

**WILLIAM BODHAM DONNE, CENSORSHIP AND THE VICTORIAN THEATRE**

DRAMATIC ANXIETIES: WILLIAM BODHAM DONNE,  
CENSORSHIP AND THE VICTORIAN THEATRE, 1849-1874

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## ABSTRACT

While writers of the Victorian era were free to address contemporary social issues, playwrights were forced to contend with government censorship that ostensibly discouraged them from debating politically controversial topics. An adjunct of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, the Examiner of Plays was responsible for censoring morally and politically sensitive material, giving this individual tremendous influence over the English stage. My dissertation, *Dramatic Anxieties: William Bodham Donne, Censorship and the Victorian Theatre, 1849-1874*, focuses on the career of one dramatic censor, William Bodham Donne (1807-82).

Throughout his tenure as Examiner (1849-74), Donne controlled the written content of every play performed in every theatre in England. His was a position of remarkable cultural and social influence, offering him the opportunity to shape the performed drama, and thereby the attitudes of those who attended it. This study examines Donne's censorship of dramatists' attempts to treat in a serious manner such political and social issues as Anglo-Jewish emancipation, Chartism, the repeal of the Corn Laws, prison reform, and the condition of the working classes. I demonstrate that to evaluate the cultural impact of dramatic censorship in the Victorian period requires an understanding of the ongoing tension between Donne and the playwrights who, despite the professional ignominy that accompanied censorship, often struggled to address the political and social issues of their time. The relationship between Victorian playwrights and the Examiner involves a cultural dialectic that negotiates the boundaries of a licensed



public space. In exposing the explicit and implicit pressures which one such Examiner brought to bear on dramatists, this study begins to uncover what is still a largely unexplored feature of Victorian theatre history.

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## INTRODUCTION

### The Victorian Theatre and Its Censor

*In certain recesses of the Palace of St. James, in Westminster, are annually deposited some hundreds of manuscripts, the records of gratified or disappointed expectations. These manuscripts are copies of the dramas licensed for representation.... It is not, indeed, desirable that there should be more frequent disinterments from this dramatic cemetery, since few of its inmates merit a resurgam upon their escutcheon; yet, in the mass, they deserve some attention, as the abstracts and chronicles of the theatrical character of the age.*

William Bodham Donne, *Essays on the Drama*, 128

Writers of the Victorian era were frequently concerned with social issues such as political reform, civil liberties, and the economic exploitation of the working classes. Yet playwrights of the period were forced to contend with government censorship that ostensibly discouraged them from debating such topics. An adjunct of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, the Examiner of Plays was responsible for censoring morally and politically sensitive material, giving this individual tremendous influence over the English stage. This dissertation focuses on the career of one dramatic censor, William Bodham Donne (1807-82), who, during his tenure as Examiner of Plays, radically shaped the English drama.<sup>1</sup> This study examines Donne's censorship of dramatists' attempts to treat in a serious manner such political and social issues as Anglo-Jewish emancipation,

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<sup>1</sup> Donne fulfilled the responsibilities of the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays from 1849 to 1874. Throughout this period Donne acted as Examiner with the exception of one year, 1856-1857, in which John Mitchell Kemble (who Donne had temporarily replaced in 1849) returned to the position, which he held until his death on 26 March, 1857. Donne was officially made the Examiner on the following day.

Chartism, the repeal of the Corn Laws, prison reform, and the condition of the working classes. The relationship between Victorian playwrights and the censor involves a cultural dialectic that negotiated the boundaries of a licensed public space. Because the Examiner sanctioned both the physical and textual sites in which the publicly performed drama was based in this period, scholars of Victorian theatre must contend with the influence of censorship. In exposing the explicit and implicit pressures which one such Examiner brought to bear on dramatists, this study begins to uncover what is still a largely unexplored feature of Victorian theatre history. The more we know about the censor, the more we may understand the cultural field – with all of its attendant limitations and opportunities – in which dramatists worked. It is hard to overstate the diacritical relationship between the Victorian drama and its censor, insofar as each came to reflect the character of the other. While scholars have called for a greater understanding of spectators' influence on the drama of this period, too often we forget that the Examiner was the playwright's first and, arguably, most crucial audience.

In his introduction to *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation* (1998), Robert C. Post criticizes past scholarship on censorship for its “oscillation between extreme abstraction and minute detail” which has resulted in “the space between, where most people live most of their lives...[being] persistently and scrupulously effaced.”<sup>2</sup> Post observes that the attention of “the new scholarship of censorship” characteristically alternates “between the concrete mechanisms of silencing and the abstraction of struggle....The challenge is thus how to preserve the analytic force

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<sup>2</sup> Robert C. Post. “Censorship and Silencing.” *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation* (1998), 4.

of the new scholarship without sacrificing the values and concerns of more traditional accounts” (4). My study seeks to fill the gap between these divergent approaches, by both examining the acutely discretionary practices of an individual censor (Donne), while at the same time investigating period documents to determine the effects of these practices on specific plays.

Despite the wealth of materials related to censorship, to date surprisingly little scholarship is devoted to Donne’s influence on Victorian drama.<sup>3</sup> When mentioned, the details of his tenure as dramatic censor are often abbreviated to the point of being glossed over, so that he is presented to us as benign and unremarkable, “the wisely liberal Examiner and Licenser of Plays.”<sup>4</sup> Even among contemporaries, such as Dion Boucicault (1822-90), one of the most successful Victorian playwrights, Donne’s role as Examiner was facetiously likened to “the presence of a lady [placed] at a dinner table of gentlemen to control in a delicate way the subjects spoken of.”<sup>5</sup> In contrast to this attitude, I maintain that Donne’s career justifies critical reevaluation; if he was dismissed by Victorians, he should certainly be taken seriously by those who study them. As we will

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<sup>3</sup> There are, to my knowledge, only three articles dedicated to Donne’s tenure as Examiner: T. Hughie Jones’ “The Censor Turns Manager: William Bodham Donne and the Windsor Theatricals.” *Theatre Notebook*. 55. 1 (2001): 37-47; John Russell Stephens’ “William Bodham Donne: some aspects of his later career as Examiner of Plays.” *Theatre Notebook*. 25 (1970-1): 25-32; and James F. Stottlar’s “A Victorian Stage Censor: The Theory and Practice of William Bodham Donne.” *Victorian Studies* 13. 3 (March 1970). 253-82. Donne is also mentioned in Stephens’ *The Censorship of the English Drama 1824-1901* (1980); Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow’s *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (2001); Richard Foulkes’ *Church and Stage in Victorian England* (1997); Robert Justin Goldstein’s “A Land of Relative Freedom: Censorship of the Press and the Arts in the Nineteenth Century (1815-1914),” and his *Political Censorship of the Arts and the Press in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1989).

<sup>4</sup> Neilson Campbell Hannay and Catherine Bodham Johnson, eds. *A Fitzgerald Friendship, Being Hitherto Unpublished Letters from Edward Fitzgerald to William Bodham Donne* (1974), xvii.

<sup>5</sup> Question #4449. Dion Boucicault. Interview. *Report from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations* (1866). In all future references to this *Report*, I will cite only the Question number, as well as the identity of the speaker when it is not stated in the text.

see, Boucicault's representation of Donne as a passive enforcer of polite etiquette belies the actively invasive, though often unseen, interventions of the Examiner. For almost a quarter of a century – nearly half the Victorian period – Donne performed a critical government function with quiet earnestness. In our own era, in which we have become accustomed to scrutinizing the agents of cultural and political power, we can easily fail to appreciate the astonishing reach of Donne's influence on English theatres and their audiences. Throughout his tenure as Examiner, Donne directly controlled the written content of *every* play performed in *every* theatre in England. His was a position of remarkable cultural and social influence that offered him the opportunity to shape the performed drama as well as the attitudes of its audiences. And he knew it.

Since the publication of Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), scholars have refuted purely hierarchical interpretations of power, arguing instead for power's multiple sites of agency and contest, while also exploring the nuances of hegemony and the apparent achievement of cultural and political consensus. Mary Poovey, for instance, presents a model of Victorian society in which she argues against "what is too often construed as a binary configuration of power," and instead "explodes the idea that power could ever be monolithic or merely repressive." Poovey employs what is by now a familiar Foucauldian understanding of power distributed through various sites in the social order, rather than centralized entirely within the state hierarchy. To illustrate her point, she cites the "economic [which] had become a relatively autonomous domain that, while still overseen by the English government, was increasingly analysed and treated as a realm in which the state should not interfere" (18). Poovey's argument is a good one,



and I do not wish to present Victorian dramatists as operating *entirely* under the thumb of the Examiner.<sup>6</sup> However, it bears pointing out that while economic production became increasingly independent of the state in this period, theatrical production – in spite of the elusive nature of dramatic performance – remained firmly under government control via a single individual in the Lord Chamberlain’s Office. This discrepancy was frequently recognized by Victorians who complained that liberties extended to most cultural and intellectual businesses were denied to theatrical ones; as a writer for *The Age* observed, “We, for our parts, see no reason why the manuscripts of plays should be submitted to a licenser more than the manuscripts of books.... We will hope for better things, and that in the country which boasts of ‘the liberty of unlicensed printing,’ we may soon possess as a companion the liberty of unlicensed acting.”<sup>7</sup> The reprieve hoped for here was long in coming. Censorship of the theatre had an extensive history in both England and Europe, and it was not to be removed easily.

Like many Victorians, Donne was apprehensive of what he perceived as the performed drama’s unique potential to generate audience sympathy for seditious and immoral causes; it was a conviction widely held by European governments throughout the nineteenth century. In 1805, for instance, one Moscow bureaucrat justified the banning of a dramatization of a book tolerated by the state using the rationale that a novel is consumed in private, while a play is watched by a multitude vulnerable to being won

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<sup>6</sup> For instance, we know that Donne was not wholly effective in his suppression of banned topics. During his testimony before the 1866 Select Committee, he was asked about his rule regarding the suppression of political allusions: “If those words are left out by your direction and are put in again [without your knowledge], do you hear of it?” To which Donne replied: “Sometimes I do; perhaps not in all cases” (Question #2266).

<sup>7</sup> *The Age* (24 July, 1852): 4.

over by the “daring expressions and thought against the government.”<sup>8</sup> Similarly, as an Austrian dramatic censor noted:

It is beyond question that censorship of the theatre must be much stricter than the normal censorship of printed reading matter.... This is a consequence of the different impression which can be made on the minds and emotions of the audience by a work enacted with the illusion of real life, by comparison with that which can be made by a play that is merely read at a desk.<sup>9</sup>

Like its European counterparts, the English stage had long been monitored by bureaucratic agents of the government, and the position of Examiner was formally created in the eighteenth century. During the period of political tension leading up to the English Restoration, politics and the theatre became intertwined, turning the stage into a venue for national and social debate, so that the English stage became nearly as partisan as Parliament. As Tobias Smollett (1721-71) pointed out in the eighteenth century, the English government, and particularly its Prime Minister, Sir Robert Walpole (1676-1745), had endured repeated attacks from several dramatists who had “exposed and ridiculed” the blemishes of his government (319). These attacks motivated Walpole to cripple the theatre’s political involvement. While insisting that legislation was needed to curb immoral and libellous presentations on the stage, Walpole initially ignored existing laws, in favour of his own more restrictive Act (Nicholson 65). Consisting of two major provisions, the Theatre Licensing Act of 1737 prohibited all theatres except those holding royal patents from the Lord Chamberlain from performing the ‘legitimate’ drama;

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<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Robert Justin Goldstein, *Political Censorship of the Arts and the Press in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (1989), 116.

<sup>9</sup> Franz Karl Hägelin was an Austrian dramatic censor between 1770-1804. This passage quoted in W. E. Yates’ *Theatre in Vienna, A Critical History, 1776-1995* (1996), 25.

second, the Act required that all new scripts be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for licensing (read censoring) prior to being performed.<sup>10</sup> The first of these provisions drastically affected the form of theatrical productions at the minor theatres existing in and around London. To evade the legal definition of a drama, unlicensed theatres combined drama with episodes of music, pantomime, or other spectacles. The Act's second provision placed playwrights under the direct scrutiny of a government censor.

Blame for the Licensing Act traditionally attaches to Henry Fielding (1707-54), who reputedly provoked Walpole with plays such as *Pasquin* (1736) and *The Historical Register for the Year 1736* (1736). If these plays were enough to provoke Walpole to propose the Licensing Act, it was ultimately a far more controversial script which persuaded Parliament to pass it. Much about this play is unknown, particularly information concerning the playwright and details of the script itself, which was not preserved (see Crean 252). What is accepted, albeit dubiously, is that the manager of Lincoln's Inn Fields, a Mr. Giffard, delivered a copy of a new play titled *The Vision of the Golden Rump* to the Prime Minister, who read excerpts so damaging to the Opposition that his Licensing Act passed into legislation with little difficulty in 1737. Subsequently, control of the performed drama resided firmly in the hands of the Lord Chamberlain and his Examiner; it would remain this way until 1968, over two hundred and thirty years later.

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<sup>10</sup> John Clyde Loftis, *The Politics of the Drama in Augustan England* (1963), 142.

From the outset, as Matthew J. Kinservik points out, the 1737 Licensing Act was largely used by Examiners to correct scripts, not to ban them.<sup>11</sup> This stratagem stemmed from the understanding that the censor's job was not merely to suppress unacceptable material, but also to train playwrights to write acceptably. The Examiner's function, then, was to monitor a particular medium by which ideas reached public attention, and to encourage playwrights to produce a national drama that reflected the interests and values of those who ruled the nation; it was a practice to which Donne's censorship closely conformed. The two major provisions of the 1737 Licensing Act – the State's licensing of theatres, and the use of government censors – were common measures used by governments throughout nineteenth-century Europe for monitoring the performed drama, though after 1843 only the latter of these provisions was employed discriminately in England. However, the patent theatre system, which existed in England from 1737 to 1843, created a distinction between the 'legitimate' drama – which was performed at London's patented theatres, Covent Garden, Drury Lane and (in the summer season) the Haymarket – and the 'illegitimate' drama (such as burlesque, melodrama and pantomime) performed at over twenty theatres after the patent system was abolished in 1843. As we will see, this distinction between 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' drama continued to prejudice theatregoers' attitudes long after its legal distinctions were formally abolished.

The state which the Examiner represented was not simply intent on suppressing seditious ideas, but rather it was concerned with censoring the theatrical dissemination of such ideas. In Chapter II my consideration of Donne's treatment of the Victoria

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<sup>11</sup> Matthew J. Kinservik, *Disciplining Satire: The Censorship of Satiric Comedy on the Eighteenth-Century London Stage* (2002), 98.

Theatre's adaptation of *Mary Barton*, investigates Victorians' distrust of the emotive potential of the performed drama. However, this conception of Victorians' anxiety about the drama was complicated in the case of Charles Reade's dramatization of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* (Chapter IV), in which I identify evidence indicating that Donne's decision not to censor the play was related to the fact that it was performed for a West End audience. Also, there are indications that many dramatists began to alter their plays willingly, as in the case of Mark Lemon and Tom Taylor's *Slave Life* (Chapter III), suggesting that Donne largely succeeded in influencing dramatists to censor themselves. Donne's censorship of London's East End drama, in particular, may be seen as an extension of larger national efforts to contain the working classes' political agency, and thus their ability to challenge the Victorian social order. Davis and Emeljanow draw far-reaching implications from Donne's attitude toward East End audiences, concluding that "[u]nlike Dickens, who wanted popular theatre to uplift the morals of the lower classes, Donne really wanted the drama to be uplifted by the exclusion of the lower orders. The better classes of spectator would oust their social inferiors and herald in a new golden age of elevated drama" (105). As I will show, such deductions, while rightly drawing attention to Donne's class prejudice, nonetheless overstate his intentions as Examiner. It is true that we find in Donne's *Essays on the Drama* (1858) an unmistakable differentiation between the "refined and instructed person" who attended London's West End theatres, and the populist tastes found "by merely crossing 'the bridges'" to the East End theatres.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Essays on the Drama*, 87 & 70.

Donne justified dramatic censorship, consciously or otherwise, by aligning it with the rationale of reformist discourses so prevalent at the time (and which frequently centred on improving the moral and physical conditions of the poor). Consequently, the premise of dramatic censorship presented by Donne must have seemed analogous to liberal theories, such as that put forward by John Stuart Mill (1806-73) regarding the role of intellectuals in the nation's cultural and political spheres in order that "the influence of superior minds [might prevail] over the multitude."<sup>13</sup> Accordingly, through his mandate as dramatic censor, Donne withheld politically sensitive issues from the public entertainment of particular audiences, usually of the lower classes – a prerogative which he justified on the grounds that he was having a "wholesome check" on the theatre.<sup>14</sup> Donne's censorship amounted to an opaque form of state propaganda, in that it made available to dramatists only those models of social organization that validated existing institutions of cultural and political authority. In this way, Donne's regulatory surveillance of London's East End drama acted to isolate the working classes from issues related to the economic and political inequalities of the English social order.

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<sup>13</sup> John Stuart Mill, "Civilization," 135. In this essay Mill laments that "in this country" there are "but two modes left in which an individual mind can hope to produce much direct effect upon the minds and destinies of his countrymen generally; as a member of parliament, or an editor of a London newspaper" (15). Mill interpreted the paucity of well-informed figures of authority as a symptom of urbanization, by which "the individual is lost and becomes impotent in the crowd" (136). The solution to this problem, Mill felt, resided in limiting sources of competition and authority. For businesses, this would come about through a consolidation of commercial interests (presumably through the formation of oligopolies), though "[c]ompetition will be as active as ever, but the number of competitors will be brought within manageable bounds" (136). In the intellectual and literary sphere, Mill recommended a licensing body of "the leading intellects of the age, whereby works of first-rate merit, of whatever class, and of whatever tendency in point of opinion, might come forth with the stamp on them...of the approval of those whose names would carry authority" (138). What Mill either did not foresee, or was not troubled by, was the potential for collusion fostered by this centralization of authority, whether corporate or cultural, and which was exemplified in the period's dramatic censorship, as a centralized mechanism for licensing and supervising the nation's theatrical entertainment.

<sup>14</sup> See Donne's testimony before the 1866 Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses and Regulations, Question #2339.

Donne's biases closely mirror the widespread anxieties in this period regarding the political mobilization of the working classes. The prevalence of these class prejudices are exposed as we contrast the seemingly inconsequential changes of plays' performative context. The dramatist, theatre, manager, audience and historical 'moment' in and for which each script was written also formed the contextual rationale that determined whether a script was censored or left untouched. Thus, by considering adaptations of novels, I am able to consider how each playwright chose to adapt the socio-political themes of the narrative for her/his respective audience, and, more important for this study, how the Examiner responded to each in turn. What I wish to examine is not only how Donne responded to the staging of a particular social issue, but also how he responded to its staging for particular theatres, and thus audiences. Understanding the correlation between audiences and the plays sanctioned for them is critical to identifying the objectives of the censor, and, by extension, the state which employed him. As much as possible, therefore, this study endeavours to consider the cultural agents which influenced the presentation, or *representation*, of an individual narrative, and its allowance or expurgation by the government's censor. I hope to show with each play why Donne did, or, as is often the case, did not intervene. As we will see, assessing Donne's rationale for licensing or suppressing a play involves coming to grips with the ongoing tension between the Examiner and dramatists, many of whom, despite the ignominy which accompanied censorship, struggled to explore the political and social issues of their time.

## CHAPTER I

### **The Examiner's "quiet sanction": William Bodham Donne, Censorship and the Victorian Theatre**

In order to come to terms with Donne's career as England's dramatic censor, we need to appreciate the historical context in which he took over the Examinership. In 1848, the year before he began acting as the state's dramatic censor, various countries in Europe, and particularly France, underwent considerable class upheavals that captured the attention (and incited the fears) of Victorians. In England Chartism, though essentially extinguished as a viable movement, was still being framed in the conservative press as a close-call for the prevailing political establishment: "London was threatened with a revolutionary movement; the Chartists in all the manufacturing towns were prepared to follow the example...and the mighty conqueror who had struck down Napoleon exerted his consummate skill in baffling the rebellion of his own countrymen, and won a victory over anarchy not less momentous than that of Waterloo."<sup>15</sup> The comparison between the defeat of Chartism and that of Napoleon, while perhaps an exaggeration, gives us an indication of the seriousness with which those in established authority viewed the political mobilization of the working classes. The assessment led *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* to pronounce 1849 "THE YEAR OF REACTION" to the revolutionary efforts in Europe and England, recalling the period as one in which a semblance of the old order was restored:

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<sup>15</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (January 1850): 3.



France, the centre of impulsion to the civilized world, was restrained; the demon of anarchy was crushed in its birthplace.... Revolution had been crushed without the effusion of blood in Berlin: law had regained its ascendancy [*sic*]; rebellion had quailed before the undaunted aspect of the defenders of order and the throne. Naples had regained the dominion of Sicily; the arms of France had restored the Pope.... Austria had regained her ascendancy [*sic*] in Italy.... Milan was again the seat of Imperial government.... Baden was conquered, Saxony pacified; the fumes of revolutionary aggression in Schleswig had been dissipated by the firmness of Denmark.... Though last, not least, Great Britain was pacified: the dreams of the Socialists, the treason of the Chartists, had recoiled before the energy of a people yet on the whole loyal and united.<sup>16</sup>

This ‘year of reaction’ was, fittingly, the same one in which Donne took over the responsibilities of England’s Examiner of Plays. Throughout his career as censor, Donne would help to reinforce the traditional order that had been rescued in 1849, silencing voices of change and protest from the English stage. Donne considered popular amusements – what we now refer to as mass culture – critical to understanding (and controlling) the psyche of a country. He maintained that “it is worth the while of historians to read the public history of a nation by the light of its recreations. No less incumbent is it on the legislators, for the present and the future, to study the undisguised aspect of the people.... Charles and Laud might have saved their own heads, and the removal of a throne and hierarchy to boot, had they condescended to survey calmly the physiognomy of England in their days.”<sup>17</sup> For Donne, the Examiner protected not merely the tastes of Victorian playgoers, but the fidelity and stability of their nation’s social order.

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<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> *Essays*, 255.

Harry White reminds us that “censorship tends to be initiated not, as some would have us think, in response to the emergence of evil ideas that might lead to corruption and depravity, but in response to the advent of new media of communication which threaten exclusive rule by making ideas that have often been around for quite a long time available to classes of people who did not formerly have access to them.”<sup>18</sup> White’s comments help to frame our understanding of Donne’s function as censor, as the state’s primary mechanism for managing the effects of deregulation imposed on Victorian theatres by the Theatre Regulation Act (1843). We should remember that Donne took over the responsibilities of Examiner at the conclusion of almost two decades of class tension and upheaval in England, related, in part, to the conditions and inequities of the industrialized labour market, as well as to legislative changes such as the 1832 Reform Act. These fluctuations in the social order were reflected in the Theatre Regulation Act, which upset both the conventional hierarchies of dramatic entertainment and the complacent attitude of West End theatregoers. Passed six years before Donne joined the Lord Chamberlain’s Office, the Act lifted controls which, since 1737, had restricted the number of theatres licensed to perform the ‘legitimate’ drama (that is, traditional comedy and tragedy). In effect, the Act created new forms, or “media,” to use White’s term, which served the interests of a portion of theatregoers previously excluded from participating in the ‘legitimate’ drama. With the passing of the Act, East End theatres began developing their own drama by catering to the interests, sympathies and tastes of their largely working-class audiences, and, in the process, became sites for potential

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<sup>18</sup> Harry White, *Anatomy of Censorship* (1997), xvi.

unrest and the propagation of dissent. To those interested in maintaining the *status quo*, this must have been unsettling.<sup>19</sup> Donne's mandate was to respond to the anxieties of the Victorian establishment, who were uncomfortable with the working classes' potential access to 'legitimate' forms of drama.

Until he began acting as the dramatic censor in 1849, Donne's life was that of a country gentleman with bookish tendencies and dwindling resources. Donne has been described by one family member as someone with "an extremely modest and retiring disposition...one of those men who are best made known by their friendships."<sup>20</sup> To date this assessment has remained largely unchallenged. William Bodham Donne is, almost literally, a footnote in history. We find references to Donne – almost always with felicity and warmth – in the memoirs of his more famous friends, such as Fanny Kemble (1809-93), or in histories of the Cambridge Apostles. Yet when mentioned, Donne's career and character are abbreviated to the point of being glossed, so that he is characteristically presented to us uncritically as an avuncular and unexceptional bureaucrat.

Donne was born on 29 July, 1807 at Mattishall, Norfolk, to Edward and Anne Donne; he was their second child, though his older brother (also named William) had died the previous year at age three.<sup>21</sup> He briefly attended Hingham Grammar School, before moving in 1819 to King Edward VI Grammar School at Bury St. Edmund's. It was here that Donne met John Mitchell Kemble, James Spedding, and Edward Fitzgerald,

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<sup>19</sup> While it is true that Victorians' views of the *status quo* was by no means a stable or uncontested notion, I shall use the term throughout this study as a reference to the class system which traditionally excluded members of the lower orders, and other marginalized groups. As David Cannadine reminds us, "[s]ee[ing] society hierarchically, and keeping hierarchy going, was the one view that united most politicians, and most people, in this period." *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (1999), 107.

<sup>20</sup> Catherine B. Johnson (Donne's granddaughter), ed. *William Bodham Donne and His Friends* (1905), vii.

<sup>21</sup> Edward Charles Donne (1777-1819), Anne Vertue Donne (1781-1859), William Donne (1803-1806).

with whom he enjoyed life-long friendships. Donne went to Cambridge in 1826, entering Gonville and Caius College. At university he was invited to join the Cambridge Conversazione Club, better known as the Apostles, where, along with Kemble and Spedding, he mixed with Richard Chenevix Trench, J. W. Blakesley, F. D. Maurice, as well as Arthur Hallam and Alfred Tennyson. A conscientious objector to the Thirty-Nine Articles of religion, Donne left Cambridge without receiving his degree.<sup>22</sup>

After leaving Cambridge, Donne returned to his family's home in Mattishall, and within a few years married Catherine Hewitt on 11 November, 1830. Within a year of the wedding, their first child, Charles Edward, was born, and thereafter every year or two he was joined by another of what ultimately amounted to five siblings.<sup>23</sup> While Donne's marriage was apparently a happy one, there are indications in many of his letters that he had difficulty paying the expenses related to his large family, particularly after his wife's death in 1843:

I shall still for a while tutorise [*sic*] the two younger boys, as I cannot run away from my poor helpless relations here, nor turn them over to my Mother, who has dependent nephews and nieces to care for. Charles however wants companions to encourage and discipline his naturally bold and active habits... In a year my circumstances may have totally changed, and I be able myself to accompany him and his brothers to a real public school, a plan to which I cling still tenaciously.

I am happy to say that my dear Blanche is well and comfortable at Mrs. Chapman's, at Norwich, and from all I see I do not think that I could

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<sup>22</sup> This overview of Donne's early life was taken from Catherine B. Johnson, vii-xiv. Among his friends, Donne could include a number of bright and influential Victorians, though the most influential relationship was arguably the one he enjoyed with John Mitchell Kemble, the son of Charles Kemble, the West End actor and theatre manager. Donne would takeover the responsibilities of the Examiner from John in 1849, while the latter was in Europe, though Donne did not become the official Examiner until Kemble died in March 1857. Donne's son, Charles, married Kemble's youngest daughter, Mildred, in May 1861. As well, Donne remained a close friend of Kemble's sister, Fanny, until his death in 1882.

<sup>23</sup> Catharine Hewitt Donne (1798-1843) gave birth to six children: Charles Edward (1832-1861), William Mowbray (1833-1907), Frederick Clench (1834-1875), Catharine Blanche (1835-1917), Valentia (1838-1918), and Emma (Sept. 1840-Nov. 1840).

have placed her better, and if Charles proves to be as well planted, I shall feel quite easy about him. Thank God they are all well inclined and this year have been unusually healthy.<sup>24</sup>

As his letters attest, in the early part of his life Donne preoccupied himself with largely domestic concerns. His situation began to change, however, and in 1849 he took over the responsibilities of Examiner from his old school friend, John Mitchell Kemble. Initially, Donne was able to maintain his home in the country by having scripts couriered to him twice each week; however, his new job gradually drew him away from his rural existence, and into the metropolitan sophistication of London. Soon after taking over Kemble's responsibilities at the Lord Chamberlain's Office, Donne – who was now in his early forties – began enjoying an increasing prominence in professional and literary circles, beginning with an offer in 1850 to become Professor of Language and Literature at University College, London – an offer he declined.<sup>25</sup> Donne's rejection of this appointment is peculiar, as he had recently started to struggle with financial restraints. Five months earlier, writing to a friend, he complained of his pecuniary situation, noting that "this year is not likely to be an *Annus Mirabilis* with me as regards money; for next month I lose my tenant at Mattishall, and at Michaelmas, unless something turns up, I fear I must drop my rents."<sup>26</sup> He was, we recall, already in midlife, and after twenty years of country life, the prospect of moving to London may have proved disagreeable. In a letter written when he was forty three, Donne reflected on his own career,

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<sup>24</sup> Letter to R. C. Trench (6 September, 1844), in Johnson, 84.

<sup>25</sup> Donne rejected the position because he did not feel himself knowledgeable enough to hold the post. Donne's granddaughter, Catharine Johnson, attributes this refusal of the position as indication that he was "too scrupulously honest to undertake work for which he did not feel himself to be thoroughly competent" (182).

<sup>26</sup> Letter to R. C. Trench (26 May, 1850), in Johnson, 179.

prematurely offering “compliments to posterity and sincere regrets that he lived too far off for me to call upon him.”<sup>27</sup> Epistolary introspection of this sort is rare for Donne – his letters are habitually occupied with concerns for his wife, mother and children, as well as the friends to whom he wrote – and provides a rare suggestion of the man’s lurking ambition. It is ironic that Donne should lament, however ambiguously, his own peripheral position in the world, just as he was about to be launched into London’s artistic and intellectual milieu. Despite his rejection of an academic post, Donne had better things ahead.

In 1852 he was offered the position of Editor at the *Edinburgh Review*, which he also declined, though later that year he accepted the post of Librarian at the London Library, which somewhat relieved his financial difficulties by providing him with free accommodation in the city at a residence located above the Library. Donne also published two books in 1852 – *Magic and Witchcraft* (which he edited), and *Old Roads and New Roads*. In the latter of these we find evidence of Donne’s knowledge of Greek and Roman history. The book, which considers the history of roads in Europe, and particularly, in England, is intended primarily to contrast the civilizing accomplishments of the Roman and British empires, drawing on anecdotal and literary sources ranging from Herodotus to Chaucer, as well as later writers such as Milton, Shakespeare, Cowper (purportedly a relation of Donne’s), Scott and Carlyle. Throughout his life Donne continued to edit and write books, including *Correspondence of George III with Lord North* (1867), which he undertook at the request of the Queen, as well as popular studies

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 178.

of *Euripides* (1872) and *Tacitus* (1873), in which he further demonstrated his knowledge of classical history. In addition to his books, Donne made over a hundred contributions, mostly in the form of reviews, to various magazines and newspapers.<sup>28</sup>

During the seven years in which he took over Kemble's responsibilities as Examiner, Donne became increasingly dependent on his fees for reading plays and the partial salary he received from the Lord Chamberlain's Office.<sup>29</sup> By the summer of 1856 his sons, Charles and Mowbray, were both attending Cambridge, and, within a month of leaving the position as Examiner, Donne was complaining of money problems: "I shall take some holiday, but when or for how long is uncertain, as the time and duration must depend upon the state of my work and my finances."<sup>30</sup> In later years, Donne would continue to complain about his job as Examiner, lamenting such things as the dearth of work during the summer – "I might be dead and buried for any trouble the Theatres give me, or for any fees they pay for new pieces" – or the increase in his duties: "I am paid no more, indeed rather less, than my predecessors in the Examinership [*sic*], but I am set to do as much work as the whole series, since there was a censor, ever performed." On other occasions we find him disgruntled at "injuring [his] mind by reading nonsense and periling [his] soul by reading wickedness," or put out at the Lord Chamberlain's refusal to give him an office in St. James' Palace, "because the Duchess of Cambridge occupies the best rooms in that ancient but inconvenient building."<sup>31</sup> These comments are mostly

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<sup>28</sup> A list of Donne's publications, including 115 articles, is listed in Johnson, 340-344.

<sup>29</sup> Donne would not receive the full salary of the position until he formally took over from Kemble in March 1857.

<sup>30</sup> Letter to Fanny Kemble (17 July, 1856) in Johnson, 200.

<sup>31</sup> Letters (31 July, and 9 September, 1858, and 10 January, 1859) in Johnson, 225-227, 231. It seems there were other perks to being Examiner, however, as Donne once confided to Fanny Kemble: "though I get no

insignificant umbrage on Donne's part, rather than real discontent; evidence suggests that, in fact, he went about his responsibilities as Examiner with unswerving fidelity to his mandate.

Notwithstanding his complaints about the position, Donne's efforts as censor seem to have left a favourable impression on the London theatre establishment. In 1856, he briefly relinquished his position as Examiner to Kemble, who had returned from researching and travelling in Europe. On his departure from the Lord Chamberlain's office, Donne noted his surprise when

the Managers of the Theatres wished to appoint a day and hour in next month for receiving them, as they desired to give me a token of their common obligations to me for punctuality, etc., etc., as Examiner of Plays during the term I held in office. I must say that I am very much gratified, since the good will of these gentlemen has been purchased by no concessions on my part; on the contrary, for a year or two many of them murmured at the increased strictness of the régime.<sup>32</sup>

If his correspondence is any indication, the ten months which Donne spent away from the Lord Chamberlain's Office was a restless and unhappy period for him, and his letters from this time are filled with petty complaints and cynicism which may have been related to his recent withdrawal from society: "I dread going to the Play with young folks. Sit they can and sit they did from 7-12 at night, until I was nearly dead with cramp and weariness.... The older I grow the greater is my reluctance to form new acquaintance with either beings or books, and if I live long enough, I shall be left a century behind the rest of the world...." In other letters he reiterates a growing dissatisfaction with his life:

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money, I do get drink from the Theatres: for praise be blest, two of the Saloon-Managers are also vintners, and one sends me a case of red wine, and the other of white," but quickly defends such patronage by protesting, "For what cause the 'might knows, since I have been no more civil to them than to others." (Letter (31 July, 1858) in Johnson, 225.)

<sup>32</sup> Letter to Fanny Kemble (28 May, 1856) in Johnson, 197.



“Yes; the London Library does contain nearly 80,000 volumes, and I am the luckless wight whose duty it is to sort and give an account of those same.”<sup>33</sup> This period of restlessness ended unexpectedly, however, with the death of Kemble on 26 March, 1857. The following day Donne was officially made the Lord Chamberlain’s Examiner of Plays; it was a position he would hold for the next fourteen years.

During the seven years he acted as Kemble’s replacement as Examiner, Donne wrote many of the articles later collected in his book, *Essays on the Drama* (1858). In these essays we find him repeatedly returning to the issue of the Victorian drama’s artistic quality, attempting, it would seem, to work out for himself and his readers an acceptable explanation for England’s apparent lack of talented playwrights. To challenge the theatre’s detractors, he drew on his considerable knowledge of Greek and Roman drama, using classical precedent to explain the state of the Victorian stage. Reading Donne’s *Essays*, one has the impression that there is more at stake in this book than a defence of the stage, and, specifically, that his comparison between classical and Victorian drama is also an attempt to assuage his own anxieties regarding the legitimacy of England’s self-privileging position in history, not only as nation, but as a *civilization*. “We cannot shut our eyes,” Donne concedes, “to the fact that the noblest dramatic poetry has been produced at the most brilliant epochs of national history.... We do not find that the nations which have been devoid of theatrical representations have surpassed, either in dignity of thought or decorum of manners, the far greater number which have cherished

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<sup>33</sup> Letters to Fanny Kemble (7 and 26 November, 1856) in Johnson, 212-213.

and developed a national stage” (120).<sup>34</sup> With remarkable confidence, Donne attempts to secure England’s cultural place next to classical Greek and Roman drama, maintaining that any contemporary weaknesses in the national drama “are not, however, features peculiar to the present age.” Instead, they only further confirm parallels between England and the ancient models of Western civilization: “[t]hey are but repetitions of what has already occurred. At Athens the new comedy supplanted its rivals and predecessors, much as the modern drama has supplanted Shakespeare and Racine” (137). Here Donne reassures readers, maintaining that English civilization is following the same path as its classical antecedents. The Victorian drama may have faltered, Donne seems to suggest, but its path can be righted. To restore England’s dramatic sensibilities, Donne prescribed a separation of dramatic “species” from one theatre to another, so that each venue could hone and specialize the skills particular to its repertoire.

In his *Essays*, Donne praises a number of (mostly West End) theatres which had developed their particular class, or “species,” of drama, attributing their success to “the systematic discrimination of these performances” (147).<sup>35</sup> These theatres, he suggests, had replaced the former patent theatres – Covent Garden, Drury Lane and the Haymarket – where the ‘legitimate’ drama had formerly been found. References to ‘legitimate’ drama usually included traditional comedy and tragedy, and excluded the increasingly

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<sup>34</sup> In his later book, *Euripides* (1872), Donne echoed this sentiment, tracing the connection between “the national character, and... the national drama” (10), suggesting that he retained his conviction in the relationship between a nation’s character and its drama. Interestingly, Matthew Kinservik notes that the ancient drama of Greece was used as an early justification for the 1737 Licensing Act. “This is,” Kinservik observes, “a convenient and misleading history manufactured to demonstrate how the wisest ancient society used the law to improve dramatic art... By historicizing the New Comedy as a product of state action, they were able to represent the Licensing Act in positive, not just negative, terms” (117).

<sup>35</sup> Donne identifies “the Lyceum, the Princess’s, the Olympic, Sadler’s Wells, and the Adelphi” theatres as those which have best developed their own distinctive brand of entertainment (146).

prevalent (and popular) nineteenth-century variants such as burlesque, pantomime, melodrama and sensation drama. These emerging derivations abandoned the rigid parameters of comedy and tragedy formerly found on the patent stages, and were commonly associated, though were not in reality limited to, the East End theatres.

Donne published this justification for separating the English drama into “species,” or genre, in an essay published in 1853. Yet in an article printed only three years later (and republished in 1858, with the former piece, in *Essays on the Drama*), Donne contradicts this theory, noting that “Greece owed to the fusion of classes...all the nobler and most vital elements of her dramatic literature”, while similarly attributing the success of Spain’s drama to the fact that the theatre was “the only point at which the upper and lower classes of the Spanish people really osculated” (251-252). It is interesting, then, that he withheld his proscription for maintaining class divisions from audiences and plays of the Victorian stage. Clearly there was an uncomfortable discrepancy for Donne, who, like many Victorians, idealized classical models of democracy while remaining profoundly uncomfortable with the potential impact of such models on the English social order. In his description of Aristophanes, for instance, Donne seems enamoured with the broad social criticism of the playwright: “the dramatic poet was not only author, manager, musician, ballet-master, and perhaps actor also, but he was the Athenian ‘Times’ and ‘Punch,’ wielding alike the scourge of invective and ridicule, as regarded politics, and the Athenian ‘Quarterly’ and ‘Edinburgh,’ – the Minos and Rhadamanthus of current literature” (6-7). Similarly, within a year of taking over Kemble’s responsibilities as Examiner, Donne would write nostalgically in one of his essays of the

cultural position of the drama in previous eras, in which the “theatre was at once the newspaper, the review, the magazine, and the novel of the seventeenth century.”<sup>36</sup> While Donne could be as sentimental about the drama’s cultural function for Elizabethans as he was for the ancient Greeks, as censor he steadfastly resisted this role for the drama of Victorians. During his testimony before the Select Committee, Donne was asked whether “[i]n the Greek drama, politics and religion were...introduced?”, to which Donne admitted that “religion [was], because a dramatic performance was a religious service, only allowed at a certain period of the year; and in the old comedy, at least, politics also [was allowed] to a great extent, if not the essential ingredient.” The implications of this answer for contemporary dramatists were enough to encourage the questioner to press Donne, enquiring “do you not think that dramatic writing as well as acting, must decline in energy in proportion as we exclude some topics of broad and living interest which a too-nice censorship might find ‘political’ or ‘religious’?” Donne evaded the question, however, citing a play with a religious theme, *Polyeucte*, which he had previously allowed, adding that in the case of this script, “I saw no reason why a religious drama of that kind should not be represented, nor do I, provided it is not doctrinal.”<sup>37</sup>

While many Victorians both aspired to and feared the Athenian democratic model, they similarly measured their own cultural and national achievements against

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<sup>36</sup> This quotation was first printed in an essay, titled “Beaumont and Fletcher” in *Frazer’s Magazine for Town and Country* (March 1850), and reprinted in *Essays*, 48.

<sup>37</sup> Question #2462 and #2463. In an unusual response to Donne’s defence of his censorship of religious plays he deemed to be “doctrinal,” the questioner (Mr. Locke) pressed his point in the following question (#2464), asking, “Did you license *Moses in Egypt*?”, to which Donne merely replied, “No.” The point Locke seems determined to make here is the frequency of Donne’s decision to censor plays on specific topics, though, in regard to the possibility of any further implications in this question, I am unable to extrapolate further on Locke’s intention.

those of ancient Rome. Turner points out that in the eighteenth century the English used the Roman Empire to argue both in support of, and as a challenge to, their own political model.<sup>38</sup> By the mid-nineteenth century historians like Charles Merivale were using Roman history to promote thinly-veiled interests of particular Victorian readers: “In contrast to ‘the great evil of the Sullan revolution’, Caesar assumed as his guiding principle ‘the elevation of the middle class of citizens, to constitute the ultimate source of political authority’.”<sup>39</sup> Donne also likened Victorian England with the same period in Roman history, observing that “[w]e have indeed arrived at a very similar epoch of civilization to that of the Cæsarian era, but with adjuncts derived from a purer religion, and from more generous and expanded views of commerce and the interdependence of nations.”<sup>40</sup> As Jenkyns notes, “though the true lovers of the classics were few, they included a great many of those who gave the Victorian age its religious, moral and political tone” (65). In this group, we can include Donne.

As part of his campaign to defend England’s dramatic contribution to European civilization, Donne protested that “it would be unjust to the theatre to deny that it has in an equal degree responded to the higher impulses of the age.” Rather, he argued, the English

possess the loftiest and most various drama in the world – the exponent of sublime and various intellect at epochs of great deeds and thoughts; and to

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<sup>38</sup> Frank M. Turner, *Contesting Cultural Authority, Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (1993), 233.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Merivale’s *A History of the Romans Under the Empire* (1852), and quoted in Frank M. Turner’s *Contesting Cultural Authority, Essays in Victorian Intellectual Life* (1993), 250. In other instances, the Roman Empire had been used to justify Victorian political concerns ranging from those of Palmerston – who in 1850, evoked nationalists’ esteem for the Roman ideal of citizenship to justify his own foreign policies – to debates regarding Disraeli’s Royal Titles Bill. See Norman Vance’s *The Victorians and Ancient Rome* (1997), 225-232.

<sup>40</sup> *Old Roads and New Roads* (1852), 12-13.

decry the drama as a whole, because some of its component phases have been censurable, is on a par with the prejudices which would banish sculpture, painting, and poetry from the pursuits of Christian men, because there are objectionable statues or licentious pictures and poems.

(*Essays* 121)

One of these “component phases,” Donne argues is the influence of England’s proverbial enemy: “The theatre, indeed, at the present moment, is in more danger from the social and sentimental corruptions of the French stage,” from which English playwrights translated dozens of scripts each month for production at London theatres. The Victorian stage, Donne insinuates, was experiencing a lull in dramatic vitality precisely because it had strayed from its Englishness. Here Donne exploits the age-old enmity between these two countries to aid in his effort to distinguish between an English, or national, drama, and foreign impostors:

The popular drama of the day is accordingly in no intelligible sense of the term national, but, like so much of our costume, a Parisian exotic. How does it fare, on the other hand, with the drama of which we justly boast, as having surpassed in amplitude of proportion and in earnestness of feeling, not only the classic frigidity of Corneille and Racine, but the authentic grandeur and harmony of the great Athenian masters.... (*Essays* 131-132)

By discriminating between England’s foreign popular drama and its national drama, Donne dismisses the former as a cultural aberration which, rather than being English, is by implication an import from the inferior culture of France. Through this rhetorical strategy, Donne justifies a place for England among the culturally dominant civilizations in European history, while at the same time attributing it to the instability of continental cultures, such as France. “[W]e have fewer *émeutes*,” Donne contended, “fewer revolutions, fewer breakings-up of the great central abysses of passion, than have

occurred among nations claiming to be livelier and more sensitive than ourselves.” In contrast to its exuberant European neighbours, “a manly vigour from the earliest times is perceptible in the recreations of the English nation” (248). A national or ‘legitimate’ drama, Donne implies, strengthens the English nation, while imported or ‘illegitimate’ entertainments undermine the country’s cultural foundation. Moreover, by positioning his argument behind the shield of English nationalism, Donne in effect undermines alternate views by casting them as un-English. Such chauvinistic jabs at the French were a staple in the rhetoric of English patriotism long before the Victorian period. In dismissing French drama by appealing to British nationalism, Donne was employing a tactic honed half a century earlier by Edmund Burke (1729-97), who, in 1790, used a similar approach to deflate the rising sympathy in England for the French Revolution.<sup>41</sup>

What we find in Donne’s comments, then, is evidence that the identity of many Victorians was still viewed in contrast to that of the French. Consequently, the dependence of English drama on French plays was perceived by some as an affront to the national identity. A writer for *The Westminster Review* referred to England’s dependence on French plays as a kind of cultural debt – “our extensive loans from the French” – insinuating that such borrowing from another nation’s literature was undermining the English theatre: “It is notorious to every actor, playwright, and play-goer in the kingdom.

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<sup>41</sup> For example, Burke’s rhetorical strategy in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) seems to pivot in large part on contrasting France’s Revolutionary ideals – such as atheism, or philosophic justifications for overturning the monarchical order – with what he presents as an English preference for order and tradition. Burke contends that, in contrast to the upheavals within France, the English social order has been constructed “under the auspices, and is confirmed by the sanctions of religion and piety. The whole has emanated from the simplicity of our national character, and from a sort of native plainness and directness of understanding, which for a long time characterized those men who have successively obtained authority amongst us. This disposition still remains, at least in the great body of the people” (90).

Some of our minor dramatic authors are in the habit of dealing so largely in this commodity, that the London managers find it necessary...to keep themselves *au courant* with the ever-increasing *répertoires* of the French stage.”<sup>42</sup> This acknowledgement of many plays’ French origins suggests that for many English theatregoers the cultural origin of a play was of little concern. That Donne *is* concerned only highlights further the extent to which his attitudes towards the drama diverged from those of the audiences he was employed to monitor.

Donne’s attitude toward the prevalence of French influences is echoed by other social critics, such as Matthew Arnold (1822-88), who similarly worried about “the infatuation, shown by the English public in its passion for the French plays and players.”<sup>43</sup> Yet while Donne explained the theatre’s lack of vitality as a consequence of having strayed from its English character, for Arnold this absence of national identity in the theatre – “[w]e in England have no modern drama at all” – was indicative of a more widespread fragmentation in the psyche of the country: “Our vast society is not at present homogeneous enough...not sufficiently united, even any large portion of it, in a common view of life, a common ideal, capable of serving as basis for a modern English drama” (231). The solution, Arnold thought, lay in the cultural tastes of the middle class, which was conspicuously absent in theatres. “[T]he mass of our English community, the mass of the middle class, kept aloof from the whole thing,” he observed (233). Inherent in Arnold’s comments is the conviction that cultural authority stems from a cohesive national identity, which could only be conferred on the drama (and, by extension, the

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<sup>42</sup> *The Westminster Review* (January 1853): 47.

<sup>43</sup> “The French Play in London.” *Irish Essays and Others* (1882), 211.



country) via the middle class. And so it is scarcely a surprise that Arnold's "remedy for this melancholy state of things" is to "believe that the State, the nation in its collective and corporate character, does well to concern itself about an influence so important to national life and manners as the theatre....Give them a theatre at the West End" (241). Once such a national, or middle-class, drama has been established, he advised, "plant a second of the like kind in the East. The people *will* have the theatre; then make it a good one" (242). Like Donne, Arnold asserted that the model for a repatriated and resuscitated drama must be forged by the tastes of West End audiences; only then could it be delivered safely to those in the East. This view that the working classes should follow the cultural lead of the upper classes is commonly found in a number of contemporary sources. For example, J. M. Ludlow and Lloyd Jones, in their study, *Progress of the Working Classes* (1867), applaud instances in which members of the lower ranks model the activities of the middle class in their own leisure time, noting by way of example that the "interest excited by the Oxford and Cambridge boat-race is on the whole an exceedingly healthy one, and by diffusing the taste for rowing has probably saved many a young London working man from gross forms of temptation" (194).<sup>44</sup> In matters of cultural authority, then, public intellectuals, including Donne and Arnold, were in

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<sup>44</sup> Ludlow and Jones' views are openly based on an assumed inferiority among the working classes, which they insinuate, is related both to educational and biological deficiencies. For instance, they explain the popularity of music among the working classes by noting that, of all the arts, music was uniquely suited to "affording enjoyment to the absolutely ignorant. To the ignorant, the joys of science are absolutely shut out, as are those of literature properly so-called; even form and colour require a certain education of the eye to be appreciated. Music alone...has charms for the child, even the idiot" (190). In this passage, then, we find echoes of Donne's view of the state as a "parent" to the infantilised masses, as a strategy for justifying the exclusion of the working classes from contributing to the cultural and intellectual life of the nation.

agreement: the proper response of working-class audiences and dramatists was deference and imitation.

Victorians' use of the terms 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' referred not only to dramatic forms, but also to particular London neighbourhoods, and by association, the classes of citizens that resided in them. I do not wish to suggest that theatre audiences of either the East or West were socially homogenous. The pit, box, and gallery (along with their different street entrances) were architectural reflections of the social order found in every London theatre. Cannadine argues that the "'two nations' image was a shape more in people's minds than on the ground, where different levels of income and status were mixed up, flowing imperceptibly one into the other....[C]ities like London or Leeds or Liverpool were better envisaged as seamless webs rather than as fabric rent asunder because of segregated housing patterns" (87). Nonetheless, theatres of all stripes relied disproportionately for their audiences on those residing in their adjacent neighbourhoods, and successful productions necessarily reflected the tastes of this audience base.<sup>45</sup> The various forms of the 'illegitimate' drama were innovative responses to the new cultural and social climate of nineteenth-century England, and presaged social change. For those, like Donne, who were invested in maintaining the *status quo*, there was a reflexive impulse to contain and diminish the influence of these emergent dramatic forms.

We find reference in various sources to the fallen state of the old patent theatres, and by implication, the social hierarchies they represented. Writing in 1860, Dickens

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<sup>45</sup> Davis and Emeljanow note, "[t]hat individual theatres attracted audiences largely commensurate with the local population is unsurprising, although we should not forget that contemporaries thought nothing of walking long distances to the theatre" ("Victorian and Edwardian Audiences" 97).

refers to “that neighbourhood of Covent-garden” and “[t]hose wonderful houses about Drury-lane Theatre, which in palmy days of theatres were prosperous and long-settled places of business”, but which now “looked so dull, and, considered as theatrical streets, so broken and bankrupt, that the FOUND DEAD on the black board at the police station might have announced the decease of the Drama.”<sup>46</sup> In contrast to this dilapidated neighbourhood, Dickens takes his readers to the Britannia Theatre where the old vibrancy of the patent theatres had found a home among East End audiences:

Besides prowlers and idlers, we were mechanics, dock-labourers, costermongers, petty tradesmen, small clerks, milliners, stay-makers, shoe-binders, slop-workers, poor workers in a hundred highways and byways. Many of us – on the whole, the majority – were not at all clean, and not at all choice in our lives or conversation. But we had all come together in a place where our convenience was well consulted, and where we were well looked after, to enjoy an evening’s entertainment in common. We were not going to lose any part of what we had paid for through anybody’s caprice, and as a community we had a character to lose. So, we were closely attentive, and kept excellent order.... (34)

This description of East End theatregoers is a combination of condescension and respect, in which Dickens is quick to poke fun at spectators’ modest attire, while at the same time calling attention to their inherent dignity (“as a community we had a character to lose”).<sup>47</sup>

Not everyone bothered with the sort of consideration shown by Dickens – indeed, many dismissed out-of-hand any attempt to respect the productions, or audiences, of East End

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Dickens, *The Uncommercial Traveller*, 31, 32. In his biography of Dickens, Peter Ackroyd determines that the essays published in this book were written by Dickens “between January and October of 1860” (921).

<sup>47</sup> Davis and Emeljanow rightly point out that “Dickens had a reason for perpetuating such a view of the audience. In both his novels and his journalism he argued that popular amusements were important for the common people not only because they kept them out of mischief, but also stimulated the imagination and often inculcated a moral. It was therefore essential that he...constructed an audience that evidently required the stimulus of popular amusement. In so doing he tended to mythologize nineteenth-century audiences, but also to establish the formula by which audiences were represented” (“Victorian and Edwardian Audiences” 98-99).

theatres. A writer for *The Saturday Review* alluded to the dismissive attitude of mainstream newspapers toward the dramatic ‘legitimacy’ of East End drama: “it is true that sometimes the managers of these obscure but profitable establishments will go out of their way to do a little bit of literature, in the hope that they will thereby acquire a character for ‘gentility,’ and mayhap get a short notice in the daily journals, by which they are ordinarily ignored.” The columnist justified this rejection based on urban geography (and, by extension, its distinctive class base):

There are certain persons, it is true, who cling with strong hope in the belief that the very minor theatres of London are fertile beds in which the flower of a Victorian drama equal in luxuriance to the Elizabethan may effectually be cultivated. It is not to the Adelphi, or the Olympic, or the Princess’s, or the Lyceum, or even to the Surrey, that these sanguine persons direct their glances, but to the Marylebone, or the Grecian, or the Britannia.... But the worst of it is that a victory gained in an obscure suburb ensures no real conquest. The laurels there acquired wither as soon as the wearer approaches a central region, and are speedily forgotten by those who bestowed them. No man can hope to lead the fashion in dress if his sphere of self-exhibition is confined to Ratcliff Highway.... To central London alone must we direct attention if we would ascertain the taste of the general public....<sup>48</sup>

Here we find evidence of the cultural chauvinism that obstructed East End theatres’ aspirations of artistic currency. What tacitly informs this argument is the inherent class prejudice that accompanies a discussion of urban neighbourhoods. Regardless of literary merit or financial success, East End productions were excluded from the cultural centrality of the city’s West End theatres.

In 1853 a writer for *The Westminster Review* similarly regretted that “[i]nstead of these patent houses, to which the higher forms of the drama were formerly confined, we

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<sup>48</sup> *The Saturday Review* (21 May, 1864): 626.

have no less than twenty-three establishments in London, all of which are privileged by law to take in the whole range of the drama, from Shakespeare to Fitzball.”<sup>49</sup> *The Westminster*’s writer is appalled to acknowledge the prevalence of East End theatres,

these places of entertainment, situated on the outskirts of the town, in the heart of dense and squalid populations – places as little known to the denizens of the west-end, as the moveable booths of China, and whose existence is never even alluded to by the critics....are the most thriving concerns we have, although their names are never pronounced to polite ears; and our leading tragedians and comedians think it not at all beneath their dignity to pass an auriferous week, now and then, in one or another of them; and on some occasions, we believe, have made the grand tour of the whole suburbs from Paddington to Mile End.<sup>50</sup>

It is interesting to note how the English working classes are conflated with the foreign ‘other,’ as a race distinct from (and subordinate to) the rest of the nation. We find in this passage, as well, evidence of the writer’s (and possibly his readers’) concern for the growing infringement of East End theatres, and their “dense and squalid populations”, on the cultural authority of the middle and upper classes. *The Westminster*’s writer appears both offended and incredulous that despite being denied the patronage of “critics” from the established press, and made taboo among well-heeled theatregoers, East End theatres should flourish – perhaps interpreting their success as indicative of the highly contested nature of authority in this period. The writer’s comments betray an awareness of the tacit relationship between traditional hierarchies of the legitimate and illegitimate drama and the larger Victorian social order, and resonate with Donne’s own call for the segregation of “species” of drama. Acknowledgement of this relationship highlights the underlying significance associated with the proletariat’s encroachment on the jurisdiction of their

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<sup>49</sup> *The Westminster Review* (January 1853): 58.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

social ‘betters.’ As we will see, the writer’s alarm at East End theatres’ ability to disrupt boundaries of cultural legitimacy in the theatrical free market closely parallels a more wide-spread anxiety regarding the working classes’ potential influence in an electoral democracy founded on universal suffrage. This apprehension about social boundaries emerged in part from the middle-class anxiety that the lifestyles and tastes of the lower classes might infect the nation, much like a disease that originated in their inferior living conditions.<sup>51</sup> The biases at work in Dickens’ essay and these articles from *The Saturday Review* and *The Westminster Review* (above) are perceptively mired in Victorian attitudes to class, and signal the contested nature of East End drama’s aspirations of cultural authority. It was a contest watched closely by the Examiner.

Donne, too, observed with concern that “[s]ociety has ceased to be divided into castes, or distinguished by outward and visible tokens of grandeur or debasement... a knight of the shire may be the son of a scrivener... ‘The toe of the peasant comes near the heel of the courtier’” (123-4). It is not surprising, then, that Donne often displays a hesitancy in his writing toward and suspicion of East End theatres – those “remote regions where horrors and nautical heroics were wont... to reign supreme, namely at the Surrey or Victoria Theatres” (126). Donne differentiates, as well, between the “refined and instructed person” (87) who attends West End venues – such as “the Opera House [later the Lyceum] and the St. James’s Theatre,” where he finds “hopes of recovery” (88) in dramatic tastes – in contrast with the less discerning preferences found “by merely crossing ‘the bridges’” (70) to the East End theatres. For Donne, the censor was a

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<sup>51</sup> Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather* (1995), 47.

protector of public morals, and particularly those of the working classes, whom he saw as impressionable to the sensations of the theatre:

The State is no less a parent than a schoolmaster; and while it necessarily provides penalties for the erring members of its household, it should with equal vigilance and sympathy afford space and verge enough for the recreations which may divert the masses from sensual indulgence and specious temptations. (*Essays* 256)

Donne's comments highlight what Sanford Levinson argues is one of the prime dangers of state-sponsored censorship. Levinson, who would recognize Donne's view of the state's parental authority over its citizens, identifies the potential for a nation's political establishment to "become an overweening *tutor* of the public, molding a distinct consciousness and subtly (or not so subtly) delegitimizing others."<sup>52</sup> It is hardly surprising, given Donne's view, that he decided challenges to established models of power were inappropriate for East End audiences. That Donne was not comfortable allowing East End audiences to view dramatic representations of subversive themes implies that such topics were considered all too relevant for working-class theatregoers.

We find in Donne's writing evidence of his resentment toward East End audiences' increasing control over the content of the dramas produced for them – an influence that challenged his hierarchical vision of the theatre's role in society, in which the drama "guide[s] rather than follow[s] the caprices of the public" (*Essays* 88). During his tenure as censor, Donne attempted to reverse the trend of audiences dictating the content of their entertainments – "the taste which the public at once fosters and imbibes"

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<sup>52</sup> Italics are those of the author. See Sanford Levinson's "The Tutelary State: 'Censorship,' 'Silencing,' and the 'Practices of Cultural Regulation.'" *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation* (1998): 196.

(75) – by exercising his editorial prerogative as Examiner. His displeasure with the encroachment of the lower classes on the performed drama was shared by other Victorians, such as a reader of *The Pall Mall Gazette*, who complained

that – *exceptis excipiendis* – every actor who professes to dress, talk, and walk in the character of an English gentleman, dresses, talks, and walks like a nondescript being something between the clerk of a second-rate house-agent and a greengrocer waiting in a butler's room? How is it that, except Messrs. Wigan, C. Matthews, and one or two others, not one English actor can look or speak like an English gentleman?

However, the reader maintains, “gentlemen embracing the stage as a profession would amend all this. They would impress something like probability on the story of the plays in which they took part, and they would insist on speaking pure English. Good actors would in time create good plays. And there is a sufficient number of educated people in London to applaud good plays well acted.”<sup>53</sup> We find in this passage further evidence that the middle and upper classes’ dissatisfaction with the theatre was linked to prevailing class chauvinism. The central complaint here is not only that middle-class characters are played by actors of inferior rank for equally ‘low’ audiences, but also that outward distinctions of class, which these actors presumably failed to bring to their representations of the wealthy – such as the speaking of “pure English” – did not re-enact (and, therefore, reinforce) class difference. If a middle or upper-class character “dresses, talks, and walks” like an ordinary citizen then, the implication seems to be, audiences might begin to devalue actual gentlemen. The site of this writer’s anxiety is not merely the public space of the theatre, but the performance of roles that threatened to expose the state’s various mechanisms for the maintenance of social order. The assumption here is

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<sup>53</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette* (25 October, 1865): 3.



that the performative nature of the theatre was understood by many Victorians to be potentially more influential than other forms of social commentary.

Donne's own apprehension of the working classes' increasingly influential activities in Victorian society was a concern shared among the middle and upper classes. Cannadine observes that "members of the governing elite still believed that society was hierarchical and that hierarchy had to be defended and asserted."<sup>54</sup> Indeed, often educational and philanthropic initiatives intended to aid the proletariat, were also designed to reinforce the lower orders' submission to the social order.<sup>55</sup> Even those critical of the political marginalization of the poor were uncomfortable with the potential impact of the masses on the higher ranks. In *Considerations on Representative Government* (1861), John Stuart Mill called for an increase in the suffrage, but took pains to assure readers that any model of representative government must have a mechanism by which the welfare of the middle and upper classes could be protected by the numerically superior votes (and, therefore, interests) of the proletariat. While insistent that the working classes should have some degree of participation in the nation's electoral process, Mill repeatedly voices the caveat that any new extension of the suffrage should nonetheless be weighted in such a way as "to prevent the labouring class from becoming preponderant in Parliament" (287).<sup>56</sup> These concerns were echoed during the run-up to

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<sup>54</sup> David Cannadine, *The Rise and Fall of Class in Britain* (1999), 90.

<sup>55</sup> Trygve R. Tholfsen, "The Transition to Democracy in Victorian Britain" (175).

<sup>56</sup> The mechanism for nullifying the proletariat's "numerical weight" (287) that Mill decided on was a citizen's occupation, which, unlike personal wealth or education, Mill reasons, justifies "reckoning one person's opinion as equivalent to more than one," whereby an individual's profession would afford a number of votes which corresponded with the "superior function" of his occupation (284). Other conditions which Mill placed on citizens' political agency included his assertion that it was "inadmissible that any person should participate in the suffrage, without being able to read, write, and, I will add, perform

the second Reform Bill in debates related to the expansion of the suffrage. Tories such as Robert Lowe feared that inclusion of the working classes would undermine England's social order and lead to a government dominated by proletarian interests; as one historian has noted, though the Reform Bill was intended to extend the franchise to a portion of the proletariat, few politicians wished to extend the vote to the entire working class.<sup>57</sup>

During the middle decades of the nineteenth century, concerns about England's political order abounded. In 1852 a writer for *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, when surveying the revolutions in Europe, noted that since the defeat of Napoleon, "[g]overnments have often great difficulties to contend with, but it has been not with each other, but with their subjects; many of them have been overturned, not by foreign armies, but by their own. Europe has been often on the verge of a general war, but danger of it arose not, as in former days, from the throne, but the cottage."<sup>58</sup> What we find in this quotation is further indication of the apprehension with which those in positions of established authority

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the common operations of arithmetic" (278), while, additionally, "the receipt of parish relief should be a peremptory disqualification for the franchise....By becoming dependent on the remaining members of the community for actual subsistence, he abdicates his claim to equal rights with them in other respects" (280).

Interestingly, in an effort to assuage whites' fears of a preponderantly black electorate in America, an English proponent of abolition noted that in the United States "there are at least ten pure whites to six blacks and browns," ensuring that "politically they [that is, whites] would be safe." The writer goes on to remind fearful whites that an emancipated black "peasantry" could never meet "the simple expedient of the establishment of a property qualification for all who had been slaves, [and which] would avert such dreaded contingency" (*The Westminster Review* (January 1853): 78). This quotation suggests an awareness among middle-class Victorians both of the democratic significance of numerical imbalances, and legal strategies for circumventing them; it also implies that the writer had no difficulty justifying the existence of a large body of non-participants in a democratic nation's electoral franchise to protect the established privileges of the participating group. The writer concludes his discussion by looking at the relative imbalance of elected representatives found in southern states, which did not include among their constituents the slaves who made up a significant portion of their populations. From this observation *The Westminster's* writer concludes with satisfaction that "we have no boroughmongering [*sic*] in England, no unfairness of electoral distribution, no absurdity of property qualifications of equal injustice to these invasions of the rights of the whites in free States, which are involved in the denial of those of the blacks in the slave [states]" (83). I should add here that *The Westminster's* article on American slavery will be fascinating for anyone interested in Victorian mores; I make frequent use of it in the pages which follow.

<sup>57</sup> David Cannadine, 104, 105.

<sup>58</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (January 1852): 243.

viewed the marginalized members of their own country. The protection of this authority was increasingly seen as a responsibility of the state's various constabulary mechanisms for maintaining civil rule; included among them was the censor.

An indication of the significance with which dramatic censorship was viewed by the government can be found in a *Report* made in 1866 by the Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses and Regulations. The Committee was "appointed to inquire into the Workings of the Acts of Parliament for Licensing and Regulating Theatres and Places of Public Entertainment in *Great Britain*, and to Report any Alterations which may appear desirable" (iii). By 1866 Donne had been fulfilling the duties of Examiner for approximately fourteen years (excepting the year Kemble returned to the post between 1856-7), and the Committee's *Report* is essentially an assessment of his efforts as censor. The *Report* contains testimony given by fifteen people selected from the theatre community and government bureaucracy, including Donne, between 19 March and 8 June, 1866. The Committee assessed, among other things, the effect of censorship on dramatists, and, as one of the sixteen findings of their *Report*, recommended that "the censorship of plays has worked satisfactorily, and that it is not desirable that it should be discontinued. On the contrary, that it should be extended as far as practicable to the performances in music halls and other places of public entertainment" (iv). Notwithstanding the *Report*'s findings, Donne was often defensive in his testimony before the Committee, and trivialized concerns regarding his influence on dramatists. He maintained, for instance, that "the system of restriction works wholesomely for the theatres," and that, regarding playwrights in particular, "I do not think any restrictions are

put upon them which can or at least ought to cramp any man's powers."<sup>59</sup> Upon being asked if playwrights were acquainted with his "system" of censorship, Donne positively assured the committee, "I believe that they are perfectly so."<sup>60</sup> However, when questioned about his "system," Donne often became evasive. He was eventually cornered by one Committee member: "You stated on Friday that religion, politics, and morality, were the three subjects to which you chiefly brought your attention in licensing a play?" – to which Donne, with an unusual economy of words, replied, "They are."<sup>61</sup>

Donne's taciturnity is hardly surprising in light of the subtlety and surreptitiousness which characterized his practice of censorship; indeed, he was generally as unobtrusive about altering scripts as he was testifying about them. A frequent tactic was his habit of arranging for amendments through theatre managers, rather than cutting passages from a script himself. For example, the first page of a script submitted by the Britannia Theatre, titled *Barrington: or a Hundred Years Ago*, carries the following note from the Examiner: "I have gone over...this drama with Mr. Wilton the Acting Manager and by a very few cuttings have rendered it unobjectionable."<sup>62</sup> In another instance, we find in one of his letters an anecdote recalling that "a piece...was submitted to me, and I induced the present Managers of the Olympic to withdraw it, and I am happy to add that

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<sup>59</sup> Questions #2371, #2461. For a good overview of Victorian middle-class attitudes toward music halls, see "Music-Halls versus the Drama." *Corn Hill Magazine* (15 January 1867): 119-128.

<sup>60</sup> Question #2411.

<sup>61</sup> Question #2438. Donne's focus on these issues was in keeping with other censors in Europe. For instance, these topics were similarly suppressed from Austrian theatre: "In broad terms, what was still excluded from performance from 1850 onwards was anything directed against the ruling house, anything that might threaten law and order or that offended public decency, anything that intruded into the private life of individuals, and anything offensive to religion or morality" (Yates 43).

<sup>62</sup> This note accompanies the play's entry, licensed 19 August, 1862, in the *Lord Chamberlain's Day Books*, ff. 27. *Barrington: or a Hundred Years Ago*, by F. Marchant (*Lord Chamberlain's Plays*, ADD 53015).

they met my proposal to cancel it at once, and cordially responded to my views of the case.”<sup>63</sup> Likewise, in 1865, Donne mentions advising “George Conquest – [manager of the] Grecian Theatre – [who] wrote two days ago to ask whether I would recommend...a license for a very powerful tragedy offered him on the subject of the ‘Murder of President Lincoln by John Wilkes Booth’! There can be no doubt that NO was my reply – I hinted also that many years must elapse before such a subject could be a fit one for representation.”<sup>64</sup> Donne referred to his surreptitious style of censorship in a letter to a new Lord Chamberlain, in which he notes “that whereas my predecessors have always contented themselves with simply recommending the interdiction of a MSS. I have on many occasions taken such time and trouble in altering pieces that I cannot, as a whole, recommend for license.”<sup>65</sup> While Kemble and other Examiners censored (or accepted) plays outright, Donne practiced a more subtle and preemptory intervention. Such evidences are significant not only as they reveal Donne’s practices as censor, but also because they challenge official documents on the topic. In his testimony before the Select Committee in 1866, Donne refuted accusations that censorship had a debilitating effect on the drama by noting how few plays he had censored, citing the records of the Lord Chamberlain’s *Day Book* to support his claim.<sup>66</sup> Donne’s assertion, moreover, was widely accepted by the Victorian public. One magazine, in an article summarizing the

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<sup>63</sup> Letter (26 January, 1858), LC1/58.

<sup>64</sup> Letter (25 May, 1865), LC1/153. (It is unclear whether this correspondence was written to Donne’s immediate supervisor, Sir Spenser Ponsonby, Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain’s Office, or the Lord Chamberlain himself.

<sup>65</sup> Letter (22 May, 1858), LC1/58.

<sup>66</sup> See Donne’s testimony, questions #2118, 2236, 2456, and 2461. A list of the plays banned by Donne between 1852-66 was published in the Select Committee’s *Report* (Appendix K, 294). According to these records, during this period Donne licensed 2 797 plays, while banning only nineteen.

Select Committee's Report, observed on the issue of censorship that "managers and authors generally concur that the power vested in the Lord Chamberlain has, as a rule, been exercised with tenderness and liberality."<sup>67</sup> However, what goes unaccounted for in Donne's testimony to the Committee are the largely undocumented communications which he had with managers recommending cuts to scripts, or discouraging their submission, such as those mentioned above. None of these interventions are recorded by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Consequently, the Office's records, which were used to argue the benevolent effect of dramatic censorship, offer an inaccurate portrait of the extent of the Examiner's intervention. Yet these unaccounted consultations represent the primary strategy in Donne's effort to shape the creative output of managers and dramatists. Donne boasted to the Select Committee that "all the excisions which I made in 1865, would not occupy more than that sheet of paper; not because I overlooked what was wrong in them, but because they did not require it."<sup>68</sup> While his comments were intended to emphasize the benign nature of his influence, they unintentionally speak to his success in commanding the compliance of dramatists. Rather than nullifying the need for a censor, I would argue that the widespread acquiescence of dramatists indicates the efficacy of Donne's regime. As a result, Donne's official annual report to the Lord Chamberlain largely read the same from year to year, and tacitly emphasized the Examiner's unobtrusive scrutiny of dramatists' work:

The year 1859 affords little to remark as regards the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction over Theatres and Saloons. It has been thought necessary to refuse a licence in one instance only, nor have the excisions from licensed

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<sup>67</sup> *Cornhill Magazine* (15 January 1867): 123.

<sup>68</sup> Question #2236.

Dramas been either numerous or serious. These facts, taken in connexion with the unusual number of places for Dramatic Entertainment now open, imply a generally improved condition in the moral character of the years [sic] Plays.<sup>69</sup>

While any modern effort to count the actual number of scripts altered or abandoned on Donne's recommendation is likely impossible, from Donne's official correspondence we are able to gather some appreciation of the penalty which censorship inflicted on a playwright's work and reputation.

One such example is that of W. E. Suter, who contacted Donne regarding a script, titled *The Blood Spot*, which had been refused licence. On hearing that his play had been banned, Suter wrote to Donne to plead his case:

As the author of about fifty Dramas, Farces &c. for various Theatres, which have without exception, and without a demur of any kind, been licensed by you, and as I have been as careful in the present (I am the unhappy writer of 'The Blood Spot') as in all my former productions to avoid any political allusions, improper joke, or slang &c. – indeed I have never an inclination to indulge in any of these – I can but suspect that the title – of which I am not the author – is the cause of hesitation in granting the license – there is certainly a good moral in the story of the Drama – and the purpose of this letter is to beseech you to inform me whether your objection is to the entire Drama, to a portion only, or to the title, and to ask for opportunity to alter, and amend, whatever you may have believed offensive.

In a pecuniary point of view, I should suffer by the refusal of your license, and worse, I feel that a stigma would be cast upon me, but that which touches me most of all in the matter is that Mr James has gone to considerable expense for the production of this Drama, that he relied upon it for the continuance of his season, and that – should your license be refused – having nothing new to substitute, his Theatre must be closed, and a body of people suddenly thrown out of employment, for all of which I, unfortunately, should be considered responsible.

If I have asked that which is incompatible with your rules, you will, I hope, forgive me, for happily I have never before needed enlightenment,

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<sup>69</sup> "Summary of Theatrical Manuscripts read in 1859" (2 January, 1860), LC 1/83.

and could have wished to continue in my ignorance, respecting them.<sup>70</sup>

If Suter is any indication of others in his profession, playwrights were well aware of Donne's stance regarding "political allusions, improper joke[s], or slang." More revealing is the indication we have here regarding the attitude of the theatre establishment towards censorship. It is clear from Suter's correspondence that to have a license withheld was both expensive and damaging to a playwright's reputation. Given these professional discouragements, it is remarkable that an experienced dramatist could not anticipate the Examiner's disfavour. Without being able to examine the script (all scripts refused licenses were returned to those who had submitted them), it is impossible to find evidence to explain Donne's hesitation with the play. What Suter's letter demonstrates, however, is both playwrights' consciousness of Donne's potential influence on their reputations and the extent to which they would go to avoid provoking his censure. What we also sense in Suter's remarks is that he *wants* to receive Donne's license for reasons beyond the obvious pragmatic and pecuniary motivations. This desire to satisfy the Examiner stems from the fact that with Donne's license the playwright gained inclusion among the formally authorized contributors to the national drama, or what Judith Butler terms "the speaking subject" (252). Butler argues that,

the question is not whether certain kinds of speech uttered by a subject are censored, but how an operation of censorship determines who will be a subject, a determination that depends on whether the speech of the candidate for subjecthood obeys the norms that govern what is speakable and what is not. To move outside of the domain of speakability is to risk

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<sup>70</sup> Letter (21 May, 1858), LC1/58. While I was unable to locate dates related to Suter's life, or a complete list of his works, the register of the Grecian Theatre records the performance of thirty plays by Suter between 1852 and 1873 (Fleetwood 245-57). The Grecian was, presumably, just one of the theatres for which Suter wrote.



one's status as a subject; to embody the norms that govern speakability in one's speech is to consummate one's status as a subject of speech.<sup>71</sup>

Here we find insight into the potency of that censorship which confers both the pragmatic permission to speak, as well as the cultural authority which this permission implies.

Without Donne's stamp of approval, Suter would lose, both practically and symbolically, his artistic agency. My aim in stating this is to point out that though Suter and other playwrights may have resented Donne's imposition on their careers, paradoxically they also needed the censor's endorsement to achieve artistic legitimacy, or, in Butler's words, "subjecthood." While the Examiner's pencil must have been a demeaning incursion in a playwright's work, without it one could not work as a playwright at all.

In response to Suter's letter, Donne wrote to the Lord Chamberlain – George John West, 5<sup>th</sup> Earl De La Warr – noting "that by certain excisions... the Blood-Spot may, I think, be rendered harmless, and with quiet sanction I am quite ready to dock and trim the MSS into tolerable fitness, more especially as Mr Suter has unconsciously, rather than intentionally, got into this scrape." The Lord Chamberlain, writing to Spenser Ponsonby (Comptroller of the Lord Chamberlain's Office) by way of a reply to Donne's letter, expressed his "opinion as to the character of the pieces belonging to a class which Mr Donne justly observed should, in these days, be banished from the stage." On the back of De La Warr's letter, Ponsonby wrote "'The Blood Spot' not allowed to be acted."<sup>72</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Judith Butler, "Ruled Out: Vocabularies of the Censor." *Censorship and Silencing: Practices of Cultural Regulation* (1998), 252-253.

<sup>72</sup> Donne's letter is dated 22 May, 1858, while the Lord Chamberlain's reply was written four days later, on 26 May. Both letters are found in the National Archives, LC1/58. De La Warr acted as Lord Chamberlain between 1841-1846, and 1858-1859. For a brief discussion of Donne's treatment of this play, see Stephens, 71. There is evidence of other examples of dramatic censorship not directly linked to the Examiner. In a letter, dated 28 February, 1851, the Lord Chamberlain at the time, Lord Breadalbane, took

This practice of “quiet sanction,” to use Donne’s words, is one of the conspicuous features of what became his particularly inconspicuous style of censorship. Indeed, the very subtlety of his approach underlines modern observations regarding the operational nuances of censorship. Drawing on Pierre Bourdieu’s notions of heterodoxy and orthodoxy, Richard Burt maintains that censorship has a “delimiting” effect on the scope of public discourse – an observation that accurately defines the effect of Donne’s censorship.<sup>73</sup> As we have already seen, it was precisely Donne’s ability to license plays which allowed him to restrict the range of subjects open to the drama’s field of artistic legitimacy.

In addition to its efficacy as a mechanism for controlling the thematic purview of dramatists, Donne’s unique style of censorship (what I will continue to refer to as his “quiet sanction”) may be rooted in the privacy of his life during the years he raised his

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issue with the Theatre’s manager, James Anderson, for failing to suspend production of a play, *Azael the Prodigal*. The Lord Chamberlain had requested this suspension after receiving a complaint about the play from the Bishop of London, though after reading the script he found nothing objectionable and allowed the production to continue. However, Breadalbane was clearly dissatisfied with Anderson’s refusal to suspend the production, as indicated by the tone of his letter:

I must nevertheless take this opportunity of drawing your attention to the Power which the Law gives to The Lord Chamberlain in all matters connected with the Theatres and the obligation under which he lies to put the Law in force in cases when the Managers refuse to accede to the requests and suggestions which he may feel it his duty to make, And [*sic*] I trust I may not again have reason to complain of inattention on your part to instructions given to you under my Authority.

Breadalbane’s letter is evidence that not all dramatic censorship was executed by Donne, who had already granted a license to the script. This letter is held in the National Archives, LC 1/50 (ff. 4). Underlining is that of Breadalbane.

The example of Suter’s play holds far-reaching implications for scholars of this period, as it draws into question the veracity of official records and what we think we know from them. If nothing else, the case of *The Blood Spot* underlines the need to treat even state documents with healthy scepticism. As Davis and Emeljanow observe, the “Lord Chamberlain’s Papers are a particularly rich resource for research into nineteenth-century London audiences, but we must bear in mind that Donne was a man with a mission. What might, at first glance, appear to be a relatively objective source is in fact a heavily loaded set of comments and reports, many of which are driven by Donne’s own obsessions and concerns” (105).

<sup>73</sup> Richard Burt, *The Administration of Aesthetics: Censorship, Political Criticism, and the Public Sphere* (1994), xvi.

family in Mattishall. Donne gave little indication that he enjoyed the public eye, either as the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner or in private life. Within a few months of taking over the responsibilities for Kemble, however, he was made all too aware of the disputatious potential of his new position. The unwanted publicity stemmed from a controversy involving the Britannia Saloon's production of a play, *The Voyage of Discovery; or, a Tale of the Frozen Ocean*. From the beginning Donne was displeased with the script, and, on 18 October, 1849, he wrote to the Britannia's manager, Samuel Lane, "requesting him to suspend the performance until the Ld Chamberlain's pleasure could be known." Lane protested that a similar production was being mounted at the Standard Theatre, titled *The North Pole; or, A Voyage to the Frozen Regions*, and complained that "if a rival establishment is permitted to play it while I am refused it will place me in an unfavourable light with the Public, and occasion me a loss of at least £100."<sup>74</sup> Lane raised the stakes by immediately posting bills cancelling the Britannia's production, and, more provocatively, including in the bill a passage from Donne's letter, and openly blamed the Examiner for the play's withdrawal:

COMMUNICATION FROM THE LORD CHAMBERLAIN:

Mr. SAMUEL LANE is requested to postpone the representation of "The Voyage of Discovery; or, a Tale of the Frozen Ocean," until further notice from the Lord Chamberlain.

WILLIAM BODHAM DONNE  
Examiner of all Theatrical Entertainments  
October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1849<sup>75</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Donne's letter to the Lord Chamberlain dated 24 October, 1849. The passage from Samuel Lane's correspondence is from a letter to Donne, dated 20 October, 1849. Both letters are found in the National Archives, LC 7/8.

<sup>75</sup> This bill is included among the Lord Chamberlain's papers in the National Archives, LC 7/8. Though the bill is not dated, in his letter to Donne, written on 20 October, Lane mentions that "though my bills were out, I have had others printed and pasted over the former ones" – which is likely a reference to the same bill which mentions Donne by name.

Donne was clearly alarmed at seeing his name on the bill, and brought the incident to the attention of the Lord Chamberlain's Office:

Mr Donne enclosed a 'poster' of the Manager of the Britannia Saloon, which was issued without his knowledge, immediately after Mr. Lane, the Manager, received Mr. Donne's letter of the 18 October, 1849 requesting him (Mr Lane) to suspend the performance of "Voyage of Discovery" .... The words "Communication from the Lord Chamberlain: have an official character, which Mr. Donne did not intend and could not foresee [*sic*]. In his note to Mr Lane, Mr Donne particularly pointed out to Mr Lane, that the request to suspend &c. was not an official injunction, but a preliminary precaution of the Examiner himself... Mr Donne would much regret to have exceeded his powers as Examiner....<sup>76</sup>

Donne demonstrates obvious alarm at the situation with Lane, and is so intent on removing himself from it that he refers to himself here in the third-person. From this correspondence it is clear that Donne was unsure both of how to handle the situation, and the extent of his own authority. In the end, the dispute was settled when it came to light that the Britannia's play had been previously licensed for production at the Coburg Theatre, in June 1819. What we find in Donne's letter above, is an indication of the hesitancy and insecurity he initially experienced in relation to the power of his position. In contrast to this early mishap, we find in Donne's subsequent correspondence an impressive assurance and subtlety which suggests that he came to wield his authority with markedly greater confidence, though, it is true, he continued to avoid public notice. Certainly there is no indication that Donne enjoyed publicity of this or any other sort.

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<sup>76</sup> Letter (24 October, 1849), LC 7/8. In this letter Donne confirms that he contacted Lane on 18 October, and therefore it would seem Lane, perhaps in his zeal, placed the incorrect date when quoting this letter in his bill cancelling the play.

Only two years earlier, he had remarked in one of his letters: “I had as lief be in the Gazette as tied to a tar-barrel for heresy, or pining in a dungeon till I bought my freedom with gold.”<sup>77</sup> It is likely that his practice of discrete censorship, or “quiet sanction,” had as much to do with political tact as with his own disposition.

The public quarrel with the Britannia Saloon was not Donne’s last experience with controversy. At various points in his career he would have to contend with open criticism, and he was sometimes targeted in the press. *The Age*, for instance, argued against dramatic censorship by attacking the Lord Chamberlain and his Examiner as expensive appendages of the Royal bureaucracy, and inflicting unnecessary control over the rights of the English people:

the formidable Chamberlain can, if he pleases, stop one and every drama which a manager may put up...and that he is the critic and the judge, before whom every new play in manuscript must be laid for his high sanction, as to what it is proper of an English audience to listen to, to disapprove of, or to admire!...Now we put it to the playgoing public – to all the public, playgoing or not – is this wretched old mockery to last? Which is the best judge of what is good or evil in a drama, you, the occupants of the boxes, pit, and gallery, or an obscure Mr. Donne, the puppet of a mere showy Marionette, the Chamberlain? Can you not be trusted with the care of your own morals, or with the preservation of the public peace?<sup>78</sup>

As we will see in Chapter II, this particular outcry against Donne was inspired by his refusal to license an East End adaptation of Harrison Ainsworth’s novel, *Jack Sheppard* (1839), after allowing a version to be produced at the Adelphi Theatre in the West End. Donne was suspicious of East End theatres, as we have already seen, and was often more

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<sup>77</sup> Letter to Bernard Barton (3 November, 1847), in Johnson, 142.

<sup>78</sup> *The Age* (24 July, 1852): 4. *The Era* carried a similar article the week before, giving voice to one East End manager, the Marylebone’s E. T. Smith, who complained about “the irresponsible dictation of an ‘Examiner’...and the necessity of the abolition of this sinecure office” (18 July, 1852): 15.

critical of material performed for their audiences. In a letter to the Lord Chamberlain, Donne explained his rationale for banning certain topics from East End productions, and in particular that

class of Dramas now nearly extinct on the stage, and ever introduced as novelties to the class in which highway-robbery, burglary, and larceny form the staple of the interest and action. In my opinion, such Dramas are extremely prejudicial to the younger portions of the Pit and Gallery audiences at the Minor Theatres, and with the exception of a few stock-pieces licensed several years ago, e.g. ‘Dick Turnpin’, ‘Jack Sheppard’ &c &c[,] scarcely any of this order of Dramas now remain on the stage.<sup>79</sup>

Donne’s apprehension regarding the influence of such plays on a specific class and geographic segment of London theatregoers, provides further evidence that his decisions as Examiner were influenced not only by the content of a script, but also by the audience for which it was intended. Heidi J. Holder notes that such anxieties posed a difficulty for London’s East End theatres: purportedly “their audiences, credulous and tending towards vice, were easily led, by theatrical performance, into mimicking acts – particularly criminal acts – witnessed on stage” (259). This anxiety suggests a larger fear on the part of the public towards the working classes’ capacity to disrupt the Victorian *status quo*. Donne’s particular scrutiny of East End productions typified a more pervasive supervision endured by the lower classes and reflected in the cultural isolation of urban spaces. Joyce Mekeel, in her discussion of conditions of private space in London, notes that the “tacit rule was privacy for the upper and middle classes and publicity and surveillance for the lower classes. This concept led not only to separate entrances in

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<sup>79</sup> Letter to the Lord Chamberlain (20 May, 1858), LC 1/58. The subject of Donne’s letter was W. E. Suter’s play titled *The Blood Spot, or the Maiden, the Miser and the Murderer* intended for performance at the Queen’s Theatre (see the discussion of this play above).

private homes for owners and guests on the one hand, and those for tradesmen and servants on the other, but also to separate entrances for each area of the theatre, box, pit, and gallery.”<sup>80</sup> Mekeel’s comments suggest that censorship of East End drama may be seen as an extension of this preoccupation with segregating and monitoring the public spaces of the working classes. Donne’s scrutiny demonstrates that the marginalization of East End audiences was sustained not merely by isolating their cultural institutions, but through a rigorous and unrelenting surveillance of them.

The prejudicial nature of Donne’s interference in the East End drama occasionally roused protests from the theatre community. In the case of the *Jack Sheppard* controversy, an East End actor, George Wilson, wrote to *The Era*, critiquing the censor’s interdiction with considerable insight:

Is the contagion of immorality less to be dreaded in the Strand than in the suburban districts of Marylebone and Whitechapel? or is there in the management of the Adelphi any peculiar antidote to the infectious poison? The exclusive permission cannot surely arise from the fact that the purlieus of the Strand were the favourite resort of the gallant burglar [Jack Sheppard], and that, therefore, an exhibition ought to be granted in favour of the locality for the mimic representations of his exploits?<sup>81</sup>

As with his conflict involving the Britannia Saloon, this sort of publicity did not suit Donne’s reserved temperament, and he would later advise an incoming Lord Chamberlain of the dangers associated with their position:

What I am most afraid of and what I know would be most distasteful both to the present and the late Lord Chamberlain is to bring their name and office too often into public notice. I doubt not you have heard, as

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<sup>80</sup> Joyce Mekeel, *Social Influences on Changing Audience Behaviour in the London Theatre, 1830-1880*. Boston University. Ph.D. Thesis (1983), 236.

<sup>81</sup> *The Era* (25 July, 1852): 10.

frequently as I have myself heard, many persons – and persons of some good judgement too, but not well informed on the subject – expressing their opinion that, while the press may print or draw what and where it likes, I, officially am an incumbrance [*sic*], nuisance [*sic*], and superfluity. And it seems to me that the most certain method in such times for abolishing the Lord Chamberlain’s most mild and necessary jurisdiction *in rebus scenicis*... would be to make frequent display of his authority....<sup>82</sup>

What we find here is an indication of Donne’s sensitivity toward public attitudes of the Examiner, and the strategies he developed to ensure his political survival. His habit of “quiet sanction” provides insight into his effectiveness as a censor. Donne clearly understood that the most adroit way to perform his duties was to do so beyond the public eye, and the scrutiny of an uncensored press. This technique of “quiet sanction,” then, became one of the hallmarks of Donne’s particular style of censorship, and, what evidence we have, suggests that he practiced it with little or no deviation throughout his tenure as Examiner.

If Donne remained outwardly consistent in his professional attitudes and duties, however, we know from his personal correspondence that his private opinion regarding the subject matter he expurgated was sometimes at odds with his official position. He was often chided, for example, on his rigorous excision of religious references and allusions, though in the following letter he attributes the necessity of these cuts to the prudery of English theatregoers:

Madame Ristori is to play Judith in a few evenings: but to please the thick-skulled superstitious British public I have been obliged to find her a new name for the Tragedy, and new titles for the characters, and all because the book of Judith happens to be bound up with the Bible, being

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<sup>82</sup> Letter (28 April, 1858), LC1/58.



all the while as much inspired as 'Tom Jones'. When shall we be wiser people?<sup>83</sup>

These private comments stand in direct contrast to his official correspondence, such as a letter written in 1855 to the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Breadalbane, regarding a play, titled *King of Persia, or The Triumph of the Jewish Queen*, that Donne wished to censor:

My Lord,

I very unwillingly trouble your Lordship with the accompanying MSS. because, on this occasion, I feel no doubt of the unsuitableness of its subject for theatrical representation.

The story is that of Esther: several of the names in the Bible are retained: viz. Haman, Mordecai, Vashti, Esther etc. With the treatment of subject I have no fault to find: my objection lies against the employing a portion of the Bible which moreover is occasionally read in the Church service, as a dramatic theme.

For these reasons, my Lord, I respectfully solicit the prohibition of this MSS as a theatrical entertainment, both as improper in itself, and as affording, if licensed, a dangerous precedent....<sup>84</sup>

This discrepancy between Donne's personal and professional opinions related to the material he expurgated was just one of many incongruities we find in English attitudes towards censorship. It is ironic, for instance, that the period of Donne's tenure as Examiner of Plays was one in which established forms of press censorship were being done away. The stamp tax, begun in 1712, was abolished in 1855, as was the advertising tax in 1853 and the newsprint tax in 1861.<sup>85</sup> All of these levies had been instituted with the intention of making the cost of newspapers prohibitive for working-class readers,

<sup>83</sup> Letter to Fanny Kemble (8 July, 1858), in Johnson, 224-225.

<sup>84</sup> Letter (30 August, 1855), in *Lord Chamberlain's Day Books* (1852-1858), ADD 53703, ff. 151. Breadalbane's reply, which granted Donne's request, was dated the following day (31 August) and is located in the same collection, ff. 150.

<sup>85</sup> Robert Justin Goldstein, "Censorship of the Press and the Arts," 131.

whom legislators traditionally considered with apprehension. Yet as censorship of the press waned in England, state surveillance of the drama continued.

One reason for this is that many Victorians considered state monitoring of public entertainment to be central to the maintenance of civil order, believing, like Donne, that

the Government which shuts its eyes to the amusements of the people, and considers that if life and goods be protected, all its duties are performed, beholds only half of its proper functions....For, if work and its fair recompense be a preventive against crime, occasional leisure and recreation are no less good prophylactics in their way. The unbent mind is, at times, in as much peril from temptation as the unemployed. (*Essays* 211)

And yet, notwithstanding his conviction regarding the “wholesome” influence of censorship on the English drama, Donne had doubts as to the usefulness of banning political topics out of hand. He expressed as much in a letter to the Lord Chamberlain, in which he noted that the

old Acts for the regulation of Places of Public Amusements nearly all rest on a dread of Jacobite conspiracy or as supplements to... police arrangements – neither of these causes for fear or precaution remaining. I see no other course than a total reconsideration of this whole question & for that I take it the House of Commons will now not have leisure for some time. I trust whenever a new Act is passed it will be, unlike the present one, both ‘intelligible and applicable.’<sup>86</sup>

How sincere his sentiments were is difficult to determine (he was, after all, writing to his boss), though we know that Donne expressed none of these doubts in his testimony the following year (1866) before the Select Committee. What is interesting to note from this letter is the indication here of Donne’s frustration with the vagueness of the Theatre

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<sup>86</sup> Letter (27 October, 1865), LC1/53.

Regulation Act (1843) regarding his mandate as censor. A similar view was put forward in *Cornhill Magazine*, which complained that, among other things, the Act “does not define with sufficient distinctness the power of censorship exercised by [the Lord Chamberlain].”<sup>87</sup> However, while the Act’s wording was certainly unspecific, Donne must also have been aware that this ambiguity left him greater potential for imposing his own opinions on the drama.

The vague legal terms outlining the Examiner’s mandate understandably aggravated many people in the theatre community. Even West End playwrights, like Dion Boucicault, were frustrated by what was perceived to be the “caprice and unsteadiness” of dramatic censorship.<sup>88</sup> Donne’s testimony before the Select Committee suggests that the seeming unpredictability of his decisions to suppress or allow political references was attributable to their immediate political or social relevance. When questioned regarding his treatment of political allusions in plays, he replied that “it depends very much on the particular times or circumstances. A particular allusion at one time would be very harmless, but under other circumstances might prove very far from harmless.”<sup>89</sup> The ambiguity of Donne’s rationale frustrated the Select Committee’s questioners (as it had playwrights), though when pressed Donne was either unable or unwilling to be more precise. This is not surprising when we consider the real focus of the censor’s attention; as Harry White points out,

In the final analysis it is not the expression which poses the perceived threat, but its audience, and censors can live with uncertainty regarding the

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<sup>87</sup> *Corn Hill Magazine* (15 January 1867): 121.

<sup>88</sup> Question #4295.

<sup>89</sup> Question #2408.

defining characteristics of things like obscenity or profanity because censorship functions to define characteristics we ought to be wary of when we find them, not in expression, but in people. *Censorship functions to define people rather than expression.* (23-24)<sup>90</sup>

One of the reasons, then, that Donne had difficulty explaining what material he considered censurable is that his concern as Examiner had never been the mere determination of what defined condemnable subject matter (particularly with regard to political themes); rather his focus was deciding who, or what class of theatregoers, would be 'suitable' for particular subjects. When questioned regarding audiences' reaction to political subjects on the stage, one Victorian playwright responded "I think it might be very popular, and I do not feel sure that the Aristophanic drama would be such a bad thing to restore" – only to add later that "the population which fills the theatres is by no means the class of people you would choose to submit a piece to."<sup>91</sup> Without knowing it, the playwright had summarized the censor's perspective better than Donne had.

The efforts of dramatists to elicit the sympathies of their audiences through political themes, in addition to Donne's corresponding zeal to remove socially or politically incendiary passages from plays, suggest that theatregoers were susceptible to such topics. Donne, in particular, voiced an attitude popular at the time, in which he maintained that "the representation of a story appeals much more strongly than merely reading one, to the senses of an audience."<sup>92</sup> Herein lies Donne's anxiety, and presumably that of his employer, regarding the theatre. Perceived as a highly persuasive

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<sup>90</sup> White's italics.

<sup>91</sup> Taken from Shirley Brooks' testimony, Questions #4490, 4496.

<sup>92</sup> Question #2417.

medium, the power of the performed drama made it liable to suppression by those who, like Donne, feared its influence on the thoughts and actions of audiences, and above all on those in the East End. As White notes, censorship “functions, not primarily as the censor claims, to protect moral and religious values by identifying expression that is supposed to be blasphemous and immoral, but to maintain and validate political control and social hierarchies by identifying classes of people government and society needs to guard against and restrain” (24). Through his mandate as dramatic censor, Donne attempted to act as a cultural arbiter for theatres, bracketing particular material from the consideration of audiences deemed unrefined and therefore ill-equipped to respond to inflammatory material. In particular, Donne’s censorship of East End theatre audiences became a form of cultural segregation – most notably by excluding the city’s working classes from debates concerning dissenting attitudes toward figures and institutions of established power in the English social order.

As we have seen, Donne managed this influence over the Victorian theatre through his practice of “quiet sanction,” which allowed him to intervene between dramatists and their audiences on behalf of the specific interests of the government (and the broader interests of the *status quo*), often below the radar of record keepers in the Lord Chamberlain’s Office. Donne came to the role of Examiner in midlife, having long acquired a deep sympathy for classical drama as well as an aversion toward the public eye. Ultimately Donne’s interest in and knowledge of classical theatre, together with his idealized Victorian notion of democracy, was at odds with his conservative (and equally Victorian) anxieties about the rights of the working classes, which influenced his

decisions to censor particular issues from the stage. Donne's habit of keeping himself out of the public eye, however, proved influential in defining his disposition as Examiner. It was, perhaps, through his desire for privacy that he came to realize the power of remaining largely unacknowledged by those who attended the increasingly popular entertainment over which he presided. What we find, then, is that through his practice of "quiet sanction" Donne created within the Victorian theatre community a parenthetical existence for himself, from which he acted as a largely unobserved agent of the state. From his position, Donne wielded an authority that for modern scholars is often difficult both to appreciate and to quantify. There remains sufficient evidence, however, for us to appreciate the dumbfounded umbrage of a columnist for *The Age* who noted, "The great world...seldom dream, when at the play, that they are enjoying their evening's pleasure at the grace of a single man."<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> *The Age* (24 July, 1852): 4. The "single man" which this columnist is referring to is the Lord Chamberlain, though, as I have already shown, the individual with the most direct influence was, in fact, the Examiner, whose decisions and recommendations were almost always followed by his superior. To this end, the columnist later acknowledges "the omnipotent DONNE" who acts as "the Lord Chamberlain's man-of-all-work...[and] who seems generally to do the criticism and propound the judgement."

## CHAPTER II

### **Censorship, the Middle-Class Agenda and the Social Order: *Mary Barton* and Its Adaptations**

In 1970 James Stottlar wrote what is still one of the few critical studies of Donne's career as the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays. In an effort to determine the effect of Donne's censorship on the Victorian theatre, Stottlar cites Donne's testimony before the 1866 Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses and Regulation, in which he detailed his responsibilities as Examiner. Despite all the information that Donne provides in this document, Stottlar expresses his regret that

...no irate playwright rushed before the committee waving a banned or mutilated manuscript and insisting that the record show what the Examiner had done to his play; no committee member had access to a manuscript that had been rendered 'unobjectionable' by the Examiner's blue pencil. The result is that...we cannot learn...how narrowly Donne interpreted the word 'objectionable.'<sup>94</sup>

As a consequence, Stottlar notes that those who "attempt to understand the Victorian drama could wish that Donne had been compelled to explain his theories and practices in detail, for then the minutes of the hearings would contain concrete information about the censorship of Victorian plays" (261). As we have seen, because of Donne's circumspect style of censorship relatively few plays were directly censored, and what is known of the plays that were altered before being licensed is limited to the passages selected for omission. Though Donne recorded all of his omissions for the plays he licensed, it is exceedingly rare to find the revised version of an edited script. Exceptions, however, do

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<sup>94</sup> James F. Stottlar, "A Victorian Stage Censor: The Theory and Practice of William Bodham Donne." *Victorian Studies* 13. 3 (March 1970): 253-282.

exist. One such play is titled *Mary Barton; or, A Tale of Manchester Life!*, an adaptation of the novel by Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-65), and, as we will see, the script provides a unique glimpse of the extent to which playwrights went to placate the Examiner.

Donne's influence on the moral and political 'message' of this play – written for the Victoria Theatre in London's East End – provides an interesting reference point against which to consider subsequent dramatizations of Gaskell's novel. After considering this play, and the subsequent alterations made to appease Donne's initial disapproval, I wish to consider two later adaptations – Thompson Townsend's *Mary Barton* (1861) and Dion Boucicault's *The Long Strike* (1866) – and the ways each attempted to entertain their audiences while also appeasing the Examiner. Both of these plays were a commercial success for the managers of their respective theatres, and Donne found nothing in them to censor. What we will discover in comparing these three plays is that Donne was intent on isolating East End audiences, in particular, from plays that openly dissented from or challenged the *status quo*. Playwrights, however, continued to address social issues, albeit in a way that deferred to, or at least ceased to challenge, existing institutions of authority, so that the drama ultimately reinforced the established hierarchies of culture and politics.

The anonymously written play, *Mary Barton; or, A Tale of Manchester Life!*, was entered by Donne in the Lord Chamberlain's *Day Book* on 18 June, 1850.<sup>95</sup> However, we know from a letter attached to the original manuscript that the play was submitted six days before this date by the manager of the Victoria Theatre, David Webster

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<sup>95</sup> Page numbers cited here refer to the original folio copy of the script submitted to Donne, located at the British Library ADD 43028P.



Osbaldiston.<sup>96</sup> Normally Donne licensed manuscripts within a day or two of submission, and so the belated dating of the license suggests the play received unusual attention. We know from his remarks accompanying the license of this adaptation of *Mary Barton*, that Donne ordered a number of passages to be cut from the play. Such omissions were not uncommon. However, what makes this particular submission so unusual in relation to the other scripts in the archive is that the subsequently altered sections of the play are included with the original manuscript. I believe that this adaptation of *Mary Barton*, extant in both its original and censored forms, offers a remarkable example or case study with which we may revisit and expand on Stottlar's examination of Donne's influence upon the Victorian theatre.

In the present chapter I wish to consider some of the material Donne took exception to in this play, and to examine how these passages were altered to appease the interests of the government he represented. It is clear from his *Essays* that Donne, unlike

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<sup>96</sup> Osbaldiston (1793-1850) was manager of the Victoria from 1841 until his death in 1850. Little is written about him, and his name appears only briefly in a number of studies of the Victoria Theatre. By far the best of these, George Rowell's *The Old Vic Theatre: A History* (1993), reports that Osbaldiston's management of the Victoria is usually discussed with "particular scorn" (35). Rowell, however, observes that despite a number of conflicts with authorities, the "fact remains that for ten years he [Osbaldiston] kept the Theatre open and solvent" (41) – something few managers before or after him were able to accomplish for any extended period. The more subdued dramas produced by Osbaldiston were a reflection of the financial realities of the Theatre: "The Victoria moved increasingly away from the exotic locations of the Coburg [subsequently the Victoria]...relying on the audience's identification with the struggle and survival of their own kind to compensate for the spectacle it could no longer afford" (38). The class struggle depicted in the Victoria's production of *Mary Barton* would seem to meet the interests of its audience.

Other than Rowell, earlier references to Osbaldiston's management of the Victoria, such as Lilian Baylis and Cicely Hamilton's *The Old Vic* (1926), tend to focus solely on his legal battles, while more recent studies, such as Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow's *Reflecting the Audience, London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (2001), largely examine Osbaldiston's adjustment of the Victoria's prices and repertory to reflect the means and interests of its East End audiences. Baylis and Hamilton note that under Osbaldiston's management the Victoria "discharged its functions of bar and brothel with something like the maximum of grossness" (169). Consequently, Osbaldiston was frequently out of favour with authorities, and in 1847 he was fined, as an example to the London theatre establishment, for serving alcohol without a license. (For more on Osbaldiston see Baylis 166-172, Davis and Emeljanow 36-38, and Rowell, 34-43).

some of his contemporaries, took the theatre quite seriously, noting that “it never seems to have occurred to anyone, that popular amusements have an ethical as well as an historical or antiquarian aspect, and are an index of the national mind” (214). Donne saw the licensing of plays as an opportunity to police the moral or “ethical” influences of the English theatre upon its audiences. As we have seen, Donne was also closely involved in promoting a drama that complied with, rather than challenged, existing social hierarchies within English society. In holding playwrights to a specific representation of the *status quo*, Donne’s regime of censorship promoted a brand of nationalism invested with specific class interests. By contrasting the original submission of *Mary Barton* with the version finally licensed by Donne for production, I wish to consider the ways in which censorship both restricted and transformed the play’s depiction of social issues such as labour strikes, working-class hardships and the Chartist movement.

Gaskell wrote *Mary Barton* in part to expose the abject hunger, labour unrest and other entrenched hardships placed on the working classes by the economic system in which they laboured.<sup>97</sup> The Victoria Theatre’s dramatization provides a similar rendering of these conditions, and largely follows the action of the novel, which centres upon two plots. The first of these involves John Barton, a Manchester weaver, who tries to obtain better wages for workers from the city’s manufacturers, represented by the character of Mr. Carson. The strained relations between worker and master result in a strike, and a

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<sup>97</sup> In a letter written in 1848, Gaskell explains her motivation in writing the novel: “I think somewhere in the first volume you may find a sentence stating that my intention was simply to represent the view many of the working-people take. But independently of any explicit statement of my intention, I do think that we must all acknowledge [*sic*] that there are duties connected with the manufacturing system not fully understood as yet, and evils existing in relation to it which may be remedied in some degree, although we as yet do not see how; but surely there is no harm in directing the attention to the existence of such evils” (*The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* 67).

scheme is hatched by a group of workers to kill Carson's son, Harry. The second plot involves Barton's daughter, Mary, who transgresses class boundaries by rejecting the proposal of Jem Wilson (the epitome of the 'good labourer') in favour of the attentions of Harry Carson – the son of her father's employer. The two plots merge when Jem is charged with the murder of Harry Carson, who, Mary discovers, was murdered by her father. During the trial Mary reveals that, in fact, she always loved Jem whom she saves through a desperate attempt to reach a witness literally as his ship sails. After the trial a stricken Barton admits his guilt, and Mr. Carson is brought by his conscience to forgive his son's murderer just as Barton dies. Mary weds Jem, and they move to Canada.

To this structure the playwright added a comic subplot, involving Sally Leadbitter – as in the novel, a woman working with Mary Barton as a seamstress – who leaves her working-class admirer, Tom Shuttle, for an itinerant performer named Badger who woos her with his dreams of celebrity and wealth (to be earned by his questionable musical talents). In the process Sally is ridiculed and driven out of Manchester by a crowd of workers, and ultimately abandoned by both men. The subplot provides comic relief as well as the occasional musical interlude, and at the same time reinforces the play's larger condemnation of individuals who attempt to rise above (and in doing so weaken) the proletariat and its position within the nation's economic hierarchy. The action of the play largely centres upon themes of class fidelity and the difficulties faced by Manchester's working classes in the 1830s and 1840s. However, as we will see, the playwright's original thesis diverges from Gaskell's call for an amelioration of class tensions, and instead advances the idea of employing violence as a means of relieving entrenched

disparities and achieving frustrated political goals.<sup>98</sup> Though by 1850 Chartism had largely exhausted itself as a political movement, sympathy for its past struggles was still alive among the working classes. This adaptation of Gaskell's novel attempts to exploit for dramatic currency what Hartmut Ilseman identifies as the endurance and spread of social themes in England even after the collapse of the Radical movement.<sup>99</sup>

The first section of the play to which Donne took exception occurs early in Act I, Scene II.<sup>100</sup> This scene draws much of its dialogue from the ninth chapter of Gaskell's novel, in which John Barton returns home disillusioned by the Chartists' failed attempt to petition the Queen and Parliament.<sup>101</sup> The workers' deepening indignation is represented here by Barton, whose exchange with Mary and Job is infused with accusations of moral outrage, such as "men will not harken to us tho we weep tears of blood" (478). Passages like this, though brief, offer the playwright an efficient and effective means of establishing the necessary emotional empathy between the audience and performers of melodrama. In the original version of this scene the playwright, with surprisingly little dialogue, presents the play's socio-political battlefield between worker and employer, and in doing so clearly privileges the former. Though the setting explicitly addressed

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<sup>98</sup> In this regard, the perspective promoted by the play echoes the maxim held by contemporary labour organizations, such as the London Democrats Association and the Great Northern Union, which resolved to achieve social change "peaceably if we may, forcibly if we must" (qtd. in Jones 149).

<sup>99</sup> Hartmut Ilseman, "Radicalism in the Melodrama of the Early Nineteenth Century." *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*. eds. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou (1996), 192.

<sup>100</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>101</sup> Motivated in large part by the economic exploitation of the working classes, Chartism was a political mobilization of the proletariat founded on a six-point agenda that included "annual parliaments; universal male suffrage; equal electoral districts; payment of MPs; the abolition of property qualifications for MPs; and the secret ballot" (Claeys xix). However, as James Epstein and Dorothy Thompson contend, "Chartism was not simply a political challenge, it was a challenge to authority and to doctrinaire ideology in a whole number of areas. Industrial action, cultural confrontation, resistance to domination from the pulpit as well as from employers and local and national government, were offered by the working people in the Chartist period at a whole number of different levels" (*The Chartist Experience* 2).

Parliament's rejection of the Chartists' 1839 petition, at the time the play must also have recalled for audiences the more recent government dismissal of the Chartists' third petition in 1848. The play's emphasis on government indifference and Barton's consequent sense of affront – "as long as I live our rejection that day will abide in my heart" – may well have struck a sympathetic chord among spectators, had it been permitted for production. Though alternate perspectives are voiced, it is Barton's bitter militancy which ultimately dominates the play. For instance, the suggestion by Job that "there's many a master that's good and better than us" is quickly silenced by Barton, who exploits melodrama's equation of righteous suffering with moral and narrative authority – what Peter Brooks calls "the psychic bravado of virtue" (43) – by reminding Job (and the audience) that he has lost a child to starvation, while Carson has not.<sup>102</sup> By only alluding to Barton's personal loss, the playwright anticipates the weaver's turn to political

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<sup>102</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (1985). Martha Vicinus maintains that while melodrama "became the arena for the most profound struggles between good and evil," the genre "always sides with the powerless." Martha Vicinus, "'Helpless and Unfriended'" *When They Weren't Doing Shakespeare* (1989), 177, 175. Katherine Newey similarly refers to the suffering melodramatic protagonist as "the heroic feeling individual," whose superlative virtue becomes, through the moral logic of melodrama, a bulwark "against the encroachments of industrialisation and urbanisation." ("Melodrama and Metatheatricality: Theatricality in the Nineteenth Century Theatre." *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Spring 1997): 98.) Other scholars of melodrama point out the centrality of the hero's plight to the overall social message of melodrama, noting that the "hero in *domestic* melodrama is the locus for a dramatic examination of heroism and its relation to a community; his persecution focuses attention on oppositions existing within British society." J. S. Bratton, *et. al. Acts of Supremacy, The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (1991), 130.

A recent and comprehensive overview of melodramatic archetypes is found in David Mayer's "Encountering Melodrama." *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. ed. Kerry Powell. (2004): 145-63. Mayer points out that "[m]elodrama depends upon our abilities to recognize evil and to distinguish it from good, and, lest we not possess this ability, the conventions of this genre are there to assist us." This is accomplished, in part, Mayer observes, through the villain, who "instigate[s] an action which destabilizes the hero and heroine and places their lives, fortunes, livelihoods, good names, social relationships, and romantic intensions in grave jeopardy. Having been abruptly extruded from stability and comfort by the villain – whose machinations the hero and heroine initially fail to recognize – these leading characters must endeavor to reclaim lost ground. Abetted by their friends...the heroine and heroine [*sic*] discover the nature of their peril, recognize that they are the victims of some combination of malice, avarice, lust, envy, and cruelty, and identify and expel the villain from his place of power" (149).

violence, presenting it as a consequence of public insult (Parliament's rejection of the petition), rather than a personal loss (such as the death of his wife and son). In doing so, the dramatist breaks with Gaskell – who habitually uses her characters' private suffering to explain their political convictions – and heightens John Barton's political significance.

When revised for the censor, however, Barton's character in this scene is significantly altered. Instead of recalling the Queen and Parliament's rejection of the Chartist petition, Barton's first thoughts on his trip to London are more those of an impressed tourist: "Oh Mary tis the world! For men of all climes are there – there all the quarters of the globe send the products of their industry. All that is rich, all that is rare is garnered in the heart of that giant town – the lofty palace and the lowly dwelling rest side by side...." (509). The modified version of this passage now directs attention away from the class conflict at the centre of the plot, and focuses instead on England's commercial and cosmopolitan might, as well as the apparent harmony between workers and managers, living "side by side," which makes this prosperity possible. All mention of the Chartist petition has been omitted. When Barton does reflect on the disparities between "the owner of the lordly mansion and the toil oppressed dweller," Mary quickly counters his complaint, counselling "we should not murmur," and in place of political action she champions religious forbearance to "solace the suffering and relieve the sorrowing from their burden" (509). Likewise, when Barton subsequently reiterates the grievances of his "loaded spirit and heavy heart," Mary again directs his attention away from political violence as a solution to the proletariat's complaints. If her father is upset by the disparities he sees as a stranger in London, then Mary's solution is for him to remain in

his own community, among “the friends that have grown” with him. As with her earlier response to Barton’s dejection, Mary advocates a passive acceptance of suffering – “let us bow to the burden” (509) – in place of her father’s political activity and the social disruption which it brings. Despite the dissatisfaction he feels with his fate, Barton accepts and even commends her proposed solution. Consequently, when at the end of the play Mary receives the “better lot” wished for her by Barton, it becomes a symbolic reward for accepting (rather than agitating against) the exploitation and suffering of the working class. Clearly, the primary objective of the playwright in the rewritten portions of the script is to appease the censor by directing the audience’s attention away from the play’s central conflict between workers and their employers.

The second major section of the original script to be expurgated by Donne was Act II, Scene I, based on chapter sixteen of the novel, in which Barton and a group of workers draw lots to murder Harry Carson.<sup>103</sup> During the 1830s and 1840s violent plots of this sort were not unusual, and extremists among the Chartist leadership condoned assassination as a political tool.<sup>104</sup> On 4 November, 1839, for instance, ten thousand Chartists gathered in Newport, Wales to protest the imprisonment of one of their members; clashes with the military followed, resulting in ten dead and fifty wounded.<sup>105</sup> After years of such violence with government forces, Chartists regarded preparing for armed conflict as a necessary means of protecting themselves against the constabulary and military units used to break up demonstrations. As late as 1848, in a resolution made

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<sup>103</sup> See Appendix II.

<sup>104</sup> Thomas Clark, “To the Democratic Working Men.” (30 January, 1850), reprinted *The Chartist Movement in Britain 1838-1850* (2003), VI. 18-24.

<sup>105</sup> *The Chartist Movement in Britain 1838-1850* (2003), I. xxv.

at a meeting of Chartist supporters, the delegates openly announced their readiness for political violence, declaring themselves of “the opinion that no other authority short of that by which the people are opposed will ever gain their rights and privileges.”<sup>106</sup> The same year, George Bown (1770-1858), a Leicester journalist and Chartist supporter, wrote in support of physical force as a means of obtaining political rights, and called for workers to arm themselves:

The joint possession of a vote, and of arms for defence, constitute the sole distinction between the freeman and the slave. They who possess the former, have an undisputed title to the latter – they who hold the latter cannot be denied the former... How long so large a proportion as five-sixths of the adult population may chuse [*sic*] to continue unarmed and unenfranchized [*sic*] is for them to decide. The insolent assumption of a power, to refuse either, will shortly be treated with the contempt it deserves.<sup>107</sup>

Barton makes a similar pronouncement before his fellow workers in the opening scene of the second Act, in which he reasons that workers must “let our task masters know that the age of reason has arrived... tell them that you will no longer crawl the earth like brutes, that you are men, that you must have and that they must grant.” If the mill owners insist on exploiting the workers and their families, then there is no choice but “to have at the masters” (485). The playwright charges the atmosphere of this scene with open hostility, assigning to the mill owners a number of pejorative epithets – “task masters” and “oppressor” – intended to highlight their treatment of the workers. Barton produces a

<sup>106</sup> David Jones, *Chartism and the Chartists* (1975), 154.

<sup>107</sup> George Bown, *Physical Force. An Address to All Classes of Reformers, but Especially to Those Who Are Unjustly Excluded from the Franchise* (1848), reprinted in *The Chartist Movement in Britain 1838-1850*. ed. Gregory Claeys (2003), V. 19-28. By Bown’s calculation, “the House of Commons (so called) is chosen by less than one-sixth of the male adult population” (23). Figures provided by recent scholars are somewhat higher, such as that of Gregory Claeys who estimates that the Reform Act of 1832 extended the franchise to: “about one in five adult males in England and Wales, and one in eight in Scotland” (I. xix).



sketch made by Harry Carson that mocks the emaciated condition of the delegates. Though Harry's sketch initially places him at the centre of the workers' condemnation, the laughter of the other masters implies that they are equally culpable. With the delegates' indignation Harry himself is soon forgotten, and almost immediately his jest (and the callousness it betrays) is seen by Barton and the others as a collective act – "*they* go and make jesting pictures on us"; "*them* as makes pictures on our wretchedness"<sup>108</sup> – so that by the end of the passage Harry is not identified as the specific target of their plot; rather their victim is now "one of the masters" (486).

In this scene Barton uses the injuries of Jones the blackleg, or scab labourer, to call for a stop to intra-class retribution, and to "have at" the mill owners themselves. Not surprisingly, significant changes were made when this scene was amended to appease the censor, and in the revised version the tone of Barton's opening remark has lost its militancy and is replaced instead by one of compliance and conciliation: "We have no recourse left us but mute remonstrance – let us shew our employers how small the heed that's granted to our labour; let us convince them that our wants are greater than they think, then justice and mercy may teach them to be more liberal" (513). Barton's rage and indignation become now a subdued appeal for "mute remonstrance," recalling Mary's earlier plea for workers to "bow to the burden" of their circumstances. Gone, too, are the disparaging references to the mill owners, which are replaced here by Barton's earnest trust in the goodwill of the masters once they understand the legitimacy of the delegates' requests. The former complicity of the masters in Harry Carson's

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<sup>108</sup> Italics added.

maliciousness has been largely removed here, and, instead, Barton accuses Harry of single-handedly poisoning relations between the workers and their employers: “There is one who ever crosses our purpose – who poisons the minds of those to whom we appeal, who turns to scorn and derision our wrongs and sufferings, who even this day has added fuel to that fire that burns between the master and the man” (513). Of course, the implication here is that the cause of the present labour tension is not one of political or economic imbalance, but rather the work of an individual who “ruins the good feeling that should exist between master and man.” Like the revised passage from Act I, this rewritten scene affirms (rather than attacks) the English social structure by laying blame for class conflict on anomalous causes (in this case, Harry Carson), while at the same time reiterating the idea that the workers’ agitation and unrest should be replaced by a more submissive response to the hardships they face. By pacifying Barton’s original hostility in the revised version of this scene, the playwright was able to appease the censor while maintaining the basic plot structure of the play. Barton still goes on to murder Harry Carson, though now he does so, not as an act of class warfare, but, on the contrary, in an attempt to restore the proper relationship between masters and workers.

Interestingly, the playwright, whose adaptation follows the basic plot of Gaskell’s novel, leaves the final reconciliation between Barton and Mr. Carson conspicuously ambiguous. As in the novel, Barton admits his crime to Carson, who leaves, refusing to forgive the dying weaver and promising instead to return with the police to arrest his employee. Barton, now overcome with guilt, can only lament “oh that Carson had forgiven me” (506). However, instead of returning to forgive his son’s murderer and

symbolically repair class relations (as Gaskell would have it), in the last moments Carson enters with the police as promised, and the only indication of a reconciliation is a stage direction that notes “*Carson stands aghast – goes to and raises Barton – Barton looks at him with gratitude – sinks into his arms etc. Will leads on Margaret and Mrs Wilson. Tableau*” (506). In a theatre, such as the Victoria, which at the time seated several thousand spectators, it is questionable how this final scene would have appeared.<sup>109</sup> Would it be clear to the audience that Carson had, in fact, forgiven Barton? Would the appearance of the police – who are not present in Gaskell’s version of this scene – standing behind Carson not lend an ominous cast to this scene? Clearly, there *is* a reconciliation intended here; however, I think it is important to note that the muted and parenthetical manner in which it is presented leaves open the possibility of staging an ending that is resistant, or at least ambiguous, toward Gaskell’s message of ameliorating class tensions. In the original version of the play, this uncertain performance would seem to echo the masters’ former indifference to workers’ appeals for assistance. Carson appears to have defied the moral transformation experienced by Barton and remains recalcitrant toward him and his class, denying the worker even this dying request. In such representations, the playwright effectively gives Barton the moral high ground, while at the same time undermining the *status quo* by suggesting that a mutual sympathy between the classes is impossible.

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<sup>109</sup> During this period, Henry Mayhew noted that in the Victoria Theatre the gallery alone held “from 1500 to 2000 people, and runs back to so great a distance that the end of it is lost in shadow” (*London Labour and the London Poor* I. 18).

With such an ambivalent reconciliation between worker and employer, the rewritten version of Barton negates the original affront and outrage that initially motivated him. His deathbed change of heart is an alteration that extends beyond Barton's character to symbolically include those whose views he represented. As scholars of this period, we are left to question the legacy of a play like this one, which has been refashioned to reflect prevailing political orthodoxy. Jacky Bratton writes of the efforts of those invested in maintaining the existing order to control the nineteenth-century theatre:

They were working on at least two fronts...they attacked the current manifestations of 'low' art; at the same time, however, there was the advantage to them in appropriating certain of the values of popular pleasure to their construction of a national identity, as long as the people's activity could be clearly articulated to middle-class moral and social concerns. The amusements of the people were thus reconstructed: their history, and their present role, were carefully described to appropriate them to a middle-class system of values, while actively suppressing their potential for resistance, or even difference and independence.<sup>110</sup>

We find indications of this effort to revise the play's representation of the Chartists' 1839 petition. The rewritten passages we have looked at significantly alter the conclusion intended by the playwright, transforming Barton from a class martyr into a model of self-sacrifice, not unlike Stephen Blackpool of Dickens' *Hard Times* (1854). In the altered version, Barton's longing to be forgiven by Carson suggests that he has, at last, accepted the path of passive forbearance advocated by Mary, and so the weaver willingly awaits Carson's mercy. Again, this altered version of the script advocates (as Gaskell's novel

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<sup>110</sup> Quotation taken from J. S. Bratton, *et al. Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (1991), 136.

does) social compliance rather than political agitation as a means of relieving the exploitation of the working classes – patience, not polemics, is to be workers’ salvation.

William Sharp notes that melodrama centres upon “either a rotten society that must somehow be cleansed or an inadequate hero that must somehow change his behavior to conform to that society” (271) – an observation which unintentionally highlights the difference between the original and revised versions of this play. In the uncensored script, John Barton is an agent of political radicalism, his indignation motivating him to seek social change within the world of the play. Yet, once rewritten to appease the Examiner, Barton’s anger at the injustices of his world is portrayed, to use Sharp’s term, as an “inadequate” alternative to Mary’s prescription of religious forbearance. In other words, to appease the censor, the social order could not be challenged openly; rather the obligation to change becomes the duty of the individual – in this case John Barton – rather than the society which exploits him.

Such conservatism accords with Donne’s testimony before the 1866 Select Committee, in which he indicated the need for caution when licensing the theatrical presentation of politically sensitive subjects.<sup>111</sup> The reason for such caution, as Stottlar notes, was that a “license, for all practical purposes, put the play on the side of the law, and the law on the side of the play” (261). By licensing a play, Donne was not just allowing certain attitudes and ideas to be performed publicly; he was effectively giving them the stamp of government approval. By insisting on changes to the ideological sympathies of a script, Donne was making it clear just what side the law was on. In the

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<sup>111</sup>Question #2408.

case of *Mary Barton*, Donne's decision to suppress the passages of working-class dissent was almost certainly influenced by contemporary political and social pressures. As Pam Morris points out, the toppling of the French monarchy in 1848, the social distress caused by the Irish Famine, and the continuing (though waning) agitations of the Chartists meant that late into the 1840s fears of a workers' revolution continued to preoccupy many of those in the middle and upper classes.<sup>112</sup> The heightened level of anxiety during this period was noted also by magistrates in London who received a large number of complaints regarding "working-class aggression" throughout the city (Jones 157). By 1848, David Goodway tells us, "the English ruling class regarded Chartism as a serious threat for the first time. The upper- and middle-class public, in general, feared that the February Revolution and consequent upheavals on the Continent would have repercussions in Britain."<sup>113</sup> More generally, the period of political unrest depicted by *Mary Barton* was, as one historian observes, "an unhappy memory, and the self-appointed task of mid-Victorian statesmen was to try to ensure its hazards did not happen again" (Cannadine 102). Certainly Donne must have been aware of these concerns. By suppressing the radical sentiments originally promoted in this play, he perhaps saw himself as helping to curb the potential for political and social unrest.

Given what we know about the Victoria Theatre at the time, a play sympathetic to the Chartists' struggle likely would have found a ready audience there. Situated on Westminster Bridge Road in the parish of Lambeth, in the mid-nineteenth century the

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<sup>112</sup> Pam Morris, *Dickens's Class Consciousness: A Marginal View* (1991), 64.

<sup>113</sup> David Goodway, *London Chartism 1838-1848* (1982), 68. Here "February Revolution" refers to the February 1848 uprising in France that led to the dethroning of the reigning King, Louis Phillipe. For a good overview of the tensions in London during 1848, see Goodway, 68-99.

Victoria Theatre stood in the heart of one of the city's working-class neighbourhoods – surrounded by wharves, a brewery and distillery, shoe factories, and the South Lambeth Water Works. A study by Janet Roebuck notes that in the late 1840s Lambeth was an area of intense urban development, which led to the overpopulation of the parish with “unskilled labourers who found homes in the cheap, unpleasant... densely built-up area.”<sup>114</sup> A similar observation was made in the same period by Henry Mayhew (1812-87) regarding the Victoria's audiences as comprised of “black-faced sweeps or whitey-brown dustmen” and other members of the gallery who “do not seem to be of a gentle nature.”<sup>115</sup> This demographic of theatregoers may have played a part in Donne's treatment of the script for *Mary Barton*, for evidence suggests that the Examiner was as uneasy about the working classes as he was about a play that promoted their political interests. If the original script of *Mary Barton* was intended by the playwright to appeal to the sympathies and prejudices of the Victoria's audience, then the rewritten portions were clearly meant to appeal to those of Donne. As a result of Donne's “quiet sanction,” this play, which began by aligning itself with a radical vision for social change, ends by confirming the very political structure it originally set out to challenge. Such reversals of artistic intent could not help but discourage dramatists who, unlike writers of other genres, were frustrated with the knowledge that, as Stephens notes, “the closer a play

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<sup>114</sup> Janet Roebuck, *Urban Development in 19<sup>th</sup>-Century London, Lambeth, Battersea & Wandsworth, 1838-1888* (1979), 124.

<sup>115</sup> Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (1849), I. 18, 19. Dickens also draws a vivid portrait of East End theatres like the Victoria and their audiences in an article titled “The Amusements of the People,” *Household Words* (March 30, 1850). Unlike other East End theatres such as the Surrey which occasionally attracted theatre goers from the West End, Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow point out that because of the toll collected at the nearby Waterloo Bridge the Victoria Theatre was particularly dependent on the surrounding neighbourhoods of Lambeth for its audience (12).

came to ‘real life’ the more likely it was that the censor would intervene” (*Censorship* 155). Dramatic censorship in this period made most theatricalized debates about politics a foregone conclusion. Because of the intervention of Examiners like Donne, the theatre was often unable to respond politically to the society it served. If the script of *Mary Barton* offers us any indication of the effect Donne’s censorship had on the Victorian drama, it is that plays – in this period of such remarkable literary engagement with contemporary issues – were forced, like the character of John Barton, into outward acceptance of the very institutions they sought to confront.

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The second stage adaptation of *Mary Barton* was written by Thompson Townsend and submitted on 30 October, 1861 to Donne, who licensed it the following day without alterations.<sup>116</sup> The play was staged for a largely East End audience, in this case at the Grecian Theatre, located in the northeast end of London on City Road near Islington. Unlike the Victoria Theatre’s dramatization, Townsend’s play avoids Radical ideas and locates the solution to social problems not within the inherent prejudices of England’s economic and political apparatus but instead within the behaviour of individual citizens, and particularly those who would disrupt or challenge the *status quo*. Though critical of middle-class self-indulgence, Townsend suggests (like Gaskell) that the employers and

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<sup>116</sup> Page numbers cited here refer to the original folio copy of the script submitted to Donne, located at the British Library, ADD 53008K. The play was produced at the Grecian Theatre during the week of 11 November, 1861. Townsend’s play was submitted to the Examiner under the title *Mary Barton*, though a bill advertised the play’s full title as *Mary Barton, or The Weavers’ Distress*. (Bill from the archives at the Theatre Museum, Covent Garden, London.)



managers of the industrial establishment will correct social inequalities if only they are not prevented by the impatient violence of union agitators. It is through the moderation and restraint of individual behaviour – not radical political and social change – that harmony between the classes can be achieved. By identifying social problems, such as alcoholism and trade unionism, as causes of working-class misery, Townsend's play largely overlooks the more conspicuous (and sensitive) issue of the working classes' political disenfranchisement. Though this adaptation of *Mary Barton* responds in a critical manner to contemporary issues, there is little in this script to provoke Donne's disfavour – a fact that may well stem from Townsend's previous experiences with the Examiner.

Before looking specifically at Townsend's play, it is worthwhile to consider briefly what is known about the playwright and his professional setbacks related to dramatic censorship. What we shall find is evidence that Townsend's early conflicts with Donne helped to shape his later compliance with the Examiner's tastes. About Townsend himself there is little recorded or written except in occasional references in the contemporary press. *The Era*, for instance, notes his attendance at a meeting in 1852 of London's East End theatre community, which had gathered to protest Donne's suppression of *Jack Sheppard* – a play based on Harrison Ainsworth's novel, and previously adapted by Townsend in 1839 for the Pavilion Theatre – which was licensed

for revival exclusively at the Adelphi (a West End theatre).<sup>117</sup> Their cause was picked up by *The Age* which used the protest to challenge dramatic censorship directly:

Who is this Mr. DONNE, that all the dramatic talent of England, and all the play going people of England, must bend and crouch to? Why should you be treated like the subjects of the Plantagenets, the Tudors, or the Stuarts? Surely now, if ever, the general mass of the community have attained that degree of enlightenment of moderation and decency, when they can afford to throw aside the lead-strings of court dictatorship in their amusements, and themselves play the licensors [*sic*] and the censors....A movement is at present being made for the purpose, but, unhappily, not in the foremost ranks of the profession. The immediate point, too, turns upon a case of alleged favouritism, with the merits of which we are unacquainted, but our objection is to the principle, from which all species of abuses – malicious and blundering – daily and nightly flow. Sometimes from sheer ignorance, and others from a pigeon-headed obstinacy, which will give no reason why, sometimes from want of personal influence, the most wanton rebuffs are given to presented pieces. The inconsistencies and self-contradictions of the office are, as might be expected, legion.<sup>118</sup>

If the editorial is any indication, there was clearly a brewing dissatisfaction with the Examiner among members of the theatre community. The suggestion here of professional “favouritism,” is no doubt an allusion to Donne’s licensing of *Jack Sheppard* exclusively at a West End theatre – a class bias that he would continue to evince throughout his tenure as Examiner. Donne later reflected on the 1852 challenge with satisfaction, noting in a letter to Lord Breadalbane: “By your Lordship’s prohibition, two or three years ago, of all the dramas in which Highway Robbery, Burglary etc. formed a prominent feature in the action, a very objectionable class of theatrical entertainments has been nearly removed from the stage.”<sup>119</sup> Though Donne gives credit here to his superior,

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<sup>117</sup> *The Era* (18 July, 1852): 15. William Harrison Ainsworth lived from 1805-82; his novel, *Jack Sheppard*, was published in 1839.

<sup>118</sup> *The Age* (24 July, 1852): 4.

<sup>119</sup> Letter (26 January, 1858), LC 1/58.

it is evident from official correspondence that Breadalbane censored only those plays brought to his attention by the Examiner. While plays were officially licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, in practice it was Donne who set the parameters in which dramatists and managers worked. In a subsequent letter to Breadalbane written the same year, Donne returned to the topic and suggested that he was aware of his role in occluding certain topics from the stage, noting "I have nearly 'scotched this snake' and should be sorry were it to revive."<sup>120</sup> Still, the decision to suppress the script left many East Enders disgruntled for some time, and letters, such as the one below from Edmund Faucit Saville, continued to appear:

Upon perusing the advertisements last week relative to the reproduction of *Jack Sheppard* at the Adelphi, and business being very bad at the "east," I wandered...to the Lord Chamberlain's Office, on Saturday last, to ascertain if I, with my version, in reality *as represented*, as unobjectionable as my neighbour's (for *Jack Sheppard* is *Jack Sheppard* all the world over), could obtain favour to the same amount. I...met with as much courtesy as men could expect or desire, but not a shadow of a chance of our desire being realized. Why is this?...The office of Chamberlain (supervisor of our profession) is most desirable, but let justice be meted out with an even hand.<sup>121</sup>

Despite this sort of protest in the East End press, Donne continued to ban dramatizations of what he often referred to as 'Old Bailey' dramas. Donne's concern with the potential popularity of *Jack Sheppard* was not new. When the novel first appeared in 1839, its "most numerous and fanatic devotees were, as one would expect, the young, 'masterless' men who constituted much of the city's growing industrial labor force." Consequently,

<sup>120</sup> Letter (20 May, 1858), LC 1/58.

<sup>121</sup> *The Era* (18 July, 1852): 11. Saville is now best known as an East End actor, and performed the role of Sikes in *Oliver Twist* (another play later banned by Donne) at the Surrey Theatre's production on 12 November 1838, as well as the Victoria Theatre's production, 20 October 1845 (Knight 170).

to “the established organs of public order, and particularly those who recalled the not-so-distant and similarly disenfranchised mobs of Chartism and the Revolution, the *Sheppard* phenomenon appeared [in 1839]...as a half-worn mask of insurrection” (Buckley 427, 431).<sup>122</sup> Authorities’ apprehension of ‘Old Bailey’ dramas did not quickly abate. In 1860, for instance, Joseph Henry Cave (1823-1912), the manager of the Royal Marylebone Theatre, wrote to Donne with surprise regarding a production of *Oliver Twist*:

Dear Sir,

I was not aware when I put up *Oliver Twist* for representation that it had been interdicted by the Lord Chamberlain[,] I never having received notice to that effect. But having gone to some expense in placing it on the stage and having nothing ready to put on in its stead may I be permitted to play it for the two nights announced viz [*sic*] this and tomorrow evening after which of course it shall never be performed at this theatre again.

I am Sir

Your obedient Servant,  
J. H. Cave

At the bottom of the letter, Donne made the following note presumably for the Lord Chamberlain’s benefit: “I let him run it on for the two nights: as hither to it has been a stock piece but after to-night Saturday it will be withdrawn forever from the Marylebone and Victoria Theatres.”<sup>123</sup>

Little came of the protest against Donne’s prevention of a revival of *Jack Sheppard* in the East End. And while it is difficult to gauge the extent of Townsend’s involvement in this protest, by 1861 it appears he had reconciled himself to the realities

<sup>122</sup> For a recent and thorough study of the reception and cultural implications of the novel’s reception in England, see Matthew Buckley’s “Sensations of Celebrity: *Jack Sheppard* and the Mass Audience.” *Victorian Studies* 44. 3 (Spring 2002): 423-463.

<sup>123</sup> Letter (28 June, 1860), LC 1/83. Donne’s note, written on the last page of this letter, is undated. Note, words underlined by Donne. Cave managed the Royal Marylebone Theatre from 1858-1868 (Howard 254).

of the Examiner's intrusion upon his profession. As we will see, Townsend's adaptation of *Mary Barton* goes to great lengths not to disturb Victorian middle-class pieties. In light of Townsend's previous experiences with the Examiner regarding the *Jack Sheppard* controversy, it is, perhaps, no surprise that the social message of his adaptation of *Mary Barton* offers scant criticism of the *status quo* which the Examiner was committed to protecting.

There is little attention given in Townsend's script to Gaskell's preoccupation with the details of working-class exploitation and suffering; rather Townsend appears more intent on determining the origins of these ills, and identifying who, or what, is the cause of them. While Gaskell ends her novel attempting to conciliate the class tensions she uncovers, the third and final Act of Townsend's script uses Jem's trial to expose and condemn the criminality of specific class forces and institutions. Townsend's play is preoccupied, much as Donne was, with a number of perceived dangers to the social order, focussing on, among other things, the disruptive influences of alcoholism and trade unions. The playwright links alcoholism with the self-respect of London's East End citizens, as well as contemporary attitudes and tactics of the temperance movement. He presents trade unions as similarly counterproductive to working-class interests. The trial scene in the play's final Act becomes an interrogation of those social forces which exploit an innocent proletariat (symbolized by Jem Wilson). While for Gaskell the answer to workers' misery is greater sympathy between the classes, Townsend attributes the

working classes' suffering to alcoholism and trade unions, which were often associated with each other in this period.<sup>124</sup>

There is considerable evidence that Townsend's adaptation of *Mary Barton* was written with the tastes and idiosyncrasies of a specific audience in mind. While the play's main plot holds generally with that of Gaskell's novel, Townsend included a comic subplot centring upon three street vendors – Sall Simmons, Sam, and Tom Dodd – and involving their brawling, complaints, flirting and gags, as well as several musical interludes. For example, in one of these scenes, Sam, who sells baked potatoes, jokingly alludes to the questionable source of meat in the pies sold by Tom:

Sam

Now, I say Tommy, honor bright, do you mean to say that them skins hanging in your manufactory are weal skins?

Tom

I say them is weal skins!

Sam

Them is werry small.

Tom

I buys the most delicate weal, but I can't stand a pattering to you. I shall lose half my trade, here's the gravy ones – hot! hot! hot! Mutton and Beef! <Looking hard at Sam: exiting.>

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<sup>124</sup> A contemporary report on miners' strikes, for example, noted the "prevalence of strikes is very much promoted by the sensual condition of the working miners: and this degradation is brought about to a very great degree by the system of employment under 'Butties,' who require them to spend a large portion of their earnings in public houses" (302-303). Butties, or the middlemen between mine owners and their workers, sometimes had a stake in encouraging alcohol consumption among miners. As Godfrey Lushington, the writer of this report, alleges, "The regulations enforced by the Butties among the workmen of South Staffordshire include a contribution for what is called 'foot' ale and 'drink' ale, which even men who are members of teetotal societies are compelled to pay, though they absolutely abstain; and, when such men refuse to go to the public-house to receive their wages, they are yet, notwithstanding that, forced to contribute to a drunken spree which the rest of the men indulge in on such occasions. The 'Butty' and the 'Doggy' [the Butty's manager] receive some countenance, in forcing this contribution on the sober men, from the drunken men, who submit to it more cheerfully. When the men are turned out from the Saturday night's spree, at the division of wages, I have myself seen, close to my own house and shop, early on the Sunday morning, as many as six or eight battles among the men infuriated by drink: that is quite a common thing at all these places" (303). Godfrey Lushington, "Miscellaneous Papers," *Trade Societies and Strikes, Report of the Committee on Trades' Societies Appointed by The National Association for the Promotion of Social Science* (1860): 265-338.

Sam

Well, it's a sin'glar fact, but Bill Perkins, who eat a lot 'o his weal pies,  
took a werry great fancy to mice for a long time arter! (5)

This scene is typical of the comic interaction between the three vendors, with Tom playing the gullible straight man baited at each turn by the taunting of Sam. Both Tom and Sam alternately vie for the affections of Sall. The last lines of this scene are addressed directly to the audience by Sam who enjoys a confederate relationship with them that serves to collapse the 'fourth wall' of the stage, implicating the fictional site of the play with the actual world of its spectators.

By populating the stage with figures common to London neighbourhoods, Townsend attempts to familiarize his dramatization of contemporary issues with the lives (and therefore sympathies) of his audience, suggesting that this play is not intended to provide the escapism so often associated with melodrama. Michael Booth, for instance, notes "that the escape into fantasy from the routine of ordinary life, so marked a feature of melodramatic appeal, is strongly evident in plays written for the audiences of East London."<sup>125</sup> Not so, I would suggest, in this play. Townsend's humour in scenes such as the one above likely had a colloquial familiarity for Victorian spectators (as it does for modern readers), as do most of the jokes and pranks upon which the play's humour is founded. The subplot is used in this way to make self-conscious connections between the lives of the script's characters and their audience. For instance, in the stage directions for Act I, Scene I, the play opens as "*Various bodies of men, women and children cross the stage to the Factory, singing local songs*" (4). The cursory reference to "local songs"

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<sup>125</sup> Michael Booth, "East End Melodrama." *Theatre Survey* 17. 1 (May 1976): 65.

suggests that there was no need for the playwright to specify a particular song (presumably because the actors already enjoyed such knowledge), and, therefore, that there was a pre-existing familiarity with such songs shared by the cast and its audience. There are a number of allusions in the play to popular ballads clearly intended as recognizable references, as when Sall, who gives up selling stove ornaments to hawk ballads, takes an inventory of her wares: “I’ve got a collection...there’s ‘Down in our Valley’ with ‘The Maid of Lodi’, ‘Pretty Jane’, with ‘Corporal Casey’, ‘All is Lost’, and ‘I’m a Nice Young Man From the Country’, with ‘Betsy Baker’, ‘Jim along Josey’, and ‘Charming Polly’” (20). These references to contemporary, and possibly local, occupations, depend, in Katherine Newey’s words, “on the spectators’ knowledge of current theatrical practices for the full impact of the humour, satire, or pathos. Such plays also construct and define an audience which is local and intimate” (87).<sup>126</sup> Townsend’s often comic references to street hawking, and ballad selling suggests that he was confident that such knowledge was shared by his audience. In one scene, for instance, the playwright pokes fun at the entrepreneurial indiscretion of ballad hawkers – a habit well documented by scholars.<sup>127</sup>

Sam

...I say Sal, I’ve got a new spec!

Sall

It wouldn’t be you if you hadn’t Sammy! What is it?

Sam

A something in our line, you know the chap that’s to be tried for murder, well arter he’s dead there’ll be a great cry out for his life[.] Well it’s all got ready aforehand.

<sup>126</sup> Katherine Newey, “Melodrama and Metatheatre: Theatricality in the Nineteenth Century Theatre.” *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Spring 1997): 85-100.

<sup>127</sup> Martha Vicinus, *Broadsides of the Industrial North* (1975), 12; also J. S. Bratton’s *The Victorian Popular Ballad* (1975).



Sall

What[,] afore the man's tried?

Sam

Why in course! There's nothing like being prepared. I tellee how we does it, we leaves a blank for the name, if it don't come off why it does for another, worses and all! (30-31)

In these scenes the desperation and class struggles of Gaskell's story are temporarily forgotten, and replaced instead with a more playful and light-hearted portrait of working-class life. Setting aside the militancy and indignation of social conflict, characters allow us to glimpse the ironic humour and wit of a class willing to poke fun at itself. Like Sam's mockery of Tom's pies, this mode of entertainment becomes self-reflexive – in this case, one form of working-class culture poking fun at another.

By using popular ballads as cultural referents recognized by the audience, Townsend encourages spectators to identify with the setting and characters of his play, as well as its larger social themes. The subplot, then, provides an urban setting readily identifiable to the audience, countering the earnest intensity of the main plot while at the same time helping to frame the struggles of its characters within the familiar background of the spectators' environment. Townsend's script consciously attempts to identify itself with the lives and sympathies of its spectators in order to promote a number of issues by contextualizing, and therefore normalizing, them within a setting recognizable to his audience. The most conspicuous of these issues is the script's temperance message, in which the playwright presents alcoholism and drunkenness as a threat to the moral integrity of the working classes.

When Jem first sees Mary's aunt, Esther, he does not recognize her, so altered is she by the effects of alcoholism – “some fiend, some wretch, that has poisoned her mind”

– and hints that his own unrequited affections are driving him to a similar doom, “I’ll learn the truth of that before I sleep!” (13). Only after Esther identifies herself as Mary’s aunt and recounts her experiences with the “body and soul destroying drink” (15), does Jem forget his course of self-destruction and instead commit himself to intervening between Mary and Henry Carson with the intention of saving her from Esther’s fate. It is evident from his confession to Mary – “from that very hour that you refused me I became an altered man, a dark cloud of evil seemed to cross me and I had nearly taken to drink and fallen” (25) – that Jem’s meeting with Esther has critical implications not only for his life, but also, as I will argue below, for the working-class ideals he represents.

Townsend largely ignores the parallels made by Gaskell between Mary and her aunt, and instead emphasizes the similarities between Esther and Jem: the two characters who, throughout the play, maintain a strict code of class loyalty – one of the pieties central to the social ‘vision’ of this script. While Jem is willing, for instance, to martyr himself to keep from betraying a fellow worker, he is equally zealous about reminding Mary that his suffering is due to the fact that she would not follow the same code: “I tell thee Mary Barton I have been an honest hard working man, and I did all cheerfully, that I might claim thee as my reward, but you spurned a good honest true heart for a thing of emptiness” (25). Even before he is acquitted of Henry’s murder, Jem’s class loyalty is symbolically rewarded by and reflected in the actions of his fellow workers, who escort Will Wilson (so that he may deliver his critical testimony on Jem’s behalf), to the courtroom (39). It is class loyalty, Townsend suggests, which saves Jem from prison and the vagaries of alcoholism.

Townsend is careful to emphasize that Jem's near miss with alcoholism has not only personal consequences, but class implications as well. As the plot develops, the playwright often directs attention away from the domestic and romantic concerns of Mary, and places an increasing emphasis on the economic and moral currency of Jem – identified as “one of a class that is the wealth of a country, an honest hard working, intelligent mechanic” (19) – who, except for the intervention of Esther, was close to joining the ranks of what she refers to as “us fallen ones” (15). Jem never succumbs to drink, but the danger of addictions (including Barton's to opium) remains a prominent theme. Alcohol, then, is highlighted in this play as a threat to the virtue and moral foundation of the working classes – qualities which, Townsend implies, distinguish the English proletariat, and help them to endure the emotional and physical stresses of their lives with dignity and independence.

Just as Jem is nearly lost because of his love for a woman who is not (or not yet) worthy of him, the cause of Esther's original ‘fall,’ she acknowledges, was not only a result of sexual indiscretion, but of her transgression of class boundaries: “it's the old story, I loved above my station” (14). However, Esther later redeems herself, following Jem's example by transcending her personal losses and refusing to betray evidence implicating Barton in the murder of Henry Carson. As a consequence, Esther is accepted back into her former home, and, we are led to believe, redeemed from the indignities of alcoholism and prostitution. Townsend's emphasis on Esther's addiction and almost complete effacement of her prostitution may explain why Donne took no objection to her character in this script as he did in the version of the novel dramatized for the Victoria

Theatre.<sup>128</sup> Even the normally offhand conversations of the characters in the subplot promote the play's temperance message, as when Sall finds Sam inebriated and prostrate in the street:

Sall

...now you aren't a bit ashamed of yourself are you?

Sam

Give us a lift up!

Sall

Not I! I have something else to do than to pick pigs out of the gutters.

Sam

<scrambling up>

Ah! You preaches temperance. Pump water and –

Sall

I practices<sup>129</sup> it, it would be good for you all if you did it. Pump water indeed, it's the blessedest thing that is –

Sam

It don't suit all constitutions!

Sall

You know it suits yours.

Sam

So how?

Sall

So how? as this! When you couldn't pay the fine and got fourteen days, you came out the very picture of health and happiness, why no one knowed you, they said you were a walking picture of innocence, how preciously you have altered. (12-13)

There are hints in passages such as this that Sall's didacticism, while communicated to Sam, is directed at the audience at large. Though speaking to her lover and fellow hawker, her speech moves from the singular "you" and "yourself" (that is, Sam) to the

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<sup>128</sup> It is also notable that in Townsend's script Esther is reintegrated into the family she symbolically betrayed – something Gaskell (whose novel is all about the healing of social rifts) does not bring about. Likewise, Gaskell implies that Jem must emigrate to Canada because his fellow workers still suspect him of being Henry's murderer. Conversely, in Townsend's play, the mechanic's shop mates become strong, though symbolic, supporters of Jem's innocence.

<sup>129</sup> Playwright's emphasis.

plural “you all,” signalling a shift in her address to the audience, and suggesting that Townsend intended spectators to take personal note.

The Grecian, like many other East End theatres, was an unlikely place to find temperance being promoted, for though alcohol could not be served in the Theatre itself, substantial profits were made from the attached Eagle Tavern. Tracy Davis notes that a 1869 report by Inland Revenue listed the Grecian as one of three theatres (including the Britannia and Highbury Barn) to have licenses for an attached saloon, which encouraged patrons to come and go between both venues (386). This figure, however, hides the ubiquity of alcohol in theatres, as attested by a note to the Lord Chamberlain, in which Donne commented that “in every Theatre in London wine and spirits may be obtained in a refreshment room.”<sup>130</sup> Additional evidence points to the importance of the income brought in by alcohol sales at the Grecian Theatre, such as we find in the opening address of its manager, Benjamin Conquest (1805-72), on 31 March, 1851:

Shakespeare has told us of the drama’s feature,  
To hold, as ’twere, a mirror up to nature.  
While such reflections here before you pass,  
You see your drama and you have your glass:  
Both which I promise, with some conscious pride,  
Shall be the best that London can provide....<sup>131</sup>

Frances Fleetwood notes that Conquest’s wife, Clarissa, who played a key role in the Theatre’s financial success, paid specific attention to alcohol sales, venturing “downstairs at night [to] plunge a stick into the barrels of beer, to test the honesty of the barmen”

<sup>130</sup> Letter (8 July 1858), LC 1/58.

<sup>131</sup> Reprinted in Errol Sherson’s *London’s Lost Theatres of the Nineteenth Century With Notes on Plays and Players Seen There* (1925), 19-20. A more complete account of his opening address can be found in Frances Fleetwood’s *Conquest: The Story of a Theatre Family* (1953), 71-74.

(104).<sup>132</sup> Throughout contemporary accounts, one repeatedly finds alcohol associated (and not always negatively) with theatregoing, where it was a source of refreshment for the audience and of profit for the management. One contemporary account of working-class theatre habits implies that alcoholic consumption was a routine and harmless part of audiences' experience:

The theatre is the most popular resort of pleasure-seeking workmen, and the gallery their favourite part of the house. Two or three mates generally go together, taking with them a joint-stock bottle of drink and a suitable supply of eatables. To the *habitués* of the stalls and boxes the eating and drinking that goes on in the gallery may appear to be mere gluttony, though the fact really is that... [those] who take a supply of refreshments with them when they go to a theatre, display, not gluttony, but a wise regard for their health and comfort.<sup>133</sup>

This portrait of the conduct of East End theatregoers, given by Thomas Wright, himself a member of the working classes, stands in marked contrast to the more prevalent ones in the middle-class press, such a piece in *The Westminster Review* which referred to the East End theatres as “Bacchanalian temples.”<sup>134</sup> A similar bias toward drinking habits in the East was promoted by temperance writers such as J. Ewing Ritchie (1820-98), who gave frequent accounts of London's working-class neighbourhoods, where “Gin-palaces and music-halls and theatres flourish.”<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> For more on Clarissa's influence on the artistic and business details of the Theatre, see Fleetwood, 72.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas Wright, *Some Habits and Customs of the Working Classes By a Journeyman Engineer* (1867), 196-198.

<sup>134</sup> *The Westminster Review* (January 1853): 46-65.

<sup>135</sup> J. Ewing Ritchie, *The Night Side of London* (1869), 163. Ritchie's portrait of East End life draws mostly from his own first-hand observations, though occasionally he includes contemporary materials such as a document submitted in a legal case listing among other things the alcohol consumed by a lodger of a boarding house. For more on his descriptions of London's East End, see Ritchie's chapters on 'The Modern Theatre', 'Life in the East', and 'The Music-Hall.'

Though it is easy to find fault with his priggish analysis of London's East End cultures, Ritchie was also, if not equally, condemnatory of the immoralities he found in the West End, noting for example that many working-class theatricals were “very sensational, but really, on the score of morality, not so

Given the prevalence of alcohol among the customs associated with East End theatregoing, why was a play promoting temperance performed at the Grecian? The answer may lie in the judgement of the Theatre's owners. A biographer of the Conquest family notes that George (1837-1901), who in 1859 took over the Grecian from his father, Benjamin, was "an excellent businessman – far more practical than his father" (Fleetwood 80). Unlike Osbaldiston, manager of the Victoria, Conquest enjoyed a generally harmonious relationship with authorities. One telling example of this is found in a report from Donne's inspection of the Grecian, in which he gave Conquest (with the exception of a few changes) a passing grade on his establishment's adherence to safety codes.<sup>136</sup> Conquest was markedly prompt in responding to the improvements required by Donne. Three weeks after the inspection, in a space next to Donne's report, the Lord Chamberlain's comptroller, Spencer Ponsonby, added the note: "Mr Conquest tells me that all suggestions have been carried out to the satisfaction of himself and of the Public. Business good."<sup>137</sup> This note suggests Conquest's commonsense approach to running a theatre: appease audiences and the authorities, while making money.

Along with keeping the authorities off his back, the younger Conquest seemed intent that his repertoire appeal to the tastes of the audiences on whom the Grecian

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objectionable as those I have seen applauded by an Adelphi audience or patronized by the upper classes" (174-175). While Ritchie's condemnation of East End morality often seems intended to appeal to the social prejudices of a middle-class readership, he occasionally locates the source of social ills, such as prostitution, in unexpected places: "When one sees how female labour is remunerated, one wonders not that so many girls go astray, but that so many are honest. Look at great employers of labour in London – ask them what they pay their female hands... Depend upon it, 'the social evil,' as it is called, is, as regards most women, a mere question of wages, and will cease when female labour is better paid" (276-277).

<sup>136</sup> Donne's report on the Grecian Theatre is dated 7 September, 1860, and is found in a document titled "Report of the Inspection of the Within-Mentioned Theatres and Saloons" and was submitted to the Lord Chamberlain on 12 September 1860. LC 1/83.

<sup>137</sup> LC 1/83.

depended. George was himself a playwright and returned from his education in France with a library of scripts that he adapted for productions at the Grecian for over a quarter of a century.<sup>138</sup> In all, the Theatre's register lists forty-nine performances of scripts authored or co-authored for the Grecian by the younger Conquest between 1853 and 1879, saving him the cost of buying plays while also allowing him to tailor scripts for the prevailing disposition of his audiences.<sup>139</sup>

What perhaps made the temperance movement attractive to Conquest was that it appealed to the self-image of the middle and working classes – both of which populated the neighbourhoods of Islington, Pentonville and Hoxton from which the Grecian chiefly drew its audiences.<sup>140</sup> An historian of the area notes that in the 1850s Islington absorbed large numbers of people displaced by the building of railroads and their stations in central London, locating in the area a socially heterogeneous representation of the city's population. In 1865, a city medical officer observed in one of the local parishes: “an excess of Law Clerks, Commercial Clerks, Schoolmasters, Printers, Goldsmiths, Jewellers, Watchmakers, Butchers, Carpenters and Joiners, Bricklayers, Plasterers, Bakers, Tailors, Shoemakers, and Labourers. In the case of Females, we have a slight excess of Schoolmistresses, Dressmakers and Milliners, Washerwomen and Domestic

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<sup>138</sup> Fleetwood notes that George Conquest initially drew attention to himself with a burlesque, *The Forty Thieves*, performed at the Grecian on Easter 1857 (81). However, Fleetwood's list of plays produced at the Theatre shows that the younger Conquest's first script, *A Woman's Secret; or Richelieu's Wager*, was performed on 17 October 1853, and restaged in February of the following year.

<sup>139</sup> For a complete list of the Grecian's productions between 1851 and 1904, see Fleetwood's reproduction of the Theatre's register, 243-268. This list of Conquest's scripts does not count his 1858 adaptation of *It's Never Too Late to Mend*, by Charles Reade; this play is not credited to Conquest in the register. After selling the Theatre to take over the Surrey, Conquest continued to write for the Grecian until 1899, two years before his death.

<sup>140</sup> Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, 84-85.



Servants.”<sup>141</sup> The social composition of this area changed little through the 1860s and 1870s. In 1873 one London newspaper surveyed the Grecian’s audience, pointing out that “[b]oth the highest and lowest were absent, yet between the two grades almost every variety of mankind was present.” The reviewer found at the gallery door “a swarthy lot begrimed withal with elements of toil; for there were hardy workers among the throng,” while at the main entrance were those who “clearly belonged to the middle dominion of society.”<sup>142</sup> It was for these spectators, on whose patronage the Grecian depended, that the temperance movement had the greatest appeal.

In what is still the major study of the British temperance movement, Brian Harrison notes that temperance organizations, such as the United Kingdom Alliance, drew most of their members from the middle classes – who often demonstrated “a self-help background...with a local reputation for initiative and business integrity,” additionally, these organizations enjoyed close ties with the English proletariat.<sup>143</sup> This demographic closely fits the description of Townsend’s Mr. Carson, the self-made mill owner. Of the two classes, it was the proletariat who had the most to gain from the

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<sup>141</sup> Pieter Zwart, *Islington: A History and Guide* (1973), 26.

<sup>142</sup> *The Hackney and Kingsland Gazette and Shoreditch Telegraph* (27 August 1873). (Note: pages of the newspaper are unnumbered.) Also quoted in Davis and Emeljanow, 85.

<sup>143</sup> Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (1971), 220. A separate but related essay by Harrison surveys those who donated £5 to the United Kingdom Alliance in 1868-69. The list of London donors includes a notable range of individuals: R.E. Farrant, Deputy Chairman and Managing Director of the Artizans’, Labourers’ and General Dwelling Co.; G. T. Livesey, who later became Chairman of the South Metropolitan Gas Co., and who paradoxically “saw in the partnership of capital and labour the solution to many social problems” while he also “[f]irmly repressed agitators who frustrated his desire to supply the public with gas cheaply and efficiently”; Archbishop Manning, the “Energetic but autocratic rector at Lavington” who, after his wife’s death, converted to Roman Catholicism and in 1865 was made Archbishop of Westminster; or Frank Wright, “Self-made Kensington chemist and scientist.” For more on this topic, see Brian Harrison’s article, “The British Prohibitionists 1853-1872, A Biographical Analysis.” *International Review of Social History* (1970).

temperance movement. Harrison notes that “teetotalism actually marks an important stage in the *growth* of the working-class consciousness: it fostered recognition that rapid social change was possible...it flourished on the genuine desire for respectability and self-reliance which prevailed within the working class” (367).<sup>144</sup> There were, of course, very real reasons for advocating against the physical and domestic hazards associated with the wretched forms of alcohol consumed by those who could not afford better. Also, there must have been many, particularly among London’s working classes, who desired to free themselves, at least symbolically if not in practice, from the moral stigma of alcoholism with which they were so often branded by middle-class social critics. Working-class testimonials, such as that of Thomas Wright, often reflect this desire by consciously distancing the proletariat from this reputation for inebriation: “though it must be admitted that intemperance is but too prevalent a vice among working mechanics, it is by no means a prominent characteristic of the *class*.<sup>145</sup> On the contrary, taken in the aggregate, they are a very temperate body of men, and among them may be found numerous representatives of ‘total abstinence’ in all its extremes and modifications” (133-134). Though he absolves his class of widespread alcoholism, Wright interestingly dismisses the idea of total abstinence from alcohol, and rather suggests a more reasonable (and presumably prevalent) habit of moderation: “I am a man of temperate habits, that I believe the little drink that I do take does me good” (135). Similar claims regarding the moderate nature of working-class alcohol consumption were made throughout the

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<sup>144</sup> Harrison’s emphasis.

<sup>145</sup> Wright’s emphasis.

century.<sup>146</sup> Conquest likely knew that, like Wright, many of the Grecian's spectators would perceive a script supporting temperance as an attempt to discredit stereotypes of the inebriated East Ender. At the same time the Grecian's manager must have been confident that whatever service Townsend's play gave to the temperance movement would have little effect on the drinking habits of his audience.

The society portrayed in Townsend's script is less volatile and contains fewer moral extremes than that portrayed either in Gaskell's *Mary Barton* or the Victoria Theatre's adaptation of the novel. Writing in this way Townsend largely resists and complicates the polarized moral positions upon which the plot of conventional melodrama is constructed. His script is not, however, without a melodramatic villain. Townsend shifts the play's emphasis away from themes of political radicalism and, instead, portrays trade unionism as a violent and socially disruptive agent. He attempts to condemn unions in much the same way that he attacks alcoholism, centring on labour organizations as detrimental to the welfare of the working classes. Townsend accomplishes this by juxtaposing Mr. Carson's promising ascent from weaver to mill owner with John Barton's dubious agitations on behalf of the union.

Gaskell's references to the 1839 petition by Chartists have been largely left out of Townsend's adaptation. Ironically the only allusion to this event – which functions as the flashpoint of John Barton's actions in Gaskell's novel and the Victoria Theatre's 1850 adaptation – comes from Mr. Carson:

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<sup>146</sup> In his *Leisure and Class in Victorian England*, Bailey notes that the founder of the Club and Institute Union, Henry Solly, argued in 1871 that, though working men enjoyed beer, they were “‘moderate drinkers’” (123).

Carson

Ah! Barton and Wilson returned from London [–] a fruitless job  
my men, a fruitless job!

Barton

So it has turned out, sir, the appeal of misery and starvation has  
had no effect. (10)

Townsend's lack of interest in Chartist rhetoric was likely due to the fact that by 1861 the political movement had largely died out, and likely of little interest to East End spectators. As J. T. Ward reminds us, even before 1860, when the movement had effectively ceased to function in the nation as a political entity, the triumphs of Chartism were already long past (235). One newspaper, referring to a demonstration celebrating the return of a Chartist leader from exile in 1856, noted the remarkable lack of concern among local authorities: "Neither soldiers, cannon, policemen, nor proclamations were needed."<sup>147</sup>

Though mention is made of workers' privations in Townsend's play, the emphasis on their suffering is quickly dropped from the plot which hurries the action of the first two acts toward Henry's murder. Without hunger and poverty to justify the formation of unions, the efforts of Barton and other organizers lose the sympathy afforded to them by Gaskell. Instead, Townsend tacitly associates unions with clandestine and dishonest activities that discredit the honour and industry of workers – a point frequently reinforced, as when Mary refuses to be compromised by sharing her father's union stipend: "No, no father. I want not the Union money! I can work for my own...." (19).

The suspicion Townsend generates toward the union is validated at the turning-point of the play during Act II, Scene II. Henry, who until this point has functioned more

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<sup>147</sup> *The Era* (21 September, 1856): 9.

or less as the play's traditional villain, experiences an abrupt reformation in which he recants his earlier plot to seduce Mary:

It's too late to see that little flirt Mary Barton tonight. <Reflecting> Mary! Mary Barton, I love the girl, can I marry her? I fear not, that's a noble fellow that loves her, and he saved me a fearful agonizing death, and spurned my recompense. Well then they shall be married and I shall give them a handsome wedding portion. (23)

Here, Henry is transformed from a class predator intent on seducing Mary, to a selfish, but ultimately harmless, suitor. Henry's magnanimity, albeit patronizing, suggests that he is not indifferent to the virtues of Jem – the “noble fellow” – who in the previous Act intervened to save Henry from a fire at his father's mill. Though Henry is far from an ideal suitor (and, therefore, no candidate for Mary's affections), he is not capable of the connubial perfidy of a Lovelace or a Steerforth. Instead, Henry, who embodies the stereotypical middle-class prejudices toward the working classes, not only reforms his ways but also acknowledges the moral qualities of his social inferiors. For a brief moment, then, the play offers the hope of a social resolution to the romantic and political tensions of the plot, until following this speech Henry is murdered off-stage. Here, then, at the turning-point of the play, Townsend unexpectedly changes villains – transferring contempt from Henry to the unionists who murder him.

The scene which follows Henry's death is one of the most interesting in the script, and entirely of Townsend's contrivance. Having just witnessed Henry's moral reformation, the audience discovers Mr. Carson pondering the future of a son of whose murder he alone is still unaware:

The sum total! Land, Mill, investments to 150 000[.] [T]ruly a formidable sum in these times; and a nice sum for that noble boy Henry to

inherit. [H]e must seek to get into the house; and then let me see. <Takes up paper.> My wife whom I married a poor weaver girl, she is amply provided for and the two girls handsome marriage portions. <Lays down paper and sighs.> Harry, my son, there is my pride, my ambition, he has talent, might become one of the rulers of the land and so gain a peerage, aye, might – he shall, he the son of a loom worker – why not? In this land the greatest men have sprung from the humblest sources and dignified their after position in life. It shall be so. <Reflecting> A peer! Harry – a peer! <Knock> Who’s there? Come in! (23)

Here Townsend presents the elder Carson as the embodiment of the very industry and economic potential that he and the other mill owners are accused in Gaskell’s novel of impeding. Carson’s speech is intended to demonstrate that the English class system in fact works, that the economic ascendance of individuals is limited only by their own abilities. Townsend draws clear parallels between this scene in which Carson ensures his family is “amply provided for,” and the previous one in which Henry decides to supply Mary and Jem with “a handsome wedding portion.” In both instances, the family model, with all its associations for Victorians of moral and social order, is solidified by the paternal generosity of the middle class, represented here by Henry and his father. Moreover, their assistance extends across class boundaries – whether for the wedding of Mary and Jem or the dowries of Carson’s daughters – and, therefore, is seen as a non-partisan agent for the public good.

Carson’s efforts to secure his family’s future with the profits of his own industry, like Henry’s plans to assist his former lover’s union to a member of her own class, are wrecked by the intervention of the union, which, in Townsend’s script, represents a militant perversion of the social order. After hearing of his son’s death, all of Carson’s plans for his family’s future are redirected to a course of revenge: “Spare no money. I

only value wealth for revenge, all I possess – all, all shall go gladly to see the murderer on the gallows, my mind shall be fixed on naught but vengeance” (24). For the Grecian’s audiences the implications of this scene must have been self-evident. As a result of the union’s plot, Townsend implies, familial prosperity and the legitimate reward of individual effort are replaced by social disruption and violence.

When Barton and Carson later compare each other’s sufferings, the mill owner again attempts through charity to bridge the gap between their respective classes, but the weaver’s guilt over his role in the murder of Henry has left him so physically weakened that he is incapable of accepting the symbolic gesture of class reconciliation:

Barton

...think ye, that sorrow and sufferings is always to be the portion of the poor and wretched?

Carson

<Looking at him> You are right, all have a right to live – here – <offers him money> take this!

Barton

<Refusing> No, I – I require it not!

Carson

Why?

Barton

It is too late when the steps are few that lead to the grave that – <pointing to the money> is but a mockery to the departing sense [that] the poor man’s tragedy is nearly played out.... (32)

Barton, emotionally and physically depleted by his role in Henry’s murder, is unable to be reconciled with his employer. The suggestion here is that the benevolent and publicly constructive use of commercial capital is thwarted by union hostility, which places the play’s middle- and working-class characters in ostensibly preventable conflicts. In this play, neither England’s socio-economic system, nor its leaders, are implicated in the

hardships of the working classes. Rather it is labour organizations, Townsend implies, which fatally prune the masters' olive branch before it can be offered.

To buttress Townsend's point, Barton (the play's figurehead of union agitation) is brought ultimately to regret not only his participation in the plot to murder Henry, but in the union itself. In a play so concerned with the breakdown of family life, Barton is clearly aware, for instance, that his activities in the union's plot compromise his paternal responsibility as Mary's guardian: "Poor child. I must leave her! leave her! like a lamb in a fold of wolves!" (19). His regret, though, reaches its climax at the end of the play, as the burden of his conscience overwhelms Barton's allegiance of silence with the other conspirators in Henry's murder. In a last minute twist to Gaskell's plot, Barton reveals that he did not kill Carson's son and discloses the name of the one who did:

Carson

Here is the murderer!

Barton

No! <taking paper from pocket> No, on the back of this picture drawn in sport, by your son of suffering, starving men, the name is written!

Carson

<taking it, and shrinking back> Abel Thornley, and he is –

Barton

Dead! <falls down> and I – Ma – Mary – I bless Jem, – and – <Dies>  
(41)

Townsend's final scene breaks with the traditional melodramatic *denouement*, by leaving the audience with a number of unresolved questions. Who, for instance, is Abel Thornley, and why is his character only introduced in the final lines of the script? Why is Barton not the murderer (as he is in the novel), and why must he still die? For that matter, why is Abel Thornley dead? Are we to imply that Barton killed Thornley? The



answer to these questions lies, I believe, in Townsend's social 'message' which hinges on the script's final scene.

The play's third Act centres on the uncertain verdict in Jem's trial for the murder of Henry Carson – a trial metaphorically intended to appraise the moral viability of English society. Who, Townsend asks, is guilty not just of the death of Henry Carson, but for the wrongful suffering of Jem? Though the play's conclusion adheres to the conventional triumph of virtue over vice, Townsend has, by this point, effectively complicated the moral arithmetic of his melodramatic plot. Consequently, the verdict in Jem's trial ultimately lays blame for both crimes on the unionists, and in doing so acquits English society of having any role in the abuses suffered by either man or their respective classes. Instead, the English class structure is presented as working for the good of all – a sentiment articulated in the final moments of Jem's trial by the Judge whose address to the jury seems, also, intended for the audience: "you are in possession of all the facts, it is in your hands and I tell you that you are bound to give the Prisoner the full benefit of the highest doubts you may have on your minds, such is the law of England, such are the Laws of Humanity. Laws I hope that will always be respected and venerated" (41). By disclosing the identity of Henry's murderer, Barton breaks his confederacy with those who organized the crime, symbolically renouncing the union and exposing its tactics as a morally illegitimate means of correcting economic imbalances within English society. The guilt for Henry's death has been placed on a faceless member of the union – his very anonymity acting to implicate all unionists in the crime. Barton expires – now unstained

by the guilt associated with Henry's murder – a working-class hero who renounces union agitation and yields to the social agency of middle-class charity.

Depictions of middle-class benevolence, such as those involving Henry's moral reformation and his father's familial generosity, represent a marked shift in the traditional vilification of the bourgeoisie, and contest some modern generalizations about Victorian melodrama's depiction of class.<sup>148</sup> By emphasizing the Carsons' working-class origins Townsend's play refuses melodrama's overt positioning of the middle classes (and particularly mill owners, managers and other capitalist figures of 'the employer') as corrupt, and instead tacitly sanctions the moral franchise of bourgeois values, particularly the reforming agency of middle-class charity. Modern scholars, such as Lauren M. E. Goodlad, have pointed out the ways in which the (particularly urban) middle classes employed philanthropy as a means of confirming their own moral superiority, while simultaneously providing a method for monitoring and shaping the behaviour of those in lower ranks.<sup>149</sup> One suspects that Donne would have sympathized with the premise of this hierarchical supervision of the populace. Scholars studying the rationale of censorship have reasoned that, "[a]t the top [of these hierarchies], reside a privileged class of persons of such distinct virtue and character that they can view material which would be harmful to most others. At the bottom, exist a class of people whose intellectual, emotional, and moral character is so flawed and untrustworthy that, in the

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<sup>148</sup> See, for instance, Booth's observation that "In play after play it is the character with class status, wealth and privilege who is the criminal, and the representative of the underclass who is oppressed" (*Theatre in the Victorian Age* 164).

<sup>149</sup> Lauren Goodlad, "'Making the Working Man Like Me': Charity, Pastorship, and Middle-Class Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain; Thomas Chalmers and Dr. James Phillips Kay." *Victorian Studies* 43. 4 (Summer 2001): 595.

interest of social order, they cannot be permitted to lead uncontrolled lives” (White 24). In this way, middle-class philanthropy is deployed from the same motivation as dramatic censorship, in that each uses a perception of the proletariat as morally inferior to justify its subordination to the agents of established (read bourgeois) pieties, and at the same time refusing any direct challenge to the very social order which sustains this inequality.

While scholars, like Booth, have taken the political bias of melodrama for granted, Townsend’s script makes it clear that the genre could be employed to affirm the primacy of a middle-class *status quo* just as, in other cases, it undermined it. Other critics have observed melodrama’s ambiguity when it comes to siding with particular class interests; indeed, some scholars imply that melodrama helped audiences adjust to, rather than undermine, the social order. Martha Vicinus, for instance, while maintaining that “[m]elodrama always sides with the powerless,” nonetheless argues that “[m]elodrama was popular with the working class in its efforts to understand and assimilate capitalism,” and in this way the genre “was able to provide consolation and hope without denying the social reality that made goodness and justice so fragile.”<sup>150</sup> Similarly, David Mayer maintains, “British melodramas frequently explored the major fault-line of class and status and the anxieties which these subjects engendered.... In some melodramas these events and problems and resulting stresses are overt. In other dramas the underlying issues are concealed, but the metaphor may be recognized, read, and understood nonetheless” (147).<sup>151</sup> Elaine Hadley likewise notes the “considerable

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<sup>150</sup> “‘Helpless and Unfriended’ Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama.” *When They Weren’t Doing Shakespeare, Essays on Nineteenth-Century British and American Theatre* (1989), 175, 177, 181.

<sup>151</sup> David Mayer, “Encountering Melodrama.” *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (2004), 145-63.

variation in the degree to which melodramatic tactics dominate and shape the narrative message,” though she maintains that “the melodramatic mode could still retain its subversive potential as a challenge to the quickly consolidating truisms of bourgeois ideology” (136).<sup>152</sup> Melodramatic motifs (what Hadley refers to as “the melodramatic mode”) formed a kind of “portable rhetoric” of familiar tropes which were employed by “a broad spectrum of interests” – a claim supported by Townsend’s adaptation.<sup>153</sup>

Townsend was clearly conscious of the genre in which he was writing, and pokes fun at melodrama and its reliance on generic characterizations. At the end of the second Act, there is a discussion among a group of “factory girls” who have gathered to hear details of Henry’s murder eagerly supplied by the jealous imagination of Peggy Leadbitter (who, as in the novel, acted as messenger between Mary and Henry):

...young Mr. Carson was a dying of love for Mary Barton (what he could see in her passes my comprehension), well, they met last night and were going by a special train to be married by a Bishop (altho’ I have my doubts) when the two fathers and the disappointed lovers all met on the platform, pistols were pulled out and they do say (mind I don’t vouch for the truth) old Carson and old Barton are mortally wounded, the two lovers in the struggle fell under the trains and were crushed to death and the unfortunate cause of all this in a fit of lunatic madness fled the scene....  
(24-25)

Here Peggy constructs a plot rife with melodramatic events (thwarted love, fatal duels, youthful idealism threatened by old enmities) bordering on burlesque, while simultaneously subverting these with parenthetical qualifications that draw their accuracy

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<sup>152</sup> Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885* (1995). Hadley convincingly contends that while the melodramatic representation of domesticity is frequently cited as evidence that the genre positions “the Victorian bourgeois social order as a spatial and temporal monolith,” melodrama’s “thematic obsession in much stage melodrama and in the melodramatic mode should instead be understood as a rumination on and response to the costs and sacrifices of this process of domestication that was becoming widely institutionalized in law and at home” (136, 137).

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 139, 138.

into question. We should not overlook the effect of her tale on our understanding of the actual events of the play. By mocking the extravagances of melodrama, Townsend hints that the ‘real’ story of Mary and Henry has implications beyond the genre’s conventional message. If the events of Peggy’s tale are suspect, those of Townsend’s are by implication more reliable. What this suggests is that Townsend was both critically aware of the generic conventions that framed his narrative and willing to destabilize and exploit the clichés of dramatic form. Equally significant, such examples of metatheatricality also challenge critical assumptions of East End audiences and their purported lack of dramatic sophistication.<sup>154</sup> Yet lurking behind Townsend’s self-conscious subversion of artistic form, is a conspicuous reluctance to interrogate inequalities found in the social order – no doubt in response to the Examiner’s interdiction of his adaptation of *Jack Sheppard*. My point in making this observation is that Townsend was no hack, that he had both an awareness of, and the inventiveness for, a critical examination of social mores – a point worth reflecting on when considering the political and social nuances of his adaptation of *Mary Barton*.

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It is interesting, in light of the Victoria and Grecian adaptations of Gaskell’s novel, to consider a later dramatization of *Mary Barton* produced for a West End stage.

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<sup>154</sup> Katherine Newey, for instance, convincingly challenges the assertion that self reflexivity is “essentially literary: complex and aesthetically informed...qualities [which] are usually denied to popular culture, and particularly to the popular theatre of the nineteenth century” (85).

Dion Boucicault's *The Long Strike* opened at the Lyceum Theatre on 15 September 1866. Boucicault's script was printed prior to being submitted to Donne, suggesting that the Lyceum's manager, Charles Fechter (1824-70), was confident the script would receive minimal injury at the Examiner's hands.<sup>155</sup> Certainly, on reading the play, one finds that there was little reason to worry. The chief reason for this lies in Boucicault's changes to the novel's plot, which largely concentrate on scenes related to the strike – an interesting approach given his choice of title.

*The Long Strike* opens with the meeting between workers, led by Noah Learoyd (John Barton in the novel), and mill owners as represented by Richard Readley (a spliced version of Henry and Mr. Carson).<sup>156</sup> However, through the heated exchange between the two men there is only incidental mention of the workers' reasons for wishing to strike, or of the owners' reasons for refusing to negotiate – something both Gaskell's novel and its East End adaptations debate at length. Boucicault's treatment of the workers is preoccupied with their revolutionary ferocity, which, as one mill owner observes, has infected the public order: "The city is in a fever – we should not expect cool judgment from a distempered body" (5). In this heated atmosphere, the workers become an uncontrolled, almost animalistic force within the city, where the "streets are full of angry men" who search for the "carcass" (10) of Readley, ready to tear him "limb from limb" (12).

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<sup>155</sup> Page numbers cited here refer to the original folio copy of the script submitted to Donne, located at the British Library, ADD 53052X. For a brief overview of the play's production at the Lyceum Theatre, see Michael Diamond's *Victorian Sensation; Or, the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2003), 230-231.

<sup>156</sup> In at least one review the spelling of this character's name appears as Radley; however, I will be relying on the spelling from the version of the script used here (*French's Standard Drama*, CCCLX), in which it is spelled Readley.

Once he has established this emotional intensity, Boucicault quickly transfers it from Noah's political struggle to his daughter's romantic dilemma. While the enmity between workers and mill owners preoccupies most of Acts I and II, its chief technical function is to set up the intrigue surrounding Jem, Jane Learoyd (Mary in the novel), and Readley. It is soon evident that Boucicault is as preoccupied with this triangle as the lovers themselves – an attitude expressed by Jem, who looks on the hunger and indignation of the workers as unportentious compared to the misery of a spurned suitor: “Poor lads, how bright their sorrow seems beside mine” (17). So eclipsed is the strike by the romantic plot that Noah Learoyd's guilt for the murder of Readley is never addressed, and he is literally pulled from the final scene so that Jane and Jem can profess their affection across the courtroom. By the end of the play, Learoyd's crime (and his reason for committing it) are of no concern, and it is left as one of the plot's loose and ultimately insignificant threads. Throughout *The Long Strike* Boucicault uses this strategy of depicting the proletariat's ‘real’ efforts to improve social conditions as inconsequential as soon as they become so for his plot, allowing him to leave early, and seemingly important, aspects of the play unresolved once he is finished with them. In Act I, Scene III, for example, a gentleman from the London Central Strike Fund has come to distribute aid to the strikers, but Boucicault dismisses this character by providing him with a foreign accent and a bureaucratic insensitivity that leaves him out of touch with the workers' language of suffering:

*Gentleman from London* ... Susan Olland – two h'infants and von 'usband, h'operatives h'on the strike – one shilling and three pence for the man, h'eight pence for the woman, and three pence a 'ead for h'each h'infant – total, two an' three pence ha' penny....

*Susan* Oh, sir, my babies is clemming.  
*Gent* Clemming! What does she mean?  
*Jack* Starving sir – that’s all.  
*Gent* Retire, Mrs. Olland, babies h’ain’t on the list. (9)

Despite his initial attention here to the condition of those involved in the strike, the playwright shows little interest in what one critic refers to as the “sociological subjects” on which Gaskell centred her novel:

Boucicault, who had no social conscience to speak of, and who knew that his audiences, if they had any, left it at the door as they entered the theatre, threw out the didactic content of the novel without a qualm. (In an earlier, even more successful play, *The Octoroon* [1859], he had succeeded in treating the incendiary question of slavery so neutrally that neither side took offense.)<sup>157</sup>

In keeping with this pattern, *The Long Strike* is more interested in the details of a realistic setting than any version of social reality. In a review of the play for *The Spectator*, R. H. Hutton complained that Boucicault “focussed the interest of his piece very much in one or two scenes of great circumstantial display and scenic effect,” for which the reviewer cautioned, “Mr. Boucicault should take care, if he will have impressive scenery (which is no doubt very attractive, and very useful in causing the success of the piece), to get actors on the scene who are not subsidiary to the scene, instead of the scene to them. At least, if he does not, he teaches the people bad art, – for which perhaps Mr. Boucicault cares very little” (Hutton 110, 112).<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Richard D. Altick, “Dion Boucicault Stages *Mary Barton*.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 14.1 (June 1959), 136. Voskuil similarly observes that Boucicault had the equivocal habit of centring his plays on social issues, while effacing their demonstrable and often severe effects (253).

<sup>158</sup> It is worth noting that Hutton’s criticism of this approach is not in keeping with the attitude of other critics who, as Voskuil notes, often lauded Boucicault’s habit of providing realistic scenery devoid of social commentary (253-254).



The detailed scenery of this production was typical of the sensation play, a new mode of melodrama, popular in London theatres in the 1860s. Recent studies emphasize the way in which the theatre provided a place for open opposition from spectators of the sensation drama who, Voskuil explains, were allowed to “counter official or dominant accounts of how society was structured and who mattered most for its progress and development” (247). Clearly, the unseen intervention of the censor limited the scope of spectators’ dissent by containing the thematic latitude of the dramatic material to which they responded – a point that remains inadequately addressed in studies of the subject. But as a permutation of melodrama, sensation plays, like *The Long Strike*, largely reduced audiences’ interactions with performances by replacing their sympathetic and emotional connection to characters with a more soporific response. The three adaptations of *Mary Barton*, discussed here, rely, like Gaskell’s novel, on audiences’ imaginative and empathetic projection of themselves into the lives of the fictional characters. However, Boucicault’s adaptation of *Mary Barton* for the Lyceum relies heavily on sensation and incident to maintain audience interest.<sup>159</sup> Of the three scripts, for instance, *The Long Strike* is the only one to depict Readley’s murder on stage, while at the same time the play remains singularly uninterested in resolving the crime by bringing Learoyd to justice or killing him off with an overdose of Victorian guilt. Boucicault’s script, which enjoyed repeated productions both in England and America, was more interested in connecting

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<sup>159</sup> This preoccupation with the sensational incidents was privileged by the Lyceum’s management in the 1860s. Voskuil points to the praise Charles Fechter received in 1863 from the *Saturday Review* for the realism of his sets and the “‘sensational’ effect” of the Lyceum’s productions (“The Theatres” 21 November, 1863, qtd in Voskuil 264).

audiences with its location than with the characters themselves.<sup>160</sup> Correspondence between Fechter and Dickens suggests that Boucicault was concerned about the script's realistic appearance to audiences – a worry which Dickens dismisses:

I clearly see the *ground* of Mr. Boucicault's two objections; but I do not see their *force*.... as to the writing. If the characters did not speak in a terse and homely way, their idea and language would be inconsistent with their dress and station, and they would lose, as characters, before the audience. The dialogue seems to be exactly what is wanted. Its simplicity... is often very effective; and throughout there is an honest, straight-to-the-purpose ruggedness in it, like the real life and the real people. (482)

It is evident from Dickens' letter that Boucicault was anxious about the realism of his dialogue, suggesting his interest in the verisimilitude of his play's appearance. In concluding his letter, Dickens includes a piece of parting advice: "let me throw out this suggestion to him and you [Boucicault and Fechter]. Might it not ease the way with the Lord Chamberlain's Office, and still more with the audience, when there are Manchester champions in it, if instead of 'Manchester' you used a fictitious name? When I did *Hard Times* I called the scene Coketown. Everybody knew what was meant, but every cotton-spinning town said it was the other cotton-spinning town" (483).<sup>161</sup> Dickens' advice is presumably based on the assumption that by using a fictional location, the strikers would have fewer associations with actual events in the minds of audiences (and the Examiner). What begins to emerge here is a sense of the contradictions implicit in the dramatic realism then fashionable in the West End: the play should look and sound as though it was set in Manchester, while at the same time its plot should have little to do with the

<sup>160</sup> For a summary of the play's stage history, see Altick, 129-130.

<sup>161</sup> Letter printed in *The Nonesuch Dickens*, vol. III, (1858-70), 482-483.

actual lives of its citizens. That Boucicault did not take Dickens' advice, suggests that he did not believe the Examiner would object. He was right.

R. H. Hutton's review of the play points to the contradictions in the production between the set's carefully contrived realism and the limited nature of several performers. In one example, Boucicault changes one of the novel's climactic scenes by using the telegraph (a new invention at the time) to allow Jane to reach John Reilly (Will Wilson) before his ship sails. Of this scene Hutton noted that

No doubt there is something legitimately dramatic in the process of conversing by electric telegraph with a far distant person, which makes it quite permissible for Mr. Boucicault to exhibit it in actual operation on the stage. But then the high dramatic interest depends on the strange instantaneous power of communication which it gives to persons in so many respects cut off from each other, and it is this that needs to be brought out powerfully on the stage.

Instead, he complains, "The electric needle does its part so much better than the human heroine that the audience almost forgets its subordination to her inquires" (111).

Similarly, when Jane and Readley meet shortly before his murder, the set again overwhelms the acting so that "the audience begins to think more about those railway lights in the distance and the 'capital smoke' from the distant factory than about her [Jane]" (112).

In her reading of *The Long Strike*, Sheila Smith contends that melodrama in general, and this play in particular, "ratified prejudice, [and] returned to the audience the ideas it wanted to find even as it supported the emotions it wanted to indulge" (241). While Smith's brief discussion of middle-class fictionalizations of the poor is limited by her concentration on a single dramatization of the novel, her observations remain

germane to this study. Intervention by Donne on this script would have been of little account, because any endorsement (overt or otherwise) of the disruption to the social order was largely lost due to the production's dilution of the sympathetic bond between audience and character. Gone, here, are the soliloquies and private asides which facilitated sympathetic links between actor and spectator in the Victoria and Grecian dramatizations. Though Donne found nothing objectionable in Boucicault's script, we know from the playwright's testimony before the Select Committee that he nonetheless resented the censor's interference.<sup>162</sup> Boucicault complained that

we have been greatly disturbed in consequence of the Lord Chamberlains having different opinions on the same subject, both with regard to plays and with regard to theatres. Some plays have been licensed, and have been withdrawn after eight or ten years; others have been refused, and then a license has been granted after 10 or 13 years; we do not know when a piece will be refused, or on what grounds it will be refused.<sup>163</sup>

To substantiate his complaint, Boucicault referred to the controversy stemming from Donne's refusal to license Townsend's East End dramatization of *Jack Sheppard*. Though when he was pressed to provide further evidence of inconsistent censorship, the playwright wavered: "With the exception of the one play [*Jack Sheppard*]...I cannot remember at present that there were any more of that kind, but there are many that have been refused a license in the first instance that have been licensed afterwards, and it as to those particularly that I referred."<sup>164</sup> In subsequent testimony, Boucicault would moderate these complaints, maintaining that they did not pertain to the present Lord Chamberlain or his Examiner: "Lord Sydney is a very liberal Lord Chamberlain, and Mr.

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<sup>162</sup> Boucicault testified before the Select Committee on 30 April and 4 May, 1866 – approximately four months before the 15 September opening of *The Long Strike*.

<sup>163</sup> Question #4042.

<sup>164</sup> Question #4392.

Donne is one of the most liberal censors that we have ever known.”<sup>165</sup> We know from extant evidence that the vast majority of decisions, including the well-publicized treatment of *Jack Sheppard*, to censor a play (either in part or in whole) were attributable to Donne, and not the various Lord Chamberlains he served. Moreover, at the time of his testimony, Boucicault had been a playwright for twenty-five years – for fourteen of which he had been answering to Donne. Notwithstanding his backtracking, it is difficult to believe that Boucicault’s complaints regarding the unpredictable nature of dramatic censorship do not refer to Donne. Despite, or perhaps because of, the Examiner’s unpredictability, Boucicault rarely irritated the Examiner – a decision that must have been attributable, at least in part, to the playwright’s business sense. For, as we will see in Chapter IV, West End audiences were characteristically uninterested in or adverse to the political and social radicalism of the sort found at the Victoria theatre.

Boucicault’s objections regarding the capricious nature of the censor’s pen remind us of Stottlar’s wish to determine what made a play ‘unobjectionable’ in the censor’s eyes. What we have so far found is that the Lord Chamberlain licensed, above all, plays which endorsed the *status quo*, especially it would seem, for East End audiences. Yet, clearly, Stottlar’s conclusion that because of the Examiner’s censorship “no writer who had anything to say would attempt to say it on the stage” (277), is attributable, perhaps, more to dramatists of the West End. Even when attempting to avoid the censor’s pen,

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<sup>165</sup> Question #4449. It would seem both from the ambiguity of his testimony and his response to earlier questions, that Boucicault’s frustration with the Lord Chamberlain was related to the playwright’s failed attempt to gain permission to open a new theatre: “one Lord Chamberlain, I believe it was Lord Delawarre, stated that he thought there were theatres enough in London, and that he would refuse to license any more; the next Lord Chamberlain says there are not enough, and that he may license more....I have never gone so far as to apply for a license, but when I was about to apply for a license I was told that there would be a difficulty about it, and I thought it very unfair” (Questions #4149 & 4150).

those who adapted *Mary Barton* for East End theatres continued to address social issues relevant to their audiences, while the West End production appears more interested in the stimulations of sensationalism. Rather than becoming an arena for the metaphoric and literal representation of urgent contemporary issues, dramatists were forced to write narratives complying with prevailing political and social orthodoxy, whether they wanted to, as in Boucicault's case, or not. Even controversial dramatizations (like that written for the Victoria) become symbolic capitulations to class privilege through the act of adaptation by which playwrights – particularly for East End theatres – aspired to elevate their works through the moral imperative found in the increasingly 'respectable' novels they adapted. In this way the motivation to dramatize novels for East End theatres would seem to re-encode the very class tensions which they were prevented from depicting – a reflection voiced with unwitting irony by Noah Learoyd, who observes before the Lyceum's audience that "you rich folks go to hear the truth, and I am not licensed to tell it ye" (4).

### CHAPTER III

#### *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Victorian Class Anxieties

In this chapter I will examine the theatrical representation of the abolitionist movement, and the ways in which it became complicated by the class anxieties of Victorians. As abolitionists became more critical of the slave system in America, they grew increasingly aware of its resemblance to the class system in England. As the *Anti-Slavery Reporter* observed, “philanthropists who take the deepest interest in the cause of the enslaved African race, are amongst the most active and enterprising promoters of the measures...to ameliorate the conditions of the humble classes.”<sup>166</sup> By mid-century, many Victorians saw the abolitionist cause as an implied challenge to their nation’s social order – a view observable in debates on slavery in the English press. The popularity of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852) further legitimated the abolitionist cause, so that, as Douglas A. Lorimer notes, English readers readily accepted the novel’s comparison between American slaves and English labourers.<sup>167</sup> As a result, Stowe’s novel became a frequent target of conservative efforts to defend slavery. Playwrights, not surprisingly, attempted to exploit the success of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* by dramatizing it for the stage. In this chapter, I examine one of these adaptations – Mark Lemon and Tom Taylor’s *Slave Life* (Adelphi, 1852) – which gives evidence that the playwrights shaped their material to appease the censor’s imperatives. Before discussing this play, however,

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<sup>166</sup> *Anti-Slavery Reporter* (February 1853): 38. Also quoted in Douglas A. Lorimer, *Colour, Class and the Victorians* (1978), 95.

<sup>167</sup> *Colour, Class and the Victorians: English Attitudes to the Negro in the Mid-Nineteenth Century* (1978), 100.

I wish first to contextualize this analysis with an understanding of the American novel's unique significance for Victorians, who increasingly made associations between the conditions of American slaves and that of English labourers. After looking at the cultural and political issues that informed the reception of Stowe's novel in England, I will turn attention to consider the ways that Lemon and Taylor's dramatization of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* reshaped these topics in an attempt to appease the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays. Specifically, I wish to consider their script as an example of the means by which Donne's practices and tastes came to bear on the Victorian drama even when he was not intervening directly in the composition of plays.

While Donne was predominately interested in controlling the East End drama, playwrights and managers for West End theatres often appear more willing to oblige and even to anticipate the Examiner's reaction. However, we should not forget the importance Donne placed on the state's surveillance of the drama, both East and West, in which he believed one found "the undisguised aspect of the people."<sup>168</sup> It was because he recognized the relationship between popular forms of entertainment and the behaviour and opinions of its consumers, that Donne believed the Examiner's "quiet sanction" could shape not merely the tastes of playgoers, but, more importantly, their attitudes regarding the nation's social order. Though he was particularly intent on bringing the East End drama into line, Donne had found "hopes of [the drama's] recovery" in West End theatres, and it is doubtful that he would have allowed them to stray, as they had in

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<sup>168</sup> *Essays*, 255.



the East, from his ideals.<sup>169</sup> In the case of *Slave Life*, which was produced at the Adelphi (a West End theatre), Donne's practice of "quiet sanction" became quieter still. Here the censor's strictures regarding appropriate representations of political and social issues was integrated into the creative practices of dramatists themselves. What we will find in Lemon and Taylor's script are indications that Donne's imperative to protect the *status quo* was increasingly adopted by dramatists who willingly suppressed, or tamed, the potentially incendiary issues in their work.

In looking at *Slave Life*, we will consider in detail this play's representation of American slavery and the cause of abolitionism – a topic made all the more provocative for Victorians because of its association with the oppression of the English working classes and their struggle for political mobilization. Though we find little verifiable evidence of Donne's intervention in this script (in contrast to the Victoria Theatre's dramatization of *Mary Barton*), I contend that Lemon and Taylor adapted Stowe's novel in such a way as to assuage concerns that social movements, such as abolitionism, endangered the *status quo*. As we will see in this chapter, even when playwrights appear to side with racial and working-class others, they can only do so by complying with a coded system of values which accorded with the middle-class interests underpinning the social order that Donne was charged with protecting. It is worth recalling Donne's boast to the Select Committee that "all the excisions which I made in 1865, would not occupy more than that sheet of paper; not because I overlooked what was wrong in them, but

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

because they did not require it.”<sup>170</sup> While his comments were intended to emphasize the benign nature of his influence, it is more likely that, as I have argued above, they simultaneously reveal his success in commanding the compliance of dramatists. Though direct evidence of Donne’s intervention is not immediately apparent in *Slave Life*, I shall argue that his seeming invisibility is in itself an indication of his ability to institute practices of self-regulation among playwrights, and thereby shape the Victorian drama through an established set of principles and values which supported, rather than challenged, the *status quo*. As Donne’s practice of “quiet sanction” demonstrates, the truly effectual censor is one that never needs to use his pen.

*Slave Life* was written by two prominent members of London’s literary community, Mark Lemon (1809-70) and Tom Taylor (1817-80). Lemon is best remembered as the cofounder (with Henry Mayhew) and first editor of *Punch*, though he was also a prolific playwright and journalist, as well as a novelist, song writer and an occasional actor.<sup>171</sup> Lemon was a friend of Dickens, with whom he co-wrote the play, *Mr. Nightengale’s Diary* (1851), the year before his collaboration with Taylor on *Slave Life*. Lemon’s relationship with Dickens was a relatively close one, and he was known to the Dickens’ children as “Uncle Mark.” Peter Ackroyd suggests that Dickens’ friendship with Lemon and other writers for *Punch* derived in part from their shared “conservative radicalism,” characterized by their stance against the New Poor Law and the Corn Laws; they “were united in their hatred of those who traded upon nostalgia for

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<sup>170</sup> Question #2236.

<sup>171</sup> See Adrian’s *Mark Lemon: First Editor of ‘Punch’* (1966).

the past or who too rigorously defined social questions as items of profit or loss.”<sup>172</sup>

Ackroyd’s assessment of Lemon’s political sympathies is particularly relevant to the discussion at hand, insofar as they stand in relation to *Slave Life*, which, as we shall see, managed to frame the abolitionist cause in such a way as to support, rather than challenge, the middle-class values of the *status quo*.

Like Lemon, Tom Taylor is one of only a handful of Victorian playwrights about whom much is still known. Born on 19 October, 1817 in a suburb of Sunderland, Taylor proved himself a consummate embodiment of the Victorian pieties of accomplishment and industriousness. He remained active in a surprising number of fields, prospering both within government bureaucracy, as well as the more fickle world of Victorian letters. Formally educated in the classics and law, Taylor worked for a brief period as a professor and lawyer before taking a place at the Board of Health in 1848 (a position he held until his retirement in 1871) – all the time maintaining a remarkable output as a playwright and journalist (from 1857-1880 he was art critic for *The Times*, and, from 1874 until his death in 1880, editor of *Punch*). Despite the broad range of his professional interests, Taylor enjoyed the regard and status of being a prominent member of London’s West End theatre community. Ellen Terry (1847-1928), for instance, remembered him as “one of the leading playwrights of the ’sixties.”<sup>173</sup> In one of his frequent attempts to defend the quality of the West End drama, Donne cited “the success of Messrs. Taylor and Reade’s plays” in which he found hopeful signs “of a restoration of a national drama” (*Essays* 131).

<sup>172</sup> See Ackroyd’s *Dickens* (1991), 496-497.

<sup>173</sup> Ellen Terry, *The Story of My Life* (1908), 62.

Lemon and Taylor dramatized Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for the Adelphi Theatre, where it opened on 29 November, 1852.<sup>174</sup> Set in Kentucky, Stowe's novel opens on the plantation of Mr. Shelby, who, due to personal debts, is forced to sell two slaves, Tom and Harry, to his New Orleans creditor, Haley. Rather than be separated from her child, Harry's mother, Eliza, decides to escape to Canada. Her husband, George Harris, comes to the same decision, fleeing (though separately) because he has been ordered to work in the cotton fields. Due to his pale complexion, George is able to pass as a Spaniard, allowing him to move through the South as a white man. Tom, on the other hand, chooses to accept Providence, and is taken from his wife and children and sold. Shelby's son, George, pledges to return Tom to his family as soon as the younger man is able. Tom, while on a riverboat, saves the life of a young girl, Eva St. Clare, whose father subsequently buys Tom. Meanwhile, Eliza and George Harris are united in a Quaker village, where they are confronted by the pursuing slave catchers, Loker and Marks. In the ensuing confrontation, George Harris wounds Loker and frightens away Marks. On the St. Clare estate life for Tom is relatively easy. He becomes close friends with Eva, whose sensitive fragility is contrasted with the robust girl, Topsy, who is purchased by St. Clare for the benefit of his sister's theories of 'socializing' slaves. The pleasant condition of life among the St. Clares continues until the death of Eva and, subsequently, her father. St. Clare's wife ignores her husband's

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<sup>174</sup> Pages numbers cited here refer to the original folio copy of the script submitted to Donne, located at the British Library, ADD 52936A. The entry for *Slave Life* is recorded in the Lord Chamberlain's *Day Book* (ADD 53703, ff. 263), and notes that the play was submitted on 15 November, 1852, and received a license nine days later, on 24 November. The reason for the delay in licensing the play is unknown; however, as I discuss below, it may be due to changes in office procedures related to the illness and temporary replacement of the Lord Chamberlain at this time.

promise to free Tom, who is sold to a harsher owner, Simon Legree. On Legree's plantation Tom's Christian benevolence quickly comes in conflict with his owner's brutality when Tom refuses to flog an old woman as punishment for receiving his help picking cotton. For this refusal Legree flogs Tom instead. Cassy, who is sexually enslaved to Legree, befriends Tom and warns him of his owner's cruelty. Seeing that Legree intends to forcibly seduce a young slave, Emmeline, as he did her, Cassy decides to save the girl, and they pretend to flee into the swamps, but instead hide in the attic of Legree's house while he searches for them. Suspecting that Tom knew the whereabouts of Cassy and Emmeline, Legree has him flogged until he collapses. Days later George Shelby appears, intent on fulfilling his promise to free Tom, who is near death. Instead, George helps Cassy and Emmeline escape from Legree's plantation. During their flight, the women make two discoveries, first meeting Madame de Thoux, who is George Harris's sister, and, second, discovering that Elisa is Cassy's daughter, who was taken from her at birth. Later, all of the fugitives are reunited in Canada, while in Kentucky George Shelby frees his family's slaves in the memory of Uncle Tom.

Of interest to the present study are the ways in which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* both appeased and unsettled conventional Victorian pieties. Almost three months before the opening of Lemon and Taylor's adaptation, *The Times*' review of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* pejoratively noted the novel's dramatic potential, taking exception to its plot, which it derided as being in "a style of proceeding well understood at the Adelphi Theatre."<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> *The Times* (3 September, 1852): 5.

*The Times* reviewer is troubled by Stowe's novel on a number of counts.<sup>176</sup> First, the reviewer ambiguously compares it with "with the mendicant who suddenly discovers himself heir to 20, 000£ a year, and, in fact, with every man whose good fortune it has been to fall asleep Nobody, and to awake in the morning an institution in the land." The second dubious aspect of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* lies, we are told, is the emotional disposition of its writer – the "instinct of her sex" – which predisposes Stowe to sway her readers via their emotions:

she does not invite a philosophical discourse, for philosophy is exacting, is solicitous for truth, and scorns exaggeration. Nor does the lady condescend to survey her intricate subject in the capacity of a judge, for the judicial seat is fixed high above human passion, and she has no temper to mount it....[T]he clever authoress takes the shortest road to her purpose, and strikes at the convictions of her readers by assailing their hearts.<sup>177</sup>

Stowe's exploitation of readers' emotions, or "hearts," makes her novel dangerously persuasive, cautions *The Times*' reviewer, who attempts to "warn the unsuspecting reader" by likening the novel's feminine emotionalism to East End melodrama:

What becomes of the judgment under such an ordeal, if the intellect be weak and the heart be strong? We are not ignorant of the mode in which great morals are enforced at our minor theatres, and of the means there taken to impress the imagination and to instruct the intellect by help of the domestic melodrama. A villain on the Surrey side of the water is a villain indeed, and a persecuted heroine is persecuted beyond endurance in any other place.... Truth, however, demands more delicate dealing, and art that would interpret Truth must watch the harmonies of Nature, which charms not by great "effects," but by her blended symmetry and grace, by her logical and unforced developments.

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<sup>176</sup> I wish to note that Audrey A. Fisch's insightful discussion of *The Times*' review has shaped my own reading of it. Wherever relevant I have cited or included her commentary.

<sup>177</sup> The author's gender was remarked, though to a very different effect, by other reviewers, such as the reviewer of *The Daily News*, who noted the novel's "great literary power – a power so peculiarly masculine as to induce us, against all propriety, to interject a doubt as to Mrs. Beecher's share in the book." *The Daily News* (4 August, 1852): 2.

In this quotation we find an apprehension of the novel's emotionalism that is reminiscent of the anxiety with which the theatre was viewed by those who feared, in Donne's words, the dramatic "representation of a story [which] appeals much more strongly than merely reading one, to the senses of an audience."<sup>178</sup> *The Times'* reviewer is clearly concerned with the "judgment" that Stowe's readers will come to, especially among those for whom "the intellect be weak and the heart be strong" – a group directly equated here with East End theatre audiences. The reader is clearly disturbed by the novel's melodramatic characteristics, which threaten to overwhelm the rational and reflective nature of the reading process and thereby make possible any number of conclusions, or "judgment[s]," regarding the society Stowe critiques. The reviewer implies one of the novel's chief faults is that it too closely resembles a play, and an East End one at that. By simultaneously conflating (and thus vilifying) *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and melodrama, *The Times'* reviewer attempts to downplay the cultural implications of Stowe's novel by attributing its success to populist sentimentality, similar to that suspected in East End theatregoers. In doing so, the critic identifies blacks, women and the working classes as cultural inferiors, or others.

Yet both these concerns – the popularity and emotionalism of Stowe's novel – seem intended to anticipate *The Times* reviewer's third, and (one suspects) central grievance against the novel, which is its inversion of racial stereotypes. "She should surely have contented herself with proving the infamy of the slave system," complains

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<sup>178</sup> 1866 *Select Committee Report*, Question #2417.

the reviewer, “and not been tempted to establish the superiority of the African nature over that of the Anglo-Saxon and of every other known race.” In particular, the reviewer takes offence at the character of Tom, who is

eternally praying for our edification and moral improvement... He is described as a fine powerful negro, walking through the world with a Bible in his hands, and virtuous indignation on his lips, both ready to be called into requisition on the slightest provocation, in season and out of season, at work or at play, by your leave or without it, in sorrow or in joy, for the benefit of his superiors or for the castigation of his equals.

Similar to journalists’ offence at the increasing independence and cultural authority exercised by East End theatres discussed in Chapter I, here we find still further evidence of the apprehension and umbrage with which the middle classes (whose interests *The Times* arguably represented) viewed any claim or expression of superiority made by those of lower ranks. That Tom should presume to judge those stationed above him – even slave owners – by praying “for the benefit of his superiors,” is deemed by *The Times*’ reviewer to be a condescension improper to a black’s station. Not only is Stowe’s novel derided here because of an emotionalism and popularity similar to that attributed to working-class plays, but, like the increasing independence of the East End drama from that in the West, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* unsettles the entrenched hierarchies and class deference of the Victorian *status quo*.

While less polemical reviews, such as that in *The Illustrated London News*, conveniently saw in Tom “the vindication of the difference between British poverty and American slavery,” *The Times*’ reviewer tenaciously attacked Stowe’s depiction of her



novel's namesake.<sup>179</sup> For *The Times*, it is the moral idealization of Tom, and the sympathy he naturally solicits, that blinds readers to a violent possibility that might accompany the end of his oppression:

Imagine them liberated to-morrow in those portions of the United States where they outnumber the whites and where they would only have to raise their liberated hands in order to strike down the traditional enemies of their race, their once tyrannical owners, their always contemptuous social superiors. Hate begets hate, and a war of races secures the rapid deterioration and decline of all the combatants. We may well shrink before rashly inviting so bloody and disastrous a conflict.

While the reviewer's alarm regarding an American "war of races" may not indicate his fear of an English war of classes, the apprehension found in this quotation is not unlike that employed by those warning of the effect on the social order of extending the suffrage to the working classes.<sup>180</sup> What is apparent from *The Times'* review is that the English were wary of the potential disruption and violence associated with any attempt to empower marginalized or oppressed segments of society. While the reviewer openly acknowledges the abuses of "social superiors," their wrongs do not outweigh the anticipated reflex of upheaval and reprisal brought about by discontinuing them. *The Times'* anxiety about Stowe's abolitionist agenda is interesting to consider in light of Victorian attitudes toward race directly connected to assumptions of English class differences. As Lorimer attests,

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<sup>179</sup> *The Illustrated London News* (2 October, 1852): 290.

<sup>180</sup> For instance, in its coverage of a meeting regarding manhood suffrage, *The Times* demonstrated a similar apprehension regarding the possible effects on the English political order: "Plebeians may be as good or better than patricians, but what possible relation has such a comparison with the proposition to swamp and annihilate every constituency in the country, composed as they are almost entirely of plebeians, for the sake of transferring the power they now exercise into the hands of a class which has hitherto had no direct voice in forming our national policy or legislation?" *The Times* (29 October, 1858): 6.

the mid-Victorians, looking outward through ethnocentric spectacles, often perceived race relations abroad in the light of class relations at home. Blacks became identified with labouring tasks and the lower social orders, and in the process respectable people extended conventional attitudes toward their social inferiors in England to all Negroes. (92)

Nor was this sympathy without precedent. Historians note that in the previous century among the colonies “indentured white servants often saw affinities between themselves and slaves,” so much so that working-class whites frequently participated in slave uprisings.<sup>181</sup> There is evidence, as well, in contemporary journalism that Victorians consciously drew comparisons between the lives of American slaves and the lives of English workers. *The Westminster Review*, for example, highlighted one attitude popular at the time which reasoned that, due to the mercenary nature of economic markets, the slave was better off than the worker. While “the chances are that the cottier or the labourer would not change places with the slave....neither, we dare say, would...[the] slave change places with them; and anyone might well be perplexed, if compelled to choose between the contented animalism of the one, and the comfortless, hopeless manhood of the other.”<sup>182</sup> Novelists, too, made explicit parallels between slaves and the

<sup>181</sup> Philip D. Morgan, 195. For more on this see Morgan’s “British Encounters with Africans and African-Americans, circa 1600-1780,” in *Strangers within the Realm, Cultural Margins of the First British Empire* (1991), and particularly, 195-197. Morgan notes that in the colonies “Irishmen, in particular, were viewed with almost as much contempt as Africans. Epithets such as “a bloody people,” “perfidious,” “wicked,” “good for nothing but mischief,” and “very idle,” which were bandied about in reference to Irishmen, could just as easily have been applied to slaves” (197).

<sup>182</sup> *The Westminster Review* (January 1853): 73. The writer of this review, however, goes on to recuperate the English labourer’s position, arguing that the “amount of misery may possibly sometimes be equal – that is, the greatest misery of the one condition may be equalled by the greatest happiness of the other; but in the treatment there is the most difference, that in the one case the effort is general and immense to better the condition, and in the other there is, at least, as great an effort to keep it as it is” (74). There is an interesting alteration in the article’s tone at this point, from a controlled critique of American apologists for slavery to a righteous validation of the English labourer’s civil liberties. The writer subsequently allies himself with one of the apologists for slavery that he had formerly dismissed (the “‘Carolinian’”), taking up the story of an evicted Irish homesteader, “an illustration – probably one which the ‘Carolinian’ would choose”, to prove that, unlike in America, English law came to the defence of those unjustly persecuted (74). For more

working classes. For instance, two years before the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Charles Kingsley (1819-75) notes these similarities in his novel, *Alton Locke* (1850), in which he presents agricultural labourers as subordinate even to the animals they tended: "I went on, sickened with the contrast between the highly-bred, over-fed, fat, thick-woolled animals... and the little half-starved shivering animals who were their slaves.... As society is now, the brutes are the masters – the horse, the sheep, the bullock, is the master, and the labourer is their slave."<sup>183</sup> Given the pervasive acknowledgement of the parallels between the conditions of American slaves and that of English labourers, it is not surprising that many among the working classes saw the abolitionist movement and its accompanying propaganda (and in particular Stowe's novel) as allies in the struggle to improve their own political and social conditions. As Frank J. Klingberg notes, "English antislavery sentiment, the workers believed, was strong enough to carry with it some relief for themselves" (552). Yet the political success of abolitionists must also have deepened the working classes' awareness of their own setbacks. In 1838 freedom was finally granted to over seven-hundred thousand blacks in British colonies who had been forcefully apprenticed to their former owners after the abolition of slavery five years earlier. This legal vestige of the British slave system ended just one year before Parliament rejected the Chartists' first petition (and its *one million* signatures) calling for increased suffrage among white (working-class) men.

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on the rhetorical strategy of this article, see *The Westminster's* example of the Irish homesteader discussed below.

<sup>183</sup> *Alton Locke*, 286. Kingsley later makes this comparison even more explicit, as one worker complains: "The farmers makes slaves on us. I can't hear no difference between a Christian and a nigger, except they flogs the niggers and starves the Christians; and I don't know which I'd choose" (288). (This latter quotation also appears in Lorimer, 103.)

Here was Parliament's predicament: having renounced its interests in slavery abroad, the nation nonetheless remained dependent on perpetuating political imbalances and economic exploitation at home. Seen in this context, it is clear why Stowe's novel (and, by implication, plays based on it) should rouse such heated responses from *The Times* and other defenders of English conservatism. Despite having already abolished slavery themselves, Victorians arguably had as much at stake in American abolition as Americans. Throughout the second quarter of the nineteenth century, abolitionists on both sides of the Atlantic demonstrated a sympathetic interest in the radical movements in Europe, and this association gave pause to those invested in maintaining the English *status quo*. We find evidence of this concern in an article in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* which lamented the effects of

the emancipation of the negroes in the West Indies. Eight hundred thousand slaves in the British colonies in that quarter of the globe received the perilous gift of unconditional freedom....As a natural result of so vast and sudden a change, and of the conferring of the institutions of the Anglo-Saxons upon unlettered savages, the proprietors of those noble colonies were ruined, their affections alienated, and the authority of the mother country preserved only by the terror of arms.<sup>184</sup>

In this quotation we find echoes of Donne's concern for the social upheaval resulting from the "perilous" liberation of England's indentured masses – an upheaval so great as to threaten the power of the state. David Turley points out that in the 1830s and 1840s middle-class abolitionists began to address the necessity of recognizing the equality of the English working classes who were also closely involved in the antislavery movement. Yet other segments of the middle class held to prejudices regarding the "unfitness of

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<sup>184</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (January 1852): 245.

workers for equal collaboration.”<sup>185</sup> By mid-century, social conservatives had instead focused on the need for gradual institutional change as a means of reconciling the moral outrage and civil fear on either side of the abolition issue – just as they had treated Chartists’ demands a decade earlier.<sup>186</sup> Those in the English press advocating abolition likewise hesitated when it came to the issues of political self-empowerment for slaves, cautioning that “[t]he Declaration of Independence would be strong meat for babes, and speeches at democratic meetings somewhat dangerous reading lessons.”<sup>187</sup> Still, the growing alliances in the first half of the nineteenth century between abolitionists and working-class radicals (and particularly Chartists) only deepened the association of these two movements. As Turley observes, the various culminations of radical agitation in 1848 provided “the student of antislavery a useful illumination of the more general ideological stance of abolitionists because the upheavals could plausibly be seen as about the freedom of oppressed people and the role of violence in political change” (132) – a lesson borrowed all too easily by those who saw parallels between the American slave and the English labourer.

When viewed in this context, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, while ostensibly about the treatment of American slaves, can be seen (and certainly was seen by Victorians) to comment on the condition of England’s working classes. For Victorians, American slavery, with its stark imbalances and injustices, displayed painful similarities to their own class system. Because of its argument for liberating socially oppressed groups,

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<sup>185</sup> David Turley, *The Culture of English Antislavery, 1780-1869* (1991), 194.

<sup>186</sup> See, for example, the debate over the 1839 Chartist petition in *Hansard Parliamentary Debates*, vol. XLIX (8 July – 6 August 1839), particularly columns 236-250.

<sup>187</sup> *The Westminster Review* (January 1853): 75.

Stowe's novel initiated uncomfortable self-reflection in nearly all segments of English society, indeed, even among those who championed the book and its cause. As we will see, the reaction of those Victorians who engaged with this novel – playwrights, reviewers, and, inevitably, the censor – is, in varying degrees, a measure of the anxiety with which each viewed the moral and social order of their own nation.

Given the complex political and social nuances of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for Victorians (not to mention the novel's length), it is not surprising that Lemon and Taylor made considerable alterations to its plot in order to turn the novel into a viable play. Nor were they alone in reworking this lengthy story into a dramatic form. In its December 1852 issue, *The Anti-Slavery Advocate* celebrated the popularity of Stowe's novel, noting, though rather belatedly, that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was "to be prepared for the stage."<sup>188</sup> In fact, between September 1852 and February 1853 there were fifteen productions based on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.<sup>189</sup> Perhaps for this reason, the Adelphi's management was intent on distinguishing Lemon and Taylor's adaptation from versions at rival theatres. In a bill announcing the play's first week of performances, the Theatre's management inserted the following notice:

It should be stated, alike in justice to MRS. STOWE, and in explanation of the liberties taken with her admirable story in this Drama, that it does not profess to be a mere Stage Version of the Tale, but a Play, in which free use has been made of her chief personages and most striking incidents. The interest of MRS. STOWE's Story runs in three distinct channels,

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<sup>188</sup> *The Anti-Slavery Advocate*. 3 (December 1852): 24.

<sup>189</sup> While a considerable number, this is far fewer than the "dozens" of dramatizations reported by Fisch (147), who inaccurately cites Douglass A. Lorimer's more modest estimate (86). Copies of these plays are located in the British Library, ADD 52934 (entries C, F, G, K), 52935 (entries I, J, R, FF), 52936 (entries A, E, Q, Z, AA), and 52937 (entries A, V). In many cases these plays were only loosely related to the novel, sometimes not at all, and were more intent on exploiting the novel's popularity. After February 1853, however, the novel's theatrical appeal faded, and there were no more adaptations in that year.

following successively the fortunes of *Eliza* and *George*, of *Uncle Tom* and *Eva*, or *Emmeline* and *Cassy*. For dramatic effect it is necessary that these threads should be interwoven, and that what cannot be connected with them should be abandoned. This is what has been attempted in the Drama of "SLAVE LIFE," in which, while there has been both the wish and effort to preserve in the Drama the spirit which breathes through MRS. STOWE's pathetic pages, the relations of characters, and the sequence of incidents have been altered without reserve. The Drama is produced under the direction of MADAME CELESTE, who has recently visited all the localities in which the action is supposed to take place.<sup>190</sup>

We find in this notice both evidence of the playwrights' approach to adapting Stowe's novel for the stage, and their anxieties regarding audiences' reaction to the changes made to its plot. Compared to other versions performed during this period, Lemon and Taylor's script represents a concerted attempt to deal effectively with Stowe's novel. In terms of length alone, their play, at over 158 folio pages, was considerably longer than other dramatizations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which range from eighteen to sixty-five pages.<sup>191</sup> A contemporary playwright, Edward Fitzball (1792-1873), recalled that the popularity of Stowe's novel "set all the managers mad to produce it on the stage. Every theatre nearly produced its [own] version. I don't know whose was the best. I was engaged by three managers to write three distinct pieces, which I did to the best of my abilities: indeed, it did not require any remarkable ability, as it was only to select scenes and join them together" (260-261). As Fitzball suggests, most adaptations of Stowe's novel were largely hack jobs, which did little to introduce scenes or develop characters and instead assumed spectators' familiarity with the novel to the extent that their plays

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<sup>190</sup> *Slave Life! or, Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Theatre Royal, Adelphi. Advertisement. 29 November, 1853. (Located in archives of the Study Room in the Theatre Museum, London.)

<sup>191</sup> While these pages range in size and 'hand,' they are, for the most part, similar enough to make general comparisons. Next to Taylor and Lemon's script, the longest of these plays was Edward Fitzball's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ADD 52934C.

were little more than snapshots of Stowe's plot.<sup>192</sup> Responses to the Adelphi's production indicate that Lemon and Taylor's efforts did not go unacknowledged in the press, and critics' general approval suggest both the unusual extent to which the playwrights prepared the novel for the stage, and the success they enjoyed for their trouble.<sup>193</sup> The plot of *Slave Life* was typical of what was known as an 'Adelphi drama,' defined by one playgoer, who observed that the Adelphi Theatre's audiences preferred that "[t]here should be in their drama, mystery, villainy, comic business, smugglers, caves, crossing of swords, firing of guns, lost daughters, mysteriously recovered, shrieking their way into their fathers' arms, hair-breadth perils, executions, reprieves"

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<sup>192</sup> See, for instance, Eliza Vincent's adaptation for the Victoria, ADD 52934F.

<sup>193</sup> Though the play's reviews are remarkably alike in their focus and judgement, it is worthwhile considering a few of them if only to remark their similarities. Almost every reviewer made note of the explanation on the bill regarding the playwrights' alterations of Stowe's novel (see above); overall the judgement was highly favourable. *The Daily News*, for example, championed the play, noting that the day after the opening of *Slave Life* that,

"Uncle Tom's Cabin" bids fair to become as popular in the dramatic as it already is in the reading world. It has now reached the Adelphi Theatre, where a free version of the story was produced last night, under the title of "Slave Life," with the greatest success. A notice is appended to the bills and justification of the liberties taken with Mrs. Stowe's tale... To all, however, who comprehend the utter dissimilarity between narrative, fiction and the requirements of dramatic action, such apology is scarcely necessary. The public will have these dramatic versions, and therefore managers must produce them; and he is the most skilful adapter who makes such use of the materials as shall result in the production of an effective and coherent drama. The result has been eminently attained in the piece under notice. (30 November, 1852): 6.

Likewise, *The Age* had a similar set of superlatives at hand in its response to the play:

The authors, however, are certainly entitled to very great praise for the manner in which they have performed their task; and they have not only evinced a due appreciation of the characters, but have so arranged their materials as to preserve a continuity of interest.... Many dramatic versions of popular novels which have preceded this of *Uncle Tom* have consisted of little more than a succession of detached scenes, which have excited attention and applause from the fact that the personages represented therein were realisations of characters whose idiosyncracies [*sic*] had become familiar to the public; but we find in the work now before us a praiseworthy instance to the contrary, and we are glad to record its complete success. (4 December, 1852): 6.

*The Era*, too, approved of the changes made to the novel's plot, finding not "the slightest objection to such a change, seeing that Mrs. Stowe draws freely upon *her* imagination – indeed, it may be one for the better" (5 December, 1852): 10.



(Morley 69).<sup>194</sup> Social critique was rarely found on the Adelphi stage. As the reviewer for *The Era* noted, “People do not go to the Adelphi to criticise [*sic*] a drama too closely, and there would be less in this to engage the beholder were it more faithful to the reality of the life it is supposed to illustrate.”<sup>195</sup>

In order to mould *Uncle Tom's Cabin* into a workable script, Lemon and Taylor reduced the number of locations in which the action takes place, focussing largely on the plantations of Shelby and Legree (now neighbours) for the first and third Acts, respectively, while the second Act is largely situated in a tavern near the Ohio river. The chapters dealing with St. Clare and Eva are omitted altogether, and the Shelbys appear only in the first Act (their son, George, is entirely absent). The character of Tom appears almost incidentally, his position subordinated to those of Eliza and George, whose separate flights and eventual reunion make up the bulk of the play's action. *Slave Life* opens with a glimpse of the bucolic and infantilised life led by the slaves on Shelby's plantation. The pastoral atmosphere is quickly disturbed by the arrival of Legree, who now serves in the role of Haley (Shelby's creditor in the novel). The decision to unite these two characters allowed the playwrights to transfer the story of Uncle Tom directly to Legree's plantation. This technique for consolidating the novel's plot by conflating the roles of various characters is repeated with considerable success throughout the play. Topsy, who is purchased by Shelby (not St. Clare), overhears the plan to sell Tom, Harry and Eliza, and breaks the secret to those concerned. Meanwhile, Cassy finds out from

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<sup>194</sup> In *Essays on the Drama*, Donne defined the Adelphi drama as “combinations of melodrama with farce” (147).

<sup>195</sup> *The Era* (5 December, 1852): 10. For a similar, though more complete definition of the ‘Adelphi drama,’ see Winton Tolles (96-7).

Tom Loker that Legree plans to purchase Eliza, and she goes to warn her. George Harris, though he has just invented a machine that does the work of a “score” of men, is being sent to work in the fields, and for this reason he decides to escape to Canada. While keeping Eliza’s flight across the Ohio river (a favourite scene with readers and theatregoers alike), Taylor and Lemon adapt the episode insofar as she reappears in the custody of Loker in the following scene and is eventually taken to Legree’s plantation where she adopts the role of Cassy’s protégé (held by Emmeline in the novel). Cassy becomes far more central to the plot, and she appears throughout the play as a kind of guardian angel, warning Eliza that she has been purchased by Legree, while later orchestrating their flight together from his plantation with George and Topsy, and ultimately shooting Legree in a confrontation during the final scene between the owner and the fugitive slaves.

Like the novel from which it is adapted, Lemon and Taylor’s play deploys a series of coded (as well as explicit) references to existing racial stereotypes of behaviour and identity, that distinguishes the dramatic function of characters along racial lines. Black characters, for instance – who speak in a distinctive vernacular complete with predictable demotic idiom and slang – operate either as comic relief or as martyrs. Topsy, for example, regularly interrupts the tension of the play with gags and flippant mockery reminiscent of the Jim Crow stereotype, as well as using the social superiority of her master (a disguised George Harris) over other slaves and lower-ranked whites (such as the tavern owner). Topsy’s extension of class distinctions among whites to her own relations with other slaves, is used both as self-reflexive irony for English audiences and,

more significantly, to naturalize the assumption of a class hierarchy among blacks – a fact which, as we will see below, becomes critical to establishing English audiences’ empathy with the characters of Eliza and George. Other slaves, such as Cassy and Tom, provide similar interludes in the play, though they function as figures of tragic (rather than comic) commentary on slavery. Tom, for instance, martyrs himself by refusing to flee with Eliza and Harry when he hears they have been sold to Legree:

No, no. I ain’t going. Let Eliza go – its her right, I wouldn’t be the one to say no – taint in natur [*sic*] for her to stay, but you heard what she said – if I must be sold or all the people on the place and everything go to rack why let me be sold. I ‘spose I can bear it as well as any one. <*sob*> Mass’r always found me on the spot always! I have never broke trust – Mass’r aint to blame – but you – you tell Eliza – its her right – its her right. (67-68)

Here we find evidence of the moral idealism so repellent to *The Times*’ reviewer of Stowe’s novel (not surprisingly most of this passage was ultimately cut, as we will see below). While a paradigm of Christian morality, Tom also tacitly sanctions the racial assumptions that perpetuate his own subordination. His conscience insists that he should endure slavery, while it is Eliza’s “right” to seek her freedom for it “taint in natur for her to stay” enslaved. Whether it is Eliza’s maternal “natur” or some other reason, which justifies her decision to seek her liberty is not clear, though Tom’s willingness to remain enslaved is linked to his racial homogeneity. This portrayal of Tom as racially, or ‘naturally,’ unsuited to the liberty that his superlative morality would seem to justify (particularly in a melodrama like *Slave Life*), may stem from a theory popularized among polygenesists in the 1850s regarding the ‘degenerate’ origins of certain races – a notion which, as Anne McClintock notes, spread the idea that freedom was “an unnatural zone

for Africans.”<sup>196</sup> In this way, Lemon and Taylor’s dramatized version of Tom, who is allocated immense moral authority in both novel and play, reinforces, as Topsy does, the very hierarchical assumptions of race that make slavery possible.

In contrast to Tom and Topsy, the play’s racially mixed characters (Eliza and George) are distinguished from the other slaves by their patrician accents and ‘proper’ English, and, as expected, they enjoy privileged fates as the play’s melodramatic protagonists. Eliza, for example, is admired by Legree for her “clear skin – [an] eye bright as lightnin – and teeth white as new dominers” (23), while the ferryman on the Ohio river initially mistakes her and her son, Harry, as white (75). Similarly, the bill requesting George’s capture describes him as “a very light mulatto, [with] light brown hair” (97). So “light” is George, that to disguise himself during his escape “his complexion is stained a spanish [*sic*] brown, while his hair is dyed black” (84). Such references to Eliza and George’s physical characteristics may be a response to Victorians’ codes of racial legitimacy, in which an individual’s place in the hierarchies of race was evidenced in features of the body. With such a rubric, the reading of one’s racial ‘class’ both complicated and transcended the binaries of skin colour. As McClintock notes, the “scope of the discourse was enormous. A host of ‘inferior’ groups could not be mapped, measured and ranked against the ‘universal standard’ of the white male child” (51). Such measures offered Victorians a compelling justification for imposing restrictions on the

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<sup>196</sup> See Anne McClintock’s *Imperial Leather* (1995), 49. Similarly, Nancy Stepan discusses the nineteenth-century theory that Africans’ “degeneration” in Europe and North America was “caused by the movement of freed blacks into the geographical and social spaces occupied by whites and into the political condition of freedom” (99). See “Biology: Races and Proper Places” in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, eds. J. Edward Chamberlain and Sander L. Gilman (1985), 97-120.

liberty and rights of individuals and groups who seemed to disturb the *status quo*.<sup>197</sup>

Indeed, in a review of Stowe's novel, *The Daily News* initially protested Stowe's physical representation of slaves, and suggested its own hypothesis to explain the novelist's depiction of characters like Tom:

[Tom] is, perhaps, unnaturally perfect; and, indeed, all the slave characters are rendered artificially attractive, in appearance, cleverness, and disposition; but... we must remember that as the author had to excite interest in a white audience, she could not afford to select for her *dramatis personae* negroes with thick lips, thick heads, and idiotic talk – probably more exact characteristics of the southern American 'servant.'"<sup>198</sup>

Here, the paper's explanation for Stowe's portrayal of slaves, like that of Tom, offers some indication of Victorian assumptions regarding the correlations between race and physical features. These assumptions are also found in the published research of scientists in this period, such as Thomas Henry Huxley (1825-1895), who studied fossils and skulls to determine "the structural interval which exists between Man and the man-like apes" (102). In Huxley's case, he retains a level of scepticism about such ideas even while acknowledging their likelihood:

The ape-like arrangement of certain muscles which is occasionally met with in the white races of mankind, is not known to be more common among Negroes or Australians: nor because the brain of the Hottentot Venus was found to be smoother, to have its convolutions more symmetrically disposed, and to be, so far, more ape-like than that of

<sup>197</sup> For more on this topic, see Nancy Stepan's "Biology: Races and Proper Places" in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress* (1985). Stepan observes that racial biology "by mid-century was a science of boundaries between groups and the degenerations that threatened when those boundaries were transgressed. As slavery was abolished and the role of freed blacks became a political and social issue, as industrialization brought about new social mobility and class tensions, and new anxieties about the "proper" place of different class, national, and ethnic groups in society, racial biology provided a model for the analysis of the distances that were "natural" between human groups. Racial "degeneration" became a code of other social groups whose behavior and appearance seemed sufficiently different from accepted norms as to threaten traditional social relations and the promise of "progress" (98).

<sup>198</sup> *The Daily News* (4 August, 1852): 2.

ordinary Europeans, are we justified in concluding a like condition of the brain to prevail universally among the lower races of mankind, however probable that conclusion may be. (103)

Scientists in Europe made similar connections between physiological differences and race. Ernst Heinrich Haeckel (1834-1919), in an effort to prove that apes' use of both their hands and feet did not differentiate them from humans, asserted that "there are wild tribes of men who can oppose the first or large toe to the other four, just as if it were a thumb," while the "Negro, in whom the big toe is especially strong and freely moveable, when climbing seizes hold of the branches of the trees with it, just like the 'four-handed' Apes." Haeckel concludes this observation by noting that "even newly born children of the most highly developed races of men...hold a spoon placed in its clutch as firmly with their big toe as with the thumb! On the other hand, among the higher Apes...hand and foot are differentiated as in man" (136). Here the flaw in Haeckel's reasoning is exposed by the 'logic' of racial hierarchy, through which Africans' presumed over utilization of the big toe equates them, on the one hand, with "children," yet, on the other, also differentiates them from "man." While he argues that the interchangeable use of hand and feet cannot be used to distinguish man from ape, Haeckel nonetheless employs the same example to distinguish man from man.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> As Stephen Jay Gould notes (writing about a separate, though related, topic), this tactic is found as a rationalization for various theories of racism, "[f]or anyone who wishes to affirm the innate inequality of races, few biological arguments can have more appeal than...[the] insistence that children of higher races (invariably one's own) are passing through and beyond the permanent conditions of adults in lower races. If adults of lower races are like white children, then they may be treated as such – subdued, disciplined, and managed" (*Ontogeny and Phylogeny* 126). The quotation in this paragraph was taken from Huxley's article, "On Some Fossil Remains of Man" (1863), reprinted in *Climbing Man's Family Tree, A Collection of Major Writings on Human Phylogeny, 1699-1971* (1972). eds. Theodore M. McCown and Kenneth A. R. Kennedy, 101-107. Haeckel's article, "Origin and Pedigree of Man. Migration Distribution of Mankind. Human Species and Human Races" (1868), is also found in this volume, 133-148.

Like Haeckel's theory, the findings of Karl Chistoph Vogt (1817-1895) were less intent on scientific inquiry than on making veiled (and not so veiled) commentary about socio-racial issues. For instance, upon surveying the variations of apes throughout the world, Vogt concludes that "we cannot see why American races of man may not be derived from American apes, Negroes from African apes, or Negritos, perhaps from Asiatic apes!" (the exclamation is Vogt's). Upon such conclusions, he then layers physiological observations, such as his claim that "monkeys found in Europe, as high up as England, are all narrow-nosed, whilst those found in American caves are all flat-nosed" (127). While Vogt does not try to explain the implication of such comments, the significance for his readers was likely self-evident. The following year, Vogt published a paper in which he contends that the "grown-up Negro partakes, as regards his intellectual faculties, of the nature of a child, the female, and the senile white....Some tribes have founded states, possessing a peculiar organization; but, as to the rest, we may boldly assert that the whole race has, neither in the past nor in the present, performed anything tending to the progress of humanity or worthy of preservation."<sup>200</sup>

The prevalence of scientists' transposition of racial stereotypes upon an individual's physical features will, of course, inform our reading of Lemon and Taylor's play. Instances in which attention is given to characters' physical features should draw readers' special notice, and may lead us to conclude that the play legitimated (consciously or otherwise) through prevailing racial typology, Eliza and George's quest

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<sup>200</sup> This latter quote is from page 192 in Vogt's *Lectures on man* (1864), and quoted here from Gould's *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (1977), 130.

for freedom, while, conversely, explaining Tom and Topsy's inclination toward bondage.<sup>201</sup>

*Top* ...Mas'r George – dun no, but suthin's come over you you [sic] holds up your head and speaks out and 'spears like you was a different man, somehow.

*Geo* I *am* a different man Topsy – I've said Mas'r for the last time to any man! I am free!

*Top* But if we was took Mas'r George – how den?

*Geo* All are free and equal in the grave, Topsy – if it comes to that!

*Top* De grave! – oh – don't, now – I'm skeared ! <she shudders>

*Geo* <opening his coat and showing two pistols and a bowie knife inside of it> Look there!

*Top* Pistols and bowie knife!

*Geo* Yes – I'm ready for em – Down south I never *will* go – No – if it comes to that, I can earn myself six feet of free soil – the first and last I shall ever own in America!

*Top* Oh – Mas'r George – 'spears Topsy like Plantation better dan dat sorter freedom.

*Geo* Nay – there is no such danger for you.... (89-90)

Here the “light” George appears so worthy of his liberty that Topsy inadvertently refers to him as “Mas'r George,” at the same time signalling her own unworthiness for freedom by admitting that death is not her only other option – as if personal bravery was a qualification for civil liberties.<sup>202</sup> The message then seems to be that liberty is

<sup>201</sup> I wish to point out that the scientific essays quoted above were published at least a decade *after* Lemon and Taylor wrote *Slave Life*, and, therefore, I have included them here with the assumption that the connection between race and physiological features already existed in public consciousness. I have found indications in contemporary journalism that suggest such ideas were in fact widely held by Victorians, such as the following quotation (published only two months after the November 1852 opening of *Slave Life*) that appeared in *The Westminster Review*: “There are proficients [sic] in the science of races, it is said, who can trace the slightest taint of black blood so exactly, that they can determine by the inspection of the nail or the length of the heel, whether the destiny of a planter's daughter is to be the belle of New Orleans, or to be sold in its shambles.” *The Westminster Review* (January 1853): 79. Scholars, such as C. J. Wan-ling Wee, note also that in the 1840s racial theories developed “‘based on comparative anatomy and craniometry in the United States, Britain and France.”” See *Culture, Empire, and the Question of Being Modern* (2003), 63.

<sup>202</sup> Lemon and Taylor's depiction of George is, of course, modelled on that of Stowe, whose prose characterization of George was applauded by *The Daily News*: “there is a secondary hero in a young half-coloured man, who is not only Apollo in form but an Admiral Crichton in intellect.” The reviewer later hedges this praise, noting that “There is individually about each of the negroes and negresses, an



determined by race (or, in the Victorian context, class), which is duly reflected in the enterprise and intelligence of individuals. It was a sentiment often found in responses to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, such as a review in *Englishman's Magazine*, which rejected the novelist's comparison of American slavery and the English class system on the grounds that "Anglo-Saxons were the 'hereditary aristocrats of humanity', and felt the oppression of servitude ten times worse than blacks."<sup>203</sup> This argument echoes the views of prominent Victorians, like Thomas Carlyle (1795-1881), who argued in his article, "The Nigger Question," that it is "an indisputable and perpetual *right* to be compelled, by the real proprietors of said land, to do competent work for his living. This is the everlasting duty of all men, black or white.... To do competent work, to labour honestly according to the ability given to them" (85).<sup>204</sup> This stance was an open challenge to abolitionists' claims for racial equality and brotherhood.<sup>205</sup> Carlyle's assessment of the issue of antislavery, like that of *Slave Life*, evades the issue of whether all people should

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ethnological but not a dramatic impossibility.... Even Uncle Tom's portrait, though refined into incredible moral beauty, has a reality about it; and the yellow Crichton is warranted a photograph, an assertion, which, with some slight exceptions and allowance for the legitimate privileges of artists, we are disposed to credit." *The Daily News* (4 August 1852): 2.

<sup>203</sup> Both the reference to *Englishman's Magazine* (September 1852, 125-128) and the actual quotation cited here are taken from Lorimer, 96. I would like to note my debt to Lorimer's superb study, *Colour, Class and the Victorians*, which is so well grounded on archival research as to have remained both highly original and germane, despite the date of its publication (1978).

<sup>204</sup> The anonymous rebuttal (written by J. S. Mill) to Carlyle's article in *Fraser's Magazine* (January 1850) addressed his allowance of individual ability to be a congenital or intrinsic rubric for the justification of socio-racial inequalities: "Among the things for which your contributor professes entire disrespect, is the analytical examination of human nature. It is by analytical examination that we have learned whatever we know of the laws of external nature; and if he had not disdained to apply the same mode of investigation to the laws of the formation of character, he would have escaped the vulgar error of imputing the every difference which he finds among human beings to an original difference in nature. As well might it be said, that of two trees, sprung from the same stock, one cannot be taller than another but from greater vigour in the original seedling. Is nothing to be attributed to soil, nothing to climate, nothing to difference of exposure – has no storm swept over the one and not the other, no lightning scathed it, no beast browsed on it, no insects preyed on it, no passing stranger stript off its leaves or its bark?" (29).

<sup>205</sup> See Catherine Hall's *Civilising Subjects: Metropole and Colony in the English Imagination 1830-1867* (2002), 349. For a very good survey of Carlyle's article and its strategies, see Hall, 347-353.

be accorded freedom, implying instead that inequality between people was ‘natural.’ Here, too, we find evidence in the scientific discourse of the period supporting Carlyle’s representation of race, such as the notions of Charles Lyell (1797-1875) regarding racial degeneration, or, “atavism” (122), as well as the work of scientists on the continent, like Vogt, who attempted to distinguish and rank the ancestral origins of human races by arguing that “facts do not lead us to one common fundamental stock” (127). It was a position that allowed Europeans to isolate (and thereby privilege) themselves from different races, and ultimately, to justify the subjugation of racial ‘others.’<sup>206</sup> Over a decade earlier, *The Westminster Review*, for example, summarized an anonymous article republished in the English press which reasoned that “[b]e the races of one blood, or be they not...this much is certain, that the slave, if liberated...must, in his present circumstances, either relapse into African savagery, or wither before white competition. Therefore, even though his chains may gall him, we must, for his own sake, scruple to break them, seeing that, by them alone, can he as yet be pulled up the steep path of civilization.”<sup>207</sup> Note here that the condition of slavery is positioned as higher, and therefore preferable, to the “savagery” in which the “African” would otherwise exist – an

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<sup>206</sup> Lyell’s articles, “Post-Pliocene Period: Bones of Man and Extinct Mammalia in Belgian Caves” and “Post-Pliocene Period: Fossil Human Skulls of the Neanderthal and Engis Caves” (1863) are reprinted in McCown and Kennedy (see above footnote), 107-122. Vogt’s essay, “Origin of Organic Nature” (1863), also found in McCown and Kennedy’s book (123-129), offers particularly fascinating reading for those interested in this subject.

<sup>207</sup> *The Westminster Review* (January 1853): 68. This quotation is taken from a review of an anonymously written essay, “Slavery in the Southern States,” that was republished (presumably after an American first printing) in *Fraser’s Magazine* (October 1852). The essay is a refutation of Stowe’s depiction of slavery in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. *The Westminster’s* article was a review of a number of essays and books on the topic of American slavery, and it ends decidedly in favour of Stowe’s portrait, while also recognizing the nation’s complicity: “[w]e Englishmen have little reason to boast of our conduct to the negro, either absolutely for its intrinsic excellence, or relatively as compared with that of other countries. In the last century we were as notorious for our efforts to excel other nations in the slave trade, as now for our efforts to prevent them from engaging in it” (73).

attitude that both claims the inherent inferiority of non-European cultures, and affirms the propriety of slave-owning as a civilizing project associated with the exploitation of other oppressed groups by elites.

This message is reminiscent of that preached in the 1830s to England's working classes in the curricula of the various educational societies that were seen increasingly as effective means both of educating the poor and reconciling them to their social position. In his essay on working-class education in this period, J. M. Goldstrom notes that these groups "wished the children to learn through their readers about the demarcations between rich and poor, and the mutual dependence of each in a harmonious society....Also important was that a child should grow up to take his place as a member of the respectable, devout and hard-working poor, and not allow himself to become one of the contemptible 'undeserving poor.'" When it came to bettering one's social condition there was often a modest, if not grudging, willingness to concede the working classes' potential for self-improvement; for instance, "the Nonconformist view is that a thrifty and diligent person may well be able to improve his lot."<sup>208</sup> By the 1840s, however, the precepts of political economy began to dominate the implied and literal meaning of lessons. Readers published by the British and Foreign School Society, for example, warned "of the dangers to the working man of challenging the economic order. The laws of political economy were invoked to demonstrate the futility of trade unions and of government intervention....In short, it contained all the essentials of teaching that

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<sup>208</sup> J. M. Goldstrom, "The Content of Education and the Socialization of the Working-Class Child, 1830-1860." *Popular Education and Socialization in the Nineteenth Century*. ed. Phillip McCann (1977), 98. Goldstrom notes, however, that this view was not uniform among institutions instructing the poor, such as the National Society, which dismissed such ideas as "impracticable. Far better that the poor should devote themselves to work, relaxation in simple pleasures, and avoidance of the shameful workhouse" (98).

the middle classes desired to imprint upon the working man.” To this dour message was later added advice on how “the labourer can improve his lot – increased skill – knowledge of best markets for labour – habits of forethought, temperance – economy” (Goldstrom 102). Under this rubric, freedom to transcend one’s socially prescribed station was earned or legitimated by an individual’s ambition and industry, thereby dismissing those who are oppressed as having failed to earn anything better. In the context of Lemon and Taylor’s play, such racially inflected qualities are specific to freedom-achieving characters, such as Eliza and George – the latter of whom also enjoys the attribute of invention, which makes enslavement even more unacceptable to him:

- George* ... Suppose I had, unaided but by my own hands, instructed but by my own thoughts, done something which should make, [*sic*] white men, free men, respect me.
- Eliza* Who that knows you does not respect you?
- George* Not as an equal – as a slave perhaps – yes – but if I have done that which makes me a place (humble tho’ it be) beside the benefactors of mankind, should you not be more proud of me?
- Eliza* Yes.
- Geo* <*takes plan from his bosom*> See here – those lines and figures have all been made by me – and the result an iron-worker – whose untiring labor [*sic*] saves the thews and sinews of a score of suffering men – this iron worker – I have made.
- Eliza* Indeed!
- Geo* <*much excited*> Yes Eliza, I have proved I have a mind, that man, not heaven, degrades us, that human laws war with the law of nature. All men are equal in the eye of heaven.... (29-30)

As Waters notes, in most Victorian dramatizations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, it is “the light-skinned George” whose active resistance to slavery is juxtaposed to the passive acceptance of Tom, whose “black skin denotes the utmost servility.”<sup>209</sup> In Lemon and

<sup>209</sup> Hazel Waters, “Putting on ‘Uncle Tom’ on the Victorian Stage.” *Race & Class* 42. 3.

Taylor's play, characters' 'right' to freedom is determined by individual merit which translates into a disposition for liberty, that is found only in racially mixed slaves, that is, slaves who are part white. George is distinguished in the passage above from his oppressed group (like *Mary Barton*'s Jem Wilson) by his affiliation with the middle-class pieties of efficiency, innovation and progress. These attributes, along with his outward marks of racial superiority, tacitly mark George Harris for narrative preference. By imbuing George both with a genteel demeanour and an aptitude for commercial profit, Lemon and Taylor construct in this character a model of the active English middle-class ideal that contrasts with the passive righteousness of the Christian paragon, Tom. That George should accept slavery is as contrary to literary convention as it is against the "law of nature."

Later in the play, George uses this inventiveness – which legitimates his own claim to liberty – in a plan to free Eliza and Harry from Legree's plantation. Posing again as a southern white, Harris tries to swindle Legree into trading Eliza, Harry and Cassy for the plans to a machine which cleans cotton "twice over" that of the traditional cotton gin (140).<sup>210</sup> However, George's invention becomes a problematic gift, connecting him to a technology that, like the original cotton gin, makes slavery *more* profitable. With the promised productivity gained by George's machine, plantation

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(2001): 41. Catherine Hall, quoting Douglas Lorimer, similarly notes that "Uncle Tom and Topsy came to be seen as the embodiment of 'negro character'" (*Civilising Subjects* 355).

<sup>210</sup> There is, of course, a more problematic reading of this scene, in which George overlooks the connection between his invention – which makes unnecessary the labour of "a score of suffering men" – and his own banishment to the cotton fields. Looked at in this way, George Harris's allegiance to industrial progress may have led him to invent himself out of a job. This deviation, however, is overshadowed by his independent disposition which drives him, again like Gaskell's Jem Wilson, to abandon the society which oppresses him and to seek a better fortune in Canada. Rather than promoting social change, the message in this play to those unhappy with the social order echoes that of *Mary Barton*: leave.

owners like Legree will not need fewer, but rather more, slaves.<sup>211</sup> Though George's plan is never realized, it becomes a further example of the danger which his inventiveness and technological invention posed for labourers, black or white. That George enjoys a privileged position in the play tends to extend this narrative approbation to the notion of technological progress (and its social effects). Consequently, in this play the behaviour of George, like that of Tom, bears a number of contradictory characteristics, which subtly act to sustain the structures of oppression that he purports to oppose.

The manuscript submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for licensing shows evidence of considerable reworking – scenes moved to different places, altered names, rewritten dialogue, and the excision of large portions of text – however, because these changes are not listed in the *Day Book*, it is difficult to determine which, if any, of the hands marking the text belong to Donne. Assessing the Examiner's intervention in *Slave Life* is complicated by the vague entry for the play recorded by the Lord Chamberlain's Office. Characteristically these entries list the details of words or scenes that Donne censored. However, in the entry for *Slave Life* (dated 15 November, 1852) there appears in the column "Words or Passages to be Omitted from Representation" only a brief record of material suppressed by the Examiner: "&c, &c, &c, and omit all oaths." Relative to other *Day Book* entries, this record for the manuscript of *Slave Life* is uncharacteristically vague. The entry is not written in Donne's hand – something that occasionally occurs in the *Day Book* – but is signed instead by Lord Ernest Bruce, the Vice Chamberlain, due to

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<sup>211</sup> It was the cotton gin, which made easy the separation of cotton from its chaff, and made the growing of cotton profitable and encouraged southern farmers to depend upon a large workforce of slaves to harvest the crop.

the illness of the incumbent Lord Chamberlain (Lord John Breadalbane).<sup>212</sup> We are left considering explanations for the entry's abbreviated condition. It is possible that this entry was intended to refer to the passages omitted from a script, *Sarah Blange*, licensed the previous day and which had by way of cuts the following record: "Throughout in the representation substitute for the word 'God' that of 'Heaven.'" This explanation, however, seems unlikely as there are few such passages in Lemon and Taylor's script. Instead, this abbreviated list of Donne's cuts, more likely suggests, as I hope to show below, that there were few omissions made by the Examiner, and that the considerable alterations to the script were made by Lemon and Taylor.

Evidence that the revisions to *Slave Life* were not made by the Examiner is suggested by testimony given to the Select Committee by one of the play's authors. When questioned about the impact of dramatic censorship on his own work, Tom Taylor replied that the Examiner had only tampered with his plays in "very trivial matters," later adding that he had not "tempted [the censor] very severely." "[I]t may be," he admitted,

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<sup>212</sup> John Campbell, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Breadalbane served as Lord Chamberlain from 1848 to 1858, though he left his position between 1852 and 1853 due to illness, and was replaced by Brownlow Cecil, 2<sup>nd</sup> Marquess of Exeter, who temporarily took over his responsibilities as Lord Chamberlain. During this period administrative duties regarding the *Day Books* seem to have fallen more frequently to the Vice Chamberlain, Lord Bruce, rather than the Lord Chamberlain's comptroller, Spenser Ponsonby, or the Examiner of Plays (Donne). I could find no other explanation for this change in administrative procedure at the Lord Chamberlain's Office; upon Breadalbane's return to the Office, the Vice Chamberlain's habit of recording licensed plays in the *Day Books* ceases. It is worth noting, as well, the past and future personal ties between Donne and Bruce. Lord Bruce was one of the questioners in 1866 on The Select Committee Report on Theatrical Licences and Regulations, which had as one of its goals to determine the efficacy and value of dramatic censorship. While questioning Donne before the Committee, Lord Bruce notes that Donne's childhood and university friend and the previous Examiner, John Mitchell Kemble, was also "an old school fellow of mine" (Question #2245). Coincidentally, Donne was also an "old school fellow" of Kemble's, which suggests that the Examiner and Lord Bruce may have had longer standing ties to one another.

“that my pieces have been free from objectionable matter.”<sup>213</sup> It is difficult to evaluate the reliability of Taylor’s remarks in regard to a play he had helped to write fourteen years earlier, though from his comments we find little indication that he resented the Examiner’s surveillance. Rather, Taylor seems to have approved of Donne’s “interference,” though the playwright felt censorship mostly applied to East End productions: “In the west-end theatres, I believe, practically, the interference is null...but there are classes of theatres at which it would be absolutely necessary; I mean the penny theatres, and...the gaffs.”<sup>214</sup> In regard to the revisions made to *Slave Life*, Taylor’s testimony suggests either he did not wish to acknowledge that alterations to the play were made by the censor, or, that he and Lemon made these changes themselves in an effort to ensure the script was “free from objectionable matter” before submitting it to Donne. If the latter is true, it indicates that dramatists, even in the West End, were willingly altering their work to appease the Examiner.<sup>215</sup> Despite the fact that a definitive identification of those who made the alterations to this script remains elusive, there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the play was altered if not *by* the Examiner, then at least *for* him. The revisions to this adaptation of Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* significantly reshape the novel’s original representation of American slavery (and, by association, the English

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<sup>213</sup> Taylor’s testimony was given on 7 May, 1866. Quotations were taken from questions #4754 and 4757, respectively.

<sup>214</sup> Question #4760.

<sup>215</sup> We know, however, that Donne did make some, likely minor, changes to Lemon and Taylor’s play. During his testimony before the Select Committee, Donne mentioned his practice of dealing with *double entendre*: “if I see a real *double entendre*, I always cut it out” (Question #2496). The manuscript of *Slave Life* holds evidence of excised *double entendre*, which suggests that the Examiner interfered to some extent with the play. The most evident of these is a *double entendre* or pun on the word ‘change’ (ff. 86). Indication of Donne’s hand in more significant cuts is difficult to verify.



class system), bringing Lemon and Taylor's dramatized version into accord with the largely middle-class values of the Victorian *status quo* protected by the Examiner.

Unlike the overtly political rhetoric which Donne censored in the Victoria Theatre's production of *Mary Barton*, little of the material excised from the manuscript of *Slave Life* openly challenges the English *status quo*. However, when we view these cuts through the lens of Victorians' conflation of enslaved racial groups with subjugated classes, the social implications of this material becomes clear to us. For instance, depictions of, or references to, Eliza's treatment as Legree's slave have been expurgated, such as the following passage:

*Eliza* <at the sound of the boy's voice starts from her stupor and rushes to him and catches him in her arms, with a burst of grief rocking herself to and fro.> Oh my boy – my boy.  
*Legree* <goes up to her and shakes her> Here you – Liza – look at me – straight now, 'tween the eyes – <holds up her fist in her face as she looks up in terror> Now jest you shet up [*sic*], you'd best. (103)

While the depiction of Eliza's maternal devotion in this passage was kept, Legree's intimidating response is expurgated entirely, and, instead of threatening her (as we see above), the slave owner's lines are rewritten so that he instructs one of his slaves to remove Harry. Throughout the script Legree's treatment of Eliza is consistently altered in such a way as to temper his treatment of her; for example, instead of threatening to "smash yer face in," Legree merely "*raises his hand*" (104). Likewise, all references to George's hopes of buying his wife and child from Legree are meticulously removed (131, 132, 133); trimmed, too, are allusions to and instances of Legree's handcuffing of Eliza

(109, 128); as well as the slave owner's attempts at extorting sexual compliance, such as we see in the following:

*Leg* Here Quimbo take 'way the critter. <*Quimbo snatches Harry from his mother*>  
*Harry* Mammy – let me stay with Mammy!  
*Eliza* Oh Master! Do – please –  
*Leg* Shake the squeak out o'the brimstone imp – Quimbo. And just you hold your noise – If you want the young 'un ye know how to get him.... (117)

When this strategy of threatening her child fails to separate Eliza from her virtue, Legree later tries to coerce her by threatening to make Tom flog her:

*Eliza* <*starting up*> Master! for mercy's sake – I did my best – indeed I did.  
*Leg* Ye know the way to get off it – Do what I want yer and yer back's safe – Well?  
*Eliza* <*shuddering*> No – no – God help me!  
*Leg* Give Tom the cowhide Sambo – Now <*to Eliza*> girl – stripe [*sic*]. Come Tom. (120)

While Legree's sexual intension toward Eliza is never in doubt, the dramatized ordeal of his predation is noticeably diminished. Given the tone of such scenes, the paring of them can certainly be explained on the grounds of social propriety. However, in light of the tacit parallels between racially mixed and outwardly gentrified slaves, such as Eliza and George, with the English middle classes, there were also distinctly political reasons why these characters were deliberately distanced from all but cursory associations with slavery.

Perhaps with *The Times'* review of Stowe's novel in mind, the revised version of *Slave Life* downplays the moral authority which martyrdom affords Tom. Modern critics

have wondered at Tom's passive acceptance of slavery in Victorian dramatizations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, noting this "significant departure from the novel, [in which] virtually nothing is made of what Stowe terms Tom's 'stubborn preference' for freedom. The Tom we see...is only too happy to serve a (good) master – and willing to serve a bad" (Waters 41). What Waters does not address in her study is the role that censorship may have played, directly or indirectly, in this submissive version of Tom's character.<sup>216</sup> In the case of Lemon and Taylor's play, there were eight cuts to depictions or references intended to emphasize Tom's idealized righteousness. These excisions centre largely on downplaying Legree's violence toward Tom (121), as well as the admiring testimonials from slaves such as Eliza (122, 132), and including this more overt reference to the disruptive influence of Tom's piety on the other slaves:

*Sam*                   ... Tom goin to make powerful deal trouble him gettin' all de niggers to feelin' bused like.  
*Leg*                   Oh! he will, will he? The psalm singing black cuss! He'll have to get a breakin' in wont he boys? (118)

The most influential of these cuts, however, comes in the final scenes of the play. In the original version of the script Tom's anticipated self-sacrifice for his cause begins to mount early in the third, and last, scene of Act Three when Legree, who has caught up with the fleeing Eliza, Cassy, George and Topsy, condemns Tom for helping their escape:

*Leg*                   And [you] was so darned pious you'd see your master robb'd without tellin him. I've brought you here to give you the pleasure of seein' your friends yonder in handcuffs, and that done Tom, do you know what I mean to do, I've made up my mind to kill you

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<sup>216</sup> Waters' paper, which provides an excellent discussion of a number of Victorian dramatizations of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is restricted in regard to Lemon and Taylor's adaptation because she relies on the version printed by Webster's Acting National Drama, which does not include the material Donne suppressed from the original manuscript.

Tom.  
*Tom* It's very likely, master.  
*Leg* I have done just a thing. I'll flog you to death on this spot afore 'em all.  
*Tom* I can die mass'r when the time comes. (156)

But before Legree can carry out his threat, Tom thwarts the slave owner's attempt to shoot George, and we are told in the stage directions that "*as he fires Uncle Tom springs forward and strikes down his arm – the shot strikes Tom who falls*" (157). Foiled by Tom, Legree is directly knocked by Cassy into a chasm where "*his body is seen to fall heavily*" and he presumably dies (158). With the chief proponent of slavery dead, it is only left for the doomed Tom to close his martyrdom with a final and affecting message to the audience:

*Tom* <raising himself on his arm and looking after them> They take to their horses – so flee the wicked. I'm getting dark – where are you – George, Liza, Cassy, Topsy – I'm goin' home children. <they come forwards>  
*Eliza* Oh Uncle Tom – Uncle Tom!  
*Geo* My poor old friend how goes it?  
*Tom* Well George, well, be good all of you tink [*sic*] of ole Uncle Tom sometimes.

*Curtain*

(158)

In the revised version of the play this scene is cut entirely, and instead Tom is peremptorily stabbed by Legree at the end of Scene Two, so that he does not even appear in the climactic showdown between the slave owner and George Harris in the final scene. In place of Tom's sentimental death, the last word is given significantly to George, who, after Legree falls to his death, comes forward and ends the play, announcing: "We are free! We are free! Now for Canada" (158). Who is 'free,' however, remains a conspicuous issue – Tom, the symbolic and literary martyr of the abolitionist cause, is

nowhere in sight. As a result of these cuts, Tom's passive moral idealism is eclipsed by the active industriousness of George Harris, separating Tom from the moral triumph of the other slaves at the conclusion. By removing Tom from the confrontation between good and evil forces in the play's denouement, dramatic authority is further transferred to George, and consigns Tom to a position of moral ambivalence within the plot. Where did Tom go? The revised version of the play is no longer about the misfortune of an oppressed and morally superior class (represented by Tom), but rather it is about improving the fortunes of blacks who might pass as white, and, by implication, the class to which they were aligned. Put another way, the censored version of *Slave Life* is not a play about oppression as much as it is about the triumph of English middle-class values embodied by George. Without enjoying the narrative validation of martyrdom, the didactic function of Tom's character is truncated, and ultimately rendered irrelevant. In the revised version of their script, Lemon and Taylor's adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not about Tom, at all.

The revisions made to this play, likely for Donne's benefit, act to privilege middle-class values, while at the same time distance the abolitionist cause from its association with the English working classes. In this play, freedom is made available only to those characters aligned with the middle classes – that is, the characters most likely to perpetuate and support, rather than to challenge or disrupt, the Victorian social order. Perhaps not surprisingly, these changes to *Slave Life* were noted favourably by *The Times'* theatre critic, for whom the diminishment of Tom's narrative importance came as a pleasing alteration: "As for poor Uncle Tom himself, he remains in proud

defiance of the dramatist's art. His Methodism is his substance, and that Methodism cannot be reproduced on the boards of a theatre. Hence, he can only be a shadowy personage, and we doubt not that Mr. O. Smith [who performed the role] would rather play any one of his customary white villains than this black perfection of mankind...."<sup>217</sup>

And so the discomfiting idealization of Tom is largely replaced by George Harris, who is aligned with the middle-class virtues of independence and industry. In this way, the figure of George functions symbolically to legitimate the Victorian *status quo* within the 'illegitimate,' or unprivileged, zone of the American slave. The revised version of *Slave Life* amends Stowe's "female error" of destabilizing the established hierarchies of race and class. Like the dramatized versions of John Barton that we considered in Chapter II, the challenge that the novel's version of Uncle Tom poses for the Victorian social order was suppressed before it could be transferred to the stage.

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<sup>217</sup> *The Times* (30 November, 1852): 8.

## CHAPTER IV

### Politics and Prisons: Donne's Treatment of Two Plays by Charles Reade

Thus far we have looked at several examples of Donne's censorship of the Victorian drama. These include instances both of direct intervention, as in the case of the anonymously written *Mary Barton* at the Victoria Theatre, and of willing self-regulation on the part of dramatists, like Lemon and Taylor, who shaped their play, *Slave Life*, to satisfy the standards of the Examiner. In earlier chapters, we also considered the impact of censorship on playwrights themselves, finding evidence of the professional disrepute and financial penalty associated with Donne's censure, as well as the extent to which they were willing to avoid the consequences of his displeasure. In the present chapter, I consider two plays by Charles Reade (1814-1884), the first of which, *Gold* (Drury Lane, 1853), represents a number of sensitive social issues, such as the repeal of the Corn Laws and Anglo-Jewish emancipation – material that was expurgated from the original version of the manuscript. As in Lemon and Taylor's play, cuts to Reade's script are often difficult to identify as excisions made directly by Donne. For this reason, I do not think it either relevant or practicable to attempt to establish whether particular excisions in the original manuscript of *Gold* were made by the Examiner (such an effort would, at any rate, be imperfect), because ultimately the expurgation of these passages was intended to help the play accord with Donne's judgment. A more likely conclusion to derive from these cuts is that playwrights and managers were willing to amend scripts themselves in order to receive his sanction. That dramatists appear to have willingly altered their own

work is not surprising: such self-regulation is both the consequence and objective of state-sponsored censorship.

In addition, I want to broaden our understanding of Donne's regime as censor in this chapter by looking at a second play by Reade, *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* (Princess's, 1865), which provided openly trenchant criticism of the state's treatment of what was perhaps the most marginalized class of Victorians: criminals. As we saw in the controversy related to the revival of *Jack Sheppard*, Donne was willing to license representations of criminality for West End audiences (in that case, the exploits of a celebrated burglar), which he withheld from those in the East. Donne believed there was more potential for dissent and volatility among East End audiences, over which his censorship amounted to a parental, even a constabulary, surveillance. In contrast, Donne's relationship to West End theatregoers was likened by one dramatist to "the presence of a lady at a dinner table of gentlemen."<sup>218</sup> Donne was less concerned with the West End drama, in part because playwrights for these theatres, such as Lemon and Taylor, were characteristically less inclined to challenge the assumptions and hierarchies inherent in the Victorian *status quo*. More interesting for my purposes is the fact that despite *It Is Never Too Late*'s controversial and unorthodox treatment of social issues, the play received the censor's approval almost without alteration. On the surface, then, this chapter appears to counter evidence of Donne's direct intervention, or "quiet sanction," found in the earlier discussion of *Mary Barton*, insofar as it looks at the permissiveness with which he dealt with West End theatres, as opposed to his stringent treatment of those

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<sup>218</sup> Question #4449 of Dion Boucicault's testimony in the *Report from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licences and Regulations*.



in the East. However, my point in this chapter is that Donne, while he could be quite controlling about plays' content, reveals in his handling of Reade's *It Is Never Too Late* that he was at least as concerned with the audiences who viewed this subject matter as with the issues themselves. Consequently, what we find in considering Donne's response to Reade's script is evidence that the Examiner's tolerance toward the subject matter taken up by the West End drama often had less to do with playwrights' compliance than it did with the audiences for whom their plays were performed.

Perhaps more than any other texts in the nineteenth century, Reade's West End plays, *Gold* and *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*, drew attention to the social boundaries which existed between the Victorian novel and stage. This chapter will contrast Donne's treatment of *Gold* with his very different response to *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*. Both plays engage potentially inflammatory issues: *Gold* addresses the Corn Laws Repeal and Anglo-Jewish Emancipation, while *It Is Never Too Late* offers a critique of the English penal system. In the case of the latter play, Reade's social criticism was so biting that the production caused, according to Daniel Barrett, "one of the most memorable disturbances in the nineteenth-century theatre."<sup>219</sup> Certainly, few plays ever received the condemnation and moral outrage with which the press responded to Reade's *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*, which openly challenged conventional attitudes to the state's

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<sup>219</sup> Daniel Barrett, "It Is Never Too Late to Mend (1865) and Prison Conditions in Nineteenth-Century England." *Theatre Research International* 18. 1 (Spring 1993): 4-15. For a brief overview of the controversy surrounding Reade's dramatization of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*, see Michael Diamond's *Victorian Sensation Or, the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2003), 236-237. Diamond identifies the play as a sensation drama, a sub-genre of the melodrama that became popular in the 1860s. To qualify as a sensation drama, Diamond maintains that "a play had to contain one or more 'sensation scenes' showing some overwhelming experience, often a disaster – a fire, an earthquake, and avalanche, a shipwreck, a train crash" (218).

treatment of criminals. The censure which both of these plays received – though not always from the Examiner – draws further attention to this study’s analysis of Victorians’ distrust of the theatre as a place for the depiction and discussion of social issues such as class and crime, politics and race. In the case of Reade’s *It Is Never Too Late*, this distrust of the theatre manifested itself in the press, which on previous occasions called for an end to dramatic censorship, but which now condemned the Examiner for conferring a license on the script. Responses to both *Gold* and *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* demonstrate that the Victorian drama was at once a field of contesting interests and discourses earnestly engaged with the world around it. At the same time, dramatists often surrendered this engagement with social issues to the “quiet sanction” of the Examiner, both as result of Donne’s direct insistence and, perhaps more significantly, through their own eagerness to appease his standards and receive his licence.

Before looking expressly at the public response to these two plays, it will be first useful for us to trace the unusual formal and thematic permutations – most notably the addition of Reade’s critique of the English penal system – which they underwent between January 1853 and October 1865. Ever one to recognize the opportunities associated with repackaging narratives for a different genre, Reade wrote *Gold* in 1853, later adapting the script into a novel, *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* in 1856, only to re-dramatize the story nine years later as a play, this time with the same title as the book. Given the convoluted life of this narrative, it is perhaps wisest to begin our examination from its beginnings.

*Gold* opened at Drury Lane Theatre on 10 January, 1853. The play centres on George Sanford, an English farmer, struggling to become financially stable enough to

marry his fiancée, Susan Merton. George's efforts, however, are frustrated by both Meadows (a wealthy landowner and moneylender who seeks Susan for himself) and Merton, Susanna's father, who wishes his daughter to marry a man with better prospects. Despite the friendship and patronage of Isaac Levi, a member of the Jewish Diaspora and local moneylender, George's farm seems doomed to the debtors. So hopeless is the future of English agriculture, that George accepts the plan of his friend Winchester, who proposes to raise sheep in Australia, after which they "will both come home rich, and consequently respectable" (I. i. 1).<sup>220</sup> At the same time, a guest on George's farm, Tom Robinson, is discovered to have stolen Meadows' wallet, and is apprehended as George is about to leave (Act One). After George sails, Meadows, a busy villain, harasses Levi, plots the ruin of George's brother, William, and dupes Susanna's father, Mr. Merton, into taking on crippling levels of debt (Act Two). The action then moves to Australia where George and Robinson are trying to make their fortune raising sheep. Because there is no market close by, however, their venture stumbles, until Robinson (a former speculator in California) discovers a vein of gold close at hand (Act Three). The site of their find is soon crowded with speculators, and Robinson, a former thief, now runs an *ad hoc* constabulary which protects miners from thieves and swindlers. Reade was clearly fascinated by the mercenary and cosmopolitan atmosphere of the Australian gold fields; so much so, that this section of the script strays at great length from the plot. Only as an afterthought does George find an immense nugget, which allows him to return to England

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<sup>220</sup> The manuscript of *Gold* (ADD 52937B) has not been given an independent numbering of pages by British Library archivists, the way most other scripts in this collection have. Consequently, I am using here the page numbers as ascribed by the script's original copyist, J. G. Saunders, who restarted numbering pages at the beginning of each Act. A citation on the fifth page of Act One, Scene Two, for example, is cited as (I. ii. 5).

a rich man to claim Susan's hand (Act Four). The final Act opens on the eve of Susan's reluctant marriage to Meadows, who has been sending her misinformation about George while he has been away. Learning that his rival has returned with a fortune, Meadows intercepts George and Robinson at an inn, where he drugs them and steals the money needed to secure Susan's hand. George confronts Susan on her way to the wedding, but all seems lost when, to his astonishment, he discovers he has been robbed. Disaster, however, is averted by Isaac Levi, who produces evidence condemning Meadows for the theft and aids in the return of the pilfered funds to George. In case there was any doubt of Meadows' villainy, he attempts to stab George but is foiled by his would-be victim. The day is saved, and George and Susan can, at last, be married.

Responses to *Gold* were largely favourable, with reviews, such as that in *The Illustrated London News*, applauding the play's concern for "the causes of emigration and the discovery of gold," subjects which, added *The Age*, were "designed to produce an effect upon the public by reason of the popularity which attaches to the subject." This view is blandly echoed by *The Era*, which admitted that "the piece decidedly pleases the multitude. The drama is not meant for more than the portrayal [*sic*] of a Gold Story."<sup>221</sup> Reade's choice of topic was no doubt a response to the general enthusiasm in England for Australia's gold rush, and his was among a number of plays produced on the subject.<sup>222</sup> What made *Gold* unique, in part, was the location of its performance. Along with the

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<sup>221</sup> Quoted respectively from *The Illustrated London News* (15 January, 1853): 42, *The Age* (15 January, 1853): 6, and *The Era* (16 January, 1853): 10.

<sup>222</sup> *The Lord Chamberlain's Day Book* records a number of scripts with (presumably) similar themes, such as *The Goldfields of Australia; or, Off to the Diggings* (licensed 25 January, 1853) for the Bower Music Hall; the Victoria Theatre's *The Gold Diggings of Australia; or, the Life of An Emigrant* (licensed 28 January, 1853); and *The Gold Finders of Australia; or, Greenleaf and Redberry the Forest Twins* (licensed 10 February, 1853 for the Standard Theatre).

Covent Garden and Haymarket theatres, Drury Lane was the former home of the ‘legitimate’ English drama. However, unlike other West End theatres, Drury Lane had done a comparatively poor job of dealing with the competition from ‘minor’ theatres made possible by the 1843 Theatre Regulations Act. A succession of managers had oscillated between producing plays aimed at populist tastes and maintaining the Theatre’s traditional repertoire, so that, as Davis and Emeljanow point out, Drury Lane “failed to live up to certain expectations” of its traditional, well-heeled audience base (202). Not surprisingly, then, we discover indications that this segment of theatregoers was disappointed to discover that *Gold*’s apparent “principle is that the stage of the day should address itself to the wants, feelings, and excitements of the period” rather than the fare traditionally found at Drury Lane:

The playgoers of the old school were sorely puzzled by the banquet provided for them. They doubtless entertained images of Garrick, Kemble, and Kean interpreting the creations of Shakespere [*sic*] in the olden time, and the aspect of the time-honoured sage was a spur to the imagination. Then the piece promised in the bills was in ‘five acts,’ and that, at any rate, looked legitimate. How completely their hopes must have been dissipated when the drama presented itself in all its reality before them, need not, under the circumstances, be insisted on.<sup>223</sup>

This complaint, while petulant and half-hearted in the present context, sheds some light on the conventional tastes of West End audiences and critics, and anticipates their far more vehement response to Reade’s reworking of *Gold* twelve years later for the Princess’s Theatre (another West End venue). Since the passing of the Theatre

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<sup>223</sup> *The Observer* (16 January, 1853): 6. It is worth noting that this section of *The Observer*’s review seems to have been copied, almost verbatim, from *The Times*’ review published five days earlier, 11 January (page 8). The reason for this is unknown to me.

Regulations Act in 1843, the appearance of ‘illegitimate’ forms like the melodrama had gradually come to replace more traditional comedies and tragedies, because, in the words of a later Drury manager, “‘Shakespeare spelt ruin and Byron bankruptcy.’”<sup>224</sup>

Moreover, had members of *Gold*’s audience seen what the script looked like *before* being censored by (or for) the Examiner, they might have contented themselves with the tamed version they received.<sup>225</sup>

During his testimony in 1866 before the Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses and Regulations, Reade was questioned regarding Donne’s previous treatment of his plays, to which he responded: “I am bound to say that he never did more than make a slight excision; and if I had paid him 10£ for making it, it is no more than he deserved, because, if he strikes out anything that is questionable, he is a benefactor to the author.”<sup>226</sup> Like other entries in the Lord Chamberlain’s *Day Book* during Lord Breadalbane’s absence, Lord Bruce’s record of Donne’s excisions to *Gold* is anything but detailed, and his note under the column for “Words or Passages to be Omitted” was entered as follows:

Omit in representation the following words  
 Act II Sc. I Crawley’s speech  
 ‘When Abraham passed his wife off to his sister’  
 (signed by Lord Bruce – Lord Breadalbane...not having yet rec’d

<sup>224</sup> Quoted from F. B. Chatterton, manager of Drury Lane, and cited in Joseph Knight’s *A History of the Stage During the Victorian Era* (1901), 63.

<sup>225</sup> This was not the first time audience members of the Theatre had expressed dissatisfaction with the ‘illegitimate’ forms of drama being produced. In 1851, the Bishop of London complained directly to Lord Breadalbane (the sitting Lord Chamberlain) of a play, *Azael the Prodigal*, being performed at Drury Lane. Breadalbane read the script and found nothing wrong with it. The incident, however, draws attention to the friction between audience expectations for the ‘legitimate’ drama previously found at Drury Lane, and the predisposition of its managers toward ‘illegitimate’ (and presumably more lucrative) forms, such as melodrama. See the Lord Chamberlain’s letter (28 February, 1851), LC 1/50: ff. 4.

<sup>226</sup> Question #6744. Reade testified before the Committee on 28 May, 1866.

his Gold key in consequence of illness).<sup>227</sup>

Adding to our uncertainty regarding Lord Bruce's vague entry is the fact that there is no such speech by Crawley (or any other character) anywhere in the play. We know from Donne's own note on the first page of the script that he received it on 4 January and licensed it the following day. This date is confirmed by Lord Bruce's subsequent entry of the play's license in the *Day Book*, which he made on 8 January. The result is that we are left with some doubt regarding the accuracy of the details Bruce logged in the *Day Book*. What is clear from the manuscript submitted to Donne is that large portions of it *were* cut, far more than indicated by Lord Bruce's entry. This leaves us wondering what to make of Reade's claim to the Select Committee that his plays suffered only "slight excisions" from the censor's pencil. Is this an accurate recollection, an attempt to misrepresent the truth or merely poor memory? Was Reade equivocating? Or had the cuts been made *before* he submitted the script to the Examiner? As we saw with the excisions made from Lemon and Taylor's play, *Slave Life*, playwrights often amended their own work to avoid Donne's censure. Thus, with a much larger degree of assurance we can argue that these excisions, if not made by the Examiner, were made by other parties (either a playwright or manager) in an attempt to receive his licence.

Next to other submissions received by the Lord Chamberlain, this manuscript is unusually embellished, and included such things as ornamentation about the heading of each Act, laurelled page numbers, and the copyist's name, as well as a bold directive

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<sup>227</sup> *The Lord Chamberlain's Day Book (1852-1865)*, ADD 53703, ff. 104.

from Reade pertaining to the cast's proper articulation of the play's dialogue.<sup>228</sup> Given the evident expense Reade went to in having the script copied, it seems unlikely that the considerable changes and excisions were made by him, though there do appear minor changes which in purpose and tone can reasonably be attributed to the playwright.<sup>229</sup> Whether we ascribe the play's alterations to Reade, the Drury Lane's manager, Edward Stirling (1809-94), or to the Examiner, is not, ultimately, the issue, because almost all of the major cuts to the piece are evidently intended to meet Donne's well-established prejudices.

The first significant excision in Reade's play occurs in the opening scene, in which George, a hard-working yet destitute farmer, is invited by his friend Winchester, one of the local nobility, to seek a better fortune in the colonies:

<Enter>  
 <~~The Honourable~~ Mr. Winchester – and George Sandford ~~discovered~~>  
 George S. Emigrate! dont [*sic*] talk of it Sir. Me leave Home, and  
 England, and the plough, to keep sheep in a desert? that will never

<sup>228</sup> Reade's note sheds some light on the precise nature of his personality, and for that reason it is worth including here; the underlining is Reade's:

This Play is an attempt at Nature, Truth, and Fact. The Dialogue is meant to be spoken rapidly, and simply – except at the several 'Situations' and these ought to be dwelt upon longer than is usual. Against this design of the Author it will be in vain to strive[.] The Play is a good Play if done this way and a very bad one if attempted in the slow monotonous way which is common on our stage.

The average rate of speaking must be rather quicker than common conversation – and on the other hand the silly situations must be leaned upon more than is usual even on the stage. (3)

All quotes from this script refer to the original manuscript in the Manuscripts Division of the British Library, ADD 52937B. While most plays submitted to the Lord Chamberlain were of poor quality, and rarely included even page numbering, this play was copied with notable ornamentation and on (approximately) 8.5" x 17" paper.

<sup>229</sup> An example of such an addition is a stage note written in the top margin of one page, advising the actor playing Meadows about his character: "NB. Meadows must be pale in course [*sic*] of this scene by those stage means that are commonly reserved for sudden displays of terror – this is very important to the scene" (27). It seems unlikely that the Theatre's manager would refer to so vague a direction as "those stage means" in his own notes. Further, the overprotective tone of the note is reminiscent of the playwright's earlier memorandum to the cast (see above footnote).



be – And I wonder at you Sir, you one of the first Gentlemen going  
and a Lord's Son.

~~Winchester.~~ The youngest of Nine – do you know what a Lord's youngest  
Son is?

~~George.~~ Well Sir! a nob no doubt.

~~Winchester.~~ A man with the desires of a Princee and the means of a Pedlar  
[sic]. Parliament ought to apprentice us all, and make our  
Governors pay the premium – or send us out of the country, with a  
hoe, a knapsack, and a pickaxe to learn labour, and eat Brown  
Bread.

~~George.~~ The country would be precious dull, when the Gentry were gone  
out of it I think.

~~Winchester.~~ I forgot that. It would decline and fall, as it has every  
year (*Vide old women passim.*) But to the point, will you go with  
me to Australia? You know me Sanford, and I know you. Go with  
me to Australia. Stay with me for one year, and put me in the way  
of things, and after that, I'll square accounts with you for saving  
my life in that thundering mill pool. (I.i.1)<sup>230</sup>

The primary thing we notice here is the alterations made to the character of Winchester, who is stripped of his nobility and all references to the restless insolvency endured by those at the wrong end of primogeniture. Likewise, throughout the script, all such allusions to Winchester's background have been removed. Presumably the reason for the suppression of these passages is related to the accompanying insinuation that England cannot support its own workers, let alone its gentry. This idea is developed further a few lines later:

~~Winchester.~~ ... We don't go to Australia to die – we go to  
make money, and come home respectable, rich that is – and marry  
somebody <*gloomily*> – one must not think of it as matters are –

~~George.~~ Oh! <reflects> It is a shame a Gentleman like you should have  
to sweat like us, that's bred to it.

~~Winchester.~~ No! it is nature's first law – Man must Sweat or Rust – I  
wont [sic] rust. Do you think the founders of our Families did'nt  
[sic] perspire, as you call it?

~~George.~~ Not they Sir

<sup>230</sup> Underlining here indicates words or passages added after excisions were made.

~~Winchester. I beg your pardon, they carried too much old Iron on their backs, not to perspire. They perspired at Battle-axe, and coat of mail, harder than you do at flail, sickle, or plough. we have gone to sleep for a few hundred years, but now we are awake again. And the Question is how can credit be gained now. The world sees through the drum and Trumpet humbug. Honest Industry is the Game of Glory now & Spades are Trumps – will you have a cigar Farmer – <strikes a light>~~

George. I don't care if I do Sir – I never got beyond a yard of clay though till to day –

~~Winchester. <lighting his cigar for him> Then I must enlighten you. <They light cigars> I'm going to the Blacksmiths [sic] Shop to learn to shoe a Horse before I go – will you oblige me with your company? (I.i.2)~~

The original manuscript offers mordant commentary on the economics of free trade, and specifically the repealing of the Corn Laws in 1846, as well as the more proverbial English pieties of industriousness and self-betterment. George and Winchester are, by all appearances, hard-working, but the prospects of both men, regardless of their different class origins, are hamstrung by an economic system that thwarts their best efforts. The result is an ironic twist on the claims for free trade as an agent of English prosperity. The social effect, as it is presented in the play, is, of course, ironic: Sir Robert Peel (1788-1850) rescinded the Corn Laws, in part, because he believed high food prices strained class relations, that is, the existing hierarchy (Hoppen 10). In Reade's play free trade does, indeed, level class differences, not, however, by providing opportunities to each rank, but rather by offering all citizens an equal lack of potential.

Hoppen points out that the repeal of the Corn Laws fatally shook the landlord-farmer relationship, and marked a “crucial ‘point of no return’” in which farmers who had fallen upon hard times could not count on the leniency and patience of those they

rented from, as they had before 1846 (27). This is precisely the dilemma in which Reade's farmer, George Saunders, finds himself. In contrast to its past, Victorian England is framed as a depleted ancestor of the country's former chivalry and grandeur. By going to Australia, the nobleman's son is aspiring to reclaim an honour and vigour that are presented here as lacking in contemporary England – though, interestingly, this new chivalry is distinctly economic, rather than martial, in character. The country's old hierarchies have been upended, so that a Lord's son must travel “out of the country, with a hoe, a knapsack, and a pickaxe to learn labour,” or train as a blacksmith in the hope of earning his respectability elsewhere.

Like Winchester, Tom Robinson similarly encourages George to abandon England, this time in favour of the gold fields of California: “this Island is the Dead Sea to a poor man... This hole you are in is all poor, hungry, arable land, without a blade of grass – you can't work it ~~to a profit with wheat at 40% a quarter~~” (I.i.17). Again, we find in this quotation any allusion to the repeal of the Corn Laws struck out, though the critical portrait of England's prosperity remains. Despite his protests – “I could not live among all those thieves, and butchers that are settled on that land like crows on a dead horse” (I.i.17) – George does join Winchester in Australia, where, after a failed attempt at farming, he joins up with Robinson in prospecting. Interesting, too, is the observation that Donne allowed the portrayal of England as a “Dead Sea to a poor man,” yet (either he or Reade) cut the claim that this was also true for members of the gentry.

Reade's obvious sympathy in this play with the protectionists in government was perhaps intended to bolster Disraeli's faltering attempts to govern. On 3 December,

1852, a month prior to Reade's submission, Benjamin Disraeli (1804-81) had attempted to shore up growing divisions in his party by proposing a number of tax reductions for farmers in place of the mandate for which he was elected: the restoration of tariffs on imported agricultural products.<sup>231</sup> Disraeli's proposed legislation resulted in days of debates, concluding with a "momentous clash" between Disraeli and Gladstone and the end of the former politician's government (Crosby 178).<sup>232</sup> Given what we have already seen of Donne's caution on issues of far less immediate importance, his decision to cut allusions to such a contentious issue then so conspicuously present in the public eye would seem a foregone conclusion, and likely one anticipated by dramatists. Whether Donne personally censored this material is less at issue than the fact that someone knew he would.

In this script we also find cuts to Biblical references, which were a particular concern of Donne, who testified before the Select Committee that "both as a matter of morality, and as a matter of taste, I never allow any association with scripture or theology

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<sup>231</sup> For a good overview of the efforts (and failures) of protectionists, see Travis L. Crosby's *English Farmers and the Politics of Protection 1815-1852* (1977), 154-186. Also, for an entertaining though obviously partial history of the issue, see Lewis Apjohn's *Richard Cobden and the Free Traders* (1886).

<sup>232</sup> If these cuts were made by Donne, then he may have had personal reasons for suppressing these passages. Though likely unknown to Reade, Donne was privately in favour of repealing the Corn Laws. Eight years earlier, in a letter dated 28 December, 1845, Donne lashed out at agricultural tariffs:

I hate monopolies in every thing, and as I believe that the corn-laws are among the grossest of the class, and stand conveniently in the breach, I am living in hopes of their speedy downfall. Then, once gone, we shall get sugar and sound doctrine cheaper by and by, for the country-gentlemen out of mere spite will abolish the duties on Molasses and the Irish Church. Peel is a wonderful man; the only man in these days who can govern other men; his villainy delights, his steadiness gives me faith in him. He must not retire till the aristocracy have been further dieted and purged. (C. Johnson 96-97)

Moreover, while Donne had expressed respect for Disraeli, there is evidence that he was sceptical of the politician's efficacy as a national leader. In an undated letter, likely written in November 1847, Donne confided that Disraeli "will always be a valuable second to any party. But a leader needs three qualities – all of which Disraeli singularly wants – station, character and discretion" (C. Johnson 181).

to be introduced into a play.”<sup>233</sup> And so we repeatedly find religious allusions

suppressed, as in the following, uttered as part of the clash between Levi and Meadows:

*Levi.* ...I but tell you what these old eyes have seen in every nation, and read in books that never lie – ~~Goliath [sic] defied armies – yet he fell like a pigeon by a Shepherd Boy’s sling. Sampson tore a Lion in pieces with his hands and carried away the Gates of a city on his shoulders yet a woman laid him low~~ – no man can defy his kind. The Strong Man is sure to find one as strong, and more skilful – the Cunning man, one as adroit, and stronger than himself. Be advised then – do not trample on one of my people – Nations and men that oppress us never thrive. Let me rather have to bless you – an old mans [sic] blessing is Gold – See these Grey hairs – my Sorrows have been as many as they are – ~~His share of the curse that is upon his tribe have fallen on Isaac Levi.~~ I have been driven to and fro like a leaf many years – and now I long for rest – let me rest in my little Tent, till I rest forever. Oh let me die where those I loved have died, and there let me be buried.

*Meadows.* ~~What? You quote Scripture, Eh? Thought you didn’t [sic] believe in that hear t’other side. Abraham and Lot could not live in the same place, because they both kept sheep. So Abraham gave Lot warning, as I give it you – and as for your dying on my premises – if you like to hang yourself before next Lady day, I give you leave – but after Lady day – no more Jewish dogs shall die in my house or be buried for manure in my garden.~~

*Levi.* <Giving way to his pent up wrath.> Irreverent cur – ~~d’ye rail on the afflicted of Heaven – The founder of your creed would abhor you for he they say was merciful – I spit upon ye – and I curse ye – Be Accursed! <He throws his hands up like St. Paul at Lystra> ....~~

(I.i.8)

In the above passage we find Donne’s habitual objection to the citing of names from or allusions to the Bible in a performed drama. Yet we can see also an alteration to the character of Isaac Levi. Audiences are prevented from sympathizing with the itinerant existence of the Diaspora. Even the stage direction intended to parallel Levi’s indignation with Paul is suppressed. Throughout the script, Levi’s claims for audience sympathy are repeatedly cut, as when George asks about the old man’s age: “My son, I

<sup>233</sup> Question #2410.

am threescore years and ten – a man of years and grief – Grief for myself – Grief still more for my nation and city – Men that are men pity us – Men that are Dogs have insulted us in all ages” (I. i. 9). Levi’s discontent with Jews’ political and social exclusion from English and European society stands in direct contrast to the growing vision of England as a nation of equality defined by one’s citizenship, not one’s religion.<sup>234</sup> What Reade appears to engage here is the issue of Anglo-Jewish emancipation, a topic of on-going debate in the nineteenth century.<sup>235</sup> In 1845 the government passed a pivotal piece of legislation, the Jewish Municipal Relief Act, allowing Jews to hold municipal office without having to convert to Christianity (a right not extended to Jews entering the Commons until 1858). The following year the Religious Opinions Relief Act provided Jewish institutions the same protection enjoyed by those of Nonconformists (Endelman 103). The desire to silence Isaac Levi’s depiction of Jewish victimization does not, as far as I am aware, arise from anti-Semitism on the part of the Examiner. It is more likely that Donne wanted to keep this issue, as he did almost all political topics, from the stage. When asked in 1866 by members of the Select Committee regarding his rationale for suppressing material, Donne stated that he was “Decidedly” disposed to censor a play in relation to “circumstances, political or otherwise, prevailing at the time.”<sup>236</sup> Whatever his reasons in this case, Donne evidently

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<sup>234</sup> See David Feldman’s *Englishmen and Jews Social Relations and Political Culture 1840-1914* (1994), 37-38.

<sup>235</sup> For a good overview of the issue, see Todd M. Endelman’s *The Jews of Britain 1656 to 2000* (2002), 100-110, and Israel Finestein’s *Jewish Society in Victorian England*, 130-153. Finestein points out that the issue of Jewish emancipation was not without its opponents, many of them powerful members of government and the nobility.

<sup>236</sup> Question #2522. There is also a strong Zionist theme which is promoted by Levi in the following passage, also cut, either by Donne or for his benefit:

felt that the subject of Jewish emancipation, like the Corn Laws debate, was too contentious for theatrical representation.

By far the largest excisions are made to the Australian scenes in the fourth Act, and sometimes several pages are cut at a time. In one of these Winchester reappears as a wealthy blacksmith, shoeing a peddler's donkey – “more use than your dad's Race Horses I reckon” (15) – with golden horseshoes; the scene concludes with an elaborate and farcical dance and pantomime involving a number of Aborigines (IV.i.14-17). In another instance, a large section was cut from the fourth Act, involving Robinson, the transported thief, who becomes a judge, or “Beak,” at disputes between prospectors from the sprawling shanty town that has sprung up around the ‘diggings.’ The scene (see Appendix V, below) is intended to be both ironic and entertaining for the audience, though Donne evidently felt (or, alternatively, someone thought he would feel) that the scene was inappropriate for dramatization. Here Robinson attempts to settle a dispute between two Chinese prospectors, who are fighting over a piece of gold which each

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Read now what befalls our Friends and our Foes – Tyre and Sidon were our Friends, and Heaven gave them the commerce of the world. The Egyptians oppressed us, and made us build the sepulchres of their nameless Kings – the Great Pyramids Israel built, survive; but what is the paltry nation that creeps under them, and looks up to them with stupid wonder – Babylon led us away captive and insulted us – and bade using Judah's songs in their dreary land – we could not sing – we were, we are too far from Sion [*sic*]. The captives of Babylon are found in every land – But where is the captor? Where is Babylon? And so shall it ever be. They that are good to us – with them it shall be well – they that oppress us have signed their own Death warrant – we are chastened more than ever but as much as ever are we the Favourites of Heaven. The Sun will rise again upon Judah, and then the Turks, and Muscovites, and all the nations and men that insult us shall perish in a moment. Swiftly as Pharaoh and his host – swiftly as Sennacheribe [?] and his hundred and four score thousand warriors – swiftly as the morning dew – or if they survive till noon day the sun and the moon shall stand still again in Nature, while the champions of Israel tread her Enemies into dust...But how long? how long? Ages Roll away, and the wounds of Sion are not cured <*music*> Jerusalem, how long shall the leaves of thy Cedar be scattered over all the Earth, and thy roots lie idle in the Sacred Hill, and thy branches forget to grow and overshadow the Holy City? <*droops*> (IV.i.18)

claims to have discovered. Besides the transparent racism on which the scene's humour depends – most notably in its caricature of “the long tails” – Donne may have been uncomfortable with the depiction of an English criminal acting as an impromptu magistrate – or “European father” – in the colonies. In particular, Robinson's musings on his new authority elicit reflections on his former attitude toward those who had sentenced him: “Ah! when I was a Thief I envied Beaks. Set up there so grand disposing with a graceful wave of their hand – their fellow creatures one to Tothill Fields – on[e] to the Penitentiary – another to Newgate and another to the Parish Soup palace – but since I took a Beak's eye view of man I'm ashamed of the Brute – and pity the Bird” (11). While intentionally blithe and naïve, Robinson's comments nonetheless make light of English judicial authority by allowing the former thief to pity those who once, presumably, pitied him. This inversion of moral and class hierarchies likely fell under Donne's practice of suppressing passages in which “it is insinuated that, after all, wrong may be right, or, after all, not so very wrong.”<sup>237</sup>

While Donne consistently cut political, religious and social commentary from this play, with the exception of the Aborigines' pantomime, all of these expurgated passages were recycled by Reade several years later when he resuscitated the narrative. In 1856 Reade returned to the plot of *Gold*, reworking it this time as a novel, which he titled *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*. Here the story of George Fielding (changed from Sanders) and Susan Merton is left largely unaltered. In the novel, however, this romantic plot is paralleled by a far more didactic and serious critique of the English penal system. Reade

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<sup>237</sup> Question #2305.



became interested in the topic after reading Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which was published in England during the summer of 1852, while Reade was writing *Gold*. As Wayne Burns, one of Reade's biographers, observes, the *éclat* of Stowe's novel gave Reade ideas of emulating her success: "The conditions of slaves had been likened to that of prisoners by philanthropists and novelists from Shaftesbury to Mrs. Trollope, and Reade, with the example of Uncle Tom before him, was quick to see how readily he could exploit that likeness in a novel based on *Gold* – by sending the thief of the play [Tom Robinson] to prison."<sup>238</sup> Reade explores the topic of prison abuses via the character of Tom Robinson, who was fashioned into an English derivative of Stowe's Uncle Tom. After being arrested for the theft of Meadows' wallet, Robinson is sentenced to a year of hard labour and solitary punishment. Instead of pursuing George directly to Australia, as we do in *Gold*, the reader follows Robinson to gaol, where, for the next two hundred pages, Reade goes to great length exposing and expounding on the abuses of "the system."<sup>239</sup> In prison Robinson and the other inmates are caught in a moral tug-of-war between the sadistic discipline of the prison's governor, Mr. Hawes, and the benevolent though demanding compassion of its new chaplain, Reverend Charles Francis Eden. Eden eventually wins the day, but not before the cruelty of Hawes' methods are revealed to the Home Office.

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<sup>238</sup> Charles Reade, *A Study in Victorian Authorship* (1961), 157. Burns goes into more detail regarding this topic in an article written with Emerson Grant Sutcliffe, and similarly concludes that "Reade, in his first attempt to write out-and-out social propaganda, was consciously attempting to emulate Mrs. Stowe" (342).

<sup>239</sup> This fictional prison is based, in part, on Reade's own tour of a number of English jails, as well as *The Times*' series of articles (6-12 September, 1853) on abuses at Birmingham Gaol. For more on this, see Burns, 134.

The disciplinary procedures of the prison focus on breaking an inmate's will through an unrelieved cycle of silence and pain. Convicts are forbidden to communicate with one another at any time during their incarceration, sealing them in "a great and glorious silence of which the jail was the temple and he [Hawes] the high-priest" (131). Reade insinuates the treasonous implications of Hawes' unlicensed behaviour, insofar as he usurps the Queen's prerogative to exact penalties within the microcosm of the prison. As a symbol of his monarchical reign, Hawes inflicts a series of punishments upon inmates, demanding, for example, a continuous silence enforced by isolation cells and hoods, or "visors" (102), which prisoners must wear to keep from recognizing one another. Convicts are regularly forced to work on the "crank" – a punitive machine deliberately weighted beyond their capabilities (110). Failure to manage an impracticable number of rotations on this machine (a conclusion that is virtually guaranteed) results in the removal of the inmate's bedding and lighting, as well as a reduction of rations. Through gradual deprivation the convict is deliberately driven to insubordination, which wins him time in the "jacket," an "infernal machine" in which the inmate's joints and cardiovascular organs are strained to the point of asphyxiation (116). Any further refractory behaviour leads to the worst punishment, known as the "black hole" – in Reade's words, "a terrible and unnatural privation" (105) – literally a lightless room in which a stay of twenty-four hours is often enough to drive a prisoner mad. Rather than attempting the moral reformation of the prisoner, Reade argues, this system makes the convict "a far worse man than ever he had been out of prison" (136). Readers who might have accused Reade of exaggeration were easily silenced by recollections of *The Times'*

coverage of similar abuses at Birmingham Gaol, which the novelist heavily mined when writing the chapters dealing with the prison. Reade was deeply affected by these articles, and he used them as models for the characters of Hawes and Josephs. While writing the novel Reade often drew directly on the Birmingham Gaol inquiry, and, in particular, the fate of a fifteen-year old prisoner, Edward Andrews, who, like his fictional counterpart, Josephs, was tormented by the governor, Captain Austin, at the ‘crank’ and ‘jacket’ until he committed suicide.<sup>240</sup>

The discretionary cruelty meted out by prison governors made it possible, Reade believed, for inmates to be “punished lawlessly by the law till they succumbed, and then, since they were no longer food for torture, ignored by the law and abandoned by the human race” (236). Consequently, Reade’s attack on the disciplinary methods of England’s prisons centres on the *unsystematic* and negligent bureaucracy which gave unobstructed fiat to prison governors – that “knot of theorists into whose hands the English jails are fast falling...[and who] think themselves wiser than nature and her Author” (237). In writing the novel, Reade clearly hoped to bring about a public revelation, such as that of the fictional bureaucrat from the Home Office, who, after being made aware of Hawes’ methods, demands to know “how came this to pass in England in the nineteenth century?” (310). Reade’s book becomes a moral pillory, in which the abuses of ‘the system’ are both exposed and held to public ridicule.

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<sup>240</sup> For more on this topic, see *The Times* for September 1853, and in particular (8 September): 7, (12 September): 9-10, (13 September): 11, (14 September): 7. See also Philip Priestley’s discussion of the Birmingham enquiry, *Victorian Prison Lives: English Prison Biography, 1830-1914* (1985), 210-213.

In its attempt to correct the punitive excesses of the nation's prison system, the novel conducted an information campaign on two fronts. First, Reade promoted the idea that the abuses in England's jails were made possible, in part, because of a pervasive ignorance among Victorians, who, like Tom Robinson, "had always been told the new system discouraged personal violence of all sorts" (113). In doing so, what Reade asks Victorian readers to address is their own complicity, as citizens of England, in the abuses in the country's prisons. Second, the author turned his attention to the nation's judges and politicians, who, conversely, were all too aware of the methods used in England's jails. For them, the novel is intended to counter the glut of existing "Books and reports... which convinced magistrates that severe punishment of mind and body was the essential object of a jail, and that it was wrong and chimerical to attempt any cures by any other means" (99). There were, of course, other published accounts and reports more in line with Reade's novel. One of the most thoughtful of these studies – in which we often find ideas that anticipate those espoused by Reade's fictional chaplain, Charles Eden – is Joseph Kingsmill's *Chapters on Prisons and Prisoners, and the Prevention of Crime* (1854). Kingsmill, himself a prison chaplain, judged that the silent system (in which prisoners are forbidden to communicate with one another during their incarceration) was "great step towards real improvement" (109), while at the same time admitting that it "presents so many temptations to communication, as to render two things inevitable, both unfriendly in the highest degree to real reformation, – perpetual surveillance and perpetual punishment" (111). Instead, Kingsmill promoted the practice of separate confinement for inmates as a way of discouraging relations between prisoners, while at

the same time it “relieved...the necessity of inflicting disproportionate punishment, [and] admits also of the application, under the very strictest discipline, of much kindness [by authorities]” (117).<sup>241</sup>

The August 1856 publication of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* was highly successful, and made Reade, in his own words, ““one of the writers of the day.””<sup>242</sup> Newspapers, like *The Observer*, applauded the novel’s condemnation of the “separate and silent systems...in all their rank luxuriance,” concluding its review by noting that the novel “deserves all the praise which can been [*sic*] bestowed upon it, and is likely to become a universal favourite.”<sup>243</sup> Nine years after the book’s publication, a reviewer would recall how the story “had harrowed the feelings and exasperated the judgment, which had been read, wept over, fought over in every part of England – a work of vicious power.”<sup>244</sup>

The release of the novel could not have been better timed to exploit prevailing interest in the issue of prison reform. Jail conditions had already become a topic of public debate after the publication of a Blue Book report of data from the country’s prison inspectors. There were other studies, too, such as that of George Laval Chesterton, himself a prison governor, who, like Reade, “would fain impress upon the legislature...[that] penal laws are administered by separate authorities, each imbued with

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<sup>241</sup> See also John T. Burt’s *Results of the System of Separate Confinement as Administered at the Pentonville Prison* (1852). Burt, also a proponent of the separate system, was the assistant chaplain at Pentonville and, coincidentally, subordinate to Kingsmill. Like Reade, Burt advocated universalizing England’s prisons, arguing that while the “administration of prison discipline is allowed to be influenced by the contradictory theories with which the subject is entangled” and therefore insisted sarcastically that “Some definite principles must be adopted and acted upon” (249).

<sup>242</sup> Quoted in Burns, 174-175.

<sup>243</sup> *The Observer* (24 August, 1856): 7.

<sup>244</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 October, 1865): 10-11.

some distinct and affected intelligence, to the great peril of equal justice" (v).<sup>245</sup>

Additionally, restrictions on the transportation of convicts to the colonies had forced England to deal with its criminal population at home. This change in sentencing made the reformation of convicts, in the opinion of one newspaper, "not only desirable, but absolutely necessary, if we do not wish the country to be entirely handed over to the tender mercies of convicted felons."<sup>246</sup> The topic was closely followed by various newspapers and organizations, generating a high level of public interest that coincided with the release of Reade's novel. *The Times*, for instance, reported favourably on 21 August, 1856 (two weeks after the publication of *It Is Never Too Late*) on a meeting of the National Reformatory Union, led by Lord Stanley and Lord Brougham, whose opinions on the topic anticipate those prescribed by Reade: "we overestimate the deterring effect of penal legislation unaccompanied with other measures, and how necessary it is both to apply means of prevention, to make punishment reformatory, and to reclaim those on whom we have been obliged to inflict it."<sup>247</sup> From the meeting's proceedings it is apparent that disagreement existed between Lord Stanley, who felt the Union's energies were best spent on the reformation of juvenile inmates, and Lord Brougham, who felt that there "can be no reason why the same society should not charge

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<sup>245</sup> See George Laval Chesterton's *Revelations of Prison Life; with an Enquiry into Prison Discipline and Secondary Punishments* (1856). For bizarre, though remarkable reading, it is worth perusing Chesterton's account of the 'Magnetoscope' – a device used, he claims, to read the character and mind of prisoners (II.279-92).

<sup>246</sup> *The Observer* (24 August, 1856): 5. The practice of transporting prisoners to the colonies began to diminish with the Penal Servitude Act of 1853, providing legislation which first established that convicts could serve their sentences in England (see Alyson Brown's *English Society and the Prison* [2003], 47).

<sup>247</sup> *The Times* (21 August, 1856): 8.

itself also with adults.” Reade, whose fictional prison included both young and older offenders, appears to agree with Brougham.

Nor was the topic of prison reform one of temporary interest. We frequently find in reports of groups, such as the Association for the Promotion of Social Science (whose President was the Earl of Carlisle), an ongoing interest in the English penal system, often with an emphasis on techniques similar to those promoted by Reade, such as retraining inmates to a trade to discourage their return to criminal activity upon release.<sup>248</sup> Other organizations, such as the Reformatory Institution for boys (which numbered among its supporters various members of Parliament including the Speaker of the House of Commons, Charles Shaw Lefevre), while interested in discouraging criminals from future crimes, eschewed submitting their institution to the sort of public transparency and judicial inquiry advocated by Reade. The Institution’s chair, the Bishop of Winchester, argued instead that while the “State should do its part...the machinery should be directed and watched over by those who had a local interest; and he hoped they would never consent to an abstract body like the Government taking that part which belonged to them, as Christian men and women, in their respective neighbourhoods, to take for themselves.”<sup>249</sup>

While the 1856 publication of Reade’s novel was timely in that it responded to the public’s existing preoccupation with the issue of prison discipline, his dramatization of the story nine years later was not so fortunate. After more than a decade of debate and a number of reports concerned with the mandate and methods of penal institutions, the

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<sup>248</sup> For example, see *The Manchester Guardian* (15 October, 1858): 3.

<sup>249</sup> *The Times* (8 August, 1856): 10.

government passed a series of laws, most notably the Prisons Act of 1865, that outlined in detail the duties and limitations of jails. The Act was widely felt by Victorians to have put to rest the abuses on which *It Is Never Too Late* places so much emphasis. This sentiment is expressed by several reviewers who (partly) justified their disfavour with the play's prison scenes by arguing that such "atrocities... have long since ceased to exist, and it seemed therefore felt by the audience, who saw them re-enacted on the stage, that an unnecessary shock was given to their feelings by forcing upon their notice the sight of brutalities."<sup>250</sup> Historians show, however, that the reality was quite the opposite.

Christopher Hardings points out that the Act privileged a punitive philosophy of behavioural management, rather than moral reformation, of prisoners, and actually increased the severity of punishments (often by including flogging).<sup>251</sup> Rather than ridding the system of the haphazard abuses of individual governors, the Act both funded and standardized the worst of their methods; where jailers like Hawes were once the exception in England's jails, subsequent to the Prison Act of 1865 they became the rule.

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<sup>250</sup> *The Era* (8 October, 1865): <http://www.victorianlondon.org/> 4 May, 2003.

<sup>251</sup> See K. Theodore Hoppen, *The Mid-Victorian Generation 1846-1886* (1998), 108. Christopher Harding, et al. *Imprisonment in England and Wales* (1985), 160. Section 18 of the 1865 Prison Act is intended to address the issue of hard labour: "Hard Labour for the Purposes of this Act shall consist of Work at the Tread Wheel, Shot Drill, Crank, Crank Pump, Stone-breaking, Rope-beating, Handloom-weaving, or such other Description of Hard Labour as may be appointed by the Prison Authority with the Approval of the Secretary of State..." (*British Sessional Papers*. III. 576). After the passing of the Prisons Act, *The Times* reported on the communication from the Secretary of State for the Home Department, Sir George Grey, to England's judiciary, requesting that judges follow the intentions of the new legislation, particularly regarding the relationship between an inmate's crime, and the type of labour-punishment he received; for the "first class" of offences "labour must be of a like description with that which is expressly specified in the Act, and which is not merely irksome labour, but labour requiring severe bodily exertion. Ordinary oakum-picking by hand would not, in Sir George Grey's opinion, fulfil this condition, while rope or oakum-beating, and mat-making with a loom, as practised in several prisons, might fairly be considered as falling within the description." On the topic of prisoners' diets, Grey advised that "The principle to be observed in framing the dietary tables is that the dietary should be sufficient, and not more than sufficient, in amount and quality to maintain the health and strength of the prisoners." *The Times* (19 January, 1866): 11.



There have been misunderstandings, I believe, of the novel's political agenda due, in part, to a lack of awareness of Victorian theories of penology. Michael Hays, for instance, sees the reformation of Robinson as reflecting "the liberal penal doctrine of the time insofar as he presents himself as someone who has been bad but is not bad of heart. In other words, he is potentially open to self-discipline and reform... which is precisely what the new prison system (as opposed to the old jail regime) was supposed to offer."<sup>252</sup> In fact, by insisting that convicts like Robinson could be reformed, Reade was challenging philanthropists' and politicians' growing disillusionment with prisons' moral resuscitation of inmates.<sup>253</sup> By siding with Eden's method over that of Hawes, Reade was openly defying the penal philosophy of this period, not imitating it. Even after the tremendous attention afforded to descriptions of prison abuse during the previous decade, those who came to see the West End dramatization of *It Is Never Too Late* were clearly disturbed by what they saw. I want to make this point clear, because I believe, for reasons discussed already, that spectators were not surprised by the existence of these conditions – indeed they appear to have been widely accepted – but rather by their representation on the stage. Records of the audience's astonishment tend to highlight the depiction of discipline and torture – the methods of which Reade had thoroughly researched when writing his novel. During the scene in which Josephs is given "the jacket" (a punishment likened in Reade's novel to crucifixion without nails), the poor convict offers a moving description of his torment:

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<sup>252</sup> "Representing Empire: Class, Culture, and the Popular Theatre in the Nineteenth Century," 140.

<sup>253</sup> Wayne Burns, one of Reade's biographers, has a much clearer understanding of Reade's view of the prevailing system in English prisons, which was evident in his novel (see Burns, 168-169) – ideas that he adapted, unaltered, to the dramatization of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*.

...It chokes me, it cuts me, it robs my breath, it crushes my heart, it makes me faint away. It kills me by inches: I cannot go on like this – first the jacket till I faint away; then buckets of water thrown over me, and to lie all night in my wet clothes; then starved, and then the jacket again, because you have starved me down too weak to work. Oh, pray, pray have mercy on me and hang me! You mean to kill me; why not have little, little, little pity, and kill me quicker! <*Sobs and clings to Hawes's knees...*>. (135)

Soon after this outcry, Josephs can no longer face such treatment, and when finally released into his cell he decides to hang himself, though before he can do so he expires as a result of the torment he has endured. Reviewers were deeply troubled by this scene, frequently citing “the brutal exercise of authority in torturing the boy Josephs, with his attempt at suicide and subsequent death.”<sup>254</sup> Similarly, the depiction of the prison’s various mechanisms of discipline left a significant impression on audiences who recalled the “dull monotonous horrors of penal servitude, as carried out by means of the mill and the crank, the separate system and the gloomy uniformity of dress, with the terrible mask concealing the features” – all of which terrified some spectators, while others assumed they were “simply brought forward to no more profitable purpose than that of creating a stage ‘sensation.’”<sup>255</sup> None of this material, however, had bothered the Examiner.

The journal entries, reminiscences and reviews dealing with the dramatization of *It Is Never Too Late* form a remarkable record of the initial public reproach that this production endured from West End audiences and critics.<sup>256</sup> It is to these responses that I now wish to direct attention, for, in their censure of Reade’s play, we find conspicuous

<sup>254</sup> *The Observer* (8 October, 1865): 7.

<sup>255</sup> Quoted from *The Observer* (8 October, 1865): 7, and *The Era* (8 October, 1865), respectively.

<sup>256</sup> Despite the poor press it received, the Princess’s Theatre’s production of *It Is Never Too Late* was a financial and popular success, running, Reade would later recall, for 148 nights and making the playwright over £2000 (Burns 235).

indications of the attitudes and expectations held by playgoers (and particularly critics). Like many of his colleagues, the theatre critic for *The Daily News* (whom Reade would later accuse of being drunk at the performance – “his custom ever in the afternoon”) recorded the audience’s “utter damnation of the second act...in which the alleged cruelties of the old prison system are painfully and brutally exhibited – in a storm of hisses, shouts, and counter-applause.”<sup>257</sup> Writing six years later, in 1871, *The Athenæum*’s reviewer recalled the play’s opening night, noting “that the audience...met the exhibition with cries of ‘Shame!’ ‘Revolt!’ ‘Stop the piece!’”<sup>258</sup> So great was the uproar that the production was temporarily halted to allow the manager, George Vining – who happened to be on stage at the time in the character (and prison uniform) of Tom Robinson – to defend his theatre’s production, which he did, in part, by noting that the majority of those expressing outrage were reviewers, and consequently had “‘Come in free.’”<sup>259</sup> To the modern reader, reviewers’ shock at the depictions of prison discipline seems suspiciously feigned. Given the widespread attention that Reade’s novel enjoyed, and that so many of the play’s reviewers openly recalled, it is hard to believe that playgoers were surprised by the production’s subject matter. Rather, as I will argue, it is more likely that critics were affronted by the unorthodox intentions of the playwright, who employs the theatre as an instrument for public correction. The play is all the more

<sup>257</sup> *The Daily News* (5 October, 1865): 2. For a copy of Reade’s reflections on this and other reviewers’ denunciation of the play, see Wayne Burns, 235.

<sup>258</sup> Thomas Purnell, *Dramatists of the Present Day* (1871), 132.

<sup>259</sup> For details and a copy of Vining’s address to the Princess’s audience, see *The Era* (8 October, 1865) <<http://www.victorian.london.org>>. Reviewers were clearly taken aback by Vining’s comments, reporting that he gave them “courageously and, except in one unhappy sentence, judiciously,” braving his angered audience with “two or three expressions which in cooler moments he might not have uttered.” Quoted from *The Observer* (8 October, 1865): 7, and *The Times* (5 October, 1865): 12, respectively. Coincidentally, this issue of the press attending performances without paying had been debated at length in 1853 during the production of *Gold*.

significant not only since its ultimate financial success vindicated Reade and Vining's decision to continue the play in the face of such publicized disapproval, but also since it marked a new division between the dramatist and the paying public. As Barrett notes, it "establishes a point in the nineteenth century when an angry audience could no longer condemn a controversial play to extinction, but could be defied by a manager and playwright who defended their production and eventually made it a success" (4).

Michael Diamond points out that Reade's play, while a sensation drama, was entirely unlike those of Boucicault – whom *The Era* had anointed "the high priest of sensationalism" – in that it had a social 'message' shaped by the playwright's "reforming zeal."<sup>260</sup> Audiences and critics used to sensation plays such as *The Octoroon* (1861), *The Trial of Effie Deans* (1863) and *Arrah-na-Pogue* (1865), would have been taken off guard by Vining's production of *It Is Never Too Late*, with its overt attempt to provoke both controversy and social change. In this respect, Reade's play, and the kind of socially-engaged drama it tried to create, anticipated the views of later playwrights, like George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), who attacked the Examiner's censorship, the effect of which was "simply [to] codify the present and most of the past prejudices of the class he represents." As a result, Shaw argued, a censor put "his hallmark on profligate farces and thinly sentimentalized tomcat love tales...[while shutting] the stage door against the great dramatic poets."<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> See Michael Diamond's *Victorian Sensation* (2003), 236. The passage from *The Era* (7 October, 1877) is quoted on the same page in Diamond's book.

<sup>261</sup> See Shaw's "The Censorship of the Stage in England", which first appeared in *North American Review* (August 1899), and is republished in *Shaw on Theatre* (77). Shaw characterized the Lord Chamberlain as "the Malvolio of St. James's Palace – responsible to nobody but the Queen, and therefore not responsible at all" (66). Shaw complained fiercely of the unaccountability of state censorship, noting that the "monarchy

Among the production's reviews there were examples of outright denial of prison abuses, such as the response from the *Pall Mall Gazette* which accused the play of being "essentially untrue," or, *The Daily News'* critic who attacked Reade for "Such an utterly false picture of prison life – such a horrid and misleading nightmare."<sup>262</sup> By and large, however, most critics accepted the realism of the play's prison set, and, indeed, focused on its documentary accuracy as the basis for their disapproval. The reviewer for *The Observer*, for instance, allowed that "reference to the blue book no doubt will show that such things were, but their stern reality is scarcely a fit theme for dramatic treatment."<sup>263</sup> Critics' indignation repeatedly returned to Reade's inversion of the moral hierarchy between jailers and inmates, often protesting that

criminals seem to be his pets.... On this occasion he had determined to vent his detestation of the present fashion of prison discipline.... The authorities are represented as superhumanly vindictive monsters, and the prisoners are suffering victims.... The details of this scene were so dismal and revolting, and so evidently one-sided in their representation, that the

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is limited; the Cabinet, with tears of rage, cannot assert itself...; the House of Lords, nominally omnipotent, puts down its foot only to emphasize the humiliation of having to take it up again; but the Examiner of Plays, greater than all these, does what he likes, caring not a dump for nations or constitutions" (67). Other writers protested the influence of the Lord Chamberlain's Office on playwrights for similar reasons. For a wonderful lampoon of the rationalizations used to legitimate England's state censorship of the drama, see *A Justification of the Censorship of Plays* (1909) – a pamphlet published by John Galsworthy (who claimed it was submitted to him anonymously). More earnest complaints also existed, such as Marie C. Stopes' *A Banned Play and a Preface on the Censorship* (1926), in which the playwright maintains that her play, *Vectia*, which eschewed portrayals of women's sexual misconduct, was banned instead because of its depiction of male impotence – something that went against prevailing tastes, which, Stopes argues, the Examiner is charged with guarding: "It is the current *code* of so-called morality, with which the Censor has to conform, that is wrong. Our current code is not merely viciously, but sanctimoniously indecent, and profoundly anti-racial. The peculiar kinks in its type of indecency result from a social moral code based on the acceptance as 'normal' of masculine over-sexuality and callous dominance and feminine frigidity, yet frailty" (7). Stopes' essay is a compelling comment on the obstacles faced by women who wrote seriously for the stage in the early twentieth century: "[a] woman who pits herself against current authority has to be almost super-naturally strong or she is socially blackened and her power crushed and thwarted" (9). One can only imagine how much harder it was for women writing in the nineteenth century.

<sup>262</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 October, 1865): 10-11, and *The Daily News* (5 October, 1865): 2, respectfully.

<sup>263</sup> *The Observer* (8 October, 1865): 7.

better part of the audience were disgusted with it....<sup>264</sup>

Despite their collective denunciation of the play, critics were generally impressed with the sets and the “profusion of accessories” employed to represent Reade’s fictional prison.<sup>265</sup> As Barrett notes, “What confronted spectators was nothing less than a modern prison yard, rendered with a fidelity never before achieved on a London stage” (8). It is not surprising, then, that we find critics, such as the one for *The Era*, suitably impressed by “The receding passages, with the cells ranged along them on each side, and illuminated by jets of gas, whilst huge iron winding staircases communicate with the different stories, produces a marvellous appearance of depth, and excites some wonder even in the minds of those most familiar with the devices of theatrical mechanism.”<sup>266</sup> Similarly, *The Observer* noted these “marvels of stage construction. Such a built-up scene as that of the long corridors...has never before been presented;” while the West End playgoer, Henry Morley, managed to dampen his admiration for the set’s “practicable tiers of galleries, and iron staircases, and cells, and gaslights” by noting it was “the most costly scene in the play.”<sup>267</sup>

What we can gather from these written accounts is the extraordinary effort and expense taken to achieve a visual realism in the construction of the play’s prison set. The evident success of these efforts to reconstruct the unseen instruments and rites of state-sanctioned punishment would seem to reverse, if only briefly, the trend throughout the

<sup>264</sup> *The Morning Advertiser* (5 October, 1865): 6.

<sup>265</sup> *The Illustrated London News* (7 October, 1865): 334.

<sup>266</sup> *The Era* (8 October, 1865). <http://www.victorianlondon.org/> on 4 May, 2003.

<sup>267</sup> *The Era* (8 October, 1865). <http://www.victorianlondon.org/> on 4 May, 2003. *The Observer* (8 October, 1865): 7. Henry Morley, *Journal of a London Playgoer* (1866), 313.

eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of removing punishment from the public eye – what Foucault refers to as “the disappearance of punishment as a spectacle” (8), in which “justice no longer takes public responsibility for the violence that is bound up with its practice. If it too strikes, if it too kills, it is not as a glorification of its strength, but as an element of itself that it is obliged to tolerate, that it finds difficult to account for” (9).<sup>268</sup> Reade’s play was intended to make audiences conscious of the hidden mechanisms of justice, laying the implications and responsibilities of these decisions before those on whose behalf punishment was exercised. Ironically, it was precisely because the procedure of separate confinement was characterized by an absence of spectacle that many approved of it as a form of punishment, leading commentators on Victorian penology to note approvingly that “[s]eparate confinement requires no severity *for examples sake*, – I mean in punishing for prison offences” (Kingsmill 116).<sup>269</sup> Greg T. Smith reminds us that public punishments were useful “only as long as the offender and the spectator shared some common understanding of the acceptability of pain and violence as corrective tools.” However, because of increasing doubts regarding torture’s ability to reform individuals’ morality, public displays of punishment failed “because their spectacular ability to publicly shame and degrade was seen more and more as a nuisance, and a stain and a blot on the character of the society as a whole” (45). Reade’s dramatization of prisoners’ cells in particular, and the inside of prisons in general, betray

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<sup>268</sup> For a brief but convincing study of the social and urban factors leading to the sequestering of punishment, see Greg T. Smith’s “Civilized People Don’t Want to See that Sort of Thing: The Decline of Public Physical Punishment in London, 1760-1840.” As an example, Smith posits that the scaffold used for public executions before Newgate prison was never made a permanent fixture “because it was regarded with a certain degree of derision, even superstition, as the primary symbol of the law’s brutal power” (43).

<sup>269</sup> Italics are Kingsmill’s.

and undermine the characteristics which made them appealing to Victorians. Moreover, as Sheila Smith remarks, what shocked audiences was not merely the spectacular authenticity of the prison scenes, but that this realism had as its end a socially didactic purpose.<sup>270</sup> This is a view echoed by the reviewer for *The Times*, who maintained that “[w]hether the abuses exposed belong to the past or to the present is of little moment; neither is mere truth a sufficient reason for stage representation.”<sup>271</sup> The issue for these critics rests, in part, on the explicit nature of Reade’s depiction of prison abuses, which are portrayed in glaring and unrelenting detail. While nineteenth-century melodrama certainly dealt with pressing issues, clearly *It Is Never Too Late* represented something very new for theatregoers. Social controversy, it would seem – at least on the scale that Reade had managed – was not what the theatre *did*.

It is not in the documentary realism of the play’s subject but in the theatrical *representation* of this reality, that we find the focus of critics’ disapproval of the play. As a reviewer for *The Athenæum* noted: “Mr. Reade’s fundamental position appears to be, that what is real is suitable for purposes of art.... There is no reason, if his notions of art were to prevail, why the operations of a dissecting-room should not be performed on the stage.”<sup>272</sup> Sentiments such as these call attention not only to playgoers’ views regarding the thematic content of Reade’s play, but, more significantly, to their attitudes regarding the dramatic mode of its presentation. Reviewers’ nearly unanimous response to this play

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<sup>270</sup> Sheila Smith, “Realism in the Drama of Charles Reade,” *English* 12. 69 (Autumn 1958): 94-100. Smith also points out that *It Is Never Too Late* is unique among Reade’s plays in that it was the only script to employ spectacular, or documentary, realism to achieve a didactic affect in his audience: “apart from Act II of *It is Never Too Late to Mend* [sic], Reade’s realistic effects were meant to thrill rather than make more evident a contemporary wrong” (97).

<sup>271</sup> *The Times* (5 October, 1865): 12.

<sup>272</sup> Thomas Purnell, *Dramatists of the Present Day* (1871), 131-132.



leaves us to question what the theatre itself meant within Victorian culture, and how the thematic purview of the performed drama was itself shaped by the expectations and receptive biases of critics, who clearly saw the stage as properly distanced or inhibited, from representations of contemporary social issues. This unorthodox employment of the drama, in which the theatre is used to comment upon a political issue, would seem to lie at the heart of this controversy. The production of Reade's play represents an intersection of otherwise separate domains – theatrical entertainment and social critique – the intersection of which disrupted the established parameters which defined and legitimated the theatre's performed space.

What we come upon again and again in these reviews is the discomfort among mid-nineteenth-century critics – people who presumably took the drama seriously – that the theatre was not an arena for debating the issue of prison reform; as one reviewer asserted, “It was an evil day for Mr. Reade when he got hold of that prison blue-book. It made him forget the platform he was writing for.”<sup>273</sup> While later critics, such as William Archer (1856-1924) and George Bernard Shaw, demanded the theatre engage serious issues, we find among the critics of *It Is Never Too Late* an ingrained and pervasive distrust of this play's capacity to influence the attitudes and opinions of its audiences through prejudiced or unbalanced information. “The unreflecting spectator,” warned one reviewer, “yields all his sympathy to the thieves, whom it has been the artist's care to make interesting; and the spectator, sympathizing with the criminals, finds his indignation concentrated on the Law personified in the prison discipline and the prison

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<sup>273</sup> *The Daily News* (5 October, 1865): 2.

officers.”<sup>274</sup> Justification for this suspicion centred on the conviction that the drama was a precariously emotional form, and, as such, responsible dramatists were to be cautious in choosing suitable (read politically innocuous) subjects for representation – a view that was adamantly argued by the *Pall Mall Gazette*’s critic, who insisted that:

the stage is no place at all for such topics. The exigencies of dramatic presentation forbid argument, qualification, moderation.... This excludes ‘burning questions,’ such as prison discipline, from the stage even more rigorously than from the novel... [and consequently,] the dramatist must be careful lest he offend the quick sensibility of the audience.... Much that the eye can read with patience, the eye cannot see without repulsion. We may read of men on the treadmill, or fainting at the crank, and feel our indignation roused; but to have the curtain rise upon that harrowing scene – to see a close reproduction of this ignoble spectacle of humanity degraded – is what cannot be tolerated upon the stage.<sup>275</sup>

By making a spectacle of ‘the system,’ Reade places the audience in a role to which theatregoers were unaccustomed: that of the judge of the very institutions that mete out justice. For the 148 nights that the production ran, the Princess’s Theatre held court on the issue of prison discipline, making Reade’s play a sort of broadsheet on the death of Josephs, and an open challenge to the prerogatives of the nation’s legal order. Sheila Smith argues that, despite his use of Blue Books and first-hand inquiry to authenticate his subject matter, Reade’s claims of documentary truthfulness, or realism, are often undermined by his “desire for incident and spectacle [which] led him to concentrate on the sensational aspects of social wrongs” (99). And yet for all of Reade’s heavy-handed righteousness, we cannot forget the social ambivalence and often outright disengagement that characterized the expectations and tastes of the playgoers for whom Reade was

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<sup>274</sup> *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 October, 1865): 11.

<sup>275</sup> *Ibid.*, 10.

writing, such as one critic who scoffed at the play and its didacticism: “A more ludicrous effort of benevolence than that of enlightening public opinion through a sensation drama was never suggested by a philanthropist.”<sup>276</sup> This response became the default position of theatre critics, such as the reviewer for *The Morning Advertiser*, who “denounced the introduction of so complex a question as prison discipline into a melo-drama....If the theatre is to be made a one-sided and exaggerated advocate for every political opinion, it certainly will be avoided by all persons who frequent it in hope of finding relaxation and amusement.”<sup>277</sup>

After so much public censure of the play, we are naturally left wondering why Donne allowed the production in the first place. We know from Donne’s correspondence that by 1865 he had known Reade on a professional basis for many years. While Librarian at the London Library, Donne mentions in a letter meeting “[Tom] Taylor’s colleague, that old man C. Reade.” Donne seems to have been amused with the writer, who evidently was a frequent caller at the Library:

He sits watching one, when he calls, with head on one side like a magpie, and deriving seemingly much amusement from the contemplation. He may think of turning me into the ‘père respectable’ of a romance. Long are his calls, long his pauses of silence, during which it is useless to talk to him: he hears or marks you not.<sup>278</sup>

This letter was written in November 1856 – during the one-year period in which Kemble had resumed his duties as Examiner. Coincidentally, it was also the period in which Reade was writing his novel, *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*. We know from the letter that

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<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>277</sup> *The Morning Advertiser* (5 October, 1865): 6.

<sup>278</sup> Quoted from a letter written to Fanny Kemble (26 November, 1856), and reprinted in Catherine Johnson’s *William Bodham Donne and His Friends* (1905), 214.

Reade spoke with Donne regarding his previous novel, *Christie Johnstone* (1853), and it is certainly plausible that the author also discussed with Donne the new book he was working on. It is clear, as well, that Donne respected Reade's skill as a playwright. Two years earlier, Donne made note of Reade in an essay for the *Quarterly Review*, in which Donne cited him as one of a small group of dramatists in whose work existed "exceptional instances of merit, and [which] rather encourage[d] the hope of a restoration of a national drama" (reprinted in *Essays* 131). Such praise was no small compliment from a man who had invested so much of his energy in both history and the theatre. However, notwithstanding this regard for Reade, it seems unlikely that Donne overlooked material he considered inappropriate and incendiary. We know that Donne originally licensed Reade's play for production at the Theatre Royal, Manchester – far from the gaze of London newspapers and their reviewers – after which it enjoyed a modest tour of various provincial theatres. Only towards the end of this run was the play picked up by the Princess's Theatre – a pattern quite opposite from the norm in which plays toured various counties only after enjoying success in London. The point of this observation is that Donne may not have been as rigorous in his scrutiny of a play intended for production on the fringe of the nation's cultural radar.

Conversely, Donne may have supported the idea of spreading public debate on the issue prison reform. At the time of the play's licensing (24 July), the 1865 Prison Act had only recently been passed by the House of Commons (6 July). Donne no doubt anticipated that Reade's script would likely make a tour of the nation's provincial cities, and moreover that it would generate at least a portion of the social debate stirred by the

novel from which it was adapted. Because of this recent legislation, Donne may have decided that *It Is Never Too Late* made Parliament's 1865 Prison Act appear an honourable and timely response to the issues raised in the play. Nor is it likely that Donne was ignorant of the considerable political patronage, in the form of MPs and members of the nobility, enjoyed by organizations dedicated to prison reform. It is not implausible, then, that by licensing Reade's play, Donne was making political calculations of his own.

These explanations, however, drift from the critical imperative of censorship, through which, as Donne articulated it, the state exercised its role "no less as a parent than a schoolmaster."<sup>279</sup> We are left looking, then, like those who reviewed *It Is Never Too Late*, for reasons to explain Donne's decision not to alter the play. One year later, in 1866, his leniency toward Reade's script became a conspicuous issue during the Select Committee's investigation into the role and effect of censorship on the English drama. The first reference to Reade's play was made by Dion Boucicault, who referred to the public censure of *It Is Never Too Late* as evidence that the public was often better at policing the morality of the theatres than the official Examiner:

I think the public themselves are the principal check; there are very many things that the licenser passes that the public does not pass; we very often have pieces performed containing things which the licenser has passed, and which even the actors themselves have passed (though they are more sensitive than the licenser, because of course, they do not want to be hissed), but what escapes them does not escape the public.<sup>280</sup>

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<sup>279</sup> *Essays*, 256.

<sup>280</sup> Question #4059. See also, questions 4061-4068, which deal directly with the Princess's production of Reade's script. Boucicault quickly balanced these statements by assuring the Committee that "I do not object, speaking as a dramatic author, to the licensing system" (4069).

John Hollingshead proposed a similar approach in his own testimony, though in his case he identified theatre reviewers (of which he was one) as effective guardians of Victorian decency: “the censorship of the press is always in advance of the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain, and it is constantly found making objections to the morality of pieces which he passes as being correct and decent.”<sup>281</sup> The underlying suggestion in Boucicault and Hollingshead’s testimony is that the Examiner should have responded to Reade’s play in the same way the press had. At the same time, this call by reviewers for the Examiner to close Reade’s play inadvertently undermined claims regarding the influence of the press and demonstrated the inability of reviewers to police the drama. For his part, the dramatist Shirley Brooks pointed out in his testimony that despite the censure of the Princess’s production by spectators and reviewers, “the manager did not recognise the right of the audience to pronounce any such opinion; he pushed the piece on.”<sup>282</sup> Unlike the Examiner’s objection, the umbrage of the press did not necessarily determine the fate of a play. As a consequence of having sanctioned Reade’s play, Donne demonstrated, albeit unintentionally, both the effectiveness of his influence (in contrast to that of the press), and the public desire for him to use it.

Still, we are left questioning why Donne sanctioned the play in the first place.

Daniel Barrett attributes the Examiner’s omission to a number of cuts made by Reade to the original manuscript:

Reade, an experienced dramatist, had anticipated Donne’s blue pencil, and although there are many excised passages in the license copy, all deletions were made by Reade himself, sometimes with the initials ‘C.R.’ appearing

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<sup>281</sup> Question #5244.

<sup>282</sup> Question #4511.

in the margin....Through these and similar alterations, Reade gave the appearance of improving the play for public consumption but left its provocative substance intact. Perhaps his self-censorship lulled Donne into a false sense of security. (7)<sup>283</sup>

Certainly the playwright appeared confident on the issue of censorship. In 1866, a year after Donne licensed *It Is Never Too Late*, Reade assured the Select Committee, "I do not fear the present licenser."<sup>284</sup> The playwright's comment is more brazen than that found in the testimony of any other playwright who sat before the Committee, and it may indicate that Reade understood Donne's complacency toward the West End drama. A reviewer of Reade's play insisted that "how it got [produced] at all the Lord Chamberlain ought to tell us. Is that highly ornamental functionary and terror of music-halls content to take all dramatic rubbish upon trust as long as his faithful licenser is paid the regulation guineas?"<sup>285</sup> In this quotation we find the suggestion that the theatre community discerned a discrepancy between the censor's treatment of East End entertainments – which made him "the terror of music-halls" – and his comparative lack of concern with West End plays, which he licensed "upon trust." More surprising, still, is the indication here that, at least in the opinion of this reviewer, the West End required more thorough scrutiny from Donne.

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<sup>283</sup> Reade's self-censorship (particularly if we accept Barrett's claim that it was intended to dupe the censor) may also give additional credibility to the hypothesis that the anonymously made cuts to *Gold* were made, not by Stirling or Donne, but by the playwright, and ostensibly to appease the latter. Barrett also observes that critics were more offended by the prison sets, than they were by anything spoken by the actors – "Even so perceptive a reader as Donne could not anticipate how graphically the prison scenes would come to life on the Princess's stage" (7) – a discrepancy which perhaps drew attention to the drama's potential as a *visually* dissenting form.

<sup>284</sup> Question #6745. Like so many of his contemporaries, Reade was, at least outwardly, in favour of dramatic censorship, so long as "his function [is] confined to what is seditious or against good morals" (#6746).

<sup>285</sup> *The Daily News* (5 October, 1865): 2.

That Donne sanctioned a West End production of Reade's play suggests that, for all of his explanations regarding the subject matter he suppressed, he was often consciously or unconsciously censoring these subjects for particular kinds, that is classes, of audiences. This unconcern toward the West End drama was not restricted to Donne, but appears to be part of a larger indifference on the part of the state bureaucracy. As Davis and Emeljanow observe, "the absence of material in the Lord Chamberlain's papers points to the fact that the office had little interest in West End audiences unlike its preoccupation with those in the East End" (*Reflecting* 168). As we saw in the case of Lemon and Taylor's play, *Slave Life*, many West End dramatists, like those in the East, willingly amended their scripts to appease the censor. However, when a West End playwright did not tame incendiary material in a play, the Examiner often seemed to take little notice. Donne's decision to allow the production of Reade's play merely bears out what we have seen in previous chapters: it was often not subversive ideas that the Examiner primarily censored, but rather parts of the population considered inherently subversive themselves. What this point foregrounds is the profound suspicion with which many marginalized segments of the population were viewed by those in established positions of power. Censorship, while certainly inflicted on both the East and West End drama, had as its chief focus those members of Victorian society considered to be potentially disruptive to the social order. What we observe, then, is that in this period of increasing political agitation and reform, the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner was part of a state apparatus charged with consolidating and defending the privileges of elite institutions and social stations. Thus, we find further evidence that the prerogatives of



the Victorian social hierarchy were neither taken for granted by those who enjoyed them, nor accepted without contest by those who did not. Rather the class system and its accompanying imbalances were vigorously defended by those charged, like Donne, with maintaining the *status quo*. For us, then, the significance of Reade's *It Is Never Too Late* is not whether the press recommended that West End audiences see this play, but that the censor did not care if they did.

The unusual permissiveness Donne showed to Reade's *It Is Never Too Late* makes the play an exception to James Stottlar's observation that "no writer who had anything to say would attempt to say it on the stage" (277).<sup>286</sup> The unanimity with which the play's social didacticism was attacked in the press is surely evidence that *It Is Never Too Late* was out of step, and arguably ahead, of its time. It was precisely because of this discord between Reade's artistic agenda and the tastes of his critics, that Léone Rivers saw him as anticipating later and more sophisticated writers such as Galsworthy and Ibsen.<sup>287</sup> In the end, perhaps the best we can say of *It Is Never Too Late*, is that, for some Victorians, it came too early.

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<sup>286</sup> Note, while Stottlar is referring specifically here to the tastes of Donne, given the sympathy and appreciation which so many playgoers had for the Examiner's intervention on behalf of public taste (and, indeed, to the extent that playgoers often censored, as in the case of this play, what Donne did not), Stottlar's comments have been extended here to include the tastes of West End theatre goers, and especially critics.

<sup>287</sup> Rivers' comparison cited in Sheila Smith, 99. Rivers edited the play for Toulouse (Impr. Toulousaine) published in 1940 (see Michael Hays' Works Cited in "Representing Empire," 146).

## CONCLUSION

The contribution of this dissertation to Victorian Studies lies in its continuation of earlier studies of Victorian dramatic censorship. The work of John Russell Stephens and James Stottlar offer valuable surveys of the influence of Donne, in particular, and censorship in general, on the English stage. No book-length study of Donne's career as Examiner has yet emerged, however, and it has been more than a quarter of a century since the studies by Stephens and Stottlar were published. Moreover, recent scholarship in the fields of censorship and theatre history has made it timely to undertake a fresh consideration of the subject. Richard Foulkes' *Church and Stage in Victorian England* (1997), George Taylor's *The French Revolution on the London Stage* (2000) and Edward Ziter's *The Orient on the Victorian Stage* (2003) are instances of the recent interest among scholars in the nineteenth-century theatre's engagement with contemporary issues. They examine the English drama's often conflicted relationship with the nation's political and social concerns. With the exception of Foulkes' book, however, the role of the Examiner in the Victorian theatre's treatment of these issues has been largely unacknowledged. Likewise, Jacky Bratton, in *New Readings in Theatre History* (2003), considers the frequent intersections of politics and the drama in the nineteenth century, examining, among other things, the influence of the 1832 Reform Act on the English theatre. In these essays, Bratton draws attention to the drama as 'popular culture,' and to the struggle by various class interests to appropriate and control the cultural power of the theatre, and "attempting to monopolise the cultural media for their own voices" (136); the

role of the censor, however, is almost unmentioned.<sup>288</sup> Concurrent with these broader studies of Victorian theatre history, the scholarship of Allan Stuart Jackson, William G. Knight, as well as Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, surveys the specific cultural work done by individual theatres both in London's East and West End.<sup>289</sup> Davis and Emeljanow, unlike most other recent scholars of the Victorian theatre, do address Donne's influence on the stage, though their attention largely consists of Donne's responsibilities regarding the physical design and safety of theatres – a topic that is wholly overlooked by my study. While Davis and Emeljanow's book represents a tremendous contribution to the study of Victorian theatre, it nonetheless does little to further our understanding the practices of censorship exercised by the Examiner. And so, while there has been increased interest among Victorian scholars in the intersections between the theatrical and the political, the majority of recent studies have not addressed the contribution of the "quiet sanction" of Examiners, such as Donne, whose mandate was to police these very intersections. My dissertation begins to confront this oversight.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>288</sup> For reasons related to her thesis, Bratton's primary focus is on restrictions related to the licensing system of the patent theatres, which were abolished in 1843 (discussed in Chapter I, above), rather than the (in)direct censorship of specific scripts.

<sup>289</sup> See Knight's *A Major London 'Minor': the Surrey Theatre 1805-1865* (1997); Jackson's *The Standard Theatre of Victorian England* (1993), and Davis and Emeljanow's *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (2001).

<sup>290</sup> In this regard Victorianists are behind scholars of the eighteenth century, who have begun to address this gap. Matthew J. Kinservik's *Disciplining Satire* (2002) has refreshed interest in the subject of eighteenth-century theatre censorship begun by L. W. Conolly almost three decades ago. Kinservik clearly takes a fresh look at Conolly's now-dated study, aptly pointing out that "subsequent scholarship has shown that Conolly's conception of 'censorship' is quite limited" (9-10). In particular, Kinservik employs Foucault's idea of power's productive capacities to examine the type of drama that eighteenth-century censorship produced (98). A similarly Foucauldian approach has been taken by other studies in censorship, such as Annette Kuhn's *Cinema, Censorship and Sexuality, 1909-1925* (1988). For more on L. W. Conolly's examination of eighteenth-century dramatic censorship see, *The Censorship of English Drama 1737-1824* (1976).

I have argued here that the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays was an individual with unique powers, which, in the hands of an individual as self-conscious and methodical as Donne, gave the dramatic censor the potential to shape an entire segment of the nation's literature. Also, I have shown that the mandate of the Examiner was part of a larger attempt by England's political establishment to resist the forces of social change – what Cannadine calls “the collective and antagonistic identities found within the modern nation state” (59) – by preventing dissenting views from appearing in the nation's theatres, and especially those of London's East End. The very existence of the censor is evidence that Victorians understood, like Sir Robert Walpole a century before, that culture, and particularly popular culture, is an influential agent in the politics of the nation. I have demonstrated that, as many scholars contend, Victorian dramatists expressed class tensions not only through archetypal conflicts between characters, such as the poor hero(ine) and the rich villain, but also attempted to explore explicitly contemporary issues – such as abolition, Anglo-Jewish emancipation, class exploitation, prohibition and the repeal of the Corn Laws – even when these subjects were not, ultimately, allowed for theatrical presentation.

The understanding of the Examiner and his influence on the Victorian drama which I present in this study contrasts with Martha Vicinus's view that the “central problem of melodrama was that it raised serious issues and then could not resolve them” (“Helpless” 183). As we have seen, melodramas, such as the original version of *Mary Barton* for the Victoria Theatre or Reade's adaptation of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*, did provide solutions to the social issues they considered, though these solutions were

often rejected by the censor. Vicinus maintains that this “central problem” in melodrama arises from nineteenth-century audiences’ “need for reassurance amidst great social change [that therefore] meant an adherence to the dominant mores” (184) – mores which, perhaps not coincidentally, were typically defended by the reigning Examiner. It is interesting to speculate on the role that the censor played in forcing playwrights of the melodrama to conclude their plays’ central conflict between good and evil without challenging the social order. Vicinus compellingly argues that “Victorian domestic melodrama is doubly valuable for what it tells us about the ‘helpless and unfriended’ during a time of enormous social change, and for the insights it provides into the sources and value of sentimentality for Victorian audiences” (184). It may also turn out that these melodramas tell us something about their censor. What has so far been seen as an organic characteristic of the melodramatic *denouement* may turn out to be, in part, the artificial product of censorship.

This study has attempted both to reveal and to examine the overtly political temper of Victorian dramatists, in the face of Donne’s control of their profession. Dramatic censorship strives to control public rather than private sites of discourse, by sanctioning the performed space of the theatre and then bracketing audiences – and particularly those considered subversive to the *status quo* – from dramatic representations of contemporary debates or issues. In this way, a licensed production was tacitly assumed to have been vetted by a representative of the state. As Examiner, Donne acted as the social agent whose job it was to keep the performed drama at arm’s length from the social issues that loomed over it from other areas, such as the novel and the popular press,

indeed, from the very conscience of the nation. Donne, literally and symbolically, extended to playwrights the stamp of cultural legitimacy – an honour only afforded to plays that reflected, or at least that did not disturb, the pieties of the state. Not only is it evident that the government was vested in the Examiner's expurgation of controversial themes and topics, but it is clear that a significant portion of the theatregoing public approved of the censor's efforts. As a result, the English theatre of this period was a site of often conflicting objectives: on the one hand, Victorians wished the English drama to be more vibrant (like the French plays on which it so often relied) and more socially relevant (similar to Shakespeare or the Athenian dramatists); yet, on the other hand, these same Victorians often wanted playwrights prevented from engaging with contemporary issues. The drama, and Victorians' expectations of it, was a conflicted *mélange* of class anxiety, national envy, impractical idealism, and cultural nostalgia. As a consequence of these attitudes toward the theatre – and, more particularly, theatregoers – the Examiner became a node through which plays' content was filtered and streamed in accord with their intended audience. The cultural work of the censor was first to restrict the theatre's engagement with politically dissenting or sensitive issues, and, second, to prevent the East End drama in particular from entering the privileged zone of the 'legitimate,' thereby maintaining the cultural authority of West End theatres and, by extension, their audiences. Donne policed lower-class dramatists who competed in this period for cultural legitimacy – a competition that closely mirrored the working classes' ongoing contention for political authority via the electoral franchise. As Examiner, Donne ensured that the political concerns of East End audiences in particular were either

removed entirely from the stage, or subordinated to the interests of established institutions of authority. At stake in this contest were nothing less than the class prerogatives and sites of consolidated power inherent in the Victorian social order.

For ninety-four years after Donne's retirement in 1874, the Lord Chamberlain's Examiner of Plays continued to confer (and deny) the state's license upon the work of dramatists. It is my hope that this study, insofar as criticism can counteract the Examiner's influence (however belatedly), has both helped to uncover the effect of censorship on the drama in this period, and in some modest way aided the struggle for freedom of expression to prevail.

## Appendix I

### Excerpt from the Original and Revised Versions of *Mary Barton* (Victoria Theatre, 1850) Act I, Scene ii

#### Original Version

*Mary*

...tell me all about the great folks in London.

*Barton*

Mary – we mayn't [?] plead there, for men will not harken to us tho we weep tears of blood.

<Enter> *Job Legh*

Where is he – ah how do you do, I saw you pass and so I thought I'll just run in and welcome you, well how did you like London, why, tell us ah about it.

*Barton*

I can't tell you on it; it's as big as six Manchesters.

*Mary*

Well but Father did you see the Queen?

*Barton*

Well I believe I didn't, tho I thought many time[s] I did. You see there was a day appointed for us to go to parliament house, we were all put 2 and 2 and the petition as were yards long carried by the foremost and when we got into the street leading to [the] Queen's palace it was there I thought I saw her.

*Job*

Well, what happened when you got to parliament house, what did they say[?]

*Barton*

I'd rather speak naught about – as long as I live our rejection that day will abide in my heart, we are left to the mercy of our masters and heaven help us.

*Job*

Sure there's many a master that's good and better than us John, and Mr. Carson told me the other day he must retrench.



**Barton**

Did he ever see his child die for want of food. Talk no more Job Legh.

### **Revised Version**

**Mary**

...tell me all about the great folks in London.

**Barton**

Great! Oh Mary tis the world! For men of all climes are there – there all the quarters of the globe send the products of their industry. All that is rich, all that is rare is garnered in the heart of that giant town – the lofty palace and the lowly dwelling rest side by side – but oh! how vast the difference between the owner of the lordly mansion and the toil oppressed dweller of the humble [way].

**Mary**

Father we should not murmur – He that cares for all is with both and watches the deeds of all. He will in his own good time solace the suffering and relieve the sorrowing from their burden.

<Enter> **Job Legh**

Where is he – ah how do you do, I saw you pass and so I thought I'll just run in and welcome you, well how did you like London, why, tell us ah about it.

**Barton**

I can't tell you on it; it's as big as six Manchesters.

**Mary**

How did you like London?

**Barton**

Don't ask me child – I went there with a loaded spirit and a heavy heart; he that is so burdened hath no eye to look upon the careless and the happy – besides what was I? The stranger in London is as lonely as the wanderer of the desert.

**Mary**

Ah let me dwell with the friends that have grown with me, hear tones that delighted me in my infancy – Father we have suffered and may suffer more, but let us bow to the burden. The storm passes and the sun bursts forth again to health and vigour.

***Job***

Why Mary I declare it's quite a treat to hear you talk.

***Barton***

She is a good girl and deserves a better lot in life....

## Appendix II

### Excerpts from the Original and Revised Versions of *Mary Barton* (Victoria Theatre, 1850) Act II, Scene i

#### Original Version

<Act II, Scene i – Room in a Tavern  
*Barton, Farside, Slater and others*>

##### *Barton*

Well then my brothers what is your answer to this – I tell you, let our task masters know that the age of reason has arrived, you must steel your heart against the oppressor tho that oppressor were your own son[.] Tell them that you will no longer crawl the earth like brutes, that you are men, that you must have and that they must grant. Look here lads, while we delegates were with the masters today, – Young Harry Carson got making game on us with his pencil, I seed him do it, he shewed it round and they all looked at us and laughed[.] He chucked it in [the] fireplace, but I got [a] waiter to give it me after were all over[;] look, what do you think of it[?]

##### *Farside*

That's John Slater, I'd known him anyhow by his long nose.

##### *Slater*

That's me any how, it's the very way I'm obliged to pin my waistcoat up to hide that I've gotten no shirt. I could laugh at a jest tho it did tell agin myself, if I were not starving, if I could keep from thinking of them at home as is clemming, but with their cries ringing in my ears, why I cannot laugh at aught[.]

##### *Barton*

Now listen lads our masters have large orders for which they will be well paid, we ask but a share of that pay, and after 3 years bad time and little work, and they say no. Well one would think that were enough but they go and make jesting pictures on us, I would give the last drop of my blood to be avenged on this chap[. B]ut it's not against those who keep at work I'll have aught to do anymore {Bus} who called me a coward, well everyone to his opinion. But I saw the man that Jones threw vitriol on, his poor face wrapped in clothes and not a limb but were trembling with pain, his moans too about his wife and children too were dreadful to hear. I thought we were all cowards to attack those poor as ourselves, who must choose between vitriol and starvation – have at the masters I say, them as makes pictures on our wretchedness[.]

***Farside***

I'd like to give them masters a bit of a fright.

***Omnes***

Aye the masters[.]

***Barton***

Here is the picture paper, we'll tear it up as many as there are here, mark one bit and him as draws it shall save but one of the masters.

***Omnes***

Aye.

***Barton***

You swear[?]

***Omnes***

We do.

### **Revised Version**

***Barton***

We have no recourse left us but mute remonstrance – let us shew our employers how small the need [?] that's granted to our labour; let us convince them that our wants are greater than they think, then justice and mercy may teach them to be more liberal[.]

***Omnes***

We will[.]

***Barton***

There is one who ever crosses our purpose – who poisons the minds of those to whom we appeal, who turns to scorn and derision our wrongs and sufferings, who even this day has added fuel to that fire that burns between the master and the man.

***Omnes***

Name[.]

***Barton***

Young Harry Carson – here behold your names and read the malice of his envenomed pen – this document fell from his pocket. I was hastening after him to return it when my

eye fell upon my name and curiosity induced me to read it. I did and found malevolence in every line.

***Farside***

My name[.]

***Others***

And mine – and mine[.]

***Barton***

Tis such as he that ruins the good feeling that should exist between master and man –  
Twould be well to teach him that the wrongs and sufferings of the poor are not to be trifled with. Do we not crush the crawling insect when there's danger in his sting[?]

***Omnes***

We do[.]

*etc. etc.*

### Appendix III

#### ***The Times' Review of Harriet Beecher Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (3 September, 1852): 5***

Twenty thousand copies of this book, according to its title page, are circulating among the American people, but three times as many thousands more have probably issued from the American press since the title page was written. According to the *Boston Traveller*, the authoress has already received from her publishers the sum of "\$10,300 as her copyright premium on three months' sales of the work, – we believe the largest sum of money ever received by any author, either American or European from the sales of a single work in so short a period of time." *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is at every railway book-stall in England, and in every third traveller's hand. The book is a decided hit. It takes its place with "Pickwick," with Louis Napoleon, with the mendicant who suddenly discovers himself heir to 20, 000£ a year, and, in fact, with every man whose good fortune it has been to fall asleep Nobody, and to awake in the morning an institution in the land. It is impossible not to feel respect for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

The object of the work is revealed in the pictorial frontispiece. Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe is an abolitionist, and her book is a vehement and unrestrained argument in favour of her creed. She does not preach a sermon, for men are accustomed to nap and nod under the pulpit; she does not indite [*sic*] a philosophical discourse, for philosophy is exacting, is solicitous for truth, and scorns exaggeration. Nor does the lady condescend to survey her intricate subject in the capacity of a judge, for the judicial seat is fixed high above human passion, and she is no temper to mount it. With the instinct of her sex, the clever authoress takes the shortest road to her purpose, and strikes at the convictions of her readers by assailing their hearts. She cannot hold the scales of justice with a steady hand, but she has learnt to perfection the craft of the advocate. *Euclid*, she well knows, is no child for effecting social revolutions, but an impassioned song may set a world in conflagration. Who shall deny to a true woman the use of her true weapon? We are content to warn the unsuspecting reader of their actual presence!

Perhaps there is, after all, but one method of carrying on a crusade, and that unscrupulous fighting is the rightful warfare of the crusader. Mrs. Stowe, having made up her mind that slavery is an abomination in the sight of God and man, thinks of nothing but the annihilation of the pernicious system. From the first page of her narrative to the last this vice is paramount in her mind, and colours all her drawing. That she will secure proselytes we take for granted; for it is in the nature of enthusiasm to inoculate with passionate zeal the strong-hearted as well as the feeble-minded. That she will convince the world of the purity of her own motives and of the hatefulness of the sin she denounces is equally clear; but that she will help in the slightest degree towards the removal of the gigantic evil that afflicts her soul is a point upon which we may express the greatest doubt; nay, is a matter upon which unfortunately, we have very little doubt at all, in as much as we are certain that the very readiest way to rivet the fetters of slavery in

these critical times is to direct against all slaveholders in America the opprobrium and indignation which such works as *Uncle Tom's Cabin* are sure to excite.

It is scarcely necessary to give in this place and in detail the plot of Mrs. Stowe's striking production; for striking and meritorious it undoubtedly is. The lady has great skill in the delineation of character; her hand is vigorous and firm, her mastery over human feeling is unquestionable, and her humorous efforts are unimpeachable. We know of no book in which the negro character finds such successful interpretation, and appears so life-like and so fresh. The scenes in which the negroes are represented at their domestic labours or conversing with each other reveal a familiar acquaintance with negro [*sic*] life, and a capacity for displaying it that cannot be mistaken. The slang of the "Ethiopian serenaders" [*sic*] for once gives place to thoughts and language racy of the soil, and we need not say how refreshing it is to be separated for a season from the conventional Sambo of the modern stage. But even as an artist Mrs. Stowe is not faultless. She exhibits but ordinary ability in the construction of her story. Her narrative is rather a succession of detached scenes than a compact, well-jointed whole; and many of the scenes are tedious from their similarity and repetition. The reader is interested in the fate of two heroes, but their streams of adventure never blend. The scene closes upon Uncle Tom to open upon George Harris, and it closes upon George Harris to open upon Uncle Tom, – a style of proceeding well understood at the Adelphi theatre where the *facetiae* of Wright must duly relieve the *diablerie* of O. Smith, – but certainly not yet recognized in the classic realms of art.

Uncle Tom is the slave of Mr. Shelby, the proprietor of a certain estate in Kentucky, which has fallen into disorder in consequence of the speculative habits of its owner, who, at the opening of the tale, is forced to part not only with Uncle Tom, but with a young quadroon woman named Eliza, the servant of Mrs. Shelby, and the wife of George Harris, a slave upon a neighbouring estate. Uncle Tom is carried off Mr. Shelby's estate by the new purchaser, one Mr. Haley; but Eliza, dreading separation from her husband and her subsequent fate, takes flight with her child, and is ultimately joined to her mate on the free soil of Canada. The two volumes of which the book is made up are occupied, as we have hinted, with the adventures of Uncle Tom and George Harris, until the former dies a Christian martyr, and the latter becomes a model liberator in the black Republic of Liberia.

Uncle Tom is a paragon of virtue. He is more than mortal in his powers of endurance, in his devotion, in his self-denial, in his Christian profession and practice, and in his abhorrence of spirituous liquors. When Mr. Haley in his turn sold Tom to a new master, the good-natured owner informed his new acquisition that he would make him "coachy" on condition that he would not get drunk more than once a week, unless in cases of emergency, whereupon "Tom looked surprised and rather hurt, and said, 'I never drink, Mas'r.'" This may be taken as a keynote to the tune Tom is eternally playing for our edification and moral improvement. He always "looks surprised and rather hurt" on such occasions. He is described as a fine powerful negro, walking through the world with a Bible in his hands, and virtuous indignation on his lips, both ready to be called into requisition on the slightest provocation, in season and out of season, at work or at play, by your leave or without it, in sorrow or in joy, for the benefit of his superiors or for the

castigation of his equals. A prominent fault of this production is indicated in these facts. In her very eagerness to accomplish her amiable intention, Mrs. Stowe ludicrously stumbles and falls very far short of her object. She should surely have contented herself with proving the infamy of the slave system, and not been tempted to establish the superiority of the African nature over that of the Anglo-Saxon and of every other known race. We have read some novels in our time, and occupied not a few precious hours in the proceedings of their heroines and heroes; but we can scarcely remember ever to have encountered either gentle knight or gentler dame to whom we could not easily have brought home the imputation of human frailty. The mark of the first fall has been there, though the hues might be of the faintest. Now, if Adam, before his decline, had been a black, as some ethnologists still insist, he could not possibly have been more thoroughly without flaw than Uncle Tom. In him the said mark is eradicated once and for ever. He represents in his person the only well-authenticated instance we know, in modern times, of that laudable principle, in virtue of which a man presents his left cheek to be smitten after his first has been slapped. The more you "larrup" Uncle Tom the more he blesses you; the greater his bodily agony the more intense becomes his spiritual delight. The more he ought to complain, the more he doesn't; the less he has cause for taking a pleasant view of life and human dealings, the less he finds reason to repine; and his particular sentiments are all to match. Tom has reason to believe that Mr. Shelby will not wish him "good by" before he starts off for the south with Mr. Haley. "That ar hurt me more than sellin, it did." Tom's wife is heartbroken at his departure, and naturally reproaches Mr. Shelby for turning him into money. Tom, always superior to human nature, tenderly rebukes her. "I'll tell ye, Chloe, it goes agin me to hear one word agin Mas'r. Wasn't he put in my arms a baby? It's natur [*sic*] I should think a heap of him." Tom "had every faculty and temptation to dishonesty," but his "simplicity of nature was impregnable," and he was never known to make a mistake in his life, although "trusted to an unlimited extent by a careless master, who handed him a bill without looking at it, and pocketed the change without counting it." What have we been doing all these years, during which, at great cost of time, labour and money, we have despatched missionary after missionary to the heathen, but neglected needful labours at home in order to effect works of supererogation abroad? Before we expor [*sic*] another white enthusiast from Exeter-hall, let us import a dozen or two blacks to teach Exeter-hall its most obvious Christian duties. If Mrs. Stowe's portraiture is correct, and if Uncle Tom is a type of a class, we deliberately assert that we have nothing more to communicate to the negro, but everything to learn from his profession and practice. No wonder that Tom works miracles by his example. Such sudden conversions from brutality to humility, from glaring infidelity to the most childlike belief, as are presented to our admiration in these volumes, have never been wrought on earth since the days of the Apostles. One of the best sketches in the book is that of a little black imp, by name Topsy, who loves lying for the sake of lying, who is more mischievous than a monkey, and in all respects as ignorant; yet she has hardly had time to remove from her soul the rubbish accumulated there from her birth, and to prepare her mind for the reception of the most practical truths, before – without any sufficient reason – "a ray of real belief, a ray of heavenly love, penetrates the darkness of her heathen soul," and enables her in due time to accept the



responsible appointment of missionary to a station in Africa. Uncle Tom not only converts by his arguments Mr. St. Clare, his master in new Orleans, who is a gentleman, a scholar, a philosopher, and as shrewd a hand in a discussion as you are ever likely to encounter, but positively redeems in a moment from utter savageness and the lowest degradation wretches in whom the sense of feeling is extinct, and from whom we have been taught, until Tom took them in hand, to recoil in horror. It is no respect for religion that we feel when Tom, beaten almost to death by his owner, is visited by a poor woman, who offers him water to relieve his mortal pains, but who is quietly informed by the sufferer that a chapter from the Bible is better than drink. Well-fed and comfortably-housed hypocrisy is apt to deliver itself of such utterances, but certainly not true piety in its hours of anguish and physical extremity. A quadroon slave called Cassy is introduced to the reader under the most painful circumstances. Her career has been one of compelled vice until her spirit has finally acquired a wild and positively fiendish character. You read the authoress's [*sic*] vivid descriptions, you note the creature's conduct, and you are convinced that it will take years to restore human tenderness to that bruised soul, to say nothing of belief in Heaven and its solemn and mysterious promises. But you err! In an instant, and most miraculously, "the long winter of despair, the ice of years gives way, and the dark despairing woman weeps and prays." She, too, "yields at once, and with her whole soul, to every good influence, and becomes a devout and tender Christian." This monstrous instance is outdone by another. Sambo and Quimbo are two black rascals, who have been trained "in savageness and brutality as systematically as bulldogs, and, by long practice in hardness and cruelty, have brought their whole nature to about the same range of capacities." When we first behold them we are told to mark "their coarse, dark, heavy features; their barbarous, guttural, half-brute intonation; their dilapidated garments fluttering in the wind," and to remember the apt illustration before us "of the fact that brutal men are lower even than animals." So long as these worthies are on the scene, their actions correspond exactly with their appearance, and with the account given of their canine bringing up; they go on from bad to worse, and at the worst, when their restitution to humanity seems utterly and for ever hopeless, then it is that Tom "pours forth a few energetic sentences of that wondrous One, -- his life, his death, his everlasting presence and power to save," -- that "they weep -- both the two savage men," -- that Tom cries to Heaven to give him two more souls, and that the prayer is immediately and satisfactorily answered by their happy and most astounding conversion. Surely there is something more real and substantial in Mrs. Stowe's volumes to account for their extraordinary popularity than such absolute and audacious trash. It would be blasphemy to believe in such revelations, and common sense and a feeling of what is due to our better nature will assuredly prevent all but the veriest [*sic*] fanatics from accepting as truth such exaggerated and unholy fables.

An error, almost as fatal as the one adverted to, is committed by our authoress in the pains she takes to paint her negroes, mulattos, and quadroons, in the very whitest white, while she is equally careful to disfigure her whites with the very blackest black. The worst negroes are ultimately taken to heaven, but few of the fair coloured are warranted, living or dying, without blemish. The case of slavery is submitted in this work, it is true, to the reader's enlightened attention, but before his judgment can calmly

set itself to work his sympathies are thoroughly secured by a lady who takes good care not to let them loose again. The very first scene of the book introduces us to an offensive dealer in slaves and to a slave-proprietor without feeling, and both are bargaining for the disposal of slaves who, in personal appearance and in moral attainments, are not to be surpassed on either side of the Atlantic. What becomes of the judgment under such an ordeal, if the intellect be weak and the heart be strong? We are not ignorant of the mode in which great morals are enforced at our minor theatres, and of the means there taken to impress the imagination and to instruct the intellect by help of the domestic melodrama. A villain on the Surrey side of the water is a villain indeed, and a persecuted heroine is persecuted beyond endurance in any other place. It is very easy to educe startling lessons from a dramatic work, as it is easy enough for an artist to delineate fear by painting a man with staring eyes, open mouth, and hair on end. Truth, however, demands more delicate dealing, and art that would interpret Truth must watch the harmonies of Nature, which charms not by great "effects," but by her blended symmetry and grace, by her logical and unforced developments. Did we know nothing of the subject treated by Mrs. Stowe, we confess that we should hesitate before accepting much of her coin as sterling metal. Her quadroon girl is all too like the applauded slave of the Victoria. "The rich, full, dark eye, with its long lashes – the ripples of silky black hair, the delicately-formed hand and trim foot and ankle, the dress of the neatest possible fit, which set off to advantage her finely-moulded shape, the peculiar air of refinement, the softness of voice and manner," are insisted upon with a pertinacity which we look for in vain when we come face to face with the less fortunately-endowed specimens of the Anglo-Saxon race. Her husband, George, a mulatto, being rather blacker than herself is painted, according to rule, in still brighter colours. He is "possessed of a handsome person and pleasing manners," is "a general favourite in the factory" where he works, "his adroitness and ingenuity cause him to be considered the first hand in the place," and he has "invented a machine for the cleaning of hemp, which displays quite as much mechanical genius as Whitney's cotton-gin." During his flight to Canada George disguises himself. Being informed of the circumstance, we are introduced to an hotel in Kentucky. "It was late in a drizzly afternoon that a traveller alighted at the door. He was very tall, with a dark Spanish complexion, fine expressive black eyes, and close curling hair, also of a glossy blackness. His well-formed aquiline nose, straight thin lips, and the admirable contour of his finely formed limbs, impressed the whole company instantly with the idea of something uncommon." Who can the distinguished stranger be but M. Lemaitre or Mr. Wallack, representing for our approval and delight George Harris, the runaway mulatto? If we have any doubt it is removed at once when we are told that the said George being addressed by a stranger at the hotel "stood up like a rock and put out his hand with the air of a prince," just as we have seen Lemaitre do it as *Le Docteur Noire*. An indifferent advocate may make one of two mistakes. He may understate his client's case, or he may overstate it. Able as she is, Mrs. Stowe has committed the latter fault, and will suffer in the minds of the judicious from the female error. With so good a cause it is a pity that her honest zeal should have outrun discretion.

The gravest fault of the book has, however, to be mentioned. Its object is to abolish slavery. Its effect will be to render slavery more difficult than ever of

abolishment. Its very popularity constitutes its greatest difficulty. It will keep ill-blood at boiling point, and irritate instead of pacifying those whose proceedings Mrs. Stowe is anxious to influence on behalf of humanity. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was not required to convince the haters of slavery of the abomination of the "institution;" of all books, it is the least calculated to weigh with those whose prejudices in favour of slavery have yet to be overcome, and whose interests are involved in the perpetuation of the system. If slavery is to cease in America, and if the people of the United States, who fought and bled for their liberty and nobly won it, are to remove the disgrace that attaches to them for forging chains for others which they will not tolerate of their own limbs, the work of enfranchisement must be a movement, not forced upon slaveowners, but voluntarily undertaken, accepted and carried out by the whole community. There is no federal law which can compel the slave States to resign the "property" which they hold. The States of the south are as free to maintain slavery as are the States of the north to rid themselves of the scandal. Let the attempt be made imperiously and violently to dictate to the south, and from that hour the Union is at an end. We are aware that to the mind of the "philanthropist" the alternative brings no alarm, but to the rational thinkers, to the statesman, and to all men interested in the world's progress, the disruption of the bond that holds the American States together is fraught [*sic*] with calamity, with which the present evil of slavery – a system destined sooner or later to fall to pieces under the weight of public opinion and its own infamy – bears no sensible comparison. The writer of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and similar well-disposed authors have yet to learn that to excite the passions of their readers in favour of their philanthropic schemes is the very worst mode of getting rid of a difficulty, which, whoever may be to blame for its existence, is part and parcel of the whole social organization of a large proportion of the States, and cannot be forcibly removed without instant anarchy, and all its accompanying mischief.

Would Mrs. Stow have liberty proclaimed throughout the States at the present moment? For her own sake, and for the sake of her countrymen, we hope not. We do not believe that the blacks in America are prepared for sudden emancipation; and, if they are, we are certain that the whites are wholly incapable of appreciating the blessing. Sir Charles Lyell, in his *Second Visit to the United States of North America*, very properly remarks that the fanaticism of abolitionists constitutes one difficulty in the way of emancipation, the prejudices of perpetuists [*sic*] another, but that the jealousy of an unscrupulous democracy is a far more terrible obstacle than either. In the same spirit, the writer of a remarkable article in the *North American Review* last year observed, that "the whites need to go through a training for freedom scarcely less than the blacks, the master being as much fettered to one end of the chain as the slave to the other." All impartial witnesses speak to the same effect. Mr. Featherstonhaugh, no lover of slavery, who passed years in the United States, declares that slavery is a positive blessing to every negro who would receive nothing but liberty from his owner. For, in truth, what is liberty worth to the possessor if it be accompanied with social degradation of the worst description? The manumitted slaves of Jamaica are, in the sight of the law, in the estimation of their fellows, and in the eye of God, equals with those whose actual "property" they were the other day. Importance no longer attaches to complexion in that island. The white and coloured people intermarry, coloured people hold responsible

offices, and are received as guests at the governor's table. An American who visited Jamaica in 1850 states that –

“At the Surrey assizes, where Sir Joshua Row presided, two coloured lawyers were sitting at the barristers' table, and of the jury all but three were coloured. Seven-tenths of the whole police force of the island, amounting to about 800 men, were estimated to be coloured. in the Legislative Assembly, composed of from 48 to 50 members, 10 or a dozen were coloured; and the public printers of the Legislature, who were also editors of the leading Government paper, were both coloured men.”

Compare this salutary state of things with the certain doom of the negro suddenly emancipated by his American master! The democratic horror of black blood in the United States knows no bounds. Sir Charles Lyell has a pathetic account of a young girl he met on board a steamer in America, and who was rudely summoned from the dinner-table because – though free as himself – she had presumed – having one streak of negro blood in her otherwise unsullied veins – to sit at the same board with a party of pure whites. He had previously been shocked by remarking that no coloured man, slave or freeman, how far soever [*sic*] removed from the negro stock, however respectable his appearance, however cultivated his mind, was allowed to take his meals while the very meanest white on board had yet to satisfy his hunger. What avail the pathetic appeals, the painful incidents, the passionate denunciations with which *Uncle Tom's Cabin* abounds in the teeth of such facts as these? Let it be borne in mind that this instinctive and openly proclaimed physical disgust and abhorrence of the negro race is not peculiar to the South, but is even more strongly evident in the North; that it is no offensive characteristic of the slaveowner, but is a vice equally rampant in the self-satisfied and complacent soul of the agitating abolitionist. Blacks are not stocks or stones; we know them to be capable of high civilization, and to be susceptible of the noblest emotions. Improved public opinion all over the world is doing much for them, and education and religion are doing still more. They are not unconscious of their social inferiority in Republican America, for they are hourly made to feel it. Imagine them liberated to-morrow in those portions of the United States where they outnumber the whites and where they would only have to raise their liberated hands in order to strike down the traditional enemies of their race, their once tyrannical owners, their always contemptuous social superiors. Hate begets hate, and a war of races secures the rapid deterioration and decline of all the combatants. We may well shrink before rashly inviting so bloody and disastrous a conflict.

And be it stated to the credit of the slaveowners of the South, that they are fully alive to the danger of the portentous struggle, and have of late years shown no indisposition to help in their own emancipation as well as in that of the slave, provided they may only escape the dire catastrophe we speak of. It is certain that a large class of slaveowners in the South are most desirous to relieve their soil of the stain and inconvenience of slavery, if the tremendous step can be taken with safety to all parties concerned in the act of liberation. Those efforts made in the South to improve the condition of the slave show at least that humanity is not dead in the bosoms of the proprietors. Mrs. Stowe has certainly not done justice to this branch of the subject. Horrors in connexion [*sic*] with slavery – itself a horror – unquestionably exist; but all

accounts – save her own, and those of writers actuated by her extreme views – concur in describing the general condition of the southern slave as one of comparative happiness and comfort, such as many a free man in the United Kingdom might regard with envy. One authority on this point is too important to be overlooked. In the year 1842 a Scotch weaver, named William Thomson, travelled through the southern States. He supported himself on his way by manual labour; he mixed with the humblest classes, black and white, and on his return home he published an account of his journeyings [*sic*]. He had quitted Scotland a sworn hater of slave proprietors, but he confessed that experience had modified his views on this subject to a considerable degree. He had witnessed slavery in most of the slaveholding States, he had lived for weeks among negroes in cotton plantations, and he asserted that he had never beheld one-fifth of the real suffering that he had seen among the labouring poor in England. Nay more, he declared –

“That the members of the same family of negroes are not so much scattered as are those of working men in Scotland, whose necessities compel them to separate at an age when the American slave is running about gathering health and strength.”

Ten years have not increased the hardships of the southern slave. During that period colonization has come to his relief – education has, legally or illegally, found its way to his cabin, and Christianity has added spiritual consolations to his allowed, admitted physical enjoyments. It has been justly said that to those men of the South who have done their best for the negro under the institution of slavery must we look for any great effort in favour of emancipation, and they who are best acquainted with the progress of events in those parts declare that at this moment “there are powerful and irresistible influences at work in a large part of the slave States tending towards the abolition of slavery within these boundaries.”

We can well believe it. The world is working its way towards liberty, and the blacks will not be left behind in the onward march. Since the adoption of the American constitution seven States have voluntarily abolished slavery. When that constitution was proclaimed there was scarcely a free black in the country. According to the last census, the free blacks amount to 418,173, and of these 233,691 are blacks of the South, liberated by their owners, and not by the force of law. We cannot shut our eyes to these facts. Neither can we deny that, desirable as negro emancipation may be in the United States, abolition must be the result of growth, not of revolution, must be patiently wrought out by means of the American constitution, and not in bitter spite of it. America cannot for any time resist the enlightened spirit of our age, and it is manifestly her interest to adapt her institutions to its temper. That she will eventually do so if she be not a divided household – if the South be not goaded to illiberality [*sic*] by the North – if public writers deal with the matter in the spirit of conciliation, justice, charity, and truth, we will not permit ourselves to doubt. That she is alive to the necessities of the age is manifest from the circumstance that, for the last four years, she has been busy in preparing the way for emancipation by a method that has not failed in older countries to remove national troubles almost as intolerable as that of slavery itself. We have learnt to believe that the old world is to be saved and renewed by means of emigration. Who shall say that the new world – in visible danger from the presence of a dark inheritance bequeathed to it by

Europe – shall not be rescued by the same providential means? The negro colony of Liberia, established by the United States, extends along the western coast of Africa a distance of more than 500 miles. the civilized black population amounts to 8,000 souls. The heathen population is over 200,000. The soil of the colony is fertile, its exports are daily increasing, it has already entered into diplomatic relations with Great Britain and France. A Government is established which might have been framed by the whitest skins; 2,000 communicants are in connexion [*sic*] with its churches; 1,500 children attend its Sabbath schools. Education has become – would that it were so here – a national obligation, and the work of instruction and conversion is carried on by educated negroes among their brethren, who cannot fail to appreciate the service and to accept the blessing. The refuge afforded by Liberia for the gradual reception of the manumitted and civilized slaves of the United States we hold to be the most promising element in the question, upon the tranquil settlement of which the happiness and political existence of the United States depend. It will enable America to save herself and to achieve a work far nobler than that of winning her own political independence. The civilisation of Africa hangs largely upon her wisdom. A quarter of the world may be Christianized by the act which enables America to perform the first of Christian duties. We have said that the process of liberation is going on, and that we are convinced the South in its own interests will not be laggard in the labour. Liberia and similar spots on the earth's surface proffer aid to the South, which cannot be rejected with safety. That the aid may be accepted with alacrity and good heart, let us have no more *Uncle Tom's Cabins* engendering ill will, keeping up bad blood, and rendering well-disposed, humane, but critically placed men their own enemies and the stumbling blocks to civilisation and to the spread of glad tidings from Heaven.

## Appendix IV

### *The Times' Review of Taylor and Lemon's Slave Life, (30 November, 1852): 8*

Dramatic authors who set about the task of turning a popular novel into an acting play generally content themselves with picking out some eight or ten of the most striking scenes and situations, and hurling then upon the stage without any of those connecting links which have cost the original narrator great trouble to fabricate. The result of the operation is a *rudie indigestaque moles*, which no one can possibly understand without previous knowledge of the novel, from which the incidents have been taken like stones from a quarry; but this does not trouble the dramatist. He knows that people come to see his work, precisely because they have already studied the subject in the more epic form, and he therefore assumes that knowledge which a dramatist, writing under other circumstances, feels bound to communicate in the course of his play.

Messrs. Mark Lemon and Tom Taylor, who have furnished the Adelphi theatre with a new dramatic version of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, have so far departed from general usage, that they have deemed it expedient to compose a drama, with something like completeness in itself, and not to raise a mere heap of scenic crudities. The disjointed character of Mrs. Stowe's novel, in which two, if not three, disconnected stories are carried on at once, may have prompted them to attempt a reformation in the art of dramatizing, for certainly the want of unity, which is felt to be a defect even in the popular narrative, becomes still more objectionable in dramatic works, where oneness of purpose is always desirable. At all events, they have evidently gone about their task with a firm conviction that a remodelling was necessary, and they have shown great ingenuity in diminishing the number of distracting objects, by rolling a couple into one whenever occasion served. Thus Haley vanishes from the nominal *dramatis personae*, but his dialogue with Shelby and his purchase of Uncle Tom and Eliza's child – to whom Eliza herself is added as makeweight – is transferred to the terrible Legree. This very transfer allows the trifling personage Emmeline to be merged into the more important Eliza, while Cassy, instead of coming in at the end of the tale, appears as the guardian genius of innocence throughout. St. Clare, who, though a most amiable person in the book, would be the most inane of "walking gentlemen" on the stage, is omitted altogether, and Topsey [*sic*] is first introduced on Shelby's estate. As for Uncle Tom, his sufferings under Legree are greatly shortened by a stab with a bowie-knife, which the ferocious planter gives him in an ebullition of rage, while the piece is brought to a conclusion by the death of Legree, who is foiled in an attempt to pursue the flying family of George Harris, as Tom Loker is foiled in the novel, though with this slight difference, that Loker lives to become a worthy and pious man, whereas Legree perishes miserably.

The ingenuity of the authors, in tying a number of diverging threads into one knot, is greatly to be commended; but nevertheless their approximation to perfection of form has in some instances led to a sacrifice of distinctive character. The "smart" Haley is a very different being from the semi-human ruffian Legree, and the blending of the two

into one cannot seem satisfactory to the spectator who comes with the novel fresh in his mind. Topsey has evidently been a puzzle to the adaptors. They have perceived the effectiveness of the character, and also the smallness of the place it occupies in the narrative. The problem, therefore, was to elongate Topsey, and this is solved by making her assume male attire and follow George Harris in his escape, as a real boy attends him in the novel. But the rude simplicity of Topsey is thus destroyed, and it is hard to connect the astute black boy of the second and third acts with the strange, uncouth girl, who is reproduced from Mrs. Stowe's book in the first.

In bringing forward a series of effective scenes, sometimes without immediate assistance from the novel, the authors have shown great talent. Mr. Shelby's corn plantation, with the groups of singing and dancing blacks, the cotton plantation of Legree, the escape of Eliza across the frozen Ohio, and the representation of Mrs. Shelby's boudoir and Eliza's bedroom in a double scene, are especially well contrived, and by a careful *mise en scene* become very effective *tableaux*. The blocks of ice on which Eliza effects her escape are real platforms, which tremble under the feet of the actress, as she springs from one to the other, and Miss Woolgar, when she reaches the far distance, obtains the applause which would be bestowed on an actual feat.

As may be supposed, many actors are employed in giving substance to this dramatised tale. Madame Celeste as the extended Cassy, a personage who seems to hover between the terrestrial and the supernatural, displays that pantomimic talent which has already supported so many melodramas. Miss Woolgar, as Eliza, devoted to her child, put forth an intensity of feeling similar to that which makes such an irresistible impression in *Green Bushes*. Topsey in the first act – the half clad savage, with the hair twisted into points – was admirably represented by Mrs. Keeley, whose appearance was a signal for shouts of laughter and applause; but even that excellent actress could make nothing of the insipid boy into which Topsey was afterwards transformed. The first Topsey, with the almost idiotic laugh, and the indefinable propensity to cry when she received a kindness, was a real "gem," but the second Topsey was commonplace. The rhetorical George Harris was played by Mr. Wigan, who showed much of his "personation" [*sic*] talent as a Yankee trader, a character which, in the play, the young mulatto is made to assume in his endeavours to free Eliza from Legree. Mr. Emery as Legree, or rather Haley-Legree, has one of those uphill parts in which an actor has a great deal to do and small thanks to get, and he went through his takes with a sustained energy which merits high praise. As for poor Uncle Tom himself, he remains in proud defiance of the dramatist's art. His Methodism is his substance, and that Methodism cannot be reproduced on the boards of a theatre. Hence, he can only be a shadowy personage, and we doubt not that Mr. O. Smith would rather play any one of his customary white villains than this black perfection of mankind, even though he is provided with such a smart Aunt Chloe as is represented by Miss Collins. Aunt Chloe is, indeed, only a small personage, but she is rendered very effective by Miss Collins; hearty good-humour and her command of the negro dialect. The music of the piece comprises several melodies of the "Ethiopian" character, but graceful above the general average, and deriving an additional grace from the unpretending manner in which they were sung by Miss Laura Honey.



Loud applause and a general call for the actors followed the fall of the curtain; but we would recommend a curtailment of some of those less effective scenes which seem to arise as a natural result when a novel is used as the basis for a drama. The house was crowded.

## Appendix V

### Excerpt of Material Cut from Reade's *Gold* (IV.i.10-13)

*<Enter Two Chinese fighting, they roll over one another and bite each other – men separate [sic] them and hold them back by their tails, they grin at one another>*

Robinson. I'm shocked – Here's a sight for a European father – is that the way to fight – what are our fists given us for ye varmint, if we are to bite and scratch like cats in a well – I must do a bit of the Beak – bring those men – I beg their pardon – cats up before me – Hem! – *<he arranges himself>* -- What are there no places of Education among the long tails – no churches – no chapels – no schools – no goals? – now there China what's the Row?

1<sup>st</sup> Chinese. Jabber, Jabber, Jabber.

2<sup>nd</sup> Chinese. Jabber, Jabber, Jabber.

Both. Jabber, Jabber, Jabber.

Robinson. What the deuce is all that about?

Interpreter. Chinese Sir!

Robinson. What can't the beggars speak English?

Interpreter. No Sir!

Robinson. No wonder they don't know how to conduct themselves – you tell me the Story.

Interpreter. Sir! it is about a lump of Gold.

Robinson. Bring the Gold into Court – provide the cause of so sanguinary a disturbance. *<Interpreter makes No. 1 Chinese give him a bit of gold the size of a small pea – puts it on Table>*

Interpreter. There Sir!

Robinson. *<Regards it with dilating Eyes>* You know this is shocking – Asia I'm ashamed on ye – Ah! when I was a Thief I envied Beaks. Set up there so grand disposing with a graceful wave of their hand – their fellow creatures one to Tothill Fields – on[e] to the Penitentiary – another to Newgate and another to the Parish Soup palace – but since I took a Beak's eye view of man I'm ashamed of the Brute – and pity the Bird proceed with the evidence.

Interpreter. This one saw the gold shining – and he said to the other “Ah!”

Robinson. No! did he though? what was the Chinese for Ah?

Interpreter. Why Ah! Sir.

Robinson. Ah! come the beggars have got hold of some English words though – they are not quite in the dark – Go on.

Interpreter. The other pounced on it first – so they both claim it.

Robinson. Well I call it a plain case.

Interpreter. So I told them Sir.

Robinson. Exactly – which do you think yourself young man?

Interpreter. Why I told them “Losers seekers – Finders keepers... [”]

Robinson. Of course – and which was the finder?

Interpreter. Why of course sir the one that – hem! – well I should say the one that – but then to be sure – Ah!

Robinson. What don’t you see? Eh? Why it must be the one that – ugh!

*<furiously> drat you why could not one of you find it and the other find another – or not find anything at all – <He scratches his head presently his countenance becomes gradually Radiant [sic]> Remove the prisoners <They are taken off> -- Are they the prisoners, or the witnesses? hanged if I know. I should’nt [sic] like to be a beak – see Mr. Levi. I have got a Gold pea just like theirs – you keep theirs a moment – fetch in Number one! <He places his bit of gold on table, and on entrance of Chinaman No.1 signs to him to take it. His face is lightened with a sacred joy> Ask him wether [sic] he is content? <Interpreter whispers to Chinaman – who draws back, makes a polite gesture begging for Space, he then advances one foot, and with the lofty and large Grace found only in Ancient Statues he addresses Robinson in slow, balanced, and modulated sentences with every variety of gesture – Robinson is surprised and a little awe struck – The Chinaman retires with 3 oriental obeisances [sic] to which Robinson makes 3 familiar little nods>*

Robinson. What did the beggar say?

Interpreter. *<Grinning>* He said something of this sort – “May your highness flourish like a Tree, by the side of a stream that never overflows – nor ever is dry – but glides even and tranquil, as the tide of your prosperity.

Robinson. I’m agreeable.

Interpreter. May dogs defile the Graves of your Enemies –

Robinson. What good will that do me?

Interpreter. When satiated with earthly felicity may you be received in Paradise by 70 dark eyed Houris [sic], each bearing in her hand Chin, the wine of the Faithful in a golden vessel and may the sympathetic applause of the Good at your departure resemble the waves of the ocean, beating musically upon rocky caverns – thy servant inexperienced in oratory retires abashed at the Greatness of his Subject and the weakness of his praise” – Then he cut his stick Sir!

Robinson. I begin to think better of this nation – bring in the other beggar – and report his speech word for word young Gentleman.

*<Chinaman No.2 brought in the Gold is given to him same as No.1 – He is about to retire when –>*

Robinson. *<says>* But where’s his speech.

*<Interpreter speaks to Chinaman who instantly clears his throat, advances his foot and goes through the same business as No.1 – Interpreter takes notes of speech.>*

Robinson. Tell him I’ll return thanks too – what did the beggar say to me?

Interpreter. He said "Your Slave lay writhing in adversity – despoiled by the unprincipled – He was a Ground withered by the noon day Sun – until your Majesty descended like the dew and refreshed his soul, with your justice and benignity – wherefore, hear now the benediction of him, whom your clemency has saved from despair. May your Shadow increase, and spread over many lands – May your offspring be a Nation dwelling in places with Gold roofs and Silver walls – and on the steps, may Peacocks be as plentiful as sparrows are to the undeserving – May you live many centuries and at the setting of your Sun may Rivulets of Ink, dug by the pens of poets – flow through the meadows of paper in praise of the virtues that embellished you while on Earth – Sing-tu-che-the meanest of his slaves wishes these things for the 'Pearl of the Nest' on whom be honour."

Robinson. <*Rising*> Sing-tu-che you are a Trump an orator and a bit of a humbug – the better for you. May felicity attend you [two illegible words] Donnor [sic] and Blitzen, etc. – tempora Mutantur – o Mia Cara sic transit Gloria-mundi and par vobiscum – Eh? <*They bow the Chinaman retires*> That is a great nation – See how they washed our shirts from California.

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