences of the Past Sixty Years* (New York: Charles Roe, 1858), 218.

Junius Brutus Booth (1796-1852), a serious rival and sometime imitator of Kean who abandoned a wife and son in England to begin another family in America, spent the last thirty years of his life performing throughout the entire country. Kean's acting clearly inspired him, but the elder Booth possessed a suppler vocal instrument and a greater knack for subsuming his own personality in performance: "We say [Booth was Kean's] superior because Booth sustains a character from the first line to the end of the play, impressing it with the grandness of a wonderful conception subdued practically."³³ Booth could also equal Kean's fire and passion: "[H]is eyes flashed fire;... and he rushed upon the foe like a lion, animating his followers with a voice of thunder."³⁴ Because he performed in almost every viable theatre community in the country over three decades, Booth had the greatest practical impact of the traveling British stars, but I suggest that his improper family life, intemperance, and bouts of mental instability likely made him more of a curiosity than an ideal model of masculine behavior.

William Charles Macready (1793-1873), the "Eminent Tragedian," shared the high-minded ideals and the off-stage decorum typically associated with the classical school, but his performance style borrowed heavily from both dominant acting traditions and direct observation of Kemble and Kean.³⁵ Abandoning the standard

³³ *Spirit of the Times*, 11 March 1848.

³⁴ *National Advocate*, 8 October 1821. This account is very similar to descriptions of Daniel Webster.

³⁵ Forrest also implemented this melding of styles. Though Macready's American debut occurred at roughly the same time as Forrest's New York debut in 1826, no evidence suggests that Forrest observed Macready at that time.



Fig. 20. Junius Brutus Booth as Richard III.



Fig. 21. William Charles Macready as Macbeth.

practice of playing “points,” Macready attempted to find a middle ground, capturing the natural feel of the romantic school while maintaining the dignity of the classical: “He cannot be entirely classed with the exclusive followers of nature, though he borrowed largely from her resources; and it would be unjust to his original powers to attribute his excellencies to his adoption of the cold and formal school of actors.”³⁶ As Macready described his own performance, “Acted Hamlet, if I may trust my own feeling, in a very Shakespearian style; most courteous and gentlemanly, with high bearing, and yet with abandonment and, I think, great energy.”³⁷

Others felt that this attempt to combine the acting schools was unsuccessful, resulting in cold formality: “Macready’s style was an amalgam of John Kemble and Edmund Kean. He tried to blend the classic art of the one with the impulsive intensity of the other; and he overlaid both with an outer plating of his own, highly artificial and elaborately formal.”³⁸

From Kemble, Macready borrowed a meticulous, finely detailed, premeditated approach to acting and characterization, embodying “all those minute traits which

³⁶ John W. Francis, *Old New York, or, Reminiscences of the Past Sixty Years* (New York: Charles Roe, 1858), 245. Francis was a New York physician and historian.

³⁷ William Charles Macready, *Macready’s Reminiscences and Selections from His Diaries and Letters*, ed. Frederick Pollock (New York: Harper, 1875), 527.

³⁸ George Vandenhoff, *Leaves from an Actor’s Notebook* (New York: D. Appleton, 1860), 18. Vandenhoff was an English-born actor who achieved passing success in America. Many recognized in Macready’s performance an attempt at unity of performance that attempted an amalgamation or compromise of styles: “he endeavored to blend the dignity and grandeur of John P. Kemble with the impulsive action and fiery spirit of Edmund Kean” [Noah M. Ludlow, *Dramatic Life As I Found It* (St. Louis: G.I. Jones, 1880), 594]. Ludlow claimed that Macready’s effort was a failure and the blend of styles an impossibility.

circumstances impart to an individual— to form a correct outline, and to fill up with those diversities, brought into complete harmony.”³⁹ He deplored, however, the lifeless artificiality often associated with the Kemble school. Inspired by Kean, Macready attempted naturalistic readings of a role, overcoming a tendency toward stilted delivery in his youth, marked by contrasts in tempo and tone.⁴⁰ From Kean also, Macready learned the *appearance* of sincere passion and spontaneous emotion:

Mr. Macready excels in passages of tender emotion, but he absolutely transcends himself in those of high and impetuous feeling. You see the passion flashing in his eye and flaming on his cheek, and you hear it in the thunder of his voice – the finest voice upon the stage. Here he never thinks of his delivery, but gives his utterance the rein, and lets it bound along with all the freedom of wild and headlong nature.⁴¹

Yet unlike Kean, Macready was intellectually controlled and justified, with at least moderate success, his sudden shifts (using what came to be known as the “Macready pause”) to give the impression of thinking within soliloquy:

If we say that *naturalness* (an ugly but a useful word) is at the basis of all Mr. Macready’s impersonations, we do not conceive we shall widely err. To seize on an emotion, to make it perfectly comprehensible to every capacity, to familiarize the creations of the dramatist to the spectator, rather than to hold them in a state of august elevation, seems to be his constant aim.⁴²

³⁹ *Monthly Magazine*, 1 February 1821.

⁴⁰ Macready’s father, William McReady, a moderately successful Irish actor who was a company member at Covent Garden, was of the stilted, declamatory school. Macready’s early career was greatly influenced by his father and Kemble.

⁴¹ Sheridan Knowles, *Lectures on Oratory, Gesture and Poetry* (London, 1873), 134. This description of Macready sounds very Forrest-like. Both actors were certainly inspired by Kean’s emotional outbursts, but Forrest sought physically to embody this passion while Macready relied more strongly on vocal intensity.

⁴² *The Spectator*, 25 January 1838. Macready constantly struggled to lose himself in the character he portrayed: “I cannot act Macbeth without *being Macbeth*” [William Charles Macready, *The Diaries, 1831-51*, ed. W. Toynbee, vol. 1 (1912), 282].

Macready sought to privilege passion closely governed by intellect over unbridled power: “I was most attentive to the necessity of subduing my voice, and letting the passion rather than the lungs awaken the audience.”⁴³ He placed clarity of intention over beauty of speech or exactness of meter: “Bad as an elocutionist, Mr. Macready is great for his psychological insight into character, and for the evolution of those minute traits which give individuality to action.”⁴⁴

Macready’s attempts to give the elevated language of the drama the sound and feel of real speech was a constant professional struggle: “I find the good effect of that natural manly tone of dialogue, with which I must endeavour to improve the colloquial groundwork of my acting.”⁴⁵ Macready’s efforts at artless subtlety mirrored the middle-class goal of the invisible performance of genteel decorum previously discussed in Chapter One. Just as Macready acknowledged the fact that he sought the *effect* of “nature,” rather than attempting somehow to (re)create it on-stage, the image-conscious men of the middle classes manufactured the outward signs of proper manliness. I will expand the connection between Macready and the genteel classes in Chapter Four.

Macready’s diaries were full of self-chastisements over failing to inhabit a character in performance. This mindset differed significantly from Forrest, whose distinctive personality was always clearly visible. Forrest would freely adapt the roles to suit himself, rather attempting to change himself to fit the role.

⁴³ Macready, *Reminiscences*, 301.

⁴⁴ *Athenaeum* (1849), quoted in Bertram Joseph, *The Tragic Actor* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), 304.

⁴⁵ William Charles Macready, *Diaries of William Charles Macready*, vol. 1, 5.

Cooke, Kean, and the elder Booth practiced similar approaches to acting – an inspired, intuitive, and impulsive intensification of nature. Their style thrilled because it had an air of spontaneity that was inherently individual. As George Henry Lewes described the shallow, surface emulators of Kean, “His imitators have been mostly ridiculous, simply because they reproduced the manner and the mannerism, but could not reproduce the power which made these enduring.”⁴⁶ In performances marked by a passionate fire that was impossible to train or teach, the singularity of these British stars, and the fledgling American actors they inspired, strongly appealed to a working class faith in individual greatness that would lead invariably to social success and mobility.

It was this very passionate individual expression, however, that made the social acceptance of the romantic actor by the genteel audience increasingly difficult, and eventually impossible. The decorous manner and ennobling performance of the classical actor, such as Cooper and Macready, was a more natural fit for the image-conscious middle classes and elite. Part of the challenge for these visiting British stars was the need to be “all things to all men.” These performers were appearing during a transitional period, while masculine identities were still in flux. If the audience had yet to separate along class lines in the 1810s and 1820s, how could *one* man possibly appeal to every masculine identity in the playhouse? Ironically, masculine representation became simpler as America’s class relationships became more complex and the audience began to fragment.

⁴⁶ George Henry Lewes, *On Actors and the Art of Acting* (New York: Holt, 1878), 3.

Initially, coming to America severely stigmatized British performers, and the actors discussed above only took the gamble for the promise of great financial gain or when faced with unpleasant circumstances, either personal or professional, at home. Cooper, the first brave adventurer, unhappy with the terms offered at London's leading theatre, decided to make the trip against the passionate objection of mentor-playwright Thomas Holcroft: "As an actor you would be extinct."⁴⁷ Indeed, Cooper later returned to a completely disinterested British public who rejected his performances as beneath their standards. Kemble never risked the trip, and it was not until 1826, thirty years after Cooper's American debut, that the next prominent classical actor (Macready) chanced the voyage. Cooke died in America within two years of his arrival, and the unstable elder Booth remained in the country, at least in part to avoid the family he left behind.

Kean was the first to enjoy success, both artistic and financial, after his return to England, proving the United States as a risky but potentially lucrative venture. While later American actors traveled to England to legitimize and validate their careers, the benefits for English actors of traveling to America were almost exclusively monetary.

The showdown between Kean and the Boston audience amounted to a masculine test of wills. Kean insulted American male audiences. They retaliated by exiling him from their stage. This triumph invested them with a new kind of masculinity – they asserted their cultural superiority and demonstrated that they did

⁴⁷ Quoted in Charles H. Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage: From the Hallams to Edwin Booth* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), 23.

not need presumptuous foreigners to teach them passionate independence. And to prove it, American male audiences of all classes began to cultivate their own stars who not only reflected their values and virtues, but who also would be properly grateful for their patronage. This ongoing status relationship was clearly at work in the evolving relationship between Edwin Forrest and his audience, and it would continue to be negotiated between the men on-stage and the men in the audience throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century.

Romantic Redux: Emulating Forrest

Edwin Forrest was an inheritor of these British traditions. And while he certainly was the most acclaimed and successful American proponent of the heroic and fiery romantic school and enjoyed the most sustained career, he had many muscular rivals and imitators who also relied on passionate outbursts and moments of dramatic inspiration. Not coincidentally, all of these actors played to predominantly popular audiences in working class theatres.

The Irish-born John E. McCullough (1832-1885) was a protégé of Forrest, who toured with him and played the second male lead in his repertoire for five years before striking out on his own.⁴⁸ Emigrating to America at fifteen, McCullough taught himself to read and write and worked as a cabinet maker before pursuing a stage

⁴⁸ Susie C. Clark's worshipful biography provides the most information on the actor's life and career. *John McCullough as Man, Actor and Spirit* (Boston: Murray and Emery, 1905).



Fig. 22. John McCullough as Coriolanus.

career at age twenty-four. His theatrical self-education was noted with admiration by critics throughout his career.⁴⁹

His performances often reflected “stertorous hints of his master, the Gothic Forrest... As a tragedian he is vigorous and effective, but it is a muscular rather than a poetic vigor... If he is not poetic, he is at least virile and emphatic.”⁵⁰ When compared to Forrest, critics praised McCullough for his vulnerability and tenderness:

The stately form, the massive ease of movement, the leonine repose, the rich variety of vocal treatment, the air of innate gentleness, and the winning manner – all these elements are fused, in his embodiment, by an individuality that is virtue itself... burning with the splendid fires of hallowed passion.⁵¹

While Forrest had been described as “imposing” and “Herculean,” McCullough was “virile,” “massive,” and “leonine” – suggesting a growing dignity and respectability in the masculine image and an added dimension that was almost (but not quite) spiritual.

⁴⁹ McCullough did not reach the height of his abilities until studying the Delsarte system under Steele MacKaye after the war. Francois Delsarte attempted to create a science of movement that classified consistent and predictable physical responses to emotional and sensual stimuli. Delsarte’s system mapped natural physical movements in order to encourage more free and natural acting, but his theories were misinterpreted and misapplied, later becoming associated with false, external, and mechanical acting. Steele MacKaye (1842-1894), a successful actor and playwright, as well as an acting theorist and teacher, was a pupil of Delsarte and the strongest proponent of the Delsartian system in America.

⁵⁰ *New York Sun*, 3 April 1877.

⁵¹ *New York Daily Tribune*, 3 April 1877. Both of these performance reviews are in response to a single performance of *Virginius*. By this time, the enthusiasm for the muscularity of the romantic actor was beginning to wane. McCullough was one of its few successful practitioners, although he appears to have moderated much of Forrest’s passion. The *Daily Tribune* nostalgically celebrated McCullough’s performance as, “a personification which, in these days, it is an astonishment to see.” The *New York Sun* spoke kindly but more condescendingly of his efforts and the audience that appreciated him: “[H]e manages to capture the sympathies of those who like to have even their tragedies made stirring.” The time for “stirring” tragedies apparently had passed for those seeking the comparatively subtle “pathos of mind.”

McCullough “was the manly friend..., the fond and tender father,... the simple, truthful, affectionate, high-minded man, whose soul could exist only in honor” and “a man of noble presence, of powerful build..., [who] could assume a lofty dignity in which Forrest was lacking, and had a notable mastery of virile pathos.”⁵² McCullough maintained a loyal following, initially among Forrest’s primarily working-class male audience and eventually adding the middle-class family, throughout his nearly thirty years on the American stage without ever attracting the passionate negative responses that marked Forrest’s career.

McCullough, known as Genial John, provided an intriguing personification of the changing artistic and masculine ideals of the mid-nineteenth century. The gradual modulations in his acting style mirrored the elevation in American taste. While McCullough never reached the bombastic heights of Forrest, he typically played for the same urban male audience, and the strength of his image and the power of his performance placed him firmly and prominently in the romantic school. After his separation from Forrest, McCullough strove for a more moderate style; and while he essentially maintained Forrest’s repertoire, his performances were noted for increased sensitivity and subtlety.

Tracing the power negotiations between actor and audience, McCullough provided an interesting example of a performer whose masculinity was non-threatening – he was the quintessential ‘yeoman farmer’ in his virtue and his solid strength – but he also ‘knew his place,’ and never challenged his audience in the

⁵² William Winter, “John McCullough,” in *Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States*, ed. Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton, vol. 4 (New York: Cassell and Company, 1886), 282; John Towse, *Sixty Years*, 222.

theatre or in his off-stage conduct. It was *because* he never issued a challenge that he was allowed in the circle of masculinity, but never reached its center.

I would argue that McCullough, although widely admired, was perhaps too moderate for true, lasting stage greatness. His performances lacked the intelligence of Booth and the fire of Forrest, and the genial but bland nature of his real-life persona was admirable but wanting in the dynamism needed to inspire emulation.⁵³ In many ways, McCullough was similar to the “dull” presidents of the mid-nineteenth century, providing a masculine model that was plausible and reassuring, that was not exciting, but that got the job done. While actors like Kean and Forrest were lambasted for their off-stage conduct, they inspired passionate responses in their audiences. I suggest that McCullough may have too closely embodied the ideals of the emerging middle class, who longed to see the repressed spark of masculine passion and inspiration beneath the controlled moderation of gentility – a quality they would come to admire in Edwin Booth.⁵⁴

Embodying the more extreme side of romantic expression, the life and career of Augustus A. Addams (?-1851), thought a legitimate rival of Forrest in the 1830s,

⁵³ On some level, McCullough’s audience did not appear to give him or his career full recognition: “There is no other living tragedian in the country, since the death of Forrest, who has taken hold upon the public and secured their esteem and affection, as has this young and careful student of dramatic art” [*Washington Chronicle*, 29 November 1875]. His success was, of course, qualified by the absence of Forrest. He inspired “esteem and affection,” which suggests fondness rather than passion in the audience’s regard. And describing the forty-three year-old McCullough, who had been on the stage for eighteen years, as a “young and careful student” seemed somehow condescending.

⁵⁴ While the middle class was intimidated by overt displays of passion (and internalized the exuberance of their responses to theatrical stimuli), they wanted to be able to see the remarkable man behind the placid exterior.

was cut short by excess: “Gifted by nature with a commanding person, not only a handsome, but an expressive countenance, a voice capable of being modulated to the tones of the softest flute, yet powerful enough to out-rant the loudest lungs of any actor who ever tore a passion to rags, Mr. Addams should have distanced all competitors.”⁵⁵ Addams openly but artfully imitated Forrest, and descriptions of his performance and person closely compare to his more established competitor:

“Physically, he is liberally endowed. His frame is well-knit, and his port commanding. His features, too, are full of expression, and susceptible, in an eminent degree, of sudden and powerful change – an attribute which the possessor rarely abuses.”⁵⁶

It is interesting to note in the descriptions of Addams that by the 1830s the language of theatre criticism revealed what were taken to be the quintessential masculine qualities (at least on-stage) – “gifted by nature,” “handsome,” “liberally endowed,” great range of physical expression, vocal flexibility (capable of modulation, “yet powerful enough to out-rant the loudest lungs”), and perfect control of these immense gifts. Indeed, the reviews assured the audience that the performers they would see possessed all the requisite features associated with “American” masculinity.

⁵⁵ Francis Courtney Wemyss, *Twenty-six Years in the Life of an Actor and Manager* (New York: Burgess, Stringer, and Company, 1847), 244. Addams birth date is unknown, but it is suspected that he was under thirty when he died. Addams was supposed to originate the role of Jack Cade in Robert T. Conrad’s original Philadelphia production in 1835 but was too drunk to perform. The role was assayed by David Ingersoll to moderate success. Addams later played Cade in Philadelphia to less than passionate response.

⁵⁶ *The Knickerbocker Magazine*, May 1835.

Sharing Addams' excesses on-stage and off-, the lives and careers of David Ingersoll, Charles Eaton, J. Hudson Kirby, and John Wilkes Booth, all successful adherents of Forrest's fiery, passionate acting school, also ended at moments of peak popularity before the age of thirty. Unable to modulate the intensity of their off-stage lives, or drunk on the fervent adulation of their supporters, these young men ultimately destroyed themselves. Their real lives could not reach the fevered heights of heroic zeal achieved by the characters they played. Their figurative immolation illustrated the danger, if not the impossibility, of realizing the unattainable ideals of the Forrestian dramas. All of these actors exuded a Byronic image of romanticism, melancholy, and melodramatic energy, and while a psychological profile of these actors lies outside the purview of this study, I suggest that the theatre tended to attract a certain "type" of rowdy young man in search of adulation.

These young men, who lived an extreme life and died young, were a stage embodiment of the lessons that Beecher and the etiquette manuals warned would lead to despair and degradation. They provided quintessential American examples of the young man squandering his considerable gifts and represented the ultimate danger facing the young republic – that it would have one or two glorious moments, then self-destruct.

Classical Copycats: Looking For the High Road

Other competing actors modeled their work on the elevated and dignified school of classical British stars like the Kembles, popularized on the American stage

first by Cooper and later Macready – a style which reached its pinnacle in America with Edwin Booth and became associated primarily with elite audiences.

James E. Murdoch (1811-1893), a less-famous early contemporary of Edwin Booth's, who like Booth presented refined and idealized characters, also wrote and taught extensively on the art of stage elocution.⁵⁷ Murdoch did much to elevate theatre's position in the American society, as the *Spirit of the Times* noted:

The pervading quality of the performance was grace and propriety of conception and delivery: relieved by electrical flashes on passages of a more elevated character. All our contemporaries concur in acknowledgment of his manly bearing, the beauty of his voice and his admirable reading.⁵⁸

Murdoch's masculine image of "grace," "propriety," and "manly bearing" suggested a more noble vision of American manhood: "There was a manliness about his light comedy that gave it more dignity than the flippant style in which it was usually played. This method elevated the characters exceedingly."⁵⁹ Murdoch presented a

⁵⁷ Murdoch wrote prolifically on his experiences on the stage and the importance of stage elocution in acting: James E. Murdoch, *The Stage* (Philadelphia: J.M. Stoddart, 1880).

⁵⁸ *Spirit of the Times*, 25 October 1845.

⁵⁹ Joseph Jefferson, *The Autobiography of Joseph Jefferson* (New York: Century, 1889), 153. Jefferson refers to Murdoch in an 1853 performance of *The School for Scandal* – although Murdoch was also a well-known tragic actor, in roles such as Hamlet.



Fig. 23. James E. Murdoch as Petruchio.

dignified, intellectual masculine behavior: “Vigorous without excess, lively and manly, his acting abounds in shrewd and well-considered by-play.”⁶⁰

Murdoch’s peak of success was in the 1840s, well before that of Booth, and he was praised for his intelligence, dignity, and moderation – one of the few actors with the courage to develop an independent style: “Neither the popularity of Forrest nor the fame of [the elder] Booth could tempt him to an imitation of either of these tragedians, and his comedy was equally free from resembling the style of the Wallacks or that of Charles Kemble.”⁶¹ Murdoch avoided the manly excess of Forrest and Booth but also failed to inspire their passionate following. In some ways, he typified the same “safe” masculine role model of McCullough and the presidents of the period, yet his career also reflected elements of Henry Clay’s moderation and sense of compromise, while echoing John Quincy Adams’ sense of independent intellectualism.

Edward L. Davenport (1815-1877), a polished and versatile actor, was noted for “his fine person, manly bearing, and quietly earnest acting.”⁶² Although lacking Booth’s passion, Davenport enjoyed a reputation as another of the more popular actors of the mid-nineteenth century noted for cultured control: “In his impersonations, calm judgment controls his impulses; his action and declamation are never measured and

⁶⁰ Henry Morley, *The Journal of a London Playgoer: 1851-1866* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974), 127. Morley alludes to Murdoch’s 1856 performance in Farquhar’s *The Inconstant*.

⁶¹ Joseph Jefferson, *Autobiography*, 152.

⁶² Anna Cora Mowatt, quoted in Edwin Francis Edgett, *Edward Loomis Davenport* (New York: Dunlap Society, 1901), 23. Davenport was celebrated as Sir Giles Overreach in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts*, William in *Black-Eyed Susan*, Bill Sykes in *Oliver Twist*, as well as Hamlet and Shakespeare’s Brutus.



Fig. 24. Edward L. Davenport as Brutus.

gauged by the popular applause, but regulated by his own correct taste.”⁶³ This “tasteful” emotional restraint was noted frequently: “A striking quality of Mr. Davenport’s acting is its quietness. His best points are made in repose. He is not, however, tame, for it is the energy of the *mind* that is expressed, though not of the body, – where the passions is supposed to be of a highly wrought nature.”⁶⁴ The reserved nature of his acting was admired intellectually, but it often failed to connect emotionally: “It never once excited any real emotion in the audience, it never made us feel.”⁶⁵

Davenport’s pursuit of versatility, and his desire to fill the theatre coffers at any cost, ultimately injured his dramatic reputation – an odd mixture of high and low in his choice of plays and in elements of his performance style – and successfully alienated both elite and working class audiences: “[I]t was this very willingness to play anything and everything that kept him below his true place in the judgment of the careless majority.”⁶⁶

Davenport did not succeed as a masculine model because he could not find *one* role to embody, suggesting the limited options available to men of this period. Often locked into a single, class-determined role for life, men ran the risk of losing their

⁶³ Henry Dickinson Stone, *Personal Recollections of the Drama, or, Theatrical Reminiscences* (Albany, NY: C. Van Bentuysen, 1973), 121.

⁶⁴ “Actors As They Are” (1856), in *Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States*, ed. Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton, vol. 4 (New York: Cassell and Company, 1886), 131.

⁶⁵ Adam Badeau, *The Vagabond* (New York: Rudd and Carleton, 1859), 74.

⁶⁶ Henry P. Goddard, “Recollections of Edward L. Davenport,” *Lippincott’s Magazine* (April 1878): 466.

manly status if they attempted to shift their identities. Davenport's career communicates a great deal about the fluidity (or lack thereof) in male role models in the mid-nineteenth century.

The studious, ambitious, and often artificial Lawrence Barrett (1838-1891), "lithe and graceful in figure," was another competent actor of the "classical" school.⁶⁷ Barrett's intelligence was always praised, but he was often accused of pure technicality – "ambitious, intelligent and painstaking" - and a lack of warmth in his acting:

Mr. Barrett is generally looked upon as being a brainy man, an earnest man, an ambitious man, and a studious man. He writes well, talks well, and manages well, but in the judgment of the metropolitan connoisseurs he does not play well. His culture and cleverness appear, they say, in everything he does except in his stage personations.⁶⁸

Barrett's flaws as an actor and masculine model mirrored those warned against in the conduct manuals. He attempted to give the appearance of genuineness, but the act was hollow and the "stage effect" was visible. A self-educated, self-made man, Barrett's ego and competitive insecurity made him difficult to like, but he was an effective

⁶⁷ Austin Brereton, *Dramatic Notes, 1883-1886* (London: Longman, 1886), 26. Barrett is now primarily known for reviving Booth's career in the 1880s, relieving him from the responsibility of theatre management (which was never Booth's forte) and allowing him to focus exclusively on acting. Barrett was noted for his Cassius (*Julius Caesar*), Lanciotto (*Francesca da Rimini*), Hamlet, and Richelieu.

⁶⁸ Henry P. Phelps, *Players of a Century* (Albany, NY: J. McDonough, 1880), 338; Alfred Ayres, "Lawrence Barrett," in *Acting and Actors* (New York: D. Appleton, 1894), 87. Ayres' extended comments on Barrett are strangely vituperative, but these comments on the popular response to his acting coincide with most of the general comments of the day.



Fig. 25. Laurence Olivier as Cassius.

manager, encouraged new American drama, and revived worthy American plays of the past, such as George Boker's *Francesca da Rimini*.⁶⁹

These intellectual practitioners of the classical school pursued a precisely detailed craft. They elevated the art of acting and the potential place that theatre could hold, gradually eroding a measure of the upper class prejudice against men of the theatre. William Winter's description of Barrett could serve equally well for all of them:

Lawrence Barrett...[showed] himself to be a true artist, a deep student of human nature, a superb executant of dramatic effect... - by the splendid self-control and the refined art with which... he subordinated copious declamation to intense feeling..., wise-tempered ardor and judicious while brilliant force.⁷⁰

Murdoch, Davenport, and Barrett (as well as others of the classical school) provided sensitive, intelligent, solid, if unspectacular, models of genteel masculinity. All were praised for dramatic versatility. This skill in adaptability I suggest appealed to middle-class men tentatively searching to find their way through a complex social landscape.

Described as “graceful,” “elevated,” “intelligent,” “well-considered,” “tasteful,” “earnest,” “correct,” “calm,” and “quiet” and exhibiting “manly bearing,” they presented ennobling, safe, comforting images of American manhood to reflect the conservative values of the elite, anathema to the working class. None of them,

⁶⁹ Otis Skinner kindly articulated the difficulties in working with Barrett: “Too ambitious to take the world easily, ever lifting his vision to his star of destiny, impatient, sensitive, frequently suspicious and given to many moods. Barrett never seemed a happy man” (*Footlights and Spotlights* [Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1924], 110).

⁷⁰ *New York Tribune*, 3 August 1886.

however, successfully duplicated the excitement that the public felt in Edwin Booth, nor his compelling warmth and vulnerability.

Comic Mockeries: The Lighter Side of American Manhood

America's comic actors not only presented and defined images of masculine ideals but also ridiculed other conceptions of manhood, stigmatizing portions of the population because of race, class, social standing, or political affiliation. James Henry Hackett, William E. Burton, Henry Placide, John Gilbert, George Handel "Yankee" Hill, William Warren, and John Brougham are only a few examples of the remarkably versatile comic actors of this period.⁷¹

James H. Hackett (1800-1871) was known primarily for his portrayal of Falstaff and the development of the stage Yankee. He presented Falstaff didactically as a moral lesson against vice: "Shakespeare has invested that philosophic compound of vice and sensuality, with no amiable or tolerable quality to gloss or cover his moral deformity."⁷² Hackett's performance was designed to appeal to the genteel proclivities of the image-conscious middle classes: "The humor of Hackett's Falstaff was not so much unctuous as it was satirical. He interpreted a mind that was merry, but one in which merriment was strongly tinged with scorn. It knew nothing about

⁷¹ Most comic actors of this period had an enormous number and wide range of roles at their command. William Warren reportedly performed in 1,150 different roles (Wilson, *History of American Acting*, 161), and the other actors listed maintained a repertoire of roles in the hundreds. It was not until after the Civil War that actors such as Joseph Jefferson, forever associated with Rip Van Winkle, began making a significant name for themselves by touring with a single role.

⁷² "Mr. Hackett's Analysis of Falstaff," *Spirit of the Times*, 4 April 1840.



Fig. 26. James H. Hackett as Falstaff. This picture suggests a far less jovial character than other contemporary renditions.

virtue, except that some people trade on that attribute; and it knew nothing about sweetness.”⁷³

Praised as a scholar and intellectual, Hackett published his *Notes, Criticisms, and Correspondence Upon Shakespeare's Plays and Actors* in 1863 and frequently rebutted critical comments in newspaper reviews.⁷⁴ Hackett was the first important American actor to go on the English stage (in 1827), enjoying at least moderate success there (he was thought a bit too gloomy as Falstaff): “[H]is cultivated mind and refined manners brought him into close intercourse with the most accomplished critics and highest social circles both in England and America.”⁷⁵ He was a staunch nationalist champion, albeit with aristocratic sympathies, and actively encouraged the American drama.⁷⁶ Hackett managed the Astor Place Opera House in 1849 at the time

⁷³ William Winter, *Shadows of the Stage* (New York: Macmillan, 1892), 44. Winter referred to Hackett’s portrayal of the fat knight in *Henry IV*, Part 1 at Booth’s Theatre in 1869.

⁷⁴ Hackett also carried on a correspondence with John Quincy Adams on *Hamlet*. John W. Francis, *Old New York, or Reminiscences of the Past Sixty Years* (New York: Charles Roe, 1858), 214-215.

⁷⁵ Joseph Norton Ireland, “James H. Hackett,” in *Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States*, ed. Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton, vol. 3 (New York: Cassell and Company, 1886), 164. Hackett sporadically attempted tragedy, “more to the satisfaction of himself than of the public” (Ibid.). “Mr. Hackett always claimed to be, and certainly thought that he was, a tragedian; the public never recognized his claim. I remember well, when at a subsequent period he played Richard III, he was heartily laughed at” (Walter M. Leman, *Memories of an Old Actor* [San Francisco: A. Roman, 1886], 83). For Hackett’s success in England see Brander Matthews, *Scribner’s Magazine* (July 1879), quoted in *Actors and Actresses of Great Britain and the United States*, ed. Brander Matthews and Laurence Hutton, vol. 3 (New York: Cassell and Company, 1886), 165-66.

⁷⁶ Hackett corresponded regularly with John Quincy Adams and developed a friendship with Philip Hone, conservative mayor of New York.



Fig. 27. James H. Hackett.

of the riot and championed Macready, whom he described as “the most intellectual and generally effective actor of the time.”⁷⁷

Performing at the aristocratic Park Theatre when in New York, Hackett also specialized in dialect characters (Yankee, “Kentuckian,” English, German, Dutch, Scotch, French), “which always fills the house, and elicits hearty plaudits... It [Hackett’s performance of the Yankee] is new, fresh from life, full of humor... We have seen nothing for many a day more ludicrous and yet more correct.”⁷⁸ Hackett did not emotionally or intellectually identify with his successful impersonation of the Yankee Jonathan Swop, presenting the original American character as an object of amusement, and an elite crowd joined in the laughter at the “ludicrous” masculine image of the stage Yankee. Hackett made a successful and dignified career out of comedy, because he fully separated himself from the buffoons he played onstage. Hackett appears to have been the first intellectual actor to look at the lower-class models from the outside.

The English-born William Evans Burton (1804-1860) arrived in Philadelphia in 1834 and remained one of America’s most popular comedians: “We have seen him keep an audience in roars of inextinguishable laughter, for minutes in succession, while an expression of ludicrous bewilderment, of blank confusion, or pompous

⁷⁷ James Henry Hackett, *Notes, Criticisms, and Correspondence Upon Shakespeare’s Plays and Actors* (New York: Carleton, 1863; reprint New York: Benjamin Blom, 1968), 139.

⁷⁸ *New York Mirror*, 13 October 1832. The review referred to his adaptation of George Colman’s *Solomon Gundy*, which Hackett entitled *Jonathan in England* – first performed in 1828. Some reviews of Hackett refer to the leading character as Solomon (instead of Jonathan) Swop.



Fig. 28. William Evans Burton as Bob Acres in *The Rivals*

inflation, settled upon his countenance.”⁷⁹ Burton’s mocking presentation of characters from the lower order elicited a divided response: “whilst thus ever fortunate in winning golden opinions from the masses [of respectable audiences], his ceaseless enterprise has made him enemies among portions of the less fortunate of mankind.”⁸⁰ The objects of Burton’s mockery clearly understood his derision, suggesting a working-class audience fully capable of reading performers’ motivations and sympathies.

Burton founded and published the *Gentleman’s Magazine* (later to become *Graham’s Magazine*) in 1836 and edited the *Literary Souvenir* and the *Cambridge Quarterly Review*. Burton was the first president of the Shakespeare Club, whose membership included many important men of the day, including Macready, and he possessed one of the country’s largest private libraries, including a collection of dramatic and theatrical literature.⁸¹ As a manager, Burton was the first American to emulate the full, lavish Shakespearean productions of Charles Kean.

⁷⁹ Francis Courtney Wemyss, *Theatrical Biography of Eminent Actors and Authors* (New York: William Taylor, n.d.), 40. Wemyss’ comments on Burton were written in the 1840s.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁸¹ Members of the Shakespeare Club included William Charles Macready, Sheridan Knowles, Douglas Jerrold, Laman Blanchard, Kenny Meadows, Richard Grant White, George William Curtis, Charles Dana, Gulian Verplanck (the younger), Charles Day, and Parke Godwin. William L. Keese, *William E. Burton: A Sketch of His Career Other Than That of Actor* (New York: Dunlap Society, 1891), 28-36. Keese also wrote a biography that focused on Burton’s artistic accomplishments – William E. Burton, *Actor, Author, and Manager: A Sketch of His Career* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1881).

Burton presented an oddly conflicting masculine image – a man of intellect and high ideals who specialized in obvious, coarse comedy:

He winked his eye at the audience without reserve, and wriggled and grimaced in order to give full force to an unobjectionable expression, rolling the precious morsel under his tongue, and actually smacking his lips, as it were, with unction at a questionable joke, until what the author may have barely touched with the pencil of conceit, the coarseness of the actor painted with a copious daubing of unmistakable grossness.⁸²

Burton's was a transparent performance: "[H]is face was a huge map on which was written every emotion that he felt; there was no mistaking the meaning of each expression."⁸³ Such naked emotions and such ribald humor earned hearty laughs from a "respectable" crowd, painting a non-threatening picture of the base nature of immigrant and working-class masculinity.

All of these respected performers, whether their comedy was broad or subtle, raucous or reserved, maintained an emotional, intellectual, and aesthetic separation between themselves and the characters (immigrant and working-class) they portrayed. They placed American character types on display for amusement or ridicule, mutually constructing and negotiating visions of laughable masculinity in order further to define and separate their own mannerly manhood. Because they sought to make a clear distinction between themselves and their objects of satire, these comic actors (men of intellect and letters) successfully entered respected society.⁸⁴ Yet at the same time,

⁸² James E. Murdoch, *The Stage, or Recollections of Actors and Acting* (Philadelphia: J. M. Stoddart, 1880), 224-25.

⁸³ Joseph Jefferson, *Autobiography*, 100.

other performers and forms of theatrical entertainment began to emerge that presented more realistic, more sympathetic, or sometimes more offensive visions of alternate masculinities, appealing across the broad audience spectrum.

Indians, Immigrants, Yankees, and Slaves: Alternate Masculine Visions

Establishing and enforcing the social and gender barriers of non-white, American playwrights helped more clearly to define the boundaries and expectations of white masculinity.⁸⁵ An examination of the theatrical construction of Native Americans, African Americans, and immigrant Irish as imagined by white males will be helpful primarily in what it communicates about the dominant masculinity, both in the behaviors stigmatized and the elements chosen for praise.

Metamora and Perceptions of the Native American Indian

While many Native American characters and situations succeeded on the American stage – most notably James Nelson Barker’s *The Indian Princess* (1808) and Mordecai Noah’s *She Would Be a Soldier* (1819) – none matched the popularity of *Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags* (1829). Written by John Augustus

⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that the “ranting heroes” previously discussed all appear to have come from the lower middle classes and were not members of the intellectual elite, while the comics were clearly men of taste, learning, and considerable ability.

⁸⁵ David Grimsted provides charts of the “Popularity of Particular Plays” and “Percentages of Types of Plays Given” (for Charleston, SC; Philadelphia; and New Orleans and St. Louis). American drama never totaled more than sixteen percent of the total dramas performed, and neither Yankee nor Indian plays ever comprised more than one-third of the American dramas presented (*Melodrama Unveiled*, 249-261).



Fig. 29. Edwin Forrest as Metamora. This image is from later in Forrest's career and does not suggest the vitality that made the role famous.

Stone (1800-1834), *Metamora* presented an image of the Indian tailored to Forrest's persona:

High on a craggy rock an Indian stood, with sinewy arm and eye that pierced the glen... Firmly he stood upon the jutting height, as if a sculptor's hand had carved him there. With awe I gazed as on the cliff he turned – the grandest model of a mighty man.⁸⁶

Loosely based on the hero of King Philip's War (1675-1676), Stone's tale embodied the freedom-fighting, white male view of nobility, while revealing America's conflicting views on the Indian issue:

It [*Metamora*] was a political instrument, a means of delicately balancing several components of the American sensibility, projecting the passionate nationalism of the new nation by incorporating, incongruously, an emblematic native American into white narrative, presenting him as an idealized hero who embodied sentimental values, but still reinforcing Andrew Jackson's policy of Indian removal.⁸⁷

The play followed the traditional pattern of romantic melodrama. Two largely unconnected plot lines (brought together by a feather that *Metamora* gives to the daughter of an English leader) presented a daughter who defied her father's demand to marry a Lord and an Indian warrior who sacrificed himself and his family in violent defense of his people and land: "This is far from the simple creation of a barbaric caricature, however, for Stone and Forrest temper images of Indian brutality and

⁸⁶ John Augustus Stone, *Metamora; or, The Last of the Wampanoags*, in *Staging the Nation: Plays from the American Theater, 1787-1909*, ed. Don B. Wilmeth (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998), 62. This quotation is perhaps the most explicit statement of masculine admiration in Forrest's dramas.

⁸⁷ Jeffrey D. Mason, "Metamora and the Indian Question," in *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 23. Mason suggests that, as a theatricalized history, "Stone's white audience could admire *Metamora* and sympathize with him, but as audience, they were not required to act on his behalf" (46).

savagery with assertions that white violence and expansion, not innate Indian brutishness, produced the bloodletting.”⁸⁸ Stone’s play elevated the noble savage while simultaneously revealing the barbarous red devil (in the utter disregard for life), but he also exposed the culpability, callousness, greed, and bloodlust of the British, suggesting the impossibility of reconciling the desires and ideals of the Indian and the English.

As America’s Indian problem became increasing troublesome in the first half of the nineteenth century, political tensions over the Indians led to a harsher, less noble image of the Native American. Andrew Jackson, an old Indian fighter unsympathetic to the Indian cause, enforced a strict policy of forcible removal and relocation of all tribes west of the Mississippi to the land between the Missouri River and the Rockies (thought unfit for habitation by whites) – supported by the Indian Removal Act of 1830.⁸⁹ The Black Hawk War (1832) and the Seminole War (1833) slaughtered many Native Americans, and even when the Cherokee Nation gained

⁸⁸ Scott C. Martin, “Interpreting *Metamora*: Nationalism, Theater, and Jacksonian Indian Policy,” in *Journal of the Early Republic* 19 (Spring 1999): 78. Martin places the play in the context of nineteenth-century viewpoints of the Indian in order to determine the reason for its success: “What made *Metamora* more popular than Forrest’s other prize plays or Shakespearean productions, which also offered physically imposing heroes battling tyranny, was its use of a distinctively American primitivism to address the nationalist and class interests of its audience” [100].

⁸⁹ The most useful studies of Jackson’s treatment of the Indians are Anthony F.C. Wallace, *The Long, Bitter Trail: Andrew Jackson and the Indians* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Michael Paul Rogin, *Fathers and Children: Andrew Jackson and the Subjugation of the American Indian* (New York: Knopf, 1975); Ronald Satz, *American Indian Policy in the Jacksonian Era* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1975); Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in the Formative Years: The Indian Trade and Intercourse Acts, 1790-1834* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962).

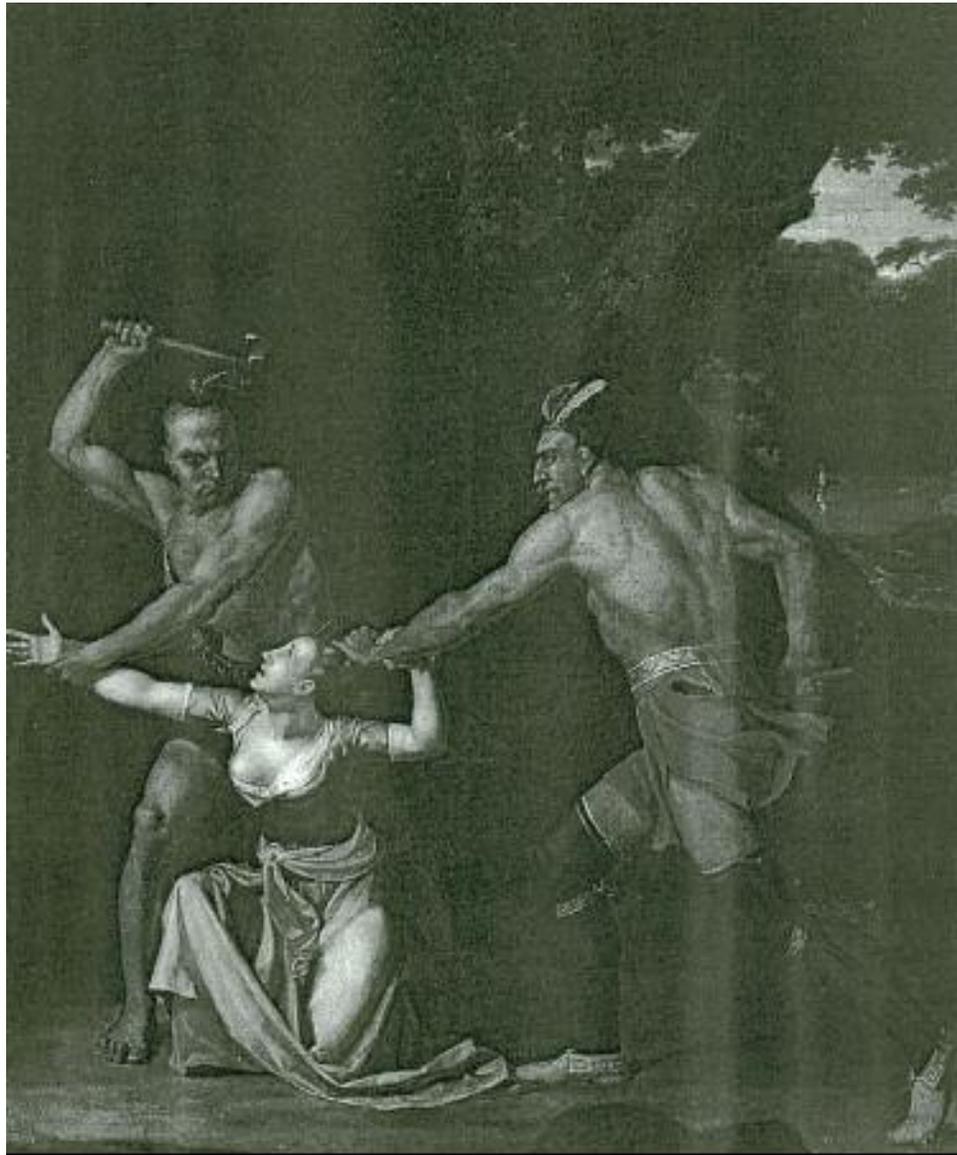


Fig. 30. John Vanderlyn's *The Death of Jane McCrea*. The dark, muscular, and vicious Indians exude a threatening masculinity, especially in contrast to the pale, defenseless, and "half-naked" McCrea.

Supreme Court support for the right to their land (*Cherokee Nation v. Georgia* – 1831; *Worcester v. Georgia* - 1832), Jackson refused to enforce the rulings. In the winter of 1838, thousands of Native Americans died on their enforced trek from Georgia to Oklahoma – known as the “Trail of Tears.”

Forrest’s biographer, reflecting the changing perceptions toward Native Americans, discussed the double vision of the white perception of the Indian:

The North American Indian seen from afar is a picturesque object. When we contemplate him in the vista of history, retreating, dwindling, soon to vanish before the encroachments of our stronger race, he is not without mystery and pathos. But studied more nearly, inspected critically in the detail of his character and habits, the charm for the most part disappears and is replaced with repulsion.⁹⁰

The idealistic image of the Indian as a wronged and noble savage gradually was replaced by “more nearly inspected” vision of a bloodthirsty and evil race that must be eradicated.⁹¹

An advertisement for The Grand Saloon of the Arcade on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia announced the following entertainment for February 7, 1842:

A Company of Real Indian Warriors and their Squaws; Exhibiting the various Modes and Ceremonies of Savage Life... On the rise of the Curtain, will be presented the Scenic Scene of the Murder of Miss M’Crea. In this Scene a beautiful young Lady will represent Miss M’Crea, who fell prey to the Savages

⁹⁰ Alger, 127.

⁹¹ George Caitlin, sympathetic to the treatment of the Native American Indians in the middle of the nineteenth century, detailed the changing vocabulary of words associated with whites’ perceptions of Indians: “I have drawn a Table, which I offer as an estimate of their comparative character, which I trust will be found to be near the truth, generally, though like all general rules or estimates, with its exceptions” (*Letters and Notes on the Manners, Customs, and Condition of the North American Indians*, vol. 2 [Philadelphia: Willis P. Hazard, 1857], 775). For example, Indians were once described as “Temperate” and now are “Dissipated,” “Independent” to “Dependent,” “Proud” to “Humble,” and “Stout-hearted” to “Broken-hearted” (792).

during the dark days of the American Revolution... Act Fifth. THE WHITE TRADER— In this Scene a white man will appear on the Stage, and show the manner in which the white people trade with the Indians, giving them mere trifles for large quantities of Furs, after getting them drunk, and show the manner of torturing and killing him... The whole to conclude with the thrilling scene of the Chace [sic], Capture, MASSACRE and SCALPING of the Mail Rider and his Wife... fully represented by the Indians on the Stage.⁹²

The proud nobility of the warrior had been reduced to a pathetic display of savages in a saloon. This presentation underscored the brutal violence of the Indian against pure, defenseless foes and the clever deception of the whites under the guise of displaying real history. This “history” privileged the harsh behavior of the savage, while celebrating white duplicity – an image much removed from Forrest’s noble warrior – yet this ambivalent narrative contained no identifiable hero and neither side of the conflict presented appeared to act with honor. I suggest that the saloon display most tellingly demonstrated the nation’s ambivalence about the role of its native people in its history – an ambivalence unsuited to either Forrest’s talents or the form of melodrama.⁹³

John Brougham’s (1810-1880) *Metamora; or, The Last of the Pollywogs* (1847) followed roughly the same plot as Stone’s play, but Brougham’s hero (“a favorite child of the Forrest”) was reduced to a ridiculous, grunting savage who gleefully dreamed of carnage:

Methought the pale-faces were gathered all,
Unarmed, defenceless; on them I did fall.

⁹² “Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills,” vol. 29, Library Company of Philadelphia, 38.

⁹³ By the middle of the nineteenth century, it was the female Indian who was more palatable to white audiences, because she had some of the allure of the tragic mulatto and also could be successfully domesticated and assimilated.

Pile after pile of dead I sent to sleep,
 Their red scalps streaming in a gory heap.
 From the gray morning to the set of sun,
 I killed and killed.⁹⁴

Filled with heavy-handed, coarse humor, Brougham's *Metamora*, "often credited with ending the Indian drama with his burlesque," illustrated the lack of viability in an Indian hero.⁹⁵

By the time of Brougham's burlesque, Stone's *Metamora* no longer presented an appealing or acceptable picture of the Native American Indian, nor a valid image of masculinity. The image of Forrest's noble American savage was replaced with an object of loathing or ridicule stigmatized as an unpalatable and unsympathetic "other." Forrest's mass appeal as a masculine model (increasingly limited by the class division of his audience) was fading simultaneously. Both Forrest and the noble Indian chief he embodied remained on the stage but largely, through the power of theatrical reputation, as something of a museum piece, drawing an audience that remembered with nostalgic relish the strength, confidence, and simplicity of an earlier generation.⁹⁶ While "Genial John" McCullough respectfully maintained or resurrected most of

⁹⁴ John Brougham, *Metamora; or, The Last of the Pollywogs*, in *Staging the Nation: Plays from the American Theater, 1787-1909*, ed. Don B. Wilmet (Boston: Bedford Books, 1998), 107. The Irish-born Brougham came to America in 1842 and became a successful manager and comic actor, but he was noted primarily for his skills as a playwright. He is known now principally for his comic burlesques, for which he was dubbed by Laurence Hutton as the American Aristophanes. *Curiosities of the American Stage* (New York: Harper and Row, 1891), 164.

⁹⁵ Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 237.

⁹⁶ I will expand this discussion in chapter five.

Forrest's other romantic incarnations later in the century, he made no attempt to revive *Metamora*.

Minstrelsy to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: Visions of Black Masculinity

Thomas D. Rice (1808-1860) originated the Jim Crow character around 1830, inspiring the minstrel show – one of the most structured and popular forms of variety entertainment over the next hundred years and the first distinctly American form of theatrical entertainment: “His (Rice's) popularity was unbounded, and he probably drew more money to the Bowery treasury than any other American performer in the same period of time.”⁹⁷ The Virginia and Christy Minstrels built upon Rice's success, creating a derogatory and fictitious picture of the African American male. Frederick Douglass described the purveyors of minstrel entertainment as “the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens.”⁹⁸

Minstrelsy was predicated on the idea of presenting “real” Southern life. An advertisement for “Sanford's Great Philadelphia Nigger Opera Troupe” told the story of a minstrel performance in Richmond, at which a respected citizen insisted that the black-faced Sanford was his “lost darkie,... recently absconded to parts unknown,” and

⁹⁷ Joseph N. Ireland, *Records of the New York Stage*, vol. 2 (1866; reprint New York: Benjamin Blom, 1966), 56.

⁹⁸ Frederick Douglass, *North Star*, 27 October 1848.



Fig. 31. Thomas D. Rice as Jim Crow.

had him arrested.⁹⁹ Sanford replied, “Massa... please let me wash de dust out of my eyes, and take off dese good close... Sanford was metamorphosed in an instant. His color, voice, gait and demeanor were all changed in a twinkle, and from an old greasy Negro, he came out a finished gentleman, as everybody knows him to be.”¹⁰⁰

Perpetuating this “authenticity” was vital to the success of minstrelsy, “thus defending their [the South’s] institutions and showing the slaves in their proper light, and not the abuse as written by Mrs. Beecher Stowe.”¹⁰¹ Also important in this message was the stark masculine contrast between the “old greasy negro” and the “finished gentleman,” reassuring the reader and audience of the differences in every aspect between white gentility and the one-way impersonation of shuffling slavery.¹⁰²

Eric Lott sees the minstrel show as an attempt to place the African American male in a manageable context in order to define the supremacy and power of the white masculine image:

[Minstrelsy] was cross-racial desire that coupled a nearly insupportable fascination and a self-protective derision with respect to black people and their cultural practices, and that made blackface minstrelsy less a sign of absolute white power and control than of panic, anxiety, terror, and pleasure... Underwritten by envy as well as repulsion, sympathetic identification as well as fear, the minstrel show continually transgressed the color line even as it made possible the formation of a self-consciously white working class.¹⁰³

⁹⁹ S.S. Sanford, “Our Day: Devoted to Choice Literature, Business, The News and Commerce,” 22 October 1860, in Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills, vol. 14, Library Company of Philadelphia, 3-4.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid.

This simultaneous attraction and stigmatization of the “other” as passively and inherently inferior helped strengthen and define the parameters of white masculinity.

In the Christy’s Minstrels’ (“giving correct portraitures of the Lights and Shadows, Humors and Oddities of SOUTHERN PLANTATION LIFE, in all its broad mirthful and original phases”¹⁰⁴) burlesque *Othello, Moor of Vengeance*, featuring George Christy as Desdemona, the title character was a buffoon who threatened not only the purity of the white woman but also the fragility of social decorum and economic-based class hierarchy:

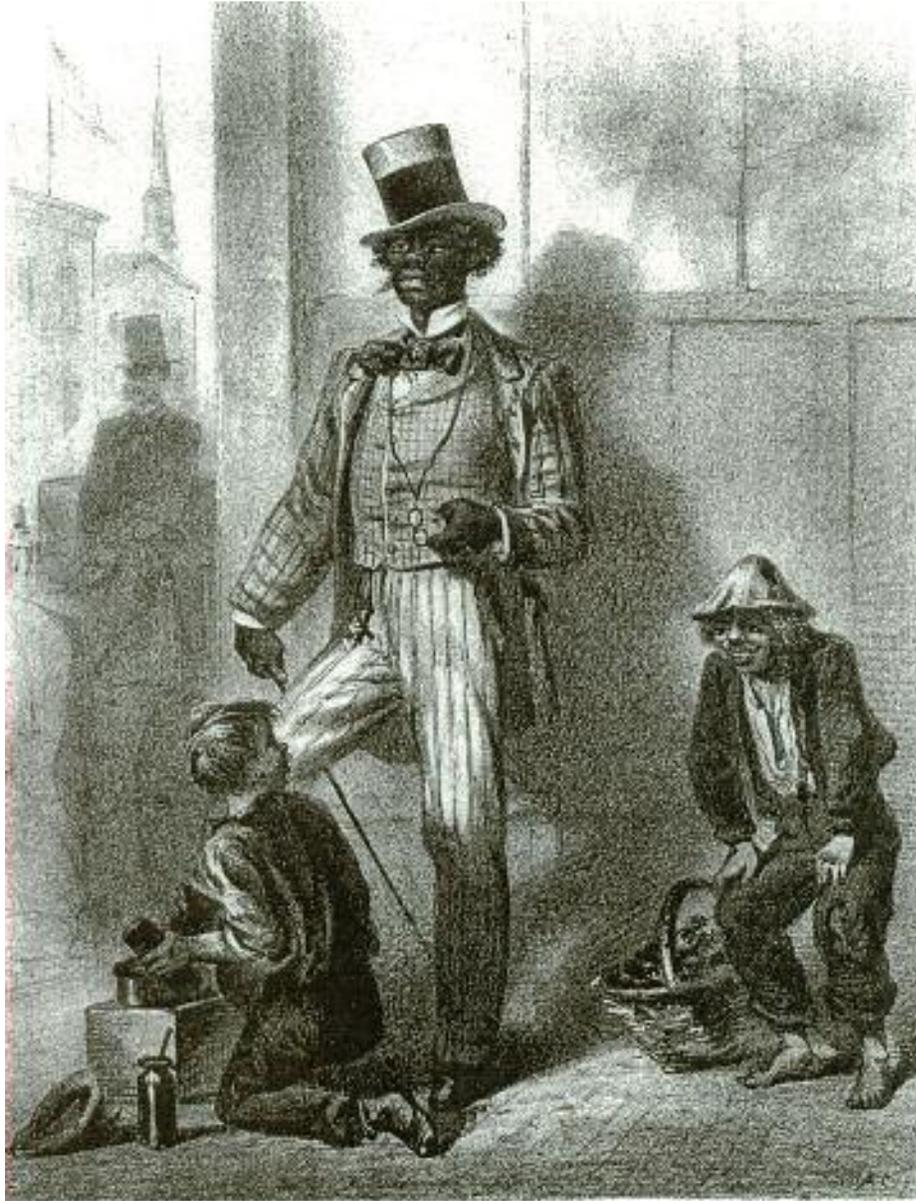
	[To the tune of “Dixie”]
OTH:	I love my Desdemona, away, away, And hand in hand we’ll take a stand, To spend Brabantio’s money...
DES:	With you I’ll sport my figure, away, away, I’ll love you dearly all my life, Although you are a nigger. ¹⁰⁵

The gullibility and penchant for violence of Shakespeare’s tragic hero is grossly exaggerated, highlighting his dull stupidity and accentuating the danger of the masculine slave image.

¹⁰³ Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 6, 8.

¹⁰⁴ Concert Hall, 29 August 1864, Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills, vol. 8, Library Company of Philadelphia, 50.

¹⁰⁵ G.W.H. Griffin, *Othello; A Burlesque*, in *This Grotesque Essence: Plays from the American Minstrel Stage*, ed. Gary D. Engle (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 71. Engle claims that the *Othello* burlesque was not performed until 1866, although in my previous note, it was advertised in 1864. It is possible that this earlier version is by someone other than Griffin.



*"I say Billy, do you know why I'm doing this?
Cause, I'm going to run for Congress soon!"*

Fig. 32. Cartoon of Urban African American, with a poor white boy kneeling to serve him, suggesting the threat of socially pretentious Free Blacks.

Providing a comparatively realistic view of black masculinity, Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) combined the tradition of the sentimental novel and the rhetoric of the antislavery movement, focusing on the fragmentation of the black family and the degenerative moral effect on the white character.¹⁰⁶ The novel, a tremendously effective tool of abolitionist propaganda, gave a human face to the inhuman system for which the Fugitive Slave Act (1850) now required the conflicted North, as well as the South, to take active responsibility.¹⁰⁷

The novel had sold over 1 million copies by 1860, but dramatizations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had an even greater impact on the general public: "Perhaps as many as fifty people would eventually see Uncle Tom's Cabin, the play, for every one person who would read the novel."¹⁰⁸ It would eventually become the greatest popular hit in American theatre history, with some conservatively estimating 300,000 performances.¹⁰⁹ The dramatic incarnations subsequently influenced if not dictated the Northern white perception of black masculinity.

George L. Aiken's adaptation of the story, the most popular stage version, was necessarily selective in the events it dramatized and was more cautious in its

¹⁰⁶ The number of studies on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is staggering, though the strongest study placing it within a socio-political context and discussing the varied response to the novel is Thomas F. Gossett, *Uncle Tom's Cabin and American Culture* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1985).

¹⁰⁷ Stowe, in her novel, encouraged colonization as an answer to the slavery question. The impact of Stowe's novel is often exaggerated, with Lincoln's famous quote a case in point: "So this is the little lady who made this big war!"

¹⁰⁸ Gossett, 260.

¹⁰⁹ Monroe Lippman, "Uncle Tom and His Poor Relations: American Slavery Plays," *Southern Speech Journal* 28 (1963): 194.

antislavery sentiments than Stowe's novel.¹¹⁰ The comic emphasis of the play, and its subsequent "happy ending" (which still included the death of Uncle Tom, but he was reunited with little Eva in an angelic tableau), further weakened its attack on slavery. In Aiken's play, the added death of Legree effectively killed the evil of slavery, simultaneously absolving the white male of any need to take action, while maintaining the "peculiar" institution:

The villain must die to lay fear to rest, and virtue must triumph to affirm the world view that melodrama's audience cherishes and to restore the moral order. That very restoration – the absolute imperative of melodrama – leads the play to confirm the fundamental racism of American society.¹¹¹

This racism affirmed the moral rightness of the subjugation of the threat of black masculinity and the stability and dominance of the white male.

The play's two principal male slaves, George Harris and Uncle Tom, provided sharply contrasting views of black masculinity. George, an articulate light-skinned mulatto, behaved like a fairly typical, assertive melodramatic hero: "if any man tries to stop me, let him take care, for I am desperate. I'll fight for my liberty, to the last breath I breathe! You say your fathers did it; if it was right for them, it is right for

¹¹⁰ Several characters (Ophelia, Topsy, Phineas Fletcher, etc.) were presented with less emotional depth and as more overtly comic, while other characters and scenes (Gumption Cute and Deacon Perry) were added solely for comic effect. Poetic justice was enacted, as Legree was made the murderer of St. Clare and was shot resisting arrest – at least partially lessening the cathartic effect and dampening the call for action. As the stage production became an attraction separate from the novel, stage spectacle became more important (Bloodhounds chasing Eliza across the ice became obligatory, although there were no mention of dogs in Aiken's script.) and often the antislavery theme was softened or even eradicated.

¹¹¹ Jeffrey D. Mason, "Uncle Tom's Cabin and the Politics of Race," in *Melodrama and the Myth of America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 125.

me!”¹¹² His heroic sentiments easily could have come from the mouth of any of Forrest’s republican heroes. George’s skin color, articulate intelligence, and the familiar peril of his domestic situation essentially presented him as white, and slavery was used as a melodramatic contrivance to part two lovers: “The first scene between the mulattoes George Harris, represented with a brick-red face, and Eliza, depicted as a pretty white girl, made no more impression than the usual tender farewell of any lover and mistress.”¹¹³

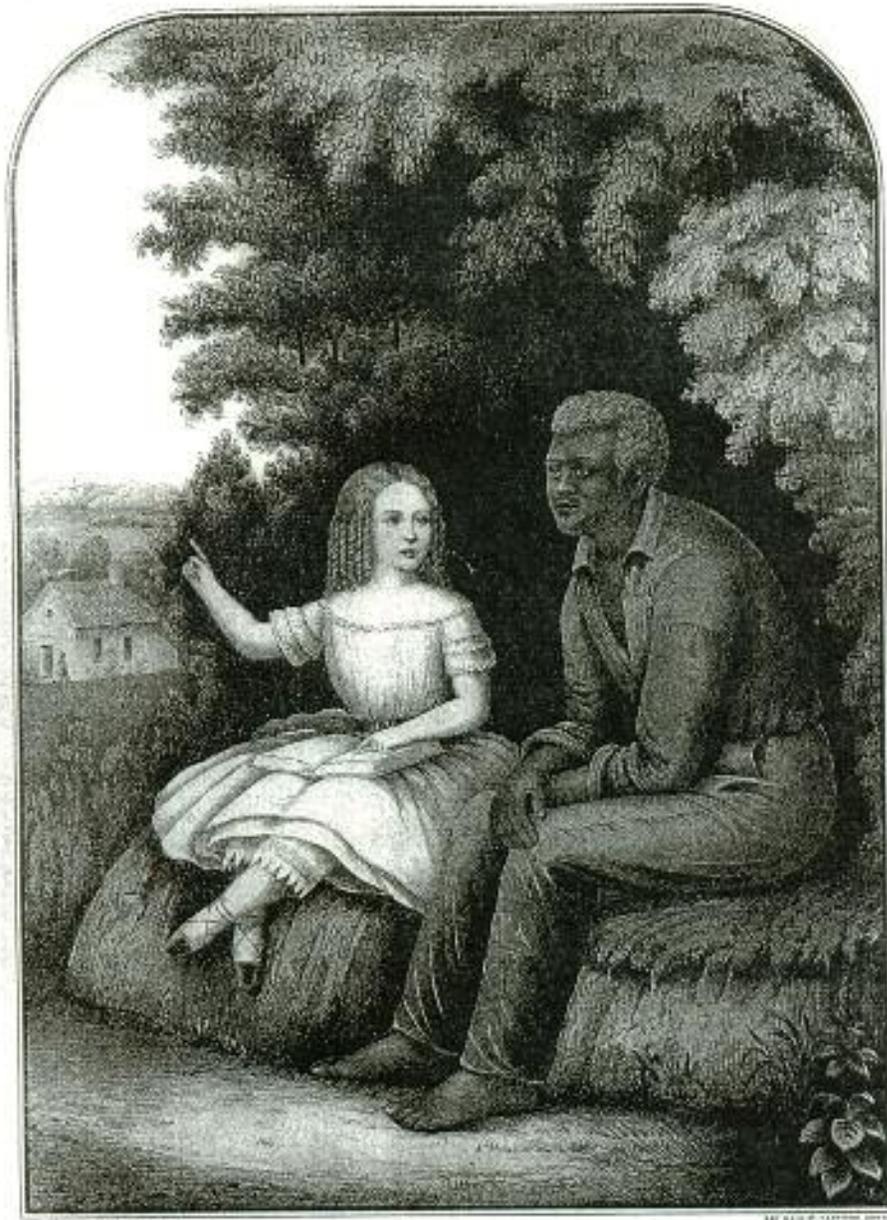
Uncle Tom fulfilled the role of sentimental, melodramatic heroine: “pious, domestic, self-sacrificing, emotionally uninhibited in response to people and ethical questions,... [insinuating] Tom into the nineteenth-century idolatry of feminine virtue.”¹¹⁴ Tom also acted as a martyred Christ figure (complete with ascension), even in the face of torture by the evil personified in Legree: “Mas’r, if you was sick, or in trouble, or dying, and I could save [you], I’d *give* you my heart’s blood; and, if taking every drop of blood in this poor old body would save your precious soul, I’d give ‘em freely.”¹¹⁵

¹¹² George L. Aiken, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly*, in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin Books, 1997), 396.

¹¹³ Laurence Senelick, *The Age and Stage of George L. Fox, 1825-1877* (Hanover, NH: Tufts University by University Press of New England, 1988), 65.

¹¹⁴ Elizabeth Ammons, “Heroines in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*,” in *Critical Essay on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. Elizabeth Ammons (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1980), 172).

¹¹⁵ Aiken, 442.



UNCLE TOM AND LITTLE EVA.

Fig. 33. Uncle Tom and Little Eva. Eva provides a commanding presence in contrast to the soft, slumping, rounded image of Tom.

Early stage performances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* should not be seen purely as a theatrical sensation for the Northern audiences who favored abolition. Rather, the immediate response from Northern conservatives and Unionists condemned the play as “a more extended agitation of the slavery question – than any that has heretofore imperiled the peace and safety of the Union,... [calculated] to poison the minds of our youth with the pestilent principles of abolitionism.”¹¹⁶ The *New York Herald* found little comfort in the initial audience response: “True, the audience appears to be pleased with the novelty, without being troubled about the moral of the story, which is mischievous in the extreme.”¹¹⁷ The actor who originated the stage role of Uncle Tom (G.C. Germon) initially expressed reluctance in doing the role and only agreed after he was assured that it would not be a “black face” part. As the production became increasingly popular, though, many black face minstrel performers began to do the role, and Tom’s portrayal became more stereotypical and stylized.¹¹⁸

It was indeed novelty that appeared to propel the stage success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The audience left the theatre with a glow of satisfaction and accomplishment, having banished the evils of slavery (while the institution lived on). Actual freedom of the slaves raised questions about equality between the black and white male that threatened the carefully constructed masculine roles of all classes.

¹¹⁶ *New York Herald*, 3 September 1852.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ Acting in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was nearly a theatrical necessity in the later half of the nineteenth century due to the sheer volume of productions, but it was a proving ground that actors passed through in their professional youth. Although some minstrel stars portrayed Tom, no respected, serious actors played in the show, suggesting that black characters were marginalized on the stage as much as they were in real life.

Theatre managers had to be wary of the appearance of pushing a controversial political agenda and encouraging a perception of slave masculinity outside the bourgeois comfort zone. With *The Octoroon* (1859), Dion Boucicault's commercial attempt to address slavery that played successfully in both the North and South, theatre managers privileged the authenticity of the portrayal of slave life, rather than any sort of comment on slavery as an institution:

[T]he manager begs to say that he disclaims all intention of making CAPITAL OUT OF POLITICAL SENTIMENT. He is actuated solely by the very great popularity of the Play... *The Octoroon* presents a faithful picture of Slavery in Louisiana in its least objectionable form, and has never been equaled for its truthful portraiture of Life in the Far South-West!¹¹⁹

The principal male slave characters in Boucicault's drama, a mischievous young boy (similar to Topsy) and a shuffling, comic old man, were more lively than Aiken's slaves (although dramatically less active) and differed little from the minstrel models – hardly an “objectionable” or threatening model of black masculinity.

Stowe's own dramatic adaptation of her novel, *The Christian Slave* (1855), consisted almost exclusively of dialogue lifted from the novel. She omitted some of the more unpleasant aspects of slavery, including the slave auction, and completely eliminated the runaway slave, George Harris. George – the most violent and masculine of all blacks in both the novel and Aiken's play - was a man of intelligence who fought for his freedom. Because he was the only black male who actively took control of his own destiny, the amiable docility of Tom and the other slaves were more plainly evident in Stowe's dramatic reworking and simplification of black masculinity.

¹¹⁹ 28 March 1864, Philadelphia Chestnut St. Theatre, Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills, vol. 12, Library Company of Philadelphia, 98.

God and family were firmly at the center of *The Christian Slave*, rather than an emphasis on the abuses and horrors of slavery. This theatrical world clearly cast whites as paternal figures and the pleasantly passive slaves as unfortunate children in need of rescue. Both Stowe and Aiken, however, succeeded in making their black characters sympathetic, in some small way perhaps providing a viable alternative to the firmly entrenched minstrel stereotypes.

The positive masculine images of free blacks in society could not find a place on an American stage inundated with these gross fabrications of minstrelsy or watered-down versions of manhood. Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), the most visible and eloquent voice and figure of antebellum African Americans, effectively employed oratory as a persuasive abolitionist weapon. In such speeches as “What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July?,” Douglass used sarcasm, humor, and passion, as well as his powerful voice and personality, to put a human face on the “peculiar institution.” As a self-educated ex-slave, he provided an intriguing and exotic figure for northern audiences, and Douglass pricked the conscience of the North, if not the nation.

As a model of black masculinity, the strength and dignity of Douglass’ image was sharply at odds with available stage representations. But Northern whites were uncomfortable with the intrusion of blacks into free society: “For many whites, a well-dressed black was an at least slightly comic figure, but there was also often, in whites’ observations, an underlying sense of disquiet, a fretful complaint at the blurring of

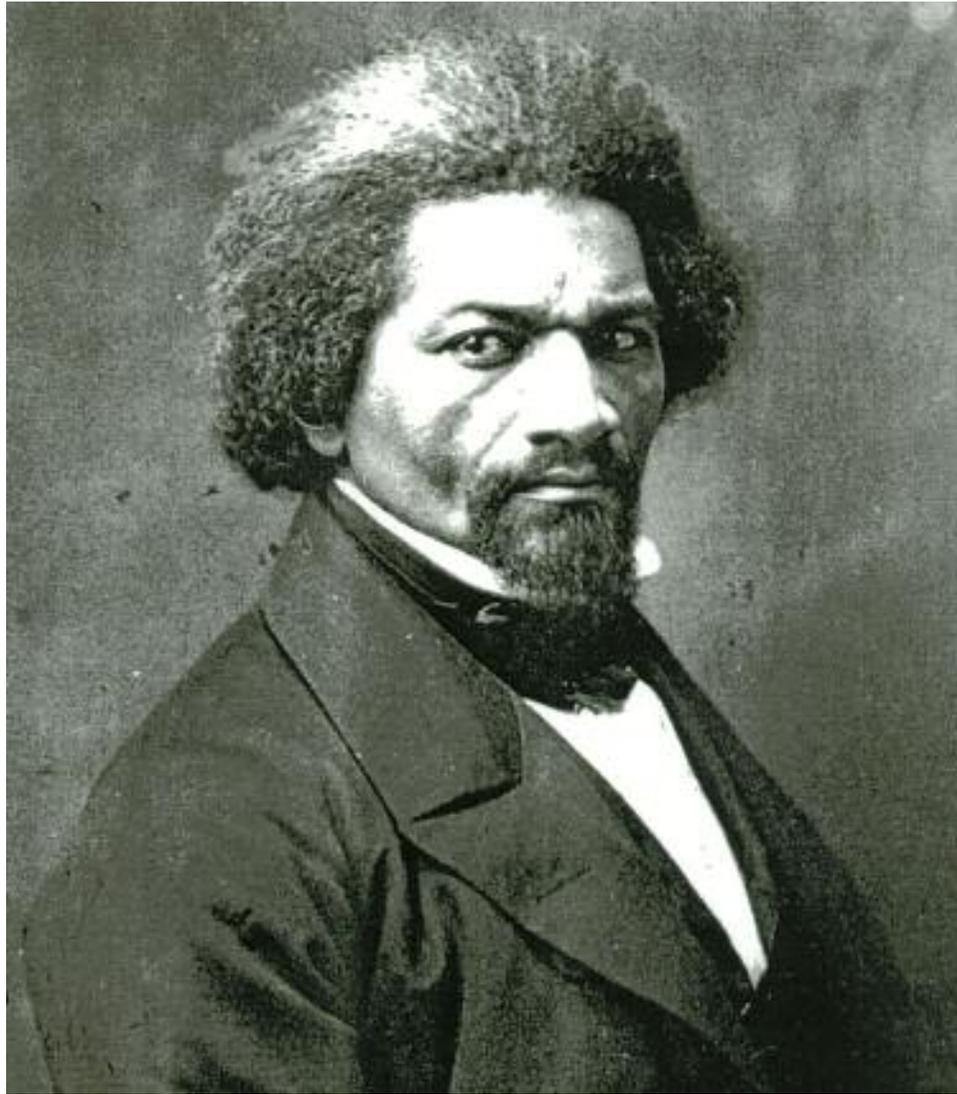


Fig. 34. Frederick Douglass. Note the similarity in swept-back hair and austere clothing to the portraits of both Edwin Forrest (Fig. 13) and Andrew Jackson (Fig. 4).

what had seemed relatively clear-cut racial boundaries.”¹²⁰ Ira Aldridge (1807-1867), America’s first great black actor, achieved little of his fame in the United States; he never had the chance to be accepted as a male role model in white American society, and his impact on members of the African American community in the North is much harder to gauge.¹²¹ A combination of prejudice and the practice of blackface performance made him an impossible masculine model on the American stage, although he received an enthusiastic reception in Europe: “We had been anticipating a vigorous style, somewhat uncontrolledly energetic, a little wild and fierce, after the manner of Kean; but [Aldridge] acts widely and restrainedly, in a majestically classical style much resembling that of Macready.”¹²²

Mark Twain’s novel *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, written in the 1890s but set during the middle of the century, provides an intriguing juxtaposition of white and black masculinity. The story involves two young boys - one white (Chambers), the other a light-skinned mulatto (Tom) - switched at birth:

Tom got all the petting, Chambers got none. Tom got all the delicacies, Chambers got mush and milk, and clabber without sugar. In consequence, Tom was a sickly child and Chambers wasn’t. Tom was ‘fractious,’... and overbearing; Chambers was meek and docile... In babyhood Tom cuffed and banged and scratched Chambers unrebuked, and Chambers early learned that between meekly bearing it and resenting it, the advantage all lay with the former policy.¹²³

¹²⁰ Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin’: African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998), 92.

¹²¹ Aldridge started with the African Theatre in New York but left America forever at the age of 17.

¹²² Theophile Gauthier, quoted in Herbert Marshall and Mildred Stock, *Ira Aldridge: The Negro Tragedian* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1968), 230.

The mulatto's slave mother condemns the pretender (raised to be slightly more selfish and spoiled but otherwise perfectly indistinguishable from other "whites") as a coward when he refuses to protect his manhood in a duel: "It's de nigger in you, dat's what it is. Thirty-one part o' you is white, en on'y one part nigger, en dat po' little one part is yo' soul. Tain't wuth savin'; tain't wuth totin' out on a shovel en throwin' in de gutter."¹²⁴ Yet at the end of the story, when the real heir has been restored, he strikes a ridiculous masculine figure in a white world: "His gait, his attitudes, his gestures, his bearing, his laugh – all were vulgar and uncouth; his manners were the manners of a slave. Money and fine clothes could not mend these defects or cover them up; they only made them the more glaring and the more pathetic."¹²⁵ Twain's suggestion of masculine behavior as purely a product of training and social conditioning built on fears echoed in advice literature that not only social pretenders but racial pretenders could learn to counterfeit genteel manhood.

Immigrant Masculinity: Sobering the Irishman

Griffin's previously discussed burlesque *Othello* also utilized the stereotype of the stage Irishman in the villainous Iago (Desdemona's father, Brabantio, was a stereotypical German immigrant), reflecting "minstrelsy's overtly grotesque reflection of the impact immigration was having on American life."¹²⁶ Indeed, the Irish

¹²³ Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1894), 40-41.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 224.

immigrant was especially prevalent on the antebellum stage, vying with the minstrel character for popularity. Mr. and Mrs. Barney Williams, “the Legitimate Exponents of Irish Drama,” exhibited “Artistic Excellence and Identification in the Peculiarities of Irish and Yankee Life!”¹²⁷ This zoo-like display of immigrant “peculiarities” bears striking resemblance to the exhibition of genuine Indian life I described earlier.

Increased immigration of the Irish in the 1840s caused an influx into densely populated urban centers and competition for jobs with the native-born working class, sparking violent ethnic conflict.¹²⁸ The stigma placed on the “Irish savage,” reflected in the stage portrayal of Irish characters as lazy, intemperate thieves, created a separation of *white* masculine identities: “By mid-century, language had built into American folk culture a sense that ‘Americans’ and ‘Irish’ were innately and permanently – physically – different from one another and that intelligence, morality, religious inclination, political affiliation, social conduct, and economic behavior were all derivative of ‘race.’”¹²⁹ By the 1850s, immigrants composed a sizable portion of working-class audiences, and theatre managers were forced to place their stage characterizations in a more favorable light. Works like Brougham’s *The Irish*

¹²⁶ Engle, *Grotesque Essence*, 69.

¹²⁷ Arch Street Theatre, 14 March 1864, Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills, vol. 3, Library Company of Philadelphia.

¹²⁸ This nativist/Irish conflict was recently dramatized as almost pure fantasy in Martin Scorsese’s *Gangs of New York* (2002).

¹²⁹ Dale T. Knobel, *Paddy and the Republic: Ethnicity and Nationality in Antebellum America* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1986), 100. The pejorative “Irish savage” is used in John Brougham, *The Irish Emigrant; or, Temptation* (1856), Brooklin, ME: Feedback Theatrebooks and Prospero Press, 2001), 22.

Emigrant; or, Temptation (1856) and Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) – both Irish dramatists and actors – created sympathetic, multi-dimensional Irish characters.

Brougham attempted to create a new Irish masculine identity in his hero O'Bryan – worthy of pity, “though he's only an Irishman” – whose character was marked by temperance, a willingness to pursue honorable labor (“There's nothing in the way of an honest living that I won't have a try at.”), and the strength to resist dishonest entrapment: “Bad luck attend me, if I don't think the divil has slipped a swadge of temptation before me at the very word; but the never a one o'me'll touch it. Git out, you schemer! I feel the whisk of your tail as natural as if I saw it.”¹³⁰

Brougham consciously addressed social issues in his work yet kept the tone of his dramas and his performances light:

His thoughts, and often his talk, dwelt upon the great disparity of conditions in society, the struggles and sufferings of the poor, and the relation of evil to the infirmities of human nature... In his writing as in his acting the characteristic quality was a sort of off-hand dash and glittering merriment, a commingling bluff, breezy humor with winning manliness. The atmosphere of his works was always that of sincerity, but it never had the insipidity of strenuous goodness.¹³¹

Boucicault's dramas, on the other hand, pointedly ignored the social conflict in New York's working-class culture, working *within* the Irish stereotype to create lovable rogues, and as the intemperate but dependable Myles-na-Coppaleen in *The Colleen Bawn* and Conn in *The Shaugraun* (1874), “interpreted to the life the generous, hearty, irresponsible, and none too sober wanderer, ever ready to help others

¹³⁰ Brougham, *Irish Emigrant*, 5, 11, 17.

¹³¹ William Winter, *Brief Chronicles* (New York: Dunlap Society, 1889), 29-30.



Fig. 35. John Brougham as Sir Lucius O'Trigger in *The Rivals*.

but with little of an eye to his concerns.”¹³² Boucicault’s skill in rendering his characters was unsurpassed: “Mr. Boucicault is probably the best stage Irishman that had been seen. It is impossible to make drollery more unctuous, and blarney more attractive.”¹³³ Boucicault and Brougham succeeded in making Irish characters more nuanced and sympathetic, but their theatricalizations of immigrant manliness were never able to rise above a certain class – primarily garnering laughs rather than admiration.

Yankee to Mose: A Lower-Class Image to Embrace

These sympathetic immigrant characters were essentially variations on the Yankee stage tradition, an established symbol of American democratic society.¹³⁴ The Yankee Jonathan, a contrast of shrewdness and naiveté mixed with a fierce independence, provided the common working man with a real life model, as opposed to the unattainable romantic heroism of Edwin Forrest: “Jonathan is a Jacksonian Man..., a general American, a native primitive set apart from all other varieties of the English-speaking breed.”¹³⁵ As this Yankee model was updated and urbanized, he

¹³² Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of the American Drama From the Beginning to the Civil War* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923), 384.

¹³³ Joseph Knight, *Theatrical Notes* (1893; reprint, New York: B. Blom 1972), 59.

¹³⁴ Francis Hodge, *Yankee Theatre: The Image of America on the Stage, 1825-1850* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1964), 5. Hodge’s work, although somewhat dated, remains the authority on the stage Yankee. As David Grimsted suggests, “This Jonathan was largely an Americanization of the Irishmen and Yorkshireman of the English stage, and clearly...a descendant of the Jonathan in *The Contrast*” (*Melodrama Unveiled*, 186).

¹³⁵ Hodge, *Yankee Theatre*, 255-56.

also stepped out from his position as a secondary character (from Jonathan in *The Contrast* to Will Dowton in *The Drunkard*) to become a hero in his own right, mirroring the aspirations and growing influence of the urban working class. James H. Hackett (previously discussed), George Handel “Yankee” Hill, and Dan Marble were the most famous of the Yankee interpreters.

David Humphreys’ *The Yankey in England* (1815) provided a detailed description of the dichotomies inherent in the stage Yankee:

Inquisitive from natural and excessive curiosity, confirmed by habit; credulous, from inexperience and want of knowledge of the world; believing himself to be perfectly acquainted with whatever he partially knows; tenacious of prejudices; docile, when rightly managed; when otherwise treated, independent to obstinacy; easily betrayed into ridiculous mistakes; incapable of being overawed by external circumstances; suspicious, vigilant and quick of perception, he is ever ready to parry or repel the attacks of raillery, by retorts of rustic and sarcastic, if not of original and refined wit and humor.¹³⁶

This description of New England’s rural male will provide inspiration for the rougher masculinity of the Bowery to be discussed in the next chapter.

The urban, working-class manifestation of the low-comedy Yankee was Mose the fire-fighting Bowery B’hoj, popularized by Francis S. Chanfrau (1824-1884), who first appeared in 1848: “The Mose plays crystallized an image that the b’hoys themselves co-produced through their reception and reenactments... Mose was both a mirror and an ‘etiquette book’ for the b’hoys, showing them how they looked and how

¹³⁶ David Humphreys, quoted in Hodge, *Yankee Theatre*, 54.



Fig. 36. Francis S. Chanfrau as Mose.

to behave.”¹³⁷ The managers and performers of these working-class vehicles (in New York theatres like the Bowery, the Olympic, and the Chatham) catered to the demands of their lucrative new audience, while the urban, lower-class male enjoyed the opportunity to mold the public manifestation of their own image.

Chanfrau, born on the Bowery, immediately became a popular figure in the circular imitation of urban masculinity: “He at once became the dramatic ‘lion’ of the town; his likeness pervaded every window, and his sayings were uttered by every urchin in the city, as well as by a very good portion of the older part of the male community.”¹³⁸ Manhood in the playhouse was taken directly from observations of men on the street, and that same theatrical performance was in turn emulated and taken out of the theatre doors – strongly supporting the idea of a mutual negotiation of masculine synergism within the imagined community of the theatre. The Yankee lacked the menace of the Bowery B’hoys who would attack Astor Place. While Mose may have grown out of the Yankee, he showed a greater tendency towards and acceptance of violence as a means of solving his problems, perhaps because his social position had sunk to the level that violence was his only means of expressions.

¹³⁷ Butsch, *American Audiences*, 59. Mose first appeared in Benjamin A. Baker’s *A Glance at New York*, which was based on Pierce Egan’s British comedy *Tom and Jerry; or, Life in London*. Many other Mose plays were written. Arthur Hobson Quinn, *A History of the American Drama From the Beginning to the Civil War* (New York: Harper, 1923), 303-307.

¹³⁸ Francis Courtney Wemyss, *Theatrical Biography*, 57. Chanfrau was a Jew who, in the creation of Mose, was sinking his own ethnic identity into a new one, generally identified with the Irish and other white immigrants.

The Bowery tough was an instantly recognizable and prominent piece of the urban landscape: “[T]he New York firemen and runners, with the various ‘machines,’ as the old-fashioned fire-engines were called, formed a distinct class... They were a rough, uncouth, roystering [*sic*] lot, sudden and quick in quarrel when the merits of the machine to which they were attached were brought in question, or when they imagined their natural rights were infringed upon; but they were brave, generous and warm-hearted.”¹³⁹ Chanfrau’s performance of Mose captured both the nobility of the “urban savage,” as well as the jeering nature of the degenerate: “[H]e had a peculiarly sardonic curve of the lip, expressive of more impudence, self-satisfaction, suppressed profanity, and ‘general cussedness’ than Delsarte ever dared to put into any single facial gesture.”¹⁴⁰

Although the stage representation of Mose did not always present him in an admirable light, the innate goodness of the character appealed to the working-class audience: “Perhaps the amorphousness of American life made persons with no particular social status eager to watch characters who were simple, naïve, and imperfect but who at bottom had a wealth of practical good sense and wholesome good sentiments.”¹⁴¹ Mose also presented the lower classes with one of their best opportunities (aside from minstrelsy) to satirize high culture by showing that he

¹³⁹ Charles Gayler, “Early Struggles of Prominent Actors,” reprinted in *Famous Actors and Actresses on the American Stage*, ed. William C. Young (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1975), 174-75. Gayler (1820-1892), a prolific dramatist who wrote *Our American Cousin at Home* (1861) for Chanfrau, composed a series of articles on actors for the *New York Dramatic Mirror* in the 1870s.

¹⁴⁰ Laurence Hutton, *Curiosities of the American Stage* (New York: Harper, 1891), 51.

¹⁴¹ David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 194-95.

understood how the world worked and that he could puncture the pretensions of those who assumed they were “above” him by virtue of their money.

Conclusion

American society was slowly fragmenting along class lines and various male groups (divided socially, ethnically, racially, politically, and economically) fought for status and respect, unable to find a national commonality. The absence of a state theatre that promoted native talent and a unified construction of gendered national identity contributed to this lack of masculine cohesion. A range of audiences individually negotiated representative masculine models, while simultaneously stigmatizing and marginalizing manly models outside of their respective classes, values, and social behaviors. Audiences, actors, dramatists, and theatre managers mutually constructed acceptable figures of manhood.

While figures like Jackson, Beecher, and others I discussed in Chapter One may have dominated the public sphere, the proliferation of comic characters and new ethnic and racial types suggested that those guidelines were too rigid to contain the rapidly changing forms of American manhood. The growth in size and power of the urban working class portended a masculine showdown with the elite and middle classes. In the next chapter, I will examine the Astor Place Riot as the best case study of these fissures in the American audience and the false monolithic image of American masculinity.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Astor Place Riot: A Masculine Identity Worth Dying For

It is really singular that, deriving all, or nearly all, the acting plays from England, applauding and constantly in association with the best English actors, there should exist, behind the scenes of the American theatres, such an inveterate hatred to the foreign artist, that every little word uttered should be construed into an intentional national insult.¹

The Astor Place Riot (May 10, 1849) was triggered by the personal and professional feud between Edwin Forrest and the British touring star William Charles Macready, who (for many Americans) was the personification of the evil, arrogant, and oppressive England. This conflict was aggravated by the anti-English and anti-elite sentiments of the working class of the Bowery and by their increasing sense of economic insecurity and a desperate, belligerent nationalism, solidifying what had been a growing separation between the classes: “One roof, housing a vast miscellany of entertainment each evening, could no longer cover a people growing intellectually and financially more disparate.”² After Astor Place, Forrest essentially severed any

¹ Francis Courtney Wemyss, *Twenty-six Years in the Life of an Actor and Manager* (New York: Burgess, Stringer and Company, 1847), 117.

² David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), 75. The fragmentation of the country also was mirrored within the schisms of the evolving literary culture. Readers of the “legitimate” American literature encouraged the growing surety of native writers from the internationally recognized Washington Irving, the epic frontier spirit of James Fenimore Cooper, and the dark psychology of Edgar Allan Poe. The New England Renaissance – beginning around 1840 and exemplified in the works of Emerson, Thoreau, Hawthorne, and Melville – celebrated individualism, embraced nature, and catered to an increasingly intellectual and elite audience yearning for a philosophical anchor in an uncertain world. At the same time, advances in printing, improvements in transportation and shipping, and great strides in basic education, led to a demand for a wide spectrum of mainstream literatures and the instant popularity of pulp fiction, primarily catering to the less-educated working-class and immigrant readers. The

significant ties to elite audiences, becoming almost exclusively associated with the working class.

Escalating tensions between North and South over slavery, exploding urbanization, the dehumanization of industrialism, and the ruthless competition of capitalism all undermined the security of both the individual and the nation.³ Within the uncertainty of the social, economic, and political climate, men of all classes sought to affirm and stabilize both their individual and collective masculine identities. The Astor Place Riot was a showdown of conflicting visions of manhood, in which the urban working-class male demanded masculine recognition and respect through attempts at intimidation and popular sovereignty, while the middle and upper classes displayed their power and exerted their dominance. The riot offered men of the lower, middle, and upper classes the opportunity of “reconstructed manhood” (to borrow a phrase from Beecher) – to solidify or redefine “how people ought to live and what they ought to be.”⁴

simultaneous approval of these disparate literary genres further emphasized the disunity of the United States.

³ The fragmentation of and conflict between classes, as well as the growing sectional separation, was reflected in the fighting within the political parties as the Democrats and Whigs (and other emerging parties like the Free-Soilers) sought appropriate candidates to draw the nation together. This political chaos would ultimately culminate in the election of 1860 when bickering between a hopelessly fractured Democratic party (divided over the nomination of Douglas and Breckinridge) and the remnants of the Whig and Know Nothing parties (nominating John Bell of Tennessee) virtually assured the election of the relatively unknown Republican from Illinois, Abraham Lincoln.

⁴ Beecher, *Yale Lectures on Preaching*, 6.

The Astor Place Riot has been one of the most extensively covered theatrical events of the nineteenth century, examined and evaluated as an explosive reflection of class and nationalistic tensions. Also implicit in these studies, however, has been the recognition of the struggle to valorize and affirm competing visions of American masculinity. The class showdown and the descriptions of the rough Bowery B'hoys versus the effete elites contained a coded indictment of competing models of manhood. These warring male factions – differing in class, politics, and education – exhibited divergent values and employed radically contrasting means of expression and persuasion.

In this chapter, I will explore this showdown between conflicting visions of masculine identity between 1849 and the election of 1860, suggesting that no single model of manly behavior could satisfy a nation already splintering along political and economic lines. The Astor Place Riot was a proving ground for the constitution of proper masculine behavior within both a personal and a group dynamic, comprising the struggle between Forrest and Macready as well as the audiences who supported them. I also argue that the personal and professional struggles of Forrest and Macready, each enacting the masculine behavior of their respective audience, fueled the feud and revealed the incompatibility of their manly models. I suggest that neither Macready nor Forrest could have acted any differently than they did in their actions leading up to the riots. In other words, by 1849, masculine identities had become so firmly fixed that there was no further room for compromise (parallel to the nation's positions on slavery and the Union).

Within the American male, warring factions of egalitarianism and individualism vied for supremacy, resulting in what Tocqueville called the “strange unrest of so many happy men, restless in the midst of abundance.”⁵ Simultaneously trapped and liberated by the republican nature of democracy, American men fiercely defended their rights of equality to other men and like access to opportunity, while resenting the confines of identification as a member of the common rank: “Because he lived suspended between the facts of his present social condition and the promise of his future, because he held a vertical vision of life in an allegedly fluid and boundless social system, he was plagued with anxiety concerning his social identity.”⁶

While the emerging gentility of the middle classes encouraged forethought and reserve, urban working class men prided themselves on the solidarity of deviant physical expression. The rabid nature of Forrest’s Bowery audience had grown unchecked through the 1830s and 1840s – their sovereignty unquestioned so long as they remained in their own sphere. Rioting was a working-class expression of egalitarian freedom and often provided a source of amusement, satisfaction, and emotional outlet for frustrations.⁷ McConachie claims that working-class riots established a sense of belonging and community through ritualized acts of defiance:

⁵Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeves (1850, reprint New York: A.S. Barnes, 1858), II, 145.

⁶Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 192.

⁷The most thorough treatment of America’s mob behavior during this period is David Grimsted’s *American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

[R]iots culminated in the ritual desecration of symbols of aristocratic oppression... In 1849, the b'hoys broke windows, chairs, and other furnishings in the opera house, set fires in the basement, and attempted to batter down the doors... [T]he mob's vengeance was directed against symbols of evil, not against the aristocratic spectators or even against Macready... Clearly, however, what the rioters of...1849 had in mind was staging the same sort of spectacular destruction they had seen so often in Bowery theatres: an all consuming fire that would burn away their bitterness by destroying an image of villainy.⁸

The working-class rioters cast themselves as heroes in a Forrestian drama of oppression, fighting the evils of effeminacy and privilege aggravated by Macready and embodied in Astor Place.

I suggest that the working-class men saw their participation in the events leading up to the Astor Place Riot as an opportunity to live the dream promised to them in Forrest dramas such as *Jack Cade*. An audience accustomed to being only passive spectators to rebellion assumed the role of active participants (or “featured players”), applying their efforts in a righteous cause, with the firm belief that the melodramatic, republican myth would be realized. The outcome of the riot served to reveal the lie behind the myth.

Up to this point, I have used the language of theatre to analyze politics and the language of politics to analyze the theatre. In this chapter, I will suggest that the two are inextricably connected and that one *cannot* read the Astor Place Riot without seeing it as both a political *and* theatrical spectacle. Thus I will use a dramatic form to

⁸ Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 149.

place this event in context and to read the event as the ultimate “acting out” of nineteenth-century masculinity.⁹

*The Astor Place Riot; a Drama in Five Acts*¹⁰

The Characters: (Anti)Hero – Edwin Forrest¹¹

The romantic attraction of great figures like Jackson was predicated on the myth that ordinary men, through strength of character and a singular force of will, were capable of achieving greatness: “the democrat wanted the freedom to rise... so that his hard-won status might distinguish him in a way that inherited status could not:

⁹ Rhys Isaac provides an intriguing model for using dramatic structure to read and interpret history: “I have attempted to systematize an ethnographic history that reaches out to understand life as it was experienced by ‘actors’ on past ‘stages,’ each playing his or her own part, and responding to the roles of others in ways that expressed their particular conceptions of the nature of the ‘play’” [*The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 357]. In a typical melodrama, the main characters (in this case Forrest, Macready, and the divided classes they represent) are introduced, and we learn that each has a history that will make conflict inevitable if they are brought into contact. In each act, the stakes escalate – the conflict building towards its inevitable climax.

¹⁰ Accounts of the riot are taken from the following: Richard Moody, *The Astor Place Riot* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1958); Peter Buckley, “To the Opera House: Culture and Society in New York City, 1820-1860,” Ph.D. diss., SUNY-Stony Brook, 1984; *Account of the Terrific and Fatal Riot at the New York Astor Place Opera House, on the Night of May 10th, 1849* (New York: H.M. Ranney, 1849).

¹¹ I classify both Forrest and Macready, the two principal players in this drama who embody the two extremes of the masculine spectrum, as (Anti)Heroes because their heroism or villainy was completely relative to the perspective of the individual viewer or participant: “Polarities – such as those between light and dark, high and low, right and left, male and female – enter profoundly into the socialization process that both maintain and transmit culture. As with all else in human perception, these oppositions are internalized with culturally assigned content and meaning” [Rhys Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 354].

worth proved via a cultural rite of passage.”¹² Fierce self-reliance and aggressiveness, a pragmatic worldview in which success was guaranteed with adequate strength and resolve, comprised key elements of the self-made masculine ideal. Reflecting the tensions between fraternal sameness and individualism (see Chapter One), Tocqueville recognized the individual’s social disconnection: “Thus, not only does democracy make every man forget his ancestors, but it hides his descendants and separates his contemporaries from him; it throws him back forever upon himself alone and threatens in the end to confine him entirely within the solitude of his own heart.”¹³

Forrest’s contribution to the riot was largely symbolic: “not Forrest the person, but Forrest as a persona, as a rallying point for the rioters, a veritable crucible for social tensions.”¹⁴ The urban working-class men (who appropriated Forrest’s active, heroic role) defined their character at sharp variance with the pretentious sophistication of the intellectual elite and the stifling decorum of the middle classes. As a theatrical audience, they demonstrated their sovereignty by shouting down perceived insults and demanding the respect and subordination of all actors – especially foreign, most especially British. Macready provided an irresistible target:

Macready was a subordinate personage, and he was to be put down less on his own account, than to spite his aristocratic supporters. The question became not

¹² David G. Pugh, *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America*, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 34. Pugh sees this desire to rise as a purely economic struggle, resulting in social betterment, but social and economic advantages are inextricably linked.

¹³ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2 (New York: Vintage, 1945), 106.

¹⁴ Sally Leilani Jones, “The Original Characters of Edwin Forrest and his American Style,” Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1992, 57.

only a national, but a social one. It was the rich against the poor – the aristocracy against the people; and this hatred of wealth and privilege is increasing over the world, and ready to burst out whenever there is the slightest occasion. The rich and well-bred are too apt to despise the poor and ignorant, and they must not think it strange if they are hated in return.¹⁵

(Anti)Hero – William Charles Macready

Macready's fine shadings of character, discussed in Chapter Three, were appreciated by middle-class and elite viewers but failed to connect with the working class. Macready's performance was criticized as overly subtle, pretentious, and ultimately inaccessible: "We cannot comprehend the meaning of some of his extraordinary sinkings and transitions of voice. They may be very fine and very sublime; but we confess that the refinements are much too sublimated for the grosser atmosphere of our 'groundling' taste."¹⁶ Working-class spectators were presented as incapable of appreciating the masculine or theatrical nuances of Macready.

An elite audience was equally repulsed by the obvious muscularity of actors like Forrest:

[A]ll persons of thought will confess to no great fondness for acting which particularly seeks to 'tickle the ears of the groundlings.' We allude to the loud mouthed ranting style – the tearing of every thing to shivers – which is so much the ambition of some of our players... To men of taste, all this is exceedingly ridiculous.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Account of the Terrific and Fatal Riot at the New-York Astor Place Opera House, on the Night of May 10th, 1849* (New York: H.M. Ranney, 1849), 19.

¹⁶ Unidentified newsclip, 1825, quoted in Alan S. Downer, *The Eminent Tragedian: William Charles Macready* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 72.

¹⁷ Walt Whitman, "The Gladiator – Mr. Forrest – Acting," *The Brooklyn Eagle*, 26 December 1846.

This fundamental difference in the mode of masculine expression between the working-class and middle-class male suggests that each group had a different language of masculinity and that they were not able to translate from one to the other. The masculine polarity of these two groups lacked a common ground of reference and identification, which made communication impossible.

In an effort to achieve social acceptance, Macready tried to raise the social position of the actor and purposely cultivated the acquaintance and patronage of the finest minds, and noblest manners, in both England and America. Famous for a fiery temper, and often described as petty and jealous, Macready made few friends in the theatre: “He was unpopular in the profession, his temper was irritable, and his want of consideration for the persons working with him strange in a man of so many fine qualities. His artistic vanity and selfishness were unworthy of a gentleman, and rendered him an object of dislike and dread to those who were compelled to encounter them.”¹⁸ Macready disliked the world of the theatre and most of the people who worked in it, rejecting fellow actors as unworthy of respect or deference – just as he himself was kept out of the inner circle of elite masculinity: “Compared with most members of the theatrical profession, he [Macready] was an accomplished scholar; he was zealous, conscientious, rigidly dutiful, decorous, conservative in his personal tastes and habits. He was never popular, we believe, with the members of his own

¹⁸ Frances Ann Kemble, *Records of Later Life* (New York: Henry Holt, 1882), 637.

profession, who thought him arrogant and unsociable, and for whom he fixed the standard, in every way, uncomfortably high.”¹⁹

There are a number of interesting parallels between Macready and Forrest. In their acting styles, while Macready favored the classical school and Forrest the romantic, both combined methods effectively. More importantly, they were both fiery-tempered social climbers, but each was read by his respective audience (“featured players” in the Astor Place drama) in a totally different way.

While Forrest provided a rallying point for the heroism of the urban working class, Macready personified both the arrogance of the British, as well as the aristocratic pretension of the upper class: “For ourselves as Americans, we prefer the unsophisticated energy of the daring child of nature to the more glossy polish of the artificial European civilian;... Some prefer the toga, some prefer the tomahawk.”²⁰ Toga and tomahawk referred to roles (Brutus, or possibly Virginius, for Macready and *Metamora* for Forrest) often associated with the two actors. Also, the toga symbolized Old World values and the European dramatic tradition, while the tomahawk represented a purely native aesthetic and celebrated American drama.²¹ Most interestingly, the toga additionally suggested classical learning and intellectual debate,

¹⁹ Henry James, quoted in Montrose J. Moses, *Fabulous Forrest: The Record of an American Actor* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1929), 245-46. The only American actors who shared Macready’s intellectualism and (at least partial) social acceptance were comic actors, such as Hackett and Burton, discussed in Chapter Three.

²⁰ *New York Herald*, 28 April 1849.

²¹ It should be noted that Washington was sometimes shown in a toga in portraits, and Forrest also appeared in a toga in roles such as Virginius, Brutus, and Coriolanus.

while the tomahawk, as an instrument of brutal violence, signified war – implying “some prefer thought and some prefer violence.”

The Setting – Astor Place Opera House

The Opera House itself was a symbol of aristocratic pride and an affront to the egalitarian notions so dear to Jacksonian working classes.²²

The 1800-seat Astor Place Opera House, completed in 1847 and named after John Jacob Astor who died in 1848, was financed by subscription by a group of 150 wealthy New Yorkers: “Through ownership they [the elite] could ensure fashion, cultivation, and respectability in the *place* they frequented, rather than in the *star* they revered.”²³ I suggest this distinction of place over theatrical personality is vitally important in understanding how the elite audience perceived theatrical models of male behavior.

The upper classes made proper behavior and decorum priorities in social gatherings. The exclusion of the working class removed any impediment to the carefully constructed refuge of refinement: “[A]n atmosphere of elegance and refinement makes itself palpable to the sense. There is a feeling of repose, of security from rude and impertinent interruption, a languor of voluptuous enjoyment.”²⁴ This elite audience reveled in the luxury of exclusion.

²² Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences: From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 54.

²³ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁴ “The Italian Opera House and the Bowery, New York,” *Spirit of the Times*, 6 February 1847.

The Astor Place audience did not seek a model of behavior in the actor on stage, typically a creature of inferior social position, but rather in the communal performance of genteel masculinity. The exclusive quality of an actor like Macready served as a token of their status: “In Macready, they beheld the pet of princes and nobles.”²⁵ It is important to remember that, although Macready moved freely within the social sphere of the social and intellectual elite and comported himself as if he belonged in that august company, once off-stage he was perhaps an object of cultural fascination but never a model of manhood: “[U]pper class males awarded...him with prestige and money, expecting gratitude and deference in return.”²⁶

The naming of the Astor Place Opera House, which was in fact used as both a theatre and an opera house, suggested the patrons’ preference for the elite connotations of the opera, not to mention its association with the enormous wealth of the Astor family. Patronage was limited by a strict dress code and admission was typically twenty-five cents higher than competing theatres, providing a safe and decorous enclave for the “exclusively aristocratic Upper Ten Thousand.”²⁷ The elite patrons of

²⁵ *A Rejoinder to “The Replies From England, etc. to Certain Statements Circulated in this Country Respecting Mr. Macready.” Together with an Impartial History and Review of the Lamentable Occurrences at the Astor Place Opera House, on the 10th of May, 1849. By an American Citizen.*, (New York: Stringer and Townsend, 1849), 68.

²⁶ Bruce McConachie, “Cultural Systems and the Nation-State: Paradigms for Writing National Theatre History,” in *New England Theatre Journal* 8 (1997): 38. McConachie’s quote actually refers to the relationship between the Boston elite and playwright John Howard Payne, but it applies equally to Macready. McConachie uses different narrative paradigms (progressivism, neo-Marxism, and new historicism) in attempting to interpret the relationship between Payne (recently returned from England) and the upper-class men who provide benefits for his support.

the Opera House fashioned an exclusive enclave (a symbol of masculinity that violated and offended the working-class vision of manhood), serving “to nourish in preference to the manly virtues that give dignity to human nature, a craving desire for luxurious enjoyment and sudden wealth, which renders those who seek them dependent on those who supply them; to substitute for republican simplicity and economical habits a sickly appetite for effeminate indulgence.”²⁸

ACT ONE: Eminence in Yankeeland – Macready’s First American Tour (1826-1827)

Macready, “the eminent tragedian,” made his American debut at the elite Park Theatre in New York in 1826, the same year that Forrest made his triumphant New York debut at the working-class Bowery. Macready’s haughtiness, aristocratic arrogance, and anti-American sentiments were displayed to the American public on this first tour. His harsh chastisement of a negligent property man in a Philadelphia performance of *William Tell* was somehow construed as an attack on America.²⁹ “A

²⁷ George Foster, *New York by Gaslight* (New York: Dewitt and Davenport, 1850), 90-91. The elites of the city apparently did not provide adequate patronage - the first complete season ended with, “a dead loss of \$20,000” [*New York Herald*, 3 May 1848]. Following the riot, the Opera House, briefly renamed the New York Theatre, never recovered from the stigma of the riot, closing its doors forever in 1852. The building survived as the Clinton Hall Library until 1890.

²⁸ Martin Van Buren, quoted in Marvin Meyers, *The Jacksonian Persuasion: Politics and Belief* (New York: 1960), 161. Jackson’s Vice President, Van Buren – later charged with aristocratic effeminacy by the Whigs – was speaking about the dangerous influence of the national bank.

²⁹ The property man forgot to provide an arrow to be broken on stage, and Macready was forced to sacrifice one of his finely balanced arrows. Macready’s harsh rebuke, “I can’t get such an arrow in your country, sir,” was interpreted as a censure of inferior

stream of letters to the newspapers denounced Macready for this insult, and he was obliged to apologize to the company. The matter ended there, and he continued his engagement without further incident.”³⁰ The uproar appeared to remain local and was quickly forgotten.³¹

Macready and Forrest did not meet at this time, although they did compete for New York’s theatrical audience in the fall of that year when the democratic Bowery Theatre housed Forrest and the elite Park Theatre featured Macready. Forrest was a twenty-year-old, making forty dollars a week, enjoying his first significant theatrical success, and Macready, thirteen years the senior, was widely hailed as England’s greatest actor: “with talents of uncommon eminence, an unspotted private character.”³² Although never acknowledged as a peer, Macready was recognized as a gentleman and easily moved through the upper echelons of America’s elite.

Treated with warm respect, although rarely with exuberance or adoration, he was roundly praised for bringing nobility to the stage and for a unity of performance that was to become his trademark: “His acting is not a point, a flash, a flat-scene, and

American quality. Story recounted from Wemyss, *Twenty-six Years*, 118. Wemyss claimed that if the penny presses had been more powerfully active during Macready’s first tour, the British actor’s American career would likely have been over. The fact that Macready criticized a man of the theatre backstage, rather than a more public display directed at “legitimate” citizens, likely prevented him from suffering the severity of Edmund Kean’s fate.

³⁰ Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 30.

³¹ No mention of the incident appeared in the days surrounding the Astor Place Riot over twenty years later, which is a bit odd, because most of Macready’s other past “abuses” of Americans were retold.

³² *New York Times*, 3 October 1826.

then another point, and flash, and flat again. It is like a finished picture, that does not lay claim to praise on any detached or peculiar merit, but on the general excellence of the execution.”³³

Macready observed Forrest as Marc Antony and William Tell on his first American tour and admired his “natural requisites” – figure, voice, and unschooled intelligence – while noting his “performance was marked by vehemence and rude force.” Macready found Forrest capable of greatness with “severe study of his art” but thought that prospect unlikely:

The injudicious and ignorant flattery, and the factious applause of his supporters in low-priced theatres, would fill his purse, would blind him to his deficiency in taste and judgment, and satisfy his vanity, confirming his self-opinion of attained perfection.³⁴

It is intriguing to note that Macready, perhaps with the benefit of hindsight, placed such a heavy burden of responsibility on the American audience, essentially absolving Forrest of much responsibility for his actions and recognizing Forrest’s masculine character, both on and off stage, as the popular construction of an uneducated mob:

[T]he state of society here and the condition of the fine arts are in themselves evidences of the improbability of an artist being formed by them... The masses, rich and poor, are essentially, ignorant and vulgar – utterly deficient in taste and without the modesty to distrust themselves.³⁵

³³ *New York Mirror*, 21 October 1826.

³⁴ *Macready’s Reminiscences*, 230-231. Macready did not begin his diary until 1827, so his comments on his first American tour were likely written much later. It should be noted, therefore, that Macready’s report of his initial impressions of Forrest was bound to be colored by their future conflict. No evidence suggests that Forrest observed Macready’s performance at that time.

³⁵ *Diaries of William Charles Macready*, vol. 2, 230, 405. These comments came during later tours of the United States in 1843 and 1848. Some writers on the riot have suggested that Macready publicly expressed disdain for American audiences.

Macready managed to survive his lucrative first American tour with his temper largely in check, his potentially offensive opinions kept to himself, his purse full, and his reputation intact. Emerging issues of national identity (Macready's attack on the property man) and class (Macready's public acceptance by the social and intellectual elite, as well as Macready's private condemnations of the "masses"), however, warned of potential trouble on the horizon.

ACT TWO: Savage Invasion – Forrest's First Tour of England (1836-1837)

After a two-year tour of European enrichment, Forrest decided to spread America's glory onto the English stage, and the British press and people responded with enthusiasm, praising his booming voice, emotional abandon ("he threw his whole power of body and soul into the whirlwind"), and massive presence:

His figure is cast in the proportions of the Farnese Hercules. The development of the muscles, indeed, rather exceeds the ideal of strength, and, in its excess, the beauty of symmetrical power is in some degree sacrificed... His features are boldly marked, full of energy and expression, and, although not capable of much variety, they possess a remarkable tone of *mental vigor*.³⁶

Although Forrest's massive body may have exceeded British taste and ideals of masculine strength and beauty, his form and energy matched England's expectations

Although this may have been a rumor, I can find no evidence to support these claims. Macready's comments were made in his diary, which was not published until after his death.

³⁶ *The Morning Advertiser* (London), 18 October 1836; *London Atlas*, 18 October 1836. Exactly how features can possess a tone, let alone a remarkable tone, of mental vigor is a bit unclear. Perhaps the reviewer was trying to suggest that Forrest looked intelligent.

of the grandeur of the American masculine spirit: “America may well feel proud of him; for though he is not strictly speaking, what is called a classical actor, yet he has all the energy, all the indomitable love of freedom that characterizes the transatlantic world.”³⁷ By placing Forrest outside the classical actor category - a classification that Macready definitively embodied – British critics put the American in the pantheon of theatrical masculinity without necessarily threatening the exalted station of their own “eminent tragedian.”³⁸

British playgoers were accustomed to the comparatively subdued and intellectual approach of Macready, and Forrest “electrified his audience,” in a way not seen since the golden days of Edmund Kean. The fulsome, if sometime qualified, praise directed at Forrest often categorized him as something quite outside the theatrical experience of the London stage and distinctly separate from the English acting model: “His very figure and voice were in his favor, the one being strongly muscular, the other replete with a rough music befitting one who in his youth has dwelt, a free barbarian, among the mountains.”³⁹ Identification of Forrest as an ideal representation of mountain-dwelling, muscular barbarity strongly implied a style of

³⁷ *London Sun*, 18 October 1836.

³⁸ No record exists of any London critics making significant comparison between Forrest and Macready in Forrest’s first visit to England. Forrest was often compared to the memory of Kean, whom many said he emulated, but Macready seemed to be an entirely different species of actor and man.

³⁹ *London Sun*, 18 October 1836.

manhood well beneath the expectations of an English gentleman, suggesting that at least a portion of Forrest's appeal may have resembled that of a circus exhibit.⁴⁰

One British newspaper went so far as to claim, "he [Forrest] has proved that he is, beyond all question, the first tragedian of the age," but, of course, not all reviews were glowing.⁴¹ Forrest's American qualities were not always praised, and at times critics spoke with a degree of condescension of "a provincial flavor of the backwoods."⁴² And even critics who praised him often tempered their remarks with criticisms.

John Forster, a close friend of Macready's, consistently and vociferously attacked Forrest: "Will and passion are the sole characteristics of the performance... [He] looked like a savage newly caught from out of the American backwoods."⁴³ Again, not only the acting style but the very masculine identity of Forrest was placed on a level significantly below that of Macready, by both Forrest's supporters and

⁴⁰ In 1833, British playgoers had enjoyed James H. Hackett's performance in William Bayle Bernard's *The Kentuckian; or, A Trip to New York* (sometimes also called *A Kentuckian's Trip to New York*) as Colonel Nimrod Wildfire, a plain-talking, coonskin-wearing Kentucky Congressman humorously based on Davy Crockett. Hackett had previously performed the Nimrod Wildfire character in his playwriting competition winner *The Lion of the West; or, A Trip to Washington* (1831) by James Kirke Paulding (and later revised by John Augustus Stone).

⁴¹ *London Sun*, 25 October 1836.

⁴² *Morning Herald*, 18 October 1836.

⁴³ *London Examiner*, 12 February 1837; 5 March 1837. Forster's detailed criticisms of Forrest from October 1836 to March 1837, although mean-spirited, provide one of the most thorough pictures of Forrest's performance style. Forster accused him of a literalism in performance that indicated a lack of intellectual understanding; a focus on making points calculated to appeal to the audience's basest instincts; and a lack of unity and logical dramatic progression in his character development.

detractors. Forrest, however, was pleased with the overall tenor of critical response: “The London press, as you probably have noticed, has been divided concerning my professional merits; though as a good republican I ought to be satisfied, seeing I had an overwhelming majority on my side.”⁴⁴

Macready was outwardly cordial to Forrest, although his diary revealed bitterness and jealousy, inviting Forrest to his home and introducing him to many of the English elite, including Browning, the poet. Forrest was feted by the Garrick Club and toasted by Macready and glowingly wrote to William Leggett: “[Macready] has behaved in the handsomest manner to me... he has extended to me many delicate courtesies and attentions, all showing the native kindness of his heart, and great refinement and good breeding.”⁴⁵ Macready even introduced Forrest to the Sinclairs, the family of his soon-to-be bride.

ACT THREE: Democracy vs. Aristocracy – Macready’s Second Trip to America (1843-1844)

A feeling of bitterness was rapidly growing between the two nations on either side of the Atlantic. The West had been outraged by the widely published revelations of its deficiencies by such English travelers as Dickens, Mrs. Trollope, and Captain Basil Hall; the English, on the other hand, felt that their pockets had been picked by the so-called ‘Pennsylvania Repudiators.’⁴⁶

⁴⁴ William Rounseville Alger, *Life of Edwin Forrest: The American Tragedian*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: n.p., 1877; reprint New York: Benjamin Blom, 1972), 317.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Alan S. Downer, *The Eminent Tragedian: William Charles Macready* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966), 253-54. “Pennsylvania Repudiators” refers to the default of that state and its businesses that owed money to England. Border disputes in Maine (1838-1839), as well as the Oregon country and the annexation of Texas in the 1840s, added to the tensions between the two countries.

After Macready's artistically successful but financially disappointing years as manager of Drury Lane (1841-1843), he returned to the United States with an eye toward retiring in "dear Yankeeland."⁴⁷ Macready expanded his tour to include the South and West in addition to the major eastern cities to significant financial reward. Direct comparisons between Forrest and Macready became more frequent: "Those who see a superiority in Macready over our own great actor, must be blinded by prejudice."⁴⁸

The newspaper comparisons took on an increasingly nationalistic tone: "Native Americanism vs. Foreignism. Which of the two to choose? Why Forrest, of course."⁴⁹ Forrest began to seek out opportunities for head-to-head competition, which Macready considered "ungentlemanly conduct:"

[S]ince my appearance, they have announced him in *American* letters, as 'Mr. E. Forrest, *The National Tragedian!*' – and put him up in my parts the nights after I have played them – It would (except that he is not estimated highly by the *leading* people) do him disservice with the intelligent and better sort, but I believe it has an effect of making a sort of factious rush to the Theatre – as his houses were very *bad* before this device was practiced.⁵⁰

Forrest benefited in money and reputation through this "factious rush" of patriotic chauvinism, clearly capitalizing on nationalistic sentiments. He used the feud with Macready to fuel a career that had begun to flag at home and abroad, essentially

⁴⁷ William Charles Macready, quoted in Downer, *Eminent Tragedian*, 254.

⁴⁸ *Republican* (St. Louis), 13 June 1844.

⁴⁹ *American Advocate* (Philadelphia), 10 September 1844.

⁵⁰ Letter to Mrs. Letitia Puckle, 27 October 1843, quoted in Downer, *Eminent Tragedian*, 258.

transplanting his masculine persona from the stage to the “real world” in order to invigorate it. While not suffering at the box office, Forrest, America’s great star, had been giving essentially the same performance for over fifteen years, and audiences had become used to him. Forrest was often losing on his home soil in his head-to-head competition with the novelty of Macready: “In Mobile Macready averaged \$455 nightly against \$397 for Forrest, and in St. Louis Macready also held the edge, \$422 to \$269... He [Macready] was overjoyed... to learn that Forrest had drawn a measly \$200 house at a performance at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia. ‘If it be so, he is justly punished for his ungentlemanly conduct.’”⁵¹ Interest in his playwriting competitions had almost totally died out (*Jack Cade* was the only new vehicle in the last ten years), and the market of talented native actors had grown immeasurably since (and because) of his debut. Forrest used his challenge to Macready to re-ignite the interest of his working-class audience, linking himself even more strongly and directly with issues of American masculinity and honor in the hopes that they (his audience and the issues) would sustain him.

Macready refused to engage Forrest in a manly contest of will or ability. Forrest sought direct confrontation with Macready, a straightforward desire in sympathy with the code of honor of his working-class audience. Forrest’s actions likely would have offended Macready’s audience, those of the “intelligent and better sort,” as tactless, unpleasant, and unworthy of a gentleman. Macready never considered Forrest to be in his class (theatrically or otherwise) and found the more frequent critical comparisons and Forrest’s attempts at competition an embarrassment

⁵¹ Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 45.

and insult: “*He is not an artist*. Let him be an American actor – and a great American actor – but keep on this side of the Atlantic, and no one will gainsay his comparative excellence.”⁵² By assuming the high aesthetic and moral ground, Macready played a status game with Forrest, drawing the encouragement and sympathy of his elite audience as surely as Forrest gathered working-class support: “The ‘respectable’ classes refused to engage Bowery b’hoys in debate... Instead they dismissed the new proletarian standard bearers as simply illegitimate. Bourgeois discourses on rowdiness and rioting were redefining these behaviors as inappropriate and unacceptable.”⁵³

Macready remained outwardly friendly toward Forrest and privately praised him on occasion (“I like all I see of Forrest very much. He appears a clear-headed, honest, kind man; what can be better?”) but became increasingly critical of his lack of artistry:

I had a very high opinion of his powers of mind when I saw him sixteen years ago; I said then, if he would cultivate those powers and really study,... he would make one of the very first actors of this or any day. But I thought he would not do so, as his countrymen were, by their extravagant applause, possessing him with the idea... that it was unnecessary... He has great physical power. But I could discern no imagination, no original thought, no poetry at all in his acting... Of Forrest’s representation [of Tate’s version of *King Lear*, which Macready abhorred] I should like to say that it was like the part – false taste... [H]e has not enriched, refined, elevated, and enlarged his mind; it is very much where it was, in the matter of poetry and art, when I last saw him... He had all the qualification, all the material out of which to build up a great artist, an actor for all the world. He is now only an actor for the less intelligent of the Americans.⁵⁴

⁵² Macready, *Diaries* II, 28 October 1843.

⁵³ Butsch, *American Audiences*, 52.

⁵⁴ Macready, *Reminiscences*, 512 (3 October 1843); Macready, *Diaries* II, 21 October 1843. It should be noted that this diatribe toward Forrest the artist was

This description of Forrest appears accurate when compared to contemporary accounts and suggests why Forrest may have needed the competition with Macready to reinvigorate his career.

Macready's condemnation of Forrest's lack of thought, imagination, and taste ultimately relegated Forrest to a subservient, if not debased, level of masculinity. As Tocqueville recognized, America's democratic system, which promised "general equality of condition among the people," could never guarantee equality of success:

[W]hen men are nearly alike and all follow the same track, it is very difficult for any one individual to walk quickly and cleave a way through the dense throng that surrounds and presses on him... They can never attain as much as they desire. It perpetually retires from before them, yet without hiding itself from their sight, and in retiring draws them on. At every moment they think they are about to grasp it; it escapes at every moment from their hold.⁵⁵

The mass of men who failed to realize their dreams of success fell to a lower level of masculine respect in the eyes of those who had reached the pinnacle of achievement. Forrest would likely claim that he had reached the zenith of theatrical and masculine success, but Macready felt that Forrest's perceived disinterest in study, his lack of self-discipline and discernment, and unwillingness to apply himself to the elevation of both his art and his audience, prevented him from achieving the absolute heights (and ultimately cultivating elite patronage). Forrest "doomed" himself forever to association with his democratic supporters.

concluded with praise of the man: "But he is something better – an upright and well-intentioned man."

⁵⁵ Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, I:3, II: 146-47.

Again, Macready placed much of the onus for Forrest's artistic, intellectual, and masculine shortcomings on the inability of the ignorant American masses to appreciate anything but the muscular, coarse, and bombastic: "From what I can learn the audiences of the United States have been accustomed to exaggeration in all its forms, and have applauded what has been most extravagant; it is not therefore surprising, that they should bestow such little applause on me, not having their accustomed cues."⁵⁶ While much of Macready's snobbish perception of the Americans could be attributed to disappointment over his own reception, the appreciation of subtlety and refinement that marked his gentlemanly code, and which guided the actions and mores of his social and intellectual peers, was truly anathema to the working-class audience that had created Forrest.

Macready did feel that he was making progress in refining the palate of more discerning audiences: "[T]he audience were much more decorous, attentive, and appreciative than I have heretofore found them. I suppose they begin to understand me."⁵⁷ Macready and his audience developed a common language of communication and arrived at a mutual understanding of theatrical and masculine expectations.

Gradually, Forrest's persistence in seeking out theatrical combat began to erode Macready's personal good feelings: "He is not a good actor – not at all an artist.

⁵⁶ Macready, *Reminiscences*, 512.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 533 (17 April 1844). Macready made this comment while touring in St. Louis ("Acted Macbeth really well, too well for St. Louis"), an audience he considered beneath him. Other towns on his tour did not fare so well: "Many *rowdy* people were there, women of the town – in short, it was an audience attracted by sheer curiosity" [530].

He acts Hamlet on Monday in opposition to me, and I hear, made this *engagement to oppose me!* This is not the English generosity of rivalry.”⁵⁸

ACT FOUR: Much Ado About a Hiss; or, Forrest’s Final Trip to London (1845-1846)

The United States was in exceedingly bad odor with the English public at the moment... The Oregon dispute, the non-payment of state’s debts, and the failure of the United States Bank were all subjects for attack.⁵⁹

Closely following Macready’s return to England, Forrest arrived in London eager to continue the rivalry and add further triumphs to his career, only to find a series of frustrations and disappointments. Forrest’s acting, essentially unchanged since his last visit (though with perhaps an even stronger reliance on bombast), underwhelmed the critics and the audience at a time when the legitimate drama was struggling on the London stage: “His passion is a violent effort of physical vehemence... [H]e spoke like a braggart beating the air with big words, and only seemed in earnest when butchery was to be done.”⁶⁰ Forrest’s Macbeth was derided as a “great amusement..., our best comic actors do not often excite so great a quantity of mirth.”⁶¹ In a letter to her mother, Charlotte Cushman, whose Lady Macbeth was

⁵⁸ Macready, *Diaries* II , 7 September 1844.

⁵⁹ Downer, *Eminent Tragedian*, 275.

⁶⁰ *London Spectator*, 22 February 1845; 29 March 1845. Other reviews (including the *London Times* and the *London News*) oddly found his performances tedious and deliberate, as if he were compensating for being a too physical actor. It was only in Ireland, where audiences connected with his republican sentiments and muscular performance style, that Forrest enjoyed marked success.

widely praised, confirmed the souring of the London public: “Forrest has failed most dreadfully. In *Macbeth* they shouted with laughter and hissed him to death... The papers cut him all to pieces.”⁶²

Forrest announced his intention to play in Paris without previously securing an engagement, feeling that the democratic sympathies of the French for their American cousins would assure his success. John Mitchell, who managed all English drama in France, refused Forrest’s request. Without any sort of proof, Forrest charged Macready (currently under Mitchell’s management) with negatively influencing Mitchell’s decision (which seems unlikely): “It is more likely that for reasons of his own Mitchell preferred not, in the days of Louis Phillippe, to sponsor so well-advertised a champion of ‘la grande cause de la liberte humaine.’”⁶³

To add insult to injury, Bulwer-Lytton, England’s most successful playwright, refused Forrest permission to perform *Richelieu* and *The Lady of Lyons*. Forrest had requested a nightly performance rate that Bulwer-Lytton did not allow, and the author demanded what Forrest considered an unreasonably large sum for a set number of

⁶¹ *London Examiner*, 1 March 1845. Shattuck (*Shakespeare on the American Stage*, 80) points out that this quote is often attributed to Macready’s friend, John Forster, but was actually written by another reviewer. Forrest’s biographer, Alger (392-93), first implicated Forster, who was bed-ridden with rheumatic fever, and Macready’s most reliable biographer, Downer (276), mistakenly credits Forster as well.

⁶² Quote in Joseph Leach, *Bright Particular Star: The Life and Times of Charlotte Cushman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 150. Forrest claimed to have been “saluted with a shower of hisses,” as part of “a systematic plan arranged in advance under the stimulus of national prejudice and personal interest,” in his London debut performance of *Othello*. [Alger, I, 391-2] No other person could corroborate this claim, and none of the newspaper reviews make any mention of it.

⁶³ Charles H. Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage: From the Hallams to Edwin Booth* (Washington, DC: Folger Shakespeare Library, 1976), 78.

performances. Again Forrest blamed Macready for constructing a conspiracy to thwart his success and convincing Bulwer-Lytton and Mitchell to act against him. Both of these men, generally respected and admired, publicly denied any undue influence.⁶⁴

Forrest also accused Macready and his critic friend Forster of collusion, poisoning the goodwill of the public and press: “The undisguised hatred of the English for every thing American, and the subsequent conduct of Macready in this country, lead me to believe that Forster only expressed his dislike of Mr. Forrest because he was an American, and obeyed the commands of his ‘eminent’ friend.”⁶⁵ The truth of this charge, about which Forrest was never able to present any sort of proof, seemed unlikely. Forster was often unpleasant and passionately championed his friend Macready at every turn, but Macready, likely out of a fear that he would appear responsible, pointedly asked Forster to treat Forrest kindly. Also, because of illness, Forster did not review any of Forrest’s London performance in his second tour, and his paper (*London Examiner*) was relatively silent. Macready certainly suffered from professional jealousy and probably disliked Forrest at this point, but he was touring the provinces when Forrest performed in London. Neither Macready nor Forster ever

⁶⁴ When the dispute between Forrest and Macready became fodder for American newspapers in the months leading up to the Astor Place Riot, Macready solicited letters from Mitchell and Bulwer-Lytton, as well as the editor of the *London Examiner*, absolving him of responsibility. These and other letters and remarks were printed in 1849: *The Replies from England to Certain Statements Circulated in This Country Respecting Mr. Macready* (New York: n.p., 1849).

⁶⁵ *A Rejoinder to “The Replies From England,”* 37.

had the power and influence directly to suborn the judgment of either the public or the press.⁶⁶

Most importantly, while both Macready and Forster were often abrasive, neither was ever accused of dishonesty. As men of intellect and refinement, they prided themselves on being above such petty actions. Macready, seemingly honest and self-critical within the secret confines of his diary, admitted to no overt actions against Forrest; such weakness, deception, and confrontation would have violated his masculine code of conduct.⁶⁷

Forrest, however, relished confrontation and did not hesitate to fling their dispute into the public sphere, and perhaps he escalated the conflict on the theory that any publicity was good publicity. At an Edinburgh performance of Macready's *Hamlet* (March 2, 1846), Forrest hissed a piece of Macready's acting business.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Macready was widely considered England's greatest tragedian, but his appeal was hardly unanimous. Plenty of critics (mostly those catering to working-class audiences) agreed with Macready's detractors in America, dismissing his performances as cold and formal. And the criticisms directed at Forrest by the British were not unlike those he suffered at the hands of Americans who were disenchanted with his dramatic excesses.

⁶⁷ While social mobility was easier in America than in aristocratic England, rhetoric privileging actions over birth began to define the gentleman: "Behavior, in a word, is an ultimately democratic criterion for gentility that had aristocratic origins...., the essence of the definition is contained in the reference cited from *The Tatler*: 'The Appellation of Gentleman is never to be affixed to a Man's Circumstances but to his behaviour in them'" (David Castronovo, *The English Gentleman: Images and Ideals in Literature and Society* [New York: Ungar, 1987], 31). Expectations of an English gentleman roughly corresponded to the aspirations of America's middle-class male.

⁶⁸ This hiss was much written about. It followed Hamlet's, "I must be idle," as the court gathered for the play scene. Macready typically executed a "waving of the handkerchief" and strutted across the stage (this was later referred to as a "fancy dance," and Forrest termed it the *pas de mouchoir*): "I waved the more, and bowed

Forrest apparently traveled to Edinburgh from Aberdeen, during a break in his performance schedule, specifically to view Macready's performance.⁶⁹ Nearly three weeks after the incident, Forrest proudly claimed credit, justifying his action as freedom of expression: "That a man may manifest his opinion, after the recognized mode, according to the best of his judgment, when actuated by proper motives and for justifiable ends, is a right which, until now, I never heard questioned, and I contend that that right extends equally to an actor as to any other man."⁷⁰ Forrest claimed the hiss as a republican right and a "legitimate mode of evincing... disapprobation in the theatre... a salutary and wholesome corrective of the abuses of the stage; and it was against one of these abuses that *my* dissent was expressed."⁷¹

While hissing was still accepted as a popular right, the practice was diminishing on the legitimate stage patronized by Macready's conservative audience,

derisively and contemptuously to the individual" (*Reminiscences*, 553). Much debate occurred as to whether or not Forrest's hiss was solitary or one of many. The High Sheriff of Edinburgh and the Manager of the Edinburgh Theatre, as well as *The Scotsman* (Edinburgh), solely accused Forrest. *The Edinburgh Weekly Chronicle* was the only voice, public or private that supported Forrest's claim that he was not alone, although they printed nothing about it until twelve days after the event. All responses were passionate but none more than that of the Sheriff (Mr. Gordon): "Not one human being hissed Macready on that night except Forrest. Believe me, there was but one hiss – and one hisser. Forrest was the hisser – Forrest's was the hiss" (*Replies from England*).

⁶⁹ None of Forrest's biographers provide a reason for his sudden trip to Edinburgh. Although impossible to verify, Forrest (fueled by the positive response of the Scotch and Irish audiences) may have gone intentionally looking to create competition.

⁷⁰ Letter printed in *London Times*, 21 March 1846

⁷¹ Letter printed in *London Times*, 4 April 1846. When the tables were reversed, Forrest did not appear to accept the "wholesome corrective" on the few instances he was hissed and responded with fury.

who kept a tighter rein on how (and when) it was implemented: “There is a tacit convention between the managers and the audience, which an intelligent public knows how to enforce. Custom and common sense regulate the understanding.”⁷² The Bowery audience used their power less judiciously and embraced their democratic right to express approval and displeasure.

Macready initially rejected the idea that Forrest could be responsible but interviews with eyewitnesses soon convinced him, as he reported in his diary:

I feel glad that it is not an Englishman – but no Englishman would have done a thing so base; indeed he dared not have done it, and that is one argument in my mind for my belief in Mr. Forrest’s guilt. I do not think that such an action has its parallel in all theatrical history! The low-minded ruffian! That man would commit a murder, *if he dared*.⁷³

While Forrest may have staunchly defended his actions as that of an audience member and arbiter of theatrical good taste, the violation that Macready experienced went beyond Forrest’s aesthetic judgment. Forrest had attacked Macready openly and professionally, venting his personal animosity in the public forum and breaking the rules of genteel masculinity.

Macready was publicly quiet, but his vilification of Forrest as base and incapable of gentlemanly behavior would forever after color his opinions of Forrest and the lower order of Americans:

This seems to me (though, of course, offensive, as anything filthy in the physical or material world would be) to be the seal of his character. Here stands self-confessed this citizen of the United States, to whom the greatest

⁷² *American Magazine and Critical Review* 2 (November 1817): 63.

⁷³ Macready, *Diaries* II, 3 March 1846.

harm that I can do, I will: which is to give him the full benefit of his noble, tasteful, and critical qualities, and ‘leave him alone with his glory.’⁷⁴

Forrest’s code of masculinity demanded a trial of public opinion and his honor would only be satisfied through universal condemnation. Again, Macready claimed a higher status of masculinity and refused to engage with Forrest, which only escalated the tension and provoked Forrest into more drastic action. Macready felt a private acknowledgement of the wrong done to a gentleman, accompanied by the debilitating shame of critical self-awareness, was more cruel and just treatment.

ACT FIVE: Masculine Showdown; or, Macready’s Final Trip to America (1848-1849)

Then appeared the unfriendly notices, and then were made the attempts to hiss him [Forrest] off the stage. The whole opposition to him originated with this little knot of *litterateurs*, inflamed against the United States, on account of the sad treatment of their ‘pal’ and brother, Master ‘Boz’ [Charles Dickens]. We [members of the elite class] have never believed that Mr. Macready originated or stimulated the attacks on Forrest at that time. He is perfectly innocent on that score, notwithstanding Forrest’s belief and interminable letters in bad taste to the contrary.⁷⁵

In spite of the bad British press, Forrest had defiantly faced the arrogant aristocracy of England and on his return was hailed as the conquering American Tragedian: “[H]e is just entitled to that honor – he has acquired it by his own labors; from a poor boy in a circus he has arisen to be a man of fame and wealth, all of which

⁷⁴ Macready, *Diaries* II, 4 April 1846.

⁷⁵ *New York Herald*, 9 May 1849. The day before the riot, the *Herald* presented a partially jesting hypothesis of the feud’s origins. On Dickens’ previous trip to America, he had been given a celebratory ball that turned out, unbeknownst to him, to be an enormous fund-raiser for the Park Theatre. The *Herald* surmised that he returned to England, complaining to his literary friends, who vented their outrage on the visiting Forrest. The *Herald* goes on to blame Wikoff, a supposed friend of both Forrest and Macready, for encouraging Forrest’s paranoia toward Macready.

he has lastingly gained by enterprise and talent, and secured both by economy and temperance.”⁷⁶ In a curtain speech following a benefit performance on his return, Forrest professed himself a champion of American drama and actors and attacked the arrogant British - “that narrow, exclusive, prejudiced, and I may add, anti-American feeling which prescribes geographical limits to the growth of genius and talent.”⁷⁷ At a jubilee celebration thrown in his honor, Forrest’s actions were defended by even the elites of the country, such as William Cullen Bryant: “In the intense competition of the stage, Mr. Forrest has obeyed a native instinct in treating his rivals with generosity.”⁷⁸

Forrest’s actions in England, perceived as a defense of republican freedoms, solidified his reputation as the great American tragic actor, although New York’s *Courier and Enquirer*, an anti-Democratic paper that had always disliked him, castigated “his whole style rough, unrefined, heavy, and laborious. His gentlemen are not such as Shakespeare drew; they are great roaring boys that cry like fat babies, and puff and blow like sledge men.”⁷⁹

⁷⁶ *Boston Mail*, 22 November 1848.

⁷⁷ Curtain speech quoted in Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 236.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 237. Bryant’s toast was given at jubilee celebration on his return, 16 October 1846. Bryant did not elaborate on the exact nature of Forrest’s “generosity.”

⁷⁹ 30 March 1847.



Fig. 37. Cartoon of Edwin Forrest as Coriolanus.

Macready returned to America with some trepidation but still considering emigration in retirement.⁸⁰ Initially, Macready was received warmly but the nation's democratic newspapers continually fueled the debate: "It is... *his* [Macready's] *inhospitality, his crushing influence, his vindictive opposition, and his steadfast determination to ruin the prospects of that gentleman [Forrest] in England, that we bring to his door.*"⁸¹ Casting Macready as the enemy of both the country and free enterprise, Forrest heightened the feud by following Macready from town to town, often performing the identical role at a competing theatre.⁸² The two men defended themselves in escalating curtain speeches, culminating in an exchange of "cards" published in most of the country's principal newspapers.

Forrest derided Macready as a liar and "superannuated driveller," condemning him personally and professionally ("there is nothing in him but self – self – self") and labeling Macready as the master of a vast conspiracy. Forrest also charged him with cowardice: "Mr. Macready... made allusion, I understand, to 'an American actor' who

⁸⁰ Macready contemplated emigration because he idealized America's republican principles, as he evinced in his comments on the celebration of Washington's birthday: "[T]hroughout these free and independent States, the memory of the man who was born this day shall be hallowed by the gratitude and joy of millions of hearts, that will hand down to their children's children the debt of reverence and love which they and mankind owe to him for the benefits his life conferred and his example has left. The birthday of Washington shall be an eternal festival wherever a freeman speaks the English tongue" [Macready, *Reminiscences*, 529]. On a more practical note, Macready also felt, because of England's comparatively high cost of living, that he could afford to retire to Yankeeland in greater luxury.

⁸¹ *Boston Mail*, 22 November 1848.

⁸² During his initial run in New York, competing theatres presented the following burlesques: *Who's Got Macready? or, a Race to Boston* at the Olympic Theatre and *Mr. Macgreedy, or, a Star at the Opera House*, starring Frank Chanfrau (famous as Mose the Fireboy), at the National Theatre (Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 72).

had the temerity on one occasion openly to hiss him! This is true... But why say ‘an American actor?’ Why not openly charge me with the act? for I did it, and publicly avowed it.”⁸³ Forrest, again, sought confrontation and appeared figuratively to challenge his rival to “step outside and settle it like men.”

Macready formally responded to Forrest’s card, “wanting in self-respect so far as to bandy words upon the subject; but as the circulation of such statements is manifestly calculated to prejudice Mr. Macready in the opinion of the American public, and to affect both his professional interests and his estimation in society.” Macready claimed he would, “without delay apply for legal redress.”⁸⁴

The differing modes of communication, Forrest in a belligerent first person and Macready in a coldly formal third person, suggest the complete incompatibility of their masculine value systems. Forrest cast himself as the hero in a dramatic confrontation, bellowing against perceived injustice. Macready, reluctant publicly to respond in such a “gross” manner, merely sought to defend his honor and, in threatening legal action, posited a surrogate champion in a comparatively non-violent forum, the courtroom.

The *London Times* (after the Astor Place Riot) provided a persuasive defense and justification of Macready’s gentlemanly reluctance to confront Forrest:

Among the members of the histrionic profession, it is, we believe, a general rule not to express public disapprobation of each other. Mr. Forrest seems to be highly offended because he is not named, and ambitious for the glory of having been the least courteous actor ever seen in Great Britain, he writes a

⁸³ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 22 November 1848.

⁸⁴ William Charles Macready, “Card to the Public,” 22 November 1848, quoted in Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 77-78; Downer, *Eminent Tragedian*, 294.

thing called a ‘card,’ in which he declares that he is the hero in question. This ‘card’ is one of the very lowest productions in the English language... Even the not very delicate stomach of the [republican] *New York Herald* cannot put up with such grossness, and honestly declares that it is ‘one of the most brutal, ungentlemanly, disgraceful *pronunciamentos* that ever emanated from one theatrical man to another.’⁸⁵

While the *London Times* defended Macready’s masculine mode of behavior, an anonymous “American Citizen” was eager to champion his native son:

If his [Forrest’s] words are not as dainty as a Chesterfield would use,... it is only an evidence that he is not schooled in the science that teaches men to deceive by falsehood; if he chooses to call men and things by their right names, it is clear that he is honest, and seeks not the shelter afforded by vague inuendoes [sic] and indirect charges; if his are the bold declarations of honest conviction, he cannot be accused of concealing his opinions, nor as being a man who fears to assume all the responsibility of his acts and expressions.⁸⁶

Reminiscent of *The Contrast*, Forrest was cast as a “Manly” ideal in expressing genuine feelings compared to the false external niceties of the Chesterfield school. Macready, through his formal, decorous, non-confrontational public declarations, was seen as an affected, dangerous vision of manhood that only feigned sincerity. The potential contamination of hypocrisy clothed in honesty played on social fears of being unable to recognize the counterfeit expression of emotions: “Since the Revolution, Americans had stressed that what made a republic great was the character and spirit of its people. The ultimate threat of the confidence man was thus his power to subvert the American republican experiment.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Quoted in *Rejoinder to ‘The Replies,’* 37. The *Herald* had traditionally been a strong supporter of Forrest.

⁸⁶ *Rejoinder to ‘The Replies,’* 42.

⁸⁷ Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 9. The confidence man (a term coincidentally first used in 1849) was a seductive, deceitful, contaminating figure who sought to influence

The drama approached its climax on May 7, 1849, when three competing versions of *Macbeth* played in New York – Macready at the aristocratic Park, Forrest at the democratic Broadway, and Thomas Hamblin (capitalizing on the publicity) at the Bowery. Fans of Forrest filled the Park, hurling taunts and projectiles at the stage. By the third act, chairs thrown from the balcony brought down the curtain. Macready planned to leave the city, but a committee of forty-seven prominent citizens, including Washington Irving and Herman Melville, petitioned him to stay, which he did with reluctance.

The quarrel between two actors had grown into a social and political question of masculine dominance: “The respectable part of our citizens will never consent to be put down by a mob raised to serve the purposes of such a fellow as Forrest.”⁸⁸ The working-class “rabble” (leaping to enact the role of dramatic hero it had been fed for some twenty years in plays like *The Gladiator*) tried to exert their control over a space from which they were excluded, and the elite class “gentlemen” drew a proverbial line in the sand beyond which the masses could not pass. The conservative press supported the lawful suppression of a potentially unruly working-class mob:

We trust that, taught by the experiences of the past, the municipal authorities will consult at once their own credit and the claims of their constituents to be protected in the enjoyment of their rights, by taking care, beforehand, that no such outrage as that perpetrated at this establishment, last Monday night [May

and corrupt sincere manhood (2-6). “As the urban stranger, the confidence man served to express the middle-class fear that success among strangers demanded not character formation, but a manipulation of those surface impressions of dress and conduct that were so crucial to urban life” (193).

⁸⁸ Philip Hone, *The Diary of Philip Hone*, ed. Allan Nevins (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1927), 876. Phillip Hone (1780-1852), former mayor of New York (1826-27), was a prominent member of the city’s elite.

7], can possibly be repeated... [T]he lessees of the theatre, at which he [Macready] is engaged – who pay to the city a regular license, and are doubly entitled to its protection, have their rights too, in which they can equitably claim to be maintained by its ordinances.⁸⁹

Rather than engaging the subservient, working-class male on his own level, the elite male invoked the law to suppress inappropriate masculine behavior – perceived as, “instinctive hostility of barbarism to culture.”⁹⁰

Anticipating trouble, the new Mayor of New York (Woodhull, who was sworn in May 8) met with heads of the police and military and the managers of the Astor Place Opera House (Niblo and Hackett, who refused to cancel the performance) to arrange the safety of the performance. 200 police would be stationed inside the theatre, 125 outside, and approximately 300 members of the National Guard would be on call. Mayor Woodhull ordered the removal of a large mound of paving stones at the construction site of a sewer next to Astor Place – for some reason never explained, this was not done.

Meanwhile, a Tammany boss (Isaiah Rynders) and the “American Committee” organized and inflamed the working class opposition to Macready.⁹¹

WORKINGMEN
SHALL
AMERICANS OR ENGLISH RULE
IN THIS CITY?

⁸⁹ *Morning Express*, 9 May 1849.

⁹⁰ Henry James, quoted in Moses, *Fabulous Forrest*, 246. James was recalling the events of the riot from his boyhood.

⁹¹ The “American Committee was a “nativist” society strongly anti-Catholic and anti-immigrant, especially Irish, who pledged “America for Americans.” The committee was headed by E.Z.C. Judson, also known as “Ned Buntline,” a dime novel author of the Buffalo Bill stories and later a member of the Know Nothing Party.

The crew of the English steamer has threatened all Americans who shall dare to express their opinion this night at the English Aristocratic Opera House!!

We advocate no violence, but a free expression of opinion to all public men!

WORKINGMEN! FREEMEN!!
STAND BY YOUR
LAWFUL RIGHTS.

*American Committee.*⁹²

These “workingmen” appear to be echoing Forrest’s language about “free expression of opinion” when he hissed Macready in England. If so, Forrest had given them the “script” for their uprising. The language, although overtly peaceful, also bore resemblance to the violent cries for freedom by Forrest’s Spartacus in *The Gladiator*:

Death to the Roman fiends, that make their mirth
Out of the groans of bleeding misery!
Ho, slaves, arise! it is your hour to kill!
Kill and spare not – For wrath and liberty! –
Freedom for bondmen – freedom and revenge!⁹³

The stage was now set for the violent conclusion. Macready’s performance was interrupted by Forrest’s supporters, who were quickly arrested (later, while being held prisoner in the basement of the theatre, they attempted to set the building on fire). As Macready continued to struggle through *Macbeth*, a mob estimated somewhere between 10,000 and 24,000 attacked the Opera House, throwing paving stones at the building and the police. The police were unable to hold the building and retreated

⁹² Handbill, reprinted in Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 130.

⁹³ Robert Montgomery Bird, *The Gladiator*, in *Early American Drama*, ed. Jeffrey H. Richards (New York: Penguin, 1997), 198.

inside. The National Guard attempted to subdue the crowd but were attacked and ultimately forced to fire on the crowd, killing 31 and injuring nearly 150.⁹⁴

Epilogue: Clearing the Rubble and Assigning the Blame

The day after the riot, Forrest fully absolved himself of all responsibility for the deaths that occurred in the riot: “This blood will rest on the heads of the Committee who insisted that Macready should perform despite of the known wishes of the people to the contrary, and on the heads of the public authorities who were requested by many of the citizens to close the house, and thereby prevent any further demonstration.”⁹⁵ If the riot had been successful (presumably resulting in the working-class mob stopping Macready’s performance and forcing him to leave the country forever), Forrest would probably have taken credit for inspiring the victory and thanked the American people for their support. Instead, he finished out the week with his normal repertoire, playing to very small houses, before (unusual for him at that time) taking a short break from the stage because of illness – possibly brought on by emotional exhaustion.⁹⁶ Unable to lead his people to victory, the riot showed that all of Forrest’s talk about the active expression of masculinity had been merely talk.

⁹⁴ The death estimates vary from 22 to 31, although some contemporary estimates were inflated. It appears that 22 died on the night of May 10th, but 31 died in total within a couple of days. The 150 injured included members of the police and National Guard.

⁹⁵ Letter to James Oaks, 11 May 1849, quoted in Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 281.

⁹⁶ No perceptible change in repertoire occurred in any of the major New York theatres. Theatrical business went along pretty much as usual, other than the temporary closing of the Astor Place for repairs, although patronage at all playhouses was diminished in

Forrest's dominance of the American stage began to wane: "The Astor Place Riot lowered his credit with cultivated and genteel folk, who, to be sure, had never been quite at ease with him."⁹⁷ Health and age forced him to curtail his performances in the 1850s and 60s, and, although he continued to draw loyal audiences (often in comparatively obscure theatrical outposts), his time had passed. As happens with every generation's ideal actors, Forrest became too old to carry the torch. His performance style appeared increasingly quaint, and his performances began to assume the quality of a nostalgic museum piece. Macready immediately fled to England, never to return to America. He retired from the stage less than two years later.

Blame for the riot was freely assigned to both Macready and Forrest, but much of the criticism was directed at the partisan press for rousing the public: "that intense snobbishness, which refuses to recognize any merit in an American artist because he is an American, and adulates trans-Atlantic talent because it is trans-Atlantic; or that counter-balancing sentiment which patriotically lauds American talent because it is American."⁹⁸ The Mayor's mishandling of the police and military was also vehemently blamed: "[B]y their [the city authorities'] imprudence, imbecility, and want of courage, and innate contempt for those whom they are pleased to call the

the days immediately following the riot because of fear of further violence. A May 11th performance of *Much Ado About Nothing* at the Walnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia – unintentionally ironic – may have been the extent of the theatrical response.

⁹⁷ Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage*, 85.

⁹⁸ *Daily Evening Traveller* (Boston), 21 November 1856.

‘lower classes,’ they have disgraced the city that honored them, and written at least one page of its history with the blood of innocence.”⁹⁹ But many felt the actions of the military justified and supported the Mayor’s resolve: “THE PEACE OF THE CITY MUST AND SHALL BE MAINTAINED.”¹⁰⁰ Potential riots in the following days were effectively squelched.

Newspapers somewhat disingenuously evinced shock and surprise that the riot reflected a previously unknown class prejudice: “There is a bitterness and rancor remaining behind,... a feeling that there is now in our country, in New York City, what every good patriot hitherto has considered its duty to deny – a *high* and a *low* class.”¹⁰¹ This notice did not, in fact, claim that Americans were unaware of class separation, but rather that they had refused to acknowledge it. The petty quarrel between two actors took a back seat to the “new” awareness of social inequality: “[T]he ‘White and Red Roses of York and Lancaster’ were never more distinctly divided into antagonistic parties, than the ‘B’hoys’ of New York and the ‘Upper Ten’... Macready’s real offence, in the eyes of those who drove him from the stage, is in being rather rancidly superfine in his personal manners, and in being dined out continually by the uptowners.”¹⁰² However, the public dialogue on issues surrounding the social and political disparity of power caused by economic inequality did not

⁹⁹ *Rejoinder to ‘The Replies,’* 3.

¹⁰⁰ Mayor’s proclamation, 11 May 1849, reprinted in Moody, *Astor Place Riot*, 185.

¹⁰¹ *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia), 14 May 1849. Given that American newspapers had spoken in the language of class since the Revolution, their sudden “revelation” of class tensions appeared questionable.

¹⁰² *Home Journal*, 12 May 1849.

continue in any significant forum. Ultimately, class concerns were joined by the sectional tensions leading up to the Civil War, distracting and dividing the nation's thoughts.¹⁰³

Conclusion

The real-life drama of Astor Place echoed back to the nation's first play, Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* (1787), the first professionally produced play written by an American. Written around the national tensions emerging from Shays' Rebellion (1786-1787), America's first drama presented the honest, independent, forthright American as a positive model compared to the aristocratic insincerity of the British.

The mistrust of the evils of European aristocracy and East coast intellectualism privileged native wisdom and encouraged a pride in the rejection of education: "I had never taken any degree, and did not own to any, except a small degree of good sense not to pass for what I was not."¹⁰⁴ The political benefits derived from the performance of rustic simplicity gradually diminished, but certainly didn't abate, as the problems facing the nation grew increasingly complex.

The Astor Place Riot was, in part, a war of masculinity, waged in the public sphere, in which the opponents employed markedly different tactics. The democratic battle plan of the working class – "an uncombed, heady, self-cultured mass of strength

¹⁰³ Class issues obviously did not disappear. The Draft Riots of 1863 – caused by northern resistance to draft laws passed to fill Union army shortages that clearly favored those with money – were fueled by class and race, as lower-class men targeted both the wealthy and African Americans, whom they blamed as the cause of the war.

¹⁰⁴ Cited in Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism*, 162. Quote by Davy Crockett, the Whig equivalent of the Jacksonian hero.

and energy” – encouraged by the republican press, relied on the previously reliable formula of deviant behavior and sovereign rule to enforce submission.¹⁰⁵ The elite, reflecting a changing code of honor and interpolating an alternate level of masculine authority, engaged in intellectual debate through the newspapers and employed the police and military as a surrogate masculine force, “the first precedent to set bounds to the sovereignty of the theatrical audience.”¹⁰⁶ Urban centers throughout the country employed professional police forces for the first time as part of a social responsibility to control unruly elements of the population.¹⁰⁷

The proper social behavior of a gentleman was now enforced legally, as well as socially. The working class who had previously used riots, “to flaunt their opposition to emerging Victorian norms of domesticity, moral character, and contractual economic relations,” were forced to find alternate, acceptable modes of expression.¹⁰⁸ Elites and the aspiring middle classes could now freely deplore the working class, not for political beliefs or economic issues but for social behavior. The problem became, not what a man thought, but how he chose to express himself. This perspective allowed the elite and middle class the appearance of democracy, addressing issues of morality rather than class conflict, behavior rather than beliefs.

¹⁰⁵ “Mr. Forrest’s Second Reception in England,” *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* 16 (April 1845): 385.

¹⁰⁶ Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 68.

¹⁰⁷ Roger Lane, *Policing the City: Boston, 1822-1885* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967); James Richardson, *The New York Police: Colonial Times to 1901* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). New York City’s police force was professionalized in 1845.

¹⁰⁸ McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 155.

The urban working class had assumed coexisting (and equally viable) models of masculinity, priding themselves on a coarser performance of manhood completely separate from the middle class' aspirations of decorum. The violence of the Astor Place Riot encouraged the upper class to enforce a single, genteel image of masculinity. The riot served as a warning of harsh patriarchal discipline – the ruling class curbing the inappropriate, adolescent behavior of the Bowery toughs – and establishing specific boundaries of acceptable behavior: “To suppose that, because a man has paid a dollar at the door, he is therefore entitled to annoy and alarm his fellow visitors, to put a stop to the performance, destroy the furniture and endanger the limbs of the performers, is to evince an intensity of stupidity and ruffianism which even ‘Mose’ should be ashamed of.”¹⁰⁹

The Astor Place Riot, as a melodramatic showdown, ultimately reflected a separation of physical and intellectual masculinities. Melodrama typically serves to enforce the extant social order – there may be a moral reform message, but in the end it affirms the values society already prizes (fidelity, temperance, etc.). The surprise twist on this melodrama was that it affirmed what society already knew – but not in a good way. There was no catharsis or pat resolution. Instead, it exposed the tyranny of the melodramatic form in its demand that all audiences conform or be forever excluded. *The Gladiator* works on stage, not on the street. Forrest's democratic dramas were fueled by a martyred, selfless, intellectual leader (Spartacus, Metamora,

¹⁰⁹ *New York Tribune*, 9 May 1849. This condemnation of working-class behavior appeared in response to Macready's first interrupted performance at Astor Place.

Cade). The Astor Place Riot privileged physical destruction over the high ideals that inspired it.

This contrast in masculine expression between the reserved introspection of the middle class and the overt physicality of the working class was reflected in the actions of the Astor Place Riot figureheads. Macready kept a diary that detailed his career and thoughts on the profession, while Forrest's thoughts were publicly pronounced: "The different vehicles generally chosen for expressing their feelings – the public press and the private diary – gave clues to the personalities of the combatants."¹¹⁰ Although publicly stoic, Macready privately was introspective and remarkably self-critical. Macready's self-awareness provides helpful insight into his character, baring his thoughts and fears.

Forrest did not have (and perhaps felt he did not need) that emotional outlet: "He took his stand, announced it publicly, and drove toward a showdown on whatever course seemed clearest, quickest, and surest. He was incapable of burying his anxieties in the pages of a diary as Macready did."¹¹¹ With Forrest, aside from a handful of letters, we only have the bluster of his public persona and his complete confidence in himself as a model of masculinity: "Forrest, in his own mind, had assumed the grandeur of the characters he portrayed and his 'inspired life,' like that of Hamlet or Macbeth, was to be one of humankind's great heritages."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 69.

¹¹¹ Moody, *Edwin Forrest*, 214.

¹¹² Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 70.

Forrest encouraged an acting duel of sorts, adjusting his schedule and repertory to match Macready's, thus forcing competition and comparison – as close to a personal, physical confrontation as practical in the theatrical world. Forrest engaged the darling of the elite (and many critics) in mortal combat – above all, perhaps, placing himself in the spotlight, blustering and flexing his muscles against the perceived abuses of aristocratic foes. Forrest's defensive behavior made the actor rivalry a matter of class and nationality, but also through his self-praise and stigmatization of Macready as an arrogant, effete, and aristocratic "other," Forrest threw down the heavy gauntlet of American masculinity. Yet by 1849, the strong, independent, and anti-intellectual masculinity of Forrest was not a viable solution to the increasingly complex problems and issues facing the nation.

Edwin Booth would provide, if not a conclusion, at least a possible compromise. Booth was an American with more passion than Macready, but he possessed the control that Forrest lacked. Performing before a comparatively tame and passive audience, Booth exuded an inner intensity, reflecting a storm of suppressed passions, and a cerebral gentility. As the urban working class was largely banished from the "legitimate" theatre to the thrills of minstrelsy and variety entertainment, the image-conscious middle class would find sympathy with Booth.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Sanctified by the American bourgeoisie:” The Genteel Manliness of Edwin Booth¹

The December 1863 issue of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* told the story of the “Easy Chair” editor escorting a rustic friend to performances of Forrest at Niblo’s Garden and Booth at the Winter Garden on a single evening. They stopped first at Niblo’s:

It was crammed with people!... And yet it was the thirty or forty something night of the engagement... And people are grandfathers now who used to see him play in their youths... [I]t delights in the representation, and shouts at it, and cries for more, and hastens and squeezes the next night to enjoy it all over again... And it has a palpable physical effect. There were a great many young women around us crying in the tender passages... They were not refined nor intellectual women. They were, perhaps, rather coarse. But they cried good hearty tears... The popular enjoyment arising from this acting is undeniable.²

They then walked into the Winter Garden where Booth was playing Iago:

The difference of the spectacle was striking. The house was comfortably full, not crowded. The air of the audience was that of refined attention rather than of eager interest. Plainly it was a more cultivated and intellectual audience... Yet there was a certain chilliness in the audience which must have affected the actor. It was the attitude of an audience appreciative and expectant of fine points, but not irresistibly swept away.³

¹ Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 239.

² Geroge William Curtis, “Editor’s Easy Chair,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* 28 (December 1863): 132-33. Few other contemporaries comment on an appreciable number of women in Forrest’s audience, although by 1863 it is not inconceivable that there were factory girls like Mose’s companion, “Lize.” Curtis’ experience at Niblo’s (and on all three legs of his journey) was likely exaggerated to give the impression that Forrest enjoyed a broader base of appeal than merely working-class men.

³ *Ibid.*, 133.

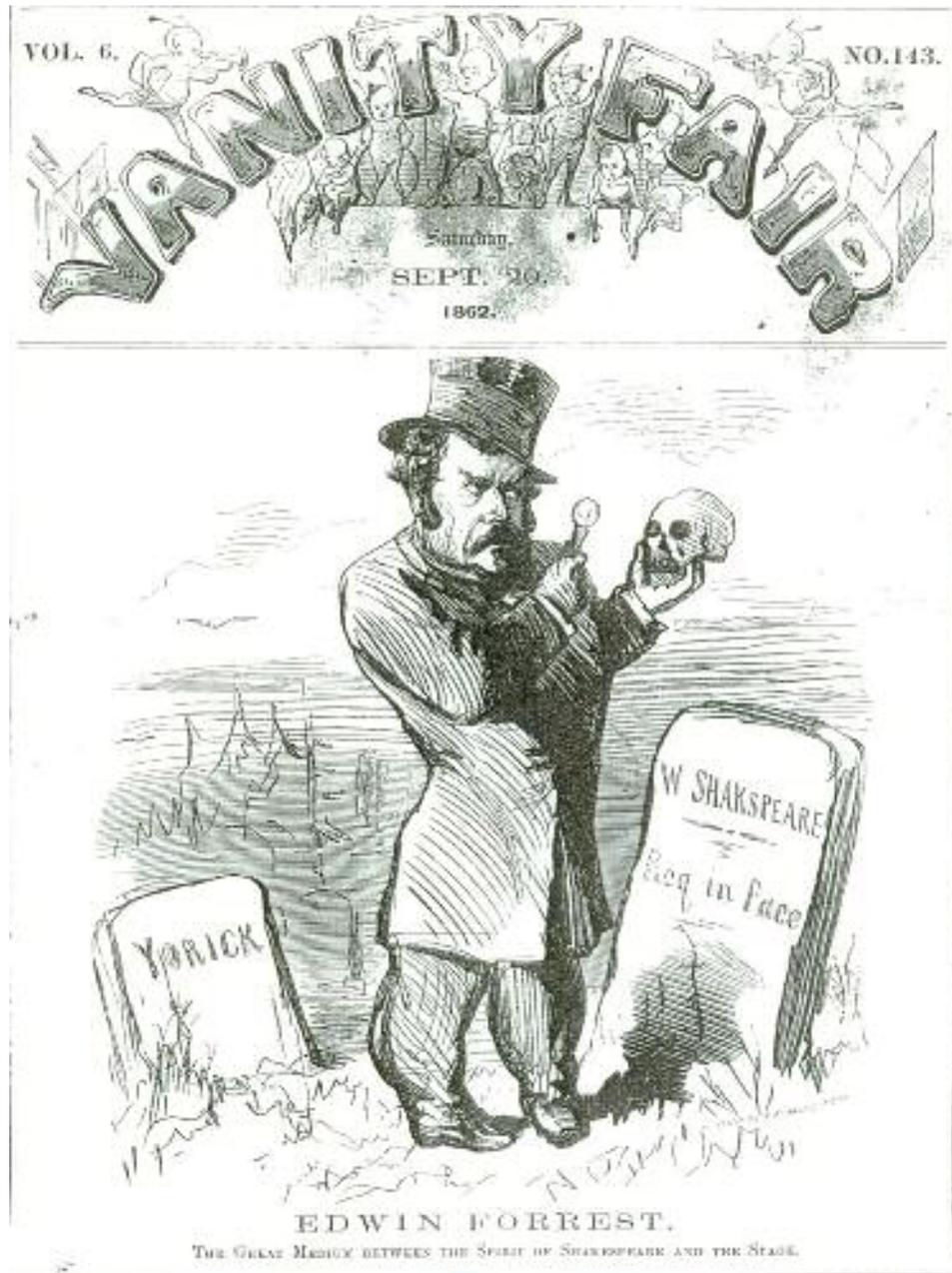


Fig. 38. Cartoon of Edwin Forrest as Hamlet. This and the following image (Fig. 39), showing stark contrasts in Forrest and Booth as well as interpretations of Hamlet, graced the covers of *Vanity Fair* only six weeks apart. Forrest is presented as a conservative, forbidding presence, whose bulging calves are still visible.

The editor appeared to regret the loss of unfettered audience response to Forrest, a natural expression of emotional abandon that for all appearances might well die with that great tragedian. He suggested that the audience aesthetic was shifting from active engagement to thoughtful watchfulness and emotional detachment.

In the first leg of this three-pronged journey that the *Harper's* narrator chronicled, they “squeezed into the mass of men” at a Union ratification meeting at the Cooper Institute, where they listened to a speech by General John Cochrane that was “greeted with hearty cheers.” The fictional visitors admired the cheering, democratic throng: “This before us was the government of the country.” The editor wrote of the great (uniquely American) power of public speech: “It is by talk, by argument, by comparison, by enlightenment, by every means incessantly brought to bear upon public opinion, that we are governed.” As the pair left the Cooper Institute, the editor’s rustic friend concluded: “Statesmanship in modern nations consists in the sagacity with which the national desire is apprehended by official leaders... Mr. Lincoln is the most successful and excellent of Presidents, because he has an instinctive perception, not of the whims and gusts of the rabble, but of the honest national desire.”⁴

Albert Furtwangler notes that most writers who look at this essay ignore the first leg of the editor’s journey: “Taken as a whole, this essay celebrates old-fashioned Edwin Forrest tragedy as a wonderful American institution. It is allied on one side with the vigorous Lincoln-style democracy that hungers after crowded rooms and

⁴ Ibid. The entire trip was, of course, fictitious, which perhaps explains the fine articulation of the editor’s “rustic friend.”

forceful debaters. It is contrasted on the other side with a drama so purified that it leaves a chill in the air.”⁵ Yet Furtwangler’s comment overlooks the influence of the powerful middle class, and by 1860, while passionate oratorical pyrotechnics remained a component of political persuasion (just as theatrical rant was an inescapable part of the playhouse), appeals to intellect and sentiment ultimately were more effective.

Changing Audiences: The Feminization of the American Stage

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the composition and decorum of middle-class audiences was undergoing a transformation: “theatrical taste was turning toward elegance; audiences were being described as ‘cultivated,’ ‘critical,’ ‘wealthy,’ ‘intellectual’; women were attending plays in increasing numbers; decorum and delicacy, moderation and refinement were coming to be prized above brute strength.”⁶ Within this changing audience dynamic, Forrest’s demeanor and muscular style was ill-suited to the restrained gentility and delicate sensibility of the image-conscious middle class: “He may have drawn many a responsive cheer from man, but has never

⁵ Albert Furtwangler, *Assassin on Stage: Brutus, Hamlet, and the Death of Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), 53-54. Furtwangler’s identification of the democratic fervor of the Union rally as “Lincoln-style” is a bit puzzling and misleading. Even harking back to the impassioned Lincoln-Douglas debates of the previous decade, Lincoln’s oratorical manner was based on homespun eloquence and compelling argument rather than crowd-pleasing bombast. The “Easy Chair” editor’s reference to Lincoln actually suggested the president’s power to synthesize and interpret all of the debate in order to understand the country’s wishes.

⁶ Charles H. Shattuck, *The Hamlet of Edwin Booth* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 13.

drawn a sympathetic tear from woman.”⁷ This critic suggested perhaps the biggest reason for Forrest’s inability to build on his audience base – his failure emotionally to connect with refined women, the arbiters of middle-class taste. Ultimately, this deficiency diminished the potential range of Forrest’s audience, limited the scope of his social and theatrical success, and placed severe limitations on his viability as a masculine model across class boundaries by the middle of the nineteenth century.

The role of women in shaping the genteel behavior of the middle classes dramatically increased, as “a genuine redemptive mission in their society: to propagate the potentially matriarchal virtues of nurture, generosity, and acceptance; to create the ‘culture of the feelings.’”⁸ Women held an important role as representatives and enforcers of a code of behavior built upon refinement, respectability, and self-restraint: “audiences were to approach the masters and their works with proper respect and proper seriousness, for aesthetic and spiritual elevation rather than mere entertainment was the goal.”⁹

Other than the upper-class theatres of the early Republic, respectable women were infrequently seen in the theatres of the early nineteenth century; but, by the 1850s, an increasing number of theatres began to cater to women as a new and enormously lucrative potential market:

⁷ *New York Tribune*, 30 March 1855.

⁸ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 10.

⁹ Lawrence W. Levine, *Howbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 146.

It is the desire of the Manager to establish a Series of Elegant FAMILY MATINEES,... such as those which have obtained immense popularity in Boston... It may be well to add that respectable ladies may, with the greatest propriety, should they desire, attend these entertainments without escort, as they are devised mainly for their patronage and amusement.¹⁰

In the age of melodrama, theatre managers began to champion the social benefits of the drama: “The public are becoming too enlightened to longer listen to the old stories of the demoralizing effects of public amusement, as the body requires medicine, so does the mind require recreation... Philadelphia has long felt the need of...an establishment...where patrons could bring their children without the fear of corrupting in any way the morals of the young – a place of family resort.”¹¹

Theatres welcomed female audiences, ensuring the safety of the family in both dramatic fare and atmosphere:

To render the Arch St. Theatre in every way worthy a liberal support, the Third Tier Nuisance [prostitution] will be abolished; improper characters will be prevented from obtaining admission to any part of the house; and the sale of alcohol, in any shape, will be discontinued in the saloons. In sacrificing the large profits attending these usual practices of all other theatres, now attempted for the first time in the United States, [Manager] W.E. Burton looks for a compensation in the more frequent attendance of families, who may depend upon experiencing at the Arch St. Theatre a wholesome entertainment of the highest character, without the possibility of witnessing an impropriety either on or off the stage.¹²

¹⁰ “Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills,” vol. 12, Library Company of Philadelphia, 80. This announcement appeared for the Chestnut Street Theatre on 20 February 1864. Note that Boston was seen as the epitome of taste and refinement.

¹¹ *Sanford’s Serenader*, November 1856, in “Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills,” vol. 24, 128. The *Serenader* was an advertisement flyer for Sanford’s Opera House, specializing in family minstrel entertainment.

¹² Reprinted in Arthur Herman Wilson, *A History of the Philadelphia Theatre, 1835 to 1855*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1935), 26. Manager W.E. Burton (discussed in Chapter Three) announced the opening of the Arch Street Theatre in Philadelphia in June 1844.

Theatres advertised comforts that would attract the refined – including early attempts at air conditioning, insuring, “THE COOLEST AND MOST COMFORTABLE THEATRE IN AMERICA!”¹³ Notices like this one for the Chestnut Street Theatre in Philadelphia appeared throughout the country, featuring bills (often moral melodramas) that promised to educate and ennoble the entire family. Theatre managers made efforts to make the theatres and the dramatic repertory sound as safe and non-intimidating as possible: “So smooth, indeed, is the language, so natural and appropriate, that like a perfect toilette [sic], it attracts no especial attention. By an afterthought only you recognize its beauty.”¹⁴

American melodrama began to change gender roles radically: “In striking contrast to the virile male heroes favored in the 1830s, sensation melodrama often featured vigorous heroines opposite passive and conflicted male leads.”¹⁵ Such an advertisement would keep Forrest’s audience far away, and indeed, they were not *welcome*: “It is particularly requested, on behalf of the Ladies, that all whistling, shouting and unnecessary noise, will be avoided.”¹⁶ The emphasis on placidity,

¹³ “Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills,” vol. 12, 124. Chestnut Street Theatre – March 24, 1864.

¹⁴ “Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills,” vol. 12, 88. Chestnut Street Theatre – March 7, 1864. The misprinted word is almost certainly toilette.

¹⁵ Butsch, *Making of American Audiences*, 77. Augustine Daly’s *Under the Gaslight* (1867) provides the quintessential example of the brave heroine saving the helpless man tied to the railroad tracks.

¹⁶ *Sanford’s Serenader*, November 1856, in “Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills,” vol. 24, 128.

comfort, and refinement in the “legitimate” theatre suggested a major redefinition of the rules of the playhouse as a public space.

The physical configuration of the auditorium was transformed to reflect new social priorities and the shift in audience control from working-class men to middle-class families:

Even the New Bowery, strange as it may seem, is going to surrender to the demand for change... the shirt-sleeved and peanut pocketed Democracy are to be removed to the upper tiers... Respectability wants room – wants to take its wife and daughter to the play – and Shilling Democracy must give way.¹⁷

This triumph of the bourgeois, banishing boisterous men to the upper reaches of the theatre, placed the audience power in the women-friendly, family-dominated parquet: “Where the noisy crowd of men were massed, upon hard, backless benches, there is the luminous cloud of lovely toilets mingled with the darker dress of the *jeunesse doree*.”¹⁸

For the middle-class male audience, theatre was presented as an appropriate diversion from the worries of the marketplace: “If troubles occupy the head and pain the heart, the next best thing to getting rid of them is to forget them, and there is no place of resort better calculated to abstract a man from himself, and relieve his troubled brain.”¹⁹ The theatre was a haven where the genteel man and his family could safely and emotionally respond to dramas that, “evoked from DENSELY CROWDED AND INTELLIGENT AUDIENCES Manifestations of Hearty Sympathy

¹⁷ “Theater and Things Theatrical,” *Spirit of the Times*, 26 October 1861.

¹⁸ “Editor’s Easy Chair,” *Harper’s Monthly*, March 1870, 605.

¹⁹ Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills,” vol. 24, 91. Barnum’s Museum, Philadelphia – September 9, 1851.

never before known in a Theatre... Tears of Unfeigned Sorrow and AUDIBLE SOBS of Grief, Not only from ladies and children but from the sterner sex.”²⁰

The changing atmosphere of the playhouse and announcements about no shouting, etc., also meant that the men were expected to change their behavior – even middle-class men, who, perhaps were not above this kind of conduct when there were no ladies present. In the theatre, the middle-class man had more freedom of expression before women invaded the house. It was certainly a place he could go and drink, and see (if not hire) a prostitute. The “legitimate” stage was no longer under a predominantly masculine purview. The feminization of the theatre limited the power and transformed the behavior of middle-class men: “What mild creatures we are when sitting at a play! how shy we are of showing our delight when delighted and with what pitiful patience we submit to the long-drawn-out stupidity of thin melodramas.”²¹

Middle-class men who had not bought into this cultural change rebelled by attending entertainments and venues largely associated with rough working-class spectators.²² By the 1860s, gentlemen’s magazines such as *Spirit of the Times*, which once devoted significant space to the theatre, shifted their entertainment focus to sports and adventure. It was not until the leg shows after the war, starting with *The Black Crook* (1866), that men enthusiastically embraced the theatre, although the

²⁰ “Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills,” vol. 22, 6. Walnut Street Theatre – February 4, 1864. The drama to which the playbill refers is *East Lynne*.

²¹ “Americans at the Theater,” *Every Saturday*, 18 May 1871.

²² Richard Stott, *Workers in the Metropolis: Class, Ethnicity and Youth in Ante-bellum New York City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 272-75. See also Elliot Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

“legitimate” stage (at which alcohol and prostitutes had been forever banned) remained a space demanding genteel, “feminized” behavior. Attending the theatre became a social responsibility and familial obligation - “the bore of attending dull or even good performances for the sole purpose of escorting their Mary Janes.”²³ Also, just as the problems of the coming Civil War overwhelmed the issues raised by the Astor Place Riot, it is possible that they temporarily obscured the need for men to see themselves reflected on stage. It may be that the theatre had become too politically volatile (as it had in the early Republic), and that men were turning to “neutral” entertainments in an age when every statement on stage could be “fighting words” open to misinterpretation.

As the American middle class became a dominant social, political, and economic force in the years before the Civil War, their values, expectations, and social roles were reflected in the restraint and moderation of Edwin Booth.²⁴ Booth eschewed Forrest’s violent excesses, exuding a thoughtful and quiet intensity. Forrest’s own forceful personality shone through every role he played – the role, merely a vehicle to highlight the strength and passions of the great actor, becoming secondary to the personality. If Forrest’s roles were a thin and flimsy garment that could never fully mask or contain the bigger-than-life personality beneath, the characters Booth embodied were enshrouded in a voluminous and heavy cloak that

²³ “Theaters and Things Theatrical,” *Spirit of the Times*, 27 October 1866.

²⁴ Booth achieved notable success on stage by the late 1850s, and his reputation as the great American actor was secured through his famous “Hundred Nights *Hamlet*,” which ran from November 26, 1864 to March 22, 1865 – three weeks before his brother would assassinate Lincoln.

made the personality of the actor unfathomable and ultimately inconsequential. And yet, while this anonymity should have made Booth the man disappear, his personal tragedies added layers of emotional depth to his stage portrayals, and the tragic nature of the characters he played enhanced the image of Booth's tortured mystique.

Booth the Man: "Darling of Misfortune"²⁵

Born near Bel Air, Maryland, Edwin Booth (1833-93) was the son of fiery British star Junius Brutus Booth and was named after the elder Booth's friend, Edwin Forrest.²⁶ Receiving little formal education, the young Edwin Booth served as companion and pseudo-guardian to his often drunk and mentally unstable father on theatrical tours. After a couple of largely unsuccessful, youthful forays onto the stage, his theatrical career truly began in California in 1852 where he had accompanied his father.²⁷ Booth served a challenging apprenticeship, playing a wide range of roles,

²⁵ Richard Lockridge, *Darling of Misfortune: Edwin Booth, 1833-1893* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1971).

²⁶ Booth's birthplace is sometimes spelled Belair.

²⁷ Booth actually acted with, and under the management of, Mrs. Catherine Sinclair, the former Mrs. Edwin Forrest, in California in the mid-1850s. The facts of Booth's early life and career are taken from the following sources: L. Terry Oggel, *Edwin Booth: A Bio-Bibliography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1992); Eleanor Ruggles, *Prince of Players: Edwin Booth* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1953); Edwin Milton Royle, *Edwin Booth as I Knew Him* (New York: Players, 1933); Richard Lockridge, *Darling of Misfortune: Edwin Booth, 1833-1893* (New York: Century, 1932); Katherine Goodale[Kitty Molony], *Behind the Scenes with Edwin Booth* (Boston: Houghton, 1931); Charles Townsend Copeland, *Edwin Booth* (Boston: Small, 1901); Edwina Booth Grossmann, *Edwin Booth: Recollections by his Daughter and Letters to Her and to his Friends* (New York: Century, 1894); Laurence Hutton, *Edwin Booth* (New York: Harper, 1893); William Winter, *The Life and Art of Edwin Booth* (New

large and small; receiving little pay; and touring a variety of remote outposts in the American West, as well as Hawaii and Australia. Junius Brutus left his son to make his own way in California in 1852 but died on his return trip East. Booth tortured himself with guilt for “abandoning” his father.²⁸

Booth’s twenties were marked by profligate behavior – drunkenness, gambling, womanizing, and general irresponsibility – that was moderated (with fairly frequent lapses) by his marriage to Mary Devlin in 1860 (who gave birth to a daughter, Edwina, in 1861) and permanently banished by her death in 1863: “[T]he hell within me is intense! My self-reproaches will never cease. [M]y conduct hastened her death; when she heard that I – her all – was lost to all sense of decency and respect for her – her feeble spirit sank.”²⁹ Booth had been performing (often drunk) in New York, as Mary lay dying in Boston, and blamed himself for her death.

Booth was received enthusiastically in Boston in 1857 (although New York initially received him coolly), his national reputation was assured by 1860, and he toured England with moderate success in 1861: “From London he proceeded to Liverpool and Manchester; but he did not win favor in either of those cities. The great war was beginning to darken over the American Republic, and a lively dislike for

York: Macmillan, 1893); Asia Booth Clarke, *The Elder and the Younger Booth* (Boston: Osgood, 1882).

²⁸ The elder Booth encouraged his son to establish an independent theatrical identity, and the decision to part was mutual. But Edwin Booth still considered himself responsible for his father’s death, because he failed to accompany him.

²⁹ Quoted in Oggel, *Edwin Booth*, 16.



Fig. 40. Edwin Booth at 33 (1860). Booth's soft, almost feminine appearance provides a sharp contrast to images of Forrest (Figs. 10 and 13).

‘Yankees’ was prevalent in those ship-building and cotton-spinning capitals.”³⁰ At the Winter Garden Theatre in New York (1864-65), Booth solidified his reputation as the nation’s greatest actor by performing his unprecedented one-hundred-night run of *Hamlet*. Three weeks after the close of this theatrical triumph, his younger brother John Wilkes assassinated Lincoln. Booth removed himself from the stage for nearly a year (and dissolved his engagement to Blanche Hanel) but returned as Hamlet at the Winter Garden in 1866 to nearly universal approval.³¹

The Winter Garden burned to the ground in 1867, destroying Booth’s personal stock of properties, costumes, and scenery. He immediately made plans for Booth’s Theatre, opening in 1869, a building of sophisticated Victorian design, lavish audience comforts, and revolutionary stage technology. Booth managed the theatre until 1874, when he filed for bankruptcy because of mismanagement (his own and others) and a bad economy. But the theatre’s spectacularly mounted productions were critical and popular successes, focused primarily on finely detailed, “historical” recreations of Shakespeare.³²

³⁰ William Winter, *Edwin Booth in Twelve Dramatic Characters* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1872), 23. For Boston audience and critical response to Booth’s *Hamlet*, see Shattuck, *Hamlet of Edwin Booth*, 10-13. When Booth performed *Richard III* in New York in 1857 most critics called his performance a pale imitation of his father’s, although the *New York Tribune* credited him with, “a vigorous truthfulness which startles his audience into wild enthusiasm” [15 May 1857]. This description would appear to put Edwin’s performance in the same category as his father and even bears similarity to descriptions of Forrest.

³¹ Booth’s eagerness to remarry was likely prompted by a need for a mother to his infant daughter.

³² The technical innovations of Booth’s theatre are described in O.B. Bunce, “Behind, Below, and Above the Scenes,” in *Appleton’s Journal* 3 (28 May 1870): 589-94.

In his later career he acted with Henry Irving, Ellen Terry, and Tommaso Salvini. With Lawrence Barrett, he also embarked on several very profitable, popular, and critically acclaimed tours, often considered the pinnacle of American Shakespearean acting in the nineteenth century.³³ He published two sets of acting versions of various Shakespearean plays (the first in the late 1860s with actor Henry Hinton, the second with critic William Winter in the late 1870s) similar to those published by Charles Kean and Henry Irving, although neither set sold terribly well.³⁴ In 1888, Booth founded and funded The Players (patterned after London's Garrick Club) – designed to elevate the social position of actors – to which he donated many of his stage possessions and his personal library and at which he resided until his death in 1893.

As Forrest's story was invariably filtered through the paradigm of the self-made man, Booth's could only be understood as one shaped by tragedy, reflecting the changing taste of an audience that no longer wanted someone who had pulled himself up by his bootstraps out of poverty and poor education, but a man who had overcome the most tragic loss that could face a middle-class man – the loss of family.³⁵ Booth

Shattuck reprinted designer Charles Witham's watercolors [*Hamlet of Edwin Booth*, Plates 4-10, 12-15] from a souvenir promptbook currently in the Harvard Theatre Collection.

³³ Shattuck details all of the Booth-Barrett tours and discusses their popularity and influence. *Shakespeare on the American Stage*, vol. 2, *From Booth and Barrett to Sothorn and Marlowe* (Washington: Folger Books, 1987), 31-53.

³⁴ Booth's detailed correspondence with Winter about the promptbooks is reprinted in *Between Actor and Critic: Selected Letters of Edwin Booth and William Winter*, ed. Daniel J. Watermeier (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 84-131.

felt guilt and personal responsibility for the deaths of his father and first wife. The same year that he opened his theatre, Booth married Mary McVicker, who gave birth to a son in 1870, and after the baby's death she gradually descended into madness and died in 1881. A carriage accident in 1875 severely and permanently injured his left arm and hand. In 1879, an insane Mark Gray shot at Booth while he was performing *Richard II* in Chicago. The burning of the Winter Garden and the financial ruin that accompanied Booth's theatre impeded his professional advancement. Looming above this entire catalog of disasters, of course, was the stigma attached to his name by the assassination of Lincoln.

Booth the Actor: "Nature's sweet interpreter"³⁶

Of average height (5'7") and slight build, Booth was frequently described as handsome, pale, delicate, refined, and intellectual: "with broad shoulders, slender hips, and comely tapering limbs, all supple, and knit together with harmonious grace."³⁷ Not suited for roles of great stature or overpowering presence, his abilities were physically and emotionally tailored to roles of emotional complexity and seething, repressed feeling: "softened and strengthened by the repose of logical thought, and interfused with that serene spirit which lifts the man of feeling so far above the child

³⁵ I will discuss the relationship between Booth's personal tragedies and his career (especially in the role of Hamlet), later in the chapter.

³⁶ E.C. Stedman, "Edwin Booth," *Atlantic Monthly* 17 (May 1866): 593.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 587.

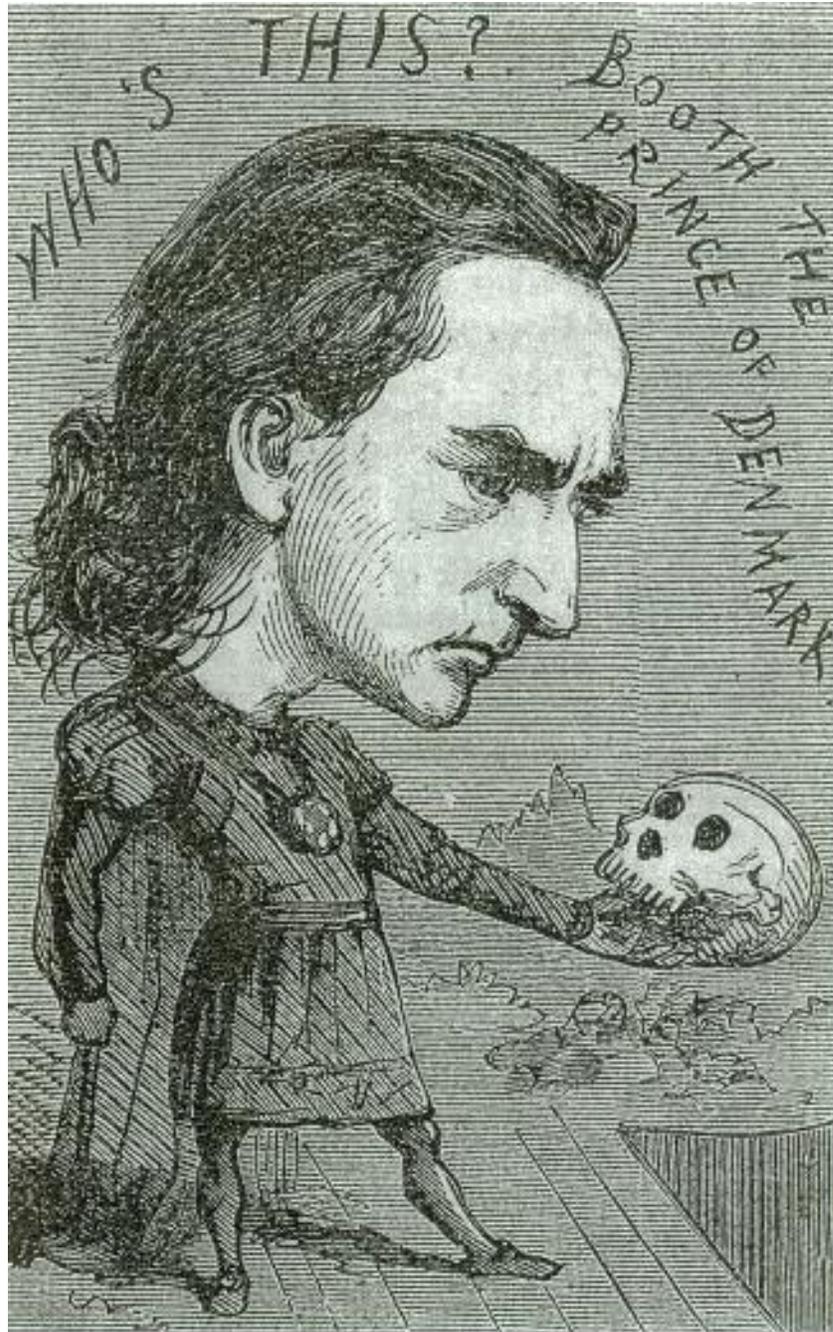


Fig. 41. Cartoon of Edwin Booth as Hamlet, exaggerating a brooding intellectualism.

of passions unrestrained.”³⁸ Booth’s admirers praised the moral superiority of his masculine self-control and derided the weakness of unchecked emotion (even on stage) as unmanly.

Booth’s audience recognized in him a compelling, mysterious spiritual component: “[I]t was felt that in the soul of Booth’s acting there was spontaneous passion, imaginative power, – the nameless beauty which thrills, entices, and enables, and which is the inseparable attribute of inspiration.”³⁹ Audiences also perceived in Booth a profound spirituality: “that mood of poetic exaltation, pensive melancholy, and exquisite refinement for which his acting... has long been distinguished, and in that tone of settled spiritual pain – that atmosphere of profound, inexorable grief.”⁴⁰

Booth’s suffering also connected to the culture of mourning propagated by the middle class:

By the mid-nineteenth century, death had come to preoccupy sentimentalists, who cherished it as the occasion for two of the deepest ‘right feelings’ in human experience: bereavement, or direct mourning for the dead, and sympathy, or mournful condolence for the bereaved. Within the sentimental cult of mourning, bereavement and sympathy were regarded as visible signs of a mourner’s Christian piety, social benevolence, and sincere sensibility. Mourning, the natural human response to the greatest human affliction, was held sacred by sentimentalists as the purest, the most transparent, and thus the most genteel of all sentiments. In mourning, a middle-class man or woman was believed to establish very clearly the legitimacy of his or her claims to genteel social status.⁴¹

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Winter, *Life and Art of Edwin Booth*, 20. Much of the language used to detail Booth’s acting is similar to descriptions of Forrest, although the passion of Booth (even though “spontaneous”) was seen as more delicate and emotionally deeper.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 129.

Booth's tragedies not only qualified him for bourgeois gentility, but also elevated his admirers by association.

Booth's acting was remarkable for its subtlety and minute attention to detail: "There is no ear-splitting violence. He has the magnetic, sympathizing quality in his tones. They charm you, without telling you the secret of their charm. This quality is the gift of nature. No art can catch it."⁴² Booth, in what might be termed "heightened reality," gave dramatic characters the appearance of truthful and natural human behavior. The "natural" quality that Booth sought in his performance in no way attempted the copy of actual life ("cold, debasing realism") that became the goal of actors toward the end of the century (and his career); rather, he focused on carefully interpreting and elevating what was natural ("the poetry of the stage") through a close critical and artistic control over his (and his character's) emotions.⁴³

Burlesques of the principal actors of the day were common and extremely popular, but there seemed little interest in burlesquing Booth and few attempts. George L. Fox's popular burlesque of *Hamlet*, which Booth watched and quite enjoyed, focused more on exaggerating production choices than on Booth's

⁴¹ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in American, 1830-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 124. See also Mary Louise Kete, *Sentimental Collaborations: Mourning and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century America* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁴² *The Traveller* (Boston), 2 May 1857.

⁴³ Adam Badeau, *Sunday Times* (New York), 14 June 1858. Badeau's essay on the rebirth of tragedy suggested that Booth was going to elevate the serious drama from the "modern and real" to "a higher sphere of art."

performance in the role.⁴⁴ Nat Goodwin, “king of burlesque imitators,” spoke of his refusal to attempt a copy of Booth’s acting:

[W]hat’s there to hang a caricature on? His art’s rounded like a ball. He has no rough knobs sticking out for pegs. In caricature we exaggerate mannerisms. You can’t be funny by exaggerating something that is not in the first place a little overdone by the one you burlesque... No, I won’t tackle Booth! I couldn’t be funny caricaturing perfection.⁴⁵

Booth’s Hamlet: “a nineteenth-century gentleman”⁴⁶

Mr. Booth’s Hamlet... met a new tradition of culture with the trademarks of culture. It suppressed passion and elaborated sentiment... [I]t marked an advance in matters of art in the direction of refinement.⁴⁷

Booth’s productions of *Hamlet* in the 1860s and 1870s, with their lavish attention to historical detail, were the perfect marriage of actor, role, and spectator: “It was a genuine feast of reason, of beauty, of fashion, and of histrionic intelligence and splendor, both as regards actors, scenery, and audience.”⁴⁸ Booth’s performance was consistently praised as “dignified, courteous, meditative, and deeply sympathetic,

⁴⁴ Booth’s daughter, Edwina, recalled that Booth thoroughly enjoyed Fox’s burlesque of Hamlet, “laughing himself to tears” [Edwina Booth Grossman, *Edwin Booth: Recollections by his Daughter* (New York: Century, 1894), 15]. For the most thorough examination of Fox’s career, see Laurence Senelick, *The Age and Stage of George L. Fox, 1825-1877* (Hanover, NH: Tufts University by University Press of New England, 1988).

⁴⁵ Goodale, *Behind the Scenes*, 75.

⁴⁶ *New York World*, 9 June 1893.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *New York Herald*, 6 January 1870.



Fig. 41. Cartoon of Edwin Booth as Hamlet.

...the manner...was always princely; grave, deliberate, and delicately apt.”⁴⁹

Middle-class audiences recognized a reflection of the masculine complexity of the mid-nineteenth century in Booth’s conception of Hamlet:

Melancholy without gloom, contemplative yet without misanthropy, philosophical yet enjoying playfulness in social converse, a man by himself yet with ardent feelings of friendship, a thorough knower of human nature, Hamlet stands as the type of all that is firm, dignified, gentlemanly and to be respected in a man.⁵⁰

Hamlet’s thoughtful melancholy and restrained behavior, filtered through Booth, appealed to the image-conscious, middle-class male: “[Hamlet was] the most accomplished gentleman ever drawn...; a gentleman by heart, no less, – full of kindly good-fellowship, brooking no titles with his friends, loving goodness and truth, impatient of fools, scorning affectation; moreover, the glass of fashion and the mould of form, the modern ideal of manly beauty.”⁵¹ While a brooding Hamlet incapable of taking decisive action may seem an unlikely template for masculine behavior, Booth’s understated performance made the character vital and accessible, and middle-class audiences responded to Hamlet’s noble perseverance in the face of tragedy – “the beau ideal of the sweet, the graceful, the gentlemanly.”⁵²

⁴⁹ John Rankin Towse, *Sixty Years of the Theatre* (New York: Funk and Wagnall, 1916), 183.

⁵⁰ Ferdinand C. Ewer, *Daily Placer Times and Transcript* (San Francisco), 29 April 1853. Ewer was a passionate supporter of Booth’s early acting attempts in California. His comments on the nineteen-year-old Booth were likely a perception (or hope) of what the role and performance could become. Ewer anticipated and articulated the middle-class perceptions of ideal manhood.

⁵¹ E.C. Stedman, 588.

⁵² *The Transcript* (Boston), 28 April 1857.

It is impossible fully to comprehend the appeal of Booth's Hamlet without understanding the ways in which his viewing public equated Booth's portrayal of the tortured soul of Hamlet with the tragedies that surrounded the man himself. As one essay in the *New York Tribune* observed:

His [Booth's] Hamlet possesses the indescribable poetic element which fascinates... The heart has been broken by grief. The mind has been disordered by a terrible shock. The soul – so predisposed to brooding upon the hollowness of this fragile life and the darkness of futurity... – is full of vast, fantastic shapes, and is swayed by all strange forces of the unknown world. The condition is princely, the manner exalted, the humor full of tears, the thought weighed down with a wide but undecipherable sense of the mysteries of the universe, and the power of action completely despoiled. This is Shakespeare's Hamlet, and this is the nature that Mr. Booth reveals... This he lives brilliantly, too, knowing that sorrow, howsoever powerful in the element of oppression, cannot fascinate. The Hamlet that is merely sorrowful, though he might arouse pity, would never inspire affection. It is the personality beneath the anguish that makes the anguish so stately, so awful, and so majestic. By itself, the infinite grief of Hamlet would overwhelm with the monotony of gray despair; but, since the nature that shines through it is invested with the mysterious and fascinating glamour of beauty in ruin, the grief becomes an active pathos, and the sufferer is loved as well as pitied.⁵³

While this critic ostensibly addressed the character of Hamlet and Booth's acting of it, this conception of the role was uniquely revealed in Booth's performance. The critic also suggested that Booth truly embodied the part and gracefully bore the melancholy tragedy of his own life. I argue that the middle-class perception of both the professional and the personal Booth, whose emotional sensitivity and personal tragedies were well-publicized, helped to assuage the anxieties of middle-class men. The anguished "beauty in ruin" that Booth enacted and experienced also applied an emotional salve for a nation torn by indecision and insecurity both before and after the Civil War: "The burden of making a noble response to a corrupting crime is of course

⁵³ *New York Daily Tribune*, 21 November 1876.

the heart of *Hamlet*. When Booth arrived in town to perform in *Hamlet* he might well have called up deep resonances out of his own life and the nation's."⁵⁴

In a brief biographical article in *Harper's Weekly* days after his return to the stage in 1866, neither his brother (John Wilkes) nor Lincoln are mentioned directly, but the sketch concludes with a call for understanding: "Mr. Booth's position before the public at this time is one which elicits our most cordial sympathy. Within the past year he has suffered with us all in a common grief, but he has also had, in connection with the very occasion of that grief, a private sorrow which ought to be sacred to us all."⁵⁵

One Booth biographer even suggested that Booth augmented the appearance of his suffering in order to encourage his identification with the character: "When he [Booth] found out fully what the audience expected, he was showman enough to supply by art such slight cementing as nature required to make its façade perfect."⁵⁶

In fact, some descriptions of the horrors facing Hamlet bore striking resemblance to both Booth's personal tragedies and the struggle of the nation (and the men comprising it) around the Civil War: "Upon this noblest youth – so far in advance of his rude and turbulent time – throw a horror that no philosophy, birth, nor training

⁵⁴ Furtwangler, *Assassin on Stage*, 129.

⁵⁵ *Harper's Weekly*, 13 January 1866. The subtitle of *Harper's* was "A Journal of Civilization," which placed Booth firmly under the protection of the genteel. The article incorrectly identifies him as Edwin Forrest Booth (his middle name was Thomas) – a not uncommon mistake.

⁵⁶ Richard Lockridge, *Darling of Misfortune: Edwin Booth, 1833-1893* (New York: Benjamin Blom, 1932), 7. Lockridge suggests that audiences were drawn to Booth more because of his high-profile misfortunes than his prodigious talents.



Fig. 43. Edwin Booth at 33 (1866). This portrait appeared just days after Booth's return to the stage almost a year after the assassination of Lincoln.

can resist – one of those weights beneath which all humanity bows shuddering; cast over him a stifling dream where only the soul can act, and the limbs refuse their offices; have him pushed along by Fate to the lowering, ruinous catastrophe.”⁵⁷ The emotionally suppressed men of the middle classes, having just emerged from Fate’s “ruinous catastrophe” (the Civil War), could connect to Hamlet’s struggle when placed in this context: “It was a role to draw audiences out in shared sorrow and wonder over the human condition – especially when they recognized Booth’s own life of sorrow deepening Hamlet’s penetrating eyes.”⁵⁸

The exaggeration of Booth’s sufferings was at least as overblown as that of Forrest’s struggles – the same kind of deliberate attempt to sell the man to which the audiences would respond. Also, an interesting parallel exists between the way Booth embodied Hamlet and Forrest lived his characters like Jack Cade, essentially employing the same strategy for different characters. The audience was going to respond best to the performer who appeared closest to their ideal.

The man and the character were inextricably linked in the minds of Booth’s audience: “We of today live in the era of Booth, and Booth, to a majority of us, is Hamlet.”⁵⁹ His audience’s perception of the essence of the character matched Booth’s personality: “[H]is nature is as closely sympathetic as ever man’s heart was with a

⁵⁷ E.C. Stedman, 589.

⁵⁸ Furtwangler, *Assassin on Stage*, 120.

⁵⁹ *Evening Post* (New York), 16 March 1870.

poet's ideal."⁶⁰ Even Booth's physical appearance matched the expectations of his audience:

His spare and almost attenuated frame, his thoughtful, and, indeed, habitually mournful expression; his hollow, low-pitched voice; his splendid dark eye; his jetty, disheveled locks, and a certain morbidness that is suggested by his whole look and bearing, carry conviction to the mass of beholders that in him they see as near an approach as possible to the Hamlet of Shakespeare.⁶¹

Booth's admirers, "myth consumers" fully aware of the personal tragedies that had confronted him, imagined that Booth was living Hamlet's suffering on stage, rather than acting it: "In his life the sweet and the bitter were mingled in almost equal proportions; and there can be little doubt that his private afflictions, most courageously endured, added to his artistic temperament that touch of grave and tender melancholy so well suited to his Hamlet."⁶² Booth's performance of the role extended into real life and their admiration of him stemmed, at least in part, from that understanding: "And as he was a victim, the public felt for him a peculiar sympathy, which finally mounted almost to adoration, that mixture of emotions with which it generally greets those who try gallantly and fail through no fault of their own."⁶³

On the national stage, the challenges and tragedies facing Lincoln bore strong resemblance to those experienced by Booth/Hamlet. Lincoln lost one of his boys, and his wife was unstable. Adding to these personal calamities, Lincoln committed thousands of young American men to war, sending many to their death and causing

⁶⁰ "Edwin Booth as Hamlet," *New York Daily Tribune*, 21 November 1876.

⁶¹ *New York Times*, 7 January 1870.

⁶² Towse, *Sixty Years*, 182.

⁶³ Lockridge, *Darling of Misfortune*, 7.

the death of countless others in the South: “The time is out of joint. O cursed spite,/That ever I was born to set it right.”⁶⁴ The burden of guilt weighed on him, providing a parallel for the new social “burdens” facing white, middle-class men.

Not only did Booth’s portrayal of Hamlet reflect a masculine ideal, but his performance and the detail of the production presented itself as a moralizing tool: the play should elevate us “from the narrow sphere of our daily lives into a loftier, grander region, whose atmosphere perforce shall purify and exalt our souls... shall infuse some of its own precious metal of nobility, honesty and courage into our own lives, glorifying our too mundane souls with some of its higher, more heavenly attributes!”⁶⁵ These guidelines for audience response illustrated Booth’s conscious effort to cultivate the gentility of the middle and upper classes and situate (if not elevate) the theatre as an ennobling social necessity: “audiences were to approach the masters and their works with proper respect and proper seriousness, for aesthetic and spiritual elevation rather than mere entertainment was the goal.”⁶⁶

Booth’s *Hamlet* was perceived as high art in cultivated circles:

His playing throughout has an exquisite tone, like an old picture. The charm of the finest portraits, of Raphael’s Julius or Leo, of Titian’s Francis I, or Ippolito di Medici, of Vandyck’s Charles I, is not the drawing nor even the coloring, so much as the nameless, subtle harmony which is called tone. So in Mr. Booth’s Hamlet it is not any particular scene, or passage, or look, or movement that

⁶⁴ *Hamlet*, Act I, scene v.

⁶⁵ Arthur Matthison, *Booth’s Theatre: Hamlet*, quoted in Charles H. Shattuck, *The Hamlet of Edwin Booth* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 72. At Booth’s behest, Mattison prepared a brochure for distribution at Booth’s Theatre for his 1870 production.

⁶⁶ Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 146.

conveys the impression; it is the consistency of every part with every other, the pervasive sense of the mind of a true gentleman sadly strained and jarred.⁶⁷

Those capable of the aesthetic appreciation that these comments suggest likely comprised a relatively small percentage of Booth's habitués. But Booth was presented, and may have even consciously performed himself, as something only the elite, the special, the "true gentleman" could understand: "If it fails to excite our enthusiasm by the force of unquestionable genius, it commands our respect by its fidelity, its self restraint, its obvious reverence for art, and the admirable influence of its example."⁶⁸ Booth's audience revered a masculine image of decorous moderation rather than thrilling dynamism.

Seeing Booth's Hamlet became a social commodity; appreciating it, understanding it, and even being disturbed by it became a status symbol of bourgeois belonging: "Mr. Booth's *Hamlet* is the perfect expression of the artistic taste of our times. That taste is characterized, and nowhere in so marked a manner as in the drama, by the substitution of finish for feeling, elaborateness for earnestness, accuracy for emotion."⁶⁹

Booth's appearance of natural ease was mirrored socially in what Karen Halttunen describes as "genteel performance:"

a system of polite conduct that demanded a flawless self-discipline practiced within an apparently easy, natural, sincere manner. At the center of the genteel performance was an important contradiction: the contents of polite social intercourse, as perceived by sentimentalists, were natural and sincere feelings;

⁶⁷ "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, April 1865.

⁶⁸ *New York Times*, 7 January 1870.

⁶⁹ *New York World*, 9 January 1870.

but the forms of polite conduct, as evidenced in the detailed complexity of the laws of etiquette, were deliberate and restrained.⁷⁰

The dual nature of actor and character requires this conscious manipulation of behavior in the presentation of the “natural,” and Booth’s comparatively seamless performance of reality provided not only a masculine model of behavior but also a social template for successful gender performance: “[H]e represents this character with such consummate ease that only in the retrospect will a critical observer appreciate the splendid poise and firm touch with which all the beautifully complex mechanism of the work has been conducted.”⁷¹ The juxtaposition in Booth’s work of emotional intimacy and distance, apparent spontaneity and craft, harmonized with the studied, self-aware nature of the image-conscious middle class, testifying “to a growing acceptance by the American middle classes of the underlying theatricality of all their claims to genteel social status... [P]ersonal conduct in societies based on the premise of upward mobility [was] characterized by a highly theatrical attention to the presentation of self.”⁷²

The lofty nature of Booth’s acting served as a model of refinement for middle-class audiences and “legitimate” actors: “Edwin Booth’s ministrations had developed acuteness of perception, diffused refinement, awakened emotion, imparted spiritual

⁷⁰ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1982), 93.

⁷¹ “Edwin Booth as Hamlet,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 21 November 1876.

⁷² Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 186. Erving Goffman addresses these same issues in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959).

knowledge of a lofty ideal, and provided a high standard of dramatic art.”⁷³ In essence, like Beecher, Booth was encouraging a “reconstructed manhood.” Booth simultaneously sought to elevate both the audience and himself:

In the first half of the nineteenth century... it was the artist’s obligation to be a teacher and actively communicate with the people... [T]his emphasis upon popular education diminished toward the end of the century. Increasingly it was asserted that cultivated people were needed not as educators but as leaders, as examples. Each Cultured Man would in effect become his own City on a Hill.⁷⁴

Booth embodied both ends of this artistic spectrum, seeking to enrich his audience while fashioning himself as an elevated model. He refused to present himself as either subordinate to the spectators or the art that they patronized: “I have given my life to these great roles. I do not consider myself an entertainer! I am an interpreter. I reveal the soul of masterpieces... They (the audience) should bow their heads reverently before these poems I reveal to them.”⁷⁵ This loftiness, bordering on arrogance, would have had little appeal for Forrest’s fans (although Forrest was just as arrogant in his own way). Booth’s attempts to elevate the theatre and his audience were part of a general trend to instill within the middle class an appreciation of high culture: “The

⁷³ William Winter, *Life and Art of Edwin Booth* (New York: Macmillan, 1893), 2.

⁷⁴ Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 215.

⁷⁵ Katherine Goodale, *Behind the Scenes with Edwin Booth* (Boston: Houghton, 1931), 59-60. Goodale (who acted under the name Kitty Molony) performed with Booth in one of his final tours. Her biography is rather sentimental and worshipful. She described Booth’s discomfort with an audience when no longer in character. In his curtain calls, many perceived him “haughty of mien, disdainful of glance, supercilious to contemptuousness” (Goodale, 59). His curtain speeches, rarely given, were always brief. Booth appeared to deplore the idea that he was subordinate to, or in any way reliant on, the approval of an audience composed of what were (at best) his peers.

sole refuge of this age is art; and that should be kept white, pure, peaceful and beautiful. What we need on stage is what will cheer, comfort, and strengthen.”⁷⁶

Theatre was recognized as a powerful tool of moral suasion; however, the class separation prevalent in the urban theatres of the 1860s guaranteed that the theatrical sermon of moderation was preached to the long-since converted. The melodramatic entertainments enjoyed by working-class audiences certainly contained moral lessons and masculine models, but the “white, pure, peaceful and beautiful” high art of Edwin Booth neither appealed to working-class sensibilities nor reflected their ideal image: “Booth may have narrowed his appeal by working so exclusively within the business-class values of sensibility, spirituality, and idealization.”⁷⁷ But Booth, who had played to coarser audiences out West in his youth, likely had little interest in (and little chance of) broadening his appeal if it meant catering to the less-refined tastes of the working class.

True appreciation of Booth in all his complexity required a redefinition of the theatrical experience. As Lincoln’s audience had learned to appreciate the softer intellectual quality he brought to political oratory, the nature of Booth’s theatre audience was transformed from riotous to thoughtful. His performance was like a piece of art, to be studied closely and admired:

[The manager is] happy in announcing to the many who complain that the Academy [of Music] is too large to enjoy fully the delicately artistic traits of Mr. Edwin Booth’s acting... He will repeat the Character of HAMLET [at the

⁷⁶ William Winter, quoted in Tice Miller, *Bohemians and Critics: American Theatre Criticism in the Nineteenth Century* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1981), 85. Winter was writing for the *Albion* (New York) in 1862.

⁷⁷ McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations*, 241.

Chestnut St. Theatre], in compliance with the expressed wish of many of the Large and Brilliant Audiences that witnessed... his Unapproachable Performance of that Character.⁷⁸

While this playbill may have been, in part, a justification for failure completely to fill the Academy of Music, it also implies that theatrical caverns were inappropriate vessels to appreciate Booth's "delicately artistic" work and calls for a more exclusive and intimate temple of worship. An intriguing potential duality existed in the phrase "Unapproachable Performance" – suggesting that Booth's performance was unequalled but also something somehow distancing or perhaps placed on a pedestal, beyond the grasp of normal men.

While an audience's response to Booth may well have been quiet, the strength of the emotional connection between the actor and the genteel classes illustrated the efficacy of Booth's moral intentions: "all that Booth has done to drill my mind, and put an edge upon my sensibility; and instruct my emotions, and inform my imagination."⁷⁹ Decorous audiences saw within Booth, "some source of mental health and light."⁸⁰ Booth's/Hamlet's sad, quiet resignation in response to "depths below depths of misery and self-conflict," touched an emotional chord with middle-class men: "[T]he desolate calmness of despairing surrender to bleak and cruel fate... is

⁷⁸ "Philadelphia Area Theatre Playbills," vol. 5, Library Company of Philadelphia, 54. This playbill was for the August 31, 1863 performance of Hamlet at the Chestnut St. Theatre in Philadelphia.

⁷⁹ Charles Clarke, quoted in Shattuck, *Shakespeare on the American Stage*, 145. Clarke composed a 60,000-word description of Booth's Hamlet in the 1870s.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

made so pitiable an object that no man with a heart in his bosom can see him without tears.”⁸¹

This sense of being overwhelmed by sympathy when confronted by such sorrow and misery was a common thread throughout the period. In Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, after Eliza had crossed the ice and sought shelter with the family of a Northern Senator who supported the Fugitive Slave Act, she asked, “have you ever lost a child?” And she recounted her pitiful tale:

The woman [the senator’s wife who had recently lost a child] did not sob nor weep. She had gone to a place where tears are dry; but every one around her was, in some way characteristic of themselves, showing signs of hearty sympathy... Our senator was a statesman, and of course could not be expected to cry, like other mortals; and so he turned his back to the company, and looked out of the window, and seemed particularly busy in clearing his throat and wiping his spectacle-glasses, occasionally blowing his nose in a manner that was calculated to excite suspicion, had any one been in a state to observe critically.⁸²

This manly pity was similarly directed toward Booth/Hamlet, reflecting a sympathetic understanding of misery and indecision.

But the responses to Booth were not purely hypnotic or cerebral: “[Y]ou make them [the audience] crazy! I sit out there and watch them until you make me lose my head over your acting. It’s like being whirled around until you’re dizzy.”⁸³ Booth was

⁸¹ “Edwin Booth as Hamlet,” *New York Daily Tribune*, 21 November 1876. While the “Easy Chair” writer of *Harper’s* at the beginning of this chapter spoke of tears (of coarse women) shed for Forrest, critics perceived a greater depth of emotion and intelligence in the sensitivity of the men responding to Booth.

⁸² Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), ed. Elizabeth Ammons (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), 72-73.

⁸³ Goodale, *Behind the Scenes*, 60.

keenly aware of his power to manipulate: “I like your picture of my working on my audience. Wouldn’t it be better to say *playing* on them as if they were a pipe?”⁸⁴

Of course, not everyone responded favorably to Booth’s transformation of one of the American stage’s most popular roles: “Mr. Booth’s Hamlet... suppressed passion and elaborated sentiment. It returned to the literary and poetic charms of the play with extraordinary gifts for their declaration, and in doing so it in a measure ignored the dramatic and tragic. Hamlet no longer shattered, it titillated. The divine bolts were left out... Hamlet had become a nineteenth-century gentleman.”⁸⁵ Nym Crinkle (A.C. Wheeler), an opponent of Booth and his influence on America’s theatre and audiences, saw Booth as “a purely intellectual man,” whose acting lacked the instinct and passion which should be a theatrical necessity: “intelligence sits primly up in front and weighs him by sentences, and gravely acquiesces in his points without a ruffle of emotion or a thrill of enthusiasm.”⁸⁶

While Crinkle’s condemnation was directed at Booth, he was ultimately fighting the “feminizing” influence of the middle classes:

[H]e aimed his attacks at the general cultural softness which was seeping through the country..., the genteel ivory-towerism, the false estheticism, the romantic nostalgia, the cult of prettiness and preciousness which governed ‘official’ art in America during the last third of the nineteenth century. It was

⁸⁴ Goodale, *Behind the Scenes*, 61. Goodale was recalling a backstage conversation with Booth.

⁸⁵ Nym Crinkle [A.C. Wheeler], *New York World*, 9 June 1893. Crinkle was a long-time critic of Booth’s lack of fire, always preferring Forrest’s passion to Booth’s reserve, and deplored what he perceived as the deadening refinement of the legitimate stage.

⁸⁶ Nym Crinkle [A.C. Wheeler], *New York World*, 9 January 1870; Nym Crinkle [A.C. Wheeler], *New York World*, 16 January 1870.

against the... sterility of mind and spirit that... Nym Crinkle was battling. In attacking Booth,... he was attacking a growing cultural effeteness and loss of morale.⁸⁷

Booth's Hamlet appears to have been simultaneously reductive and empowering for the middle class. On the one hand, his "domestication" of Hamlet, diminished to bourgeois morality, trivialized the larger issues at stake in the play. On the other, identification with Hamlet elevated the middle-class male, giving him the opportunity to imagine himself as a man of deep feeling and intellect.

Beyond Hamlet: "a man beneath whose calm exterior sleeps a hellish tempest of passion"⁸⁸

Booth was most often praised for his ability to reveal the souls of sensitive, noble characters: "In all characters that evoke the essential spirit of the man – in all characters, that is, which rest on the basis of spiritualized intellect, or on that of sensibility to fragile loveliness, the joy that is unattainable, the glory that fades, and the beauty that perishes – he is easily peerless."⁸⁹ Yet a strange and rather obvious contradiction existed between this perception of Booth's ennobling and spiritual persona and many of the roles in which he excelled:

That Booth could give fine expression to the nobler attributes of humanity,... he proved abundantly by his Brutus and parts of his Othello and Hamlet, but it is nevertheless a fact that he was most triumphant in characters containing a baser alloy. His alert manner, his flashing eyes, his crisp, somewhat metallic utterance, his capacity for fierce passion, his general suggestion of agile

⁸⁷ Shattuck, *Hamlet of Edwin Booth*, 93.

⁸⁸ *New York Daily Tribune*, 9 April 1880.

⁸⁹ William Winter, *Edwin Booth in Twelve Dramatic Characters* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1872), 51.

mentality, constituted a most valuable equipment for parts in which the intellectual predominated over the moral or the sentimental.⁹⁰

While primarily remembered for the spiritual elevation of his Hamlet, most of Booth's other wildly successful characters, if not villains, certainly possessed qualities contrary to the "spiritualized intellect" and "fragile loveliness" perceived in his Hamlet: "With such gentleness as his it was singular that his greatest effects should have been made in parts of sinister and diabolic character."⁹¹

Although Booth was considered quite handsome and was admired greatly by the fairer sex, he had little interest in romantic roles: "This fellow [referring to Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*] is a lover... I loathe the whole pack of them. Always did. Even as a youngster I loved the villains."⁹² Part of Booth's attraction to devilish characters may have emerged from his self-torture and self-loathing over the death of his first wife: "I can't be good. I'm a fiend! I struggle upward as hard as I can but down I come plump into the sea of evil. I must drown – there's no use struggling."⁹³

What was at the heart of this fascination with evil? Karen Halttunen details the nation's enthrallment with the villain in the middle of the nineteenth century:

⁹⁰ Towse, *Sixty Years*, 190. The Brutus likely refers to Payne's tragedy, rather than Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

⁹¹ Otis Skinner, *Footlights and Spotlights: Recollections of My Life on the Stage* (Indianapolis: Bobbs, 1924), 171. Skinner acted with Booth in 1880.

⁹² Skinner, 172.

⁹³ Quoted in Eleanor Ruggles, *Prince of Players: Edwin Booth* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1953), 144.

The collapse of familial, communal, and clerical influence over American youth had left a vacuum into which flowed the confidence man... The clear authority exercised within the hierarchical social institutions of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century America was giving way to the more tenuous authority possible within the egalitarian social organizations of the nineteenth century. In the emerging social system, authority could be seized by any charismatic figure who emerged from the masses as a man of magnetic personal power... [T]hese men held the fascinated attention of the American people because, in the absence of a clearly defined, hierarchical authority structure, they used the power of charisma to bend others to their will.⁹⁴

Booth's attraction to evil characters matched that of his audience, who found their machinations endlessly interesting, and the roles comprised a significant part of his repertoire:

In Richard [III], as embodied by him [Booth], the observer recognizes a man consistent with human nature and with himself – false, cruel, wicked, demoniac, yet a human being, with brain heart, conscience, imagination, and passions, and not merely a stage ruffian... [H]is embodiment of the part shows forth an actual, possible man, whose ambition is intelligible, whose conduct implies rational motive, the workings of whose conscience are visible even in the very pains he takes to avow his dissimilarity from other men, whose remorse treads close on the heels of his fearful crimes, and whose last hours are baleful with terrors and awful with warning. The observer cannot but rejoice over the ruin of such a fiend; but, at the same time, he will deplore, with a grief too deep for tears, the appalling agony, the blank wretchedness, and the eternal doom of such an imperial soul.⁹⁵

The quality perhaps most admired in Booth's Richard III and Iago was his skill and simple perfection in hypocrisy: "[F]or parts in which the intellectual predominated over the moral or the sentimental,... his duplicity was altogether Machiavellian,

⁹⁴ Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 23-24.

⁹⁵ *New York Daily Tribune*, 9 April 1880. In the melodrama conventions of the day (and Shakespeare informed by the nineteenth-century sensibility) the villain must repent and be punished.



Fig. 44. Edwin Booth as Iago. He is presented as a sinewy, seductive figure.

exactly adapted to time and circumstance.”⁹⁶ Rather than portraying obvious, snarling villains, Booth’s characters presented flawless masks of duplicity to the world around them: “embodying a man beneath whose calm exterior sleeps a hellish tempest of passion, a smouldering flame of demoniac malignity, a baleful fountain of deadly purpose.”⁹⁷

Booth was adept at humanizing the complexity of stage villains, and the portrayal of these characters played into the middle-class fear of and morbid fascination with the evil within themselves and what might be lurking behind the masks of others: “hypnotic, charismatic demagogues..., whose game was to profess an interest in the public good..., were rising up to enslave a generation of American youth for selfish, unprincipled gain.”⁹⁸ Booth’s ability to portray morally “gray” characters also reflected the transition from the “simple” politics of the Jacksonian era (with clearly defined issues of right and wrong, elite and poor), to the more complicated questions facing the nation in the Civil War. Lincoln had to be both a hero and a villain – he did not have the luxury to choose.

Of the twelve dramatic characters featured in William Winter’s 1872 overview of Booth’s career – Hamlet, Richelieu, Othello, Bertuccio (in Tom Taylor’s *The Fool’s Revenge*), Richard III, Brutus (Payne), King Lear, Shylock, Macbeth, Benedick (*Much Ado About Nothing*), Don Caesar de Bazan (in the play of the same name), and Melnotte (*Lady of Lyons*) – the final three roles were only sporadically in Booth’s

⁹⁶ Towse, *Sixty Years of the Theatre*, 190-91.

⁹⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, 9 April 1880.

⁹⁸ Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 14, 16.

repertoire.⁹⁹ Of the remaining nine, his Macbeth and Othello were never considered successes (although he continued to perform them occasionally) because he lacked the physical stature and commanding presence. In fact, Winter spent far more time discussing and praising Booth's Iago (one of his most celebrated roles) than he spent addressing his shortcomings as Othello.¹⁰⁰ So, an examination of the remaining characters – Hamlet, Richelieu, Bertuccio, Richard III, Payne's Brutus, Lear, and Shylock – and adding Iago, provides an accurate and fairly complete picture of Booth's active and most celebrated repertoire.

Of these characters, Brutus was the only traditionally heroic figure.¹⁰¹ In *Richelieu*, "the playwright [Bulwer-Lytton] chose the hero-villain of the Gothic drama

⁹⁹ Melnotte in Bulwer-Lytton's *Lady of Lyons* was an odd role to include, because romantic, sentimental melodrama was a genre in which Booth rarely performed and was generally acknowledged to have little ability. Benedick (Booth's most performed comic role and one of Shakespeare's most intellectual comic heroes) and the title role in *Don Caesar de Bazan* were both principally comic and were never roles for which Booth primarily was known. Twenty-one years later, Winter himself called Booth's Melnotte and Benedick "indifferent" and claimed, "Booth's embodiment of Don Caesar was marked by winning sweetness of temperament and by graceful recklessness of demeanor, diversified by occasional thoughtfulness, and now and then by touches of deep feeling," but ultimately, "did not entirely satisfy" (*Life and Art of Edwin Booth*, 261, 257). Winter did not choose the twelve characters (which were dictated by the twelve character portraits) in the 1872 study and was merely asked to provide a brief biographical sketch, which he himself suggested was a bit premature – Booth was not yet forty.

¹⁰⁰ Booth played Othello largely because it was expected by audiences and critics. Othello was one of the principal roles by which an actor of the period was judged. In many circles, Iago was considered the minor role, especially by Forrest's generation. Forrest only played Iago when quite young and subordinate to a major star. It was not unusual, for two major actors to alternate in the roles during the run of a show, which Booth did with Henry Irving.

¹⁰¹ In Payne's *Brutus; or, The Fall of Tarquin*, the title character, a deposed Roman who feigns idiocy, ultimately leads his people to victory over the evil, invading

(or the Byronic hero) as his model. Richelieu as the hero is on the right side, but he is like a villain in being, as he calls himself, “both lion and fox.”¹⁰² Richard III, Iago, and Shylock were pure villains, although Booth’s portrayals did elicit pity. Lear (in which Booth was often criticized for lacking requisite stature), Bertuccio, and Shylock were disappointed fathers driven to madness and extreme, irrational behavior.¹⁰³ The *only* character, in fact, that appeared to satisfy fully Winter’s criteria of “spiritualized intellect” and “fragile loveliness” was Hamlet.

Out of the Forrest and Into the Booth: “Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere”¹⁰⁴

Tarquins. At the end, Brutus must sentence his son, in love with Princess Tarquinia, to death for siding with the enemy. The title role was played by many of America’s principal actors, including both Forrest and Booth, primarily noted for providing the opportunity for great drama and pathos in the speech where Brutus condemns his son. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the play was not thought to possess much in the way of literary merit, although it was still acknowledged as a serviceable acting showcase.

¹⁰² J.O. Bailey, *British Plays of the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology to Illustrate the Evolution of the Drama* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1966), 71-72. The melodramatically contrived plot features a duplicitous, witty, and aging Richelieu protecting his beloved country and assisting a defenseless orphan.

¹⁰³ In Tom Taylor’s *The Fool’s Revenge*, based on Victor Hugo’s *Le Roi s’amuse* that also inspired Verdi’s *Rigoletto*, Bertuccio is a deformed jester whose quest to avenge his innocent wife’s abduction inadvertently leads to the death of his daughter. Booth played Shylock with “moments of pathos, [but] ...chiefly impelled by personal hatred and greed,... a fiend-like man, cold and deadly in outward seeming, but fiercely impelled by the pent-up fires of hatred, malice, and cruelty” (Winter, *Life and Art of Edwin Booth*, 198, 200). In an earlier biographical sketch, Winter described the evil of the performance even more strongly: “Fierce vitality, bitter, sardonic humor, and mad vindictiveness made the embodiment absolutely fiendish – a horrible incarnation of gleeful wickedness and insane fury” (Winter, *Edwin Booth in Twelve Dramatic Characters*, 25-26).

¹⁰⁴ *Henry IV*, Part 1, Act V, scene iv.

The transition from Forrest to Edwin Booth marked the most important phase of its (the American stage's) development. Forrest, although he had a spark of genius, was intrinsically and essentially animal. Booth was intellectual and spiritual... The epoch that accepted Booth as the amplest exponent of taste and feeling in dramatic art was one of intellect and refinement.¹⁰⁵

In the middle of the nineteenth century, foreign plays (especially Shakespeare) continued to dominate the American stage, and American dramatists continued to rely on European models. The nation's poetic dramas encouraged by Forrest, contributions to the "legitimate" theatre, were typically set in ancient times and locales, especially Rome:

[A]s a republic with a history of rebellion, war, and tyranny, it could support a political theme in which the American attitude toward democracy and freedom would be prominent and readily understood... [T]he characters were not individuals but social types. Lacking a sense of greatness and showing little psychological insight, ...the heroes were simply virtuous – lovers, leaders, honorable men. Having no internal conflict, they had only to love the heroine, defeat the villain, and speak moral platitudes.¹⁰⁶

The powerful yet uncomplicated emotions and clear binaries of good and evil provided an ideal showcase for Forrest's masculine excesses. Booth, forever associated with the character of Hamlet, excelled in characters tortured by the very "internal conflict" that Forrest (and most American dramatists) eschewed.

While Booth kept a certain number of "contemporary" poetic dramas in his repertoire, reveling in the passion and pathos of the tragic conclusions, he was most

¹⁰⁵ Winter, *Life of Edwin Booth*, 1-2. This assessment by Booth's biographer clearly privileged the cultural triumph of the genteel middle classes and cannot necessarily be taken at face value. Dismissing Forrest (and by association the working-class male) as a soulless animal (over forty years after Forrest's theatrical prime) suggests a continuing need to champion the validity and primacy of bourgeois masculine values.

¹⁰⁶ Walter J. Meserve, *An Outline History of American Drama* (Totowa, NJ: Littlefield, Adams, and Co., 1970), 52-53. This study by Meserve, a progressive historian, contains a number of inaccuracies and must be viewed critically.

often associated with Shakespearean characters.¹⁰⁷ Forrest's performance of Shakespeare placed the immortal bard within the realm of popular entertainment, while Booth's classical delineations catered to a comparatively exclusive audience: "On the one hand, in other words, was a democratic art form, which celebrated Shakespeare as a vigorous American spirit and made his lines the familiar language of scholar and workman alike; on the other hand was an intimidating, esoteric theater..., in which Shakespeare was preserved beyond the reach of ordinary people."¹⁰⁸ Booth's performance and style of production encouraged this social separation.

No one denied the fundamental differences – personal character, acting style, target audience, ideal role – between Edwin Forrest and Edwin Booth. Although Booth represented many of the same qualities as Macready, he and Forrest never had the same kind of acrimonious showdown. Forrest did briefly follow Booth, playing some of the same roles; but, Forrest's health and dwindling audiences and Booth's good-natured placidity probably prevented significant tension. Most acknowledged the passing of the torch of America's theatrical ideal from Forrest to Booth: "Less virile than the muscular Forrest, whom he [Booth] succeeded, he excelled him in subtlety, brains, grace, and real dramatic fire."¹⁰⁹ From the late 1850s when Booth

¹⁰⁷ John Howard Payne's *Brutus; or, The Fall of Tarquin* (1818) was the only notable example in Booth's repertoire written by an American.

¹⁰⁸ Furtwangler, *Assassin on Stage*, 51. Lawrence Levine also discusses the bifurcation of Shakespeare – indicating the growing separation between "'serious' and 'popular' culture," and the two contrasting visions of Shakespeare: "the humble, everyday poet who sprang from the people... [versus] the towering genius" (Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 68-69).

¹⁰⁹ Towse, *Sixty Years*, 180.

began to be recognized on the national level until the early 1870s, however, Booth and Forrest often performed simultaneously in competing theatres, although never together.¹¹⁰

Because of changing theatrical tastes, by the 1860s Forrest's acting was an often-ridiculed American institution: "We may crack our jokes at it. We may call it the muscular school; the brawny art; the biceps aesthetics; the tragic calves; the bovine drama; rant, roar, and rigmarole; but what then?... For there is the great, the eager, the delighted crowd... And he moves his world nightly."¹¹¹ Forrest continued to appeal; however, it should be noted that he moved only "his world," and a separate and ultimately more influential world looked elsewhere for its masculine models.

Forrest and Booth possessed nearly opposite performance strengths and utilized fundamentally different modes of expression:

Whenever excessive emotion has induced a strong physical enthusiasm, the natural craving of the spectator is for an overwhelming outburst of physical power. Forrest was usually supreme at such moments... The fulfillment of them is generally accepted as greatness in acting – whereas, in fact, it is no more than a 'limb and outward flourish.' Edwin Booth – spiritually a higher actor – frequently fails to fulfil them, simply because he lacks in volume of voice and in brawn.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Forrest continued to perform until the early 1870s and retained a significant, vocal following, albeit primarily among urban working-class males and the unsophisticated (or at least the uninitiated) in more remote theatrical outposts. Booth reportedly suggested that they appear together in *Othello* with Forrest as the Moor and Booth as Iago, but Forrest refused [Ruggles, *Prince of Players*, 218]. Had this performance occurred, it would likely have been one of the most significant events on the nineteenth-century American stage.

¹¹¹ George William Curtis, "Editor's Easy Chair," *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* 28 (December 1863): 132.

¹¹² *New York Daily Tribune*, 9 April 1880.

An appreciation of Booth required a retraining of the “natural craving” of the audience, while Forrest satiated that craving, suggesting that the learned decorum of the social-climbing middle class demanded a suppression of feeling and an editing of response: “Mr. Booth’s style and delivery, in most of his characters, are sedate, temperate, even cold... He sways his audiences less by the violence of his emotions than by the repression of his feelings.”¹¹³ It was this sense of repressed feelings – seething passions boiling just beneath a placid surface – that connected Booth so strongly to the restrained behavior of bourgeois masculinity. Booth’s performance suggested greatness, or at least great feeling, lurked behind the impenetrable mask of the seemingly ordinary.

While Booth was commonly granted a spiritual superiority to the more physically and emotionally demonstrative Forrest, Booth’s restrained acting style was likely less a matter of artistic choice than a result of deficiency in physical, vocal, and perhaps emotional resources. Yet Booth’s seeming weaknesses were transformed, in a performance mutually constructed by Booth and his viewers, into virtues and strengths: “It was never with the dominating force of Edwin Forrest who is said to have exclaimed, ‘By God! I *am* Lear!’ The alchemy of Booth’s art was more profound and subtle.”¹¹⁴ Booth, in seeking an acting aesthetic that more nearly matched his own abilities and temperament, gradually developed a style that played to his inherently pensive nature and repressed intensity:

¹¹³ Laura Keene, quoted in John Creahan, *The Life of Laura Keene* (Philadelphia: Rodgers, 1897), 90. Keene and Booth toured together in the early 1850s, well before Booth’s national success.

¹¹⁴ Skinner, *Footlights and Spotlights*, 92.

But what Booth could not foresee was that Forrest's 'old school' of tragic acting – outsized, oratorical, heavily masculine – was passing from favor. Really nice people were a little ashamed of Forrest, who for all his powerful intelligence, will, muscle, and voice had been tarnished in reputation by involvement in the Astor Place Riots and by the scandal of divorce courts. Forrest would endure, of course, and command a following for many years to come, but his giantism did not ingratiate him with the new generation of sophisticates.¹¹⁵

“Really nice people” were drawn to the martyred restraint of Booth's performance and personal aesthetic, which itself grew out of and evolved from his own strengths and limitations as an actor and a man.

It is doubtful that Booth initially intended to revolutionize acting or redefine the ideal masculine image, or that he somehow set a personal goal to cultivate the patronage of an emerging, aspiring elite class that was barely perceptible in his formative years. Booth's success was merely a matter of the right man emerging at a fortuitous time in a conducive set of circumstances: “Booth [was] the epitome of a *gentleman*, a man who more than anyone else appealed to the new class of genteel theatre-goers that rose to prominence in the late nineteenth century in America.”¹¹⁶

Forrest had been similarly well suited in temperament, in addition to possessing the requisite tools and abilities, to fulfill the performance demands and gender expectations of an audience in the unique social and political atmosphere of his own time: “The class of passions for which his powers are best adapted are consequently those that dwell in the depths of the soul, and demand strong expression – revenge, hate, scorn, indignation. Those that belong to the ‘melting pot’ – that move

¹¹⁵ Charles H. Shattuck, *The Hamlet of Edwin Booth* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1969), 13-14.

¹¹⁶ Oggel, *Edwin Booth*, 1.

to pity and subdue with sorrow lie farther beyond the circle of his genius and resources.”¹¹⁷ I discussed this idea of temperament dictating abilities in Chapter One, detailing the masculine transition from Jackson to Lincoln, and the qualities that marked Forrest and Booth followed a similar pattern.

Although Booth was sometimes described as formal or aloof on stage, a vast majority of personal reports suggest that he was merely shy and reclusive, but always patient, generous, compassionate, and forgiving to a fault: “Somehow I can’t hate longer than it takes to ‘cuss’ a round oath or two, then I’m serene.” Booth, in fact, derided himself as “unmanly” for not “hating better.”¹¹⁸ Booth’s self-doubt about the manliness of his restraint echoed middle-class male worries about increased feminine influence undermining masculine strength. As Jackson biographer John William Ward states, “Perhaps the most severe condemnation that can be made of nineteenth-century America is that it equated charity and love with a lack of manhood.”¹¹⁹ Yet forgiveness was an important virtue in a nation struggling with the Civil War and Reconstruction, as reflected in Lincoln’s second inaugural address: “With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan – to do

¹¹⁷ “Mr. Forrest in Charleston,” *Spirit of the Times*, 23 January 1841.

¹¹⁸ Quoted in Oggel, *Edwin Booth*, 7.

¹¹⁹ *Andrew Jackson: Symbol for an Age* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 193.

all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves, and with all nations.”¹²⁰

Booth’s serenity suggested a sharp contrast with Forrest’s egoism, jealousy, and temper: “let me own that I have a religion of Hate – not Revenge – a hatred of oppression in whatever form it may appear – a hatred of hypocrisy, falsehood, and injustice – a hatred of bad and wicked men and women, and a hatred of my enemies.”¹²¹ This bitter belligerence could not be further removed from Beecher’s Gospel of Love.

In describing Booth’s inability convincingly to portray (or lack of suitability for) immense dramatic figures, E.C. Stedman perhaps best captured the essential difference between Forrest and Booth. Forrest enjoyed his great success in massive poetic and tragic characters: “towering creatures of action – Othello, Coriolanus, Virginius, Macbeth – somewhat deficient, whether good or evil, in the casuistry of more subtle [sic] dispositions, but giants in emotion, and kingly in repose. They are essentially *masculine*, and we connect their ideals with the stately figure, the deep-chested utterance, the slow, enduring majesty of men.”¹²² Booth, on the other hand,

¹²⁰ Quoted in *A History and Criticism of American Public Address*, ed. William Norwood Brigance, vol. 2 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1943), 873.

¹²¹ Quoted in Moses, *Fabulous Forrest*, 327.

¹²² E.C. Stedman, 592. Stedman never refers directly to Forrest but the roles he lists and the performance he describes certainly point to him. Although Booth played many of Shakespeare’s grand heroic characters, most critics agreed that he was unsuited: “He had a firm intellectual grasp of them, he had imagination and an abundance of nervous energy and intensity, but in the great crises of emotion lacked massiveness and grandeur” (Towse, *Sixty Years*, 184). Forrest was equally unsuited for the roles in which Booth excelled, although Hamlet was in Forrest’s repertory – “a

exuded the opposite quality: “The genius of Mr. Booth has that feminine quality which, though allowing him a wider range, and enabling him to render even these excepted parts after a tuneful, elaborate, and never ignoble method of his own, might debar him from giving them their highest interpretation.”¹²³ This change in preference from the majesty of men to effeminate grace suggested a radical shift in socially acceptable masculine ideals: “So much, in the character and in the acting of Edwin Booth is gentle, delicate, winning, and admirable.”¹²⁴

Stedman’s description of Booth’s on-stage persona as feminine was not intended as an insult, but rather a compliment to his taste and refinement. Booth privately acknowledged the positive, transformative power of a refined and loving woman, elevating his late wife to near sainthood, vowing to live up to her expectations, and crediting her with all that was worthy within himself: “I feel that all my actions have been and are influenced by her whose love is to me the strength and wisdom of my spirit. Whatever I do of serious import, I regard it as a performance of a sacred duty I owe to all that is pure and honest in my nature – a duty to the very region of my heart.”¹²⁵

While Booth’s vow may have been extreme, the elevation of women as models of purity and the performance of masculinity as a devotion to the feminine ideals of

broad-shouldered, athletic, middle-aged man, knit in coarse vigor, who seemed to writhe most uncomfortably under the load of sweet fancies and dreamy philosophic thoughts which thronged upon him” [*New York Tribune*, 20 March 1855].

¹²³ E.C. Stedman, 592.

¹²⁴ Winter, *Twelve Dramatic Characters*, 48.

¹²⁵ Quoted in Oogle, *Edwin Booth*, 17.

refinement, repression, and sentiment lay at the heart of the changing ideals of middle-class manhood. And Booth connected strongly with the middle-class women who accompanied their men to the theatre: “Mr. Booth has three things in his favor: youth, the name he bears, and beauty; he is a favorite with the ladies, and their verdict is omnipotent. After seeing his performance they look upon Hamlet as perfection, whereas he [Hamlet] was about as contemptible a whelp as ever breathed.”¹²⁶

Booth himself, in a letter to friend and critic William Winter, described his perception of the role of Hamlet, as well as his portrayal of it, as essentially feminine:

I have always endeavored to make prominent the femininity of Hamlet’s character and therein lies the secret of my success – I think. I doubt if ever a robust and masculine treatment of the character will be accepted so generally as the more womanly and refined interpretation. I know that frequently I fall into effeminacy, but we can’t always hit the proper key-note.¹²⁷

Booth’s consciously created “feminine key-note” – a decorous, non-threatening hero – ultimately encouraged his audience’s more complete identification with the tragic figures of both Hamlet and Booth himself.¹²⁸ Audiences felt sympathetically toward Booth, worshipfully toward Forrest.

Ann Douglas describes the nostalgia and narcissism inherent in a reader’s self-indulgent identification with Stowe’s Little Eva, “We are meant to bestow on her that

¹²⁶ *Boston Traveller*, 18 September 1866.

¹²⁷ Edwin Booth, Nashville, to William Winter, 10 February 1882, printed in Daniel J. Watermeier, ed., *Between Actor and Critic: Selected Letters of Edwin Booth and William Winter* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971), 203-4.

¹²⁸ Booth appeared to see “feminine” as all of the positive, genteel qualities of a woman of sentiment, while “effeminacy” was unmanly, “womanish” behavior and comportment. Booth wanted to cultivate the former and seemed to fear the latter.

fondness we reserve for the contemplation of our own softer emotions.”¹²⁹ The delicacy that elevated the saint-like Eva similarly lionized Booth. Douglas claims that nineteenth-century women “had a genuine redemptive mission in their society: to propagate the potentially matriarchal virtues of nurture, generosity, and acceptance; to create the ‘culture of feelings.’”¹³⁰ This celebration of genteel passivity and sentimentality ultimately served to justify social and economic inequality:

[S]entimentalism... was an inevitable part of the self-evasion of a society both committed to laissez-faire industrial expansion and disturbed by its consequences... Sentimentalism is a complex phenomenon. It asserts that the values a society’s activity denies are precisely the ones it cherishes... Sentimentalism provides a way to protest a power to which one has already in part capitulated... Sentimentalism provided the inevitable rationalization of the economic order.¹³¹

The “feminine” refinement embraced by the middle classes and performed by Booth taught patience and forbearance, encouraging the silent internalization of suffering, while Forrest’s robust masculinity demanded attention and retribution. The myth of sentimentalism replaced that of equal access to opportunity as the rationalization for the status quo.

Booth consciously submerged his own personality off-stage as well as on-stage. Unlike the media circus that surrounded Forrest’s life, including his much-publicized divorce and frequent litigations, Booth kept personal foibles and private

¹²⁹ Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 4. It is intriguing to note that Douglas discusses at length the sentimentalization of our reading of the Little Eva figure in Stowe’s novel, while completing ignoring the even more wide-spread impact of the saint-like character on stage.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

tribulations out of the public sphere.¹³² This private, self-conscious performance mirrored the careful and conservative behavior of the American middle class in the decade before the Civil War.

Forrest courted confrontation, thriving on the contest of wills. When any actor challenged his position in the limelight, he encouraged direct comparison by performing in the same town and preferably in the same role. This macho kind of showdown led to tragedy with Macready, but Forrest persisted in the behavior, coming out of semi-retirement to go head-to-head with Booth in 1860. Booth, on the other hand, went to great lengths to avoid all confrontation. When Henry Irving planned a theatrical tour of America, Booth chose that same time to tour England. Booth wrote to Irving, suggesting an exchange of theatres. Irving ignored the invitation for almost two years, but then proposed (without apology or explanation) just such an arrangement when it was beneficial to him. Had Forrest been treated to such behavior, public tension would have likely occurred, but Booth shared the stage with Irving, and they ultimately developed a mutual respect.

Booth's spectators interacted as silent isolated figures: "[A]udiences in America had become less interactive, less of a public and more of a group of mute receptors. Art was becoming a one-way process: the artist communicating and the audience receiving... The desire of the promoters of the new high culture [was] to convert audiences into a collection of people reacting *individually* rather than

¹³² Booth had something of a wild reputation as a young actor but appeared to make a conscious effort to sanitize his public image by the time he reached national recognition. His earlier behavior largely was forgiven as a time of sowing the proverbial oats. As his second marriage dissolved because of his wife's mental instability, the press sensationalized it, but Booth never commented publicly.

collectively.”¹³³ Booth’s audience developed (what they at least perceived to be) a deeper personal and emotional connection to their star, as they mutually constructed a masculine identity: “Instead of loudly signaling their immediate reactions, audiences did now sit quietly and attentively. But some individuals also responded deeply and long afterward. Some returned again and again until they knew Booth so well that they could repeat his words and gestures.”¹³⁴ Booth was a less intimidating masculine figure than Forrest physically and personally, although perhaps not spiritually. While the perception of internal torment was something the audience could (or perhaps felt they should) recognize within themselves, there was also a certain fear of identification with the darker side of the soul.

Conclusion

National manhood erects an abstracting, atomizing circuitry that charges white men for market competition in the name of national unity. White men are promised relief from the anxieties of economic competition in the warm emotional space of civic fraternal sameness, of “brother moderation.” But over and over national manhood’s competitive individualism and hollowing logic of representivity vitiates the anticipated pleasures of fraternal exchange.¹³⁵

Dana D. Nelson’s observation of the anxiety and insecurity of American men (discussed in the Introduction) suggests a paradox of fraternal sameness versus competitive individualism. What is the frontiersman (or Spartacus or Metamora) but the quintessential individual? How then can that self-determined character learn to

¹³³ Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 195.

¹³⁴ Furtwangler, *Assassin on Stage*, 134.

¹³⁵ Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), x.

cooperate in a “civilized” society? Forrest and his followers were able to straddle precariously this fence of sameness and individuality, but others like Booth or Brougham could not. Forrest’s dramas showed how all men could potentially be individuals together (at least until the Astor Place Riot), but Booth’s Hamlet was the quintessential solo artist who could not collaborate and could *not* fit into society.

Edwin Forrest, like Jack Cade, fought for a personal and communal cause – a sense of independence and respect against oppression and elitism – as the nation sought a unique identity and the men who lived in it craved a new vision of American manhood. Yet he was unable to adapt his masculine image to keep pace with the nation’s social and political changes. Forrest’s masculinity, no longer appropriate in the playhouse, went to the sporting arena to seek new manly models and free avenues of expression, while Edwin Booth’s masculinity became emblematic of the struggle facing Lincoln and the nation.

Edwin Booth pursued private goals and social acceptance that mirrored the desires of the emerging middle class, gaining respect and status from his ability to bear sorrows in silence. Booth internalized his masculine performance, so the obvious signs and signifiers of ideal masculine behavior so easily read in Forrest began to change.

Booth epitomized the masculine ideal of the genteel middle-class, while simultaneously reflecting a broader definition of American masculinity: “He is thus the ripened product of our eclectic later age, and has this advantage about him, being an American, that he is many-sided, and draws from all foreign schools their

distinctive elements to fuse into one new, harmonious whole.”¹³⁶ While Booth’s image may indeed have been many-sided, he could not possibly reflect the ever-widening spectrum of American manhood. His restrained performance style harmonized almost exclusively with the decorous behavior of his audience: “[H]e courts rapturous silence rather than clamorous applause.”¹³⁷

¹³⁶ E.C. Stedman, 593. By “foreign schools,” Stedman refers to Booth’s melding of the classical and romantic styles of acting. But also, while Forrest sought a masculine image completely, fiercely independent of the behaviors of European gentlemen, Booth was able to assimilate English gentility into a distinctly American vision of manhood.

¹³⁷ E.C. Stedman, 589.

CONCLUSION: A Multitude of Masculinities

“[W]e should properly question whether one great man could rightly symbolize the complex America of the modern age, or even of the 1860s.”¹

There was indeed no shortage of masculine images during this period. In fact, American men were bombarded with advice from every side – the political platform, the pulpit, advice manuals, and the stage. What could they distill from this clamor? They found the rugged masculinity of Forrest, the genteel sympathy of Booth, and, interestingly enough, the haven or outlet of the low comedies of the minstrel show and immigrant humor, which provided a “safety valve” to release pent-up frustrations. Yet, ultimately, it appears that by the end of the Civil War, there was no one place in which a man could be his “whole” self – that not only had the nation’s masculine identity fragmented, but the individual’s *own* identity fragmented as well. He could not be entirely a man of action nor a man of feeling – yet he was being pushed to make a choice – with the inevitable result that something would be lost in the process. That something, I might suggest, was any hope of creating either a unified political body or a unified culture. Thus the fragmented nature of post-Civil War entertainments seem to reflect the splintered personality of the individual male, as much as it did the divided loyalties of the nation.

Ideals of masculinity reflected on the nineteenth-century American stage are often reduced to an overly simplistic division: Edwin Forrest before the Civil War and Edwin Booth after. This shift from the rugged, independent, frontier manliness of

¹ Albert Furtwangler, *Assassin on Stage*, 91.

Forrest (the theatrical embodiment of Jacksonian ideals) to the cerebral, refined, domestic masculinity of Booth was not an abrupt revolution but rather the result of a complex evolution. The ideal man as a solitary figure on the American frontier was gradually replaced by an image of an increasingly “civilized” member of the community. This quest for alternative masculine identities mirrors a parallel shift in the audience, the drama, and even the theatres of the period:

As the traditional spatial distinctions among pit, gallery, and boxes within the theater were undermined by the aggressive behavior of audiences caught up in the egalitarian exuberance of the period and freed in the atmosphere of the theater from many of the demands of normative behavior, this urge gradually led to the creation of separate theaters catering to distinct audiences and shattered for good the phenomenon of theater as a social microcosm of the entire society.²

The increasing class separation, the proliferation of immigrants (Chinese, German, Jewish, Italian, and Irish), and the growing African-American populations, swelled the war-time theatres with a range of audiences, each demanding the reflection of their own values and models of behavior unique to their respective situations and each searching for a sense of masculine, communal belonging: “The inability of civic fraternity actually to deliver on its affective promises emphasizes how the benefits of national manhood come at significant human cost to its others – the white women, Indians, blacks, primitives, poor, foreigners, and savages through which white manhood defines and supplements itself – and to white men.”³

² Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 60.

³ Dana D. Nelson, *National Manhood: Capitalist Citizenship and the Imagined Fraternity of White Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), x.

I would argue that as these individual groups became more influential in the theatre auditorium and in the public sphere, constructions of American masculine identity shifted to address their diversity. Thus, the stage began to offer “admirable” as well as comical male immigrant characters (of men like John Brougham and Dion Boucicault). Additionally, the African-American male entered the manly arena as a viable contender – although still problematic and still represented by white men in blackface, characters like George Harris in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* offered blueprints for how to *become* part of the masculine culture in America.

Though their diverse components were frequently at odds, nevertheless, the often-uneasy interaction of the full spectrum of American society sat in the shared space of the theatres of the early republic and enjoyed a vast array of entertainments on a single bill. With massive urban growth, socially divided theatres were financially viable, and the entertainments presented therein began to mirror more closely the taste and tenor of their devotees. The Astor Place Riot illustrated the incompatibility of the nation’s increasingly divergent masculinities. Divided by class, education, race, nationality – but most importantly by social behavior – urban audiences patronized theatres that catered to their niche, demanded entertainments that reflected their values and fulfilled their needs: “An age constructs, or reconstructs, the symbols of culture into something it can be comfortable with, something in which it can locate meaning.”⁴ Audiences created stars who embodied their masculine aspirations.

In the forty-year period between Forrest’s debut and Booth’s triumph as Hamlet, the American definition of masculinity fragmented along lines of class, race,

⁴ Ibid., 240.

and politics. I suggest that the national stage not only mirrored but magnified that process through the creation of physical characters upon which contemporary ideals of masculinity could be inscribed. “[T]he stage has proved to be a highly appropriate arena for representing or propagating norms and ideas crucial to the given society,” and the “theatre has contributed to the civilizing process by employing and interpreting the actor’s body as a sign system.”⁵ I also suggest that while both Forrest and Booth’s bodies provide “texts” for reading masculinity during this forty-year period, there were a myriad of other models that deserve consideration. I hope my study will contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the various shades within the complex formation of masculine identity in the American republic.

In the wake of the Civil War, the nation experienced a period of profound disillusionment with the impeachment of Johnson, a succession of fairly lackluster presidencies, and the failure of Reconstruction. In some ways, the collapse of Reconstruction provides the ultimate “proof” for the argument I have suggested above – that the nation, once divided, cannot be reconciled successfully. It can be pieced together, but the cracks still show. Late in the nineteenth century, the nation’s men continue to be myth consumers, but they are forced to re-imagine their past masculine role models with greater and greater fervency and longing, as they begin to seem more and more remote. We also see the white man supplanted on the stage – he loses control of the representation of the immigrant and the African American, as the “real

⁵ Erika Fischer-Lichte, “Theatre and the Civilizing Process: An Approach to the History of Acting,” in *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, ed. Thomas Postlewait and Bruce A. McConachie (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1989), 19, 34.

thing” comes onto the scene. Thus, I would argue that the problems of the late nineteenth-century stage can only be fully understood in the context of this sixty-year struggle to define and establish identity. The story I have told lays the foundation for many of the challenges that confront later performers, who struggle to reach this divided male audience.

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National Gazette
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