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Dion Boucicault and Augustin Daly: Competing Visions of Theatrical Professionalism in the Late Nineteenth Century

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PROJECT TITLE: Dion Boucicault and Augustin Daly:
Competing Visions of Theatrical Professionalism
in the Late Nineteenth Century

I have reviewed this completed senior honors thesis with this student and certify that it is a project commensurate with honors level undergraduate research in this field.

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Date: 8 May 99

Comments (Optional):

Mark did a fine job of synthesizing diverse literary and historical materials. His project was truly interdisciplinary. It was a pleasure to work with him.

Dion Boucicault and Augustin Daly: Competing Visions of Theatrical Professionalism in
the Late Nineteenth Century

Mark W. Jones
College Scholars Thesis

Dion Boucicault, a famous late-nineteenth century melodramatist, stated in a letter written in the 1860's that:

'When the wind blows, then the mill goes'; and Fortune's gale is making my mill spin round like blazes. I have developed a new vein in the theatrical mine...I have tried the bold step of producing...a sensation drama...The experiment has succeeded. I introduced The Poor of Liverpool—a bob-tail piece—with local scenery...I share after thirty pounds a night, and I am making one hundred pounds a week on the thing. I localize it for each town, and hit the public between the eyes; so they see nothing but fire.¹ Et voila! *I can spin out these rough-and-tumble dramas as a hen lays eggs. It's a degrading occupation, but more money has been made out of guano than out of poetry.* (emphasis mine) (qtd. in Walsh 95)

A contemporary of Boucicault's, Augustin Daly, who was an equally famed melodramatist, described his own career in terms that stand in stark contrast to Boucicault's words. In a speech to the New York Shakespeare Society in 1896, he proclaimed: "If to write the songs of a nation is to exert more influence upon it than to make its laws, then the men who control the amusements of the people have a responsibility in one way as great, if not greater, than the men who fill its pulpits. It is with a sense of such responsibility that I have done what I have done for the modern stage" (qtd. in Felheim 46). While Daly envisions himself to be an arbiter of national taste and values of greater importance than legislators and ministers, Boucicault's metaphor of choice is that of a barnyard animal churning out an undistinguishable product. Why does Daly, but not Boucicault, paint himself in such glowing terms?

Their gross disparity in self-conceptions is even more interesting in light of their many similarities. Collectively, their careers span from 1839 through 1900. Although Boucicault received a slight head start, their careers largely overlap. Boucicault began his career in England, but both he and Daly produced the majority and the best of their work in New York City. Each was a giant in the dramatic world, dominating American theatre in their time. Boucicault's preeminence in the field of melodramatists was so complete that he is literally listed in the dictionary under "melodrama" (Baldick 131-2).

Their styles are remarkably similar in many facets. Their strengths and weaknesses were much the same. Each was a master at effective staging. Their work ethics were equally impressive. Both knew instinctively what would captivate an audience. However, they also both were dependent on others' works for inspiration. Each was a renowned plagiarist. Their actual writing was seen by critics as a weak point of both Boucicault and Daly. Their plays and managerial styles are so similar that it is not surprising that when Daly was a drama critic, he had listed Boucicault as one of his favorite playwrights (Wilmeth, Plays 28).

Despite the similarities in their theatrical styles and tastes, there is a gross difference in their conceptions of the theatre and of themselves as playwrights. In spite of his financial success, Boucicault saw himself as a laborer churning out a commodity, not as an artist. The bitterness he felt because of this is evident in his descriptions of his audience and his own career. In contrast, Daly envisioned himself as a cultural magnate almost from the very beginning. The metaphors which he employs to describe the theater, his writing, and himself stand in stark relief next to Boucicault's more jaded view.

¹ The climactic scene in this work featured the depiction of a burning building on stage.

Although they produced very similar plays, they clearly felt very different about their status in doing so.

This paper argues that the discrepancy in their attitudes to their work stems from their fundamentally different approaches to navigating the tension between dramatic production as a commercial enterprise and as an artistic endeavor. The state of the entertainment world in New York during this time frame facilitates the differing self-conceptions that Boucicault and Daly construct by allowing for the viability of differing ideas of what it means to be an author, even between two playwrights as similar as Boucicault and Daly. The entertainment world was a fluid one in which genres were readily adaptable from one venue and audience to another. Performers often moved within the realm of “high” and “low” art at the same time. Forms shifted and evolved rapidly from “legitimate” to “illegitimate” status and vice versa with relative ease. Often, the entire gamut of entertainment choices would be available under the same roof. A visitor to Barnum’s American Museum could hear a temperance speaker, see a freak show, and attend a melodrama in the same building. Entertainment venues themselves changed quickly; one building might serve a half-dozen managers and present the same number of different forms in as many years. This fluidity created an environment within which Boucicault and Daly were able to adapt their respective outlooks despite the similarities in their work. In their rapidly shifting and multi-faceted world it is possible to see how each conclusion could be reached.

Without their roles sharply defined for them, Boucicault and Daly decided to pursue differing visions of professionalism. Boucicault followed a vision of what can be termed “commercial professionalism,” while Daly endeavored to adhere to a sense of

“artistic professionalism.” Each can be called a professional due to the level of skill and commitment they displayed in their respective careers. However, Boucicault candidly placed commercial concerns at the fore throughout his life in the theatre. He quite explicitly identified the tastes of the masses and catered to those tastes in order to make a profit. He did this quite well. Daly strived not only to earn a living, but to do so in a manner that yielded respect for his creative abilities, as well as money. In this vein, he sought to make his theater more “respectable.” In addition, he pursued a coherent synthesis of his professional ideals through absolute control of his theater. This was central to his concept of artistic professionalism.

These differences in their professional goals can be seen in their respective attitudes toward themselves and their audience. Boucicault calculatingly created plays that he felt certain would appeal to the broadest and, consequently, the most profitable tastes. He knew that he was bound to the taste of the masses and he resented it: “And what is success? It is simply the consensus of those wretched people we are bound to despise; it is the fiat of the people” (“Future” 210). Clearly, he felt constrained by what the people wanted. To write at all, Boucicault had to sacrifice his conception of good drama to the whims of the crowd. In doing this, his works have been described as simplistic, tritely moralizing, and senselessly sensational. He was aware of the heavy-handedness of his writing; it was intentional. Boucicault believed that his audiences would only appreciate images painted in the broadest of strokes: “You must first tell them that you are going to do it, you must then tell them that you are doing it, and then that you have done it, and *perhaps* then they will understand you” (qtd. in Walsh 185).

Drawing from his decline into commercial pandering, Boucicault publicly ruminated on what had created the current theatrical climate. Why was it that playwright's had to write in the style that they did? In an article, he offered two reasons for, what he saw, as lowered dramatic standards (Boucicault, "Decline" 186). First, he claims that potential authors are so overwhelmed with the welter of new scientific information that not enough time is left for a man to write well. Intellectual energies that would have been spent in introspection, observation, and literary expression were now being used in the effort to understand nature, master machines, and invent new ones. Second, he attacks the expanding press as being too influential an arbiter of taste: "As the newspaper has prospered, so in proportion have the poet, the novelist, and the dramatist disappeared" ("Decline" 186). Boucicault felt that the press had usurped legitimate literary critics. Newspaper reviews were too easy on dramatists and did not force them to hone their craft. The root of this, he believed, was a lack of knowledge and the conflict of interests that theatrical advertising created for newspaper editors. Without a community of critics to help support and promote better theatre, dramatists were forced to write to the tastes of the masses.

In this article, Boucicault is defining the circumstances that cut short the dreams of his youth. He places the blame on a vicious cycle of poor taste. The undercutting of literary critics by newspaper reviewers leads to a general weakening of societal taste. This in turn creates an economic climate that spawns "the commercial manager," who worsens matters by catering explicitly to the masses. And the cycle begins anew. Essentially, he cites societally prevailing tastes in entertainment as limiters to the quality of plays he can write.

Daly offered an explanation for the current state of the theatre very similar to Boucicault's earlier opinion. Like Boucicault, Daly believed that the audiences were the main determinant of what the theatre had become and what it could become. In a response to critics, he argued, "Certainly the very best people we have in American society patronize the theatre today, *and it is to gratify their tastes that the theatre is made what it is*. If, then, the theatre is attacked, the critics are animadverting on the tastes of the best society" (emphasis mine) ("Playwrights" 199). Both playwrights saw the public taste as the wellspring of theatrical trends and their own works. However, their attitudes towards this are profoundly different. Boucicault bitterly comments on being compelled to pander to the tastes of a dull, unintelligent audience whom, at times, it seems he actively resents. Daly, in contrast, describes his audience as the "best society." Boucicault feels manipulated by the unsophisticated; Daly emotionally ties himself to the urbane and successful. The dramatist who mechanically supplies works to satisfy the prevailing market demand was as foreign a model to Daly as the dramatist as cultural high priest to the elite was to Boucicault.

This is not to say that Daly is the superior artist. Current criticism generally rates Boucicault as being a more important author than Daly. Boucicault enjoys the honor of being enshrined in the Nineteenth Century Literary Criticism series, while Daly is absent. The differences in their professional self-conceptions cannot be explained by substantial discrepancies in talent or success. Nonetheless, the differences are there.

The possibility and viability of such differing professional outlooks between two dramatists with a large degree of similarity in their careers and work is largely due to the nature of New York City and its entertainment world at the time.

Change, in America and New York City, was a constant. America entered the new century still practically and psychologically tied to the apron strings of the Old World and began the twentieth century on the cusp of world importance. The continual influx of immigrants created a bewilderingly heterogeneous society. Political and economic differences between regions threatened to pull the nascent nation apart, culminating in the Civil War. Even as the nation became more and more divided, America and Americans marched inexorably westward to fulfill their Manifest Destiny, adding even more geographical and cultural complexity to a country already struggling to reconcile its differences. The Industrial Revolution introduced new technologies that would change the daily life of every last American. How people fundamentally spent their lives would forever change. The same inventions that created wealth beyond imagination for a few would mire others in the newly developing underclass. Railroads brought the nation closer together with their promise of faster and more reliable transportation and communication; they also helped split the nation along class lines by creating a wealthy few on the backs of the miners, steelworkers, and rail workers. All of these factors contributed to the social dynamism of New York City.

The convergence of different factors led to an exponential rate of change. In 1870, only one-fifth of America's population was to be found in urban areas; by the turn of the century, one-half of Americans lived in cities (Wilmeth, Plays 4). In 1840, New York City had a population under 450,000. That number had swelled to over 900,000 by 1860 (Wilmeth, Variety 92-3). New York City then went on to triple in population between 1870 and 1900 (Wilmeth, Plays 4). One historian describes the United States at this time as "an industrializing, urbanizing nation absorbing millions of immigrants from alien

cultures and experiencing an almost incomprehensible degree of structural change and spatial mobility...with populations shifting from the countryside and small town to the city, from city to city, and from one urban neighborhood to another..." (Levine 176).

The New York entertainment world was as swiftly shifting and as variegated as the population that it served. Virtually any taste could be satisfied. Melodrama, tragedy, minstrelsy, vaudeville, and freak shows coexisted with ballet, opera, and music performances. Furthermore, virtually everyone could afford to partake of some form of entertainment. Prices ranged from a pittance to a fortune. In 1846, White's Melodeon charged 6 ¼ cents for a gallery seat or 12 ½ cents for a parquet seat at its variety shows (Dimmick 34). For a mere 6 cents one could gain admittance and receive refreshments at Peter Morris' Varieties (Dimmick 42). P.T. Barnum charged a quarter at his American Museum and at his circuses (Durant 63, 60). The more "legitimate" theater houses were a little more expensive. Box seats at the Olympic Theatre cost 75 cents in 1837, with pit seats commanding 37 ½ cents (Dimmick 31). The Academy of Music, described as the "home of grand opera in New York," charged three dollars for an Italian opera troupe on its opening night in 1854 (Dimmick 40). The first ticket sold to see the famous European singer Jenny Lind's New York debut in 1850 was auctioned off for the phenomenal sum of \$225 (Dimmick 33).²

The diversity of the fare offered matched that of the prices charged. The depression of 1840 forced many of the "legitimate" theaters to close their doors. Cheaper establishments and different forms of entertainment sprang up to fill the void. In its March 25, 1841 issue, the New York Express observed, "The failure of the large houses

and the success of the minor ones presents an anomaly which it is difficult to reconcile. Public taste has been diverted from its usual course, and it will require time, skill, and judgment to bring it back again” (qtd. in Buckley 457). This critic was correct in stating that the public taste had begun to change; however, the increased interest in alternative forms would grow to become a fixture of the New York entertainment scene. One author states that by 1850, “The old tragic drama had seen its best day and the craze for minstrelsy, farce and burlesque had taken its place, with rivalry and a spirit of commercialism rapidly increasing among managers, while theaters and amusement houses were now beginning to grow at a most surprising rate” (Dimmick 37).

Minstrelsy was one of these new forms quickly establishing itself in the city. The first minstrel troupe to appear in New York was the Virginia Minstrels, consisting of William Whitlock, R.W. Pelham, Frank Bower, and Dan Emmet (Buckley 462). They arrived in 1841. They were rapidly followed by many other groups, like the Kentucky Minstrels, the Ring and Parker Minstrels, and the Congo Melodists (Dimmick 82). By the early 1840’s, minstrelsy had begun its stereotypical appropriation of “authentic” black traditions (McConachie 159).

The average show would consist of a collection of sketches, songs, dances, and a type of panel discussion. The discussion portion of the show would typically use three or four performers in different stock characters. Often a rural African-American, an urban African-American, and a mediator would be the characters portrayed. The differences in background of the characters allowed for the humorous exploitation of stereotypes:

“There were many opportunities, within the gradient of class represented in the line, for

² This author could find no explicit descriptions of the range of prices charged by Boucicault and Daly themselves. However, given their preferred genre, it is reasonable to assume that they fell in a middle range

puns, double entendres, and malapropisms—for great social and behavioral misunderstanding” (Buckley 463). Minstrelsy was a very opportunistic form. It soon incorporated, satired, and parodied virtually all theatrical forms. However, throughout its various manifestations, spontaneity and a quick, improvisational feel were characteristic.

Originally, minstrelsy was seen as suspect and degenerate. This was partly by design. Don B. Wilmeth states: “Minstrelsy was the first major stage entertainment to avoid the elitist reputation of legitimate drama and commit itself, quite consciously, to the new common-man audience. It was immediate, unpretentious, and devoted to fun, the emotional outlet that its urban patrons so desperately needed” (Variety 120). “From the start it appeared that a sort of generalized illicitness was indeed one of minstrelsy’s main objectives. So much is suggested, at least, by the lengths to which reviews and playbills typically went to downplay (even as they intimated) its licentious atmosphere...,” comments another (Lott 25). As such, the reputation of minstrel shows was a decidedly tainted one.

However, beginning in the 1850s, minstrel shows began to reform themselves. In an effort to successfully compete against the increasing number of alternate entertainment sources, minstrel shows generally began to use broader material (in order to appeal to a wider audience) and produced more lavish, polished performances (Wilmeth, Variety 121). Minstrelsy became popular across a wide range of groups. John Hanners describes it as the “favorite theatre going activity of mass white audiences” (24). Abraham Lincoln and Queen Victoria were just two of the fans of the newly respectable minstrel show (Hanners 24). Charles Haswell, in his memoirs, also testifies to minstrelsy’s new widespread appeal: “New Negro songs’ were sent out almost daily from the publishers’

presses and were sung all over the land...*Households that had amused themselves with singing English opera* (which had been greatly in fashion) and English glees and part-songs, *turned to the new melodies*" (emphasis mine)(qtd. in Buckley 463). Minstrel tunes had become mainstreamed enough to supplant the older opera.

To capitalize on the minstrel craze, managers began to build more impressive theaters and to raise prices. In 1857, Henry Wood's Marble Hall was built. As the name implies, it was a marble edifice that could seat two thousand patrons (Dimmick 42). Kelly and Leon's Theatre, which operated from 1866 until 1872, introduced "high-priced minstrelsy" when they began charging \$1.50 for admission (Dimmick 38).

Another popular form, which borrowed heavily from the minstrel show, was the variety show. Each genre mixed sketches, song, dance, and fast-paced wordplay together. As in minstrelsy, variety shows were unpretentiously concerned with entertainment; they delivered this in a "common man" atmosphere with humor that was unsophisticated and easy to enjoy. However, without blackface to limit the range of subject material, the topics addressed in variety shows could be broader. This feature allowed them to capitalize on the city's immigrant population by allowing the shows to trade on the specific characteristics and stereotypes of different sub-groups (Wilmeth, Variety 131).

Variety shows were originally closely associated with concert saloons. Although well-established by the late 1850s, they carried the negative stigma of being tied to the carousing atmosphere of the saloon. They were, in fact, a place that men of all classes attended for the very fact that the code of behavior allowed for looser conduct (Wilmeth, Variety 131). By the 1860s, a public concern over the danger posed to public propriety by variety shows at concert saloons forced managers to begin to adapt. The changes were

often more cosmetic than substantive. For instance, the term “concert saloon” was changed to “concert room,” “concert garden,” or “music hall” in attempts to shed the connotation of “concert saloon” (Wilmeth, Variety 131). The term “variety hall” ultimately had the most staying power.

As the effort to refine variety shows continued over the following years, vaudeville gradually emerged as an adequately cleaned up compromise. Tony Pastor is generally credited with being the manager who contributed the most to the transformation. In fact, he has been termed the “Father of American Vaudeville” (Palmer 13). The format was largely the same as the older variety shows. Pastor’s shows generally followed this order: a song and dance number, a singer, a comedy sketch, a specialist (a juggler, a magician, etceteras), a dramatic skit, a musical act, and, finally, acrobats (Palmer 13). The humor was still broad and easily understood. However, there was less overt sexuality in both the material and the atmosphere. Women and men attended his shows, which had been removed from the saloon context; by 1881, Pastor had effectively separated vaudeville from its popularly disreputable lineage (Wilmeth, Variety 132).

It is hard to imagine burlesque, another popular form, ever separating itself from disreputability. William Green describes its intent as being “to incite audiences to laughter and delight through appeal to the rougher side within the human being. If nature abhors a vacuum, the vacuum that the burlesque show filled in the popular entertainment world was as a type of show frankly sexual in nature...[it is] fun related to the animalistic side of man and for an appreciation and display of female beauty” (qtd. in Wilmeth, Variety 152).

The fact that sex sells was eminently illustrated by The Black Crook, a precursor to the burlesque form, which was first produced at Niblo's Garden in 1866. Its plot has been described as "a remarkable hodge-podge of sorcery, demonism, and wickedness, with such characters as an alchemist, the Devil, fairies, demons, and baronial servants" (Kraus 106). It was an amalgam of drama, song, and dance. However, the most salient factor in its success was that much of its cast was a scantily clad woman. Promoters pushed this aspect in their advertising, featuring three women in short skirts, with ample arm and cleavage showing (Hearn 32). Many people professed to be shocked by the scandalous attire (Kraus 107). However, many people were enticed for the same reason. The Black Crook was an enormous financial success. Its first run was 475 days and it grossed almost a million dollars (Amberg 195). It went on to run almost continuously for the next forty years³. Its success prompted one of its financial backers to remark that "legs are a permanently salable commodity" (Amberg 195). Others had realized this fact, as well. In 1868, Lydia Thompson and her "British Blondes" began to capitalize on the prurient appeal of overt feminine sexuality on the stage (McConachie 172). Their assertiveness, along with The Black Crook, helped to birth burlesque.

The result was basically a parodic variety show that generously employed bawdiness and suggestively clad women. Generally, burlesques were built around a stock comic situation, from which performers were expected to ad lib. The emphasis was on spontaneity: the focus was the "personal inventiveness and wit [of the performers] and not a scripted, inviolate text" (Wilmeth, Variety 153).

³ It was revived in New York in 1866, 1869, 1871, 1873, 1879, 1879, 1881, 1884, 1889, and 1903 (Amberg 195).

Due to its blatantly sexual nature and the crudity of its humor, the burlesque was considered by many to be a degenerate form. One contemporary, in critiquing the average burlesque singer's performance stated that "at the very thought of it a musician would cut his throat, blow out his brains, and leap from a tenth story window" (Hartt 29). For him, burlesque was so vulgar that its popularity was a tangible threat to the fabric of society: "It was Goethe...who said that men never displayed their characters more clearly than by what they thought laughable...wherefore I think myself doubly warranted in declaring that anybody capable of enjoying McGooligan's [a burlesque performer] comicality should be clapped into a reformatory without trial, simply as a precaution against treasons, wars, and stratagems..." (Hartt 20-1). In his view, the mentality of one who would enjoy burlesque shows is so primal and unsophisticated that, while being dangerous, it also merits compassion towards their inferiority: "...they abhor the drama and adore burlesque for its very faults' sake. And this, I find, should teach us a tender, compassionate charity for their own so grievous faults, since, as morality is nine parts brains, these disordered mentalities can't be held to account like cultured folk for their shortcomings" (Hartt 15-6). However, despite such criticism from some quarters, the burlesque was a popular form of the day.

Museums were also a common diversion. Of these, the most successful was P.T. Barnum's American Museum, which was open from 1842 until 1865. During this period, he sold thirty-eight million tickets at a quarter each; the population of the United States was roughly thirty-five million at the time (Hanners 71). The doors opened at dawn and closed at ten o'clock at night. Many visitors brought a packed lunch and spent the entire day wandering the cavernous museum (Durant 63). His museum had something to attract

literally everyone. There were (Barnum claimed) 600,000 curiosities on display (Wilmeth, Variety 94). The museum also featured “scientific” demonstrations, lectures, skits by Tom Thumb, magic shows, ballets, dramas, variety acts, a three thousand seat “lecture room,” and a freak show (Saxon xiv). The wide array of his offerings ensured that virtually everyone was a potential customer.

Central to Barnum’s attraction was his ability to mix the novel and the fraudulent with nods to education and self-improvement (Wilmeth, Variety 94). One author comments that “the urban museum could offer entertainment that was useful, enlightening, and safe for families. Menageries were ‘educational;’ drama, ‘moral;’ fine arts, ‘edifying;’ weird freaks of nature, “scientific literacy’ (Hanners 70). Barnum realized this and made the most of it. In 1850, he distributed a circular that proclaimed:

My plan is to introduce into the lecture room highly moral and instructive domestic dramas...so constructed as to please and edify, while they possess a powerful *reformative* tendency...My whole aim and effort is to make my museum totally unobjectionable to the religious and moral community, and at the same time combine sufficient *amusement* with instruction to please all proper tastes and to train the mind of youth to reject as repugnant anything inconsistent with moral and refined tastes.

(Barnum 43)

Today, the “morality” or “scientific” value of displaying people afflicted with physical deformities as public spectacle is clearly questionable. However, the thinking of the day allowed for “freaks” to be exemplars of both natural history and the diversity of God’s creation.

Barnum's professed high intentions for his museum did not preclude him from lying outright to increase the appeal of his museum. Indeed, he once said, "The public likes to be fooled" (Durant 57). He often went to elaborate lengths to foment interest in a particular exhibit. One of his first endeavors in show business was in conjunction with Joyce Heth, who he claimed to be the 161 year old former nurse of George Washington. He advertised Heth heavily and then leaked a letter to the press that claimed she was a ventriloquist's dummy (Wilmeth, Variety 93). The publicity was priceless; people thronged to judge for themselves. It was later proven that Heth was, in reality, roughly eighty years old (Wilmeth, Variety 93). Barnum repeated the trick with Madame Josephine Clofullia, a bearded lady. He secretly conspired to be sued for fraud. At the trial, he produced three doctors and Clofullia's husband as witnesses to her true gender (Durant 65). When the case was thrown out he reaped enormous publicity. Perhaps his most audacious prank was the presentation of the Feejee Mermaid, which was in reality a monkey torso sewn onto a fish's body. To support his claim of the existence of mermaids, he placed fake scientific articles in newspapers and published a pamphlet (Durant 53). The public knew of Barnum's penchant for exaggeration and outright lying. His reputation for disingenuity was so firmly established that he embodies the slick side of show business even today. If anything, however, this actually increased his popularity. He was a legend in his own time; his autobiography sold over a million copies in his own lifetime (Saxon x111).

One author asserts that the public's awareness of Barnum's humbuggery "implied a social contract in which the customer expected to be fooled by the showman" (Hanners 70). Indeed, the suspension of disbelief and, alternately, the challenge of discerning the

real from the false seems to have been part of the appeal of the museum. Whatever the psychology involved, the acceptance of Barnum's sensationalistic methods had far-reaching effects. Legitimate museums had to adapt the same tactics to attract patrons who were accustomed to more excitement with their edification. The Charles Wilson Peale Museum and Gallery of Fine Arts, for example, resorted to using magicians, mind readers, and bird-eating anacondas to bolster its attendance (Wilmeth, Variety 94).

For those who found nothing to amuse them at one of the museums, ballet was another entertainment option. However, there was a real scarcity of even moderately talented dancers. George Amberg, commenting on this, states that "there was no continuous development, no substantial tradition, in the American ballet during the nineteenth century" (9). Ferdinando Reyna and June Ryan do not even begin their histories of American ballet until the twentieth century (209, 54). As such, managers had to import their dancers from Europe. The Bowery began this practice in 1827 and was "destined to pioneer in the introduction of European dancers to this country" (Amberg 186). Some other theaters began to hire foreign ballet troupes, as well. The Park Theater, one of the Bowery's main rivals in regard to ballet, brought in European dancers yearly. Other venues to feature ballet included Niblo's Garden, the Broadway Theater, and Palmo's Opera House (Amberg 192).

However, the only true ballet luminary to appear on an American stage in the nineteenth century was Fanny Elssler, who is generally to be counted as the best or second best female dancer of the century (Conyn 139). New Yorkers had been whipped into quite a frenzy through advance press when she finally arrived in 1840. The crowd at the harbor awaiting her arrival was so large that she thought there had been an accident

that had attracted such attention (Guest 128). She received a standing ovation when the curtain rose at her first performance before she had danced a single step (Guest 131-2). Elssler's performances were always packed. In her second season in New York, she had nine performances that averaged a gross of \$1,300. Her share was \$500 per evening (Guest 141). Elssler and her persona were profitable away from the stage as well. Her popularity inspired a blitz of products marketed under her name. There were Fanny Elssler boots, stockings, garters, corsets, shawls, parasols, fans, boot polish, shaving soap, champagne, and even cigars (Guest 133).

Despite the European domination of what little ballet existed in New York during the period, four American dancers were talented enough to earn historical recognition: Mary Ann Lee, Augusta Maywood, Julia Turnbull, and George Washington Smith. Lee is seen as the first genuine American ballet talent (Kraus 106). Maywood, although American, spent most of her career in Europe. After gaining fame at home, she became a life-long ex-patriate. In doing so, she became the only American dancer of the period to earn international recognition (Amberg 5). Lillian Moore names Smith as America's only "native *premier danseur noble* of the day" (qtd. in Amberg 7). As such, he accompanied and received equal billing with all of the leading European ballerinas that toured the United States (Kraus 106).

Although these four individuals achieved some status as ballet dancers, the profession as a whole was seen as a disreputable activity. Dancers generally were not well compensated and were deemed socially undesirable (Maynard 24). Maynard explains, "The American dancing girls of the period had the worst of reputations, especially as the management believed in advertising them as Parisians, and had them

masquerade under Gallic names, with the supposed Gallic reputation for amorousness” (24). She adds, “Any parent would have told an ambitious student that ballet was a haphazard and depraved career for a good woman” (26).

The forms of entertainment described above only begin to touch the diversity of amusements from which a New Yorker had to choose in the late nineteenth century. Other less significant, forms abounded. For approximately a quarter, one could stroll the grounds of a garden. These venues, while primarily offering a chance for social exhibition and voyeurism, also featured music and theatrical acts. Many built follies to explore, hung lanterns in the trees, and used other techniques to make the sensory experience richer (Buckley 450). An unique variation on the garden was the Maze Garden, which opened in 1853 (Dimmick 39). It featured a two acre shrubbery maze which patrons could navigate at their leisure. Again, the wanderings were done to the accompaniment of live music.

“Posture models” and *tableaux vivant* were in vogue in the 1840’s. Performers would act as living statuary, frequently depicting a famous scene. The form quickly descended into a somewhat respectable way for men to gawk at women in suggestive poses.⁴ In December 1847, the Herald lamented that there were a dozen “taverns, hotels, saloons, and other drinking houses—where young men and women are exhibiting, in every form and shape, and for every price, from sixpence up to fifty cents” (qtd. in Buckley 451). The limits of decency were pushed; in 1848, the police raided a venue that was featuring nude posing behind a translucent scrim of stretched gauze (Buckley 452).

⁴ “Esther in the Persian Hot Bath” and “Eve in the Garden of Eden” are scenes indicative of the potential for “edifying” scenes to provide titillation, as well (Buckley 451).

A more respectable alternative to the sometimes licentious *tableaux vivants* was provided by the Lyceum movement. Begun by Josiah Holbrook in 1821, the movement was intended to provide free lectures on science, history, religion, and other topics for the purpose of societal improvement. (Buckley 473). However, the lectures soon became commercialized. By 1850, speakers were receiving honorariums ranging from \$50 to \$100 dollars per appearance. With a typical admission fee being twenty-five cents, organizers had to compete fiercely through advertising to gain the public's attention and recoup their investment (Buckley 474).

Another attraction was social dancing, which "had become popular on all class levels...[even when] theatrical dance...and particularly ballet...was at a low ebb" (Kraus 118). The social elite enjoyed cotillions and formal balls; in addition, nearly all of the professional organizations held an annual dance function (Kraus 109). Others enjoyed this pastime at public halls, like the Third Ward American Republic Ball or Mr. Parker's Ball, at the cost of twenty-five cents to a dollar (Kraus 109). One indication of the increasing popularity of social dance is the boom in dance instructors. At mid-century there were eight "dancing masters" listed in the New York directory; by 1896, that number had ballooned to sixty-three (Kraus 107).

The above, brief descriptions of the variety of entertainments shows the amazing diversity of options available to New Yorkers in the late nineteenth century. In describing them, they have been roughly grouped into different categories by genre. However, in reality, there was an amazing degree of fluidity and exchange between the different forms. Performers often worked in more than one genre. A single type of entertainment would be enjoyed by people of different classes at differing venues; sometimes classes

would intermingle at one site. A “debauched” form could be cleaned up for family viewing and, conversely, a “classy” genre could be easily adapted to appeal to coarser tastes. This degree of flexibility is important to note because it means that there was no discernibly proscribed role or template for entertainers, authors, or managers to follow. One could viably model their career in several differing ways. A performer could focus on one form or dabble in many. Works could be catered to a specific audience or designed to attract as many people as possible. As such, it can be seen how Boucicault’s and Daly’s differing outlooks on their careers could have been equally plausible and viable, even though their plays were of very similar style and enjoyed similar levels of success.

A good example of how quickly forms could evolve and performers could move from one genre to another is The Black Crook. The dancers in this sexually risqué and sensationalistic piece originally intended to perform La Bicheau Bois, a ballet (Amberg 8). However, the theater that they were engaged to perform at burnt down, leaving them somewhat stranded. To avoid completely losing their investment, the managers hastily bought the rights to a decidedly average play and began to rework it. The play was altered to allow for the inclusion of some of the dances, costumes, and scenery from the original ballet (Hearn 12). The resultant amalgam was a blend of drama, music, dance, and raw sexuality. Its splendid success spawned a new form of entertainment while also illustrating the ease with which “high” art could metamorphose into “low” art and the quickness with which performers and writers could find themselves earning their living in very different ways.

The latent ambiguities and possibility for change that is exhibited in The Black Crook is also evident in other forms. The “posture master” and the *tableaux vivant* both stem from the melodrama technique of freezing the action on stage at the end of a scene (Buckley 451). Melodramatists employed this technique in order to clarify the relationships and action represented on the stage. By allowing for the thorough examination of the close of a scene, playwrights helped ensure that their audiences could easily understand the import of what has just occurred on stage. Soon, this technique was lifted from the stage and made to stand alone as an independent entertainment. Managers, presenting themselves as “professors,” began to stage living reenactments of historical moments, Biblical episodes, and famous works of art. Again, the line between the respectable and artistic work and the salacious and overtly commercialized piece was blurry. A “Dr. Collyer” presented “model personifications” at the widely respected Apollo Rooms in 1847 (Buckley 451). He staged pieces like “A Monument to George Washington” (with male models) and “The Three Graces” (with gauzily clothed women) under the same roof and under the same pretense of academic and historical interest (Buckley 451). Eventually, this, at least nominally, respectable exhibition would lead to de facto peep shows that were routed by police.

A similar trend is seen in the Lyceum movement. Originally, this movement was motivated out of a legitimate interest in the advancement of free public education. However, the managers began to charge admission and the speakers began to demand compensation. What had begun as an intellectual exercise soon placed a premium on theatricality and commercial success. To attract patrons, the speakers placed increasing emphasis on style over substance. For instance, Park Benjamin was noted for delivering

his speeches in rhymed couplets and Bayard Taylor discussed his middle-Eastern travels in Arab garb (Buckley 475). The flexibility of the lecture form allowed both speakers and patrons to participate in the genre on their own terms. A speaker on the lecture circuit could be an intellectual or a showman. Likewise, a patron could attend a presentations that was as highbrow or as lowbrow as they pleased.

The same type of development is seen in minstrelsy, as well. Minstrelsy began as a definite working class diversion. Conscious use was made of its disreputability in advertising campaigns designed to appeal to the masses. But due to increased competition, variations of minstrelsy began to evolve that were aimed to appeal to a broader audience. In time, minstrelsy became widely popular in all classes and counted Lincoln and Queen Victoria among its fans. The degree of variation within the form became so pronounced that it “frequently was indistinguishable from other variety forms or spectacular musical productions” (Wilmet, Variety 121). One could situate themselves in a number of professional contexts along a continuum of styles and still be a “minstrel.” For example, many legitimate opera companies did seasons of “Africanized” opera in blackface (Buckley 466). These were “minstrel shows,” but they used material decidedly different than that of the original minstrelsy and played in the best venues. In fact, a lot of minstrel shows were simply standard routines from other forms that were performed in blackface (Buckley 467). As such, the difference between minstrelsy and other forms, even forms like opera, could sometimes be of only a semantic nature.

The centralization of many different types of entertainment at one establishment further eroded concrete distinctions between genres. In order to attract more customers, showmen began to offer more and more attractions to their establishments. Barnum with

his claim of six thousand curiosities, a theatre, a freak show, and many other entertainments provides an illustration of the scope and success of this type of conglomeration of forms. Many others followed the same tenet of “more is better.” William Niblo’s Gardens was an all-season entertainment complex that housed a saloon, a theatre, and a hotel (Buckley 472). The Crystal Palace drew a crowd of twenty-thousand to its opening by placing a variety of entertainments into a five-acre glass-sided building (Dimmick 38). Gardens offered many diversions for people to enjoy as they promenaded. On any given day, a garden patron could see ventriloquists, fire-eaters, polyphonists (vocal mimics), contortionists, musicians, tumblers, and pyrotechnics (Buckley 450). Ferdinand Palmo amply illustrates the diversity of entertainment that could be offered under one roof in an 1844 advertisement in the New York Herald: “Palmo’s establishment will contain everything you can have: baths, opera, cherry cobblers, sandwiches, comedy, scandal, wit, and theology on the Sunday nights” (qtd. in Buckley 472). The irony of promoting public baths, scandal, and theology in the same breath is palpable, but the practice was successful. The simultaneous presentation of multiple forms in the same establishment weakened meaningful distinctions between “artistic” and “commercial” forms. As such, to state that an establishment presented one form or another does not tell one much about the professionalism of that theater or the quality and tastefulness of the work.

Given the ephemerality of many distinctions between genres and venues, it is not surprising that performers and managers often participated in a wide gamut of professional activities themselves. In describing a visit to a variety show, one author muses, “But think a minute! Haven’t you somewhere seen yonder acrobats before? Why,

yes, to be sure—in refined ‘vawdavi!’ There’s a perpetual interchange between the loftiest and lowliest ranks of the varieties, vulgar talent taking ‘refined’ engagements whenever chance offers, and ‘refined’ talent taking vulgar in days of adversity” (Hartt 31). Tony Pastor, who eventually helped make vaudeville widely respectable, typifies the opportunistically freelance nature of an entertainer’s career. He began as a comic singer at temperance meetings. Next, he briefly tried his hand as a minstrel at Barnum’s before joining a circus as a clown and general performer. After a stint as a ringmaster, he finally settled on variety shows (Palmer 12).

Dancers, even the best, often performed multiple roles, as well. The very popular Ravel family presented ballet alongside tight-rope walking and acrobatics (Amberg 4). Mary Ann Lee, the first native American to gain fame as a ballerina, did not limit herself to just ballet. She began her career by touring with Barnum’s circus and performing in burlesque shows (Maynard 19). Over her life, Lee “appeared in everything from Shakespeare to Burlesque, and danced in everything from *La Sylphide* and *Griselle* to ‘The Sailor’s Hornpipe’” (Kraus 104-5). Similarly, George Washington Smith, the first great male American dancer, “danced in everything from classical ballet works and opera to the circus” (Kraus 106). European stars were not exempt from this. Maria Bonfanti and Rita Sangalli both performed at the Paris Opera and were first-class dancers. However, they, along with approximately eighty other dancers, are now remembered for being the stars of *The Black Crook*, a show that is of a decidedly different character than traditional ballet (Maynard 23). Less talented dancers had to be even more adept at multiple performance styles than the stars. Dancers “were required not only to dance but also to sing, act, support comedians, trained animal acts, or starred singers, in variety

shows...Many of them worked in factories by day and danced in the *corps de ballet* at night. Most of them were waitresses on the side..." (Maynard qtd. in Kraus 107).

Audiences and critics were cognizant that this type of creative cross-pollination occurred. Brander Matthews, a critic of the day, dismissed variety shows as "purely sensational amusement for the unthinking" (qtd. in Felheim 75). However, he then adds that one positive aspect of the variety show is that it serves as "a nursery for the actual theater" in which young actors and writers can hone their craft (qtd. in Felheim 75). This statement addresses the fact that authors and performers could, and did, move from one medium to another.

Patrons were not always lumped into discrete categories, either. Certainly, at the large entertainment complexes, like Niblo's Gardens, fans of opera were entertained next to those who preferred variety shows. There were theaters that *generally* served a certain class of people. However, these barriers were permeable. One author states:

During most of the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth, there were 'low-brow' or 'popular priced' theaters in most large cities, quite distinct from the 'first-class' theaters. Of course, the two worlds were not completely separate; a taste for blood and thunder was not limited to the proletariat, and there were, in most of the 'first class' houses, galleries to which the lowliest members of society could obtain admittance. (Poggi 88)

Walt Whitman fondly spoke of attending the Bowery and seeing "the faces of the leading authors, poets, editors of those times [in the boxes, while he enjoyed] the slang, wit, occasional shirt sleeves, and a picturesque freedom of looks and manners" of the working class in the pit (Levine 25).

More overt transgressions of class boundaries occurred, as well. The Black Crook was so successful that many upper-class ladies attended, although they did typically wear veils to avoid being recognized (Maynard 23). Fanny Elssler, the internationally renowned ballerina, was bolder. When her La Tarentule was burlesqued as La Mosquito at the Olympic Theatre, she became an avid fan of the production. She went several times to see a male version of the famous “Fanny” hauled comically through the air on wires (Guest 134).

This is the fluid environment within which Boucicault and Daly worked. There were no clear markers to denote what type of work or what type of performer was or was not “artistic.” Genres would change quickly, so that what was once esteemed as sophisticated became debauched and the converse. Performers would often freely move from one type of form to another. Although there were distinctions between what type of person patronized certain varieties of entertainment, these differences were often subtle. Some venues were seen as being of a generally “higher” class. However, often the true difference between one theater and another would be merely in pretension. Frequently, the better theaters would offer fare very similar to the less respected establishments; the difference in respectability apparently hinged as often on the context of a work’s presentation as it did on the actual merits of the work. The fact that people of all classes attended certain establishments further blurred class lines. The distinction between going to a garden to listen to the music, but not watch the puppet show, becomes somewhat hollow when they are taking place in the same space and with a mix of classes. This context did not provide pat answers to one’s questions about their rank in the dramatic world. It is in this world that Boucicault and Daly each made their way.

Dion Boucicault was, by all accounts, a popular success. His career was a turbulent one, with long periods of success interspersed with episodes of financial failure. Eventually, he became an icon of the age both for his contemporaries and students of the period:

Through public success and personal disappointment Boucicault came to symbolize for would-be playwrights the glamour and economic possibilities (and dangers) of a life in the theatre. For the modernist critics who later excoriated his melodramas, he became the quintessence of a degenerate theatrical age. For students of American literature, he has remained the epitomal playwright of his era. (Richardson 293)

In 1862, two dukes, two marquises, four earls, and a member of the British parliament were supporters of Boucicault's New Theatre Company in London (Walsh 86). A Lord Londesborough gave Boucicault eleven thousand pounds to personally stage Babil and Bijou (Walsh 119). Queen Victoria not only attended plays staged by him, she saw The Colleen Bawn three times (Walsh 79). Obviously, by the 1860's there was not a negative social stigma attached to Boucicault's work. He was lauded by equally elite circles in America. On November 10, 1888 he was the honoree at a banquet attended by General William Tecumseh Sherman, Colonel Robert Ingersoll, the governor of New York, and Andrew Carnegie (Walsh 173). When he died, in 1890, his funeral was attended by the glitterati of the American theatrical world (Walsh 174).

In addition to his societal acceptance, Boucicault also was very successful financially. A single play, The Shaugraun, is believed to have made a profit of over \$500,000 dollars (Walsh 149). Upon the death of his son in a train wreck in Huntingdon,

England, Boucicault asked the town if he could erect a building to commemorate his memory. In less than a year, Boucicault had constructed a new grammar school for the town in honor of his son (Walsh 147). Despite his fame and his fortune, he still labored under the conception of writing as pandering to the masses due to his early experiences.

Boucicault clearly had a successful career. However, there were quite a few obstacles in his path when he began. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a “generally phobic response to theatricality” (Roach 348). Dramatists and actors were perceived, and treated, like little more than servants by even the lowest of their audiences (McConachie 136). The term “actress” was virtually synonymous with “whore” in the popular imagination. In fact, all writing was seen as “a distinctly marginal activity” (Richardson 251). Of those that did write, there were generally two types: the socially elite amateur, for whom writing was an avocation and the multi-purpose actor/manager who wrote to provide fodder for their companies. Pennsylvania Supreme Court Justice David Paul Brown’s statement is representative of the gentleman writer’s credo: “[My plays] were written rather as matters of relief from the care and toils of an arduous profession, than with any view to their representation on the stage” (qtd. in Richardson 252).⁵ Writing is cast as a diversion, not a profession.

It was against these prejudices that Boucicault set out when, at the age of sixteen, he wrote his first play in 1836. There were definitely other career options for Boucicault. He had attended prestigious schools, paid for by a friend of the family.⁶ In 1837, he entered an apprenticeship in engineering, which he abandoned to pursue the stage. The next year he began his theatrical career with his first paid role. He staged his first play,

⁵ One of Brown’s plays, *Sertorius*, was performed publicly in 1836.

⁶ This “friend” was also most likely Boucicault’s true biological father (“Dion” 24).

London Assurance, in 1841; it was a hit and earned him a curtain call (Walsh 28). He then began to concentrate solely on writing, not returning to the stage until 1854. Over the next three years, he collected a string of successful runs in the London theatre. However, after a financial disagreement with a theatre manager, he left for Paris, where he stayed from 1844 through 1848. He returned briefly to London, before travelling to America in 1853 with his second wife, actress Agnes Robertson.

Boucicault had intended to serve as Robertson's manager on an American tour. However, faced with an increasing number of children (he ultimately fathered six), he resorted to doing anything that would either make or save a little money. He even made an ill-fated attempt at joining the lecture circuit in 1856. However, his speeches were abysmal failures.⁷

A passion for the stage was Boucicault's original motivation. In recalling his first performance, he wrote:

In the summer of that year we had an exhibition at which the boys played Pizarro. The part of Rolla fell to me, and then, for the first time, my mind seemed to soar. I wanted to play every part in the piece, but had to content myself by teaching all the rest how their parts should be given... We wanted an after-piece. I offered to write one... The success attending this exhibition settled my mind. I would be an actor and nothing else. (Walsh 14)

⁷ Titles include "Sketches of European Society," "Woman, Her Rights (?) and Her Wrongs," "My Literary Life; or, the Vicissitudes of a Man of Letters in London and Paris," and the "The Story of the Stage" (Walsh 52).

However, his artistic stirrings were soon to be hardened by the economic realities of the profession. Boucicault later described the encounter that fundamentally changed his outlook on the theatre:

...the usual price received by Sheridan, Knowles, Bulwer, and Talfourd at that time for their plays was five hundred pounds. I was a beginner in 1841, and received for my comedy London Assurance three hundred pounds. For that amount, the manager bought the privilege of playing the work for his season. Three years later I offered a new play to a principal London theatre. The manager offered me one hundred pounds for it. In reply to my objection to the smallness of the sum he remarked: 'I can go to Paris and select a first-class comedy; having seen it performed, I feel certain of its effect. To get this comedy translated will cost me twenty-five pounds. Why should I give you three hundred pounds or five hundred pounds for your comedy, of the success of which I cannot feel so assured?' The argument was unanswerable and the result inevitable. I sold a work for a hundred pounds that took me six months hard work to compose, and accepted a commission to translate three French plays at fifty pounds apiece. This work afforded me child's play for a fortnight. Thus the English dramatist of that day was obliged either to relinquish the stage altogether or become a French copyist. (Walsh 40-1)

This exchange greatly affected Boucicault. It also led to two of his most memorable characteristics: his legal activism and his talent for shameless pandering.

Arriving in Paris shortly after this episode, Boucicault found a literary scene very different from London. French authors had enjoyed standardized profit sharing since 1806 due to the solidarity of their *Comite des Auteurs*, the first authors' trade union (Rahill 176). Boucicault immediately began trying to organize his fellow authors in support of a similar arrangement upon his return to England. However, his efforts failed due to the lack of support of key members of the Author's Society who were economically successful under the status quo (Rahill 178).

Boucicault had been sufficiently disheartened to give up his public fight for standardized profit sharing. However, he continued to pursue profit sharing for himself. He began to demand a portion of the gross, rather than the standard per performance payments. Managers, incredulous, turned him away. Boucicault bided his time. In 1864, the Princess's Theatre was mired in financial difficulties. It needed a strong run to recover. Boucicault approached the manager, George Vining, and offered to stage The Streets of London. The theatre would receive one hundred pounds per evening, equaling a guaranteed thirty pound profit per night, under Boucicault's terms. The rest would go to Boucicault himself. Under pressure from other managers, Vining refused the deal. Undaunted, Boucicault offered a second proposal. He would pay the theatre ten thousand pounds up front; in exchange, Boucicault would receive all profits for the first one hundred performances (Walsh 94). This was a display of enormous confidence on Boucicault's part. A return on his money was not guaranteed. A mere recovery of the investment was not assured, either. Nonetheless, the deal was struck and the play opened. In the end, Boucicault did quite well.

More importantly, he had set a precedent. In 1865, Vining entered into a similar contract with Charles Reade. Reade proclaimed that he made more profit in eighteen nights than he had made in the previous eighteen years (Rahill 180). Boucicault persuaded Frances Cowley Burnand to insist on a share in the profits of one of his works, rather than a lump sum. Burnand went on to net two thousand pounds, instead of the fifty he had been offered. A decade later Burnand began an editorial campaign encouraging theatre managers to adopt standardized profit sharing (Rahill 180). As more and more authors began to follow Boucicault's example, royalties slowly began to become the norm. George Augustus Sala even claimed that "Boucicault invented the royalty payment" (qtd. in Rahill 180).⁸

Boucicault's earlier negative experience may have benefited the literary world by motivating him to work for more equitable contracts, but it also soured Boucicault's attitude towards the theatre and his audience. Stung by the poor selling price of his play, Boucicault had reached:

...the turning point in the lane...; he must now choose between two roads—one leading by showman philistinism to popularity and progenity, the other by aesthetic restraint and economy to honorable and permanent recognition as a dramatist. Boucicault obeyed the siren voices and went the road of the successful showman. (Walsh 37)

The above statement is a bit hyperbolic. At the time, Boucicault actually had a different decision to make: satisfy the people's craving for sensationalistic and simplistic melodramas or cease to be a professional dramatist. There simply was not a sufficient

⁸ Several sources state that Boucicault had a part in the passage of the 1856 revision of American copyright law, as well. However, there is no description of his exact role.

audience to profitably stage plays of “aesthetic restraint.” However, the above quote does evoke something of what Boucicault must have felt when his childhood passion began to freeze into calculated business acumen.

Boucicault was candid about his approach to writing. He alternated from deprecation to defensive statements in regard to his penchant for adapting others’ works. In one breath, he would muse, “I despoil genius to make the mob worship it” (qtd. in Walsh 73). In the next, he would philosophically offer, “Originality, speaking by the card, is a quality that never existed. An author cannot exist without progenitors anymore than a child can. We are born of each other” (qtd. in Walsh 97). His tendency towards heavy dramatic borrowing was well known; a critic described him as “the English playwright who was as much a pirate if not more so than Daly” (qtd. in Felheim 55). One contemporary wrote, “Boucicault had read everything about the theatre—read everything and remembered everything, good, bad, and indifferent...He knew by heart all the *croix de ma mere* of modern melodrama, and from his mass of reminiscences he concocted his crazy-quilt-like plays, imitating involuntarily, unconsciously. He was plagiarism incarnate” (Filon 29).

Regardless of the variations in how he described his writing techniques, the results were generally the same. He would take a play, often French, that had proved itself successful. He would keep the central aspects of the work, while changing details to fit the specific audience. The setting would shift to New York, or whatever town he was playing in, and details would be added to give the piece a local feel. Stock characters would be shifted to reflect the demographics of the city. And he would almost invariably add a “sensation scene.”

The sensation scene was an exercise in theatricality on the grandest level. It contained suspense, danger, and incredible stage effects. They thrilled audiences and an well-engineered one could make a play successful almost independent of any other quality. Boucicault's mastery of this type of scene impelled one critic to state that he had single-handedly created the genre (Filon 29). The Shaughraun featured a prison wall that rotated during the scene to show the prisoner's escape from the inside and outside. For Arrah-na-Pogue, a tower revolves and sinks into the stage to show the hero's flight and to simulate climbing. The heroine in The Colleen Bawn nearly drowns on stage. A system of mirrors created the illusion of her sinking to the bottom of a pond. Trapdoors allow her to be shown "surfacing" in different areas of the stage. He even blew up a steam ship for The Octoroon.

It was with such spectacles that Boucicault won his audiences. Critics of the day, however, were not as easily swayed. Commentaries on Boucicault express an interesting mixture of repugnance at his lack of sophistication and bemused admiration and appreciation of his talents. All recognized that as a playwright he was greatly lacking. Review after review cite the unoriginality of his plots. His reliance on sensation scenes evoked comments about their aesthetic superfluity. However, the same effects are cited as making him "a pioneer in the field of theatrical productions" ("Dion" 24).

As guilty as critics felt being moved by Boucicault's plays, it was as if they, along with the rest of New York, could not help but be viscerally engaged by the sheer theatricality of what unfolded before them. Above any other talent, Boucicault had ability to *stage* things well. More than many other playwrights, his works existed solely for the stage. When seen, they amazed; when read, they amused with their outlandishness.

The review of his first production, London Assurance in 1841, is representative of most in its ambivalence:

This is his first attempt in the dramatic line, and he shows as great qualifications for the art he has chosen—strength, animation, and a full flow of spirits. It is true his work is a five act farce...it is true that not one of the characters is original, that many of the incidents are borrowed, that the construction is far from neat, that utter absurdities are committed by the characters, such as no human being would perpetrate...yet with all of this...the author has displayed a vivacity...which distinguishes the piece from every work of the day.” (“Covent” 26)

The fantastic plots were impossible to ignore. The unoriginality was difficult to overlook. The roughness of the work was glaring. Yet, the action and pulse of the work was equally clear and enjoyable. Henry James echoes the above sentiment in describing The Shaughraun: “There is no particular writing in it, but there is an infinite amount of acting, and of liveliness generally; and all of this gives on to the tune of the finest feelings possible” (James 27). “*Action* is the great secret which—since Shakespeare’s time—none have understood as well as Boucicault. It seems preposterous to name the two with the same breath...yet it is true,” stated Edwin Booth, seeming to surprise even himself (30).

Boucicault knew that he had made a career out of pleasing popular taste. In 1878, late in life, he decided to change: “Hitherto I have given you bunting. I propose now to furnish point-lace” (Walsh 151). He decided to stage Louis XI, casting himself as the monarch. He was sure that his formidable acting ability would charm the world and reserve his place among other tragedians of the day.

Perhaps his skills were never up to the task. More likely, the years had begun to dim his fire and dull his formerly razor-sharp theatrical edge. Before the show, he seemed lost and displayed none of his typical tyrannical perfectionism or managerial control. George Clarke, a member of the company, found Boucicault backstage struggling to put on his makeup. A man who had literally overseen every possible aspect of theatrical production through the years was distraught over his inability to apply the greasepaint. "If it had been anyone but Dion Boucicault, I should have burst out laughing. He looked more like a Sioux or a Kickapoo in full warpaint than the wily French monarch, and I really felt sorry for him. He was in genuine distress, so I volunteered to help him. He not only assented, but sat docile as a child," Clarke describes (qtd. in Walsh 154). The ill omens backstage foreshadowed worse still on the stage. Of the actual performance, Clarke states:

It was weird beyond words. At first, the audience sat in dumb amazement; then came titters and giggles and finally roars. Never did monarch receive less grave and reverent treatment. Boucicault's brogue came out thick and strong...The rest of the company, either out of deviltry or catching the infection, became Gaelic instead of Gallic, and before the play was half over the French tragedy had degraded into an orgy of Hibernian dialects. The audience certainly had their money's worth. Heartier laughter never resounded in a theatre. People laughed till the tears ran down their cheeks. (qtd. in Walsh 155).

Other attempts at personal aesthetic redemption met with some degree of success. Boucicault had always admired pantomime as a genre. In fact, he once stunned his

companions at a dinner party by stating that pantomime was the most important subset of drama. While others saw only a debauched form, perhaps Boucicault admired the skill and the purity of effective pantomime. In 1886, he brought Lady-Bird to the stage in an effort to revive pantomime as a respected art. The December issue of The Gentleman's Magazine reported that "This hazardous experiment evoked abundant enthusiasm from critics with long memories, but the public unfortunately did not enter into the spirit of their gratifications" (qtd. in Walsh 89). Boucicault finally had his unqualified critical success. But it came at the cost of being abandoned by his previously loyal fans.

He died a few years after this production. His career had left an indelible mark on the world of theatre. His popularity had rivaled that of Shakespeare. Critics were enchanted by his plays despite their best efforts to dislike them. Later scholars have begun to reevaluate the role of melodrama and Boucicault himself. One has stated that "his best works transcend their function as popular literature and rival the classic comedies of Restoration and eighteenth century masters" ("Dion" 24).

Daly's career follows a somewhat similar trajectory as Boucicault's. In 1838, when Boucicault already dabbling with drama, Daly was born. His interest in the theatre began in his early teens, when he began to direct plays in his backyard. Even then, his talent was for directing, not acting; "He never acted in these boyish plays, but would often rush in among them all and show them how to do things," wrote his brother (qtd. in Felheim 2). In 1856, he began writing in earnest. The next five years were spent fruitlessly circulating hand-written scripts to theatre managers and leading actors. He was rebuffed time and time again.

Determined to make a living as a writer, he tried his hand at many forms. He wrote plays, novels, short stories, and essays. All were unsuccessful. His efforts were so amateurish that, upon his eventual success, he disavowed authorship of his earlier, embarrassing efforts (Wilmeth, Plays 7).

Finally, in 1859, he was hired as a general writer for the Sunday Courier. Soon, a fortuitous vacancy allowed him to become the drama critic. He was only twenty-one years old. Gradually, he began to procure positions at other papers. In 1864, he became the critic for the New York Express, as well. By 1867, he was employed as a theatre critic by five different papers simultaneously: the two aforementioned papers plus the New York Times, the New York Sun, and the New York Citizen (Felheim 8). In addition to these responsibilities, he also acted as a press agent for a Miss Menken and Kate Bateman.

These years were very important for Daly. For eight years, he was paid to evaluate drama. He was afforded the opportunity to see what worked on stage and what did not. More importantly, he consciously sought to formulate a new conception of the theatre and the playwright. He was not satisfied with what he saw around him. The lack of adequate rehearsal time contributed to amateurish acting. The tradition of actors stagnating in one or two lines of acting created wooden, stock characters. Plays were performed by unrealistic automatons, simply going through the motions. In making these observations, he was not only fulfilling his role as a drama critic; he was also creating the artistic expectations that would guide Daly the playwright and manager. Rose Eytinge, an actress, describes this period as a time when Daly was palpably struggling to define himself aesthetically: "...there were little plaster casts and small pictures scattered about;

and everywhere there were evidences of his reaching out after a literary and artistic atmosphere” (qtd. in Felheim 7).

His popular success was as spectacular as Boucicault’s, and for mainly the same reasons. Daly employed the sensation scene as spectacularly as his predecessor had. And the crowds responded with the same enthusiasm. Many of Daly’s sensation scenes were so arresting that they have become overused to the point of triteness. The “railroad scene” device of tying a victim to railroad tracks is not the only Daly innovation that has become enshrined in the cinematic and television vernacular. The Red Scarf; or, Scenes of Aroostook featured a man tied to a log, about to be torn to shreds by a sawmill. For good measure, Daly also decided to set fire to the entire mill. Scenes like these live on today in their original forms or in slightly updated versions. James Bond may now battle a laser, not a sawmill, but the idea still goes back to Daly. And the impact is as electric now as it was then.

In addition, his eye for local detail and realistic touches was keen, like Boucicault’s. His ability to weave realistic details into a play allowed him to adapt foreign plays into “Americanized” versions. He was particularly adept at painting an image of the city, with all of its diversity and bustle.⁹ One contemporary, commenting on a foreign adaptation, stated that “...the characters...were made to appear entirely American. Personally, I never thought of them as anything but native to our soil (Wilmeth, Plays 28). His plays were littered with topical references that worked to extend the world he presented on the stage into that of his audiences. In Under the Gaslight, he uses civil war pensions (a especially contentious topic of the day), class tensions, and

women's suffrage as plot elements.¹⁰ All of this was presented against a realistic set designed to look specifically like New York.

By 1873, Daly was the manager of three different theatres in New York, leading to his depiction in the Graphic as "An Atlas of the Theatres," holding the weight of the New York theatrical world on his shoulders (Felheim 13). Daly became synonymous with the theatre; by 1883, he was the most visible luminary of the stage and a trip to his theatre was essential for the tourist seeking to taste the real New York. A revival of Under the Gaslight, in 1900, prompted one reviewer to remark, "...if any playgoer is unfamiliar with Under the Gaslight his education has been sadly neglected, for he has lost the chance to study a genuine melodrama that belongs to the historical American stage..."(qtd. in Felheim 52).

Another measure of his fame was the frequency with which his works were burlesqued (Odell 443). Hooley's Opera House and the Nellie Maskell Burlesque Company were two troupes that offered burlesque renditions of Daly's Under the Gaslight (Odell 537, 547). Both of these were staged in 1869. More broadly, his sensation scenes, especially the railroad device, entered the theatrical vernacular and were widely used for comic effect. Daly actually successfully sued one of the first appropriators. When the Olympic Theatre used a comic version of Daly's railroad scene in a pantomime entitled Humpty Dumpty in 1868, Daly sought and obtained an injunction. The case was settled out of court with alterations being made to the scene and a cash payment being made to Daly. Effective parody presumes that the audience has an intimate knowledge of

⁹ Daly observed and wrote about life in the city for the New York Courier, doing pieces on prostitutes, the working class, and prisoners. His articles exhibit the same ability to sympathetically represent the poor or the marginalized that he used on the stage (Wilmeth, Plays 7).

the original work. That parodies of Daly's works were so popular speaks to how many people were familiar with his work.

His popularity eventually extended across the ocean. His was the first complete American theatre company to perform in England. Robert Buchanan wrote that "...at Daly's there is a combination so admirable in ensemble, so full of natural talent and acquired fitness, so excellently guided and directed that it became last summer the talk of London" (qtd. in Felheim 284-5). Daly's company was also the first American troupe to perform in Germany and France, as well.

He was as lauded among the literati as he was among the masses. Mark Twain actually submitted an unsolicited script to Daly, which he turned down: "My dear Mr. Clemens, I fear that Tom Sawyer would not make a success at my theater...I regret that I cannot find this suitable" (qtd. in Felheim 301). Later in 1892, Daly approached Twain in regard to dramatizing his work, The American Claimant. Twain's faith in Daly's ability was apparent with the response "You bang away and dramatize the book *your* way and that way will be *my* way..." (qtd. in Felheim 300). Oscar Wilde also submitted a play, A Good Woman, for Daly's perusal. It, too, was rejected. Alfred Tennyson asked Daly to stage his comedy, The Foresters, which Daly successfully did in March of 1892.

His recognition as an important artist extended beyond the stage. In 1887, he co-founded "The Players" with Mark Twain, Edwin Booth, Lawrence Barrett, and A.M. Palmer (Felheim 36). He also served as the group's vice-president. In 1894, the University of Notre Dame honored him with the Laetare Medal. The New York Shakespeare Society held a benefit for Daly, "...the one who has done more than any

¹⁰ The heroine, upon removing Snorkey from the railroad tracks, remarks, "Victory! Saved! Hooray! And these are the women who ain't to have a vote!" (Daly, Under 177).

other man that lives to give to the men and women and children of this generation a practical realization of what Shakespeare said and was,” in 1896 (qtd. in Felheim 36).

His successes made him a wealthy man. The first eight performances of his Round the Clock; or, New York by Dark grossed almost \$19,000 (Felheim 183). To commemorate the death of both his children, Daly spent \$25,000 on a lavish edition of a Bible in 1885 (Felheim 27).

The critical analysis is somewhat similar to that of Boucicault: a mixture of praise and condescension. Reviewers tended to say “absurd, trifling, but well-done!” (Wilmeth, Plays 7). Some of the criticisms could be quite scathing. One author, who described Daly as a “prolific carpenter of plays,” wrote: “The story of A Flash of Lightning...is too preposterous to detain posterity for many precious moments; it is difficult, even with Under the Gaslight in memory, to believe that Daly could have written it” (Odell 293). His Shakespearean adaptations have been termed “emasculations” (Felheim 22). A Boston critic admitted, “One week ago today in speaking of the dramatic version of Griffith Gaunt at the Museum, we said it was the ‘worst dramatization of any book we ever remember to have seen.’ We had not yet witnessed Mr. A. J. Daly’s version...” (qtd. in Felheim 84). The New York Times offered a sweeping condemnation of all his work as “weak, plotless, wishy-washy without rhyme or reason and full of offences against average intelligence” (qtd. in Felheim 183). However, the praise he received is full of superlatives, as well. His acting company was widely seen as the best of its day: “There is not at this present time any company in the world speaking the Anglo-Saxon tongue, that can compare with Mr. Daly’s company for harmony of action, unity of purpose,

perfectness in discipline, excellence of artistic ability and general completeness” (qtd. in Felheim 18).

His effectiveness as a dramatist began to decline in the 1890’s. He was a victim of his own success. Having done so well following the basic principles that he believed underlay good theatre, he became formulaic and predictable. Ironically, his work became dated as the new European style of realism swept into America. Unable to change, he was overcome by a style for which, in America, he had helped clear the path. George Bernard Shaw poignantly observed, “What is to be done with Mr. Daly? How shall we open his mind to the fact that he stands on the brink of the twentieth century?” (qtd. in Felheim 30). Nonetheless, he is still considered a giant of his day.

In many ways, Daly’s career was similar to Boucicault’s. However, there are some substantive differences that point towards their differing conceptions of what it meant to be a melodramatist. First, it is clear that Daly was very concerned not only with how well he did financially, but also with how he was received socially. Boucicault did not place as much emphasis on this. This is evident in their attitudes towards their audiences. Boucicault disdained his as unsophisticates to whom he was obligated to pander. It is a reasonable inference to assume that he did not seek the esteem of those whom he ridiculed. In contrast, Daly praised theatergoers as being the best of American society. Daly’s different opinion of his audience (which was the same as Boucicault’s) is significant. To be economically tied to cultural inferiors is degrading; to entertain the elite is honorable. This is not to say that melodrama enthusiasts were culturally inferior or that they were elite; it is to say that this is how Boucicault and Daly *viewed* them,

respectively. So, for Daly, to be seen as respectable by his “elite” audience was one step towards artistic professionalism.

Daly, wanting to be seen as respectable, was keenly aware of the lingering negative impressions of the theatre. To combat these, he again imposed his will on his performers, forcing them to be “respectable”. A stringent set of rules were created and enforced with monetary fines. Actors were not allowed to smoke because it was “a very bad habit.” Offenders were fined fifty cents (Wilmeth, Plays 19). Conspicuous public appearances, speaking with the press, and conducting business outside of the theatre were also finable breaches of decorum. One of Daly’s harsher fines was levied for the teasing of a co-worker: “I shall fine anyone a night’s salary whom I shall convict of this offense against good breeding inside the theatre” (qtd. in Felheim 32).

It is possible that some of these rules were made to enhance the running of the theatre. However, many of his rules would have undoubtedly caused problems when his actors begin to chafe under his authoritarianism. The reference to “good breeding” illustrates the fact that Daly was consciously trying to make his theatre as “respectable” as possible. He took other steps towards this end, as well. For example, Daly removed any potentially vulgar terms from his Shakespeare adaptations to ensure that no one was offended (Felheim 221).

Moreover, Daly publicized the morality and respectability of his theatre frequently. He boasted, “The best portion of the community has taken possession of the theater...From the topmost gallery down, respectability reigns” (“Dramatist” 192). Daly also claimed that “the moral of actors in this country is unsurpassed by that of any other

country or age” (sic) (“Playwrights” 199). It is obvious that he was very concerned with the “respectability” of the theatrical world.

His theatre *was* seen as reputable. George C. Odell described Daly’s audience as “the best in the city in the realms of fashion, literature, and art” (qtd. in Wilmeth, “Plays” 13). “One was proud to be in so distinguished an assembly,” he continued. The New York World eulogized him by stating that he “taught the men and women under him to step into and maintain dignified places among cultured people. Had there been more Augustin Daly’s, the stage would now suffer fewer stigmas” (qtd. in Wilmeth, “Plays” 22-3).

George Bernard Shaw commented that Daly “was a real manager with definite artistic aims which he trained his company to accomplish” (Wilmeth, “Plays” 1). Daly did have specific goals: an acting troupe that was the finest in the world and a theatre so refined that it attracted the best of society. To accomplish this, he followed four tenets: the manager should have total control, the public deserves only the best, realism is the dramatic goal, and actors should truly *act*. Of these, the keystone was the first tenet. If he established himself as the true director of all facets of his theater, the rest would fall into place.

As such, Daly the manager was an exacting man. Many actors left when they tired of the martinet. Many returned, as well. George Clarke, who walked out several times, said, “I could not keep away. I was able to make a great deal more money elsewhere; but I never found elsewhere the artistic atmosphere, the home of art, that remains unchanged here [at Daly’s] always” (qtd. in Felheim 29). Daly exerted his control over everything: the script, the staging, the blocking, the costumes, the finances, and anything else that fell

under his gaze. He was continually posting notices demanding greater adherence to his personal vision. When actors began improvising too much on stage, Daly posted the following note: “There is a growing evil to which I must call particular attention and insist upon its immediate amendment...I refer to the additions of ‘ifs,’ ‘ands,’ and ‘buts,’ of ‘ha-has’—or repetitions and integrations in their own speeches...The author’s text *must be adhered to*. Permit him to rise or fall by his own lines—not by your additions” (qtd. in Felheim 27). Daly’s level of control was so great that Eric Scott noted that, even though Daly himself never acted, “It is no exaggeration to say that Mr. Daly made each play a monologue with himself as principal performer” (qtd. in Felheim 17).

Daly knew precisely how he wanted his plays to be performed. To accomplish this, he routinely worked sixteen hour days and demanded the same from his performers. When his plays went on tour, he assembled an ensemble that was the equal of his New York company. Furthermore, he would accompany them on tour to ensure that everything was done to his tastes. This level of managerial control was unheard of. When attending a Daly performance, one knew that they were seeing the artistic creation of one man. It is because of this strict adherence to his own personal vision that Daly has been remembered as America’s first director in the modern sense.

The accurate representation of life through art was what Daly sought on the stage. The histrionics of previous generations, which he referred to as “The thunder and lightning and absurd farce acting of our boyhood era,” would not do (qtd. in Felheim 16). Through regimented drilling, he created world class actors. Dora Ranous, a company member, stated, “He was a wonderful teacher of acting; I believe he could teach a broomstick to act; he shows one just how to move, to speak, to look; he seems to know

instinctively just how everything should go to get the best effect” (qtd. in Felheim 18). Emphasis was placed on a life-like delivery. Actors were taught not to merely mouth their lines, but not to overexaggerate, either. Performers were never to acknowledge the audience on the other side of the footnotes. This, alone, was quite a change from the grandstanding of the past. Daly truly took great pains in teaching his actors and, because of this, was recognized as helping create an American school of acting. He was also credited with making great strides towards creating a truly American theatre: “He has...accomplished the remarkable feat, for the first time on record, of writing an American comedy. The scene is American, the motive is American, the characters performed are American” (“Music” 177).

In addition to teaching actual acting technique, Daly also introduced a new managerial style designed to extract every last bit of talent from his actors. Instead of using acting lines, Daly would shift actors from one type of part to another from one play to the next. This prevented his actors from stagnating or his characters from becoming wooden. He cast unknowns and gave minor stars a chance to handle leading roles, creating a virtual actor factory; the Dramatic Mirror attributed the career of seventy-five major actors to Daly (Wilmeth, Plays 17).

Daly did not give preferential treatment to any of his actors. To do so, he felt, would be to sacrifice the play itself. “I want my company kept at a level, I put them all in line, and then I watch, and if one head begins to bob up above the others, I give it a crack and send it down again” (qtd. in Wilmeth, Plays 17). If he was impartial in delivering punishment, he was also equitable in showing respect. In a letter, his brother encouraged him to continue his even-handed dealings: “[it may be unusual for] little people of the

stage to get the same respect from the manager as the big people. It is against all reason that the leading actresses should not trample on the lesser ones. Well, stick to your way. This is the theatre for ladies and gentlemen, not for tyrants and slaves” (Wilmeth, Plays 19). Daly’s labors resulted in his theatre being described as “...the richest repository of the best dramatic tradition, and the only true school of acting in the United States” (qtd. in Wilmeth, Plays 18).

Because of his pioneering managerial style, his ability to mold actors, and his insistence on a respectable theatre, Daly was a legend in his own time. Many commentators professed to believe that he had achieved his professional goals. In 1884, Nym Crinkle, critic for the New York Sun, lauded Daly for his faithful adherence to the highest standards:

- 1) the pursuit of art for its own sake, not merely to make money
- 2) the encouragement of native talent
- 3) the creation of a new order of drama...
- 4) the introduction of elaborate stage settings
- 5) the creation of a thoroughly adequate stock comedy company (qtd. in Felheim 26)

His theater had become a paragon of good reputation. Felheim described Daly’s theater by saying that “no taint of bad taste, no coarse word, no indelicate allusion could be endured in a theater whose standard was beauty or by an audience whose manners were dictated by fussy society editors” (234). George O. Sullivan dedicated a book to Daly in 1888 “in recognition of his rare earnestness as a student of dramatic literature; his faithful

adherence throughout his career as a manager and dramatist to the methods which make the drama an art as well as a business..." (qtd. in Felheim 45).

However, the praise was not unmitigated. Despite his artistic proclivities, Daly was subject to the same economic realities of other authors of the day: if one did not draw a crowd, one would not be a playwright very long. Some people have criticized Daly for too easily succumbing to the popular taste. Ranken J. Towse writes that:

his sense of artistic propriety did not prevent him from resorting to some of the most mischievous practices of the purely commercial and speculative managers. He did not hesitate, for instance, to sacrifice artistic principle for the sake of 'booming' a popular actress, to put on plays for whose interpretation his players were wholly unqualified, to mangle the text in order to minimize their incompetency, or to offer attractive spectacle as a substitute for good acting. Some of the pieces that he produced were unmitigated trash, flagrant melodramatic absurdities, with no other possible object than to catch the mob....

(114)

Daly was, in fact, sometimes a little questionable in terms of artistic integrity. As Towse asserts, Daly was, at times, a "commercial and speculative manager;" for example, in 1874, he was exposed for running advertisements consisting of fake reviews from the Evening Post, the Mail, the Sun, the Graphic, the Times, and the Herald (Felheim 12). In a Dramatic News editorial entitled "Theatrical Charlatanism," his six fake reviews were juxtaposed with the real ones.

Nonetheless, plays that are popular are not necessarily inartistic. In addition, if Daly presented truly bad plays (which he often did) which he actually thought were true

to the goals he outlined for himself it would not be a contradiction of his self-conception. A later author echoed this in stating, “That he failed to achieve the highest artistry is a fault of his intelligence, not of his heart, for on the level of intentions he stands as an earnest and devoted manager” (Felheim 46). Much of what can be considered mass-marketed drivel by current standards might actually have satisfied Daly’s personal aesthetics. Nonetheless, it is a virtual certainty, given the entertainment market at the time, that Daly did bow to economic forces to some degree.

Another problematic area in relation to Daly’s conception of artistic professionalism is the issue of originality. It is very hard to tell exactly what his thoughts on the importance of originality is. At times, he claims that it is unimportant. Then, however, he will strenuously defend the originality of his own works. The very frequency with which he addresses the issue in one form or another shows that it was a question that he struggled with. Regardless, his inconsistent actions and words do not contribute to the artistic unity that he sought. Furthermore, he lies and commits fraud repeatedly as he struggles with the issue of originality. That is not professional by any standard.

Despite his occasional claims otherwise, Daly was a profligate plagiarizer. There is very little of his work that is not taken directly from someone else. He adapted approximately one hundred French and German plays for the American stage. In addition to stealing the original work, he never gave credit for the translations, either. Often his playbills would proclaim that he had translated the work himself, although he did not speak either German or French (Felheim 193). Until the 1870 revision of the copyright law, he also freely adapted novels for the stage.¹¹

¹¹ The 1870 revision granted authors the right to dramatizations of their works.

He was unapologetic about his methods. Discussing the value of originality, he concludes, “Originality of plot and incident seem, by the common consent of the highest dramatic censors in every age, to count for nothing in the estimate of literary pretensions” (“Dramatist” 191). Following this logic, he also defended his dramatizations of other’s works: “I include dramatizations of novels as original plays because novels and plays are essentially and radically different achievements. The only thing they can have in common is a story. The plot has to be changed—the incidents altered...” (qtd. in Felheim 83). Audaciously, he copyrighted everything that passed through his hands, virtually none of which was truly his, in his own name. He even copyrighted his productions of Shakespeare. Daly’s penchant for claiming others’ works as his own was so well known that once a gentleman tried to entice him to buy two works, including one by Boucicault, with the incentive that “the piece can be registered in your name in America as your own *property and translation* if you desire it” (Felheim 196).

Ironically, Daly was quick to defend himself against those who claimed that he had drawn from another author without permission. In 1875, he brought suit against the Dramatic News because they had claimed that he had based his play Pique on a French play called Flirtation. The suit was somewhat surreal, in that Daly had admitted incorporating pieces of another French play, Her Lord and Master, into his own. As the editor of Dramatic News put it, “In other words, while he generously forgave the reckless French pirates who stole his ideas before they even occurred to him, he determined with strenuous ire, that nobody should accuse him of stealing plot and language from one source, when, in point of fact, he stole them from another” (qtd. in Felheim 127). Due to

a lack of international copyright provisions in American law, Daly won the case and collected \$2,363.63 in damages.

In another instance, Daly preemptively defended his talents in a letter to the press. Referring to his adaptation of L'Assomier, he wrote: "Indeed, so thoroughly distinct is the dramatic work from the other [Zola's novel] while it contains the very life essence of the novel—that its very originality will be its protection against the imitators who are making ready, as usual, to spring their spurious works on the public, if the courts give them any sort of chance" (qtd. in Felheim 139). An artistic distinction between an adaptation and a copy of an adaptation seems to be tenuous, but Daly tried to draw one in the public's mind. Daly's statements are even more disingenuous than they first appear. The play had actually been pieced together by Olive Logan. Nevertheless, the playbill read "Adapted and arranged by Mr. Augustin Daly" (Felheim 139). Logan had to sue Daly to receive compensation when he defaulted on their contract.

Given Daly's aggressive use of the copyright law to defend his claimed authorial rights, the post-humous discovery of his personal correspondence with his brother was shocking. The letters between the two brothers show that Daly wrote virtually none of what he claimed to have authored. His brother, Joseph, did. Not only were "Daly's" works adaptations, he had not even done the adapting. The only play that can be said to be truly Daly's is A Priceless Paragon. The authorship of this work is made clear by a comment that Joseph made in a letter dated February 12, 1890: "It seemed strange for me to sit at the first play your ever produced...in which I had no hand" (qtd. in Felheim 152). Joseph wrote his plays, his speeches, his letters, and his articles. Even the quotes attributed to Daly in this paper almost surely were ghost-written by Joseph.

Joseph Daly was an extraordinary man. He was Chief Justice of the New York Court of Common Pleas, which eventually was subsumed into the New York Supreme Court. He served, upon appointment by President McKinley, as chair of the committee responsible for revising Puerto Rican laws. Upon his death in 1916, Pope Benedict XI named him Knight Commander of the Order of St. Gregory (Felheim 44-5). He was also very good at keeping secrets. Before the discovery of their correspondence, the only public mention of their collaboration was one sentence in Joseph's biography of his brother: "I substituted for him upon his various newspapers [in 1864]" (qtd. in Wilmeth, "Plays" 25).

It seems that Daly assumed the familiar role of director in the writing of his plays, as well as in the theatre. Daly would prepare a rough outline for a play: a brief plot outline, descriptions of characters, and an indication of necessary stage directions (Felheim 65). He would then give his instructions to Joseph, who would write the actual play. Joseph was typically reimbursed for his work, with a standard fee of \$1,000 per play and a 2% royalty (Felheim 201).

It remains a mystery as to why Joseph did what he did. He almost surely did not need the money, given the success he had in his own career. It is even harder to imagine how Joseph remained content to watch his brother become an international celebrity while he himself remained anonymous. It is clear that they had an unusually close relationship. They met every afternoon for lunch and usually walked home together. Over the years, they exchanged thousands of letters that were openly affectionate. In 1864, Daly wrote to Joseph, "I believe you are the only real brother anybody has in this living world...and you are all mine" (qtd. in Wilmeth, Plays 24). Joseph was usually even more

effusive than this towards his younger brother. Undoubtedly, their relationship was unique. While others called Daly the “Governor,” “Commodore,” or “Commander,” Joseph affectionately called him “Buddy John” or “Bubsey” (Wilmeth, Plays 24). As unusual as their relationship was, it is obvious that both their lives and the theatre was enriched for their secret symbiosis.

One thing, however, is not a mystery: Daly did not give a moment’s thought to authorial rights. He appropriated anything useful that was within his reach and presented it as his own. Furthermore, the translations he claimed as his own were not done by his hand. The adaptations of these translations were also not his. Yet, he claimed them all. In reality, he was several times removed from the literary production of all of his plays. He was not a playwright, only a talented manager.

Boucicault and Daly both relied heavily on adaptations and plagiarism. However, they had different attitudes towards the practice. Boucicault simply acknowledged the fact. At times, he was even somewhat philosophical about the nature of writing, stating that authors are necessarily “born of each other” (qtd. in Walsh 97). Daly, however, oscillated and acted erratically in relation to the importance of originality. Their respective attitudes toward the issue were illustrated in a remarkable legal case involving both of them.

“The plaintiff is, by profession, a dramatic author...”; with these words, New York Circuit Court Judge Samuel Blatchford began his judgment in the case of Daly v. Palmer et al. Daly was seeking an injunction against the performance of Boucicault’s play After Dark, which had been purchased by Palmer and his associates. The reason was alleged

plagiarism of the famed “railroad scene” in Daly’s Under the Gaslight. Daly’s lawyers contended that:

one Dion Boucicault...procured a copy of said play by some means, and, without the knowledge or consent of the plaintiff, prepared therefrom a play...in which he introduced several of the scenes and incidents of the plaintiff’s play, varying them slightly...so as colorably to be a different work, while substantially retaining the attractive features of the plaintiff’s play...[and] that the work of Boucicault is a palpable imitation of the plaintiff’s said ‘railroad scene,’ and is plagiarized therefrom...and put into the play called After Dark, by Boucicault, for the purpose of obtaining the pecuniary benefit which might otherwise result to the plaintiff....(Daly v. Palmer et al)

The scenes involved *are* notably similar. In Daly’s play, the heroine, Laura, is locked in a train station storage shed, at her request, for safety until her train arrives. The villain, Byke, enters the scene with Snorkey, a messenger and Laura’s unofficial protector. Byke then proceeds to bind Snorkey’s arms and tie him to the railroad track. Laura sees this through a window, as stage effects indicate an approaching train. Luckily, there is a bundle of axes in the shed. Grabbing an axe, Laura frantically hacks her way out of the shed and removes Snorkey from the tracks as the train thunders onto the stage.

Except for slight tinkering, Boucicault’s scene is much the same. A character, Gordon Chumley, is drugged and lain across an underground rail line. In the same act, an “Old Tom” is thrown into a wine vault adjacent to the tracks. Through an opening onto the tracks, Old Tom spies Chumley laying on the track. Again, the flash of lights and

sound effects suggest the impending passage of a train. Finding an iron bar, Old Tom enlarges the opening in the wall, allowing him to tumble through and drag Chumley from the track immediately before the train passes.

The play was mongrelized, to say the least. The plot of the play was taken from the play Rosedale by Lester Wallack. Wallack, in turn, had based his play on the novel Lady Lee's Widowhood. Others have claimed sources different from those Boucicault cited as the inspiration for the "railroad scene" itself. Colonel T. Allston Brown, a contemporary of Daly's, stated that the idea had been lifted from the English play The Engineer; or, the Life of George Stephenson. To further cloud things, this play is adapted from the book The Life of George Stephenson, Railway Engineer by Samuel Smiles (Felheim 50).

The case made its way through the appeals process until it ultimately was decided, in Daly's favor, by the United States Supreme Court. He received a judgment of \$61,000, but only actually received \$6,000 (Felheim 57). The process had taken nearly twenty years. Neither the scene, nor the play, were completely original to Daly. He knew this, seeming to indicate that he did not value originality. However, he also spent close to two decades embroiled in a lawsuit. The only rational way of reconciling his statements and his actions, both in this case and in general, is to assume that Daly was an opportunistic, self-interested showman when it came to this issue. He would plagiarize when it benefited him and then sue others for copying what he originally stole himself. Boucicault, however, was as straightforward as he always was on this issue. He laconically stated: "The railway effect is not devised from Mr. Daly's Under the Gaslight,

but is a London stage machinist's invention of as early a date as 1843" (qtd. in Felheim 55).

To be fair, it is easy to see how Daly could become entangled in the issue of originality. The practice of piracy was standard during this time period. Adapting others' works, rather than writing one's own, had several attractive advantages to a playwright. First, it was easy. Charles Reade commented, "To invent good pieces is very hard...to adopt them is quite as easy as shelling peas...I can lay my hand on a dozen adapters of French pieces who know neither French or English or the stage" (qtd. in Felheim 190). Second, there was very little cost to the author. There was not much time spent in labor. In most cases, no royalties were paid or rights purchased. At most, there might be a small translation fee. Third, and most importantly, an adaptation of an already popular work came with a greater assurance of success than did a completely new play. Of course, because the adaptor wanted to have the same success as the original author, he took the very heart of the play's appeal and then tweaked it slightly, maybe adding a little local color, to make it more appealing for his specific audience. As such, the substantial elements of a work were precisely those that an adaptor was going to borrow. The adaptor chose the play he would like to appropriate based on its success in captivating an audience similar to his. Ideally, an adaptation would engender the same reaction, with the same result: commercial reward.

The copyright law of the day was inadequate to prevent this from being the most cost-effective way to produce drama. Until 1856, managers could perform an author's works without paying any royalties. After dramatic performance was granted copyright protection, authors could still adapt foreign works freely. It was not until the passage of

the Chase Act in 1891, which reciprocally extended American copyright protection to foreign authors, that playwrights truly had to produce original work. Without any sort of legal protection, it was infeasible to be a professional author and produce truly original works. Boucicault recognized this and accepted it for what it was. Apparently, Daly's desire to be an artist never allowed him to completely let go of the issue. The result is that his career is riddled with hypocrisy and marred by lies.

Boucicault and Daly had different perceptions of what it meant to be a melodramatist. The nature of the entertainment world in New York City in the second half of the nineteenth century was fluid enough to allow them to produce very similar works under very dissimilar self-conceptions. A concluding question is why Boucicault and Daly viewed their careers the way they did and not in the inverse. A definitive answer is impossible to provide given that one can never know what personality traits and inner thoughts drove them to think the way that they did.

However, some general conjectures can be made based on their early experiences with the theater. Boucicault's first taste of the theater was as an actor in a boyhood play. He was smitten immediately and embarked on a life-long love affair with the stage.

However, he found that to provide the quality of writing, managing, and directing that he wanted, he had to perform these jobs himself. His standard roles included manager, director, producer, playwright, actor, and acting instructor. In addition, he did whatever else needed to be done. One contemporary described his first meeting with Boucicault by saying, "[He] was up to his eyes in business, nailing lace curtains to the private boxes..." (Walsh 58). Out of economic necessity, Boucicault was involved in even the most menial details. Obviously, he was a very busy man. A friend of the family commented:

Boucicault was a patient and constant worker—a temperate man, simple in his habits, *who treated dramatic authorship as a trade*. He worked harder than a banker's clerk...Early and late, he never idled, and after his pleasant little dinner parties and social gatherings he regained his lost time by increased industry. (emphasis mine) (qtd. in Walsh 106-7)

In both his attitude and his actions, he treated his work as a “trade,” not an art or a calling. His jack-of-all-trades approach would contribute to this conception.

In contrast, Daly was always the director. Even as a child, he organized his playmates to give broader expression to his own imaginings than he could as a single actor. In adulthood, he did not act himself, but was famous for teaching others how to perform on the stage. Given that his brother almost everything attributed to Daly, his directorial role even held sway in that arena. The distinction between mental and physical labor was one commonly used by Americans in the nineteenth century to distinguish between the working and middle class (McConachie 161). Daly's role as the creative force that never actually exerts himself physically on the stage is more favorably interpreted, according to this model, than Boucicault's more “hands-on” approach. This natural tendency to direct was strengthened by Daly's work as a theater critic. During this period, Daly applied his taste to the work of others. It is inevitable that his sense of his own theatrical sensibility would be sharpened and clarified in the process. This extended period of extensive thought about what was positive and negative about the theater would have laid the framework of Daly's own aspirations as a manager. Boucicault was not afforded a similarly reflective period early in his career in which to consciously develop a personal aesthetic sense.

Finally, Boucicault's negative experiences with money early in his career may have colored his view of the field. He quite explicitly speaks of the disappointment he felt upon facing the economic reality of the day and realizing that he could not afford to produce truly original works. As a young man, he was forced to begin adapting plays to be able to write at all. The bitterness in his words makes it clear that he did not enjoy the task. His resentment towards the restraints put on his writing can be felt in his attitudes towards his audiences. Daly had no similar experiences. In fact, it would be hard for Daly to feel the same emotions as Boucicault because Boucicault was truly a playwright, while Daly essentially masqueraded as one. Therefore, Daly might not have had the same personal investment in the actual plays he directed. To be sure, Daly was very concerned with the quality of the *production*; he was a director who held himself to a high standard. However, as a director, his professional goals (a well-acted and well-staged production) were also economically rewarding. As such, Daly could pursue his main objectives while simultaneously satisfying his audience. Because he basically sub-contracted his writing, the actual scripts themselves (and the fact that they were tailored to fit popular taste) did not necessarily have to enter into Daly's conception of what *he* did and who *he* was as a professional. Boucicault, of course, did not have this option.

Again, however, it must be emphasized that the precise reason for the attitudinal differences between the two men is ultimately unknowable. It might even be that they would have a difficult time answering the question themselves. Such is the nature of human thought and emotion. Nonetheless, the circumstances described above may have plausibly contributed to their differences.

The challenge of constructing a professional identity was not unique to Boucicault and Daly during this period. Barnum, for example, appears to be the consummate commercial showman. Not only did he mislead and deceive to make a fast buck, he seemed to revel in his talent for doing so. He had a keen sense of what the public would pay to see and he delivered it to them, even if he had to lie in the process. However, even he became uncomfortable with his role as pure panderer. In the 1850's he began to feel uncomfortable with himself as someone who would present anything as long as it was profitable. He expressed his discomfort with his popular identity in a private letter to James Gordon Bennett, a newspaper writer, in 1854: "Dear Sir...I send you this letter as a *Flag of Truce* and *not* for publication...Well, I think your experience has convinced you that I am not to be killed by newspaper bullets...But now comes the question: Don't you think that it is time to let me drop? I mean as a *target* for ridicule. I decidedly think *it is*, and respectfully request you to do so" (Barnum 75-6). Barnum certainly used protestations against to the press as a means to a more profitable end frequently. However, that does not appear to be the case here. First, the letter is specifically stated to be private. Second, his actions after 1850 seem to suggest that he was truly trying to reform his reputation. In 1850, he engaged European opera star Jenny Lind to tour the United States. She was a very legitimate and talented singer. There is indication that Barnum sought her out precisely because she would be able to confer a sense of respectability to his own career (Durant 59). If this is true, it is poignant; Lind was very hesitant at first for the exactly opposite reason: fear that her own reputation would be damaged by being associated with Barnum. Other efforts to reform Barnum's career included support of several legitimate museums. He was a large contributor to the new

Smithsonian Museum and the American Museum of Natural History in New York City (Saxon xiv). In addition, he founded the Barnum Museum at Tufts University with an endowment of \$150,000 (Barnum 235).

New York City in the late nineteenth century offered challenges in self-conceptualizing to anyone associated with the entertainment world. The potential for fame, fortune, and respect existed alongside the grimmer specter of the more common reality: marginality and poverty. Rollin Lynde Hartt was struck with this dichotomy when he observed an anonymous variety show musician seated in the orchestral pit reading a respectable music periodical during spare moments. The juxtaposition of the performers reality, reflected in the seedy surroundings, with his higher personal hopes, symbolized by the magazine, moved Hartt to comment that the man was “despised both because he is a musician and because he is not...” (106). The permeability of barriers between genres, venues, and classes meant that the difference between the commercial and the artistic was often narrow. In addition, the competitive nature of the entertainment field, coupled with the economic reality fostered by meager copyright protection, made it very hard to have an economically viable career that was also artistically centered. Boucicault and Daly are two dramatists who personally struggled to navigate this divide. Ultimately, neither was completely successful in doing so. Being individuals, they cannot wholly represent the challenges that faced playwrights during this period. Furthermore, their lives and attitudes are their own and are not exactly representative of all dramatists and performers. However, the questions they faced and the conclusions they reached are illustrative of the general issues that faced dramatists and entertainers of their day when they asked, “What does it mean to be a professional?”

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