ADAPTATIONS: THE LONDON STAGE AS ENTERTAINMENT INDUSTRY, 1790-1890

A Dissertation in

English and Women’s Studies

by

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ABSTRACT

Scholars have consistently critiqued Hollywood for producing adaptations that ignore the narrative intricacies and cultural critiques characteristic of the novels chosen for adaptation. This project argues that this practice has a long history—one that is almost as old as the novel—and that the nineteenth-century theater industry has much more in common with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s understanding of the modern culture industry than we might first imagine. The dissertation investigates how nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations significantly changed the politics espoused in their parent novels. Chapters on early theatrical adaptations of the history of Three-Fingered Jack (1800), Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein (1818), Victor Hugo’s Notre Dame de Paris (1831), and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin (1852) demonstrate how the radical politics that informed these novels were changed when adapted for the stage in order to promote narratives that closely fit England’s political aims both at home and abroad.

The project includes analyses of adaptations staged in London throughout the nineteenth century, and argues that these early stage adaptations solidified their parent novels’ place in the popular literary canon. The methodology employed is primarily historicist, drawing upon theater history, advertisements, reviews of the performances, and political movements. Together, these documents illustrate the highly-commercial nature of the nineteenth-century theater industry and the financial and political motivations behind staging adaptations in London’s major theaters.
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INTRODUCTION

It Lives! Adaptation and Everlasting Life

Adaptations share a lot in common with Frankenstein’s monster. Adapting a novel to a dramatic format (stage or screen) first requires the selection of choice parts. The pieces are then stitched together into a new creation that is brought to life through the use of modern technology. Both are also considered by many to be ugly creatures—imperfect (or even hideous) copies of the original. However, no matter how ugly they may appear to some, they both possess significant appeal for others. The Creature in Shelley’s novel may be ugly and violent; however, he manages to gain the reader’s sympathy through his articulate speeches. Adaptations too have their ugly side—distortions of the story that often make scholars (or fans) of the novel cringe. Nevertheless, they possess strong appeal for many people. We know this for a number of reasons that have been theorized elsewhere.¹ The most obvious reason is that no matter how much criticism they may receive, they are always around us. The best ones always keep coming back in sequels and spin-offs. Like the most famous Hollywood monsters, you cannot stop them.

Most importantly, we know that adaptations are an important popular practice because adaptations inform all of our daily lives. We can find adaptations in every popular medium today. Films stand out as the most visible, accessible examples. If one were to look through a list of blockbuster films from the last few years, Hollywood’s

lucrative love affair with adaptation would be apparent instantly. Quite a few forms find their way onto the big screen: novels, short stories, comic books, graphic novels, video games, and television series. “Adaptations are everywhere.” This pointed, three-word sentence opens Linda Hutcheon’s *A Theory of Adaptation*. They need not say more.

Some novels have been adapted so many times that there is no doubt that the story and characters are more widely known through adaptations. The abundance of *Frankenstein* adaptations to date makes it an easy example of how adaptations can overshadow the novels and short stories that bring them to life. Everyone knows *Frankenstein*, even if they do not know *Frankenstein*. The version of the story known to most is not the one found on the pages of Shelley’s novel. Yet, *Frankenstein* is merely one example of how popular entertainment appropriates literature and reconfigures it for new audiences, often with little regard to textual faithfulness or historical accuracy.

Nineteenth-century texts in particular find their way into current cultural visibility through films, television, animation, and comic books. A “Scrooge” is understood by most to be a grumpy penny-pincher, but current students are more likely to associate the character with George C. Scott, Bill Murray, or the cartoon character $crooge McDuck rather than attribute him to Charles Dickens.² In a similar vein, Dracula and the notorious one-man duo of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde have become icons of twentieth-century cinema, detached from the fictions of Bram Stoker and Robert Louis Stevenson. Quasimodo, Victor Hugo’s unforgettable hunchback, has inspired memorable performances from at least three major twentieth-century actors; he also became a

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² During a class discussion of this text in 2006, my students made a considerable case for the inclusion of *The Muppet Christmas Carol* (1992) in this list of “influential” (or at least most memorable) adaptations.
friendly face for five-year-olds in 1996 courtesy of an extreme Disney makeover
complete with lessons in song and dance.

All of these twentieth-century incarnations of nineteenth-century characters have
at least one thing in common: they are fairly easy to dismiss as products of capitalist
ventures more interested in profits than in introducing new generations to a literary
cultural legacy. The films and cartoons, along with the multi-million dollar
merchandizing machines that accompany them, are produced to encourage the mass
consumption of products that appear to have little so-called “artistic” value (much as the
“Frankenberry” and “Count Chocula” cereals use the respective literary characters to
market the consumption of a breakfast item with minimal nutritional value).

Adaptations may have little artistic value for some critics; however, they are here
to stay. Adaptations and other popular appropriations have taken over the dissemination
of literary classics in mass culture, much to the chagrin of scholars, teachers, and
bibliophiles, whom often find themselves defending the novels. As scholars and teachers,
one of our tasks is convincing students, friends, or colleagues to actually pick up and read
a novel that they already think they know. The proliferation of adaptations of most
canonical novels often makes this task a difficult one. Consider the following
introductory remarks to The Modern Library Classics edition of The Hunchback of Notre-Dame written by Elizabeth McCraken:

I mean to introduce the entire book, which is a great work of literature.
Those words once suggested a book you had to read; now they suggest
one you needn’t bother with, because so many generations have done it for
you. Surely by now the plot of The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (or
Robinson Crusoe, or A Tale of Two Cities) is encoded in our DNA, a kind of evolutionary Cliff’s Note.\textsuperscript{3}

McCraken’s comments ring a bell with literary scholars. Film adaptations usually take the Cliff’s Notes approach to literature. In summarizing the text, the novel is often stripped of its narrative intricacies—especially those that provide critical cultural commentary about their historical period’s political and social controversies. The most spectacular characters and incidents in the novels are chosen specifically for their ability to amuse audiences, for their ability to capture the interest of potential consumers. This sacrifice of “serious” material for spectacle has become a standard practice—one that we have come to expect at a time when cinematic spectacle reigns over the written word.

The cultural struggle between novels and their cinematic adaptations is a legitimate concern for teachers and scholars. As teachers, we know that students often approach canonical texts with a set of expectations produced by their encounters with adaptations and other popular appropriations. As scholars, we often privilege authoritative, scholarly editions without seriously engaging the popular adaptations of those texts that are most familiar to a wider audience. The discourse that surrounds this subject is one that is usually fraught with fraudulent assumptions regarding the practice of adaptation. Most inquiries into the abundance of adaptations set up the following series of simple oppositional dichotomies: text versus film; past versus present; “high” versus “low” art; artistic endeavor versus commercial entertainment. Surely these opposites constitute part of the relationship between novels and their adaptations; however, that relationship is much more complicated than one might first assume.

\textsuperscript{3} Elizabeth McCraken, Introduction to The Hunchback of Notre-Dame (New York: Modern Library, 2002): xi.
For example, in the passage cited above, McCraken sets up a distinct historical dichotomy between novels and contemporary students’ familiarity with the text. “So many generations” separate one from the other and, in the case of Victor Hugo’s nineteenth-century novel, that gap is filled by twentieth-century adaptations and interpretations of the text. The only way to know the novel as it would have been known in the 1830s is to pick up the book. McCraken implies that this was the way that most readers met Quasimodo and Esmeralda in the 1830s. However, from a historical perspective, this claim is largely false or—at the very least—underdeveloped. True, today’s students have been repeatedly exposed to visual adaptations of the novel, but so were Hugo’s contemporaries, as were Shelley’s, as were Stowe’s, as were Stevenson’s. In fact, it would be difficult to name a major nineteenth-century novelist whose work was not adapted for the stage in the nineteenth century. Over the course of the nineteenth century the novel became the dominant literary form, but that literary dominance emerged in part because the practice of adapting novels for the stage became a staple of theatrical entertainment.

Many nineteenth-century novels that we now consider “canonical” were adapted for theater audiences shortly after their first publication. Sometimes those stage adaptations were responsible for the novel’s commercial success. Chapters two and three of this study fall into this category, showing how Three-Fingered Jack and Frankenstein’s Creature would have never become famous had they not been adapted over and over again in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Adaptations also served as catalysts for new printings and less-expensive editions, making an already successful novel all the more lucrative not only for authors, but also
for publishers. Chapters four and five of this study demonstrate this by looking at the popular history of Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris* and Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The latter is an especially fruitful example of how the history of adaptation on the nineteenth-century stage depicts the connections between novels and their adaptations as complex, multi-layered processes, not simple, diametrically-opposed struggles.

Feminist scholar Linda Hutcheon offers a more optimistic view of adaptations. “An adaptation is not vampiric,” she writes, “it does not draw the life-blood from its source and leave it dying or dead, nor is it paler than the adapted work. It may, on the contrary, keep that prior work alive, giving it an afterlife it would never have had otherwise.” Instead of dismissing adaptations as derivative works, she argues that it is important to see them as works that have a major cultural impact, and in some cases, may have been the source of a novel’s continued relevance. Such was the case with *Frankenstein*. Before its 1823 stage debut, *Frankenstein* existed in 500 copies. The success of Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption* played a role in tripling the number of copies in circulation. (A second edition of the novel was issued only weeks after the play’s premiere.) Even more interesting is the fact that on any given night that the play was performed, it was viewed by more individuals than the total number of copies of the novel in print. *Presumption* and the adaptations, parodies, and burlesques that followed

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4 Hutcheon, p. 176.
6 In the introduction to *Harlequin Empire: Race, Ethnicity and the Drama of the Popular Enlightenment* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2007), David Worrall explains how a successful play could easily bring in more than one million viewers at the turn of the nineteenth century. His estimates are based on known performances of George Colman’s *Inkle and Yarico* (1787). The number of viewers who saw *Presumption* on stage was likely much higher in the 1820s due to longer runs, more revivals, and theaters with larger capacities.
certainly kept *Frankenstein* alive throughout the nineteenth century from the simple fact that they reached a wider audience and, in turn, brought a renewed interest in Shelley’s novel. (However, to be honest, it appears that demand for the novel never reached the same level as demand for new, spectacular adaptations of the story of Frankenstein and his failed experiment.)

Adaptations continue to do the same today. Novels are regularly reissued to coincide with the release of a major film adaptation. A contemporary example can be found in the release of the *The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy in 2001, 2002, and 2003. HarperCollins, one of many publishers of the books by J. R. R. Tolkien, saw sales increase four hundred percent in 2001. This increase was directly related to the commercial as well as critical success of the first film in the trilogy.\(^7\) Other major publishing houses benefited as well. Houghton Mifflin became “the exclusive publisher in the United States of the official tie-in books for the Academy Award-winning film trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings,*” and released editions of all three novels “featuring cover art with lavish film imagery” alongside the release of the big-budget adaptations.\(^8\) The publisher also added to its catalog several guides to the films that essentially peddled Tolkien’s now-classic stories to fans of the films that may have had no interest whatsoever in picking up the novels in order to gain more insight into their beloved big-screen characters. Regardless of one’s impression of the adaptations directed by Peter Jackson, there is no doubt that the box-office success of the films directly increased book sales.

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\(^8\) Images of the film-inspired cover art for the three Tolkien novels can be found on the publisher’s website, http://www.houghtonmifflinbooks.com/features/lordoftheringstrilogy/movie/index.jsp.
sales, making the Tolkien novels (or at least the characters of his novels) more popular than they had been for decades.

Although releasing a new edition of a novel alongside a major film adaptation is a successful business strategy, publishers do not have to wait for the release of a new, commercially-successful adaptation in order to capitalize on a novel’s popular cinematic history. Both the Barnes & Noble Classics and the Oxford World Classics series use screen shots from classic Hollywood adaptations in editions of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* (Figure 1) and Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Dust jacket for the Barnes & Noble Classics edition of *Frankenstein*, featuring a still from the 1931 film starring Boris Karloff as the monster.

Figure 2. Cover art for the Oxford World Classics 2008 edition of *Dracula*, featuring a still from the 1930 film starring Bela Lugosi as the Count. Lugosi also appears on the 1998 cover.
Although these publishers also regularly use period-appropriate paintings as cover art for their paperbacks, their decisions to also feature stills from the classic twentieth-century adaptations are based on marketing strategies that acknowledge the cultural impact of film adaptations on today’s audiences. Frankenstein’s monster and Dracula are not only important because they are the main characters of two important nineteenth-century novels, but also because they have continued to live in on in twentieth-century popular culture. The use of movie stills as cover art recognizes the reader’s probable familiarity with the film monsters, and suggests that popular adaptations of the respective literary works should be acknowledged alongside the novels. Acknowledging the novel’s popular film history is a potential way to attract new readers to the text, audiences who may have never picked up the respective novels had they not met these nineteenth-century monsters in twentieth-century films.

One of the overarching goals of this study is to demonstrate that popular appropriations of a text should be of more interest to nineteenth-century literary scholars because adaptations are the lifeblood of the literary canon. Instead of simply acknowledging the fact that almost every literary “classic” has been adapted for stage, screen, or another medium, literary scholars should consider the extent to which a successful theatrical run in the nineteenth century or a blockbuster screen adaptation in later centuries played a role in the formation of the current literary canon.

Adaptations should also be of interest to cultural historians of the nineteenth century because this type of entertainment was hugely popular throughout the century and made up a significant portion of the century’s theatrical repertoire. Adaptations appeared in all theatrical genres at all of London’s theaters. In other words, due to the
sheer number of novels that were staged in London theaters during the period, it is most certain that nineteenth-century theatergoers were experiencing adaptations of the most fashionable novels on a regular basis. There is no solid evidence that suggests that theatergoers had read the novel beforehand, or that seeing an adaptation performed on stage immediately made them go out and read the novels that they had seen at the theater. Yes, new editions were printed after a successful theatrical run; however, these numbers never coincide with the number of people that would have undoubtedly seen the novel on stage.

After one acknowledges how common adaptation was on the nineteenth-century popular stage, there are essentially two ways of approaching the question as to why adaptations were so popular during this period. The first way to approach the question is through an aesthetic line of inquiry, one that tends to privilege a novel-to-stage (or screen) approach to adaptation. This model has dominated scholarly discussions of adaptation in the nineteenth century. Existing scholarship that approaches nineteenth-century stage adaptations as cultural artifacts worthy of serious attention most often focuses on adaptations of a particular author’s work. For example, several book-length studies on early adaptations of the novels of Charles Dickens have appeared in the last two decades. Extensive recovery work on the history of *Frankenstein* in popular culture by Steven Forry, as well as Albert LaValley, has uncovered this novel’s rich nineteenth-century stage history. Brian Rose’s study of the century-long history of *The Strange

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Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde in adaptation shows how Stevenson’s novella has been reconfigured for different generations, and reads those adaptations in the context of cultural anxieties about race, class, economics, gender, and sexuality. A recent edition of eight nineteenth-century dramatizations of Charlotte Brontë’s Jane Eyre provides background on the plays and historical contexts for students today. All of these studies share a similar approach to adaptation; they are all focused on either a single work, or the body of work of a single author. The decision to focus on a single author or work in adaptation is a practical one for obvious reasons. More attention can be given to the primary texts and their derivative works. Focusing on a single novel and its adaptation history is the best way to get a comprehensive view of the way that a text changes over time, for reasons good or bad.

This model also has its limitations. Approaching adaptation from the perspective of a single text or a single author leaves the impression that the particular work or author is somehow special. A tone suggesting that a rich adaptation history is a testament to the individual work’s “greatness” often accompanies the single-author/single-text approach. Readers are often left feeling as if the texts or authors are special cases, extraordinary in some way.

However, over the past two centuries, adaptations have become quite ordinary, a standard practice of the entertainment industry. Studies that take a more general look at adaptation clearly show that adaptation is in no way an invention of the modern period, and that it has played a central role in entertainment for at least two hundred years.

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Hutcheon’s study of adaptation as a cultural practice, which is almost exclusively geared to twentieth-century examples, acknowledges the contemporary entertainment industry’s debt to the nineteenth century. She writes as follows:

The Victorians had a habit of adapting just about everything—and in just about every possible direction; the stories of poems, novels, plays, operas, paintings, songs, dances, and *tableaux vivants* were constantly being adapted from one medium to another and then back again. We postmoderns have clearly inherited this same habit, but we have even more new materials at our disposal—not only film, television, radio, and the various electronic media, of course, but also theme parks, historical enactments, and virtual reality experiments.  

Clearly, Victorian, modern, and postmodern entertainment has relied heavily on adaptation. We postmoderns may have many more media outlets at our disposal, but the Victorians also took full advantage of the media at their disposal. Novels found their way on stage in every popular genre throughout the Victorian period. Indeed, the practice goes back further, at least as far back as the late eighteenth century in England.

The extent to which we can call the proliferation of adaptations over the past two centuries a “habit” (as Hutcheon calls it) is an issue that deserves closer attention. Whose “habit” has adaptation become? Much of the existing scholarship approaches the question from the audience’s perspective. A frequently-cited article by John Ellis does just this. “Adaptation into another medium becomes a means of prolonging the pleasure of the original presentation, and repeating the production of a memory,” he writes. “The process of adaptation should thus be seen as a massive investment (financial and psychic)

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13 Hutcheon, i.
in the desire to repeat particular acts of consumption within a form of representation that discourages such a repetition." Ellis clearly sees the audience’s investment in adaptation as an act of repetition and revisiting. Unfortunately, this argument assumes that viewers of adaptations have some degree of familiarity with the “original” text and derive pleasure from experiencing the text anew. This formulation is obviously problematic. As much as we would like to believe that everyone viewing the latest film installment of the Lord of the Rings trilogy is invested in repeating the memory of reading one of Tolkien’s novels, we know that this is not the case. It was also not the case when nineteenth-century theatergoers saw adaptations on stages before the days of multi-million dollar production budgets. However, that is not to say that Ellis’s analysis is completely devoid of some accuracy. His understanding of reading novels and viewing adaptations as acts of consumption is an almost perfect description of the commercially-driven entertainment industry that informs all of our daily lives.

Although Ellis’s aesthetic analysis of adaptation serves as a direct influence for Philip Cox’s study of adaptations staged in England between 1790 and 1840, Cox admits that it is important to look at adaptations for more than their appeal to audiences’ (supposedly) interested in revisiting a favorite text. Cox understands the various aesthetic, generic, and economic forces that informed cultural production at the turn of the nineteenth century. He explains that when all three are brought to a study of nineteenth-century texts and their early stage adaptations, “it soon becomes evident that the generic interrelationships brought into play through adaptation are varied and

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15 Any doubt about this claim should be easily erased by taking a brief survey of any college classroom.
complex and that they offer a potentially revealing insight into the origins of the still prevalent distinction between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture and the relationship between art and the marketplace.” Like most contemporary scholars interested in the popularity of adaptations over the years, Cox gives an almost obligatory nod to the marketplace accepting that there was an economic interest in the success of certain artistic endeavors. The connection between art and the marketplace is, of course, not original to Cox, but it is one that hardly receives the attention it deserves, despite the fact that it seems to lie under the surface of most discussions of adaptation as a cultural phenomenon. It is time, I argue, the relationship between novels, the marketplace, the rise of capitalism, and the politics of the stage in England (specifically with regard to the transmission of a certain image of the British Empire) be brought to the foreground in the history of adaptation on the nineteenth-century London stage.

The postmodern entertainment industry’s motives for repeatedly releasing adaptations are much easier to explain than is their appeal for individual viewers. Today’s entertainment industry constantly recycles narratives that have proven popular into new media for phenomenal profits. Nineteenth-century theater managers and adapters did exactly the same thing. Texts were not chosen for adaptation because of the novel’s greatness. Instead, they were chosen for their ability to attract attention to their productions, and thus attract paying patrons to the theaters. From the late eighteenth century to the present, textual faithfulness has rarely been a factor in the adaptation process. If a novel was thought to be marketable to theatergoers, the most sensational

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16 Philip Cox, 5.
17 Adaptation is extremely profitable for Hollywood. Of the twenty top-grossing films of all time, nine are adaptations of novels. The Lord of the Rings trilogy of films based on the fantasy-novels of J. R. R. Tolkien (ranked no.2, no.8, and no.15 in this list) made an estimated $2.8 billion in box-office sales alone.
scenes were selected in order to maximize the dramatic effect on the stage. At times, controversial novels (even if they were not commercially successful) were chosen for adaptation because there was no doubt that they would stir debate, and therefore provide free publicity for the production. At other times, theater managers would commission adaptations of the most fashionable novels in order to capitalize on their already-established success. Either way, the desired end result was always the same—to draw in theatergoers that would recommend the play to other potential patrons.

Although this study is not an economic history of adaptation, it provides a behind-the-scenes view of the formation of a lucrative business model that has become the dominant model of the entertainment industry of the modern and postmodern eras. I mention profits only because it is impossible to comprehend the history of adaptation without acknowledging that profits were at the heart of the practice of adaptation in nineteenth-century England, just as they are today. The entertainment industry has kept certain novels alive through adaptations for one reason only—they are usually sound investments.

Adaptations and sequels of *Frankenstein* and *Dracula* gave Universal Pictures the firm financial foothold in the 1930s that transformed the studio into the mega-corporation that it is today. In 1818, Frankenstein’s Creature was a nameless, faceless, yet eloquent character in a short novel by a first-time author. In 2008, Frankenstein’s Creature is an easily-recognized, mute monster that can either terrorize connoisseurs of classic cinema or entertain 9-year-olds waiting to ride a multi-million dollar attraction at the Universal Studios theme park in Orlando, Florida.
What would Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley, who belonged by birth, marriage, and friendship to one of the most radical intellectual circles of her day, have to say about her monstrous progeny’s current employment as a fantasy dream-vacation spokesperson? That question, of course, is impossible to answer. However, what we do know is that in 1823, when the nameless, Satanic hero of her novel made his first stage debut, she was at least somewhat amused. We also know that Shelley’s sympathetic response to the first stage production of her novel was at least partly inspired by financial motives. The commercial successes of more than a dozen adaptations and parodies of *Frankenstein* throughout the 1820s and 1830s helped solidify Shelley’s current place in the literary canon. Bentley’s decision to issue a new edition of *Frankenstein* in 1831 was no doubt based on the success that the novel had found on stage for almost a decade. These early successful adaptations also generated the model for Frankenstein’s Creature that currently reigns in popular culture. *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, the first in an endless series of adaptations over the next two centuries, premiered at the English Opera House on July 28, 1823, to a packed theater which held approximately four times as many individuals as the total number of copies of the novel in print. On that night, the public was introduced to a radically-different monster than the ostracized creature of Shelley’s creation. This “new” creature was not an eloquent critic of society’s ills, but rather a spectacle of social deviance that reinforced popular cultural stereotypes and ideological norms all in the name of amusement for theater patrons and profits for theater proprietors. Universal Studios did not strip Shelley’s novel of its narrative intricacies in the 1930s; instead, the writers, producers, directors, and actors of all *Frankenstein* films to date have inherited a cultural narrative devoid of the author’s
cultural criticism from the novel’s earliest stage adapters and producers in the 1820s precisely because the earliest adapters introduced a much more marketable version of the monster.

The central argument of this project is that nineteenth-century adaptations are important cultural texts (events) that give us insight into the emergence of a modern culture industry partly characterized by its continuous reliance on adaptations that turn financial profits at the expense of political content. The study is primarily historicist in its approach to adaptation, relying on social, political, and historical evidence to explain why major changes were made to novels when they were adapted for the London stage in the nineteenth century. Along the way I show that faithfulness to an author’s work did not factor into the process of adaptation—this fact should be very clear to anyone who reads (or has read) any of the nineteenth-century plays discussed in this study.

What about the changes made to the novel as it is adapted for dramatic performance on either stage or screen? These changes are discussed as well; however, they do not form the basis of the arguments made either in the individual chapters, or in this study as a whole. Like Frankenstein’s monster, the chapters have been organized by selecting the most notable changes made to the novels and events chosen for theatrical adaptation. However, unlike Victor Frankenstein, my goal is not to simply piece together a history of adaptation without taking a step back from my work and seriously considering the consequences of my experiment. I take a more holistic approach to the history of adaptation, arguing that it is impossible to understand the ubiquity of adaptations for more than two hundred years without understanding their relationship to not only the cultural marketplace, but also the dissemination of ideas. A close look at
adaptations staged in the nineteenth century reveals that certain narratives were privileged throughout the century in England. These narratives included clear-cut definitions of good and evil, sentimental stories grounded in domestic relationships, and a penchant for the reinstitution of order whenever plots challenged social norms or questioned the authority or moral superiority of the British Empire. In other words, nineteenth-century adaptations turned politically-charged events and novels into standard melodramas that often ignored the social critiques espoused by the source materials chosen for adaptation. The chapters of this study show that adaptations reconfigured the plots presented in order to coincide with at least one of the aforementioned types of narrative. In most cases, they adhered to all three.

This project differs from other studies of adaptation because it paints a more detailed picture of the cultural landscape in which this practice emerged. I begin by providing historical background necessary for understanding the nineteenth-century theatrical marketplace. Government censorship and the rise of capitalism were largely responsible for shaping theatrical culture in the nineteenth century. Theater emerged as a popular site for the consumption of narratives that were closely aligned with the aims of government, specifically patriotic narratives that were mostly conservative in their representations of gender, family, race, and imperialism. The chapters in this study demonstrate how this occurred when historical events and radical novels were adapted for the London stage throughout the nineteenth century.
Overview of Chapters

Chapter One, “The Nineteenth-Century Culture Industry: Theoretical Spotlights and Historical Backdrops,” shows the workings of the nineteenth-century English entertainment industry. The chapter provides a historical look into the popular theater industry of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. I begin by demonstrating the long-term effects of the Licensing Act of 1737, which launched an uninterrupted 231-year history of theatrical censorship in England. Dramatic censorship drastically changed the English drama in the eighteenth century; however, by the turn of the nineteenth century, the theatrical marketplace had adjusted in order to thrive. Throughout the nineteenth century, London had a thriving theatrical entertainment industry that was profit-driven. Popular genres dominated the stage. On any given night, spectacle was much more popular than Shakespeare. Theatrical adaptations of novels were staged in all of London’s major and minor venues. They came in all genres, pantomime, melodrama, burlesque, and even blended the forms at times. Audiences of all theatrical tastes were treated to novels adapted for the stage. The most famous actors of the day often portrayed literary characters on stage. Some became famous precisely for their portrayals of characters from popular novels. Professional dramatists also made careers out of adaptations. The chapter provides a glimpse into the business of adaptation in the first half of the nineteenth century. I argue that in order to understand the continued life of adaptations in the present, we must understand the history of adaptation and its role in the making of the modern entertainment industry.

Chapter Two, “Making History: How Three-Fingered Jack Became Famous,” investigates the Obi phenomenon that came to England in 1800 and lingered for more
than three decades. Many characters became famous because of repeated adaptation, and these characters were sometimes based on historical figures. At least five known adaptations of the story of Three-Fingered Jack appeared in England between 1800 and 1830. Three were textual; two were theatrical. All told the story of a Jamaican rebel who raised a lot of concern for the colonial government of the island in 1780-81. Jack was killed in Jamaica in 1781; he became famous in England in 1800 as his story was told and retold on the popular stage and in popular print. However, the popular history of Three-Fingered Jack is not very historically accurate. Popular versions of the story “based on true events,” drastically deviated from the historical record. The chapter looks at the effects of the changes made to the history of Three-Fingered Jack when his story was retold for English audiences, specifically in the misrepresentation of black resistance in the West Indies. The chapter demonstrates how popular adaptations stripped the story of Three-Fingered Jack of any radical political overtones undesirable for popular consumption. However, all was not lost. The same adaptations are the reason that we know who Three-Fingered Jack is today.

Chapter Three, “‘My hideous progeny’ Made Visible: The Spectacular History of Frankenstein,” is the heart of this project. No novel has been adapted as many times as Frankenstein. No novel has been changed so much by its popular history as Frankenstein. The chapter traces major points of difference between the novel and its theatrical successors, showing how spectacle was the driving force behind adaptations staged in England throughout the nineteenth century. Frankenstein’s nineteenth-century visual history can still be seen in the adaptations of the twentieth century. Eliminating Shelley’s frame narrative, robbing the Creature of his rhetorical abilities, controlling the
monster at the end of the story—these common features of most of *Frankenstein’s* cinematic successors were also common in the nineteenth century. They all began with Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, which was the summer blockbuster of 1823. Like the second and fourth chapters of this study, chapter three underscores the importance of the changes made to the radical political content of Shelley’s novel when it was adapted for the stage. The value of understanding the nineteenth-century visual history of *Frankenstein* should not be lost on those who study Shelley’s novel because throughout the nineteenth century (much like the twentieth century) more people came in contact with Frankenstein’s Creature on theatrical stages than in the novel’s pages.

Chapter Four, “From Historical Romance to Domestic Melodrama: The ‘Timeless’ Characters of *Notre-Dame,*” follows the next nineteenth-century literary monster to achieve celebrity status through adaptation. Within two years of its publication in 1831, Victor Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris* was translated for English readers as *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. One year later, Quasimodo, Esmeralda, Frollo, and the rest of Hugo’s cast of characters appeared in London theaters. *Notre-Dame* was adapted for the stage several times throughout the century. The chapter looks at two different adaptations penned by the popular dramatist Edward Fitzball in 1834 and 1836, as well as another version written by Andrew Halliday in 1871 and performed at the Adelphi Theater. Although different from one another, these three adaptations rewrite Hugo’s historical romance into domestic melodramas that eschew the novel’s tragic ending in favor of a happy ending where Esmeralda lives and is rejoined with her family in the play’s final scene. The novel’s historical, social critique is completely erased in
the nineteenth-century English adaptations. Quasimodo and Esmeralda become the center of the plot; the cathedral and the medieval setting are relegated to mere backdrops—the set where all of the real drama is performed. The erasure of history in adaptations of Hugo’s historical romance made the characters that inhabit Hugo’s medieval Paris stock melodramatic characters embodying simple ideas of virtue, courage, and evil that not only fail to do justice to Hugo’s complex characters, but also disengage the characters from any particular setting. One curious consequence of these early changes is that although all of the nineteenth-century plays and twentieth-century films replicate the look and feel of medieval Paris, the drama that unfolds around the characters is completely disengaged from this particular historical moment. They have become everyday stories of everyday people arranged on a medieval backsplash. Overall, the chapter demonstrates that although disengaging the story from its historical contexts has kept Hugo’s story in mass circulation for almost two centuries, it has done so at the expense of the novel’s republican politics. This is something that is expected in twentieth-century film adaptations, especially those targeted to younger audiences; however, the twentieth-century films follow the same formulas introduced by nineteenth-century adaptations that mostly appeared as domestic melodramas.

The final chapter of this study, “Keeping it Real: Uncle Tom ‘Mania’ and the Marketing of Authenticity,” takes a broader look at the popular history of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in England between 1852 and 1880. While theatrical adaptations do figure into the discussion (there were at least eleven during the 1852-53 season in London), the chapter takes a step away from the technical differences between the adaptations in order to take a closer look at how these adaptations were advertised to London audiences. Instead of
analyzing the changes made to Stowe’s novel when it was adapted for stage presentation, I look at how the plays were marketed as authentic representations of slave life in the American South. Like *Obi, Frankenstein*, and *Notre-Dame*, adaptations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* relied more on spectacle than sentimentalism to put on a good show to sold-out audiences. On stages on both sides of the Atlantic, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* went from abolitionist manifesto to minstrel show. In England, this was taken to a new level in 1878 when Henry Jarrett and Harry Palmer, two American theater entrepreneurs, traveled across the Atlantic with nearly two hundred actors to perform *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as Europe had never seen it before—*with real* black actors. The production was a substantial financial success. Once again, adaptation of a known work proved to be a profitable formula for theatrical business enterprises.

Collectively, the chapters in this study show how the novels of Shelley, Hugo, and Stowe were immediately reconfigured for mass consumption in ways that significantly altered the intents of their authors. The chapter on Three-Fingered Jack demonstrates how a revolutionary historical event could be rendered politically insignificant through repeated adaptations. The changes made in the early adaptations continue to thrive in later versions, including film adaptations where applicable. As previously stated, there is a healthy history of academic interest in adaptation that often likens it to a phenomenon most productively approached via an aesthetic line of inquiry. Such an approach naturally raises the following set of questions about its chosen subjects: How faithful is the adaptation to its parent novel? How do the changes made to the text affect the viewer’s interpretation of the visual narrative? Do the changes made to the text complement or contradict the novelist’s intentions? What happens when a popular
adaptation replaces its novel in the popular imagination? Why should this shift be of importance to literary scholars? I am interested in posing the same questions about the earliest stage adaptations of *Obi, Frankenstein, The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. However, my project differs from existing scholarship because I am not interested in raising questions about any given adaptation’s aesthetic merit when compared to its parent novel, nor is my goal to provide a theory for understanding the appeal of adaptation as a general practice.

Instead, I am more interested in illustrating the cultural impact of selected stage adaptations than in arguing for a recuperation of these mostly forgotten dramas for their aesthetic merit. One of the most frequently asked questions I receive regarding these early dramatizations is: “Are they any good?” To be honest, not really. At least, they aren’t a very good read. However, they were not written to be read. They were written to be performed on stage during a time when spectacle became the dominant driving force behind popular English theater. The printed plays reduce their respective multi-volume novels into scripts of no more than forty pages with a considerable amount of the content consisting of descriptive commentary regarding elaborate stage sets and acting directions. Despite the diversity of content that novels delivered to their respective readers in the first half of the nineteenth century, their stage adaptations show little narrative depth, and no critical commentary. The emphasis on spectacle is clear. The sanitation of most of the controversial material found in the novels is also clear. What becomes obvious to the reader is that the practice of adapting novels for the stage in the nineteenth-century was not motivated by any sense of faithfulness to the novels and their authors. Such a view of past audiences would be sentimental at best. Most importantly,
throughout this project I argue that early stage adaptations were principally responsible for the mainstreaming of these four novels in both the nineteenth century and beyond. Understanding their popularity in their own time is important in order to comprehend their continued life in our own.

Although the examples chosen as case studies (Obi, Frankenstein, The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, and Uncle Tom’s Cabin) may appear erratic at first glance, when grouped together on the nineteenth-century London stage they raise an interesting set of questions about the representation not only of the literature produced in and/or about countries other than England, but also about the representation of non-English cultures and peoples. They also raise questions about how the misrepresentation of those lands, cultures, and peoples in adaptation has continued to shape the way that these novels are presented to today’s film audiences. I return to these issues in the short epilogue to this study titled “Going Global: Birth of an International Entertainment Industry” because the answers will be more apparent once we take a closer look at the practice of adaptation in the nineteenth century and its continuing effects in our own time.
CHAPTER ONE

The Nineteenth-Century Culture Industry:

Historical Backdrops and Theoretical Spotlights

In “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer criticize the “ruthless unity” of the industrialized, mid-twentieth-century entertainment industry.¹ The authors envision the modern culture industry as a carefully planned and structured media network conceived primarily to promote Enlightenment ideas of modernity, a linear narrative of technological progress, and the glue that holds it all together—capitalist enterprise. Their critique covers a mass network of incorporated, popular media and entertainments (with special attention given to popular cinema) and their reduction of art to a standardized, technological process, which Adorno and Horkheimer argue “integrates all the elements of the production, from the novel (shaped with an eye to the film) to the last sound effect.” The culture industry, thus, controls all aspects of production to put forth a grand narrative of “the triumph of invested capital, whose title as absolute master is . . . the meaningful content of every film, whatever plot the production team may have selected.”²

Although decidedly not the focus of their theoretical aims, Adorno and Horkheimer use the culture industry’s practice of adapting novels for cinematic representation as a productive example of the powerful influence that the modern entertainment industry has over other branches of cultural production, including literary production. Not only do the authors lament the way that a “Tolstoy novel is garbled in a

² Ibid., 34-35.
film script,” but they also charge the culture industry with shaping the goals of novelists and thus controlling not only the practice of adapting novels to the screen, but also the process of novel writing and publishing as well.³

Adorno and Horkheimer’s observations can be seen all over Hollywood today. No one doubts the claim that popular authors today such as Stephen King and Dan Brown owe much of their commercial success to Hollywood’s lucrative love affair with adaptation. However, as I have explained in the introduction to this study, the practice of adapting novels into spectacular productions is much older than the modern film industry and can be traced back at least 150 years before the historical moment that informs Adorno and Horkheimer’s essay.

Adorno and Horkheimer’s essay serves as one of the most-cited critiques of popular entertainment in the midst of World War II and its technologically-conceived spawn—postmodernity. Their focus on the dominant media forms of the mid-twentieth century and their probable impact on future citizens and consumers look forward, expressing concern over the role that the culture industry plays in the post-industrial world. Less interest is expressed in its historical emergence.

However, the commercial system of mass-production that, according to Adorno and Horkheimer, “now impresses the same stamp on everything” has its genesis in the industrial revolutions that took hold of both Europe and North America as early as the latter half of the eighteenth century.⁴ Mary Poovey makes a similar argument in Making a Social Body: British Cultural Formation, 1830-1864. For Poovey, modernity is characterized by a “mass culture” that follows Adorno and Horkheimer’s model of the

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³ Ibid., 33.
⁴ Ibid., 32.
culture industry; however, she situates it historically as a result of “mid-nineteenth-century developments.” According to Poovey, mass culture “presents itself as a series of repetitions . . . consuming products that are ever more precisely differentiated yet always already the same . . . .”5 While Poovey identifies several facets of mid-nineteenth-century cultural production that played a role in shaping the idea of a unified, British identity, her argument may be applied more closely to the greatest vehicle of mass culture in the nineteenth century—the theater. The repetitive nature that characterizes mass culture for these critics is nowhere stronger than in the practice of adaptation. Novels often went through more adaptations than printings. The continued demand for new adaptations of the same work brings into relief the repetitive nature of the modern culture industry beginning at least as far back as the mid-eighteenth century.

The history of industrialization, capitalism, and the rise of consumer culture is widely documented by historians and scholars that take a cultural studies approach to the study of literary production; however, it does not seem to garner significant attention in studies of the novel in adaptation. Economically-driven histories are crucial to our understanding of cultural production over the last several centuries because they ask us to question modern assumptions about the relationship between art, culture, politics, and economics. Ann Berminghan provides the following succinct argument for the recovery of a more comprehensive, historical view of modern consumer culture:

[The history of cultural consumption has been] suppressed by a vision of modernity which has turned largely on an economic analysis of the social organization of production, and on an ideology of modernism which has

taken upon itself the task of defending ‘culture’ against the very forms of mass consumption that we now seek to examine. In short, modernism’s master narrative of culture has obscured the early history of consumption and its relationship to social and cultural forms, substituting in its place a history of culture focused on artistic production, individualism, originality, genius, estheticism, and avant-gardism. This would help to explain why critics of postmodernism like Fredric Jameson, nostalgic for a more ‘authentic’ culture, see consumer society as part of the superficial, schizophrenic ‘logic’ of late capitalism . . . Indeed, it is only by operating outside the limits of modernism that we can see a ‘consumer society’ that is nearly four hundred years old.6

Bermingham’s point is well taken. “Rather than being seen simply as a phase of late capitalism, the consumption of culture needs to be examined as intrinsic to all phases of capitalism, even the very earliest.”7 However, her critique of Frederic Jameson as one of the purveyors of a model of understanding the postmodern culture industry as a distinct entity with no history is not wholly accurate. Although Jameson’s work is (like Adorno’s and Horkheimer’s) more immediately concerned with the present, he does in fact acknowledge the importance of historicizing mass culture. In the introduction to Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Jameson writes:

Consider, for example, the powerful alternative position that postmodernism is itself little more than one more stage of modernism proper (if not indeed, of the even older romanticism); it may indeed be

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7 Ibid., 4.
conceded that all of the features of postmodernism . . . can be detected, full-blown, in this or that preceding modernism . . .

Although Jameson does not give examples of the continuities that may exist between modernism and “the even older romanticism,” there are indeed several.

Although the modern and postmodern culture industries are multi-faceted due to their multimedia reach, they share at least four characteristics that are fairly easy to identify in the entertainment industry of the last two and a half centuries. First, no one would challenge the claim that the modern entertainment industry is primarily driven by spectacle and sensation. Visual media dominate today’s cultural landscape, and just about all media from films to daily news programs use sensationalism in order to attract the most paying customers or the highest Nielsen ratings. Second, the modern entertainment industry is driven by celebrities. Celebrity is in and of itself a moneymaker, no matter what the celebrity’s claim to fame. Familiar faces sell well. This applies to magazine covers, television programs, and big-budget films. Third, the twentieth-century entertainment industry is characterized by its lack of emphasis on history. Much as new-and-improved products replace older ones considered outdated (often in a very short period), mass entertainment readily shuns history, or at least the accurate representation of history when it is indeed warranted.

These three features of the modern entertainment industry can be found in the entertainment industry of the nineteenth century. Like today’s popular movies, nineteenth-century popular stages were driven by special effects and technological innovation. The promise of seeing something new was one of the major draws of

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theatrical entertainments going as far back as the eighteenth century, but in full force by the year 1800. Celebrity and notoriety were also draws for theater patrons. Audiences came back time and again to see their favorite actors in the roles of their favorite characters. They were also interested in pieces that were rumored to be scandalous. As I will show later in this chapter, the famous axiom that any publicity (even bad publicity) is good publicity was indeed applicable to the nineteenth-century theater industry just as it applies to today’s entertainment industry. Finally, the fourth characteristic shared by both the nineteenth-century theater industry and the twentieth-century entertainment industry. Like the audiences of today’s “reality” shows, nineteenth-century theatergoers flocked to theaters promising to see astonishing spectacles of “real-world” events, and narratives based on true stories, despite the fact that most entertainments billed this way were highly-scripted and misleading representations of individuals, cultures, and histories. The purpose of this first chapter is to demonstrate how the history of the nineteenth-century theater industry is in fact the history of the modern and postmodern entertainment industries.

Recovering the history of the modern culture industry helps us recognize how industrialization and the rise of modern capitalism during the nineteenth century quite literally set the stage for the twentieth- and twenty-first century entertainment industry. In short, I argue that in order to understand the culture industry described by Adorno and Horkheimer in the med-twentieth century, or by Jameson at the turn of the twenty-first, we need to look back to early vestiges of the culture industry that emerged hand-in-hand with capitalism, commercialism, and consumerism driven by commodity fetishism. This project looks to the entertainment industry as the locus of popular culture consumed by
the masses. In nineteenth-century London, no other industry provided more varied entertainments, made more use of emerging spectacular technologies, and attracted so many individuals of varied socio-economic classes than the theater.

The application of this Frankfurt School model to the past must be a careful process. The variety of entertainments available to theatergoers throughout the nineteenth century shed light on the limits of Adorno and Horkheimer’s interpretation of the culture industry of the mid-twentieth-century. Before the days of multinational media conglomerates, mass entertainment was not as centralized. There were certainly voices of resistance in the nineteenth century. J. M. Golby and A. W. Purdue have demonstrated that although popular culture has become progressively more commercialized throughout the last three centuries, several examples of resistant forms existed in working-class amusements during the first half of the nineteenth century (more so than in entertainment geared to the middle- and upper-classes). However, they also acknowledge that these voices in no way constituted a representative majority.9 Yet, they are right to point out that entertainment culture was neither as uniform nor as organized as later critics see the culture industry of the last hundred years. Theaters, newspapers, magazines, music, sporting, and other commercial forms of leisure in the nineteenth century were not controlled by a handful of mega-corporations as they are today. For that reason, I do not wish to attempt such a comprehensive (and thus limiting) model of a uniform nineteenth-century culture industry reaching into all areas of production.10

10 Patricia Anderson provides a more optimistic view of the rise of mass culture, by arguing that the boom in illustrated publications between 1790 and 1860 participated in the making of a “modern mass culture” that saw its audience increase exponentially as advances in printing technologies reduced prices, making periodicals more accessible to Londoners with modest incomes. Anderson warns against reading the making of a modern mass culture with what she calls the “pessimistic conclusions of the Frankfurt School.”
Acknowledging that the emergence of a modern culture industry can easily be traced to
the democratization of print and visual culture does not mean that we have to adhere to a
model that is all-encompassing and already fixed both in its message and its reception as
do Adorno and Horkheimer. Print publications were not regulated throughout the
nineteenth century the way that theater was; therefore, these outlets were in more free to
voice whatever opinions authors saw fit (as long as they could sell their works).

We should however note that government intervention into at least one arena of
cultural production—the theater—was unquestionable and that the reach of this branch
was often wider than that of print media. This is especially true for the novel because
even examples with impressive print runs could not reach the same numbers that a
successful adaptation could at London’s largest theaters. My goal in this chapter is to
show how this model may begin to help us understand how many aspects of the modern
and postmodern entertainment industries can be found in the entertainment industry of
the nineteenth century. I focus on popular theater in general and the popular practice of
adaptation on the nineteenth-century stage in particular because even though theaters
were not owned by a handful of billion-dollar business motivated solely by profits in the
nineteenth century, theater was in fact regulated through a centralized system of
government censorship that was interested in protecting its own political and
authoritative capital.

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However, her footnote is given precisely because Adorno and Horkheimer’s critique is relevant in this
case. Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image & the Transformation of Popular Culture 1790-1860*
current events, history, and international cultures to a large audience, the illustrations that accompanied this
information often relied on stereotypical depictions of non-British cultures and as such made the frame of
reference for the common Londoner more unified, more streamlined, and most likely based more on false
stereotypes than it would otherwise be. As travel became easier to the provinces, this streamlining of
information transformed into a more unified national identity with a more uniform frame of knowledge.

11 For example, Covent Garden and Drury Lane could each accommodate more than 3,000 patrons; the
smaller Haymarket had a capacity of approximately 1800.
Censorship, Meet Spectacle

Almost every study of the nineteenth-century English theater begins with a disclaimer defending the author’s choice of subject-matter. The century is infamous for the so-called “decline of the drama,” an appellation given to the 1800s by its own citizens and echoed by later scholars. Our current scholarly dialogue charts the decline of the drama alongside the rise of the novel. The emergence of the latter in the first half of the eighteenth century corresponds with the decline of the former. This phenomenon is often the first issue that literary scholars must grapple with in order to understand the cultural shift that took place during the eighteenth century and that came to characterize the subsequent century.  

Although drama—along with poetry—had for centuries been associated with “high” culture, by the turn of the nineteenth century the novel had for all intents and purposes displaced the drama from its previous aesthetic superiority. The lack of “high artistic seriousness” one finds in the vast sea of extant dramatic literature produced during the nineteenth century is the leading reason that study of the period’s drama has been largely neglected in traditional literary studies. However, there has been a notable rise in interdisciplinary interest in the nineteenth-century theater over the

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12 Philip Cox, *Reading Adaptations: Novels and Verse Narratives on the Stage, 1790-1840* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000): 5. Cox describes the correlation between these two forms as follows: “[T]he drama had an established literary genealogy which invested it with a potential cultural respectability whereas the novel was, historically, a relative newcomer which was often denied such respectability as a result of the very popularity which rendered it so culturally prominent. Yet it would be wrong to suggest that this distinction between the two genres was either stable or unproblematic for the situation is further complicated by the fact that, from a historical perspective, we can trace a narrative which charts the rise of the novel as a ‘serious’ literary form during the nineteenth century and a corresponding decline, in Britain, of the theatre as a site for high artistic seriousness.”

13 Poetry remained the literary form of highest regard until at least mid-century.

14 One needs to look no further than current university course offerings to see how this artistic shift structures literary studies, especially in the United States. British literature course offerings covering periods before the mid-eighteenth century are dominated by the study of poetry and drama; literature courses after this moment are most often focused on poetry and prose (the novel being the most-studied form of the later periods). With a few exceptions, namely the closet-dramas of the canonical Romantic poets and the plays of Oscar Wilde, dramatic literature rarely enters the common discourse of nineteenth-century literary studies.
last fifteen years. Theater histories have crossed with literary histories in productive ways to show that melodrama and other popular theatrical forms worked alongside literary production in the development of a mass culture. Popular theater thrived throughout the century and we see theatrical modes inflected into many novels (Charles Dickens is one of many notable examples). In turn, popular theatrical adaptations were directly involved in the rise of a popular literary canon.

What caused the theater to decline as a site of artistic seriousness in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries while the novel emerged as the dominant literary form? The answer is two-fold and thus requires us to understand both the political climate and the economic factors that caused this shift.

First, the political. While theatrical censorship existed in England prior to the eighteenth century in different forms, the nineteenth century is of special note because it lies at the center of an uninterrupted 231-year run of legislative censorship beginning with the Licensing Act of 1737 and culminating in the Theatres Act of 1968. Considered a “central historical event” by its most learned documenters, the Licensing Act of 1737 enacted two major policies for the staging of drama in London. First it required that all traditional dramas acquire a license before appearing on stage. Licenses were granted exclusively by the Examiner of Plays, an appointed, paid position under the supervision of the Lord Chamberlain. The law encompassed new dramas and revivals of older works, as well as any authorial amendments to scripts previously submitted for

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15 For example, see Emily Allen, *Theater Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 2003).
review even if they had already received approval from the Examiner of Plays. The Licensing Act of 1737 also reintroduced the Royal Patent system first introduced by Charles II in 1660. In the metropolis, spoken word drama could only be staged at the two patent theaters: the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane and Theatre Royal, Covent Garden. The two patent houses (along with special permission granted to the Haymarket Theatre during the summer season) held exclusive rights to the staging of spoken-word, or “legitimate” drama from 1737 until the Theatres Regulation Act of 1843. The smaller non-patent theaters were wholly banned from staging any performances unless they contained a considerable amount of songs, dances, pantomimic displays, musical interludes, or other entertainments perceived as having lesser artistic value and thus dubbed “illegitimate.”

The division between what became known as legitimate and illegitimate drama carried with it all of the perceived distinctions between “high” and “low” art. Historically, alongside the Licensing Act of 1737, we find a decrease in the number of “serious” artists writing for the stage and a concurrent increase in the number of writers experimenting with the new fledgling form of the novel. Henry Fielding is considered the first writer of note to turn to from the stage to the new narrative form that was not subject to the strict political regulations of the former. As Robert Hume has explained, Fielding was an amazingly successful political satirist before turning his artistic energies to novel writing. Correcting Fielding’s literary biographers who often dismiss the writer’s turn to the novel as a sign of a more mature, level-headed artist, Hume makes the material, economic conditions for this shift of utmost importance:
Many critics are glad to see Fielding leave drama for the novel, and take his silence about the Licensing Act as tacit evidence of his foresight. But in 1737 Fielding was England’s most successful living playwright; he had just enjoyed two phenomenally successful seasons as impresario; and we know that he was busy with plans for improving his theatre and strengthening his company. The Licensing Act deprived Fielding of his livelihood.\(^1\)

The Licensing Act essentially hit Fielding doubly. Its restriction of traditional drama to the major patent theaters was a devastating blow to the smaller theaters, including the Haymarket where Fielding had spent the previous two seasons as manager; its prohibition of political references and allusions on the stage destroyed his chances of using his exceptional political wit for the major patent theaters.

Although Fielding’s life and career occur significantly earlier than the historical scope of this project, the example is a necessary one if we are to understand the extent of the damaging, lasting effects of the Licensing Act. The restrictions enacted by this single piece of legislation essentially set the tone of English drama for the next two centuries until the Theatres Act of 1968. As a result “the damage to the drama and the theater,” Hume writes, “is incalculable.”\(^2\) We have no reason to believe that Hume’s claim is exaggerated. In fact, his position is supported historically by a turn-of-the-century writer whose experience both in the theater and novel industries is very comparable to Fielding’s. In 1807 the actress, dramatist, novelist, and essayist Elizabeth Inchbald published the following analysis addressed “To the artist”:

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\(^2\) Ibid, 253.
[The writer of novels] lives in a land of liberty, whilst the Dramatic Writer exists but under a despotic government. Passing over the subjection in which an author of plays is held by the Lord Chamberlain’s office, and the degree of dependence which he has on his actors—he is the very slave of the audience. He must have their tastes and prejudices in view, not to correct, but to humour them . . . the will of such critics is the law, and execution instantly follows judgement.  

Inchbald’s short publication is relatively unknown but has drawn some scholarly attention. Philip Cox, for example, provides the following comment regarding the importance of Inchbald’s comparison: “Inchbald is well placed to make comparisons between the two genres and it is thus significant that, whilst she does not reject the theatre, she none the less defines the novel as more conducive to successful aesthetic and moral effect.”  

Although Inchbald’s comments do in essence lend themselves to aesthetic and moral concerns, to cast Inchbald as primarily concerned with these issues, as Cox does here, makes the author subject to the same political sanitation that she so strongly criticizes in these remarks. Inchbald’s radical sympathies are well-documented; her circle of friends included the well-known radicals William Godwin and Thomas Holcroft. To describe her as simply a concerned moralist primarily interested in the artistic form most conducive to desired pedagogical goals ignores the more-than-explicit political dimensions of her condemnation of theatrical censorship and the theatergoing public’s “tastes and prejudices.” The artist who writes for the theater is, according to Inchbald, a slave (a charged word to use in the same year where two decades of

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20 Elizabeth Inchbald, “To the Artist,” The Artist 1 (13 June 1807), 14 quoted in Philip Cox, 25.
21 Cox, 26.
unsuccessful attempts to effectively end Britain’s involvement in the slave trade finally proved triumphant). Her artistic freedom is restricted by government censorship (here embodied in the Examiner of Plays) and she is economically dependent on the audience’s approval. Supporting oneself financially as a dramatist demanded that the writer abandon any hope of producing plays that presented critiques of government, and many other controversial social themes. The audience was to be appeased, not instructed (at least not didactically). These were the conditions of any writer attempting to make a successful career as a playwright and, as we can see, these conditions affected the careers of both Fielding and Inchbald, as well as many other writers with dramatic ambitions that fill the years between their respective careers and those who followed over the course of the next century and a half.

During the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, L. W. Connolly tells us, “It was unwise and unprofitable for any playwright to become associated, even remotely, with republicanism, and those who found themselves under such suspicion were usually vociferous in their denials.”²² Inchbald’s circle of radical writers experienced economic hardships under the regulation of drama, but Holcroft’s experience was probably worst of all. As Connolly writes, “Holcroft’s involvement in reform-minded political societies led to his being tried for high treason; his mildly political plays led to his being accused of republicanism. Of the former charge he was acquitted in court; of the latter he was convicted and condemned time and again by the massed juries of Drury Lane and Covent Garden theaters. . . . [He] died in London, penniless, in 1809.”²³

²³ Ibid., 84-85.
Yet despite the highly undesirable artistic limitations necessary in order to make a proper living writing for the stage, money could in fact be made in theatrical ventures—lots of it. Like the modern movie industry, the English nineteenth-century stage was a popular stage. It was a space where spectacle reigned over the spoken word. For the modern scholar, the history of the nineteenth-century stage reads more like a precursory history of Hollywood blockbusters than a history of cultural production worthy of serious attention. The comparison to contemporary cinema is one that continuously shows up in descriptions of audiences’ taste for spectacle and the subsequent production of incredibly expensive, yet very profitable, visually-driven stage productions. Jeffrey Cox, for instance, takes a brief moment to liken early nineteenth-century dramas to contemporary blockbusters and show their appeal to both sets of historical audiences. He writes, “just as moviegoers today would prefer to go see the new installment of Mission Impossible (which could essentially be done as a silent movie) over the new film version of Shakespeare's Titus Andronicus, so audiences then flocked to the new drama of sight and sensation over the older theater of the word.”

Cox’s comparison is useful as it brings to bear similarities between today’s spectacular theater and the one present at the turn of the nineteenth century. There is also a cultural and artistic hierarchy present in this example. Mission Impossible is spectacular entertainment; Titus Andronicus (even in a visual form) is literary culture albeit one that is inferior to the printed page. Their positioning on the cultural hierarchy is best measured by their commercial appeal (or lack thereof).

Cox is also right to point out that this commercially-driven reliance on spectacle was necessary to the financial survival of all London theaters (both patent and non-patent

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houses) and that “the result was that canny men and women of the [traditional] theater . . .
began using the tactics of these new theaters for plays at the patent or major theaters.”

In other words, spectacle proved popular at legitimate as well as illegitimate theaters, not
just those that were severely restricted in their choice of productions by the Licensing
Act’s limitation of serious, “spoken-word” drama to Drury Lane and Covent Garden. In
fact, we can mark the historical emergence of the modern-day culture industry with its
ever-growing reliance on spectacle at the very moment that censorship became the order
of the day in London theaters. The Licensing Act established a cartel on the commodity
of spoken-word drama, leaving smaller theaters to turn to various forms of “illegitimate”
entertainments in order to thrive in the marketplace. The result was a market that was
flooded with spectacular entertainments and thus very limited in its choices of “serious”
drama. As the patent theaters retained their cultural hegemony on “legitimate” drama,
the minor theaters were forced into a steep competition to keep their doors open.

Managers at the dozens of minor theatrical venues in London who were only allowed to
stage “illegitimate” entertainments such as comedies, pantomimes, melodramas, and
burlesques obviously had to rely on spectacle to draw in audiences. However, what is
surprising for most is the realization that despite holding exclusive rights over the staging
of “legitimate” drama, the patent houses also included a variety of spectacular
entertainments in their repertoire. This practice, as one might expect, was generally
condemned by the proprietors of the minor venues who felt that the managers of the

\[\text{Ibid., par. 5}\]
major theaters were abusing their power by capitalizing on the only means by which the minors could survive.  

In short, a combination of censorship, spectacle, and commercialism drove the nineteenth-century theater industry much as it continues to drive the modern movie industry. Although I understand the problems inherent in imposing a mid-twentieth-century view of corporate structure and production anachronistically, it is an applicable comparison that comes up repeatedly in economically-informed studies of the period’s theater. For example, in a meticulous account of the economics of the nineteenth-century British stage, Tracy Davis has demonstrated that throughout the nineteenth century the theater thrived as a lucrative business venture driven by capital investment with major profit margins. At the same time, government control of the theaters was heavily invested in regulating theatrical content while giving in to market (political?) pressures that demanded free-market competition. By mid-century the theatrical monopoly held by the patent houses caved in to industry demands through a new piece of legislation. No longer able to justify the major theaters’ sole rights to stage traditional drama, the Theatres Regulation Act of 1843 abolished the patent system, thus allowing all theatrical venues to stage all types of dramatic entertainments. The passing of the act might appear to be a democratic victory for the minor theaters; however, their newly-acquired rights to a fuller repertoire did not come without a hefty price tag. While it is true that the minor theaters suffered financially from the limitations placed upon them by the patent system, they also enjoyed certain freedoms because they only staged “illegitimate” forms. Prior

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26 An account is provided by J. K. Chapman and T. Melrose, proprietors of the Tottenham-street Theater in “Charles Kemble’s Mercies; or The ‘999’ Increasing,” a lengthy letter to the editor of The Morning Herald dated 18 November 1830. The full text is reprinted as an appendix to Tracy Davis’s The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914 (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000): 363-66.
to 1843, minor theatres were free from the watchful eye of the Examiner of Plays, whose official jurisdiction only extended to spoken-word drama staged at the two patent theaters. While in practice many managers at the minor ventures offered pieces for licenses, they were not bound to in theory. In the spirit of the Licensing Act of 1737, the Theatres Regulation Act of 1843 actually increased the Lord Chamberlain’s powers of censorship, extending the power of the Examiner’s pen to all London theaters staging spoken drama in addition to spectacular genres. What might appear to be the opportunity for the galvanization of a stage made stagnant by more than a hundred years of regulations barely caused a spark. Davis provides the following description:

> When . . . the drama was officially unshackled from the [patent theaters], nothing remarkable appeared to happen. London’s theatrical business seemed to carry on very much as before, except that the patent houses and minor theatres alike could produce any genre they thought would turn a profit, legally unhindered by anything but market forces, uniformly under the supervision of the Lord Chamberlain. It seems that achieving parliamentary sanction for the ‘free trade in spoken drama’ resulted neither in a flowering of talent nor a revivified theatre scene.\(^{27}\)

The deregulation of the patent system did nothing to encourage the staging of more “serious” productions most likely because the censorship of drama remained intact. Nevertheless, as Davis’s thorough fiscal history of the stage shows, minimal gains in the number of spoken-word dramas did not coincide with a decline in patrons or profits. As London’s population steadily increased, the most important goal for theater entrepreneurs was to draw a steady number of consumers. The biggest draw for customers quickly

\(^{27}\) Davis, 18.
became the prospect of seeing something new. As a result, the theater remained an economically-prosperous industry centered on spectacle.

Although spectacular entertainments have a long history on the English stage, throughout the nineteenth century the English theater thrived on audiences’ ever-growing fascination with emerging technologies as industrialization rapidly changed both the landscape and the faces of the city. As the modern middle class emerged, the make-up of theater audiences changed. New audiences introduced a new set of expectations that theater managers had to adapt to in order to keep their businesses afloat. In a handful of book-length studies and dozens of articles, theater historian Michael R. Booth has repeatedly demonstrated that despite the changing face of theater audiences, the most successful theater managers understood the nineteenth-century consumer’s growing expectations for spectacular entertainment and employed the use of new technologies in order to ensure profits for increasingly expensive productions.28 Booth’s prolific body of work on the history of the nineteenth-century English stage shows that the choice of plays and how they were staged depended heavily on the newly-acquired purchasing power of the rising middle class and that throughout the century “the English theatre changed substantially in response to population expansion, urbanization, industrialization, and new patterns of transportation, with all their social and demographic implications.”29 These implications were without a doubt as varied as the people that embodied them and required theater managers to be shrewd businessmen concerned not only with the fiscal

management of the theater, but also with the social and political climate that shaped the lives of their patrons.

**A Disciplined Theater Industry**

Thus far I have shown that despite the censorship of drama that became a regulated, standard practice during this time, theaters were popular places and profitable business ventures in nineteenth-century London for those who knew how to circumvent the patent system by staging spectacle-driven entertainments. The popularity of spectacular theatrical entertainments would continue to grow throughout the Victorian period. As the population of London continued to grow throughout the century, so did the number of places offering spectacular amusements, especially with the rise of music halls at mid-century. New theaters were built to attract London’s growing population with expendable income; established theaters underwent significant remodeling in order to accommodate larger audiences. There is little or no evidence to suggest that this growth was motivated by a commitment to the fine arts—such an interpretation would be purely sentimental. Instead, the growth of the theater industry throughout the period was directly linked to its profitability.

Significant profits demanded major investments that went beyond production costs and salaries. As the theater industry grew, so did demand for its safety. Theater proprietors were responsible for ensuring the safety of their patrons at all costs. The introduction of fire codes, sanitary standards, and safety regulations placed increased financial burdens on theater proprietors. As such, investors needed to be sure that their theaters not only met higher standards for public safety but also needed to ensure that
patrons would not cause damage to their expensive property. Riots had to be quelled, even if it meant that management would have to give in to market demands for ticket prices, as was the result in the O.P. Riots of 1809. Obviously, it was best to avoid any kind of crowd incitement, be it with regard to pricing policies or political dissent. The application of free market principles to the theater industry ensured that prices would stay competitive and fair (especially after the 1843 legislation); the continued censorship of drama during the century helped to reduce the chances of inciting the crowd for political reasons.

Tracy Davis provides the following example of how the practice of theatrical management depended on both an understanding of the marketplace and socio-political savvy. We see this as early as the late eighteenth century in the experience of John Philip Kemble, who left the following list of notes scribbled in his personal memorandum book in 1791, during his management tenure at Drury Lane:

Always take Care to have a Singer of the deepest Bass; no matter how he speaks; the Gallery loves a Rumble. The elder Mr Banister [is] no Actor—great Favourtite.

Never let an old Actor of Merit want an Engagement on any Account. It is [in ] the true Interest of the Stage. Monopoly not to suffer the Publick to think that there is not Room enough for every body at the two Theatres.

Little Children have a very pleasing Effect in Pantomimes, Processions, &c.

Always keep well with the leading Performers, particularly with the Women though they should be ever so unreasonably troublesome. By humoring half a dozen you uncontrolably [sic] command three score.
There are one hundred thirty six lights in the Front of Covent Garden Theatre, and seventy two in the Front of Drury-Lane Theatre.

Whenever there is Danger of a Riot, always act an opera; for Musick drowns the noise of opposition. 30

Together these six seemingly disjointed observations list the range of knowledge required of proprietors beginning with an understanding of proven crowd pleasers and ending with strategies for crowd control.

Kemble’s list reminds us that theaters are not only businesses, but also heavily-trafficked, enclosed spaces where large groups of people assemble on a regular basis. As such, they require not only massive financial investment, but also careful planning, organization, and security. During especially sensitive times, threats of political protests, riots, and other acts of disobedience were taken seriously. On their side, managers had a vested interest in a government-mandated, politically-sanitized stage whose potential for inciting an audience was relatively weak—especially if orchestra conductors knew when to cue the music to drown out any noise of political opposition emerging from the crowd. Kemble would come to know the devastating effects of continued protest during the O. P. Riots in 1809 while he was manager at Covent Garden. The event is considered a major success by theater historians because the outcome forced management at Covent Garden to rescind a ticket price increase put in place to recoup the cost of rebuilding the theater after its destruction by fire the previous year. 31

Be it for political reasons or economic

30 Davis, 3-4. Davis dates this manuscript 1791, but seems to confuse the dates of Kemble’s management of Drury Lane with those of Covent Garden. Kemble served in management capacities at Drury Lane from 1789 until roughly 1801. He became manager of Covent Garden in 1803, after purchasing a one-sixth share in the theater for £23,000.

backlash, theater proprietors and managers knew that audiences were capable of mass property destruction if care was not taken to appease the crowd and “drown the noise of opposition” whenever it presented itself at public, theatrical engagements. It was in the best interest of theater owners and managers to ensure that patrons behaved properly when assembled on their property. Thus, the theater, like many public places that found increased capacity and attendance throughout the nineteenth century, became a space of increased surveillance, organization, and control—all which came with a hefty price, but a price that was well-worth paying in if it successfully protected the massive investments of proprietors.\textsuperscript{32}

The political, economic, and social contexts described above help paint a picture of an increasingly commercial industry that became even more heavily regulated and streamlined as the century progressed. Efficiency was essential to any theater operation and an obvious requirement for theater managers was that they be well-disciplined men of business. This responsibility for efficiency was also expected of dramatists, actors, and patrons, thus affecting all stages of production and consumption. In order to set up a production in the span of only a few weeks, dramatists needed to produce scripts that would require little or no revision in order to receive a license from the Examiner of Plays before opening night.\textsuperscript{33} Actors would not only need to perform successfully with very little formal rehearsal time (a practice heavily used to keep lighting costs and other expenses down), but were also expected to be very cautious if they were to ad-lib on

\textsuperscript{32} Covent Garden’s destruction by fire in 1808 destroyed real estate, costumes, and props worth an estimated £150,000.
\textsuperscript{33} Managers were required to submit manuscripts to the Examiner of Plays for licensing as least two weeks before the play was to be performed.
stage so as not to draw disapproval from the audience or fines from the authorities.\textsuperscript{34}

Finally, audiences were expected to be well-behaved, good customers while attending the theater. In order to keep ticket prices relatively stable, theater management would offset costs by selling merchandise during and after the performance. Souvenirs ranging from prints of actors in character to sheet music commonly sold for one or two pennies. In all, theaters became highly-organized, efficient spaces of both cultural production and consumption. They were places where patrons were not only delighted and amused but also (and I would argue more importantly) instructed in the practice of repeated consumption. We might hypothesize here that the commercially-driven theater industry of the nineteenth century became an influential force in the rise of capitalism by training its regular patrons to be good consumers.\textsuperscript{35}

There also seems to be another level of training at work here—the shaping of theatrical tastes and public opinion. All scholars agree that the nineteenth-century theater (both legitimate and illegitimate) was primarily a popular theater. However, the assumptions often brought to bear on this fact—namely the idea that the development of popular tastes was a democratic process developing from the ground up—is severely complicated by the multiple levels at work in deciding what would end up on stage. Connolly describes this multi-layered process as follows:

\begin{quote}
The audience . . . successfully directed the playwrights’ output in these years away from radically inclined plays toward what Frederick Reynolds
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{34} From a legal standpoint, all ad-libbing was forbidden under the Licensing Act as it required that every word spoken on the stage be included in the script submitted to the Examiner of Plays.

\textsuperscript{35} As London’s population doubled in the first half of the nineteenth century, theaters not only accommodated the changing demographics of audiences but also played a crucial role in setting new fashion trends and providing models for consumer activity in the metropolis. For a fuller account see Davis.
[in 1826] called the “trumpery trap-claps” of patriotism. But for those brave few writers prepared to defy the audience dictatorship, there were the other usual obstacles to overcome. Besides the Lord Chamberlain’s censorship there was the theatrical managership. Regardless of his own political leanings, the manager was bound to be wary of accepting politically controversial plays, partly because of the likelihood of a hostile audience reaction and partly because he knew that in the more extreme cases there would be no hope of obtaining the Lord Chamberlain’s license.  

Managers would select plays based on whether or not they would be approved. In turn, should the Examiner of Plays miss inappropriate content, the audience would be sure to voice disapproval. This was the understood dynamic at the legitimate theaters. However, what might be surprising is that we see a very familiar model at work at the illegitimate theaters (sans Lord Chamberlain) before deregulation. Most of the dramatic works discussed in this project are technically illegitimate forms; however, as the adaptations discussed in Chapters Two through Five will show, we see similar politics and processes at work in the regulation of dramas that did not require licensing.

The simplified plots and characters of spectacular drama (especially melodrama) also gave theatergoers a common language to employ in narratives of social and political life. The formulaic plots and stock characters of melodrama were easily discerned by members of all economic classes and provided a common language that most nineteenth-

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36 Connolly, 85-86. In this passage, Connolly cites Frederick Reynolds, The Life and Times of Frederick Reynolds (London, 1826).
37 One example of note is the way that melodramatic plotlines were infused into political scandals, see Thomas Laqueur, “The Queen Caroline Affair: Politics as Art in the Reign of George IV,” Journal of Modern History 54, no. 3 (1982): 417-66.
century scholars claim made the theater one of the most democratic spaces in nineteenth-century London. However, such arguments are often put forth in an attempt to legitimize the study of melodrama as a genre and medium for revolutionary, artistic expression. While I do not wish to dismiss such arguments for their primary aesthetic interests, I do wish to propose that a very different history of melodrama and other spectacular entertainments emerges when the focus is shifted away from aesthetics and replaced with an economically- and politically-informed investigation of the function of popular theater in nineteenth century London. Popular theater no doubt reflected consumers’ demands in an age where profits became the primary motivation behind theatrical production, but it also largely directed those desires in the choice of plays, celebrity casting, and production techniques. For these reasons, it is useful to consider theater as one of the many disciplinary spaces that characterize the modern, industrialized, capitalist city.

Foucault’s understanding of disciplinary power can be productively applied to the proto-culture industry that emerged alongside the modern prison, schoolhouse, asylum, and clinic. We have already seen through Kemble’s example how theater managers

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38 In Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995), Michel Foucault argues that the modern city is a carefully-planned aggregation of “functional sites,” spaces of utility conceptually-designed for the careful observation, ordering, and classification of myriad groups. Foucault ascribes disciplinary power to the military base, the industrial factory, and the school house. These spaces are pedagogical sites of disciplinary training that “produce subjected and practiced bodies, ‘docile’ bodies. Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (138). Penal, military, and education systems are for Foucault the most telling examples of how citizens were organized and trained for what deemed acceptable and desirable ways of functioning in the changing, congested, modern city. The picture he paints of the industrial city is one of careful planning, management, and surveillance shaped with one goal in mind: to produce manageable citizens accustomed to the daily grind of industrialized life. Functional sites are spaces that produce subjects that will fit the needs of capitalist enterprise. This training is both physiological and psychological. In the rehabilitative penitentiary, the prisoner is not only required to atone for his crime through physical labor, but is also conscious of being under what he perceives to be constant, uninterrupted surveillance. The aim of his “rehabilitation” is to ensure compliant, docile behavior within prison walls as well as without. For Foucault, the ultimate aim of the school house is no different—to produce subjects that have the necessary skills to participate in commerce and industry but whose respect
became well-versed in identifying crowd pleasers and became well-disciplined businessmen by recycling proven techniques in order to maximize profits for their investors. The censorship of drama also led to the disciplining of dramatists, audiences and, to some extent, actors. In effect, the limitations on drama enacted by the Licensing Act made the censored theater of the period a well-oiled, pedagogical arm of political and economic interests well before the public schoolhouse became the standard space for producing disciplined citizens.

The disciplinary effects of the Licensing Act began almost immediately after its passing in 1737. The first two groups affected by the limitations placed on them by the Lord Chamberlain’s office were dramatists who depended on the stage for their livelihood and theater managers who were responsible for purchasing scripts for theatrical production. Managers, regardless of their personal politics, had to adhere to the censorship regulations in order to ensure that their theaters would not be subject to fines or other disciplinary measures. As a result, they were less inclined to invest in scripts that would not easily be granted a license by the Examiner of Plays. Dramatists eager to see their plays staged had to accept these conditions in order to sell their works. At first glance, what might appear on the surface as a shift in theatrical tastes and market demands during the second half of the eighteenth century becomes a more carefully-planned system of state-sponsored censorship and regulation when placed in the context of the Licensing Act and its disciplinary power.

Although the existence of specific legislation complete with procedures for enforcement suggests a model of sovereign power, Matthew Kinservik explains that in
practice the Lord Chamberlain’s office rarely issued outright bans on plays submitted for licensing. On the contrary, most plays received approval as long as the changes made to the text by the Examiner were reflected in their performances. Kinservik provides the following lucid explanation of the disciplinary effects of the Licensing Act in its first decades:

The passing of the Licensing Act coincides with the supposed shift from a penal system characterized by arbitrary punishment to one that worked by discipline and regulation. . . . Focusing on the first decade of the Licensing Act’s implementation, we can see how a law that appeared to be a monarchical exercise of power par excellence became, in practice, a way to discipline satire. The Lord Chamberlain was not an aloof, severe censor who randomly and without warning levied £50 fines and closed theatres. Certainly, plays were censored and illegal theatre troupes were shut down, but the various Lords Chamberlain seem almost never to have exercised their authority to punish. Rather, with the appointment of an Examiner and Deputy Examiner of Plays, the Lord Chamberlain’s office became an efficient censoring bureaucracy whose main objective was to make the play texts acceptable for performance. The emphasis was clearly on correcting texts, not punishing violators, even though there were violators to punish. This was a smart policy because it reduced protests against the law, which, in fact, came to embody some of the characteristics of
theatrical regulation that supporters of the theatre had been urging since the turn of the century. ³⁹

Understanding the relationship between the theatrical world overseen by the office of the Lord Chamberlain after the Licensing Act of 1737 and a society increasingly subject to new modes of surveillance, organization, and management, Kinservik explicitly connects his analysis of the censorship of satire in the eighteenth century to Foucault’s model of disciplinary power. He argues that “Distinguishing between punishment and training is important for understanding the effects of the Licensing Act. Because so much of the censoring came in the form of altering texts and recommending specific changes to authors, the most important effects of the law were productive, not prohibitive.” ⁴⁰

Kinservik argues that if Foucault’s material argument is applied to the symbolic “body” of work of staged drama produced in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a clearer picture emerges of the “disciplined” drama (and also dramatists) that characterized the London stage from the Licensing Act of 1737 well into the twentieth century. Important to remember is that it was not the explicit aim of the Licensing Act to prohibit the production of new dramas as such a move would have undermined the free market ideas that underscored contemporaneous economic analyses of the stage; instead the law was enacted in order to regulate the presence of “controversial” material in London’s theaters and thus to regulate the discourse in a network of large public spaces frequently visited by a large cross-section of London’s population. ⁴¹

⁴⁰ Ibid., 98.
⁴¹ Daniel O’Quinn also finds Foucault’s theories of governance, sovereignty, and discipline productive lenses through which to see the stage under the strict regulations that were introduced in the eighteenth century. Reading dramas produced 1770-1800 in the context of the revolutions in America and France and the perceived threat they posed to national identity and British imperialism, he argues that by the end of the
Political satire was the first legitimate theatrical genre to be regulated, but material deemed “controversial” was determined by the Examiner of Plays and could thus include any content that the censor found undesirable including indecent and blasphemous content. In effect, the Licensing Act had three “productive,” regulatory or pedagogical aims: (1) to teach dramatists how to write scripts that would be granted licenses with ease; (2) to teach theater managers how to choose plays that could be produced with little difficulty; and (3) to train audiences to expect stage productions that did not espouse dangerous political, social, and economic ideologies and by extension to identify with the narratives permitted by the Examiner of Plays.

Important to note here is that the procedure of writing scripts, acquiring licenses, and producing plays was—as today—a “behind the scenes” process. Very little, if any, of the process was made public and as a result, theatergoers did not actively participate in debates about what was or was not appropriate material for public display and consumption. The invisibility of the process behind the censorship of drama made it particularly effective in developing not only an entertainment industry that suppressed radical critiques of political or social institutions but also one that was overwhelmingly condoned and accepted by most patrons. This is not to say that disapproval of the process did not exist (the Inchbald and Holcroft examples provided earlier in this essay.

eighteenth century a regulatory theater emerged that nightly presented its patrons with allegories of “possible futures for the nation and the empire.” O’Quinn sees late eighteenth-century theater as a place where political and economic concerns are played out but where the narratives of empire and socioeconomic concerns favored a model that was in line with British imperial practices. Theatrical narratives provided audiences with models of nation, empire, race, sex, and class; the censorship of drama ensured that these models closely followed the ideological bent of British imperial and mercantile pursuits. O’Quinn’s focus is on legitimate drama staged in London at the end of the eighteenth century; however, he concludes his study by moving the argument into the arena of illegitimate entertainments, especially military re-enactments and plays that included technologically impressive battle scenes that he sees as thinly veiled displays of Britain’s military, mechanical, and administrative superiority over colonized peoples. For a more detailed analysis see, Daniel O’Quinn, Staging Governance: Theatrical Imperialism in London, 1770-1800 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2005): 5.
show that many dramatists were not happy with the law), but dissent was for the most part reserved for writers and radicals who found the censored stage to undermine artistic freedom and democratic ideals.42 These arguments against censorship were diffused by an overwhelming support for the regulation of theatrical content that might seem odd by today’s standards.

Calhoun Winton, for example, explains that while censorship has negative connotations in the present, it has been widely embraced at several moments in British history including the period currently under examination. “Most segments of British society with anything approaching political or social influence,” he writes, “believed in dramatic censorship in one for or another. This is not to say that a given author was happy when his play was censored; it is to say that society as a whole was quite willing to accept the process, usually without comment.”43 Winton is careful to acknowledge that dramatic censorship found support from Whigs and Tories alike and no political party was more likely to censor the stage than the other. However, as the political climate in England became increasingly conservative in the years following the French Revolution, so did the scope of acceptable political sentiments on the stage. Theater owners and managers understood that a play’s profitability depended first and foremost on its ability to appeal to as wide an audience as possible and that this appeal depended on not offending theater patrons or inciting crowds. Also of some importance is Winton’s choice of words in describing which segments of British society were most supportive of theatrical censorship, namely those segments with “political or social influence.” While

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42 The nineteenth-century theater was equally distrusted by evangelicals, but their arguments differed in that they often promoted greater censorship of theatrical content.
British society may have overwhelmingly supported stage censorship, we must remember that this acceptance did not originate with the largest group of citizens—namely middle- and working-class theater patrons. Instead, the support of theatrical censorship was a top-down process originating with legislators, business owners, and other politically and socially influential groups with an invested interest in promoting and perpetuating ideas that they found most beneficial to visions of social order and economic prosperity that most closely fit their ideals.

We might cite the long-term effects of the Licensing Act as perhaps one of the reasons (or, better yet, the reason) why deregulation of the patent system did nothing to re-energize serious drama at mid-century. By 1843, spectacular entertainments that avoided controversial material had in fact become the norm in London theaters. More than 110 years of continuous censorship of the stage had if fact produced the nineteenth-century theatergoer’s so-called “taste for spectacle.” When the Theatres Regulation Act opened the minor houses to full participation in the theatrical “free market” there was absolutely no need for managers to encourage the production of spoken-word drama that had long gone out of fashion. By mid-century, melodrama was the dominant genre on the English stage, and just about any story could be turned into a melodrama, including the most radical novels of the day.

**Melodrama: Its Delights and Discontents**

The Licensing Act had direct control of the political sentiments voiced in legitimate drama. However, the long term effects of the Licensing Act also had an impact on the development of illegitimate forms. Melodrama in particular stands out as a
useful genre to investigate further because unlike the other popular genres, melodrama straddled the stages of spectacular entertainment and spoken-word drama. Like pantomime and burletta, melodrama required the presence of music, dances, and songs in order to be generically classified as an “illegitimate” form. However, unlike these other popular forms, the musical entertainment did not dominate the production; instead, it was interspersed throughout scenes that contained spoken dialogue. As such, melodrama could in effect present controversial material onto the stage precisely because it was a hybrid form not under the Lord Chamberlain’s jurisdiction.

At times, it did. Separate book length studies by Jane Moody and David Worrall have demonstrated the subversive possibilities of illegitimate theater in London during the first half of the nineteenth century. Elaine Hadley has also looked at radical expression through what she calls “the melodramatic mode,” specifically the use of familiar melodramatic narratives to garner support for political change by appealing to supporters’ emotions. The collective efforts of these authors remind us that any claims about the stifling of political expression at the major theater houses did in fact meet with resistance in some of the minor venues. However, all three authors to some extent admit that their recovered histories do not constitute a representative majority of the political sentiments voiced on stage, nor do they connect these sentiments to business practices in the historical contexts of imperialism and capitalism. Worrall’s work makes an informed regarding the ways that radical groups were often successful in circumnavigating the censor, but as the book’s

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title indicates, the study takes a close look at radical “subcultures,” not the mainstream. Hadley’s study (whose scope is the most free of the censorial constraints of the actual stage) closes with an acknowledgement that despite their conventional happy endings, the heroes of melodrama do not always come out on top against villains that “embody all the ills of modernizing Victorian capitalism.” She explains:

   By the conclusion of a melodrama, the heroes and heroines of stage melodrama almost always defeat the self-interested plots of these dastardly figures, frequently disinheriting them but not “disowning” them. Eschewing any proprietary interest in people or places, melodrama’s heroes and heroines strive for the spectacular familial tableau that ends the play. In the history of the melodramatic mode, however, these villains have usually won, and, as is well known, history belongs to the victors.46

Melodrama, with its emphasis on the stability of the family, offers little forms of resistance to the actual material conditions of everyday life in the growing city. Sure, the emotional appeals are on the side of the hero or heroine, but the outcome usually suggests a successful navigation of the system, but rarely the defeat of the inequities of nineteenth-century urban capitalism at the height of the British Empire.

   Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulos tell us that throughout the nineteenth century “. . . melodrama underwent multiple transformations—moving from ‘outlaw’ to domestic and then imperialistic modes, for example—[and] these metamorphoses carried with them the unmistakable traces of the socioeconomic and political transformations that were played out at the same time in the home, academy, and the political sphere, and

46 Hadley, 225.
even in the theatres where the melodrama was staged.”47 The authors explain that the
conventions of melodrama evolved from these social and historical contexts. However,
that is not to say that these modes emerged in the order of succession described above.
Michael Booth, for example, has documented the presence of imperialist melodrama
from much earlier in the century. As one might expect, late Victorian melodramas
commonly staged battles against colonized peoples as the British Empire concurrently
reached new heights; however, imperialist narratives also formed the basis of
melodramas staged as early as 1804 that promoted British patriotism through military
successes both past and present.48

These contexts are important to add because of their presence in so many sub-
genres of melodrama, even some of the earliest forms. We see two major ideological
underpinnings in both nautical melodrama (more popular during the first decades of the
nineteenth century) and domestic melodrama (which became the dominant melodramatic
genre in the century’s second half). Both subgenres overwhelmingly offered audiences
narratives in line with imperialist and capitalist ideology. The imperialist ideology at
work in both subgenres has been documented by Cox. Noting that melodrama was
democratizing in its reach, he reads the content of the message being sent in less radical
terms. Cox gives the following analysis:

47 Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, Introduction to Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a
48 Michael Booth, “Soldiers of the Queen: Drury Lane Imperialism,” in Melodrama: The Cultural
Emergence of a Genre, ed. Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou (New York: St. Martin’s Press,
1996): 2-20. Booth provides the following account of how imperialism shaped early melodrama:
“Patriotism and the glorification of British feats of arms and the heroism of the British soldier and sailor
had marked the spectacle entertainment of the early years of the nineteenth century, such as The Siege of
Gibraltar (1804) and The Battle of Trafalgar (1806), fought by fully rigged model ships in the forty-by-
one-hundred-feet water tank installed on the stage of Sadler’s Wells. The sailor-hero of nautical
melodrama is a direct creation of this patriotic spirit. Battles on land, as in The Battle of Waterloo (1824)
and The Invasion of Russia (1825), were the specialty of the stage and attached circus ring of Astley’s
Theatre. . . . [The] Crimean War spawned several melodramas, immediately dramatized from newspaper
accounts, on the London stage” (5-6).
. . . the melodrama may have revolutionized the British stage, but it supported conservative values. On the one hand, the melodrama offered fantasies—often orientalist or militaristic—and, on the other, in its domestic form, packaged accounts of working-class life within a sentimental frame of family values and a conventional social order. Even an examination of the plays offered at working-class theatres shows that these plays were either escapist or participated in a hegemonic ideology . . . The melodrama could place any formal innovation or controversial content within a safe vision.49

Although different in setting and theme, both nautical and domestic melodrama circulated narratives that promoted similar imperialist and economic principles. Cox sees this at work in most of the London theaters, regardless of the class makeup of their audiences, giving such conventional, normalizing narratives maximum reach.

In short, what we see at work in the rise of melodrama in the early decades of the nineteenth century is a regulated stage that employed a popular genre to advance what many would read as an anti-populist sociological vision by today’s standards. The emphasis on spectacle substituted for content made melodrama and other illegitimate forms competitive in the “free” market of the theater industry making the genre very profitable for the minor theater houses. Melodrama helped business boom at the smaller theaters, but this result can only be read as a triumph from a business perspective and perhaps to some extent also a success for a stage aesthetic that was embraced by a wide audience. However, “despite its innovative stage techniques,” Cox reminds us that “the

melodrama nevertheless functioned within the institution of the theatre and the hierarchy of dramatic forms as a reaction against the Gothic and romantic drama and ultimately as a vehicle for a reactionary ideological vision.”50 For Cox, this “reactionary ideological vision” has a very specific historical context because it emerged as a critique of the earliest melodramas imported from France by so-called Jacobin writers. Melodrama began in France during the post-Revolutionary period. Within a decade it had become a genre to be reckoned with in England as well. However, if the early French melodramas of Pixèrecourt and others espoused pro-revolutionary sentiments on their stages, English melodramas too reflected the political climate of their own country.51 Melodrama may have had a radical birth but its importation into England required some “acculturation.” Cox tells us that “there is a disjunction between a ‘progressive’ history of aesthetic or stage techniques and a history of cultural reaction in which potentially radical forms are routed in the post-Napoleonic theatre by the domestic melodrama.”52

Despite their different settings and conventions, both nautical and domestic melodrama had similar aims achieved through the recycling of plots that had one common message. “It seems love, hard work, and moral righteousness conquer all,” writes Michael Hays, “but their (melo)drama also functions superbly as a means of uniting all classes in the audience in their desire to further experience representations—if not the practice—of the unifying and sustaining project of empire.”53 We might see this as a pedagogical function of melodrama throughout most of the century. Melodrama, in

50 Ibid., 167. Cox is referring specifically to A Tale of Mystery, adapted by Thomas Holcroft, which was first staged at Covent Garden in 1802.
51 Although there was a very different political climate in France at the end of the eighteenth century, both Paris and London stages shared similar state-sponsored regulations.
its many manifestations, offered both working- and middle-class audiences representations that would enable identification with the Empire both at home and at its peripheries. These representations were highly escapist (at the very least), offering the audience encounters with exotic lands (that they would likely never visit) mediated through the safe perspective of characters that represented the Empire in a favorable light, especially soldiers, sailors, and statesmen. Hays sees melodrama as a widely-embraced form that was “crucial to the culture of high imperialism, and to a description (and concomitant marginalization) of colonial peoples outside the national ‘center.’”

If nautical melodrama offered narratives of military struggles abroad, then the domestic melodrama focused on the economic struggles of local life. These narratives, too, were escapist in their depictions of everyday life in a rapidly-changing economy. Many of the victims (often simultaneously the heroes) of melodrama are wronged by the economic system. Orphans, widows, and other innocent poor people are pitted against greedy landlords, step-families, and factory owners in a battle for the moral high-ground, but not always economic equal-ground for all. The end of the domestic melodrama always sees the victim compensated for the wrongs he has suffered, but the remuneration never extends beyond the individual and his or her family. Martha Vicinus offers the following analysis: “Melodrama was popular with the working class in its efforts to understand and assimilate capitalism; it appeared to offer truths not found elsewhere. Social and economic conditions were unstable during much of the nineteenth century; melodrama acknowledged this and seemed to demonstrate how difficult circumstances

54 Ibid., 136.
could be endured and even turned into victory.” Melodrama offered as hope the triumphs of a few, but never a collective victory for revolutionary principles.

Melodrama may have originally championed the democratic ideals that defined the late eighteenth century, but its revolutionary legacy would be soon be lost on the English stage. The earliest melodramas—specifically gothic melodramas—may have found ways to bring forth radical principles on stage, but the increased conservatism that emerged during the Napoleonic wars saw a marked shift in the tone of popular melodramas staged in London and, later, at the provincial theaters. Cox describes this shift in clear cause-and-effect terminology: “Put simply, the Gothic drama enacted the revolts—both personal and collective, both erotic and political—of the age of democratic revolution, while the nautical melodrama works to discipline any rebellious tendencies, harnessing sexual energy within the institution of traditional marriage and staging the end of revolt . . .” After the revolutions in both America and France, there was much worry among some Britons that the same radical ideas would spread at home. These anxieties were staged on a nightly basis in London theaters with new subgenres emerging to counteract the revolutionary spirit of the earlier forms. Cox assigns the later nautical and domestic melodramas a disciplinary function. “The ultimate goal of nautical melodrama,” he writes, “[is] to insure that the audience performs upon its own emotional responses the same kind of discipline that the plays perform upon the thoughts and feelings of their characters.”

Nineteenth-century melodrama in its various forms

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57 Ibid., 186.
worked primarily through a system of easily-understood character types, symbols, and a narrative accessible to all that made it a highly-effective medium for the promotion of imperialist ideology.

By the first decade of the nineteenth century, nautical and domestic melodrama had replaced the earlier, more radical Gothic forms, making the popular stage increasingly more conservative. Although this conservatism would evolve throughout the century as British opinion became overwhelmingly sympathetic to specific emancipation and enfranchisement movements, it nonetheless ensured that these sentiments were engineered to work within a conventional social model that discouraged radicalism. More importantly, it consciously reworked radical narratives into new, disciplined forms for popular consumption. We see this at work in the practice of adapting novels with fairly radical sentiments to the well-disciplined stage. The brief history that I have traced above shows that the nineteenth-century theater was heavily regulated and legislatively censored and hence was characterized by multiple levels of production that slowly standardized the theater industry and laid the foundations for the entertainment industry of the present.

**The Business of Adaptation**

If the connection between nationalist interests and an emerging theater industry in the nineteenth century seems like a suspicious anachronism, Tracy Davis explains that the connection among the entertainment industry, funding for the arts, government policy, and economic interests was as prominent in the nineteenth-century as it is today. She writes, “[t]he economic principles being worked through by nineteenth- and twenty-
first-century legislators and business people share a great deal—the liberalization of trade zones and protection of industrial sectors, as well as the state’s role in fostering national theatres and supervising the moral and nationalist message they promulgate . . .”\textsuperscript{58} The arts, business, and government worked together in the production of popular entertainment during the nineteenth century in ways that bear resemblance to our present day. This triangulation of cultural production is best illustrated in the widespread practice of adapting novels for the stage, especially in the case of novels that contained potentially subversive messages. Politically or morally questionable novels brought with them a particularly strong attraction for theater proprietors. If a novel happened to have caused a critical stir at publication, then the plot had proven its potential to capture the attention of potential theater patrons. If the novel’s plot happened to be at odds with the range of acceptable topics on a stage that was subject to censorship since the 1737 Licensing Act, then its plot, incidents, and characters would be changed accordingly. This was a common practice, one that good dramatists were trained to do by the turn of the nineteenth century.

Let us turn briefly to \textit{Frankenstein}, as it offers an clear example that has been well-documented by William St. Clair. Published anonymously in 1818, the three-volume novel was greeted with reviews ranging from lukewarm to scathing. Nothing in the novel’s unimpressive 500-copy initial run could have predicted that it would eventually become the most famous Romantic novel. Nothing, that is, except for its early success on the stage. Richard Brinsley Peake’s \textit{Presumption; or The Fate of Frankenstein} premiered at the English Opera House on July 28, 1823, to a packed theater. \textit{Presumption} was a great success; its popularity gave Shelley’s monstrous

\textsuperscript{58} Davis, 3.
progeny a cultural visibility that the novel alone would have never achieved (and which will be discussed at length in Chapter Three).

What was the reason behind bringing the novel to the stage? It certainly was not its critical acclaim. While many reviewers expressed a favorable opinion of the novel’s more picturesque moments, they were less impressed with the unnaturalness of the events depicted, and condemned the author for going against the established order of nature, making a mockery of religious belief in an almighty Creator, and offering no real moral purpose. For example, wondering “whether the head or the heart of the author be the most diseased,” John Wilson Croker gives the following evaluation in a review published in the January 1818 number of the *Quarterly Review*:

> Our readers will guess from this summary, what a tissue of horrible and disgusting absurdity this work presents. . . .

> . . . Our taste and our judgment alike revolt at this kind of writing, and the greater the ability with which it may be executed the worse it is—it inculcates no lesson of conduct, manners, or morality; it cannot mend, and will not even amuse its readers, unless their taste have been deplorably vitiated. . . .

Croker’s review condemns the novel precisely for its expressive power. For this reviewer, the novel’s supposed lack of any “lesson of conduct, manners, or morality” is made worse because it is executed with great ability. The author suggests that well-written novels should come under greater scrutiny with regard to moral purpose because of their ability to reach and, more importantly, to influence a wide audience.

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This review makes it clear that the novel would not be appropriate for stage representation because of its morally questionable content. The announcement of Peake’s production was met with protests that served as publicity for the play’s opening night. As Steven Forry notes, Peake’s production came under immediate attack by at least one group who distributed the following leaflet condemning the play and warning theatergoers of the story’s immoral subject:

Do not go to the Lyceum to see the monstrous Drama, founded on the improper work called “Frankenstein”—Do not take your wives and families—The novel itself is of a decidedly immoral tendency; it treats of a subject which in nature cannot occur. This subject is pregnant with mischief; and to prevent the ill-consequences which may result from the promulgation of such dangerous doctrines, a few zealous friends of morality, and promoters of this Posting-bill, (and who are ready to meet the consequences thereof) are using their strongest endeavours.  

Unfortunately for these “zealous friends of morality” who desperately tried to avoid the circulation of “such dangerous doctrines” among the populace, protests ultimately served to promote the melodrama. Here we see the economic benefits of adapting a controversial novel for the stage.

William Godwin foresaw the effect that stage success potentially could have on his daughter’s literary career as is evidenced from the following letter written to Shelley on July 22, 1823, in anticipation of her novel’s first stage adaptation:

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60 Steven Forry, *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of Frankenstein from Mary Shelley to the Present* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1990): 5. Forry includes an extended description of these and other similar protests, reproducing leaflets circulated prior to *Presumption*’s Birmingham debut.
It is a curious circumstance that a play is just announced, to be performed at the English Opera House in the Strand next Monday, entitled, Presumption, or the Fate of Frankenstein. I know not whether is will succeed. If it does, it will be some sort of feather in the cap of the author of the novel, a recommendation in your future negociacions with booksellers.  

On the surface, these words sound like the warm wishes one might expect any father to give his child in a similar situation. However, anyone with even the most cursory knowledge of the relationship between these two literary figures realizes that Shelley’s relationship with her father was often complicated by the financial pressures Godwin placed on his daughter. His mention of “future negociacions with booksellers” explicitly shows that his interest in the success of Peake’s adaptation is rooted in a wish for his daughter’s financial success and—by extension—his own. Any perceived altruism that might be afforded to Godwin is immediately diffused by the fact that he personally oversaw, and perhaps profited from, the publication of the novel’s second edition in two volumes by the publishers G. and W. B. Whittaker. The 1823 edition (a reprint of the 1818 text)—now with the author’s name revealed—appeared on August 11, 1823, just two weeks after the premiere of Presumption and just in time to capitalize on the adaptation’s success. Presumption’s popularity may have indeed given sales of the novel a much-appreciated spark, but theater-goers whose interest for the novel may have been drawn in by its visually-driven stage progeny would have been surprised by the novel’s narrative sophistication and philosophical content.

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61 Ibid., 3.
Godwin’s foresight was not accidental. His own experience in adaptation almost thirty years before had taught him a few things about the dilution of questionable content on stage. The range of acceptable sentiment was not stable throughout the 231 years that English drama was under the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain’s office; however, the sentiments on stage were usually in step with government. We find an early, telling example in the period immediately following the Reign of Terror. As public opinion in London became more conservative following the events in France, so did London’s stages. However, that did not stop Richard Brinsley Sheridan, the Whig politician and manager of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, from commissioning George Colman to pen an adaptation of Godwin’s 1794 novel *Things as They Are; or, The Adventures of Caleb Williams*. The novel had already received press and had gone through multiple printings. Although Sheridan was sympathetic to the novel’s politics, he was also banking on the novel’s moderate commercial success to draw audiences into the theater.

Unfortunately, Sheridan’s bets were off. The dramatization was both an artistic and financial failure for the theater, with its critics equally attacking the performance and the play’s apparent Jacobin sympathies despite opening to what one reviewer for *The Times* calls “one of the most crowded audiences of this season.”62 The drama was closed after four performances at this theater.63 Later scholars have not been surprised by this stage flop at Drury Lane. John Loftis sees the results as inevitable. “In the anti-Jacobin temper of 1796,” argues Loftis, “the association with Godwin’s *Things as They Are*

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63 *The Iron Chest* was revived for thirteen performances at the Haymarket. The play would receive mild success later in the nineteenth century but mostly for actors’ individual performances.
would seemingly have been enough to have prompted suppression.\textsuperscript{64} Godwin’s notoriety by mid-decade is well-noted, but perhaps it might be more useful to consider whether Godwin’s celebrity was what drew Sheridan to commission the piece in the first place.

The play’s association with Godwin may have in fact been seen as a potential draw for curious patrons. However, whatever Jacobin sympathies remained in the adaptation were the result of interpretations brought to bear on the drama by familiarity with Godwin’s politics. Certainly the political sentiments of the stage production were not as radical as those found in the novel. Sheridan’s choice of Colman as adapter was made in complete confidence of the successful dramatist’s understanding of what material would gain the approval of both the Examiner of Plays and the audience (or so he thought). Colman was particularly suited for this task. By 1796, he could boast of a fourteen-year career of penning dramas that proved popular with theatergoers and fully understood what material was acceptable for production. As Philip Cox explains:

\begin{quote}
In \textit{Caleb Williams}, Godwin had hoped to produce what was, in effect, a “popular” form of his philosophical work \textit{[Political Justice]}; in \textit{The Iron Chest} Colman reproduced the novel in a form which had the potential to reach a wider and more obviously “popular” audience. In the process, the ideological underpinnings of the novel were significantly changed.\textsuperscript{65}
\end{quote}

\textit{The Iron Chest} was Colman’s production, not Godwin’s. Any acknowledgements of Godwin’s influence on the drama were relegated to incidents of plot and character, not politics. In fact, Colman’s reverence for the authority invested in the Lord Chamberlain’s


\textsuperscript{65} Philip Cox, 41.
office is supported by the following introductory remarks to the first printed edition of

_The Iron Chest:_

I am indebted for the ground-work of this Play to a Novel, entitled ‘Things as They Are; or the Adventures of Caleb Williams’ . . . I have cautiously avoided all tendency to that which, vulgarly, (and wrongly in many instances), is termed Politicks; with which, many have told me, _Caleb Williams_ teems. The stage has now no business with Politicks: and, should a Dramatick Author endeavor to dabble in them, it is the Lord Chamberlain’s office to check his attempts before they meet the eye of the Publick. I perused Mr. Godwin’s book as a tale replete with incident, ingenious in its arrangement, masterly in its delineation of character, and forcible in its language . . . .

Colman’s disclaimer becomes a short manifesto detailing his own dislike of politicized dramas. Obviously, if anyone was to bring Godwin’s controversial novel to the stage, Colman was the safest bet for Sheridan. His firm opposition to the presence of political content on the stage made him a perfect candidate for the undertaking. The drama itself was financially unsuccessful, but Colman’s decision to distance himself from Godwin’s radicalism proved to be a smart career move for the dramatist in his later years because it demonstrated that he could be trusted by the Lord Chamberlain’s office. He succeeded John Larpent as the Examiner of Plays in 1824, a salaried position he held until his death in 1836.

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The Iron Chest’s rusty debut did not turn Sheridan away from following the same business model the following year. However, this time he avoided gambling on political notoriety in his choice of novelist. Of course, some controversy was needed. He turned to a young, fellow parliament member who had caused much sensation with the publication of The Monk in 1796. Raymond and Agnes; or, The Bleeding Nun: A Ballet of Action (with Dialogue), adapted from Matthew Gregory Lewis’s novel, had been staged on June 1, 1797, at the rival Covent Garden Theatre. The successful adaptation gave Sheridan confidence that the young author could draw a crowd (and turn a profit) and therefore he purchased the first gothic melodrama penned by the young, controversial author. Unlike The Iron Chest, Lewis’s The Castle Spectre (1797) would prove a huge success for Drury Lane, despite some criticism for content. The melodrama earned £18,000 in its initial three-month run at the theater. Exactly how much of that money made its way to Lewis is unknown; however, according to an anecdote by James Skene, it is believed to be very little. Sheridan and Lewis would have a falling out over the small sum the former paid the young author for his smash-hit. However, Lewis would find other ways to benefit financially from his theatrical success. Just as Sheridan had capitalized on Lewis’s infamous novel when advertising The Castle Spectre, Lewis and his publishers repeated this valuable marketing strategy when advertising subsequent editions of The Monk. Although The Castle Spectre was not an adaptation of his earlier

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novel, it contained similar sensational gothic elements that would appeal to similar audiences. Keeping the association between the stage and the page alive in the mind of the consumer, the fourth edition of the *The Monk* published in 1798 (which Gamer notes is a “self-censored edition”) included an advertisement signed by “M. G. Lewis, Esq. M.P. Author of ‘The Castle Spectre.’” At least four other stage versions of his novel similar to *Raymond and Agnes* appeared in London and traveled to America over the next sixty years.

The brief sketch of Shelley’s, Godwin’s, and Lewis’s contribution to the history of adaptation shows that the practice of adapting novels for the stage was motivated at least in part by the business interests of theater proprietors at the turn of the nineteenth century. We also see that (1) the changes made were both financially and politically motivated and (2) a successful stage-run could make the career of an aspiring young writer. The stage helped solidify the commercial successes of two sensational novels penned by Shelley and Lewis, two authors best-remembered for novels written before either came of age. Lewis continued to find success writing for the theater during his short life; his last dramatic work *Timour the Tartar* (1811) demonstrates his keen eye for the popular, spectacular stage. Shelley would go on to publish six additional novels and many shorter works throughout the remainder of her life. She was moderately successful in this task; however, no other piece produced by the author would ever attain the popularity or the cultural visibility of *Frankenstein*. Unfortunately, the Frankenstein

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72 Tempereley lists the following additional adaptations: a musical drama of the same title by Lewis in 1809 (staged at the Haymarket in 1811), an opera in 1853, and an adaptation by Fitzball in 1855, featuring music by John David Loder.

73 For a discussion of Lewis’s popularity on the stage as well as the full text of *Timour the Tartar*, see *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama*, ed. Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003).
myth in popular culture never made her much money (the big profits went to theater proprietors). Instead, the novel received immortality through hundreds of hideous progenies over the years.

Teaching Machines

The cultural visibility that a string of successful stage adaptations in the first half of the nineteenth century brought Shelley’s story forever changed the way that the novel would be read, studied, interpreted, and invoked in popular discourse. Many of the novels that we teach carry with them pop-cultural baggage similar (albeit not equal) to *Frankenstein*. *A Christmas Carol*, *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and *Dracula* only name some of the most obvious instances. Most new students come to these novels with some sense of the characters, incidents, and plot provided by popular adaptations. But popular culture (specifically contemporary cinema) not only provides visual models for students to draw upon but also often guides literary interpretation of the text. One example is the way that *Frankenstein* is often simplistically reduced to a religious, cautionary tale about a man who dared to take on creative powers reserved for an all-powerful being. Such a reading is barely supported by the secular 1818 text; nevertheless almost identical warnings open both the first two classic Universal films directed by James Whale, *Frankenstein* (1931) and its sequel *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935). These films preserve conservative, religious readings introduced a century ago.


Most references to God in the 1818 edition appear as expletives such as “Good God!” The Creature’s discussions of God, Adam, and Satan are all based on his reading of *Paradise Lost*; therefore these references are not drawing on a Biblical context. Justine Moritz is the only character who calls on God in a
earlier. What becomes clear is that popular adaptations of Shelley’s novel produced since the nineteenth century have introduced a religious reading of the novel that is at odds with the text (especially when the text was written by the spouse of one of the most famous atheists in British literary history).  

Popular culture enacts a strong, educative function in today’s media-saturated world. Its massive reach has convinced several contemporary educational theorists that popular culture should be seriously studied in order to provide students with the skills necessary to read and evaluate these “texts” in ways that are historically and critically informed. The most vocal and prolific writer on the subject is Henry Giroux who has repeatedly argued that the postmodern entertainment industry produces objects of consumption that serve as both conveyors of meaning and creators of culture, which he explains as follows:

Films do more than entertain, they offer up subject positions, mobilize desires, influence us unconsciously, and help to construct the landscape of American culture. Deeply imbricated within material and symbolic relations of power, movies produce and incorporate ideologies that represent the outcome of struggles marked by the historical realities of power and the deep anxieties of the times; they also deploy power through the important role they play connecting the production of pleasure and

\footnote{Mary Shelley also adopts a more conservative, religious tone in the introduction to the 1831 edition. However, given that \textit{Frankenstein} had been adapted more than a dozen times by that date and those adaptations usually offered conservative interpretations of the story, these early adaptations should be credited as introducing the religious reading into \textit{Frankenstein}’s popular history. Shelley may have eventually agreed with the interpretation, but her change in attitude may very well have been a positive reaction to the popular adaptations of her story.}
meaning with the mechanisms and practices of powerful teaching machines. Put simply, films both entertain and educate.77

For Giroux, films possess an especially strong power to educate precisely because they are primarily approached as entertainment. Nevertheless, these entertainments offer up narratives that are highly-influential in the way that many viewers perceive themselves, the image of their nation, and its place on the international stage. Giroux’s work is well-known to contemporary educators, but his analysis of the pedagogical function of contemporary cinema is not limited to the turn of the current century; neither is his understanding of films (or theatrical narratives) as “powerful teaching machines.” Twenty-first century cultural theorists such as Giroux have every right to be concerned about what films teach audiences. However, in voicing these concerns they echo arguments that have been raised by contemporary critics about nineteenth-century theater, as well as arguments that were raised repeatedly throughout the nineteenth century.

Contemporary critics have made similar arguments about the educative function of theater in the nineteenth century, specifically with regard to its presentation of events and information as fact. For example, in Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England, Martin Meisel writes that nineteenth-century theater “provided a form of topical news show that served the appetite for oracular truth and mastery over time, space, and materials, and anticipated not only the illustrated news magazine, but the newsreel itself.”78 Hazel Waters too explains that

nineteenth-century theater was not only a space of entertainment, but also one with a strong educative function. She explains:

Theater then was much like television now. Before mass education and mass literacy, and in a period of explosive urban and industrial growth, it was the popular medium, drawing its audiences from all but the very poorest, with many going night after night. Bills were long, lasting from around six until midnight or maybe later, and varied, changing every few days. The appetite for new material was insatiable . . . .

Meisel and Waters paint similar pictures of nineteenth-century theaters. Both critics explain that theaters were not only places where patrons went to be entertained, but also spaces where they learned about their world. These were spaces that they visited repeatedly and for long periods at a time. They were spaces that served as centers of knowledge before compulsory education.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century writers espoused similar ideas about the educative function of theater. Joanna Baillie, the author of a substantial collection of poetic and dramatic works, is perhaps best remembered for her 1798 “Introductory Discourse” to the first volume of Plays on the Passions where she provides the following defense of drama that is judged to have little artistic value: “A play but of small poetical merit, that is suited to strike and interest the spectator, to catch the attention of him who will not, and of him who cannot read, is a more valuable and useful production than one whose elegant and harmonious pages are admired in the libraries of the tasteful and

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refined.” Throughout this introduction she argues that all people—regardless of literacy ability—learn primarily through observation. The theater, for Baillie, is a space where all spectators learn how to interact with others and understand the world that they inhabit. Her dramatic project is utilitarian and geared to finding a common language that all share, thus her decision to organize the plays around a series of emotions common to all. Baillie’s insistence that common emotions and experiences are appropriate subjects for artistic expression anticipates Wordsworth’s similar thesis in the 1800 Preface to Lyrical Ballads by two years. Her vision of the theater as a major site of education anticipates Giroux’s work by two hundred years.

Baillie’s argument was repeated almost twenty years later by the Scottish novelist and entrepreneur John Galt, who criticized what he saw as anti-intellectualism fostered by the stage under strict legislative control. His four-volume edited collection of rejected dramas The New British Theatre (1814-15) opens with the following description of the nineteenth-century theatrical teaching machine:

The stage has, in England, become as great an organ of public instruction as the pulpit. Is it proper that there should be no law to regulate what is taught from it, except the notions of one obscure solitary individual, the reader of plays in the Lord Chamberlain’s department? It would be better if some of those who are so loud and vociferous for alterations in the state of the government, would look a little more to their private trusts; and

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evidence that they really possess some capacity for directing national affairs, by the judgment and liberality with which they promote the interests of the drama—a department of domestic economy which has more permanent influence on the character of the nation, than the measures of any administration, and which, in a moral point of view, is infinitely more dignified and important than the objects of half of all the questions annually discussed in the House of Commons.  

Galt affirms the theater’s position as the principle purveyor of public instruction more influential, in his view, than both pulpit and parliament. Although his language in this passage may appear to be more concerned with the moral sentiments displayed on stage from a religious perspective, the introduction to the collection of banned dramas grounds his disapproval of censorship practices dictated by the Lord Chamberlain’s office in a primarily political context. Galt believes that censorship has no place at the theater in the aftermath of decades of revolutions and subsequent wars because it ensures that the only sentiments voiced on the stage will be those that the Examiner of Plays (an extension of the government) meets with approval.

Many more literary figures described the theater as serving a primarily pedagogical function including Sir Walter Scott, William Hazlitt, and Charles Dickens.  

Although all of the aforementioned authors may have envisioned somewhat different political, moral, and aesthetic goals for the theaters that they patronized, their writings agreed that the stage was a place where much more than simple entertainment was performed. All identify the theater as a space of education, a place where morals, values,

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82 John Galt, Preface to The New British Theatre; a Selection of Original Dramas Not Yet Acted; Some of Which Have Been Offered for Representation, But Not Accepted. (London: Colburn, 1814-15): viii.
and knowledge of the world are disseminated *en masse* to the public. Prior to the introduction of a compulsory education system, the theater was perceived by many as a principal place of instruction, a space where large groups would watch a range of cultural norms and conflicts enacted on stage.

The teaching potential of nineteenth-century popular theater should not be underestimated. Gillian Russell has shown that at the turn of the nineteenth century Londoners were likely to formulate political opinions based on information presented in popular plays and other communal events rather than in newspapers and other periodicals:

> For many people war was experienced not as a written text—newspaper accounts, pamphlet literature, the broadside, or handbill—but primarily as a communal event. Any assessment of the cultural impact of the French wars has to take this into account. The response to the conflict was played out in the streets, commons, and theatres of Britain, as much as it was in the printed media of the period.84

The popular stage offered audiences accounts of battles, sieges, and conquests in a language accessible to all. This was particularly true in the spectacular renditions of foreign conflicts, especially those that directly impacted public perceptions of the imagined “virility” and stability of the British empire. To some extent the staging of historical and current events had a productive purpose; they expanded the arena of public discourse to include individuals that would have otherwise lacked access to such information be it for economic or educational reasons.

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However, just because the popular stage readily drew much of its inspiration from historical situations and current events did not mean that the narratives they presented were actually grounded in fact or objectivity. Heidi Holder provides one account from a concerned reviewer in the August 18, 1883, issue of *Punch*: “With such a guide, then, as the Lessee of the National Theatre to conduct us, we can not do better than take ‘the children home for their holidays’ to Drury Lane, to brush up their knowledge of Modern Egyptian History.”

Holder points out that this anonymous reviewer’s sarcasm is directed at Drury Lane’s popular “Autumn Melodramas,” seasonal offerings known for their repertoire of military re-enactments based on what she calls “historically ungrounded spectacle.”

Connolly provides an earlier anecdote regarding the rejection of *Helvetic Liberty* (1792), an opera telling the story of the heroic, “historical” William Tell, whose drama was turned down by a theater manager for its political subject. The anonymous author of the drama gives the following reason for the rejection of his work: “. . . but in that paradise I found politics to be the forbidden fruit, lest the people’s eyes should be opened and they become as gods knowing good and evil: in brief, my Piece was politely returned, with an assurance, that it was too much in favour of the liberties of the people, to obtain the Lord Chamberlain’s licence [*sic*] for representation.”

If dramatizations of actual events often had little factual basis and a clear political bias, then what exactly did the London stage teach nineteenth-century audiences about their own history as it unfolded? According to several scholars, popular theatrical

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86 Holder, 142.
87 Connolly, 86.
entertainments were vital to the formation of a national, British identity that crossed boundaries of class and geography. Russell sees a theatrical trend of promoting a more-unified, patriotic, British identity emerging with the American and French Revolutionary wars. She explains that stage representations were “highly effective politically and militarily, in that [they] allowed individuals to retain local ties while at the same time securing the fiction of a transcendent loyalty to Britain and the King.”

Patriotic characters, narratives, and images on popular stages enabled audiences to see themselves as British above all other local or national identities.

J. S. Bratton provides a similar thesis in an earlier study of the hero of military/imperialist melodrama—the English Tar. She reads the well-liked stage hero (a staple of one popular subgenre of melodrama) as a recognizable archetype employed as a convincing, esteemed mouthpiece for the British Empire: “The starting point of the ideology of imperialism must be its justification in terms of the imperialist nation itself. . . In the creation of an archetype of the True Briton, naturally superior to and fit to rule over subject races in an ever-growing Empire, the theatre of nineteenth-century Britain performed this function.” Bratton and others have repeatedly shown that popular understanding of the setbacks, successes, and changes in the empire found themselves repeatedly negotiated on the popular stage. In many ways this was a democratizing trend. Popular theater played out the dissemination of information about history and current events in a visual narrative accessible to more people than texts alone. However, when one looks at the case of novels in adaptation, it is difficult to see changes to a novel’s radical political sentiments as a democratic act.

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88 Russell, 6.
Of course, the variety of entertainments available to London theater-goers in the early half of the nineteenth century would not have made the theater industry such a well-organized and established vehicle of cultural production as we may envision today. There were in fact several types of entertainments that made alternative voices available because they were not subject to regulation. 90 Much of what was known as “illegitimate” theater (which included almost all popular genres including pantomime, melodrama, and burletta) was not legally bound (in theory) by the same censorship laws that applied to traditional drama. For example, David Worrall has recently illustrated that some pantomimes and burlettas staged at the Coburg Theatre played to the sentiments of its more radical audience.

Nevertheless, on all stages we see the same repertoire of spectacular representations of different races, cultures, and regions. Even the most seemingly apolitical entertainments engaged the empire on some level. Worrall maintains that “Georgian drama was the culturally dominant mode for providing representations of national identity, war, discovery, changing relationships with other cultures and the complexities of an ever-growing empire.” 91 This engagement encompassed all genres and even though many popular genres were not subject to the same censorship as “legitimate” forms, surviving scripts overwhelmingly show that a considerable number of these pieces nonetheless promoted sentiments similar to the dramas approved by the Examiner of Plays who was overseen by the Lord Chamberlain.

Worrall’s focus is on the latter half of the eighteenth century, but his conclusions suggest that such spectacular constructions of race, nation, and empire not only had a strong history, but were also on the rise. This study argues that this trend indeed continued throughout the nineteenth century and that it was particularly evident in adaptations of novels that voiced what might be considered radical ideas. If reading adaptations with what may seem to be no (or at least very little) explicit political content may appear misguided, cultural historian Kathleen Wilson explains that Britain's imperial ventures permeated almost all levels of English culture and that “even in its most apolitical manifestations, supported an accumulationist and mercantile view of empire—that is, that empire was at heart about trade, commerce, accumulation, and consumption, and as such augmented national, as well as individual, standing, wealth, and power.”

This has particular importance for the novel in adaptation because in reconfiguring the texts for theatrical representation the political sentiments espoused by novelists were often significantly revised in order to present more “acceptable” opinions. More importantly, what Worrall calls a “national network of theaters” had developed by 1800, and that network had on any given night the potential to reach more individuals than could any novel. The result? Popular adaptations could often reach more theatergoers than the total number of existing copies of a novel. For example, at the end of 1823 there were less than 2,000 copies of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley’s *Frankenstein* in print. However, Richard Brinsley Peake’s *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, which premiered that summer, brought a truncated version of the story to approximately

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3,000 people every night that it was staged. While there were certainly individuals in attendance that had read the novel before hand, there is no way that they could constitute a majority of theater patrons. Popular adaptations often introduced theater-goers to the novels being presented on stage. In short, they were responsible for “teaching” *Frankenstein* and other novels, for bringing them to a wider audience, for shaping popular knowledge of the novels’ supposed content, for changing their politics in order to better meet the needs of national interests, and, simultaneously, for offering audiences a developing cultural and literary history that in many ways had almost nothing to do with the events or novels being adapted for the stage.

Without a doubt there was a political hand involved in the decisions behind what changes were made to a novel’s ideological sympathies. This involvement was highly non-interventionist because it did not need to be. By the turn of the nineteenth century dramatists had been writing for the approval of the Examiner of Plays for over sixty years. After almost three generations, dramatists had learned how to write plays that would receive the necessary license in order to be performed, even when they were not required to obtain a license.

**Novel Celebrities**

Adaptations sprung from the heavily-regulated theater industry described above. Theater managers commissioned popular novels for stage representation in order to capitalize on their popularity (or their infamy). Rarely were novelists consulted when their works were adapted for the stage. In fact, one reason that novels were so popular for theaters was that they provided free source material. Copyright protection did not
carry over to other media, and authors like Shelley only profited from stage adaptations when they in fact led to increased book sales and other publishing contracts. Shelley did in fact benefit in this way. The slew of theatrical adaptations staged both in England and in France throughout the 1820s made *Frankenstein* a shoe-in for Bentley’s popular series. Even though her novel had been completely transformed when adapted for the stage, she in fact became famous because of the adaptation. (I will discuss this more fully in Chapter Three).

Adaptations have been responsible for keeping countless narratives in circulation over the centuries. The more a story is adapted, the more likely it is to be exposed to a larger audience. Today, there is no doubt that the best-known novels and their characters are known because they have been repeatedly reconfigured for new audiences. Many of the characters discussed in this study have become celebrities in their own right—often more famous than the authors that brought them into existence. This is certainly true of the main characters featured in the chapters that follow. Three-Fingered Jack, Frankenstein’s Creature, Quasimodo and Esmeralda, and Uncle Tom have become celebrities in their own right, even more than the famous authors that brought them to life.

Adaptations have also been responsible for making other people famous. Many actors have made careers out of their performances of the most sensational characters from nineteenth-century novels. Take, for example, the most memorable twentieth-century Hollywood monsters. Lon Chaney was dubbed “The Man of a Thousand Faces” primarily for his portrayal of two disfigured characters of literary origin: Quasimodo in the silent film *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923) and Erik, the love-stuck hermit, in
the 1925 screen release of Gaston Leroux’s 1910 novel *The Phantom of the Opera*. Boris Karloff brought many characters to life on the big screen, but he is best known for his portrayal of Frankenstein’s Creature throughout the 1930s. Similarly, Bela Lugosi took on more than one hundred roles on stage and screen over the course of his life, but even death could not save him from carrying his *Dracula* days to the grave; he was buried in one of the many capes he wore while portraying Bram Stoker’s famous vampire.\(^93\) A quick glance through the catalog of classic Hollywood films is all it takes to see that adaptations have been responsible for making the careers of many celebrities in the modern and post-modern periods.

Nineteenth-century actors were also known for their starring roles in adaptations. Thomas Potter Cooke was one of the most famous English actors of the first half of the nineteenth century. His breakthrough performance was as Lord Ruthven in James Robinson Planché’s *The Vampire; or, The Bride of the Isles* (1820), a melodrama very loosely based on John Polidori’s famous short story.\(^94\) He would go on to log the most appearances as Frankenstein’s Creature, with at least 365 performances by mid-century.\(^95\) Only one actor would come close to achieving similar status in the same role in the first half of the century—Richard John Smith, known professionally as O. Smith.

Like Cooke and other popular nineteenth-century actors, Smith made a living out of bringing literary characters to the popular stage. At the end of his career, his acting

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\(^93\) This decision was made at the request of his son and fifth wife in 1956. Contrary to popular belief, Lugosi’s career as the Count did not begin in 1930. He first appeared on stage as the famous literary vampire in a 1927 Broadway production whose success no doubt played a role in Universal Films’ decision to invest in a cinematic adaptation shortly thereafter. In fact, the opening credits of the 1931 film directed by Todd Browning lists Hamilton Deane’s and John L. Balderston’s play as the source for the screenplay.\(^94\) Planché’s play is actually an adaptation of Charles Nodier’s melodrama *Le Vampire*, which premiered in Paris in 1819. Nodier’s play is a loose adaptation of John Polidori’s *The Vampyre*, published earlier that year.\(^95\) This figure is an estimate given in *The Illustrated London News* 15 October 1853.
résumé boasted more than forty performances as Don Quixote in Edward Fitzball’s *Don Quixotte! Knight of the Woeful* (1833), with just as many appearances the previous year as Hendrick Hudson in a dramatization of Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” performed at the Adelphi Theatre. Over the course of his twenty-five-year career at the Adelphi (where he became a permanent fixture in 1829), Smith appeared in adaptations of at least eight novels by Charles Dickens including four of the five Christmas books. He also starred in at least three different adaptations of *Frankenstein* in the 1820s (and another in 1849) and played Claude Frollo in two dramatizations of Victor Hugo’s *Notre-Dame de Paris* during the 1830s. During the 1852-53 season, just one year before retiring from the stage, he appeared eighty-two times as Uncle Tom in *Slave Life*, the Adelphi adaptation of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Although not the focus of this study, Chapters Two, Three, Four, and Five cover some of O. Smith’s most famous roles, including the role that catapulted him to fame—Three-Fingered Jack, the focus of the next chapter.

This chapter has presented a collective picture of how government regulation and business practices functioned together in the shaping of the English taste for spectacle that characterized the popular theatre of the 1800s. The remaining chapters of this study illustrate how these processes affected *Obi, Frankenstein, Notre-Dame de Paris*, and

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96 Edward Fitzball’s *Don Quixotte! Knight of the Woeful Countenance and the Humours of Sancho Panza* premiered at the Adelphi Theatre on January 7, 1833. William B. Bernard’s *Rip Van Winkle* was first performed at the same theatre on October 1, 1832.

97 Smith’s Dickensian repertoire on the Adelphi stage included the following: twenty-four performances as Old Clutchley in *Peregrinations of Pickwick* (1837); twelve performances as Bill Sykes in *Oliver Twist* (1839); eighty-seven performances as Newman Noggs in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838); twenty-eight performances as Hugh in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841); forty-three performances as Ebenezer Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol* (1843); forty performances as Toby Veck in *The Chimes, a Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In* (1844); twenty-eight performances as Peerybingle in *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845); and forty-one performances as the Phantom in *The Haunted Man and the Ghost’s Bargain* (1848). O. Smith’s theatrical repertoire can be browsed online through *The Adelphi Theatre Project, 1806-1900*, eds. Alfred L. Nelson and Gilbert B. Cross, http://www.emich.edu/public/english/adelphi_calendar/acpmain.htm.
Uncle Tom’s Cabin individually when these novels were made to pass through the filter of the nineteenth-century culture industry.
CHAPTER TWO

Making History: How Three-Fingered Jack Became Famous

A historical marker on the Kingston—St. Thomas road erected by the Jamaica National Heritage Trust Commission reads as follows:

JACK MANSONG OR THREE FINGER JACK

North of this road, in the hills and valleys behind this Marker, was the territory of the famous Jack Mansong or Three Finger Jack. It is not certain whether he was born in Jamaica or came from Africa, but it is known that in the years 1780-81, he fought, often singlehandedly, a war of terror against the English soldiers and planters who held the slave colony. Strong, brave, skilled with machete and musket, his bold exploits were equalled only by his chivalry. He loved his country and his people. He was said to have never harmed a woman or child. His life became a legend. Books and plays about him were written and performed in London theatres. He was ambushed and killed near here in 1781.¹

Today, this plaque is frequented by visitors to the island, and short histories of Three-Fingered Jack appear in guides to Jamaica and other tourism literature.² The basic sketch provided above serves as the basis for most of these short accounts. Three-Fingered Jack is described as a heroic rebel who stood up to the English colonists and slaveholders. He is described as a patriot and a brave fighter. He was chivalrous to boot. His life became

¹ Transcribed from a photograph of the historical marker published in Kenneth M. Bilby, True-Born Maroons (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005), 308.
² See, for example, Polly Thomas and Adam Vaitilingam, The Rough Guide to Jamaica (New York: Penguin, 2003), 149.
legend as his story was repeated over and over in both print and performance thousands of miles away in England.

The wording on the historical marker commemorating Three-Fingered Jack suggests that the Jamaican patriot became legend once his story was told in the English press and London theaters. Although Three-Fingered Jack has lived on in Jamaica through storytelling, the versions of the story commemorated on the plaque are the early nineteenth-century adaptations of the story produced in England. The story of Three-Fingered Jack was adapted for English audiences at least five times in the first three decades of the nineteenth century. He was introduced to English readers in 1799 in an appendix to Dr. Benjamin Moseley’s *A Treatise on Sugar*. Moseley’s version of the story of Three-Fingered Jack was adapted twice the following year, not only as a popular pantomime by John Fawcett titled *Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack* but also as an abolitionist novella by William Earle, Jr., with the almost identical title *Obi; or, The History of Three-Fingered Jack*. The popularity of Fawcett’s pantomime prompted a third adaptation of the story in 1800, William Burdett’s pseudo-historical piece, *Life and Exploits of Mansong, Commonly Called Three-Finger’d Jack, the Terror of Jamaica*. Other derivative works based on the story circulated during the next three decades, leading up to William Murray’s *Obi; or, Three-Fingered Jack*, a melodramatic adaptation of Fawcett’s pantomime first performed in 1829.

In Jamaica, Three-Fingered Jack was an immediate folk hero. As one can see from the substantial list of adaptations above, he was quite a celebrity in England as well. However, when one takes a close look at twentieth-century Jamaican versions of the story versus those popular in England in the first half of the nineteenth century, it becomes
clear that Three-Fingered Jack exists in two very separate traditions. The first tradition hails him a hero and discusses his violent acts in the historical context of slave rebellion and colonial resistance. (The historical marker in Jamaica is a good example.) The second tradition finds his exploits exciting, but ultimately exhales a sigh of relief when he meets his fate at the hands of a more level-headed (and handed) man. This chapter traces the story of Three-Fingered Jack over the first three decades of the nineteenth century in order to show how English adaptations rewrote the radical history of Three-Fingered Jack into a sensational tale that deemphasized critiques of British colonialism by changing two of the most important facts of the historical record: (1) Three-Fingered Jack was not a lone rebel, but instead the leader of a large gang; and (2) Reeder, the man who killed Three-Fingered Jack was a Maroon, not a slave as is stated in the English adaptations.

Three-Fingered Jack enjoyed a celebrity afterlife in England for many years after his actual death in 1781. Although no longer the legend he was in the nineteenth century, Three-Fingered Jack has definitely made a comeback in recent years. That is, he has made as much of a celebrity comeback as is possible with a fan base of literary scholars and cultural historians of the Romantic period. The story of Three-Fingered Jack is of interest to scholars today because its early nineteenth-century popularity intersects with many cultural studies points of interest such as the history of abolition and representations of race and empire in popular culture. His first cameo appearance in contemporary literary scholarship was in Alan Richardson’s “Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807,” where he is discussed alongside more than half a dozen works featuring obeah (the Jamaican counterpart to Haitian voodoo and Cuban santeria)
produced in England during the decade leading up to the Slave Trade Act of 1807. A Broadview edition of Earle’s novella, edited by Srinivas Aravamudan was published in 2005. Aravamudan’s comprehensive introduction to the novella provides historical details about the real Three-Fingered Jack, and discusses the story’s reach into other areas of cultural production. Aravamudan’s edition also includes Moseley’s account and provides a detailed description of Fawcett’s pantomime along with the lyrics to all of its songs. Jeffrey Cox, Charles Rzepka, Jeffrey O’Rourke, and others have shown how Fawcett’s pantomime and Murray’s melodrama rightly deserve attention for their impact on nineteenth-century English theater culture and its penchant for offering up spectacular, imperial fantasies for popular consumption. The obi phenomenon was also transatlantic in its reach. As Michael Warner demonstrates in a team-authored article, Three-Fingered Jack found some success on American stages, most notably in New York, where Fawcett’s pantomime was first staged in 1801 and followed by new adaptations of the story in the 1820s. All of the scholars listed above find it impossible to ignore how the story of Three-Fingered Jack played out in more than one contemporaneous account, a point of similarity in most of the extant scholarship.

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3 Alan Richardson, “Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807,” Studies in Romanticism 32 (1993): 3-28. Although Richardson only cites Fawcett’s pantomime in his essay, he also quotes from Murray’s 1830 melodrama, mistaking the melodrama for the earlier pantomime.


6 A notable exception is Peter Reed’s “Conquer or Die: Staging Circum-Atlantic Revolt in Polly and Three-Finger’d Jack,” Theatre Journal 59, no. 2 (2007): 241-58. Reed offers a more radical reading of Fawcett’s pantomime than is possible if one considers it in relation to other versions of the story, especially Earle’s novella.
Three-Fingered Jack has made a recent return to literary, theater, and historical scholarship precisely because his presence was ubiquitous in early nineteenth-century popular culture in multiple media. However, only recently have the five popular versions of the story been approached together. Diana Paton’s 2007 article “The Afterlives of Three-Fingered Jack” looks at the five versions of the story produced between 1799 and 1830 through a collective lens, arguing that the variety one finds among the adaptations are reflective of English debates about slavery, first aimed at abolition and later full emancipation. For Paton, the varied political sympathies that one finds in the five adaptations are reflective of the diversity of opinion regarding slavery that was characteristic at the turn of the century and later in the 1830s as the emancipation movement eventually gained a majority consensus in England. Paton explains as follows:

The cumulative impact of the cultural figure of Three-Fingered Jack was not to produce a coherent argument regarding the slave trade or slavery. Rather, representations of Jack could be adapted and adopted by those on all sides of the slavery debates. Nevertheless, the easiest fit was with a gradualist and ameliorationist viewpoint; potentially hostile to the slave trade, but not emancipationist. Criticisms made by the prose and stage versions of Three-Fingered Jack could be reconciled with the continuation of slavery. Indeed, these texts, especially the pantomime and Burdett versions, could fit quite easily with the reforming planter school of thought outlined by propagandists like William Beckford (1788) and later Thomas Roughley (1823) and Alexander Barclay (1826). These

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polemicists addressed themselves to both their fellow-slaveholders and to a wider British public, arguing that a reformed system of slavery could be and was being produced, and that this system obviated the critiques of abolitionists.\(^8\)

The various adaptations of the story of Three-Fingered Jack produced in England between 1799 and 1829 reflect the spectrum of opinion on slavery and emancipation. Three-Fingered Jack’s rise to fame in the early nineteenth century was directly tied to the rise of abolitionist debates in England. Whether he was used to argue against the evils of slavery or as a warning against emancipation, Three-Fingered Jack was always tied to these legislative debates in English popular culture.

However, the historical Three-Fingered Jack was neither a legislator nor an activist. He was a rebel who, along with his gang, terrorized the island until he was finally overtaken by force. The true history of Three-Fingered Jack is not one of legislative abolition in England, but instead a part of the history of slave rebellion in the Caribbean. Three-Fingered Jack met his demise in Jamaica in 1781 and became famous in England in 1800. During this time, a rebel slave named Toussaint Louverture was also making history in the Caribbean by leading the most successful slave rebellion in the Western hemisphere, the Haitian Revolution (1791-1804). This historical backdrop never makes it into the popular history of Three-Fingered Jack in England. Then again, neither does the actual history of Three-Fingered Jack.

All of the English versions of the story contradict the historical record in their representations of both Three-Fingered Jack and his rebellion against the injustices of colonial slavery. Some of the English adaptations present Jack as a hero, although one

\(^8\) Paton, 59-60.
who is (more often than not) *rightfully* thwarted in the end (Earle’s novella is the exception). Instead of a hero, Jack becomes an anti-hero (at best) or a sensational villain. Paton points out that regardless of the specific changes made in each individual adaptation, the story always ended in a celebration of Jack’s defeat and the restoration of colonial authority and order on the island. Despite the different tone of each adaptation and the political inclinations of their adaptors, all versions are fairly moderate accounts of a historical event that was radical and, some would say, even revolutionary. The story of Three-Fingered Jack could be adapted across mediums and for different political purposes; however, the result was always a sensationalized account that rarely came across as radical despite the fact that the story was based on what was for all intents and purposes an actual slave rebellion in Jamaica, albeit a relatively small one.

How could the story of a rebel slave be reconfigured to support a moderate and gradualist answer to the slave question? The answer to that question is “very easily,” once a few basic changes were made to the narrative. Like Paton, I believe that the most fascinating aspect of the Three-Fingered Jack phenomenon is the fact that despite major differences among the nineteenth-century adaptations, they are all fairly cohesive with regard to specific changes made to the historical record. The nineteenth-century versions share a series of changes that contradict eighteenth-century news reports, including their representation of Jack as a lone rebel and the man who finally defeated him as a slave rather than a Maroon.

This chapter builds on existing scholarship that examines the major changes made to the historical record when Three-Fingered Jack was adapted as English entertainment. The popular history of Three-Fingered Jack serves as a prime example of how early
popular entertainment participated in shaping public knowledge, both historical and political. Regardless of the political tones that they took, all of the adaptations share historical inaccuracies that presented London audiences with a distorted history of British colonial rule in Jamaica. Because the historical Three-Fingered Jack was an escaped slave, all of the adaptations also played a part in shaping public knowledge and discourse regarding slavery and abolition, especially since four of the five adaptations appeared less than a decade before the Slave Trade Act of 1807. However, even though the adaptations are so closely tied to the politics of their age, the historical event on which they are based is significantly altered in English adaptations, especially in theatrical versions of the story. Three-Fingered Jack’s popular history serves as a productive early example of the entertainment industry’s two-hundred year history of diluting historical information and political events and adding a concentrated mixture of sensation and spectacle that always simmers down to a profitable formula.

This chapter focuses on the two main characters of the drama inspired by true events that entertained English audiences for many years, Three-Fingered Jack, the famous rebel who posed a significant threat to order on the island beginning in 1780, and Quashee (or Reeder), the man who finally succeeded in bringing down the infamous “Terror of Jamaica” in 1781. Eighteen years later, Moseley introduced England to the story of Three-Fingered Jack, unsuspectingly unleashing a pop culture phenomenon. Moseley’s account inspired a series of adaptations that made Three-Fingered Jack and Quashee famous in England for approximately half a century after their fatal fight took place in 1781 somewhere “near” what is today a heavily-traveled road in Jamaica.
The (In)Famous Three-Fingered Jack

Known as “The Terror of Jamaica,” Jack Mansong (as he is called in some accounts) was a runaway slave who for nearly two years led a gang of escapees in the Blue Mountain region of Jamaica. The gang robbed nearby plantations and assaulted travelers, sometimes killing them. By the summer of 1780, the group led by Three-Fingered Jack posed a real threat to public order and the colonial government’s control of the island. Fortunately for the government, the group was eventually disbanded in December 1780 and Three-Fingered Jack was killed the following month. Three-Fingered Jack’s two-year run was well-known in Jamaica, and he was a folk-hero to many for his success in causing fear in the colonists and avoiding capture for a considerable amount of time.

As L. Alan Eyre notes, one of the most difficult tasks in uncovering the history of a folk hero is separating the fact from the fiction. This is a particularly difficult task in the case of Three-Fingered Jack because most of the literary record consists of popular adaptations of the story that were presented as histories despite obvious authorial liberties taken in each version. Fortunately, a less sensational record does exist whose importance is highlighted when compared to the popular versions of the story that circulated in England during the early decades of the nineteenth century. Three-Fingered Jack appears in at least four different contemporaneous reports in The Supplement to the Royal Gazette, a weekly addition to the Jamaican newspaper, as well as two proclamations issued by Governor John Dalling. The first report from the week of July 29, 1780, reads:

A gang of run-away Negroes of above 40 men, and about 18 women, have formed a settlement in the recesses of Four Mile Wood in St. David’s; are

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become very formidable to that neighbourhood, and have rendered
traveling, especially to the Mulattoes and Negroes, very dangerous; one of
the former they have lately killed, belonging to Mr. Duncan Munro of
Montrose, and taken a large quantity of Linen of his from his slaves on the
road: they also have robbed many other persons servants, and stolen some
cattle, and great numbers of sheep, goats, hogs, poultry &c. particularly a
large herd of hogs from Mr. Rial of Tamarind Tree Penn. They are chiefly
Congos, and declare they will kill every Mulatto and Creole Negro they
can catch. BRISTOL, alias Three-finger’d Jack, is their Captain, and
CAESAR, who belongs to Rozel estate, is their next officer.

This banditti may soon become dangerous to the Public, if a PARTY,
agreeable to the 40th or 66th Acts in Volume I of the laws of this Island, or
the MAROONS, are not sent out against them; which should be applied
for, and no doubt it would be ordered.10

This is the first reference to Three-Fingered Jack in the newspapers. He is not alone.
The gang of almost sixty is the threat. Three-Fingered Jack is their leader and therefore
most definitely the most dangerous of the group. However, there is emphasis on the
group of rebels, their exploits, and, most notably, their organization. Not only do they
have a leader in Three-Fingered Jack, there is also a second officer and presumably
others. This report is especially important to the history of Three-Fingered Jack because
it is wholly omitted from the popular record. As one can see from this report, by

December 1780, Three-Fingered Jack and his banditti were perceived as a legitimate

10 Supplement to the Royal Gazette 2, no. 67 (29 July—5 August 1780): 458, quoted in Introduction to
William Earle, Obi: or, The History of Three-Fingered Jack, ed. Srinivas Aravamudan (Peterborough,
threat to the colonial government of the island. Their crimes were violent and it was clear that the situation had to be remedied in order to keep public order. The first report ends with the recommendation that a special party—or the Maroons—be sent after the gang.

Something was done immediately. On December 12, Governor John Dalling (who served as governor of Jamaica from 1772 to 1774, and again from 1777 to 1781) issued a Royal Proclamation, offering a reward of £300 for Jack’s capture and an additional £5 for the capture of any of his associates. Did the reward promised by the colonial government help speed up the capture of Three-Fingered Jack? Most definitely, yes. Three weeks after Jack easily dispatched the mulatto from Dr. Allen’s estate and made an easy escape, a third report in the Supplement to the Royal Gazette shows a major turn of events: “We are informed that the wife of Three Fingered JACK has been lately removed from Saint David, to the Jail in this town; and that directions have been given, some time since, to deliver her and the other negroes, taken by the Maroons, to be dealt with as the law directs.” As Aravamudan points out, Three-Fingered Jack’s gang of robbers were mostly disbanded by the end of December. The report establishes another hard fact: Three-Fingered Jack’s wife and associates were captured by Maroons (this

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11 Dalling’s document is of special importance to nineteenth-century popular adaptations. Moseley’s, Earle’s, and Burdett’s versions of the story all reprint most of the governor’s proclamation. In other words, the three earliest English adaptations of the story of Three-Fingered Jack use this historical document to lend authenticity to their respective accounts. All three textual versions present themselves as histories, and Earle’s novella, which is unquestionably the most openly fictitious account of these adaptations, uses an epistolary structure in order to give the illusion of authenticity. The Royal Proclamation opens the final letter from George Stanford, a resident of the island, to his English friend Charles. All three textual versions of the story admit that Three-Fingered Jack posed a real threat to the colonial government, as the offer of such a significant reward undoubtedly proves. In contrast, the two dramatic adaptations—both Fawcett’s pantomime and Murray’s melodrama—do not make this threat apparent. Both plays open with a demonstration of how much the slaves fear Three-Fingered Jack. However, neither theatrical adaptation provides the viewer with a clear sense of the real danger posed by Three-Fingered Jack—a threat to public order and the colonial government of the island.
12 Supplement to the Royal Gazette 2, no. 87 (16 December—23 December 1780): 747, quoted in Aravamudan, 12.
detail will be discussed at length in a later section of this chapter). Having had success offering rewards for the capture of each member of Jack’s gang, the House of Assembly, on December 29 increased the jackpot, adding the promise of freedom to any slave who might capture or kill Three-Fingered Jack to the total bounty offered. The logic is clear here—enlist as many hands as possible in the pursuit of the three-fingered rebel. The stage was set for Jack’s demise. The final newspaper report announces Three-Fingered Jack’s death approximately one month later:

We have the pleasure to inform the public, of the death of that daring freebooter Three Fingere Jack.—He was surprised on Saturday last, by a Maroon Negro named John Reeder, and six others, near the summit of Mount Libanus, being alone and armed with two musquets and a cutlass.—The party came upon him so suddenly, that he had only time to seize the cutlass, with which he desperately defended himself, refusing all submission, till having received three bullets in the body and covered with wounds, he threw himself about forty feet down a precipice, and was followed by Reeder, who soon overpowered him, and severed his head and arm from the body, which were brought to this town on Thursday last.—Reeder and another Maroon were wounded in the conflict.—The intrepidity of Reeder, in particular, and the behaviour of his associates in general, justly entitle them to the reward offered by the public.¹³

Reeder made out very well on the deal. Aravamudan notes that according to public documents, Reeder continued to collect a pension until 1840, almost sixty years after his defeat of Three-Fingered Jack.\footnote{Aravamudan, 13, citing revenue and expenditure records echoed in Clinton V. Black, \textit{Tales of Old Jamaica} (London: Collins, 1966), 119.}

Two names stick out in the historical record. First, of course, is Three-Fingered Jack, the star of the reports. However, Reeder plays a strong supporting role in the last report. Although both Jack and Reeder received the assistance of a group of men in order to accomplish their respective missions, these two men received all of the credit. The second, third, and fourth reports do not mention any of Three-Fingered Jack’s associates by name (the first one names Caesar as the next officer of the gang). Even Three-Fingered Jack’s wife is unnamed in the report that announces her capture. The same is true for Reeder’s expedition to defeat Three-Fingered Jack. The final report tells us that “Reeder and another Maroon were wounded in the conflict.” The second wounded veteran of the fight gets no credit for his bravery. Nevertheless, all the reports do make it clear that both Three-Fingered Jack and Reeder were the leaders of two groups of substantial size. Even though their identities are absent in the reports, their presence is felt nonetheless. I point this out because it is the first major change to the Jamaican historical record that one finds in English adaptations of the story.

Moseley’s \textit{Treatise on Sugar} (1799) is the first English account of the “history” of Three-Fingered Jack. The story is included in an appendix to the treatise as a subsection of an essay on obeah. The reader gets a significantly changed version of the story in Moseley’s text, although the author claims to have met the man who killed Three-Fingered Jack. Moseley’s version begins “I saw the Obi of the famous negro robber,
Three fingered Jack, the terror of Jamaica in 1780 and 1781. The Maroons who slew him brought it to me.”\(^{15}\) In fact, Moseley appears to know the leader of the Maroons quite well, as he first refers to the man as Quashee, not Reeder as named in the reports. Why the name change? Moseley offers a simple explanation. “Quashee, before he set out on the expedition, got himself christianed, and changed his name to James Reeder.”\(^{16}\) Note that there are no references to a baptism or name change in the Jamaican newspaper reports. The absence of this information in the historical record does not necessarily mean that Moseley’s explanation is false; however, there is no primary source material to confirm Moseley’s claim except the author’s own testament to the truth of his account. The same is true for Moseley’s claim that he saw Three-Fingered Jack’s obi horn. None of the newspaper reports makes reference to obeah in connection to the danger posed by Three-Fingered Jack and his gang.

Although Moseley’s account is rather short (approximately ten pages), it is essential to the popular history of Three-Fingered Jack because it introduced a series of changes to the historical record such as the revelation of Reeder’s “real” name and the introduction of an obeah storyline in the history of Three-Fingered Jack. Another important change made by Moseley was his insistence that Three-Fingered Jack was a lone rebel. Moseley’s description of the rebel contradicts all of the newspaper reports. A portrait of Three-Fingered Jack according to Moseley reads as follows:

> He had neither accomplice, nor associate. There were a few runaway negroes in the woods near Mount Libanus, the place of his retreat; but he had crossed their foreheads with some of the magic in his horn, and they


\(^{16}\) Ibid., 166.
could not betray him. But he trusted no one. He scorned assistance. He ascended above Spartacus. He robbed alone; fought all his battles alone; and always killed his pursuers.\textsuperscript{17}

Although the historical marker that today commemorates Three-Fingered Jack in Jamaica claims that Jack “often singlehandedly” fought his pursuers, Moseley’s account completely contradicts the first newspaper report of Jack’s sixty-person strong gang. In Moseley’s version, Jack has no friends or followers. The “few runaway negroes” that also happen to live in the same vicinity as Jack do not fight alongside him. Instead, they are described as being under the spell of “the magic in his horn.” In Moseley’s version of the story, Jack is characterized as a misanthrope who shuns the help of others and keeps entirely to himself. He is able to evade capture for so long because he has convinced others of the power of his obi horn, which in the end proves no match for Reeder’s newly-acquired “\textit{white Obi},” or Christianity.

Two spin-offs of Moseley’s text appeared in 1800. Fawcett’s pantomime \textit{Obi; or, Three Finger’d Jack} and Earle’s novella \textit{Obi; or, The History of Three-Fingered Jack}. Despite the fact that they were both based on Moseley’s account, these two adaptations of the story are radically different, primarily because they support very different political points of view. Earle’s novella is clearly abolitionist in tone. He presents Three-Fingered Jack as a sympathetic hero who has rebelled against the colonial government in order to avenge the wrongs committed against his family in particular and his people in general. The justice is on his side and his violent acts are justified because they are committed in retaliation for a greater injustice. Along the way, Earle gives details of a few of Jack’s associates; however, he is never linked to a group as large as the one

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 164-65.
described in the Jamaican reports. Earle also follows Moseley in that he includes details of Jack’s obi powers; however, the real focus of Earle’s novella is making sure that this “bold Defender of the Rights of Man” makes the annals of history. When Three-Fingered Jack is killed, Earle’s narrator laments, “Thus died as great a man as ever graced the annals of history, basely murdered by the hirelings of Government. No doubt in the end Jack died deservedly—had he died like a man. But who worked his passion to the pitch? Who drove him to the deeds of desperacy and cruelty? Oh fie! fie!”

Earle’s description of Jack’s death is perhaps the most melodramatic of all the nineteenth-century adaptations. (It is much more melodramatic than what we find in Murray’s melodrama.) Earle’s abolitionist novella would be the first and last time that Jack would be cast in such a heroic light.

Fawcett’s pantomime *Obi; or, Three Finger’d Jack* premiered on July 2, 1800, at the Haymarket. It was an all-around hit. The scenery, songs, and stage business were stellar according to early reviews. Sheet music from the pantomime was sold separately, spreading the story’s reach. Charles Rzepka summarizes the pantomime’s success as follows: “The *Obi* pantomime dominated the London stage that summer, and one of its songs, ‘A Lady of Fair Seville City,’ even became the equivalent of a modern ‘Top-Ten Hit.’ The pantomime continued to play in London at both the patent and the popular theaters as well as throughout the provinces for at least the next three decades.”

Beginning with Fawcett’s pantomime, Three-Fingered Jack made a definite switch from folk hero (as he remains in the Jamaican tradition) and/or revolutionary hero (according to abolitionists like Earle) to sensational villain. In the pantomime, the

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18 Earle, 157.
19 Rzepka, par. 5
audience receives no background information about Three-Fingered Jack. Jack does not utter a single word in this adaptation (he is not even afforded the opportunity to sing as might otherwise be expected in this genre). Instead of a sympathetic outlaw, Jack is cast as a pure villain in the pantomime, a shadowy figure, a bogeyman. He terrorizes not only the white landowners, but also the slaves. Everyone is scared of his alleged obi powers, and the stage is set for a new hero to emerge.

Enter Quashee. Fawcett is obviously following Moseley here; however, he gets the character all wrong. Despite the many differences between the two, both Moseley and the historical record are consistent in that the man who killed Three-Fingered Jack and collected the reward was a Maroon. Moseley does not give any additional details, but this distinction is important. Maroons were free blacks living in Jamaica that were not under the jurisdiction of the colonial government. After the fighting the Maroons for control of their lands for nine years, the colonial government was instead forced to sign a peace treaty in 1740 that granted the Maroons their sovereignty in exchange for help capturing escaped slaves and quelling slave rebellions should they occur. Fawcett’s Quashee/Reeder is a far cry from a Maroon. Instead, he is cast as a slave in the pantomime.

What could be the reason for this highly-misleading change from the historical record? One reason could be simple confusion on Fawcett’s part. A document from the Jamaican House of Assembly from December 1790 adds to the existing bounty on Three-Fingered Jack’s head, the promise of freedom should a slave be the person to defeat him. The House of Assembly’s final reward did not make a difference in bringing about the real Three-Fingered Jack’s capture because he was ultimately apprehended and killed by
a Maroon who would have already been free. Nevertheless, this final incentive
sponsored by the island’s colonial officials is the reward that motivates Quashee/Reeder
in theatrical adaptations of the story (both Fawcett and Murray focus on this reward).
Because he was inspired by Fawcett’s adaptation, Burdett too makes Quashee a slave
working hard to attain his freedom.

The error may have been unintentional; however, this change makes it difficult to
read Fawcett’s pantomime as a revolutionary text as some scholars have done. It can
barely be read as “ameliorationist” (Paton’s term) in its portrayal of slave life and rights.
In Fawcett’s pantomime, freedom is not free. Quashee and Sam earn their freedom by
proving their allegiance to the colonial government, the overseer of the plantation, and
the benevolent master who always keeps his slaves well fed and never beats them. They
deserve their freedom because they earn it through their actions. Freedom is not a basic
right in this version of the story. Quashee’s freedom is the fruit of his labor.

The historical record explains that Three-Fingered Jack was eventually brought
down by a sound business deal. Placing the right price on his head, the colonial
government was able to eradicate their enemy. The same rule applied for the members of
Jack’s gang. By offering rewards for the capture of each robber and a grand prize for
their leader, the colonial government was able to rid themselves of what could have
otherwise grown to be a much larger problem. Note that although Three-Fingered Jack
and his gang terrorized the Jamaican mountainside for more than a year, it took only one
month and half to disband the men and take the hand and head of their leader once
rewards were offered by Governor Dalling and the House of Assembly. Money played a
major role in ridding the colony of a major threat to public order.
The adaptations by Fawcett, Burdett, and the later melodrama by Murray ignore this fact for the most part. Although the reward is sometimes mentioned, the three authors choose to sentimentalize the story. The band of Maroon bounty hunters led by Reeder in the historical demise of Three-Fingered Jack is replaced by two loyal slaves led by Quashee (later Reeder) who are willing to risk their lives in order to gain freedom for themselves and their families. In Fawcett’s 1800 pantomime Quashee and Sam are good family men; their families serve as catalysts for their bravery. For example, stage directions for Fawcett’s pantomime as it was performed at Covent Garden read as follows:

They all view the Proclamation, but shake their heads, and scout away. At length Quashee and Sam come and look at it on opposite sides—seem as if animated by the same feeling—point particularly to the word “Freedom,” then to their Wives and Children. They each take up a little Black Child, and kiss it very affectionately, and swear to perform the great task. They then take each other by the hand, and come down the stage firmly. Tuckey, who has observed all that passed, comes between them, and offers to accompany them. They caress him, and accept his services. Enter Planter—he encourages them. Quashee goes on his knees, and makes signs of a wish to be christened. Planter promises it shall be performed. Quashee rises in great glee—tells the rest of the Negroes, who all follow the Planter off, R.H. making attitudes of dancing, leaving only Quashee, Wife, and Child. (Act I, scene v)  

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20 John Fawcett, Songs, Duets, & Choruses, in the Pantomimical Drama of Obi; or, Three Finger’d Jack: Invented by Mr. Fawcett, and Perform’d at the Theatre Royal, Hay Market. To Which Are Prefix’d Illustrative Extracts, and a Prospectus of the Action. 3rd ed. (London: T. Woodfall, 1800). The imprint to this edition explains that it was sold at the theater. Fawcett’s pantomime can also be found online, “Obi
In Fawcett’s adaptation, Quashee and Sam are more courageous than the other slaves on the plantation. Motivated by their devotion to their children, the two decide that the promise of freedom is worth the undertaking. They inform the Planter of their decision, and Quashee immediately kneels before him and asks to be christened. Quashee’s submissiveness to his master and the Christian God anoint him as the hero of the piece. All the necessary elements are set for the final showdown between Jack and Quashee.

The changes made by Fawcett certainly made for a sensational story. In other words, they were good entertainment. However, they are problematic because the pantomime was largely presented as an accurate adaptation of the history of Three-Fingered Jack. For example, a review of the premiere of Fawcett’s Obi published in the *Whitehall Evening Post* on July 3, 1800, reads as follows:

Hay Market. A Pantomimical Novelty was brought forward last night at this Theatre, under the title of *Obi; or, Three Fingered Jack*. It is avowedly founded upon a story respecting a famous Negro Robber, which *Dr. Moseley* has introduced in his *Treatise on Sugar*. Obi is a supposed magical power exercised by some of the Negroes, which enables them to annoy their enemies.—The hero of this drama, it seems, was really a formidable marauder in Jamaica, in 1780, who excited great terror among the Negroes, and committed many ravages, but always escaped punishment by his bravery, his artifice, and the supernatural powers which were imputed to him.21

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Fact and fiction flow freely in this review of Fawcett’s pantomime. The reviewer presents the pantomime as a fable based on facts, but it is never clear what separates Fawcett’s fable from the real history of Three-Fingered Jack. Moseley is invoked in the review as an authority, lending authenticity to the plot of the pantomime. The sketch provided by the reviewer shows how Jack was reconfigured as a “formidable marauder” with no attention given to what might have been the cause of his violent history.

According to the reviewer, Jack “excited great terror among the Negroes.” There is no mention of the terror he caused among the colonial government and the plantocracy.

Announcements and reviews of the pantomime’s premiere at the Haymarket appearing in two additional publications also tout the play’s foundation in fact. The *Morning Post and Gazetteer* on July 2, 1800, gives the following synopsis before the grand premiere at the Haymarket:

[Three-Fingered Jack] is a free-booter, that conceals himself in a cave on the inaccessible part of the mountains of Jamaica. This Island is well known to be intersected with a ridge of steep rocks, tumbled on one another, in a most stupendous manner, by frequent earthquakes; and the scenery is said to be awfully grand. Governor Dalling, about twenty years ago, found Jack to be such an alarming depredator, as defied the whole power of Government, and he offered a reward, by proclamation, of 300l. for his three fingers, and his head. With much difficulty he was slain in his cave, by three negroes; and Mr. Fawcett is said to have worked up a most interesting Drama from the above fact.22

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The following day, *The Morning Herald* published an almost identical summary of the “facts” behind the new summer sensation playing at the Haymarket Theatre. “A new Pantomimical Drama,” it reads, “called *Obi, or Three-finger’d Jack*, was performed, for the first time, last night, to a crowded audience, with universal applause. This piece is founded chiefly on a fact mentioned by Dr. Moseley. Relative to the daring exploits of the famous Negro robber, *Three-finger’d Jack* . . . in Jamaica, of which Island he was the terror, in the year 1780.” Both publications advertise the pantomime as a story based on facts, in other words, a typical “based on a true story” drama. It is a problematic claim given the authorial liberties taken in translating the historical event for the stage.

The only review that comes close to providing a more accurate description of the history and its adaptation for the stage appears in the July 3, 1800, issue of *The Times*, which reads as follows:

> This exhibition is founded upon a singular circumstance which occurred in the Island of Jamaica in the year 1780, and is minutely related by Dr. Moseley, in his Treatise on Sugar. The Hero of the Piece was a Negro remarkable for his strength, intrepidity, cunning, and the success with which he carried on his depredatory system, and defied for nearly two years the civil power and militia of the island. He was at length overcome, and killed by two negroes, and from this occurrence the Pantomime derives its chief interest. As the transaction did not however afford materials sufficient for a complete Dramatic Entertainment, fiction has

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been judiciously introduced, and the whole has been formed into a series of interesting action, that is attended with considerable effect.\textsuperscript{24}

The summary given above is the most accurate review of the history of Three-Fingered Jack as it was presented on stage in 1800. However, as we can easily see, there is little guidance as to what parts of the play are fact and fiction. The reviewer tells us when and where Three-Fingered Jack lived, but gives little detail about his actual exploits. Interestingly, the reviewer is one of the only English writers to admit that Jack posed a serious threat to “the civil power and militia of the island.” However, this fact is quickly glossed over and the reader is told that Jack was eventually killed by “two negroes.”

Note that there is no indication of whether these were enslaved or free blacks. What is clear is that Three-Fingered Jack was an extraordinary fighter who was finally (and rightfully) thwarted in the end. The fictional emendations made to the story by Fawcett are acknowledged, but not given much attention. All that matters is that, as a whole, the pantomime works through a series of interesting action that is executed “with considerable effect” on the part of actors, set designers, musicians, and all others involved in putting on this show.

Historical reenactments and colonial settings were common theatrical spectacles in the nineteenth century. “True” stories from the West Indies were particularly appealing to nineteenth-century thearregoers for a number of reasons usually driven by curiosity. As Heidi Holder explains:

\begin{quote}
Accurate presentations of facts about the indigenous societies of lands colonized by the British was, from the earliest plays, an important aspect of colonial melodrama. In part eye-pleasing and strange spectacle, in part
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{24}“Theatre-Haymarket,” \textit{The Times}, July 3, 1800.
education of the audience, in part melodramatic entertainment, such plays always exhibited a complicated relation to fact. . . . The characteristics that were to be exploited in the later imperialist melodramas can be seen even in their earlier colonial counterparts.\textsuperscript{25}

The reason why popular dramas depicting colonial lands had a “complicated relation to fact” was that, more often than not, they completely disregarded their source material and did so at a great cost to the political nuances—or simply the facts—of the case. Although they were sometimes met with criticism from any number of angles, they were more often incredibly profitable in their allure to theatergoers and mostly homogenous in their portrayal of the British colonies and their management.

Instead of accurately portraying the experience of colonized people, popular plays paid more attention to props and the use of realistic scenery. Like most dramatic adaptations of novels and historical events popular then and today, spectacular adaptations of historical events such as battles were visually-driven exhibitions of the latest technologies. Fawcett’s \textit{Obi} was no exception. Much of the attraction of the piece was its reputed scenery. “The scenery is extremely beautiful,” writes a reviewer for \textit{The Morning Herald}, “and does infinite credit to the taste and judgment of Whitmore. There are nine changes, each of which present a highly pleasing and picturesque view.”\textsuperscript{26} \textit{The Times} review provides further details about the lavish visual presentation:

\begin{quote}
The decorations, machinery, and dresses are not inferior to those of establishments superior in magnitude and expence, but the Painter in particular has distinguished himself by a display of talents which evince a
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{25} Heidi J. Holder, “Melodrama, Realism, and Empire on the British Stage,” in \textit{Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930}, ed. J. S. Bratton et al. (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1991), 133.

\textsuperscript{26} “Theatre,” \textit{The Morning Herald}, July 3, 1800.
profound knowledge of his art. Among the scenes, the Plantation, with the Sugar-works, the Obi Woman’s Cave, the View of Montego Bay, the Subterraneous Passage, the high craggy Mountain, and the Pavilion and Illumination furnish the most distinguished objects.27

Not bad for the Little Haymarket, especially when compared to much larger venues that had much more money to invest in the spectacular elements of the production. This attention to and investment in sensational visual effects was perfectly suited to the popular theater of the period. More often than not, more money, time, and energy was invested in sets and props than in accurately portraying the event and exploring its social and economic underpinnings, especially in plays set in colonized lands where serious moral questions about empire and the ethics of its management could be raised. The actual history of Three-Fingered Jack would have certainly raised such questions in 1800, as opposition to the slave trade was on the rise and the Haitian Revolution was at its height. However, because the nineteenth-century adaptations erase many historical details from the story, these questions are easily evaded. The pantomime is recommended and received for its spectacular elements, not its accurate portrayal of history.

The censorship of drama no doubt played a part in how Three-Fingered Jack could be portrayed on stage. The two dramatic versions (Fawcett’s 1800 pantomime and Murray’s 1830 melodrama) contain the most dramatic departures from the historical record, most notably in their portrayal of Jack as a revolutionary figure (or lack thereof). However, even though the textual versions by Moseley, Earle, and Burdett provide a more in-depth exploration of the events of 1780-81, their accounts are also marred by

historical inconsistencies and factual errors that raise some questions about how popular media (both in print and on stage) played a role in promoting certain views and shaping popular knowledge and opinion about abolition. These popular versions, whether printed or performed, were without a doubt the primary sources that introduced Londoners to the historical Three-Fingered Jack of Jamaica. The fact that they differ so much from the actual history of Three-Fingered Jack leads one to question the reasons for those changes. The answer can be found by looking at what adaptations of the story of Three-Fingered Jack did not show and sometimes did not even acknowledge—the actual history of slave rebellion in the West Indies. The first half of this chapter has looked at Three-Fingered Jack’s rise to fame; the second half looks at the historical price of that fame.

**Erasing Re-Writing the History of Black Resistance**

Michel-Rolph Trouillot begins his essay “From Planter’s Journals to Academia: The Haitian Revolution as Unthinkable History” with an anecdote. A French colonist in Saint Domingue writes a series of letters in 1790 reassuring his wife in France that the Revolution has not spread to the French colony. The colonist writes, “There is no movement among our Negroes. . . . They don’t even think of it. They are very tranquil and obedient. A revolt among them is impossible.”

Apparently, all was quiet on the (French) Western front. There was no sign of an uprising, according to the colonists. The thought of an uprising was “impossible.”

In August of the following year, the Haitian Revolution began. The irony of this story is not lost on Trouillot, who writes:

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The Haitian Revolution thus entered history with the peculiar characteristic of being unthinkable even as it happened. Publications of the times, including the long list of pamphlets on Saint Domingue published in France from 1790 to 1804, reveal the incapacity of most contemporaries to understand the ongoing Revolution on its own terms. They could read the news only with their ready-made categories, and these categories were incompatible with the idea of a slave revolution.29

Trouillot chalks the planter’s ignorance up to a larger world-view shaped and shared by slaveholders about enslaved peoples. These were, according to Trouillot, ontological views rooted in denial. He explains, “When reality does not coincide with deeply-held beliefs, human beings have the rather curious tendency of phrasing interpretations that force reality within the scope of these beliefs. They devise formulas to repress the unthinkable and to bring it back within the realm of accepted discourse.”30 To believe that the principles of the Revolution in France would be adopted by slaves in the French colony of Saint Domingue would be to acknowledge the humanity of the slaves in their ability to identify with revolutionary principles and rise in arms to defend those principles. As one may easily guess, this would have been a frightening image for French colonists living in Saint Domingue after revolution broke out in France in 1789. Nevertheless, it was the image they were met with in 1791. A well-organized slave revolt turned into a full-scale revolution that lasted until 1804 and led to independence from France.

Although the Haitian Revolution was then and continues to be the most successful slave revolt in the Western hemisphere, it was preceded by many smaller uprisings, not

29 Ibid., 82.
30 Ibid., 81.
only in Saint Domingue, but also throughout the European colonies in the Caribbean. Jamaica was home to several black uprisings throughout the eighteenth century, with resistance coming from both enslaved and free blacks at several times throughout the century. However, despite the fact that the colonies all had their share of slave revolts small and large, historical and literary sources often misrepresented the possibilities of mass revolt by focusing on isolated incidents and individuals as opposed to well-organized, collective rebellion. Trouillot again gives us a useful summary of the reports from Saint Domingue:

Close as some were to the real world, planters and managers could not fully deny resistance, but they tried to provide reassuring certitude by trivializing all its manifestations. Resistance did not exist as a global phenomenon. Rather, each case of unmistakable defiance, each possible instance of resistance, was treated separately and drained of its political content. Slave A ran away because he was particularly mistreated by his master. Slave B was missing because he was not properly fed. Slave X killed herself in a fatal tantrum. Slave Y poisoned her mistress because she was jealous. The runaway or the rebellious slave emerges from this literature . . . as an animal driven by biological constraints, at best as a pathological case. This is not “a man in revolt” . . . but a maladjusted Negro . . . a pathological escapee, a deviant.  

Although he is referring to reports written by French colonists in Saint Domingue, Trouillot’s “unthinkable history” of organized black resistance might also apply to popular English representations of Jamaica at the turn of the nineteenth century, just as

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31 Ibid., 86.
the French lost control of their own Caribbean colony. The approach to misrepresenting
the reality of collective rebellion outlined above easily applies to the history of Three-
Fingered Jack in English popular culture.

Although different in their respective politics and approaches, the nineteenth-
century adaptations deemphasize the collective threat behind Three-Fingered Jack’s
exploits in 1780-81. English adaptations of the story of Three-Fingered Jack
misrepresented the history of collective resistance in Jamaica in two major ways. First,
Three-Fingered Jack, the leader of a gang of rebels, became a lone rebel. Stripping Jack
of his followers made the story appear to be an isolated incident, much like the trend
outlined by Trouillot above. The second way that Three-Fingered Jack’s popular history
in England ignored the actual history of black resistance (and even independence) was by
changing Jack’s captor from a Maroon to a slave. Maroons in Jamaica were free blacks
that fought multiple wars against the British colonists during the eighteenth century. All
of the nineteenth-century adaptations of the story of Three-Fingered Jack misrepresent
the identity of Jack’s killer. Whether intentional or not, this change completely distorted
the story of Three-Fingered Jack and his demise when his story was presented for English
audiences. When combined, the misrepresentations listed worked together to rewrite the
history of Three-Fingered Jack so that it, like other stories of slave insurrections in the
West Indies, was believed to be an isolated incident as opposed to a link in a chain of
revolutionary—or at least rebellious—events.

As explained in the previous section of this chapter, Three-Fingered Jack, the
leader of a band of nearly sixty rebels, quickly became a lone hero in the English
adaptations. As a result, all of the nineteenth-century popular adaptations de-emphasize
the collective threat posed by the historical Jack’s gang of sixty escaped slaves. None of the adaptations present Jack as the leader of a large group. He is sometimes allowed a few rag-tag followers, but the presentation is nothing like the eighteenth-century reports that describe a well-organized group of men and women who remained a tight-knit group until a few weeks before their leader was defeated.

For example, in Earle’s novella, Jack comes close to rallying a band of slaves by giving an emotional speech about his lone quest for freedom and revenge. As one might expect from Earle’s abolitionist sympathies, Jack describes his mission in altruistic terms. The author takes this opportunity to paint Jack as a romantic, solitary hero—a revolutionary abolitionist:

I am a single desolated being, ready to catch at an opportunity, wherein I can benefit the distressed of my country. If I die, no one bewails my loss, saving this loving mother; if I live no one is benefited by it, no one of ye, my brethren. The fruits of my labor and yours go to pamper the sordid appetites of the rich and proud, and not to relieve the distresses of the poor and needy, either of this country or ours.

This speech is effective in the novella. The narrator tells us that “he was surrounded on every side by attentive negroes; those that had at first seized him gave up their hold, in attention to what he said, and when he finished, loud huzzas rent the air.”

Unfortunately, nearby British troops hear the cheering crowd and quickly descend on the

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32 Aravamudan comes to the same conclusion in his Introduction to Earle’s novella, 11.
34 Ibid., 111.
slaves, and send them running. Jack is disgusted by what he sees as the slaves’ cowardice and quick retreat:

“Rascals! cowards! do ye fly then? I spurn you, and will seek the woods alone, there will I torment these vile Europeans. Traitors to your country, your trust, and your liberty, I despise you, abject as you are, I disclaim you; I loath you more than your enemies, under whose whip you would rather die than by one exertion shake off the thing ye hate.”

One man named Mahali remains loyal to Jack, but even his presence in the novella is rather short-lived. Outnumbered and unarmed, Jack is captured by the soldiers and confined. Although he eventually escapes for a brief period, Jack does not attempt to recruit any more followers after this failed attempt. He understands that his undertaking is a solitary one. He ends his mission much as he begins it—alone. The story presented by Earle is that of a romantic revolutionary who must face the stronger, well-organized colonial soldiers. Even in this adaptation by an ardent abolitionist, Three-Fingered Jack poses only a limited threat to colonial authorities. The soldiers intercept the rally before the slaves can organize; the slaves do not have a chance and quickly run away. They are not patriots; they are not abolitionists; they are simply cowards.

Compared to Earle, Burdett presents Jack as a slightly more effective leader capable of inciting slaves against the colonial government. He includes one incident where Jack participates in a successful slave uprising in Crawford Town. This scene in Burdett’s history is drawn on an actual slave uprising in 1780 concurrent with the historical Three-Fingered Jack’s activities. However, Eyre casts doubt on the historical accuracy of Burdett’s claim. “The burning of Crawford Town certainly did take place,”

35 Ibid., 111.
he writes, “but there is no other evidence [aside from nineteenth-century accounts] that Jack took part in it.” Regardless of whether or not Jack actually participated in the burning of Crawford Town, the incident is quickly glossed over in Burdett’s account, taking up only two and half pages. Despite acknowledging that Crawford Town was completely destroyed by this uprising, the author wraps up the anecdote with a decisive victory for the colonial government. According to Burdett:

The Governor sent five hundred choice Maroons in pursuit of those rebels. They met—they fought; the negroes, as before, rushed upon their guns, but the Maroons firing as they retreated, kept them at bay, and made a great slaughter.—Jack encouraged his men, but could not rouze them to the combat, and they fled in every direction. The next day, the Governor published a pardon to such of the insurgents as would return to their duty; this had the desired effect; for they all returned, except Jack, who was still determined to harass the European settlers.

This account is factually incorrect. Contemporaneous news reports date the disbanding of Jack’s gang in December of 1780, ten months after Crawford Town was set ablaze. While it may be true that Governor Dalling issued a pardon for slaves involved in that incident, he did no such thing for Jack’s band of rebels. In fact, by the end of 1780 a reward of £5 was issued for the capture of any of Three-Fingered Jack’s accomplices. Admittedly, this bounty was nowhere near the £300 reward offered for their captain, but the situation was not resolved as easily as Burdett claims in his version of the story.

36 Eyre, 12.
37 William Burdett, Life and Exploits of Mansong, Commonly Called Three-finger’d Jack, the Terror of Jamaica in the Years 1780 & 1781: with a Particular Account of the Obi . . . (Sommers Town: A. Neil, 1800), 33.
Although Earle and Burdett both hint at “the collective nature of the threat posed by runaway slaves” that, according to Aravamudan, is explicitly detailed in the historical documents, these were admittedly the two least known versions of the story circulating in London during the first half of the nineteenth century. Moseley’s account, which is cited by both Earle and Burdett (as well as in advertisements for and reviews of Fawcett’s pantomime), presents Three-Fingered Jack as a lone ranger who “robbed alone; fought all his battles alone” and resided in “the deepest recesses of the most inaccessible part of the island . . . far remote from all human society.” Similarly, the dramatic adaptations of the story by Fawcett in 1800 and Murray in 1830—the most popular adaptations of the five English versions—do not stage any group scenes such as those described by Earle and Burdett. By and large, in the minds of most nineteenth-century Londoners, Three-Fingered Jack was a solitary bandit who was not tied to any larger, organized threat to the colonial government of Jamaica, and was sometimes cast in a somewhat sympathetic light.

In yet another departure from this historical record, sentimental narratives were often added to the story of Three-Fingered Jack in adaptation. These narratives often presented abolitionist arguments through a domestic storyline. Fawcett, Earle, and Murray insert family into the story in different ways, but the effect of introducing the domestic plot is always the same—slavery is critiqued through the safe vision of domestic affections, not through collective revolution. For example, Murray’s 1830 melodrama, Jack rebels against the plantation owners because of wrongs committed to his own family. The entire plot is recast as a domestic drama that largely ignores any

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38 Aravamudan, 11.
broader political reasons for Jack’s retaliation. In the play, Jack’s mother is a powerful obi-woman who uses her powers to curse Jack’s enemies, not as a rallying tool for revolution. Jack makes his first stage appearance in Act I, Scene ii, of the melodrama, where he enters his mother’s cave and interrupts a spell. The audience learns a lot about Jack’s history in this scene with the obi-woman, something that is completely absent from Fawcett’s version where Jack never speaks (as was common in pantomime). First, he gives a brief account of his experience of being torn from his lifeless wife and child in Africa. From that moment, Jack (whose African name the audience is told is Karfa) makes a decision to enact revenge on his captors. Orford, the man who purchased him from the slave merchant was to forever be the target of his rage. Jack’s modus operandi is to attack those closest to Orford. He begins by killing the slave owner’s wife, but his desire to continue attacking Orford does not end there. As Jack tells the audience, “Years have elapsed since I sacrificed the wife of the white man, a victim to the memory of my beloved Olinda, whom they tore lifeless from these arms as they dragged me from my native land; can I forget? can I forgive? Never” (Act I, Scene iii).

Note the clear departure from the historical Three-Fingered Jack’s life. As shown earlier, the Supplement to the Royal Gazette for the week of December 16, 1780, reports

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40 This account makes no explanation of the presence of his mother, specifically how they managed to stay together. This raises questions as to whether or not the obi woman is actually Jack’s biological mother. However, they do refer to each other as “mother” and “son,” making an explicit familial connection between Jack and the obi-woman.
41 Note the similarity between Jack’s attacks on Orford and the central story of Frankenstein (discussed in the next chapter).
that Jack’s wife was in the custody of colonial officials, just one month prior to Jack’s
death. A more important change is the violence towards women described in this
melodrama. Most accounts note that the historical Three-Fingered Jack did not kill
women and children. In Murray’s melodrama, the audience is made aware that Jack has
killed Orford’s wife and now threatens his daughter. There is no evidence to substantiate
the plot of Murray’s melodrama. The reasons given for Jack’s anger and violent attacks
in Murray’s melodrama are completely fictional and most likely added to the plot in order
to fit the conventions of domestic melodrama at the expense of historical accuracy and
political context.

In a recent article, James O’Rourke argues that Murray’s 1830 melodrama is full
of Jacobin sympathies, specifically because Jack’s character undergoes major
development from the 1800 pantomime. He writes, “the 1830 Obi is . . . in fact a Jacobin
play, both in its legitimation of the violence of the oppressed and underclass and in the
repudiation of its inherited romantic plot.”43 This observation is accurate insofar as the
two popular dramas are concerned. Three-Fingered Jack was cast in a more sympathetic
light on the 1830 stage when compared to his 1800 dramatic predecessor in several ways.
Most notably, Murray’s addition of spoken lines delivered by Ira Aldridge, the first black
actor to portray the Jamaican folk hero on the London stage, opened up certain radical
possibilities in the performance of the melodrama absent from the earlier pantomime.
However, Murray’s melodrama hardly sounds radical when compared to one of its

43 O’Rourke, 286. While in some ways the melodrama might be seen as a more radical version than its
earlier dramatic predecessor because it humanizes Jack within a similar domestic framework, the
production as a whole depoliticizes the history of Three-Fingered Jack. Murray’s melodrama only
sympathizes with Jack’s desire to avenge his murdered wife and thus deemphasizes the more revolutionary
ambitions that likely motivated the real Three-Fingered Jack to rebel against the plantocracy. Murray’s
melodramatic anti-hero is significantly humanized through this domestic storyline when compared to the
earlier pantomime, but he is in no way presented as a rebel who posed an actual threat to the authorities
protecting the British colony.
textual predecessors, specifically Earle’s abolitionist novella which actually introduces Three-Fingered Jack as “a bold Defender of the Rights of Man.”⁴⁴ O’Rourke’s reading is a convincing comparative reading of the two plays, but is less convincing when one considers some of the popular textual versions that preceded the 1830 melodrama.

O’Rourke’s radical reading of the melodrama is also complicated when one looks beyond the title character and instead compares representations of the story’s supporting characters to the historical record, specifically Quashee, the second most important character in the story of Three-Fingered Jack. Once again, the historical Three-Fingered Jack was killed by a Maroon named Reeder, a free man. However, all of the nineteenth-century adaptations of the story recast Reeder as a slave named Quashee who, along with another slave named Sam, agrees to fight the three-fingered bandit in return for his freedom (and sometimes money). This change is a significant one because it epitomizes the way that English adaptations erased a second layer of collective black resistance in eighteenth-century Jamaica when rewriting the story of Three-Fingered Jack.

The original Maroons were runaway slaves who set up independent colonies throughout the West Indies. By 1780, the year of the historical Three-Fingered Jack’s activity in Jamaica, the Maroons had a long history on the island. Maroon populations in Jamaica date back to the sixteenth century, when the island was under Spanish control. When the British gained control of the island in 1655, the Maroons refused to give up their independence. They violently resisted the British colonists, leading to decades of confrontations that ultimately resulted in the First Maroon War, which lasted from 1731 until 1740. The British, unable to defeat the Maroons, instead entered into a series of official treaties that granted the Maroons relative autonomy as well as land (most notably...

⁴⁴ The quotation is from the Advertisement to Earle’s novella. See Aravamudan, 68.
concentrated in the five towns of Accompong, Trelawney Town, Moore Town, Scots Hall, and Nanny Town) in exchange for assistance quelling slave riots and capturing escaped slaves. These expectations are detailed in the *Supplement to the Royal Gazette* report provided earlier in this chapter from the summer of 1780 regarding Three-Fingered Jack’s gang. The Maroons were expected to participate in the capture of Three-Fingered Jack and all historical sources confirm that a Maroon named Reeder was in fact responsible for killing him.

The consensus in the historical record makes the change from Maroon to slave all the more pronounced in the nineteenth-century adaptations. Although Moseley never comes out and describes Quashee as a slave—he even explicitly states that Jack’s captors were Maroons—his description of Quashee (and Sam, his sidekick) is vague and likely the source of confusion among most of the later adaptors.

In the adaptations that follow, Quashee’s characterization ranges from an industrious slave primarily motivated by the colonial government’s reward to a loyal slave who earns his freedom after risking his life to defend/avenge his benevolent and grateful master. Moseley includes both the reward and the promise of freedom as the main allure for Quashee, which, once again, is not historically accurate given that Maroons were already free. Earle’s narrator, on the other hand, focuses more on the bounty offered by the colonial government as Quashee’s main motivation for dispatching of Three-Fingered Jack. Disgusted by the financial reward offered for Jack’s capture, Earle’s narrator offers the following description of Jack’s demise: “Thus died as great a man as ever graced the annals of history, basely murdered by the hirelings of
In Earle’s version, Quashee is cast as an assassin funded by an oppressive regime. Ironically, Earle’s description is accurate insofar as money did in fact play a huge role in Three-Fingered Jack’s capture since Reeder was in fact a Maroon bounty hunter. However, because Earle’s Quashee is described as a slave working on behalf of the same government that enslaves him, he is not made into a hero in the novella as he is in the adaptations by Fawcett, Burdett, and Murray. This historical inaccuracy in what is without a doubt the most radical adaptation of the story of Three-Fingered Jack that appeared in the nineteenth century not only ignores the facts of the case, but does so at the expense of recognizing the most significant and radical group of independent blacks living in Jamaica in the eighteenth century.

Unlike Earle’s adaptation, Burdett’s version casts Quashee as a hero, a well-deserving recipient of his dual reward. Burdett offers a more personal account of the rivalry between Jack and Quashee, the former representing rebellion against the colonial government, the other a submissive slave loyal to the establishment. However, despite its claims to historical accuracy, Burdett’s account explicitly presents Quashee as a slave fighting primarily for his freedom. The final lines of his pamphlet are “Reeder and Sam, gifted with freedom and the rewards, annually celebrate the fall of the once terror of the whole island of Jamaica.”

Unlike the textual accounts, which give Quashee/Reeder more agency in his decision to pursue Three-Fingered Jack, the theatrical adaptations present him as a loyal slave whose duty to his master is rivaled only by his dedication to his own family. In the previous section I explained that Fawcett’s pantomime presents Quashee and Sam as

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45 Earle, 157.
46 Burdett, 56.
loyal fathers fighting for their respective families’ freedom. Their duty to their wives and children is presented alongside subservience to the Planter. This characterization is taken to a greater extreme in the 1830 melodrama, where Quashee’s motivation for fighting Jack (rewritten to conform to the generic plot structure of domestic melodrama) is presented as a slave’s loyalty to a benevolent owner. This is made clear at the end of the melodrama’s first act:

QUASHEE. (with great feeling) Massa! you have been kind massa to me; and Missee Rosa been kind missee to wife and pickaninny here, and I now show you black man's heart beat warm as white. I will go; and if I meet this Jack, Quashee will kill him, or him kill Quashee, only if poor nigger die, you take care of wife and little Massa Quashee. (Act I, Scene vii)

Moved by Rosa’s (the Planter’s daughter’s) despair, Quashee puts his life on the line in order to defend his master’s family. All that he asks in return is that his “Massa” will look after his wife and child should he be killed in the conflict. Quashee’s loyalty is rewarded with freedom at the close of the melodrama, giving this final popular incarnation of the legend of Three-Fingered Jack an exaggerated sentimental tone that the other versions do not exude (except, perhaps, for Earle’s).

The story told in both the 1800 pantomime and the 1830 melodrama is ridiculous when compared to the real story of Three-Fingered Jack’s defeat at the hands of a Maroon. Although the Maroons in Jamaica were required to work with the colonial government as a condition of their autonomy, this group was in no way subservient to government officials, planters, or any other groups living on the island. In fact, approximately fifteen years after Three-Fingered Jack was killed in Jamaica and five
years before he was resurrected in England, the Trelawney Town Maroons were involved
in a violent eight-month-long insurrection against the colonial government. In 1796, the
colonial government, once again unable to control the Maroons, shipped the Trelawney
Town Maroons to Nova Scotia. Most of the Maroons involved in this transportation
eventually resettled in Sierra Leone in 1800, the same year that a Maroon named Reeder
was transformed into a slave named Quashee for the entertainment of English audiences.

While the historical inaccuracies in presentations of the Quashee/Reeder character
may be attributed to innocent errors on the part of Earle, Fawcett, and Murray, who, as
far as we know, did not spend time in Jamaica prior to authoring their adaptations of the
story, the versions written by Moseley and Burdett are a different case. For example,
although Moseley never explicitly states that Jack’s captor was a slave, his explanation
that Quashee and Sam were “allured by the rewards offered by Governor Dalling . . . and
by a resolution which followed it, of the House of Assembly,” implies that the promise of
freedom (offered by the latter legislative body) played a part in motivating these men to
confront Three-Fingered Jack. This motivation strictly contradicts Moseley’s earlier
claim that he once met the Maroon who defeated Jack as well as his explanation that
Quashee and Sam were both of Scots Hall, Maroon Town. Moseley, who spent
considerable time in Jamaica prior to publishing his 1799 treatise, would know the
difference between a Maroon and a slave, and his decision to omit any further details in
the appendix about the reward claimed by these two men comes across as rather
disingenuous given the author’s meticulous descriptions and asides in the longer work.

The same error seriously undermines the credibility of Burdett’s history.
Burdett’s account also explicitly states that Quashee and Sam are from Scots Hall,
Maroon Town, but the author also describes Quashee in a later footnote as “the Slave who, some time before, in a battle, had cut off Jack’s two fingers.” He additionally claims that Quashee was once an “intimate of Jack’s in his days of slavery.” The so-called historian’s lack of knowledge about Jamaica can also be found outside of the relationship between Jack and Quashee, most notably in his description of Mr. Chapman, a minor character in this account, who Burdett describes as “an eminent Planter in Maroon’s Town,” despite the fact that it is highly unlikely that there were any white landowners (or even white residents) in any area belonging to the Maroons. It is hard to believe that a “many years overseer of a Jamaican plantation,” as Burdett claims to be, would make such an incredible factual error especially in 1800, less than five years after a major conflict broke out between the Trelawney Town Maroons and the colonial government. Even if Burdett had left Jamaica before the 1795 revolt, the Second Maroon War was reported in all major London newspapers and other sources and would be known to anyone abreast of colonial affairs.

What could have led Burdett to make such an obvious mistake? Of course, it is possible that the author was exaggerating his Jamaican experience and expertise. However, even if this is the case, Burdett’s failure to accurately represent the history of

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47 Ibid., 46.
48 Ibid., 35.
49 Ibid., 37.
50 The five-month conflict that ended in the spring of 1796, known as the Second Maroon War, resulted in the deportation of the revolting Maroons from Trelawney Town. Nearly five hundred Maroons were first shipped to Nova Scotia and later resettled in Sierra Leone in 1799.
the Maroons and their continued resistance to the colonial government is similar to the “objective” accounts of life in the West Indies by white colonists at the turn of the nineteenth century outlined earlier by Trouillot. Obviously, the story of Three-Fingered Jack was known well enough that it could not be denied. The story had also proved to be quite popular and profitable in England, and Burdett even appends a scene-by-scene description of the pantomime in order to capitalize on its success. However, although it did not make any sense to deny the story of Three-Fingered Jack from a financial perspective, it also did not make much sense to give an accurate history of the Terror of Jamaica and his death at the hands of Maroons. To accurately depict the Maroons in popular versions of the story of Three-Fingered Jack would be to admit that the colonial government did not have complete control over the black populations in Jamaica. Pushing the Maroons to the margins of this historical event effectively erased a history of black resistance in Jamaica at precisely the time that the most successful slave revolution in the West Indies was reaching its apex.

The Haitian Revolution (1791-1804) that produced such “unthinkable” moments in prose coincided with both the Second Maroon War in Jamaica (1795-96) and the appearance of four of the five versions of the story of Three-Fingered Jack that appeared in London at the turn of the century (1799-1800). That the versions of the Jamaican rebel’s story by Moseley, Earle, Fawcett, and Burdett significantly downplay the real possibility of revolution and resistance from rebel slaves or Maroons is one reason to consider how Trouillot’s analysis of writings about the revolution in Saint Domingue may also apply to popular representations of other Caribbean colonies and British anxieties about the spread of revolution on the islands under British control. Whatever
the case, the fact remains that all of the nineteenth-century adaptations of the story of Three-Fingered Jack fail to acknowledge the possibility of slave rebellion inherent in both the historical event they were adapting and the more immediate examples of resistance taking place in the West Indies around them. The multiple versions of Three-Fingered Jack are especially useful in showing how English adaptations of the story of the Jamaican rebel significantly changed the politics behind the events that transpired in the British colony in the late eighteenth century. Such an approach is productive because it demonstrates how continuous adaptation of a historical event such as a slave rebellion could be spectacularized by popular entertainment (most notably on stage) to the point of being rendered politically insignificant or, at the very least, severely stripped of its historical significance. For this reason, the popular history of Three-Fingered Jack should be read as part of a more general history of misrepresenting black independence in the West Indies at the turn of the nineteenth century.

**White Obi**

Thus far I have shown how nineteenth-century adaptations of the story of Three-Fingered Jack significantly rewrote the history of Jack’s uprising in order to downplay the event’s most disturbing fact—that Jack actually posed a major threat to civil order on the British colony. We see this not only in the way that Three-Fingered Jack is turned into a lone hero in the English adaptations, but also in the way that Quashee is turned into a loyal slave who decides to risk his life in order to attain freedom for himself, his family, and, in some cases, to avenge his wronged master. Despite the individual differences among the major adaptations of the story, all of them downplay or completely erase the possibility of a massive slave revolt. Instead, the story is reworked as a duel between two
black Jamaicans, one rebelling against the colonial government, the other working on behalf of the government. The Maroons of Jamaica get pushed to the margins of the adaptation (when they appear at all). The result is that English audiences only saw two categories for blacks living in Jamaica in the late eighteenth century. Black inhabitants of the island were either slaves or escaped slaves. There is no room for a third category that actually existed—free blacks who continuously fought for their independence from the colonial authorities for over a century. Together, these major discrepancies in the history of Three-Fingered Jack as it was presented to English audiences paint a picture of an island that was firmly under the control of the colonial government, even though this claim is seriously misleading.

There is a third and final unifying element to the adaptations that needs to be addressed—the addition of the obeah storyline in the popular history of Three-Fingered Jack in England. There is no indication in the historical record that Jack was ever associated with obeah, a ritual practiced by African-born slaves in Jamaica that played a key role in several uprisings on the island throughout the eighteenth century. The obeah thread was spun into the legend beginning with Moseley’s account in 1799 and became a permanent fixture of the nineteenth-century English adaptations.

By the turn of the nineteenth-century, obeah was understood to be a method for organizing black uprisings against European colonists, the most famous being Tacky’s Rebellion in the summer of 1760. Obeah was outlawed in Jamaica for the second half of the eighteenth century precisely because the white colonists distrusted the idea of slaves gathering in large numbers in order to practice rituals that the Europeans did not

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52 Obeah men were largely responsible for organizing Tacky’s Rebellion. Several obeah practitioners were publicly hung once the colonial government was able to suppress the revolt.
understand. Thus, the distrust of obeah in general, and obeah leaders in particular, was linked to a fear of slave uprisings on an island where blacks outnumbered whites by eleven-to-one. Voodoo, the Haitian equivalent of obeah, played a central role in the revolution in Saint Domingue, an island with a slightly lower ratio of black and white inhabitants (ten-to-one). By 1800, the open practice of African traditions was cause for alarm for white colonists and this alarm is reflected in much of the period’s literature, albeit in a significantly different way.

In the first decade of the nineteenth century, at the height of its popularity, only one thing overshadowed Three-Fingered Jack in the obi phenomenon and that was the spectacularization of obeah itself. The focus on obeah was perhaps expected at the height of revolutionary fervor in the West Indies, first with the Haitian Revolution in Saint Domingue (1791-1804) and also during the Second Maroon War in Jamaica that began in 1795, given that African religious rituals were often linked to black uprisings in the colonies. However, obeah’s role in the English adaptations of Three-Fingered Jack is much less threatening than one would otherwise expect. As Richardson concludes in his analysis of the proliferation of popular representations of obeah, “like the practice it purports to represent, obeah as constructed within colonial discourse raises fears in order to play upon them and redirect them.”

This redirection is clearly seen in the popular history of Three-Fingered Jack. As opposed to an organizational tool for black uprisings, in the nineteenth-century adaptations obeah is recast as mere superstition. Murray’s melodrama takes this idea to the extreme. Jack does not believe that his obi horn possesses any real power; instead, it is a tool of psychological warfare. Three-Fingered Jack carries an obi horn in order to

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53 Richardson, 27-28.
invoke fear in his black opponents who, according to most contemporaneous accounts, believed in the power of obeah “magic” and were therefore not willing to fight the three-fingered menace. The nineteenth-century adaptations find an interesting way to fix this problem—challenging obeah with a more powerful “white” obi, Christianity.

Again, there is not a single report of obeah or Christianity in any of the eighteenth-century reports, nor in the historical marker in Jamaica that commemorates Three-Fingered Jack today. However, both are major elements of the English adaptations. Historical reports name John Reeder, a Maroon, as the man who ultimately defeated the notorious bandit and collected the £300 bounty placed on his head. The nineteenth-century adaptations name Quashee, a slave, as the man who finally gains the upper hand fighting Three-Fingered Jack. The three textual versions, which reproduce at least some official documents in the text, justify this discrepancy in the identity of Jack’s killer by explaining that Quashee eventually changed his name to Reeder after he was christened in order to fight Three-Fingered Jack. The dramatic adaptations, much less indebted to the historical record than the textual versions, do not engage this discrepancy at all; Quashee does not undergo a name change in either Fawcett’s pantomime or Murray’s melodrama. He is christened in order to defeat the fear that Jack has inspired among the slaves through the use of spells, charms, and superstition.

Although the obeah storyline and the Christian conversion narrative applies to all of the nineteenth-century versions of the story, with the exception of Murray’s 1830 melodrama, where the promise of freedom is enough to motivate Quashee to ignore Jack’s supposed magical powers, I would like to focus briefly on Fawcett’s 1800

54 It is not clear as to whether the bounty was awarded to Reeder alone or divided among his associates. Regardless, Reeder was being awarded a pension as late as 1840 (nearly sixty years after Three-Fingered Jack’s defeat). See Aravamudan, 13.
pantomime in order to show how this final plot device functioned as a way of denying the history of black resistance in the West Indies, and thus the superiority of British imperial power.

In Fawcett’s pantomime we see this at play in two ways. First, Quashee is set up as a formidable opponent for Jack not because of his bravery, but because of his loyalty to and acceptance of British culture. Jeffrey Cox explains:

The black characters who are given the most positive portrait are Sam and Quashee who stand against Jack. Quashee in particular, who converts to Christianity in order to defeat Jack and win freedom for himself and his family, is offered as the anti-revolutionary figure in the play who will succeed because he accepts the white man's religion and because he proves to his white masters that he is worthy of freedom by doing their bidding.\(^{55}\)

By accepting Christianity, Quashee is converted into a heroic figure that will restore the island to civil authorities. When Quashee and Jack meet for their final showdown, the loyal slave makes this connection explicit in the nth scene of the pantomime’s second and final act. The stage directions for this showdown read as follows:

*Enter Jack from the top of a high mountain, L.H. He gets from a branch of a tree to a lower one, R. comes down upon it to R.H. rock, from thence, upon the stage. Looks carefully about, then retires up the same way he came, carefully drawing the branch of the tree after him. Smoke is seen at times at top of rock. Enter Quashee, Sam, and Tuckey, R.H. in search of Jack. They look carefully about—at last discover the marks of Jack’s*

\(^{55}\) Cox, par. 6.
footsteps, and trace them. They go up the hill different ways. Sam gets on top of wing, L.H. Quashee goes up the rock, R.H. Tuckey climbs up a backward hill, R.H. with his gun. Jack starts up, behind some bushes at top of rock, L.H. Quashee crosses his forehead, and tells him that he has been christened. Jack is daunted, and lets his gun fall—Tuckey draws his cutlass. Quashee presents his gun—it misses fire. Jack jumps down on the opposite side, and is seen to run across from L. to R. followed by Quashee. Jack ascends the platform in front of the rocks, and is going up L.H.

Quashee following—he returns.

A “desperate combat” follows and Quashee is finally able to get the upper hand on Three-Fingered Jack. He stabs him in the heart and proceeds to decapitate him and cut off his tell-tale hand. What is most interesting about the stage directions for the spectacular final showdown in Fawcett’s pantomime is that although Jack is clearly outnumbered, he fights to the end, almost without missing a beat. Almost. He fumbles once, when Quashee makes the sign of the cross. Jack is “daunted” by this gesture and loses his gun in the process. He never regains his composure after that moment. The three men descend on him. The three-fingered marauder is dead. Here we have one of the most formidable fighters in Jamaican history brought down not by modern technology or superior fighting ability on the part of his killers. Instead, in Fawcett’s pantomime, Three-Fingered Jack’s fate is sealed by the sign of the cross.

The adaptation by Fawcett ends with the restoration of order on the island. A celebration ensues and the characters of the piece form a procession displaying the
severed head and hand of Three-Fingered Jack. The plantation overseer delivers the following lines:

Here we see villainy

Brought, by law, to short duration;

And may all Traitors fall

By British Proclamation.

CHORUS

Then let us sing

God save the King, &c, &c. (Act II, Scene viii)\(^56\)

Not only does the overseer deliver the final spoken lines of the pantomime, his declaration that “all Traitors fall / By British Proclamation” is met with a chorus of slaves singing “God Save the King.” Colonial authority is restored at the end of the play.

Robert Hoskins reads the final procession and musical score as follows:

Marches draw us back into the safe boundary of the plantation and a final chorus of relief and rejoicing (“Wander now to and fro”) which is peppered with C major shouts of "God save the King". The episode parallels Christianity's victory over Obeah and the triumph of plantocratic society over any potential cultural danger. And yet the plantation now is at once honor-bound to grant a slave his freedom . . . . Fundamentally *Obi* is a morality tale about the meeting of two perceived entities—the West and Afro-Caribbean peoples. These entities are personified, variously, into forces of good and evil that engage in a prolonged contest. . . . If the

\(^{56}\) *Aravamudan*, 227.
final chorus stands for Enlightenment imperialism, then the setting remains an exotic paradise, whether lost or found or rejected outright. Three-Fingered Jack, the traitor, is no longer a threat to the British colony in particular or the British Empire in general. As Richardson explains, “In the defeat of Jack and of obi with him, the ‘Terror of Jamaica’ and the ‘Horror’ of Saint Domingue could be symbolically exorcised.” The procession at the end of the pantomime suggests that even though uprisings could occur in the West Indies, the British colonies were not subject to the same kind of weaknesses as their French counterparts. As France was losing control of its Caribbean colony (partly due to the intervention of British troops) and at war with England, the story of Three-Fingered Jack on stage unfolded as a narrative that secured England from the threats posed by both the French Revolution and the Haitian Revolution. Rule, Brittania!

A Star is Born

As this chapter has demonstrated, Three-Fingered Jack rose to stardom in the early years of the nineteenth century through repeated adaptations of his story. Without the English adaptations, the Jamaican rebel may have never made the annals of history. If the story of Three-Fingered Jack had not been adapted so many times in the early 1800s, then it is safe to say that today’s nineteenth-century scholars would not have found Three-Fingered Jack to be as interesting a subject as he has become in the last two decades. Three-Fingered Jack’s nineteenth-century celebrity is in fact the reason why he is studied today.

58 Richardson, 19
I would like to conclude this chapter by briefly showing another way that the popular history of Three-Fingered Jack participated in the making of history—this time from a more professional standpoint. Although Three-Fingered Jack was a celebrity in his own right, he also helped make others celebrities as well, specifically those actors who portrayed him on stages both in London and in the provinces. Charles Kemble and Ira Aldridge, two of the best-known actors of the nineteenth century, played Jack on stage. Kemble played the role during its premiere season at the Haymarket. William Murray, a theater manager from Edinburgh, turned the pantomime into a melodrama, apparently for the sole purpose of casting Aldridge in the lead role. Because the *Obi* pantomime had such a long stage life in London and the provinces, many actors donned the role. “The silent role of Jack, which substantially boosted the career of a young Charles Kemble in the original production,” explains Rzepka, “raised the stage profiles of numerous character-actors to follow. The most famous of these was Richard Smith.”

Although Richard John Smith was a famous actor in the nineteenth century, with a career spanning approximately five decades, it would be difficult to find him in today’s theater annals because he went by his stage name “O. Smith” for almost his entire acting career. How did he acquire this stage name? By playing Three-Fingered Jack.

Despite his overwhelming theatrical success in the first half of the nineteenth century, very little is known of O. Smith today. To date, the most detailed account of the actor’s life is a short autobiographical memoir that was first published in 1979 as a special edition of *Performing Arts Resources*, edited by William Applegate. In his foreword to Smith’s *Recollections*, Applegate likens the actor to one of his famous

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59 Rzepka, par. 6.
Hollywood successors. “O. Smith,” he writes, “has aptly been called the Boris Karloff of the nineteenth century. Tall, gaunt, with a sepulchral voice, he made his reputation playing demons, devils, monsters, and assassins.”

Smith was certainly known for playing these roles; however, in this list of character types, Appleton forgets to mention that Smith was also known for playing black characters. The actor’s breakthrough performance was as the lead in the 1807 revival of John Fawcett’s pantomime *Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack*. After *Obi*, Smith was forever known as “O. Smith.” His last major theatrical role was as Uncle Tom in Mark Lemon and Tom Taylor’s *Slave Life*, which premiered at the Adelphi in 1852. The actor also appeared as Othello at Covent Garden on April 23, 1816, in a grand pageant in honor of Shakespeare’s birthday.

Although these three roles may not have comprised the majority of Smith’s acting career, the coincidence was not lost on some theatrical patrons. The following piece of theatrical humor published in the October 17, 1840, issue of the *Theatrical Journal* gives us reason to believe that audiences were at least partly aware of the actor’s penchant for playing black characters:

O. SMITH IN OTHELLO

Quoth Harry to Joe one summer’s day,

“How would you, my fine fellows,

Like to see the ‘demon O. Smith’ play

A negro, or Othello?

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“I should not, my friend, replied young Joe,

“And with me you will agree:

He’d appear indeed then, very low,

For a black-Smith he would be.\(^\text{63}\)

The observation made here by “Alexander” is either amazingly prophetic or incredibly predictable. Smith began his career in the first decade of the nineteenth century in role of Three-Fingered Jack. From his very first performance as Three-Fingered Jack, Smith would be forever known for that role.

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When Smith joined the Adelphi company in 1829, he revived his namesake role for a brief six performances. His first performance at this theater was in the same role that solidified his career.\textsuperscript{64} There is little doubt that his performance as Three-Fingered Jack catapulted Smith to fame, and there was no better way for the management at the Adelphi to capitalize on Smith’s celebrity status than to introduce him to their regular patrons in the role that made him famous.

In sum, three of the most famous actors of the early nineteenth century played Three-Fingered Jack on the London stage; however, Three-Fingered Jack was also quite a celebrity in his own right. His multiple appearances in adaptations published or staged between 1799 and 1830 put his celebrity at the time on par with some of the more famous characters in the chapters that follow.

\textsuperscript{64} The 1829 revival at the Adelphi is Fawcett’s pantomime despite being billed as a melodrama in some Adelphi theater records. An advertisement for Smith’s first performance at the Adelphi as Three-Fingered Jack can be found in “The Mirror of Fashion,” \textit{Morning Chronicle}, 12 October 1829. According to the advertisement, this was the first time that Fawcett’s pantomime was staged at the Adelphi.
CHAPTER THREE

“My Hideous Progeny” Made Visible: The Spectacular History of *Frankenstein*

Mel Brooks’s *Young Frankenstein* (1974) is best remembered for its over-the-top spoofing of the Frankenstein myth in popular culture. It simultaneously parodies and pays homage to the classic American films produced by Universal Studios in the 1930s and 1940s and the later British Hammer films that began production in the 1950s, whose sixth and final installment was released the same year as Brooks’s comedy. No one reasonably acquainted with Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley’s novel would identify *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) as the direct inspiration for Brooks’s classic comedy. Although the script co-written by Brooks and Gene Wilder demonstrates familiarity with Shelley’s novel, the sets, situations, and cast of characters in *Young Frankenstein* draw more closely on emendations to Shelley’s story made popular in cinema by James Whale and film directors following in his footsteps.¹ Full appreciation of Brooks’s contribution to Frankenstein’s popular legacy depends not on the viewer’s familiarity with Shelley’s novel, but instead on the viewer’s knowledge of its cinematic history.

However, Brooks’s knowledge of the Frankenstein myth in popular culture goes beyond his obvious familiarity with the Universal and Hammer films that he directly lampoons in his parody. In addition to incorporating Frankenstein’s cinematic history into its own spectacular adaptation, *Young Frankenstein* also includes a nod to the story’s nineteenth-century stage history, specifically in the scene where Frederick von

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¹ In addition to mimicking the look of James Whale’s *Frankenstein* (1931) and *Bride of Frankenstein* (1935) by shooting in black and white, *Young Frankenstein* also includes the original stage sets used in the first Universal Studios film in the series.
Frankenstein exhibits his Creature to a sold-out theater audience. Although the occasion is advertised as a scientific event open to doctors and scholars, all attendees are dressed for a night at the theater. After a brief scientific demonstration by Dr. Frankenstein, the real entertainment begins. The Creature reappears on stage dressed in tails and a top hat, appropriate attire for his performance of Irving Berlin’s “Puttin’ on the Ritz.” A mishap half-way through his heavy-footed dance routine is eventually met with an attack of boos and airborne vegetables from the displeased audience. The Creature cannot stand the rejection and lashes out at the crowd. The young scientist’s dreams of fame are crushed after the Creature’s disastrous stage debut.

The Monster played by Peter Boyle in the 1974 comedy is booed off stage; however, the nineteenth-century actor Fred Leslie received a different reaction from the audience when he played the Creature in a burlesque adaptation titled *Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim* in 1887, where he sang and danced his way to applause. This dramatization was a considerable success at The Gaiety, staging 106 performances between December 1887 and April 1888. Like *Young Frankenstein*, *Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim* took its most immediate cultural inspiration from a combination of gothic thrillers, earlier adaptations, and other popular entertainments as opposed to Shelley’s novel.² One could even say that *Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim* was the *Young Frankenstein* of its day. The plot, characters, and situations of both comic adaptations resemble one another in their incorporation of decades of popular

² The Monster in this production is a satirical portrait of Oscar Wilde in the style of Bunthorne from Gilbert and Sullivan’s *Patience* (1881), a caricature that would have been familiar to avid theatergoers of the period. As the adaptation’s title suggests, *Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim* borrowed two stories from the famous 1816 Villa Diodati ghost story competition. Dr. John Polidori’s novella and its 1820 stage adaptation *The Vampire; or, The Bride of the Isles* by J. R Planché are the primary sources used in this production given that the dramatization predates the publication of Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897) by a decade. *Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim* appears to be the first time that Frankenstein’s Monster and a vampire (albeit not Count Dracula) have appeared together in dramatic form.
appropriations of Shelley’s novel. Both took scenes and situations from previous
dramatizations and sutured them together into new fabrications of the Frankenstein
legend. Stills from the popular Victorian burlesque may have even served as visual
models for the theater scene in Brooks’s film. Leslie’s version of the Creature dressed in
a tailored suit and bowler hat bears an uncanny resemblance to Boyle’s costuming for the
theater scene in the 1974 comedy (see figures 5 and 6).

![Figure 5. Fred Leslie as the Monster in Frankenstein; or The Vampire’s Victim (1887)](image1)

![Figure 6. Peter Boyle as the Creature in Young Frankenstein (1974)](image2)

In the still taken from Brooks’s film, Boyle’s pose is almost identical to a photograph
taken of Leslie’s performance almost a century before. Despite nearly ninety years of
separation between them, the similarities between these two theatrical incarnations of
Frankenstein’s Creature make Young Frankenstein a useful twentieth-century source
from which to begin recovering the spectacular history of Shelley’s novel in nineteenth-
century popular culture.
Young Frankenstein lampoons nineteenth-century emendations to the Frankenstein story that have defined the legend in the present. For example, when the Monster wanders away from the castle laboratory in Brooks’s film, Frankenstein and Igor set up a phonograph outside and play recorded violin music to lure him back home. The Creature in Young Frankenstein is drawn to music; it has a calming effect on him; it assuages his rage. This is a memorable moment in the film; however, the concept is not original to Young Frankenstein, nor to its cinematic predecessors. The Monster’s weakness for music was a staple of nineteenth-century theatrical adaptations such as Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim. This addition to the popular history of Frankenstein began with the novel’s first stage adaptation, Richard Brinsley Peake’s melodrama Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein, which premiered in the summer of 1823. The power of music over the Creature also figures prominently in other nineteenth-century dramatizations such as Frankenstein; or, The Model Man, a burlesque-extravaganza penned by brothers Richard and Barnabas Brough in 1849. These were some of the best-known versions of the Frankenstein story in the nineteenth century and, as their influence on Brooks’s Young Frankenstein shows, they all continue to shape the Frankenstein legend in the present.

Nineteenth-century stage adaptations have had more influence on twentieth-century film versions than Shelley’s 1818 novel. For example, if we were to chart a very rudimentary genealogy of Young Frankenstein, we would have to include all of the films produced in the twentieth century beginning with the Universal Studios franchise that started with the 1931 James Whale film with a script written by Garret Fort, Francis Edwards Faragoh, and John Russell, incorporating ideas based on a script co-written by
Fort and Robert Florey, based on John Balderston’s revision (1930) of Peggy Webling’s successful play *Frankenstein: An Adventure in the Macabre* (1927) that incorporated many elements from two English adaptations that premiered in 1826, Henry Milner’s *Frankenstein; or, The Man and the Monster* and John Atkinson Kerr’s *The Monster and the Magician; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*. These two productions owed much of their success to the sensation caused by Peake’s *Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein* in 1823.³ We would also have to include a number of Victorian stage versions as such as the dramatizations staged in 1849 and 1887 in this genealogy. To date, *Frankenstein* has been adapted (both directly and loosely) for either stage or screen more than one hundred times.

The Frankenstein myth has been reconfigured so many times in print, on stage, and on screen that it is difficult to find an “original” Frankenstein. Paul O’Flinn explains that “There is no such thing as *Frankenstein*, there are only *Frankensteins*, as the text is ceaselessly rewritten, reproduced, refilmed, and redesigned.”⁴ Each adaptation brings new layers to the Frankenstein story in popular culture.⁵ Each reproduction creates more of a historical distance from Shelley’s 1818 novel. However, *Frankenstein*’s connection with the nineteenth century is not completely lost for twentieth- and twenty-first century

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³ This is the most basic genealogy possible and it is grossly incomplete in its omission of dozens of known stage versions before 1931 and three early films. For a full list of stage adaptations from 1823 to 1986 see Steven Forry, *Hideous Progenies: Dramatizations of Frankenstein from Mary Shelley to the Present* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990): 121-26. For a discussion of the most notable adaptations of the last two centuries, see Albert J. Lavalley, “The Stage and Film Children of *Frankenstein*: A Survey,” in *The Endurance of Frankenstein: Essays on Mary Shelley’s Novel*, ed. George Levine and U. C. Knoepflmacher (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979): 243-89.


⁵ I say countless because although Forry’s list is extensive, its coverage ends in 1986 and thus leaves out film and stage versions produced over the last twenty years. Also, there is no in-depth coverage of the Frankenstein story in other visual media such as comic books, graphic novels, and other abridged versions. The most recent book-length study that approaches the Frankenstein legend more broadly is Susan Tyler Hitchcock’s *Frankenstein: A Cultural History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).
generations because with each new reproduction we also see repetitions of the changes made to the novel by its earliest adapters. For example, Fritz (the lab assistant who is a staple of the film adaptations) actually made his stage debut in 1823. Peake’s *Presumption* introduced this comic lackey in *Frankenstein’s* first dramatization and forever changed the Frankenstein story in popular culture just five years after the publication of Shelley’s novel. Since 1823, Dr. Frankenstein has rarely gone without his comic sidekick on stage or screen. Peake’s addition immediately became a staple of other nineteenth-century adaptations; it continued to appear in twentieth-century appropriations in an array of visual media. For this reason, Peake’s adaptation should be known as the primary Romantic-period source for spectacular modern and postmodern adaptations of the novel.

This chapter does not trace a full stage history of *Frankenstein*. Instead, I look at a handful of popular nineteenth-century adaptations that have played a key role in shaping the Frankenstein legend in order to show how many of the charges made against twentieth-century adaptations may be applied to popular adaptations staged a century or more before. I focus on several changes to the novel that have come to define the Frankenstein story in popular culture including the following: the omission of the novel’s frame narrative; the erasure of the Creature’s speaking abilities; and the introduction of a range of climactic options for restoring social order at the conclusion of the drama. The adaptations also significantly change the gender politics of Shelley’s novel by reconfiguring relationships, and for the most part avoiding the subject of a possible mate for the monster. All of these changes are often mistakenly attributed to Whale’s 1931

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6 To date, the most comprehensive historical recovery work on *Frankenstein* in popular culture is Forry’s book.
film, despite the fact that they were all in place by 1823. They are significant not only because they continue to shape *Frankenstein* in the present day, but also because they demonstrate how the modern (and postmodern) culture industry has continued to take many of its cues from the entertainment industry of the nineteenth-century, specifically through its focus on spectacle as opposed to faithful adaptation of the novel.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that like their twentieth-century descendants, nineteenth-century stage adaptations of *Frankenstein* spectacularized Shelley’s story with the same end in sight—to capitalize on a story that already possessed high visibility. Although limited in print for its first five years, *Frankenstein* was a controversial and shocking publication that was ripe for theatrical use (or exploitation). Theaters that staged *Presumption* benefited financially from the controversy stirred both by the content of the novel and by its author’s controversial family. However, Peake’s adaptation bore little resemblance to Shelley’s novel and whatever radical politics could be found within its pages. That the novel was purged of its political sympathies and social commentary in its first theatrical adaptation should not come as a surprise—this had been a standard practice for decades by 1823. Revisions to the plot and characters of Shelley’s novel were necessary in order to bring *Frankenstein* to life on stage. Peake easily picked out the most spectacular elements of the story and pieced together a drama that would satisfy both the Examiner of Plays and the management at the English Opera House. His adaptation would be revived at many of London’s major theatrical venues for the next three decades, as well as in theaters across the country. *Presumption; or, The Fate of

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7 Mary Shelley was revealed as the author of *Frankenstein* only a few weeks after *Presumption*’s premiere. The novel was published anonymously in 1818.
Frankenstein was licensed only days before the July 23, 1823, premiere and forever changed the fate of Frankenstein in popular culture.\textsuperscript{8}

**Radical Revisions**

Anyone who reads Frankenstein and then watches any popular adaptation can easily identify the changes made from novel to film. There are many. These changes include the omission of major characters, revisions to characters actually included in the adaptation, and alterations to the plot of Shelley’s novel. Together these major changes undermine the politics of Shelley’s 1818 text in two major ways. First, Frankenstein’s adaptation history ignores the novel’s gender politics by completely rewriting the women characters. Additionally, the novel’s adaptation history rarely includes Shelley’s frame narrative, which I believe is the novel’s most radical sub-plot. The film most frequently credited as the culprit of these radical revisions is the classic 1931 film starring Boris Karloff as the Creature. However, while readings that take a comparative approach to the 1818 novel and the 1931 film have uncovered intelligent ways to read the very different politics of each, the narrow focus on just these two texts has led several scholars to make claims that are historically ungrounded and therefore seriously misguided.

We find an obvious example of this error in Caroline Picart’s feminist critique of the 1931 film, titled “Re-Birthing the Monstrous: James Whale’s (Mis)Reading of Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein,” which offers a lucid psychoanalytic reading of Whale’s film but fails to acknowledge that all of the examples she cites as evidence of “how Whale’s film attempts to excise or severely delimit Mary Shelley’s disturbing critique of the Romantic

\textsuperscript{8} For more information on Presumption and its licensing, see Jeffrey N. Cox, *Seven Gothic Dramas, 1789-1825* (Athens: Ohio UP, 1992).
politics of gender” are not original to the 1931 film. Picart points out the omission of three female characters in the 1931 film, arguing that these exclusions are “indicative of the degree to which the original novel seems to have been purged of its implicit criticism of a patriarchal politics of gender.” Her reading is convincing but lacks historical accuracy because early dramatizations also purged the novel of any proto-feminist politics. Margaret Saville, Caroline Beaufort-Frankenstein, and Justine Moritz (the three female characters that Picart points out as examples) are not characters in any major dramatization of *Frankenstein* from 1823 to 1931. Similarly, Picart is surprised that Elizabeth is allowed to survive in Whale’s film; however, Elizabeth also survives in Peake’s *Presumption*, where she is cast as a love interest for Henry Clerval. She survived in all later nineteenth-century English adaptations as well (in those adaptations that decided to include her at all).

By omitting or altering the female characters of the novel, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century adaptations offer a more stable image of the domestic sphere. More than thirty years of feminist scholarship on Shelley’s novel have offered various ways of reading *Frankenstein* as a critique of nineteenth-century gender politics and the limits of the domestic sphere. Mary Jacobus, for example, argues that a main theme of Shelley’s novel is the male characters’ failure to understand the necessity of domestic affections, and that this, above all, is the source of the Creature’s rage:

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10 Ibid., 392.
11 Henry Clerval is renamed Victor Moritz in the 1931 film. This is perhaps the closest that Justine gets to inclusion until more recent adaptations such as Kenneth Branagh’s *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (1994).
The monster's tragedy is his confinement to the destructive intensities of a one-to-one relationship with his maker, and his exclusion from other relations—whether familial or with a female counterpart. The most striking absence in *Frankenstein*, after all, is Eve's. Refusing to create a female monster, Frankenstein pays the price of losing his own bride. When the primary bond of paternity unites scientist and his creation so exclusively, women who get in the way must fall victim to the struggle.\(^{13}\)

By allowing Elizabeth to survive, or by omitting the women entirely from the cast, the nineteenth- and twentieth-century adaptations side-step Shelley’s argument that the Creature understands the importance of domestic ties and family more so than his creator, who takes it for granted.

Shelley’s inherited feminism can be found in both the plot of the novel, as well as in its broader, thematic arguments. Scholars such as Mary Poovey have argued that the novel is a feminist critique of masculine individualism (or Romanticism) that emphasizes (often silently) the importance of a society that values community over individualism. “Frankenstein's fatal impulse . . . has profound social consequences,” writes Poovey.

Mary Shelley is more concerned with th[e] antisocial dimension . . . primarily in terms of [Victor’s] social relationships. After animating the monster, the product and symbol of self-serving desire, the exhausted scientist is immediately confronted with a dream explication of his crime:

having denied domestic relationships by indulging his selfish passions, he has, in effect, murdered domestic tranquility.¹⁴

By bringing the Creature to life, Victor kills domestic stability in the novel. Interestingly, domestic tranquility always survives in the adaptations in some shape or form. When Frankenstein perishes alongside his creation, others left behind ensure a stable future. When Frankenstein survives at the end of the drama, he is integrated back into family life. Most adaptations ignore the completely tragic ending of Shelley’s novel, and therefore remove her critique of the dangers of allowing selfish, individualist pursuits to destroy the home. In adaptation, the home is always the site of stability, and that stability is never questioned.

Peake’s 1823 melodrama introduced the image of the stable family into the Frankenstein story. The changes made to Shelley’s novel were numerous and affected most of the novel’s political sympathies, not just its domestic critiques or its female characters. In fact, one of the most radical revisions of both the style of the novel and the politics of its author comes in the elimination of one of the novel’s central male characters—Captain Robert Walton, the principle narrator. The elimination of the novel’s epistolary frame tale in almost all film adaptations drastically changes the politics of Shelley’s novel, eschewing the novel’s social commentary and replacing it with a conservative, religious warning against the pursuit of so-called forbidden knowledge.

According to O’Flinn, in the novel the frame narrative offers “a straightforward contrast” between Walton and Frankenstein that emphasizes a secular, progressive alternative to the “don’t-interfere-with-God” message that has been written into the Frankenstein

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myth. For O’Flinn the message in Shelley’s novel is clear. “Scientific development subject to some form of strong democratic control—even in the form of mutiny—can avert the dangers its researchers encounter and save human beings from the possibly fatal consequences of those researches. That is Walton’s story.”

Perhaps the most radical moment in Walton’s narrative (and arguably in the novel as a whole), the crew’s threat of mutiny never appears in any major adaptation produced over the last two centuries. Walton appears in a couple of adaptations, but his role is always overshadowed by the two most sensational characters—the amoral scientist and his ghastly creation. Without Walton, dramatic adaptations of *Frankenstein* fail to provide an alternative perspective. Instead what emerges is a flat critique of science and an upholding of so-called conservative values, a narrative that fitted the conventions of melodrama and conformed to the theatrical censorship of the age.

Although O’Flinn acknowledges that Peake’s *Presumption* was the first adaptation to eliminate Walton’s frame narrative, he does not give a reason as to why this particular decision was made in the first place. Neither is there an obvious reason as to why this continues to be the most repeated omission in *Frankenstein*’s dramatic history. However, it is clearly a major omission as it limits interpretations of the story for the adaptation’s viewers and obviously changes the politics of Shelley’s novel. What reasons might begin to explain this omission? First, there were generic limitations that may have

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15 In the opening scene of the 1931 film the viewer is greeted by a stage announcer whose presence serves as a guide to interpretation of the film. His introduction to the film is highly theatrical and reads as follows, “How do you do? Mr. Carl Laemmle [the producer] feels it would be a little unkind to present this picture without just a word of friendly warning. We are about to unfold the story of Frankenstein, a man of science who sought to create a man after his own image without reckoning upon God. It is one of the strangest tales ever told. It deals with the two great mysteries of creation--life and death. I think it will thrill you. It may shock you. It might even horrify you. So if any of you feel that you do not care to subject your nerves to such a strain, now’s your chance to--uh, well, we warned you.”

16 O’Flinn, 198.
necessitated the deletion of the Walton story. Frankly, *Frankenstein* may have had too
many interweaving voices to translate onto the stage and especially into melodrama—a
genre in many ways defined by simple, easy-to-follow storylines. Another generic
limitation might be that the frame narrative in Shelley’s novel is too introspective to
reproduce in a medium driven by visuals and external action. However, some of the
elements of the frame narrative would have been particularly fit for the early nineteenth-
century stage. An Arctic landscape and a ship seized by mutiny—these were common
stage spectacles in the early decades of the century, particularly in nautical melodramas.17
Their omission is significant in that despite the fact that they were proven crowd-pleasers
they were deemed unfit for stage representation in *Frankenstein* adaptations throughout
the entire nineteenth century. Of course, one reason for their omission might have come
from a desire to simplify the story into order to streamline it for stage presentation.
However, every single adaptation staged in the nineteenth century completely ignored the
Walton character and storyline, even when the adaptation included the nautical imagery
of the frame tale. A more probable conclusion is that the content was deemed
questionable by licensing restrictions and was therefore conveniently excised in order to
satisfy the licensing requirements of the day.

*Frankenstein*’s shift to the stage thus came with a stripping of its most radical
politics of both the domestic and public spheres. Instead of the novel written by a young
woman who was at the center of a group of well-known and very outspoken radicals,
theater audiences saw a story rewritten as a conservative warning against rebellion
against the status quo. Instead of an introspective story, they were treated to a sensational

17 For a closer look at the generic conventions and ideological sentiments of nautical melodrama, see
Jeffrey N. Cox, “The Ideological Tack of Nautical Melodrama,” in *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of
spectacle where all problematic content was always properly contained at the end of the production and domestic stability always secured.

Presumption’s playbills promoted the conservative, moral message of the drama. “The striking moral exhibited in this story, is the fatal consequence of that presumption which attempts to penetrate, beyond prescribed depths, into the mysteries of nature.”

Theater managers were quick to make a clear distinction between Peake’s Presumption and Shelley’s Frankenstein. However, that is not to say that the earliest adaptations of Frankenstein did not benefit from the conservative criticism that Shelley’s novel met in 1818. The negative criticism launched at the novel followed Frankenstein to the stage. Peake’s Presumption, which premiered on July 23, 1823, at the English Opera House, was met with protests from groups such as the Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality. As Forry explains in his adaptation history of Frankenstein, the attacks launched by this conservative group backfired—for them. The conservative protests against Presumption failed for two reasons. First, the Society for the Suppression of Vice and Immorality’s claims were irrelevant because they were aimed at the content of Shelley’s novel, not Peake’s melodrama. There was no way that an adaptation that followed the novel’s full plot and politics would have been approved by the Lord Chamberlain, and Presumption passed the Examiner’s desk. As Forry explains, Samuel James Arnold, manager of the English Opera House emphasized the play’s license in an open letter defending Presumption published in the August 12, 1832 issue of the Theatrical Observer which read in part, “It is to be remembered that the Right Honorable the Lord Chamberlain sanctioned the Piece by granting his License, which License would certainly have been withheld, had the Drama been of an IMMORAL

18 Forry, 5.
TENDENCY.” Shelley’s novel may have been of “immoral tendency,” but this drama was most definitely not.

Arnold’s argument was very effective. To accuse the drama of immorality would be to argue against the Examiner of Plays and the Lord Chamberlain. His strategy was successful in eventually silencing those opposed to the drama while allowing those individuals to create a buzz about the play, which leads us to the second reason why the conservative protests failed to achieve their desired results. Negative publicity for the drama drew attention to the production and effectively brought paying patrons through the doors of the English Opera House to find out what all the fuss was about. Once there, they would find nothing offensive in the adaptation that Peake packaged precisely for presentation on a stage that discouraged radical sentiments when it did not ban them outright. Instead of the meaty controversial material in Shelley’s novel, Peake offered a bony sketch of the story that emphasized spectacle in the form of song and a final spectacular tableau that would forever change the Frankenstein myth in popular culture.

From 1823 onwards the Frankenstein story would be used as an example of the dangers of radical change. Like the films of the modern period, *Frankenstein’s* nineteenth-century visual history is dominated by conservative imagery that undermines the radical sympathies of the novel. Nowhere in its nineteenth-century stage history do we find critiques of gender norms or corrupt justice systems. Instead of the positive

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19 For the full exchange between protesters and the management at the English Opera House, see Forry 5-9.  
20 For example, in the novel’s first edition, Elizabeth condemns the practice of capital punishment when she and Victor visit Justine in prison on the eve of her execution: “Oh! how I hate its shews and mockeries! when one creature is murdered, another is immediately deprived of life in a slow torturing manner; then the executioners, their hands yet reeking with the blood of innocence, believe that they have done a great deed. They call this *retribution*. Hateful name! When that word is pronounced, I know greater and more horrid punishments are going to be inflicted than the gloomiest tyrant has ever invented to satiate his utmost revenge” (62-63). Although Elizabeth’s critique is omitted from the 1831 text, Victor voices similar sentiments of the “wretched mockery of justice” in both editions when he delivers the news of Justine’s
outcome that the threatened mutiny has in Shelley’s novel, *Frankenstein*’s visual history always condemns rebellion, revolution, and any form of radical change. Throughout the nineteenth century, the “warnings” embedded into the popularized Frankenstein story were easily applied to a number of national, cultural, and economic contexts. For example, in 1832 the Frankenstein Monster was portrayed in at least three political cartoons that featured the Creature as the monstrous embodiment of enfranchisement achieved through the Reform Bill. Politicians alluded to the story in arguments against emancipation. Shortly after his first stage debut, Frankenstein’ Creature became a monstrous straw-man that was repeatedly invoked as a metaphor for class, national, and racial difference. Enfranchised, working-class Englishmen, Irish nationalists, Russian imperialists, and even Spanish papists were all made into Frankenstein’s monster. The story of Frankenstein and his unruly creation was reconfigured into racist arguments applied to regions both East and West of England. Colonists, slaveholders, and conservative politicians invoked the story of Frankenstein in arguments against abolition in the colonies. The most frequently given example of this type of misuse of Shelley’s novel is an excerpt from a parliamentary speech given by Foreign Secretary George Canning arguing against abolition in the West Indies on March 16, 1824:

> conviction to Elizabeth: “it is decided as you may have expected; all judges had rather that ten innocent should suffer than that one guilty should escape” (61). Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, ed. Susan J. Wolfson, Longman Cultural Edition, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson Longman, 2007).

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21 Frankenstein’s monster is invoked to critique the 1832 Reform Bill in the following three political cartoons: “Frankenstein’s Creating Peers,” *McLean’s Monthly Sheet of Characters*, No. 27, March 1, 1832; “The Political Frankenstein,” *Figaro in London*, April 28, 1832; and “Reform Bill’s First Step Amongst His Political Frankensteins” (1833). For reproductions and discussions of these cartoons, see Forry.

In dealing with the negro, Sir, we must remember that we are dealing with a being possessing the form and strength of a man, but the intellect only of a child. To turn the negro loose in the manhood of his physical strength, in the maturity of his physical passions, but in the infancy of his uninstructed reason, would be to raise up a creature resembling the splendid fiction of a recent romance; the hero of which constructs a human form, with all the thews and sinews of a giant; but being unable to impart to the work of his hands a perception of right and wrong, he finds too late that he has created a more than mortal power of doing mischief and himself recoils from the monster which he has made.  

H. L. Malchow cites Canning’s remarks as evidence of the racial prejudices embedded in Shelley’s novel. Reading Shelley’s novel alongside contemporaneous representations of Africans, Malchow argues that Shelley’s Creature is an agglomeration of popular racial stereotypes. “Indeed, the peculiar horror of the monster owes much of its emotional power to this hidden, or “coded,” [racial] aspect,” he writes, “and the subsequent popularity of the tale through several nineteenth-century editions and on the Victorian stage derived in large part from the convergence of its most emotive elements with the evolving contemporaneous representation of ethnic and racial difference.” Malchow argues for a reading of Shelley’s Creature as racial Other by drawing on a combination of textual and cultural stereotypes about the physical differences between Africans and

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24 Malchow, 9-10.
Western Europeans that find their way into Shelley’s text. The Creature’s size, physical
dexterity, and ability to survive successfully in rugged climates, for Malchow,
demonstrates his similarities to descriptions of African peoples and posits racial
difference as the “coded” indicator of Otherness in Shelley’s novel.

Reading the gothic monster as racial Other is by now a well-established practice. *Frankenstein*’s continued popularity makes it especially prone to this line of inquiry.\(^{25}\) However, to claim that Shelley’s novel is simply another instance of how “popular romance and sensational theatre played a clandestine role in confirming the white, English, upper-class male in the empire” is only half right.\(^{26}\) Malchow’s argument more accurately applies to the sensational adaptation that premiered only months before Canning’s speech and does little justice to the sympathetic descriptions of the Creature in Shelley’s novel.

A close reading of Canning’s racist remarks indicate that racial interpretations of the Creature were derived primarily from staged versions of the story. Although Malchow, Chris Baldick, and Susan Lederer interpret Shelley’s novel as the primary source behind the “recent romance” to which Canning alludes, his summary does not follow the novel’s plot. Canning’s plot summary contains two major discrepancies. First, he describes the Creature as being incapable of a “perception of right and wrong” when in fact the Creature in Shelley’s novel not only understands the difference between the two, but also defends his actions because they are retaliations for the wrongs that society


\(^{26}\) Malchow, 40.
has committed against him. Secondly, Victor does not recoil from his creation after realizing that the Creature is (supposedly) incapable of distinguishing between right and wrong, as Canning explains; instead, he recoils from him immediately in disgust of his hideous body. These two departures from the novel closely follow the plot of *Frankenstein*’s first stage adaptation. The fact that Canning made these remarks in 1824—only one year after the premiere of Peake’s *Presumption*—further grounds his analogy in this popular stage production, rather than in Shelley’s novel.

*Presumption Sets the Stage*

Mary Shelley returned to England in the summer of 1823 to a surprise. “Behold! I found myself famous!” she wrote to Leigh Hunt on September 9. The reason for her newly found fame? The first dramatization of her novel was a hit at the English Opera House and a second printing of *Frankenstein* had been issued with the author’s name revealed for the first time. The 1823 printing owed its success to the fact that Peake’s *Presumption* was all the rage, and made Shelley a literary celebrity in her own right. As described earlier, the announcement of the drama stirred enough controversy to ensure a full house for the July 23 premiere. According to reports, it was a spectacular drama to witness. Shelley, who attended the presentation on August 29, was impressed by the production, as she explained to Hunt:

> The play bill amused me extremely, for in the list of dramatis personæ came, --- by Mr. T. Cooke: this nameless mode of naming the un[n]ameable is rather good. . . . The story is not well managed—but

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Cooke played ---’s part extremely well—his seeking as it were for support—his trying to grasp at the sounds he heard—all indeed he does was well imagined & executed. I was much amused, & it appeared to excite a breath[less] eagerness in the audience.28

Shelley was impressed and amused by Cooke’s performance as the Creature and she appears to have been especially happy about the excitement it produced in the audience. However, she was less pleased with the changes made to the plot of her novel. As she notes in the letter, “The story was “not well managed.” In fact, it was completely changed. As in Shelley’s novel, the Creature in Peake’s drama is nameless. His creator’s name is Frankenstein. The two of them do not get along. These were about the only similarities between Shelley’s *Frankenstein* and Peake’s *Presumption*.

Many changes were made to the plot, characters, and setting of Shelley’s novel. These were apparent from the first scene of the adaptation. Instead of the isolated apartment that sets the scene for Victor’s experiments in the novel, in *Presumption* the scientist’s laboratory is known to all (Henry Clerval even stops by for what seems to be a regular visit in the opening act). Frankenstein lives with a servant named Fritz, a comic lackey whose stuttering and nervous ticks have been reproduced time and again in *Frankenstein*’s film history.29 The audience is immediately made aware of the scientist’s experiments. Fritz’s first lines reveal his suspicion that his master “holds converse” with the devil, and shortly thereafter he tells Clerval that “like Dr. Faustus, my master is

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28 Ibid., 378.
29 Fritz is also the name of the assistant in the 1931 film, further demonstrating that Whale’s film follows Peake’s *Presumption* more closely than it does Shelley’s novel. In Whale’s film Fritz is a more diabolical character than Peake’s comic lackey. The Monster eventually kills him because the assistant continuously tortures him with fire. Fritz was replaced by Ygor (played by Bela Lugosi) in the third installment from Universal Studios, *Son of Frankenstein* (1939).
raising the Devil” (Act I, Scene i). Clerval delivers lines explaining that Frankenstein is a brilliant chemist, perhaps even an alchemist interested in discovering “the elixir of life.” The actual creation scene takes place off stage in Scene iii, but the audience is clearly made to understand that the chemist’s—or alchemist’s—experiment is about to wreak havoc on the stage. Fritz describes the Creature as a “hob—hob-goblin, seven-and-twenty feet high!” and shows his loyalty to his master by immediately running away.

The Creature makes his spectacular stage debut as follows:

_music._—Frankenstein sinks on a chair; sudden combustion heard, and smoke issues, the door of the laboratory breaks to pieces with a loud crash—red fire within.—The Monster discovered at door entrance in smoke, which evaporates—the red flame continues visible. The Monster advances forward, breaks through the balustrade or railing of gallery immediately facing the door of laboratory, jumps on the table beneath, and from thence leaps on the stage, stands in attitude before Frankenstein, who had started up in terror; they gaze for a moment at each other. (Act I, Scene iii)

The Creature’s stage entrance is marked by a series of spectacular effects. He breaks through doors, then through a balustrade, and executes two impressive leaps while fire burns in the background. Unfortunately, his creator is not impressed by his amazing strength and acrobatic ability. Instead, Frankenstein recoils from the “horrid corpse” that he has animated. The Creature makes conciliatory gestures at him. Frankenstein rejects him. The Monster gets mad. He grabs Frankenstein’s sword, snaps it in two, seizure the

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30 Richard Brinsley Peake, _Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein_ (London, J. Duncombe, 1824), reprinted in Forry, 137-38.
31 Ibid., 143-44.
smaller man, tosses him onto the stage floor, and escapes through a large window at the top of a staircase while the scientist lies senseless on the floor. The curtain closes on the first act amid loud thunder and lightning.

The rest of the drama’s action revolves around the Creature’s terrorizing exploits. The DeLaceys are included in this adaptation, but their storyline is significantly changed and used for the purpose of presenting the adaptation as a domestic melodrama, which by this time had become the dominant sub-genre. Domestic ties are heightened in *Presumption*, with almost all couples surviving the play and getting the requisite happy ending. Elizabeth Frankenstein and Henry Clerval are married during the course of events; Felix and Safie share a passionate on-stage duet; even Fritz is paired off with a “spousy” of his own, Madame Ninon. Agatha DeLacey does not fare as well because she is romantically paired up with the mad scientist. Her regret is clear. “I may regret the day that I have given my affection to Frankenstein,” she admits after the monster has crashed the Frankenstein-Clerval wedding festivities (Act III, Scene iii). Anticipating this major discrepancy between the novel and its film incarnations; however, this change was first portrayed by Cooke in 1823, not Karloff in 1931. Cooke’s Creature (as well as the majority of those that followed in his large footsteps) was played mostly in

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32 Ibid., 158.
dumbshow, with exaggerated gestures and emphatic groans and shrieks replacing the eloquent speeches found in Shelley’s novel. This is a major point of departure from the novel, but one that nevertheless influenced subsequent adaptations of Shelley’s story. Gone are the countless references to *Paradise Lost* and the Creature’s other readings. In the novel, the reader easily sympathizes with the Creature, as one anonymous review published in 1824 makes clear:

> For my own part, I confess that *my* interest in the book is entirely on the side of the monster. His eloquence and persuasion, of which Frankenstein complains, are so because they are truth. The justice is indisputably on his side, and his sufferings are, to me, touching to the last degree. Are there any sufferings, indeed, so severe as those which arise from the sensation of dereliction, or, (as in this case) of isolation? . . . The poor monster always, for these reasons, touched me to the heart.  

Viewers of *Presumption* with no familiarity with Shelley’s text saw the monster differently. Although Cooke infused some sympathy into his portrayal of the nameless monster, his character fell short of invoking the same identification possible from reading Shelley’s novel. Instead of seeing the Creature’s rage as justified, *Presumption*’s audiences were more likely to see the monster as a threat that needed to be eradicated. One early reviewer explains that this is the only logical ending to the drama:

> One moment he is a monster delighting only in blood; the next a “lubber fiend,” and then even beneficent spirit. He sets fires to houses, plays with blind men, stabs ladies, scares children, and burns his own fingers! At

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length, when this gentleman has done much mischief and more foolery, and every body begins to wonder how he is to be disposed of in the end, the author gets rid of him by a stratagem, to say the least of it, original.\(^\text{35}\)

Unlike the reader of Shelley’s novel who sympathizes with the Creature’s position and writes that “the poor monster always touched me to the heart,” the viewer of *Presumption* looks forward to his “disposal.” The difference could not be more marked.

Reader reactions could be so different from viewer reactions because *Presumption*’s plot stripped Shelley’s novel from its ambiguous characterizations of hero and villain and replaced them with clear-cut definitions of good and evil, beauty and ugliness, humanity and monstrosity. In this visually-driven format, spectacle guided interpretation and, as Lavalley explains, the spectacle of the monster made him a much less sympathetic character:

> In the films or on the stage . . . hideousness tends to dominate; as a result Victor has no real bond with his creation and is rarely as ambivalent about him as he is in the novel. . . .

The novel strongly suggests that our notions of beauty are questionable, that an apparent monster may be moved by emotions like our own. The physical representation on the stage or in the film, however, obviously discourages such ambivalences. Almost any visualizing of the Monster makes him the focal point and a point that is perforce primarily physical.\(^\text{36}\)

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\(^{36}\) Lavalley, 244, 249.
The Creature’s physical hideousness especially dominates when it is paired with a mute monster incapable of expressing his feelings, desires, and loneliness to the audience.\textsuperscript{37}

Because the character was stripped of language in these dramas, the earliest performers who enacted Frankenstein’s Creature on stage relied heavily on pantomime to portray the Being’s emotions (be they benign or wrathful); their performances were primarily physical, further emphasizing the spectacular elements of the story as opposed to its more introspective speeches. Harold Nichols’s archival work on Cooke’s acting style uncovers the physical dimensions to the actor’s theatrical success in melodrama. In 1820 (three years before \textit{Presumption}), Cooke had notable success as the vampire Lord Ruthven in J. R. Planché’s \textit{The Vampire; or, The Bride of the Isles}, an adaptation of John Polidori’s short novella. A reviewer describes Cooke’s performance in this drama as “one of the most vigorous and effective specimens of melodramatic acting we ever remember to have witnessed; his expressive countenance and commanding figure are displayed to great advantage, and his whole appearance is extremely picturesque.”\textsuperscript{38} It was precisely Cooke’s “commanding figure” that would lead to his casting as the Creature in Peake’s melodrama where one reviewer explains that Cooke:

\begin{quote}
\ldots powerfully embodied the horrible, bordering on the sublime or the awful. His exhibition of great strength, of towering gait, and of reckless cruelty, contrasted with the fiend’s astonishment on hearing a “concord of
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} The three most recent film adaptations that restore some of the Creature’s articulate dialogues include \textit{Terror of Frankenstein} (1977), \textit{Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein} (1994), and \textit{Frankenstein} (2004). The Creatures in these films, played by Per Oscarsson, Robert DeNiro, and Luke Goss, respectively, not only sound but also look more human than most of their cinematic predecessors.

sweet sounds,” and on beholding female forms, or in saving a human being from drowning, was masterly and characteristic.\textsuperscript{39} Moments of both terror and tenderness, Cooke’s powerful performance depended solely on his physique. At six feet tall, Cooke towered over the other cast members, a sight memorable enough to capture in artistic sketches of the drama and to guarantee Cooke the part for over 365 performances.\textsuperscript{40} His portrayal of the Creature would influence other actors taking on the role for the next two centuries. Cooke’s Creature is the earliest progenitor of the Karloff’s platform punctuated performance in 1931 although, as the stage directions included earlier show, Cooke’s Creature was much lighter on his feet.\textsuperscript{41}

Karloff’s green makeup in the 1931 film is also a throwback to Cooke’s 1823 performance in \textit{Presumption}. Cooke’s skin was painted light blue supposedly in order to effect a more ghastly, inhuman appearance. However, there is evidence to suggest that the Creature’s colored skin also carried racial connotations with some productions emphasizing race more than others.\textsuperscript{42} O. Smith, the second major actor to become associated with the role, brought his reputation for playing the Jamaican rebel Three-Fingered Jack when he donned makeup to play the blue monster. We find an interesting example in Peake’s correspondence. When the author of \textit{Presumption} heard of the catastrophic premiere of his adaptation in Birmingham due to the theater manager’s refusal to invest in appropriate scenery and costumes, he wrote a letter dated December 10, 1824, to Charles Mathews comically dramatizing an imagined dialogue between

\textsuperscript{39} The Drama; or Theatrical Pocket Magazine 5 (1823): 30, quoted in Nichols, 77.
\textsuperscript{40} This figure is an estimate given in the Illustrated London News (October 15, 1853).
\textsuperscript{42} The 1931 film emphasizes ethnic difference in the credits. The English actor William Henry Pratt who took the stage name Boris Karloff is simply designated “KARLOFF” in the closing credits (he is unnamed in the opening credits).
Alfred Bunn (manager at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham) and an actor simply referred to as Mr. Power in contemporaneous accounts:

Power—There is no dress in the Wardrobe for the Monster, the Blue man
Bunn—You wont get one out of me for such rubbish—ask for Touchstone’s dress, that will do . . .
Power—Red & Yellow wont accord at all for the Monster
Bunn—Who plays the Monster—aye—O. Smith—O. Smith has looked black at me often enough, now he may look blue if he likes . . . .

Although Bunn’s frugality bears the brunt of the attack in the letter as a whole, this portion of the imagined exchange makes a joke out of the fact that O. Smith took his stage name for his breakout performance as Three-Fingered Jack approximately fifteen years earlier, and had therefore “looked black” on stage enough times to easily “look blue” in this drama. In the end, the joke was on Bunn. His refusal to invest in proper costumes and scenery made his production of *Presumption* a flop, especially when compared to the versions being staged in London, which continued to draw full houses. Fortunately, O. Smith was unaffected by the bad Birmingham production. He quickly became the number two man for the part, playing the Creature whenever Cooke took his show on the road. In 1826, Smith made the role his own in Milner’s *Frankenstein; or, The Man and the Monster*, a “Peculiar Romantic, Melo-dramatic Pantomimic Spectacle” that also a featured a mute monster donning costume and paint “of a very pale yellowish brown, heightened with blue, as if to show the muscles, &c.” Smith was briefly succeeded in this production by Ira Aldridge in 1832, adding yet another performance

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41 Quoted in Forry, 10.
that would have undoubtedly carried racial undertones no matter what color makeup the actor would have donned to play the Monster in that revival—yellow, brown, or blue. The effect was always the same. On the nineteenth-century stage, Frankenstein’s Creature was always a monstrous outsider marked by the color of his skin as much as the ugliness of his stitches.

In sum, while readers of the novel were presented with a Creature they could identify with, viewers of the early adaptations always saw a Monster that had to be brought under control to restore order at the end of the drama. The elimination of the Creature’s capacity for verbal communication and philosophical thought in *Presumption* (as well as all other adaptations that follow Peake’s) dehumanized him and made him less sympathetic to theater audiences. Although Cooke and Smith both infused sympathy into aspects of their performances (such as the Creature’s fascination with music), a Creature incapable of communication could not capture the audience in the way that the Creature’s emotional speeches do for the reader of the novel. In dehumanizing the Creature and highlighting his hideous appearance, *Presumption* and the nineteenth-century dramatizations that followed deemphasized the more philosophical and political aspects of Shelley’s novel.

While the effect that *Presumption* had on later versions of the story may be seen as a major loss for today’s literary scholars, many nineteenth-century theatergoers were quite happy with most of the changes that Peake introduced into Frankenstein’s popular

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45 In their biography of the actor *Ira Aldridge: Negro Tragedian* (New York: Macmillan, 1958), Herbert Marshall and Mildred Stock list the Monster in Milner’s *Frankenstein; or, The Man and the Monster* as one of Aldridge’s “white” characters. The fact that stage directions for all published adaptations call for a Creature with non-white skin complicates their classification.
history. As one review of the adaptation published in the *Morning Post* on July 30, 1823, makes clear:

> Whatever may be thought of Frankenstein as a novel, or of the principles of those who could indite [sic] such a novel, there can be but one opinion of it as a drama. The representation of this piece upon the stage is of astonishing, of enchanting, interest. In the novel the rigid moralist may feel himself constantly offended, by the modes of reasoning, principles of action, &c.—But in the Drama this is all carefully kept in the back ground. Nothing but what can please, astonish, and delight, is there suffered to appear . . .

While not all contemporary critics of *Presumption* agreed with this reviewer’s claim that “rigid moralist[s]” might alleviate their offense with the tale by seeing the piece performed on stage, both positive and negative reviews of Peake’s drama agreed that the theatrical production far outweighed its literary presentation. Theatergoers could rest assured that instead of suffering through a richly-layered narrative, they would be treated to a spectacle that would certainly “please, astonish, and delight” them. This *Morning Post* reviewer captures one of the major differences between Shelley’s novel and the majority of its stage and screen successors, namely the simplification of the novel’s ethical and political commentary. By keeping the author’s complex “modes of reasoning . . . in the background,” Peake’s adaptation of the novel brought only what would “please, astonish, and delight” audiences to the foreground. Props were destroyed, fires were set, and much excitement was had until the final spectacular scene where both man and monster perished in an avalanche.

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Presumption was incredibly popular and was revived five times in London the following year, twice at the English Opera House, its original home, and three times at Covent Garden. Peake’s play continued to be revived for the next three decades at other theaters both in and outside of London. In that time dozens of other dramatizations of Frankenstein appeared in England and France—some intended to be more serious and direct adaptations than others. All, however, continued most of the changes introduced by Peake. Frankenstein’s visual history is more indebted to Peake than to Shelley. By 1832, at least fifteen different adaptations were staged in England and France, most taking their cues from Peake’s successful adaptation of Shelley’s novel.

Spectacular Death Scenes

Frankenstein is full of death. Shelley’s novel chronicles the deaths of seven characters: Caroline Beaufort-Frankenstein, William Frankenstein, Justine Mortiz, Henry Clerval, Elizabeth Lavenza, Alphonse Frankenstein, and, finally, Victor Frankenstein. Notably absent from this list is the Creature, who is only presumed dead (again) at the end of the novel. Neither the 1818 edition nor the revised text of 1831 provides the reader with a definitive conclusion regarding the Creature’s death. Both editions close with the Creature’s vow to end his own life but, as Walton narrates, the Creature ultimately floats away on an ice-raft and is “borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance.” Shelley’s decision to close with this image underscores the ambiguities attached to the Creature’s characterization throughout the novel. Although the Creature is a self-proclaimed murderer, both Walton and the reader believe he will

carry out his plans to “collect [his] funeral pile, and consume to ashes this miserable frame.”48 He may be a murderer, but he is not a liar. Shelley’s Creature is afforded complete agency in determining his own fate. He does not need justice to be enacted upon him; he is able and willing to carry out his own punishment.

This ending is the most varied scene on stage and screen. Most film versions show the Creature being destroyed, usually by fire (or so we are led to believe). James Whale’s film made the pitchfork-and-torch-wielding-townspeople-gather-as-a-mob-to-hunt-the-monster scene a staple of film versions. Branaugh’s film (which, like the novel, closes from Walton’s point-of-view) ends with the Creature actually setting himself ablaze over the corpse of his “father.” These endings are usually accompanied by spectacular special effects, heightening the dramatic effect.

Nineteenth-century versions were equally spectacular. Once again, Presumption was the first adaptation to make the Creature’s death the final, sensational scene where an avalanche buries both scientist and monster. Following suit, the earliest productions popular in London differentiated themselves by the originality of their death scenes and this practice has been carried out since. Elizabeth Nitchie gives the following survey:

The Monster seemingly had as many lives as a cat, and each necessitated a different end. In 1823 at the English Opera House he perished in an avalanche, at the Coburg in a burning church. In 1826 he was killed by a thunderbolt in Paris and at the West London Theatre, he leapt into the crater of Mount Aetna at the Coburg, he died in an Arctic Storm at the

48 Ibid., 185.
English Opera House. In the twentieth century, on the stage he committed suicide by a leap from a crag in 1927 and was shot to death in 1933.\footnote{Elizabeth Nitchie, \textit{Mary Shelley: Author of Frankenstein} (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1953): 225.}

Nitchie makes clear that the earliest plays made killing the Creature the standard ending to the Frankenstein myth, and that the earliest dramatic adaptations continued to influence adaptations well into the modern period. Although diverse, the various death scenes listed above share an undeniable spectacular quality.

The earliest stage adaptations made the death scene the spectacular, climactic scene of the piece, a dramatic departure from the Creature’s slow fade-to-black exit in the novel, where he floats away until he is lost in “darkness and distance.” The Creature in Shelley’s novel disappears out of sight; however, on stage and screen he is most often killed in plain view. Often Frankenstein perished alongside his Creature; sometimes the scientist was allowed to survive at the end of the production. Yet whether both main characters survived or only one, all of the early adaptations concluded with spectacular \textit{tableaux} whose centerpiece was the eradication of the monster. This ending was yet another way that the earliest dramatizations of the novel distanced themselves from the novel’s social commentary, replacing Shelley’s ambiguous ending with a definitive conclusion.

Frankenstein’s Monster was definitely dead at the close of the curtain in the first three major adaptations. Detailed stage directions for the three major adaptations of the 1820s suggest that dramatists, managers, directors, and actors all understood the importance of the final scene. For the first season of \textit{Presumption}, those directions read as follows:
(Music.—Frankenstein discharges his pistol—The Monster and
Frankenstein meet at the very extremity of the stage.—Frankenstein fires
his second pistol—the avalanche falls and annihilates the Monster and
Frankenstein.—A heavy fall of snow succeeds.—Loud thunder, heard, and
all the characters form a picture as the curtain falls.) (Act III, Scene v)  

Presumption closes with a traditional tableau freezing the final action, by this time a
standard stage technique signifying the end of an act in melodrama. (Actors would
actually pose for the still picture, anticipating the modern film equivalent of the freeze-
frame.) In this production, both scientist and monster are annihilated by an avalanche,
leaving no ambiguity as to their fate. The scene is meant to be the spectacular close to
the drama—an image that would stand out for the audience. If this was the aim of the
final scene of the drama, then it most definitely worked. The picture formed by the
characters before the final curtain fall in this production is of special interest because of
its role in shaping later versions of the story.

The prominence of the Creature’s death scene in later melodramas suggests that
adapters were closely following Peake’s version/vision of the story (an ending that had
proven popular with previous audiences), albeit with additional changes to the characters
and situations presented. Milner’s Frankenstein; or, The Man and the Monster, for
instance, ends with Victor murdered by the Creature, who is then chased down by
soldiers and armed peasants. Badly wounded and cornered, the Creature leaps into

50 Richard Brinsley Peake, Presumption; or, The Fate of Frankenstein (London, J. Duncombe, 1824),
reprinted in Forry, 160. All quotations from Peake’s Presumption included in this chapter follow Forry’s
pagination.
51 Here we see the earliest inspiration for the fire-at-the-mill finale of Whale’s classic film.
Mount Etna in a volcanic eruption “*vomiting burning lava.*”\(^{52}\) The stage directions clearly call for the use of “*torrents of fire, sparks, smoke, &c.*” to simulate a volcanic eruption. These special effects were indeed executed to some degree, as most reviews mention such effects at least in passing. The sensational final scene of the drama was meant to be remembered once the audience left the theater. The Duncombe printed edition of the play even published a diagram depicting actors’ stage positions at the curtain’s close, further emphasizing the visual impact of the adaptation’s final scene.

Another melodrama from 1826 that follows Peake’s spectacle-driven ending is Kerr’s *The Monster and the Magician; or, The Fate of Frankenstein*, which returns to the nautical imagery of the novel for purely spectacular reasons. Escaping the flames of his burning castle, Frankenstein finds himself aboard a small boat in a tempest-tossed sea. As his cohorts attempt to rope and pull him aboard a larger, more stable vessel, the Creature leaps onto the small boat from a nearby cliff when “*a thunderbolt descends and severs the bark, the waves vomit forth a mass of fire and the Magician and his unhallowed abortion are with the boat engulfed in the waves.*”\(^{53}\)

Kerr’s production is noteworthy for its return to the novel’s nautical imagery. Later revivals of Peake’s *Presumption* would incorporate a similar ending instead of the spectacular avalanche staged in the original production. The spectacular finales of all three early *Frankenstein* adaptations demonstrate not only theatergoers’ tastes for elaborate stage sets and action-packed dramas, but also the technological advances that dominated nineteenth-century popular theater. Knowing that directors and producers


were capable of staging such elaborate scenes raises questions about why none of the early adapters chose to end their plays with a final scene more faithful to the novel’s ending. Surely the image of the Creature disappearing into darkness would have produced a spectacular effect on the audience. The fact that early adapters favored a final death scene suggests that Shelley’s chosen ending for the novel would not please audiences expecting a “correct” ending for the story unfolding on the stage in melodramatic form. Keeping in mind that all three of these adaptations featured a mute Creature incapable of truly garnering the audience’s sympathy, the death of the Creature becomes the most logical conclusion in melodramas. Without the rhetorical powers of expression allotted to him in the novel, the Creature becomes little more than a monster in need of containment at the end of each of the early stage adaptations.

No matter how the scientist and his experiment met their death, the three most successful early adaptations, first produced between 1823 and 1826, clearly focused on the most sensational aspects of Shelley’s story and made changes in order to present theatergoers with a spectacular night of entertainment that was first and foremost driven by visual effects. Props of all kinds were used to stage these spectacular death scenes, with some more successful at achieving the desired effect than others. A successful production required adequate investment in special effects, and theater managers who understood this saw their theaters full on a nightly basis.

On the other hand, those managers who did not invest in visual effects such as costumes, props, and new stage technologies quickly found themselves with a financial flop. The focus on the spectacular elements of the death scene sometimes backfired on theater managers who did not take the care to invest in appropriate props and capable
stage hands. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, when Alfred Bunn (manager of the Theatre Royal, Birmingham) produced *Presumption* in 1824, he decided to make-do with existing props in order to maximize profits. Instead of hiring the necessary materials and manpower to stage the finale, he ordered that a large canvas elephant used in another play be whitewashed and made to simulate the avalanche that closes Peake’s adaptation. O. Smith, the second most popular actor to play the Creature in the 1820s and 1830s gives the following first-hand account of the disastrous special effects sequence at the Theatre Royal, Birmingham:

> Before we reached our elevation a pistol was fired behind the scenes, when the Master Carpenter being over anxious for the success of the experiment let go—when down came the elephant with a tremendous crash, knocked down the platform and scenery and came rolling down the stage to the footlights where it ran some danger of being roasted till it was dragged off the stage by the green-coat men, and the curtain dropped upon Frankenstein amid the laughter and applause of a good natured audience.54

The audience may have been good natured on this particular night; however, they were not as quick to recommend the piece as their London counterparts. Theater patrons expected to be entertained, and a poorly-financed piece was unlikely to cause enough excitement to generate ticket sales.

The amusing anecdote provided by O. Smith shows that proper investment was paramount to an adaptation’s commercial success and that audiences were ready to

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reward theaters that took the needed measures to keep them entertained and at the edge of their seats. Audience expectations would change over time; however, throughout the nineteenth century (much like today) attention to visual effects proved a successful strategy for the theater industry. In the case of Peake’s *Presumption*, Milner’s *The Man and the Monster*, and Kerr’s *The Monster and the Magician*, the final death scene required such investment and those theaters that took the challenge head on made Frankenstein the stage hit of the 1820s.

**Domesticated Creatures**

Throughout the nineteenth century, some of the stage monsters were lucky enough to escape the unfortunate fate of their earlier brethren. Adaptations and other loosely-based dramatizations that took a more comic approach to the Frankenstein legend often allowed the Creature to survive at the end of the play. Such endings might appear to follow Shelley’s novel more closely; however, this was only a superficial similarity. The melodramas produced in the 1820s overwhelmingly closed with the Creature’s death. However, on the Victorian stage—as dramatizations of the story took a more comic approach to the Frankenstein story—the acceptable alternative to death for Frankenstein’s monster was education.

Unsurprisingly, Brooks’s 1974 comedy also follows this formula. At the end of his film, Frankenstein performs an experiment in hopes of transferring some of his intelligence to his Creature. The operation is successful. Now able to address the villagers with an eloquent, sympathetic speech, the Creature is accepted into the community and even marries his creator’s one-time fiancé. In the rehabilitated
Creature’s final scene, he reads *The Wall Street Journal* and groans as Elizabeth comes to bed in full Bride-of-Frankenstein costume. Educated and married, the Creature is now a full member of society irrespective of his origins. No one seems to notice the bolts and stitches any longer. No one is frightened of this educated, domesticated Creature.

Victorian versions had a similar, but much less progressive, vision of the Creature’s rehabilitation. Both *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man* (1849) and *Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim* (1887) played up the possibility of integrating the Creature into society. Nevertheless, integration is represented in racist and imperialist contexts that ultimately undermined what might have been otherwise a progressive turn in the Frankenstein’s popular history.

Instead of suggesting the use of physical force as earlier dramatizations had done, the ending of Richard and Barnabas Brough’s *The Model Man* suggests a method to control the Monster that is meant to be understood as a humanitarian alternative to death—a finale that would have been too extreme for the light-hearted piece. *The Model Man* differed generically from the most of the earlier dramatizations. Billed as a burlesque-extravaganza, this dramatization follows the plot of the traditional harlequinade. *The Model Man* featured the Creature in the role of Clown, who Forry describes as “wreaking havoc until the end of the play when, having been tamed by music from Otto’s flute . . . he dances on stage.” This conclusion is one of the earliest instances of the alternative ending that allowed the Creature to survive at the end of the play. However, the play explicitly engages the politics of Shelley’s novel, undermining them in such a way that suggests the changes made in this dramatization were at least partly politically motivated, not simply determined by generic conventions.

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55 Forry, 55
Forry suggests that *The Model Man* engages contemporary politics more so than any other stage adaptation of *Frankenstein*. On one hand, this might appear to be a throwback to Shelley’s novel; Mrs. Shelley is even mentioned twice in this adaptation. However, the politics of the Brough brothers’ dramatization are closer to those of earlier melodramas than to Shelley’s novel. The play is explicitly anti-revolutionary. In the final scene, Frankenstein links his uncontrollable scientific experiment to similar political “blunders” abroad: “I’m not the only man who’s set a going / A horrid monster that he could’n’t stop. / For precedents across the channel pop.”56 Although *The Model Man* is set in Germany, its political perspective is English. The horrid monster “across the channel” is stands in for the European Revolutions of 1848 that began, once again, in France, and spread to Germany, Switzerland, Poland, and other countries, including Brazil.

*The Model Man* engages the theme of revolutions gone awry both in Europe and the West Indies. The play’s conservative politics are even more evident in the way that Frankenstein’s Creature is depicted in this dramatization and ultimately brought under control. Like *Presumption* and the melodramas of the 1820s, *The Model Man* continued the trend of depicting Frankenstein’s Creature as racial Other, despite being described as a mechanical man made of clock work and steam in this version (as opposed to an animated corpse). In many ways, this burlesque adaptation was lampooning the practice of using inhuman skin colors to heighten the Monster’s hideous appearance. The scientist in *The Model Man* puts the finishing touches on his Creature with a paintbrush, adding “a touch or two / Of red just here—and a tinge of blue.” However, although a Creature painted with strokes of red and blue would make for a skin tone of a purple hue,

the Monster in *The Model Man* is notably represented in the following illustration as a black man.

![Figure 7. Scene from *The Model Man*, starring Paul Bedford as the Creature and Edward Wright as Frankenstein. A black-and-white version of this image can be found in *the Illustrated London News*, January 12, 1850. The color print is reproduced in Susan Lederer’s *Frankenstein: Penetrating the Secrets of Nature* (2002).](image)

The illustration demonstrates that this dramatization took earlier racial characterizations to their extreme. However, the ending of the play often camouflages this fact. For example, Forry argues that the end of the play offers the possibility of political reform. “As opposed to earlier dramatizations where music served as a temporary panacea for the Creature’s rage,” he explains, “in *Model Man* it restores and rehabilitates him.”  

Forry is here referring to the play’s final scene in which Undine gives Otto (as Harlequin) a flute with the instructions:

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57 Forry, 66
Here take this magic flute
And seek him out, the most ferocious brute.
Its notes will bring to calm subordination,
It plays a simple tune called Education. (Scene vi)\textsuperscript{58}

Invoked in the image of the “ferocious brute” is the figure of the noble savage who can be rehabilitated through education and culture. However, the educating flute in *The Model Man* does not magically give the Creature speaking abilities, nor does it bestow upon him any knowledge of the world. On the contrary, the Creature in *The Model Man* can reason and speak from the moment of animation despite lamenting that he has no formal education. Forry’s argument does not take this distinguishing feature into account.

Even more problematic is the fact that in this adaptation the Creature is rendered through a racialized discourse that undermines the play’s final “rehabilitating” scene. The Creature’s darkened skin and accessories in the illustration from this play seem to point towards a radically different interpretation of the Creature’s “educated” dancing at the end of the play. Instead of the positive “rehabilitation” at the end of the drama which Forry describes, the conclusion of *The Model Man* bears uncanny resemblance to minstrel shows, which were already popular in 1849 both in the United States and England. Through the use of multiple stereotypes and racist, imperialist discourses, *The Model Man* continued the conservative readings established by the melodramas of the 1820s and illustrates how contemporaneous political discourses about education and rehabilitation were played out on stage in the post-emancipation period.

*The Model Man*’s politics are undoubtedly reactionary, but they are carefully rationalized on stage as empathetic and humanitarian. The play portrays not only the

\textsuperscript{58} *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man*, reprinted in Forry, 246.
anxieties of full emancipation in the West Indies, but also addresses changing attitudes about penal models that coincided with the shift from physical punishment to disciplinary rehabilitation.⁵⁹ After learning that his Creature has been apprehended by the hero, Frankenstein and Otto have the following exchange:

_Fran._ I hope you have’nt . . . hurt him much.

_Otto._ Hurt him, oh no, that’s not at all the way

We serve offenders in the present day.

The world grows wiser and begins to find

That to its erring sons it should be kind,

And stead of scaring them with jail & fetter,

The proper way is teach them to grow better.

I’ve tamed him.

_All._ Ha.

_Otto._ Yes, by this weapon small,

Whose unobtrusive power would conquer all

The ills that o’er the earth hold domination

If people understood its application.

Behold its charm to soothe the savage breast,

And lull the—everybody knows the rest. (Scene vii)⁶⁰

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⁵⁹ See Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1995). The Creature’s “education” at the end of the play and its enactment through dance brings to mind Foucault’s analysis of institutional regulatory practices. If, as Foucault suggests, nineteenth-century educational institutions are architectural sites of disciplining bodies through physical education, obedience training, and mechanical drills, then we can see how music/education in *The Model Man* also functions as a bodily practice, soothing the Creature’s savage inclinations and making him rhythmically move his body to a polka tune from Otto’s flute.

⁶⁰ *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man*, reprinted in Forry, 249.
“Everybody” knows that education is the most humanitarian way to solve all of the world’s troubles, the hero explains—as long as the proper education is defined by British standards. Otto’s remedy to “soothe the savage breast” is the disciplining of otherwise uncontrollable bodies vis-à-vis a formalized education. This polka-dancing, “reformed” Creature, now dressed as a “happy Villager with his hair and mustaches curled,” embodies the image of the “tamed” savage, often invoked in abolitionist debates. Forry suggests that it is possible to see the reformed Creature as a progressive image, but such a humanist reading is problematized by understanding how this dramatization can be seen as one more instance of how nineteenth-century adaptations of *Frankenstein* tamed the radical politics of Shelley’s novel in order to make them more palatable to a mainstream audience. At the end of the play, the Creature is integrated—if not fully assimilated—into “respectable” society. With a properly educated, trained “son” to recommend to friends, Frankenstein promises the monster a proper financial “situation”—the thing that the Creature has longed for all along.

We find another instance of integrationist rhetoric in Richard Butler’s and H. Chance Newton’s *Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim* (1887). This dramatization features not one, but two Creatures. The “Monster” (played by Fred Leslie) and a less-developed progenitor (simply called the “Model”) are described as being made from clay and terra cotta, respectively. Although the Model is the only character to have distinctive, non-white skin (here apparently terra-cotta-colored), both Creatures engage in at least one dialogue that explicitly embeds them as racial outsiders in a colonial context:

Monster (*to Model*): I say can you speak?

Model (*grinning*): I think so.
Monster: What’s your name?

Model: I dunno…

Monster *(wondering)*: I dunno?

Model: What’s yours?

Monster *(With a happy thought)*: The same! Perhaps they’ll christen us soon to give us status.

Model: And later on perhaps they’ll vaccinate us.

The engagement with a narrative of colonization in this interaction seems unquestionable. For the Monster and the Model, naming, religious conversion, and vaccination are the means to acquiring status as “normal” identities with “status.” Equally interesting is the role of vaccination as it relates to the legitimization of their monstrous bodies within that social order. While the Monster welcomes a christening as the first marker of “status,” the Model’s reply suggests that naming (i.e., language) alone does not have the power to make them full citizens. The Model’s comment about vaccination suggests the need for physical change or assimilation in order to achieve “proper” status, such as the adoption of physical and cultural traits that emulate those of the ruling class. If this logic sounds familiar, it is because it follows (perhaps coincidentally) the plot of the plays discussed in the previous chapter. The dialogue between the Monster and the Model in this 1887 burlesque closely resembles the 1800 pantomime and 1830 melodrama of *Obi; or, Three Finger’d Jack*, where Quashee is able to defeat Jack’s powerful magic only when he converts to Christianity. When they appear on the regulated London stage in the age of empire, these otherwise “unruly” characters (either racialized monsters or black slaves)

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61 Richard Butler and H. Chance Newton, *Frankenstein; or The Vampire’s Victim* (1887), quoted in Forry, p. 57.
are only allowed to obtain “proper” status if they understand Western markers of identity (education, Christianity, modern medicine) and assimilate accordingly.

Grouped with the earlier melodramas, *Frankenstein; or, The Model Man* and *Frankenstein; or, The Vampire’s Victim* show how the Creature was repeatedly represented as racial Other, dehumanized, and controlled at the close of the adaptations despite the novel’s very different ending. Whether by execution or rehabilitation, Frankenstein’s Creature was always contained on the nineteenth-century stage. By the time *Presumption* premiered in 1823, the domestic melodrama was the most prevalent form on the popular stage and adaptations of *Frankenstein* followed the formula, eschewing the ambiguous ending of Shelley’s novel and replacing it with safe, conclusive endings where any threat to order was properly eradicated or domesticated.

The revised endings can be read as integrationist narratives in both colonial and domestic contexts. Just as the Creature is tamed at the end of each dramatization, Frankenstein is also domesticated. “Even the story of Frankenstein’s animation of the creature and then his struggle with it is firmly imbedded in a vision of domestic relations,” Jeffrey Cox tells us. Cox is referring specifically to *Presumption*, but his observations apply to adaptations of *Frankenstein* staged later in the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Whether Frankenstein dies (as he does in *Presumption*) or survives (as he does in Whale’s 1931 film), the domestic comforts that he repeatedly shrugs off in Shelley’s novel become central, defining themes in dramatizations of the story beginning in 1823. In Peake’s adaptation Victor is oddly coupled with Agatha DeLacey in one of a series of strange changes to the romantic pairings in the novel. Even though Frankenstein dies with his Creature at the end of this

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play, three happy, heterosexual couples remain “to find domestic bliss.” James Whale’s first film ends with the Baron Frankenstein making a toast to “the future of the House of Frankenstein” as the picture fades on the upcoming marriage of the young doctor and (a very much alive) Elizabeth.

Happy endings that restore the stability of the domestic sphere abound in Frankenstein adaptations on stage and screen. Although such domestic endings completely ignore the actual consequences of Victor’s ambition in Shelley’s text, they nonetheless privilege the domestic sphere as a stabilizing force in a world of rapidly-changing technologies just as Shelley does in her novel. However, even though there are similarities between the novel’s sympathetic portrayal of the domestic sphere and the adaptations’ privileging of the home as the site of unshaken stability, the arguments put forth by each differ significantly. In adaptation, Shelley’s feminist critique of masculine individualism is never expressed. Ultimately, in sparing most of the members of the Frankenstein family, some of the nineteenth-century dramatizations focus more on the containment of the monster rather than the careless scientist, and therefore bypass the more nuanced critique of selfish ambition that Shelley delineates in her novel.

Important to note is the fact that a stable, domestic future is not offered to the Creature until Whale’s film sequel Bride of Frankenstein (1935), an observation made by Jacobus. “In The Bride of Frankenstein, Frankenstein and his crazed collaborator Dr. Pretorius undertake what neither Mary Shelley nor her hero could quite bring themselves to do—embody woman as fully monstrous.” When she is finally animated in the 1935 film, she rejects the monster, just as Victor predicts in the novel. The nineteenth-century

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63 Ibid., 69.
64 Jacobus, 133.
adaptations completely skip over the portion of the novel where the Creature asks Victor for a mate to save him from a miserable existence. Although she is destroyed before she is completed in the novel, she is never mentioned on the nineteenth-century stage. Marriage and family are never in the monster’s reach. The Creature in the Victorian dramatizations is offered comfort only through education and cultural assimilation. In the novel, Victor’s fears that a female monster may very well be more dangerous than the Creature he already cannot control seem dubious to the reader. However, in adaptation, his fears are validated by her repeated absence. On page, stage, and film, the Creature’s chances for domestic happiness are always non-existent.

**Original Frankenstein?**

All of the nineteenth-century adaptations discussed in this chapter—be they serious or comic—reduce the novel to a series of spectacular events that have been repeated on stage and screen for almost two hundred years. Understanding the nineteenth-century stage history of *Frankenstein* is important for scholars of both later films and the 1818 novel. As this chapter has shown, film adaptations of *Frankenstein* draw on earlier stage dramatizations more than on Shelley’s novel. The early melodramas and burlesques loosely based on Shelley’s novel are the actual primary source material for later theatrical and cinematic incarnations and must be considered in any serious account of the continued popularity of the Frankenstein story in popular culture over the last two centuries. *Frankenstein*’s stage history is also important for students and scholars of Shelley’s novel. The altered versions of the novel staged in London (and later in the provinces and abroad) throughout the nineteenth century were
central in keeping Shelley’s novel alive in the popular imagination. Today *Frankenstein* is a canonical text; it is arguably “the” Romantic novel. The novel owes its canonization to the early dramatizations that ensured continued printings. There is little reason to believe that we would still be reading, teaching, and writing about Shelley’s novel if Peake and the managers, production workers, and actors of the English Opera House had not staged such a successful theatrical spectacle in 1823. Early dramatizations played a central role in making *Frankenstein* a success in the publishing and theater industries. However *Frankenstein*’s commercial success did not come without what any reader of Shelley’s novel would call a “great expense.” Maximum profits called for the minimization of any potential radical sympathies expressed in Shelley’s novel. The earliest dramatizations completely rewrote the politics of Shelley’s *Frankenstein* to fit the requirements of the regulated nineteenth-century stage and these changed narratives have become the new primary texts used to assess the ubiquity of the Frankenstein legend in popular culture.

I began this chapter by suggesting that it is very difficult to trace an accurate genealogy of the Frankenstein legend in popular culture because the last two hundred years have brought us almost as many versions of the story. I would like to end by complicating this history a little more by showing that popular productions of the Frankenstein legend may have not even begun with the publication of Shelley’s novel in 1818. In comparing *Frankenstein* to other tales that have attained similar cultural status, Anne Mellor argues that “Mary Shelley created her myth single-handedly. All other myths of the western and eastern worlds, whether of Dracula, Tarzan, Superman, or more
traditional religious systems, derive from folklore or communal ritual practices.\textsuperscript{65}

However, this claim is exaggerated. First, Shelley did not “create a myth.” She wrote a novel. The Frankenstein myth, as this chapter has shown, was created by all of the adaptations of the novel and the way that they kept Shelley’s novel alive in the popular imagination for almost two hundred years. Secondly, Shelley’s did not spark the Frankenstein myth single-handedly. It is a well-known fact that Percy Shelley was actively involved in the editing of her manuscript. Even if he were not, Shelley drew on other myths to write her novel. Possible literary and historical sources for Shelley’s novel have been unearthed.\textsuperscript{66} Shelley’s lack of explanation for Victor’s experiments suggests the legend of Dr. Faustus and early adaptations such as Presumption in 1823, The Monster and the Magician in 1826, and most notably the intervention of the demon Zamiel (played by the aging O. Smith) in The Model Man in 1849 also suggest that theater audiences were working through a Faustian framework when seeing Frankenstein on stage. But the Frankenstein legend may have had an earlier stage progenitor, one that like his animated progeny never had a proper name.

Evidence suggests that Shelley’s ghost writing experiment may have been inspired in part by a well-known pantomime. Joseph Grimaldi, the legendary English clown, may have been the first “Dr. Frankenstein” to grace the London stage. A scene from Harlequin and Asmodeus; or, Cupid on Crutches (1810) closely resembles the basic plot of Shelley’s novel. During the 1810-11 winter season, audiences flocked to see


\textsuperscript{66} For a probable literary source see Sydny McMillen Conger, “A German Ancestor for Mary Shelley’s Monster: Kahler, Schiller, and the Buried Treasure of Northanger Abbey,” Philological Quarterly 59, no. 2 (1980): 216-31. Radu Florescu’s In Search of Frankenstein (London: Robson Books, 1997) uncovers possible folkloric sources by tracing the Shelleys’ travels and local legends and places that may have inspired the novel. Florescu’s book contains much conjecture, but the number of possible sources he uncovers complicates Mellor’s assertion regardless of whether these sources were known to Shelley.
Grimaldi in the Christmas pantomime at Covent Garden. In one act, Grimaldi’s character builds a creature composed entirely of vegetables and animates this culinary monstrosity only to be boxed off stage by his ungrateful creation. According to several sources, the scene caused much delight in the audience and was sketched by R. Norman and widely distributed throughout the year (see figure 8).  

In a short scholarly note, Dalton Gross and Mary Gross have argued that Grimaldi’s vegetable man skit be read as a possible influence for Shelley’s novel, suggesting that Shelley would have heard about Grimaldi’s most famous performances from Lord Byron, who was a friend of the comedian. Shelley may have also encountered visual renderings of the skit given its wide circulation and overall popularity. For scholars seeking to uncover the origins of *Frankenstein*’s plot, this skit is particularly interesting in how closely its premise follows that of Shelley’s novel, leading Gross and Gross to conclude, “Mary Godwin may consciously have remembered talk about Grimaldi, or the talk may have slipped into her unconscious. . . . In either case, Grimaldi’s performance in *Harlequin and Asmodeus* was probably a primary influence on the plot of the novel.”

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68 See Dalton Gross and Mary J. H. Gross, “Joseph Grimaldi: An Influence on *Frankenstein*,” *Notes and Queries* 226 (1981): 404. Descriptive information about this performance and the literary references provided here are indebted to this invaluable.
Whether Grimaldi’s pantomime performance was a direct influence on Shelley’s novel remains somewhat speculative (although probable); however, that both Grimaldi and his fans saw a link between the two is indeed provable. “The vegetable pugilistic figure,” as Dickens would refer to this stage creature in his edition of Grimaldi’s Memoirs, was “the happiest of his creations” and would come to be one of the most memorable characters of the actor’s career.⁶⁹ The actor acknowledged the importance of this performance on his career, more memorable at the time of Grimaldi’s retirement because of the recent popularity of Peake’s Presumption. Grimaldi linked his vegetable creation to the Frankenstein legend as he recited the following lines in a farewell address to a theater audience in January 1824:

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Ne’er shall I Build the wondrous verdant man,
Tall, turnip-headed,—carrot-finger’d.—lean; . . .
Ne’er shall I, on the very newest plan,
Cabbage a body;—old Joe Frankenstein.\(^{70}\)

The connection here is explicit. However, is the use of the Frankenstein name in this address a nod to Shelley’s novel or Peake’s *Presumption*? The answer is most likely both, although there is good reason to believe that the stage association would be at least as strong or even stronger for theatergoers that were more likely to have had their first encounter with the newer “Frankenstein” currently reaching hundreds (and often thousands) of London theatergoers on any given night as opposed to Shelley’s novel which had less than 2,000 copies in print in 1824.\(^{71}\)

The following year Thomas Hood penned an “Ode to Joseph Grimaldi, Sr.” that also compared Grimaldi’s vegetable man skit to the *Frankenstein* story. The poem’s twelfth stanza repeats:

For who like thee could ever stride!

. . . . . . . .

Or like Joe Frankenstein compile

The *vegetable man* complete!—

A proper *Covent Garden* feat!\(^{72}\)

\(^{70}\) From *The Drama; or, Theatrical Pocket Magazine* 5 (January 1824): 300, quoted in Forry, 39, 23n.

\(^{71}\) For further details regarding early printings of *Frankenstein* and its relationship to early adaptations, see William St. Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Although none of the characters that Grimaldi played in *Harlequin and Asmodeus* donned the name “Joe Frankenstein,” Hood’s use of the name indicates that he saw a connection between Grimaldi’s performance and the Frankenstein story that had recently achieved instant popularity on the stage. Gross and Gross, in fact, cite Hood’s poem as evidence that fans of Grimaldi saw the similarities between the two plots.

The simple plot of this single scene in a popular Christmas pantomime performed at one of the large patent houses may very well have been a source of inspiration for Shelley’s novel. Perhaps Shelley’s novel itself was a radical adaptation of a plot produced for the popular stage of her youth. If so, the radical sympathies articulated in her version of this fantastic, rebellious premise were disciplined when the story made a return to theatrical venues.

In bringing many adaptations of the Frankenstein legend together we see how popular theater and popular prose drew upon one another in the competing market of entertainment culture in the nineteenth century much as it continues to do so today. In fact, the story of a Creature (either vegetable or man) of unnatural origins who rebels against his Creator, a story that first appeared on stage in 1810, still continues to draw in theater audiences today. In 2007, Frankenstein’s Creature was reanimated on Broadway. *The New Mel Brooks Musical Young Frankenstein* is Brooks’s new adaptation of his earlier adaptation of all the adaptations of *Frankenstein* that came before.
CHAPTER FOUR

From Historical Romance to Domestic Melodrama:

The “Timeless” Characters of *Notre-Dame de Paris*

Although they hail from the Romantic traditions of two different countries, Quasimodo and Frankenstein’s Creature share much in common. Both characters serve as fictional case studies in Enlightenment theories of early childhood development in their respective novels.\(^1\) In addition, Quasimodo physically resembles Frankenstein’s Creature as we see in the following description provided by Victor Hugo’s narrator: “his feet were immense, his hands monstrous; but, with all this deformity, he possessed a formidable air of strength, agility, and courage,” and more specifically, “He looked like a giant who had been broken in pieces and badly soldered together again.”\(^2\) Like the Creature built from a collection of human parts, Quasimodo’s body is reduced to a series of disfigurements and disabilities. The results in both cases are larger-than-life monsters—one stitched, one “soldered.”

In addition to their physical similarities, Frankenstein’s Creature and Quasimodo are two of the most popular characters that have survived the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and continue to roam the world at large in the twenty-first. They both have an international iconic status independent of their parent novels. For both characters, this independence occurred very soon after their literary births by means of popular adaptations. Frankenstein’s Creature and Quasimodo exist beyond the worlds they

\(^1\) Just as Shelley engages the educational theories of Rousseau, Hugo invokes Hobbes by name in his description of Quasimodo’s perception of the world. Compare the passages regarding Quasimodo’s developmental growth from Book 4 of Hugo’s novel to the Creature’s oration of his time with the DeLaceys in Volume 2 of *Frankenstein*.

inhabit in prose. They may even be said to exist above them. The proof? Both have become international cultural icons even though they are not the title characters of their respective novels. The reason? These icons are produced not by the novels but from repeated adaptations of the novels, their mass appeal, their wide reach across generations, and their continued profitability for theater companies and movie studios. The result? Both characters have become timeless orphans completely disengaged from both their parent-novels and the respective cultures that gave birth to them.

Frankenstein’s Creature and Quasimodo are no longer nineteenth-century characters. They belong to later generations as much as they do to Shelley and Hugo. They are no longer tied to a specific historical moment—at least not in the public imagination or in mass culture. They are celebrities in their own right. They can sell cereals, vacations, and other modern products. They can serve as spokespersons for media companies and accompany kid’s meals at fast food restaurants. They are timeless characters. By calling these characters timeless I do not mean to invoke a nostalgic tone. The word is usually used in this way by bibliophiles interested in holding up a literary character’s cultural staying power as evidence of a novel’s greatness. Such an approach is wholly counterproductive when trying to understand the cultural staying power of certain novels, their characters, and the culture industry that has produced them. Characters like Frankenstein’s Creature, Quasimodo, Ebeneezer Scrooge, Dracula and the like are not well-known today because the public at large have continued to read the nineteenth-century novels that brought them on the scene. Instead, they are known to most of the Western world because they continue to be reintroduced to new audiences via entertaining adaptations. Each adaptation—be it graphic or textual, direct or indirect—
has reconfigured the characters and the dramas around them in new contexts for new audiences. These adaptations (usually expensive productions) are aimed at reaching new consumers (as well as bringing back old fans) and often present the material in new historical contexts with little regard to the historical moment from whence these characters came.

The “timelessness” of Hugo’s characters serves as an interesting case study. On the one hand, the characters are always tied to a specific historical setting—medieval Paris. On the other hand, they rarely engage that particular historical moment in adaptation. The actors playing Quasimodo, Esmeralda, Phoebus, and Dom Frollo always don the appropriate costumes and the drama that unfolds around them always takes place amongst scenery meant to replicate the look and feel of medieval Paris; however, these expensive productions rarely ever engage the political moment of the historical setting. They instead focus on the personal drama between the characters. Love, lust, forgiveness, self-sacrifice—these “timeless” themes are the focus of The Hunchback of Notre-Dame films of the twentieth century. There is no sense of historical specificity outside of the props and scenery used to replicate medieval Paris for the viewer. This is precisely what has made the characters of Hugo’s Notre-Dame timeless. As Kathleen Grossman explains:

In the case of Notre-Dame and Les Misérables, the metaphorical playfulness, historical and cultural digressions, and allusion to republican politics disappear in most of the cinematic interpretations. In exchange,

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3 The budget for the 1939 film directed by William Dieterle was one of the largest film budgets for its time.
Hugo’s characters have become timeless—literally not tied to history—part of the mythography of the international landscape.4

In adaptation, the characters of Hugo’s novel circulate in a historical vacuum. They are disengaged from the social and political contexts that define their historical setting. Adaptations of Notre-Dame have repeatedly dehistoricized the story, or if looked at more positively, have made it ahistorical.

This is a major departure from Hugo’s novel, whose full French title is Notre-Dame de Paris, 1482 (1831). Hugo’s novel is very much tied to two specific years—1482, the medieval setting of the plot, as well as 1830, the year that the novel was written. The historical romance is consciously written for the nineteenth-century reader. The drama of the novel constantly pauses so that the narrator may explain the historical and political nuances of medieval Paris to his contemporaries. The historical setting is the late fifteenth century, but the narrator’s immediate political context—the frequent references to grand revolutions and republican politics—is the nineteenth century. Hugo’s narrator is a citizen of Paris in the year 1830 and his long asides and digressions serve as an extended historical lesson intended to show the reader how to better understand the past as well as the present. The novel’s frequent trips to the gallows and exposure of clerical, judicial, and monarchial corruption are set during the reign of Louis XI, but they bear both implicit and explicit similarities to the reign of a later monarch with the same name. There is also a more immediate political context as the novel was written in the wake of the July Revolution of 1830 that replaced Charles X with Louis-Phillipe I. Hugo’s novel has a historical hyper-awareness—the politics of the present

cannot be disengaged from the past, be it in the wake of current revolution, the Great Revolution of the previous century, or the cultural revolutions that began with the invention of the printing press, which for Hugo’s narrator marks the dawn of the modern era.

History lurks around every corner in Hugo’s novel; however, it is nowhere to be found in the novel’s history in popular culture. The films of the twentieth-century, those responsible for keeping Quasimodo and company alive in the popular imagination, downplay the historical “lessons” of the novel in favor of the story’s most sensational and spectacular moments. This feature of the history of Hugo’s *Notre-Dame* in adaptation has been covered extensively in the existing scholarship. However, it is only discussed in the context of twentieth-century American films based on the novel such as the famous silent film of 1923, starring Lon Chaney in the role of Quasimodo, the 1939 adaptation directed by William Dieterle starring Charles Laughton, and the 1997 Disney animated version of the story. Nevertheless, nineteenth-century stage adaptations of Hugo’s novel also dehistoricized the characters, offering instead spectacular shows based on significantly-shortened and heavily-revised stories bearing only a superficial resemblance to Hugo’s lengthy, historical book. Such has been the case since the first dramatization of the novel staged in London appeared in 1834.

*Notre-Dame’s English Stage Progeny*

Although there are several studies of *Notre-Dame* in adaptation, there is little coverage of its full adaptation history. The twentieth-century films mentioned earlier overshadow *Notre-Dame’s* stage history in both popular culture and historical
scholarship. Even when a nineteenth-century history of adaptation is acknowledged, it is
glossed over briefly. The nineteenth-century stage adaptations have yet to be the focus of
inquiry of any scholarly production. For example, in a recent dissertation focused solely
on adaptations of *Notre-Dame*, Laurie Harnick writes:

[T]he novel seemed destined for translation into different media from the
beginning. Within months of its initial publication, a French dramatist,
Dubois, wrote a moderately successful, seven-scene play in three acts for
the Theatre de Versailles. In 1850, Hugo’s own brother-in-law, Paul
Foucher, produced a drama in five acts based on the novel. That
production proved to be very successful and went on to a long run at the
Porte-Saint-Martin. Since then, the story has been adapted to many
different media—opera, theatre, ballet, radio, print, and film. It seems that
there is something about this story that encourages an assortment of
readings in a variety of forms.⁵

Harnick goes on to provide a detailed film history of Hugo’s novel and convincing
interpretations of the various films. In the passage above, a few nineteenth-century
versions are mentioned, but these references leave the reader with little sense of how
widespread adaptations of *Notre-Dame* were in the decades immediately following the
novel’s publication in 1831. Hugo himself penned a stage version of his novel titled *La
Esmeralda* in 1836 (which Harnick briefly acknowledges later in her study). The

⁵ Laurie Harnick, “‘Translating Hugo: Adapting and Transfiguring Victor Hugo’s *Notre Dame de Paris:*
1482 on Film,’” Ph.D. diss., University of Western Ontario 2005, 3-4. The passage cited above begins with
one of the most common assumptions made in most modern scholarship on novels in adaptation, namely
that there is something inherently “special” or “timeless” inherent in novels that are continuously adapted
to new media. One of the primary purposes of this project is to demonstrate that there are many novels that
have been adapted over and over again; therefore, suggesting that there is something “special” about a
particular novel because it has happened to enjoy a lengthy popular life is simply not accurate.
historical gloss given above also gives the reader no sense of the popularity (or even existence) of these adaptations outside of France even though they were popular throughout Europe in the nineteenth century.

Grossman acknowledges _Notre-Dame_’s nineteenth-century stage history more closely than Harnick; however, the early adaptations she discusses in her essay are also limited to those staged in France. She points out the similarities between the plot of the 1997 Disney film and that of an adaptation by Foucher staged in 1850 in France. Foucher’s version concluded with a standard happily-ever-after ending strikingly in tune with Disney’s animated oeuvre, but cacophonous when compared to Hugo’s novel. Suprisingly, Hugo was also in tune with some of the major changes made to his novel in adaptation. Hugo not only approved of some of the changes made to the plot of the novel made by Foucher, he had even made similar changes to his own 1836 adaptation _La Esmeralda_, where the title character actually survives at the end of the play and Phoebus is oddly turned into a tragic hero. Grossman suggests that the changes originate here; however, although Foucher followed major changes made fourteen years earlier by Hugo, Hugo was not the one to introduce those changes into the popular history of _Notre-Dame_.

The popular dramatist Edward Fitzball made similar changes to the plot and characters of the novel before Hugo—twice. He was the first dramatist to capitalize on the success of Hugo’s novel in England with two different adaptations: the first, _Esmeralda; or, The Deformed of Notre Dame_ (1834), which preceded the Paris premiere of Hugo’s adaptation by two years; the second, _Quasimodo; or, The Gipsey Girl of Notre Dame_ (1836), which opened more than nine months before Hugo’s _La Esmeralda_ saw the Paris stage.
Hugo’s novel was staged in London on April 14, 1834, at the Surrey Theater. Fitzball’s *Esmeralda; or, The Deformed of Notre Dame*, an oddly-titled adaptation, drew approving crowds, no doubt an incentive for the Adelphi Theatre to purchase Fitzball’s adaptation later that year in November. (*Esmeralda* was also revived at the Adelphi during the 1839-40 season.) Fitzball’s adaptation should be the focus of more scholarship on *Notre-Dame*’s adaptation history because it is an earlier source of *Notre-Dame*’s happily-ever-after reconstruction in popular culture. At the end of Fitzball’s drama, Esmeralda lives, Quasimodo dies, and Phoebus arrives with a pardon from the king—a long shot from the novel where Esmeralda is hanged, Quasimodo joins her in a post-mortem “marriage,” and Phoebus essentially forgets about both of them and ends up miserably married to Fleur-de-Lys. The 1834 and 1836 adaptations by Fitzball do not include such tragic endings and definitely avoid the necrophilic ending of Hugo’s novel. In short, Fitzball sanitized the plot of *Notre-Dame* in popular visual culture long before Disney in 1997, Dieterle in 1939, Foucher in 1850, or even Hugo himself in 1836. The changes to the story introduced by Fitzball in England were well received by some enthusiastic theatergoers and panned by bibliophiles who expected to see a faithful adaptation of Hugo’s novel. For example, a *Times* reviewer for the Surrey production who strangely believes that the plot of Fitzball’s adaptation “in most parts . . . closely follows” Hugo’s novel, reports that “the piece was received throughout with loud and deserved applause.” On the other hand, a reviewer responding to the same drama at the Adelphi in November concludes that “the piece . . . passed over coldly,” after bashing the adaptation for butchering Hugo’s novel.⁶ However, the second reviewer’s disapproval of

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⁶ For the positive review of the April 1834 performance at the Surrey, see “Surrey Theater,” *The Times*, April 17, 1834: 5; For the review of the November 1834 performance at the Adelphi, see “Adelphi
Fitzball’s changes was not likely shared by a majority of theatergoers, and the dramatist replicated his success two years later.

Fitzball’s *Esmeralda* was successful enough to prompt the writer to pen a second adaptation. *Quasimodo; or, The Gipsey Girl of Notre Dame*, which premiered at Covent-Garden on February 2, 1836. This piece was a heavily-revised, slightly less spectacular adaptation, but one that nevertheless kept similar points of departure from the novel intact. Once again, Esmeralda is saved from the gallows, this time by Quasimodo who rushes in at the nick of time, stopping the executioner, and producing a pardon for her life. As Quasimodo expires from a fatal wound from the hand of the now-dead Frollo, Phoebus rushes in, Esmeralda is reunited with her birth mother Gudule, and the curtain closes on a happy picture. Like its 1834 predecessor, the final scene of the play replaces the tragic ending of Hugo’s novel with an image of domestic bliss and social justice that has no place in the Hugo prose canon. Nevertheless, it has since become the standard ending to the story in popular culture, repeated in most major stage and cinematic adaptations since.7

A third notable nineteenth-century adaptation of Hugo’s novel is Andrew Halliday’s *Notre-Dame; or, The Gypsey Girl of Paris*, which debuted in 1871 at the Adelphi. Halliday’s adaptation, by far the closest adaptation of Hugo’s novel produced in the nineteenth century, also rewrites the ending to Fitzball’s of the novel this time so that both Quasimodo and Esmeralda survive, the latter reunited with her lover and birth mother and pardoned by the king, an almost identical ending save for Quasimodo’s survival. The thirty-five years that divided Fitzball’s adaptations from Halliday’s were

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7 A notable exception is the 1956 film starring Anthony Quinn as Quasimodo and Gina Lollobrigida as Esmeralda.
filled with popular, theatrical versions of Hugo’s novel in the form of operas, ballets, and even parodies, most of which follow the same formula used by Fitzball in 1834.⁸ Often reviewers acknowledge the differences between these dramatic versions and Hugo’s novel, but they are nevertheless positive in their evaluations of the adaptations as theatrical pieces. For example, a review of the 1844 ballet *La Esmeralda* staged at Her Majesty’s Theater in March reads:

Never did we see those parts of a long story that might be dramatically effective selected and arranged with such skill as in this new ballet. The catastrophe of the novel is altered, the incidents selected are greatly modified, but that tact with which five tableaux have been taken out of the romance, and combined into a neat pantomime of action, without a gap, deserves unqualified praise.⁹

Although the changes to the novel were often received negatively by viewers more faithful to Hugo’s novel, the overwhelming response to the theatrical adaptations was generally positive. Existing dramas were revived at new theaters, and new plays and even parodies were written that drew crowds to the theaters. Some adaptations were clearly meant to be taken more seriously than others, but others introduced new sensational gimmicks meant to keep the theater full, such as the parody by Tom Taylor and Albert Smith staged at the Adelphi in the 1850s which included a lottery in the festival scene where audience members won prizes.¹⁰

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⁸ For example, a parody “Esmeralda, or the sensation goat!” by H. J. Byron appeared in 1861. For a review of the parody see “Strand Theatre,” *The Times*, October 3, 1861: 10.

⁹ “Her Majesty’s Theatre,” *The Times*, March 11, 1844: 5.

¹⁰ The same reviewer recalls this gimmick in his review of H. J. Byron’s 1861 parody.
With their gimmicks, changes, and sensational scenes, the English adaptations by Fitzball and Halliday in the nineteenth century are the original sources for the American films of the twentieth century. Among the changes made by Fitzball are the following two definitive departures between the novel and the vast majority of its adaptations: first, the simplification of all of the novel’s characters into the simple, “stock” characters of popular melodramas; and second, the decision to save Esmeralda from execution, a major change to the plot laid out by Hugo in his lengthy novel. What we see from these early adaptations staged in London is the transformation of Hugo’s tragic, and sometimes morally ambiguous, novel into a domestic melodrama with a happy ending. In the Fitzball and Halliday adaptations, Frollo is a purely villainous, lustful priest with no redeeming qualities; Quasimodo is nice and perhaps even charismatic at times, a severe alteration from the novel; Phoebus, the lustful, opportunistic Captain of the Royal Guard in Hugo’s text, is transformed into a courageous, heroic love interest for Esmeralda; Esmeralda is saved from the gallows by her lover, newly found mother, and the disfigured bell-ringer of Notre-Dame. Alone, these changes might seem minor, but together they present a conservative, conventional ending that strips Hugo’s novel of its social and political critiques.

However, more positively, they are also responsible for keeping Hugo’s Notre-Dame alive in popular culture. Happy endings were proven audience pleasers, and audiences expected to see them. The economic motivations behind repeating proven changes made by the earliest adapters should not be underestimated. Domestic melodrama was by far the most popular theatrical form of the mid-nineteenth century. Adapters and theater managers were well aware of this and, as this study as a whole
shows, were more than willing to alter novels when adapting novels for the stage if that was what would bring in the most patrons. Like the novel’s screen successors playing to the demands of the twentieth-century culture industry, the first English stage adaptations rewrote Hugo’s political romance into a domestic drama, the most popular form of the day.

**Stoek Timeless Characters**

The Cathedral of Notre-Dame is the centerpiece of Hugo’s novel. Some scholars have even suggested that the cathedral is the central *character* of the novel, humanizing the building. However, the story is known for its human characters. Quasimodo, Esmeralda, Claude Frollo—these are the central characters of the adaptations that have kept Hugo’s novel alive in popular culture for almost two centuries. These are the characters that helped Hugo make a popular name for himself in England in the 1830s. However, for many London theatergoers, the characters that they came to know on stage were not those who inhabit Hugo’s novel. As a disheartened reviewer laments in 1834 after a production of Fitzball’s *Esmeralda* at the Adelphi:

There is scarcely, in truth, the least relation between the plot of the drama and that of the romance. The few incidents which might have been common to both the playwright has so ingeniously warped as to render them completely his own, and all the peculiarities which the leading characters of Victor Hugo severally possess he has successfully covered with the melodramatic mantle. . . . [Claude Frollo and Quasimodo] these grand creations, we say, these characters so profoundly original, have been
generalized into a lewd monk and a tenderhearted hunchback; and

Esmeralda, their destiny . . . is converted into a mere Gipsy dancing-girl.\textsuperscript{11}

The reviewer scarcely recognizes the characters he has come to the theater to see. The 1834 production indeed simplifies the characters to fit melodramatic conventions. Although some aspects of their character are retained, these are merely superficial. Claude Frollo is no longer shown to have a tender side for Quasimodo as he does in Hugo’s novel. Quasimodo’s mostly misanthropic attitude, the result of decades of maltreatment and ridicule, disappears on stage as well. Esmeralda, the true central character of the novel, is completely stripped of a personality. Her irrational love for Phoebus (a point Hugo repeatedly drives home in the novel) is presented as genuine and requited in the English stage adaptations. This is essentially the Disney version of events, in 1834.

Although the over-simplification of the characters and plot of a long novel such as Notre-Dame might be expected in a melodramatic adaptation, Fitzball stuck fairly close to this style two years later when he wrote the more serious adaptation Quasimodo for presentation at Covent-Garden. Once again, a reviewer familiar with Hugo’s novel is surprised at the material staged:

[The drama] is founded on Victor Hugo’s celebrated work, The Hunchback of Notre Dame, but presents, as may readily be supposed, but a feeble shadow of that heart-stirring production. Indeed, he who could condense the interesting scenes which are contained in Victor Hugo’s volumes, and bring them forward prominently in a dramatic form, must possess powers infinitely beyond those which have fallen to the lot of Mr.

\textsuperscript{11} “Adelphi Theatre,” The Times, November 19, 1834: 3.
Fitzball, the concoctor of the new piece. He has preserved the names of the principle characters, and a few of the main incidents; but the spirit of the former has been suffered to evaporate, and the latter have not been wrought out either with skill or spirit. Mr. Fitzball was evidently unable to grapple effectively with the abundance of materials which were placed at his disposal; and instead of availing himself of them to the most ample extent, he frequently fell back upon his own resources, which are of a very meager description.\footnote{12}{"Covent-Garden Theatre," \textit{The Times}, February 3, 1836: 5.}

This certainly sounds like strike-two for Fitzball—at least as far as capturing the “spirit” of Hugo’s novel. However, despite disliking the changes seen, the same reviewer admits the piece was “extremely successful,” evidently owing “its success, not to its merits as a drama, but to the excellence of the music, and the goodness of much of the singing and acting, the beauty of the scenery, and the general propriety which distinguished the manner in which it has been brought out.”\footnote{13}{Ibid.}

The reviewer is not pleased with the piece as an adaptation of Hugo’s novel, but admits it is nevertheless a good piece of theatrical entertainment.

A reviewer less invested in the specifics of Hugo’s novel had better things to say about Fitzball’s talents in 1834, writing “from the manner in which [\textit{Esmeralda}] has been written, got up, and acted, it bids fair to outstrip the popularity of most of the very popular pieces which have recently appeared at that side of the water.”\footnote{14}{“Surrey Theater,” \textit{The Times}, April 17, 1834: 5.} On seeing Esmeralda reunited with her birth mother Gudule, the same reviewer writes, “Few scenes in modern dramas have been so affectingly wrought.” Reviews of these adaptations were
certainly mixed, but overall positive enough to continue staging the pieces and bringing them to new audiences.

New adaptations were brought out in different theatrical genres, usually bringing the same sorts of criticism and praise. A review for an 1844 ballet choreographed by Jules Perrot titled *La Esmeralda* is almost identical to the reviews of Fitzball’s adaptations: “The catastrophe of the novel is altered, the incidents selected are greatly modified, but the tact with which five *tableaux* have been taken out of the romance, and combined into a neat pantomime of action . . . deserves unqualified praise.”\(^{15}\) By the time Halliday adapted *Notre-Dame* for production in 1871, the basic formula for the story on the stage was well-established. Halliday’s adaptation fleshes out the drama, expanding the roles of some supporting characters sometimes ignored or overlooked in other adaptations. However, the major plot changes introduced by Fitzball remain relatively intact.

What motivated the changes made by Fitzball in 1834 and repeated later in the century? Certainly, he was not out to butcher a novel already beloved by some. His decisions were most likely the result of years of experience writing for a specific arena of cultural production. Over the course of his thirty-five-year career, Fitzball produced no less than 170 dramatic pieces, most of them melodramas. His plays were performed at most of the major London theaters during this time.\(^{16}\) Although Halliday was not as prolific a writer as Fitzball, his repertoire of writings for the stage included adaptations of

\(^{15}\) “Her Majesty’s Theatre,” *The Times*, March 11, 1844: 5.

\(^{16}\) In addition to adapting Hugo’s work, Fitzball also penned the following derivative dramas: *Waverley, or Sixty Years Since* (1824), an adaptation of Sir Walter Scott’s novel; *Thalaba the Destroyer; or, The Burning Sword* (1836), a melodrama inspired by Robert Southey’s epic poem; and *Raymond and Agnes* (1855), a romantic opera based on one of the storylines of Matthew Lewis’s *The Monk*. See Edward Fitzball, *Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author’s Life*, 2 vols. (London: T. C. Newby, 1859).
notable novelists such as Scott and Dickens.\textsuperscript{17} Both writers were expert adapters and well-versed in the mechanics of translating novels from page to stage in order to make a living as dramatists. Both writers also understood that to be a financially successful dramatist, one had to understand the economics behind adaptations, their appeal for theater managers, and their commercial viability. For example, in his two-volume memoir, Fitzball describes being “wearied and worn out” by the pressures of working with the managers at London’s major theaters:

\begin{quote}
\ldots with continued mental exertions, and strong excitements, somewhat disheartened by, if not disgusted with, the selfishness of managers, who were never satisfied with me, unless I brought them a fortune, instead of a drama, because I had the fortune, or misfortune to have achieved such a purpose, in one or more instances, for others, I fancied that it was a hardship, on the playwriter, from whose brains emanated all that was good to theaters . . . .\textsuperscript{18}
\end{quote}

Although Fitzball’s comments pertain to the pressures of repeatedly penning successful dramas, his comments suggest that this pressure applied to all theatrical pieces, both original dramas and those adapted from other sources. I provide this example to show that the motives behind the choices made when adapting novels for the stage were often tied to financial considerations, and not wholly motivated by maintaining faithfulness to

\textsuperscript{17} According to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, “He also was the writer of a series of dramas adapted from the works of well-known authors, such as Little Em’ly (Olympic Theatre, 9 October 1869); Nell (Olympic Theatre, 19 November 1870); Notre Dame (Adelphi Theatre, 10 April 1871); Rebecca (Drury Lane, 23 September 1871); The Lady of the Lake (Drury Lane, 21 September 1872); and Heart’s Delight, founded on Dickens’s Dombey and Son (Globe Theatre, 17 December 1873). He possessed a remarkable talent for bringing out the salient points of a novel, and his adaptations were successful where others failed; Dickens warmly praised the construction of Little Em’ly.”

\textsuperscript{18} Edward Fitzball, Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author’s Life (London: Newby, 1859), 2:1
the novels chosen for stage representation, an assumption that often permeates much scholarship on the novel in adaptation.

In adapting *Notre-Dame* for the stage, Halliday weathered the reviews from Hugo fans better than Fitzball (although the latter was more commercially successful overall). Halliday’s efforts were rewarded nonetheless with favorable reviews as to his ability to adequately adapt Hugo’s novel for the stage. Again, *The Times* offers the following favorable commentary:

Mr. Halliday embodies in his drama the entire substance of the novel, with the exception of those portions in which Louis XI is the leading personage, but he does not slavishly follow M. Hugo, and his work does not bear the least resemblance to those dramatized romances in which the merely external form of narrative is suppressed, without regard to internal structure.\(^\text{19}\)

This review is overwhelmingly positive given the reviewer’s general claims about the inferiority of most theatrical adaptations in general.

While briefly sketching the course of incidents in Mr. Halliday’s new drama we have assumed in our readers a reminiscence more or less distinct of M. Hugo’s novel, our intention being to show the work actually done by the adaptor. The remark is too commonly made that anybody with the aid of scissors and paste can convert a long novel into a play, and that the performance of such a feat does not in the least entitle the performer to be called a dramatist. Several dramatized novels, the result of little more than mechanical abbreviation, have done much to justify this

\(^{19}\) *The Times*, April 11, 1871: 9.
remark, but it by no means admits of universal application. That it does not apply to [Halliday’s] *Notre-Dame* we have sufficiently proved.\(^{20}\)

Halliday’s adaptation pleased fans of the novel for its attention to detail. Whereas Fitzball’s two earlier adaptations significantly simplified the characters and situations of Hugo’s novel, Halliday’s follows Hugo more closely, expanding the roles of most of Hugo’s supporting characters including Gringoire, Clopin, Jehan Frollo, the priest’s vagabond younger brother, as well as Phoebus’ rich fiancée. However, notably absent from this list (but not unnoticed by the nineteenth-century reviewer) is Louis XI, the only *actual* historical personage in Hugo’s novel.\(^{21}\) The late-fifteenth-century monarch is a leading character in later sections of the novel, specifically once Gringoire and Clopin rally Paris’s vagabonds to rise against the bailiffs and storm the cathedral in order to save Esmeralda from the gallows. In Hugo’s novel, Louis XI waits out the storming of the cathedral in the safety of the Bastille in a scene no doubt filled with irony for nineteenth-century readers. This pseudo-historical yet heavily-political moment in the novel is always downplayed in adaptation and usually omitted in its entirety. In this regard, Halliday avoids “slavishly” following Hugo’s politically-charged scene and, if the reviewer’s opinion may be taken as a representative example, the scene does not appear to have been greatly missed by English audiences attending the adaptation in 1871.

Nor would it have been expected. One of the most striking features of nineteenth-century melodramas was their repetition of standard formulas in characterization and plot. There was not much room for deviation from the formula; therefore, the exclusion of extensive historical materials and extraneous characters would not have come as a

\(^{20}\) Ibid.

surprise to viewers already acquainted with Hugo’s novel. In fact, the *Times* review of Halliday’s production praises the play for the omission of the novel’s only actual historical character.

Similar omissions and changes were expected in other theatrical forms as well. As the *Times* reviewer of the 1844 ballet by Perrot explains:

Victor Hugo’s great work, as massive and architectural in its structure as in its subject, presented M. Perrot with a mass of materials, from which he has selected what exactly suited him, and discarded the rest at once. At the same time, he has managed to preserve all the character of the personages who figure in the romance, with the single exception of Phoebus, whose original peculiarities could not have been represented in a ballet.22

According to the reviewer, the changes made to Phoebus in the performance are not only desirable, but also expected given the generic conventions of ballet. The “peculiarities” of his character in the novel—no doubt the fact that he is nothing more than a philanderer—are, at least according to this review, not part what theatergoers attending the ballet would expect. Perhaps even more striking, however, is the fact that the reviewer believes that these “peculiarities” simply could not be represented in this genre, a rather curious claim. Whatever this reviewer might see as the limitations of ballet, Phoebus’s “peculiarities” are for the most part absent in every single dramatization of the novel, regardless of genre. The nineteenth-century (and twentieth) adaptations usually rewrite Phoebus as a man of honor, transforming him into a heroic love interest worthy of Esmeralda’s affection. For example, Halliday’s adaptation, like the earlier ones by

22 *The Times*, March 11, 1844: 5.
Fitzball and Perrot, ends with Phoebus bearing a pardon for Esmeralda and the couple’s happy reunion. This is another major departure from the novel that did not bother some reviewers. As previously mentioned, the Phoebus of Hugo’s novel is nothing more than an opportunist, enchanted by Esmeralda’s beauty but engaged to a rich debutante with whom he shares an overall distaste for the lower classes. That is the Phoebus that readers of Hugo’s novel encounter. On the nineteenth-century stage, however, Phoebus is reconfigured by Fitzball, Hugo, Perrot, Foucher, Halliday, and others as a courageous captain who truly loves Esmeralda and who (usually) rescues her at the end of the dramatized story. Together, the changes made to his character (as well as others) abide by the stock characters and standard plots expected in popular dramas, always concluding on a happy note.

**Happily Ever After; or, Saving Esmeralda**

When Disney announced that *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* would be the newest addition to its library of animated classics in the 1990s, there was little doubt that they would turn Hugo’s novel into a sappy story complete with a standard storybook ending. Happily-ever-after endings are, after all, the company’s forte and Disney rarely strays far from its standard formula, a strategy that has proven to be commercially-successful for the company for decades. The premiere of the film in 1997 proved this to be true. As one might expect, Esmeralda survives at the end of the movie and Phoebus proves to be a picture-perfect man of honor and integrity. They both live happily-ever-after along with their good friend Quasimodo, who finally finds acceptance. This is a far cry from Hugo’s novel; however Disney did not have to go as far back as Hugo’s novel
in order to find inspiration for its fairy tale ending. Most of the twentieth-century films end on a similar, happy note.

There is little reason to believe that Hugo’s novel is the actual primary source for the 1997 cartoon. As Hugo biographer and French scholar Arnaud Laster explains, the Disney film is “much less an adaptation from the Hugo novel than from a cinematic predecessor, the famous American version directed by William Dieterle in 1939.” (See figures 9 and 10.)

Figure 9. Charles Laughton as Quasimodo during his short reign as King of Fools (1939).

Figure 10. Disney’s rendition of the same scene (1996). Quasimodo is again King of Fools, not Pope of Fools as in Hugo’s novel.

Disney took much of its narrative and many visual cues from the 1939 film. William Moritz writes, “Charles Laughton's boyish Quasimodo with his one lumpy eye is clearly the model.” The major point of departure between the Disney and Dieterle films is the decision as to who ends up winning Esmeralda’s heart, with the 1939 film straying from the adaptation canon by strangely pairing the heroine with Gringoire (who in the novel ends up with Esmeralda’s goat Djali instead). Nevertheless, the two films end with a


traditional, happy ending featuring a picture of domestic bliss—a trend popularized by the melodramatic adaptations staged in England during the 1830s.

Despite minor differences among the English and American adaptations of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries such as the one described above, there is one major point of similarity among them all—the plot is always centered around saving Esmeralda and ensuring that she has a stable, domestic future. The novel ends on quite the opposite note with Esmeralda dead and no one happily married. Quasimodo’s “marriage” is to a corpse. Gringoire ends up with the goat and a mediocre career as a composer of tragedies, and, according to Hugo’s unsentimental narrator, “Phoebus de Châteaupers likewise ‘came to a tragic end’: he got married.”25 In order to remain faithful to Hugo’s novel, early adaptors would have had to dramatize the novel according to the generic conventions of tragedy. However, tragedies were not the big money-makers of the day. Melodramas—specifically domestic melodramas—were. As a result, all of the major adaptations of the nineteenth century—even those that were not melodramas—reconfigured Hugo’s novel to fit the generic conventions of the most popular and most commercially-viable form of the times. The adaptations of Hugo’s novel staged in the 1830s solidified a conservative, happily-ever-after ending in Notre-Dame’s adaptation history. In addition to the introduction of a traditional image of the family, the nineteenth-century adaptations also altered the novel’s characters in order to represent soldiers and other “legitimate” forms of authority in a more positive light, while demonizing other “illegitimate” authoritative figures (Catholic monks, for example). Changes made to the plot in the nineteenth-century adaptations turned Hugo’s republican historical romance

25 The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, 463.
into a domestic drama, a trend continued ever since. The nineteenth-century English adaptations literally set the stage for most of the film adaptations that have followed.

As one might expect of melodramas in general, the *Notre-Dame* adaptations of the nineteenth century were highly spectacular productions. Regardless of whether or not theatergoers were familiar with the plot of Hugo’s novel, these were adaptations to be seen nonetheless, sometimes if only for the impressive visual components of the piece. All of the nineteenth-century reviewers of the various dramatizations praise the costuming, scenery, and overall visual effect even when they are less impressed with the changes made to the content of Hugo’s novel. Even Halliday’s production, perhaps the most generally praised nineteenth-century adaptation for its presentation of Hugo’s various sub-plots and supporting characters, was also heavily commercial and sensational. A reviewer of the 1871 Adelphi drama ends his recommendation based on visual and technological criteria: “The public garden in Paris, and the bird’s-eye-view of the French capital by night are excellent specimens of Mr. Lloyd’s talent, and the eastern extremity of the Cathedral, built so as to cover a large portion of the stage, is one of those feats of scenic art by which modern audiences are so frequently surprised.”26 This was an adaptation to see, a dramatization in tune with the expectations of modern theatergoers.

The most memorable image of most dramatizations of the novel is usually the spectacular “Sanctuary!” scene where Quasimodo saves Esmeralda from the gallows and carries her off to the cathedral. The “Sanctuary!” scene is without a doubt the most spectacular moment in the novel. Consequently, it is also the novel’s most consistently adapted moment. Every cinematic version of the novel includes some form of a spectacular rescue scene. Quasimodo’s rescue of the innocent gypsy is repeated in every

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major film adaptation as it had been in most nineteenth-century theatrical versions.

However, instead of a politically-charged moment (as the reader gets in the novel), it is always overpowered by the spectacle of the scene, with each successor attempting to outdo the previous one.27

The spectacular staging of the “Sanctuary!” scene can be traced back to nineteenth-century melodramatic adaptations of Hugo’s novel staged in England.28 Fitzball’s *Esmeralda; or, The Deformed of Notre Dame*, which opened at the Surrey Theatre on April 14, 1834, should be credited as the first popular adaptation in England to make the scene the climactic event of the drama.29 Quasimodo’s descent from the cathedral is replaced by dialogue in Fitzball’s production, but the rescue is sensational nonetheless. As the executioner is about to behead the innocent gypsy, Quasimodo bursts onto the scaffold, pushes aside the axe man, frees Esmeralda, and delivers the following pathos-laden speech while wielding the confiscated weapon:

> Forbear this hellish rite! She is innocent and shall not die. Men-at-arms, move one step towards me—the strength of worlds is in this determined hand—this uplifted axe shall strike him dead that follows Esmeralda to the shrine. Comfort, Esmeralda! To the sanctuary—to the sanctuary! ‘Tis

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27 Lon Chaney’s ape-like bell ringer scales the cathedral in a style that can only be described as simian. Charles Laughton needed the assistance of two experienced stunt doubles to execute the extravagant acrobatic rescue. Anthony Quinn’s hunchback drops in to save the day in a less spectacular scene, yet nevertheless performs the obligatory cry of “Sanctuary! Sanctuary!” while holding the helpless gypsy over his head hundreds of feet above the cheering crowd. Disney’s animated Quasimodo performs a Tarzan-like rescue choreographed to Alan Menken’s orchestral, operatic score.

28 I have not been able to obtain a copy of the first adaptations of the novel staged in Paris in 1832. William Fry’s American lyrical drama *Notre-Dame* omits the scene altogether. See William Henry Fry, *Notre-Dame of Paris: A Lyrical Drama in Four Acts: The Subject from Victor Hugo’s Novel of the Same Title* (Philadelphia : King & Baird, 1864).

29 This adaptation was also staged at the Adelphi in 1834. For an advertisement at this theater, see [Advertisements], *The Times*, November 17, 1834: 2.
the refuge of the guilty—shall be of the innocent. The sanctuary! (Act II, Scene iii)\(^{30}\)

Of notable difference from the novel is the threat of physical violence that Quasimodo delivers to the guards. In the novel, Quasimodo’s only dialogue is the repeated call for “Sanctuary!” (he yells it nine times during the rescue). Hugo’s Quasimodo is, after all, deaf, and his character is therefore not known for the long speeches he is sometimes given in adaptations such as this one. In the novel, the narrator’s description and political commentary dominates the scene in the novel. In Fitzball’s melodrama, Quasimodo is afforded much more dialogue, but the sensational dialogue comes at the expense of the narrator’s very careful political analysis in the novel. The result is a scene that is stripped of the novel’s radical critiques of royal and judicial corruption, and instead infused with the standard, pathos-laden conventions of melodrama. The hyper-sentimentalism of the theatrical version as a whole focuses on virtue, innocence, romantic love, and familial relationships—the bread and butter of domestic melodrama.

The final scene of the melodrama, which once again is about saving Esmeralda, is perhaps even more sensational. Locked in a tomb inside of the cathedral by Frollo, it is up to Quasimodo, Phoebus, and Gudule to rescue Esmeralda from a living tomb. Eventually, Quasimodo reveals the secret to opening the tomb, which is unlocked by pressing the hand of a statue.\(^{31}\) He perishes, but Esmeralda is finally reunited with her lover and mother. At least, this is the finale that Fitzball intended. It was most likely staged this way in the earliest productions. However, at least one promptbook that bears


\(^{31}\) This is a conventional, gothic plot twist particularly reminiscent of Matthew Gregory Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), which also enjoyed a lengthy life in theatrical adaptation through the mid nineteenth century.
a stamp of 1836 gives a very different ending, omitting the gothic statue scene altogether and replacing it with a much more authority-centered scene and much less dialogue (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. The final scene of Esmeralda promptbook with most of the dialogue removed.

In this promptbook, the final scene is mostly cut and replaced with a quick ending where Phoebus bursts on stage yelling “Pardon! Pardon! The pardon, by the King, to Esmeralda!” In this production, order is restored through a royal pardon, not an act of rebellion. Everyone is relieved and all is well as the curtain closes. The changes to
Fitzball’s first adaptation can hardly be described as improvements to the drama—at least not with regard to the narrative quality of the adaptation. However, the changes made did make for a more visually-impressive spectacle, especially given the instructions for “Red Fire!” before the curtain. Of particular interest in the revised promptbook is the elimination of the gothic plot that Fitzball added to the storyline. One reason for the change could be that gothic melodrama was mostly out of fashion by the 1830s. However, it is clear that the revised ending presents an authority-centered rescue out of tune with Hugo’s political sympathies.

Fitzball’s second adaptation Quasimodo, staged at Covent Garden in 1836, passes over the sanctuary scene; however, the final scene of the adaptation essentially follows the same altered plot. After dispatching Frollo and wresting Esmeralda’s pardon from the monk’s hand as he falls from the cathedral, Quasimodo reaches the scaffold in the nick of time.

Qua. Stay!—Esmeralda, Esmeralda, the monk is dead—dead, he would have given thee the axe—Quasimodo brings thee pardon. [Holds up the pardon, which is taken by the Executioner who hands it to the Verger—as Quasimodo dies, Phoebus emerges from the crowd, and exclaims “Esmeralda!” She seeing him makes a movement of joy, and with a frantic scream falls into his arms—Enter Gudule—a picture is formed as the curtain descends.] (Act III, Scene iv)32

In this version, Quasimodo again saves the day. However, Quasimodo’s rescue loses even more of its original anti-authoritarian flair. He does not snatch Esmeralda from the executioner; instead he arrives bearing an official pardon and hands it to the executioner,

who in turns passes the document up to the next official in the chain of command. The heroine falls into her lover’s arms, her mother appears, and the curtain closes on a picture of domestic stability and civil order.

The sanctuary scene of Halliday’s version varies slightly from the one in Fitzball’s first adaptation as it does not revolve around saving Esmeralda from the gallows (she does not quite make it there), but instead saving her from Frollo as she is allowed to confess to the priest before being put to death for sorcery. The stage directions read as follows:

Quasimodo slides down rope, pushes Frollo aside, takes up Esmeralda, and exits with her by church door. Frollo exits. The door is shut. Uproar, shouts; noise off R. U. corner. Women exeunt.

Enter, R. U. E., Guards, driven back by Vagrants. (Clopin, Jehan, Spicali, Guillame may be prominent among Vagrants.) General fight, in which the Guards are defeated. The Vagrants cheer and attack the church door. Red fire on church roof. Quasimodo, carrying Esmeralda, swooned, on left arm, appears on balcony. He waves two torches. All form picture. (Halliday, Act II, scene iii)

As the scene shows, the rescue scene in Halliday’s production stages civil unrest and even gives the vagrants the upper-hand in this particular fight against the guards. However, by the end of the drama order is once again restored once Quasimodo throws the evil Frollo from the top of the cathedral, and Esmeralda is reunited with Phoebus and

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33 In this adaptation, women watching the procession to the gallows comment on the “red letter on her breast.” Another woman explains, the “S—stands for sorcery. She is a witch.” Here, Halliday is obviously drawing upon Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter* (1850), further evidence of how other popular novels played a role in shaping adaptations.

Gudule, with the assistance of the guards. The stage directions published in the DeWitt edition of Halliday’s adaptation describe a final picture with four guards staggered behind the reunited family.

The three adaptations discussed above demonstrate how adaptations staged throughout the nineteenth century standardized the ending of the story to fit the generic conventions of domestic melodrama and to satisfy audience expectations. The focus was clearly not remaining faithful to Hugo’s novel. The review of Halliday’s production published in *The Times* suggests as much:

> We have omitted to state that the life of Esmeralda is saved by a Royal pardon. Her execution in a drama would be intolerable. Indeed, it always leaves a painful impression on the minds of those who read the novel, and one cannot help regretting that if M. Hugo felt himself bound to kill the fascinating gipsy, he did not use some less repulsive instrument than the gallows . . . . On the stage, as we have said, even behind the scenes the execution of Esmeralda would be an abomination. She is not an historical personage like Joan of Arc, who would lose half her significance if bereft of her crown of martyrdom, but her miserable death is simply the result of a false accusation.\(^{35}\)

In the English adaptations, Esmeralda becomes nothing more than a damsel in distress. She is dutifully rescued by the handsome captain. Her innocence is proven at the end of the play. English theatergoers (but not necessarily literary purists) expected Esmeralda to survive in the adaptations and Fitzball and Halliday delivered accordingly. As both were commercially successful dramatists, both were writing to meet the demands of the

\(^{35}\) *The Times*, April 11, 1871: 9.
nineteenth-century entertainment industry. Instead of the injustices espoused in Hugo’s novel, viewers of the English adaptations were treated to standard conventions of melodrama where, as Peter Brooks explains, “the body of persecuted virtue is at first expressionistically distorted, as in hysterical conversion, then is rewarded, fêted, married, and emblazoned with all the signs of the public recognition of its nature.”

In the English adaptation of *Notre-Dame*, Esmeralda is the body to save, reward, and marry.

Hugo himself did the same, at least to some extent. As several scholars have noted, Hugo’s own 1836 operatic adaptation ends with Esmeralda saved from wrongful execution. So why place so much emphasis on the happily-ever-after ending of the nineteenth-century English dramatizations and their twentieth-century American followers? Because there is a major difference between Hugo’s own dramatization and the other adaptations. Despite the fact that Hugo completely overhauled the novel for theatrical presentation in 1836 in order to satisfy French theater censors and condense its complex subplots in order to stage the drama in the standard timeframe allotted, the “Sanctuary!” scene in *La Esmeralda* maintains its political critiques. Hugo replaces the narrator’s critique with the following chorus from the crowd assembled to witness Esmeralda’s execution:

Quasimodo: Sanctuary! Sanctuary! Sanctuary!

The People: Sanctuary! Sanctuary! Sanctuary!

Rejoice, O People!

Hail to the good bell-ringer!

Oh, destiny!

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The criminal
Belongs to heaven!
The scaffold falls!
The eternal God
Instead of a tomb
Discloses the altar!
Executioners, back!
King’s officers, back!
This barrier
Limits your power. 37 (Act IV, Scene iv)

Hugo’s *La Esmeralda* is much more conservative than his *Notre-Dame* in its religious sentiments, a requirement of the French censors, as well as in other areas. However, as this scene shows, the adaptation penned by Hugo retains the author’s critique of corrupt, sovereign power, a common theme in all of his literary and theatrical productions. Quasimodo’s rescue in Hugo’s dramatization is a much more collective effort. The crowd’s cheers and participation adds a revolutionary undertone to the action. “The eternal God” and the people form a “barrier” to injustice and abused “power.” This more democratic approach is pretty much absent from the nineteenth-century adaptations staged in London. In Paris, the only city where Hugo’s adaptation was performed, *La Esmeralda* was met with political disapproval. However, in London, reviews of the Fitzball and Halliday adaptations do not mention political sympathies at all, unlike Hugo’s adaptation, mostly because, English audiences saw little political influence in the

early adaptations, and those adaptations, on the whole, were much better received than Hugo’s *La Esmeralda*. The previously described scene detailing Quasimodo’s “Sanctuary!” rescue is one reason why. There is no narrator as in the novel, and no defiant crowd as in the case of Hugo’s *Esmeralda* to guide a specific political interpretation of the scene. As a result, Quasimodo’s call for sanctuary is stripped of the loaded political significance that Hugo’s narrator insists the reader understand.

Surely Fitzball, Halliday, and others cannot be held in contempt for meeting the business demands of their profession, since Hugo too was eager to change Esmeralda’s fate in his own 1836 opera. “For Hugo, the narrative was mutable and one suspects that he would have been more fascinated than appalled at the many ways in which his work has been adapted. So, if Hugo altered his own text so freely, why can’t others?” asks Harnick. 38 There is, however, another major difference between Hugo’s own adaptation and the nineteenth-century English dramatizations and their twentieth-century American film descendants. In Hugo’s dramatization Esmeralda does not get a “happy ending” despite having her life spared at the end of the adaptation. Yes, Esmeralda lives; however, Phoebus dies. He reappears at the end of the opera mortally wounded, and saving his last breath in order to save his beloved Esmeralda. This ending is quite different from those of the adaptations penned by Fitzball, those staged later in the nineteenth century, and those of the twentieth-century films. In the nineteenth-century adaptations, Phoebus rushes in at the moment of execution to save Esmeralda; but, his “salvation” is usually accompanied by a pardon for Esmeralda from the King.

In Hugo’s own adaptation the exposure of the truth in and of itself leads to justice for the innocent gypsy. In the English adaptations justice is administered by the

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appropriate authorities. This small change radically alters the critiques of power and corruption that Hugo retains in his adaptation despite allowing Esmeralda to survive at the end of the opera. Thus, even though the outcomes of the nineteenth-century adaptations are similar, the politics of Hugo’s version are decidedly different than those of the English versions staged in the 1830s through the 1870s. The curbing of radical politics in the English adaptations certainly began in England with Fitzball, but its relative uniformity throughout the century and into the next illustrates the workings of a larger entertainment industry—its standards, expectations, and formulas for financial success—and therefore cannot be attributed to any individual dramatist and his respective adaptation of Hugo’s novel. In fact, the erasure of the radical politics found in Hugo’s novel extended beyond the theater industry and into the printing industry as well. It actually began there. In many ways Fitzball, the later English adapters, and their later American adapters were following certain lessons learned from the novel’s popular reception history in England.

Although Fitzball and Halliday and others are guilty of making major changes to the characters, situations, and politics of Hugo’s novel, students and scholars of the adaptation history of *Notre-Dame* should realize that these early dramatic versions of the story were produced with the aim to satisfy the needs of a commercial theater industry that by the 1830s had a well-established set of expectations regarding the staging of undesirable, or unprofitable content. In the case of *Notre-Dame*, unpopular content included both tragic endings and explicit political content. How did these writers know that the actual politics of Hugo’s novel would prove unpopular with a majority of the London public? They took their cues from the novel’s early reception in England. In a
sense, this is where the evolution of Hugo’s political romance into a domestic melodrama began.

**The Politics and Economics of Translation**

Quasimodo is not the title character of Hugo’s novel, despite the title we have come to know. Hugo’s originally titled *Notre-Dame de Paris* was published in 1831. The French author was read in England and was known to have an admirer in Charles Dickens, that other great writer of unforgettable characters. French copies of *Notre-Dame* circulated in England, but readers who did not read French did not have to wait long. The novel was quickly translated into English in 1833. Although Hugo’s novel met with critical praise under its original title, Hugo’s novel failed to draw a popular English readership. That soon changed with the introduction of a second translation retitled *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*. The success of this second translation coupled with the novel’s repeated adaptations for the stage demonstrates how literary and dramatic success depended heavily on a story’s ability to cater to an English taste for spectacle that continued to grow throughout the century. It also serves as evidence that the elimination of political content applied to both popular print and popular plays produced with an eye to satisfy popular trends and opinion.

The first English translation of *Notre-Dame de Paris* appeared in August 1833. This version by the younger William Hazlitt included a “Prefatory Notice, Literary and Political of Hugo’s Romances” that according to Kenneth Ward Hooker made Hugo’s novel appear “violent[ly] anti-Royalist and Republican.” In Hooker’s account, the

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“proselyting Liberal” young Hazlitt introduced Hugo to English readers as an alternative to the novels of the more traditional Sir Walter Scott and championed its author’s Liberalism thus making “a political issue of the novel by praising its author at the expense not only of Scott but of Tories in general.”\footnote{Kenneth Ward Hooker, \textit{The Fortunes of Victor Hugo in England} (New York: Columbia UP, 1938): 32-33.} As one might expect from the period’s politically-charged perceptions of France and only a few years after the July Revolution of 1830, Hazlitt’s politicized translation was met with mixed reviews. The opinions of reviewers depended almost wholly on the publication’s political inclinations. The \textit{Gentleman’s Magazine} criticized both the novel and translators and publishers in general who perpetuated their anti-Royalist politics in the choice of texts they chose to make available; on the other hand, the \textit{Athenaeum} and the \textit{Edinburgh Review} gave the novel favorable reviews that mirrored those publications’ slightly more liberal-leaning sympathies.\footnote{See Hooker for a more thorough description.}

\textit{Notre-Dame’s} shaky English debut soon found strong footing with the appearance of a second translation in October of the same year. This second English version by Frederic Shorbel was published by Richard Bentley under the title it has since become known by in the popular imagination—\textit{The Hunchback of Notre-Dame}. Despite the popular success of the first Bentley edition, not all English readers were happy with the title change. Under the new title, the hunchback figuratively replaced the cathedral as the centerpiece of the novel. Critics of the novel’s new English title such as F. S. Mahoney (“Father Prout”) took issue with the cathedral’s relegation to second-class status. He was in many respects correct in his reading. Reader interpretation was often influenced by the title alteration. By the end of 1833 Hugo’s first novel masterpiece was best known for its
memorable characters, especially Quasimodo. As Olin Moore explains, “After six years of effort to imitate Shakespeare, Hugo scored his first conspicuous success in the *mélange des genres* in the novel *Notre-Dame de Paris*. Unfortunately, the grotesque elements of the story almost completely outweighed, in the mind of the public, the plays on words, the irony, the ‘sudden glory,’ etc., on which the author had worked so hard.”

Regardless of (or perhaps because of) what might easily be seen as a stripping of the novel’s complex political and historical themes, the new title sparked interest in a larger popular readership. Hooker, who on the whole seems happy with de-emphasizing the novel’s possible radical sympathies, explains the reason for the later version’s success under the change:

> It seems to me that [Mahoney] would have done better to congratulate Bentley upon his knowledge of English taste, of which this change of title is indeed characteristic. For the antiquaries were outnumbered perhaps a hundred to one by the readers who were just looking for a good story: and these latter were certain to concentrate their attention on the human (or monstrous) characters anyway. Shorbel’s version had no political significance, and in his preface, instead of a Liberal manifesto, he offered parts of the warm recommendation from the *Edinburgh Review*, which . . . afforded the best advertisement the novel could have.44

According to Hooker, the “antiquaries” interested in Hugo’s architectural expositions and descriptive passages were not enough to catapult the novel to financial success in

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43 Although Hugo had previously published three novels *Han d’Islande* (1823), *Bug-Jargal* (1826), and *Le Dernier jour d’un condamné* (1829), *Notre-Dame de Paris* marked the French author’s major introduction to English readers as a novelist.
44 Hooker, 35.
England. In order to ensure the novel would prove profitable for its publisher, a wider readership needed to be reached. The readers “just looking for a good story” seemed much more interested in the novel once it had been retitled and repackaged to emphasize the most spectacular character of the story.

Hooker’s understanding of popular English taste is right on target, and although he does not give any significant thought to the role that popular theater may have played in the development of this English taste for spectacle, adding this context helps to develop his understanding of the period’s popular tastes. The new title was meant to draw in a popular readership, to cater to the English taste for spectacle that by the 1830s had been proven by the success of *Frankenstein* and its earliest theatrical successors. Bentley would have no doubt profited from *Frankenstein*’s success on the stage as it was the ninth novel published in his six-shilling series of Standard Novels all of which were advertised as a cheap, popular series. For Bentley’s target buyers, *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame* was simply a flashier, more sensational and appealing title.\(^45\) It was an editorial decision that also translated well onto the stage. Once retitled, it took less than eighteen months for Fitzball to use the same strategy in his adaptation. In fact, both of his adaptations are titled after the most spectacular characters of the novel, using the cathedral as merely a backdrop to the more sensational elements of the story. Thus, the origins of this trend in adaptations (both of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries) should be attributed to the novel’s early translation history in England.

Although Hooker rightly explains that the decision to change the novel’s title turned out to be a successful marketing strategy for English readers, his repeated

\(^{45}\) For the announcement of the title in the Bentley series, see “Advertisements & Notices,” *The Examiner*, September 8, 1833.
assertion that the text of Hugo’s novel does not lend itself to specific political sympathies is dubious at best. Hugo was an outspoken republican and highly critical of censorship and social injustice, especially with regard to the poor. In addition, *Notre-Dame de Paris* contains a chapter-long aside where the narrator extols the virtues of Gutenberg’s gift to the fifteenth century. “The invention of printing,” explains the nineteenth-century narrator, “is the greatest event of history. It is the Revolution’s mother.” For Hugo’s narrator, the revolution is artistic, political, and religious. He elucidates, “Before printing, reform would have been merely a schism; printing made it a revolution. Without the press, heresy was enervated. Be it fatal or providential, Gutenberg was the forerunner of Luther.” The Catholic Church placed the novel on its Index of Condemned Books in 1834.

Hugo titled his own 1836 operatic adaptation *La Esmeralda* after the novel’s more appropriate central character when French theater censors refused to allow the opera to be performed under the novel’s original title. Religious references were also suppressed in this version. Unfortunately, despite the changes made to satisfy French censors, the collaboration with Louise Bertin was shut down after only a few performances at the Académe Royale de Musique. Albert Halsall attributes the commercial failure of *La Esmeralda* to “Hugo’s political enemies, or the enemies of his friends.” Bertin, his collaborator, was certainly one of those friends who had many political opponents and these were no doubt partly responsible for the failure of the opera. An anonymous *Times* reviewer corroborates Halsall’s conclusion in a November 18, 1836, piece by explaining

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46 *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, 168.
47 Ibid. 167.
49 Halsall, 172.
that after the opening performance in Paris “three or four persons in the pit expressed
disapprobation,” a disapproval that the writer attributes to “opposition…founded on
political motives.”\(^{50}\) The (apparently) English reviewer explains that despite an almost
complete absence of advertisements for the opera, “the curtain drew up to a full house”
on the night of November 14, 1836 at the Académie Royale de Musique. Unfortunately,
“the libretto, the work of Victor Hugo himself, was as meagre an outline as can be
imagined,” a disappointment only further enhanced by poorly performed music and
“scenery, dresses, and decorations [that] deserve[d] no particular notice.” The most
notable moment for the anonymous reviewer is “the scourging of Quasimodo on the
scaffold actually performed (!)” an indication that Hugo insisted on keeping at least one
more of the most politically-charged moments of the story intact regardless of the
negative reactions that it might receive from disapproving members of the audience who,
according to early biographer Alfred Barbou, “hissed” at the production.\(^{51}\)

Hooker and Halsall could not be more different in their readings of the politics of
Hugo’s novel. The first dismisses the political significance of the novel as an unfortunate
consequence of reader interpretation because “there is no clear political doctrine in Notre
Dame.”\(^{52}\) On the other hand, the second scholar reads the novel and its 1836 theatrical
reception in Paris as the start of a series of political disagreements that would later send
Hugo into exile from 1851 to 1870. The interpretive schism between these two scholars
is representative of the inherent difficulties of simultaneously engaging the thematic and
political concerns of Hugo’s novel. The novel is a multi-layered narrative including

\(^{50}\) “Private Correspondence,” The Times, November 18, 1836: 1.
\(^{51}\) Alfred Barbou, Victor Hugo and His Times, trans. Ellen E. Frewer (London: Sampson Low, Marston,
Searle, & Rivington, 1882): 160.
\(^{52}\) Hooker, 32.
multiple subplots and expositions on history, architecture, and culture.\textsuperscript{53} But there is in fact a clear sense of the narrator’s attitudes toward corruption and authority, be it religious, judicial, or monarchal. For example, the blatant injustice of the justice system is succinctly illustrated in Quasimodo’s punishment in the Place de Grève, the location of all public punishments in \textit{Notre-Dame} that is frequently visited by the innocent. The reader bears witness to several injustices at this location. Quasimodo appears there once; Esmeralda is destined to repeat her trip to the scaffold twice in the latter half of the novel as she is framed for the supposed murder of Phoebus.\textsuperscript{54} During the novel’s multiple trips to this spectacular, disciplinary stage, the narrator’s disgust with sovereign power and its abuses is made clear: “[The] disease produced by fear of the scaffold was the most monstrous of all illnesses because it came not from God but from man.”\textsuperscript{55} In Hugo’s \textit{Notre-Dame}, the scaffold becomes one of many symbols of the corruption that infects medieval Paris. Yet it is also a place where revolution—or at least disobedience—ferments under the surface. When Esmeralda is unjustly sentenced to death for the murder of Captain Phoebus the stage is set for one of the most spectacular acts of judicial disobedience in the nineteenth-century novel. Unable to see his beloved die for a crime she did not commit, Quasimodo descends the façade of the cathedral and saves Esmeralda from the executioners calling for the sanctuary of the cathedral. The

\textsuperscript{53} Victor Brombert also opens his chapter on the novel by addressing its thematic complexities, “There are subjects enough for several novels packed into \textit{Notre-Dame de Paris}.” Victor Brombert, \textit{Victor Hugo and the Visionary Novel} (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1984): 49. Kathryn Wildgen expresses similar difficulty: “\textit{Notre-Dame de Paris} is a puzzling and unsatisfactory novel at first reading. The worlds of reality and melodrama seem to be systematically juxtaposed throughout the work. It would be difficult to answer the question “What is the book about?” because it is about so many things and the plot is genuinely intricate.” Kathryn E. Wildgen, “Romance and Myth in \textit{Notre-Dame de Paris},” \textit{French Review} 49, no. 3 (1976): 319.

\textsuperscript{54} See Olin H. Moore, “How Victor Hugo Created the Characters of \textit{Notre-Dame de Paris},” \textit{PMLA} 57, no. 1 (1942): 255-74. For Moore, the critique of judicial systems is further underscored in the character of Quasimodo, who he has argued is at least partially based on Hugo’s earlier novel \textit{Le dernier jour d’un condamné} (1829).

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{The Hunchback of Notre-Dame}, 54.
rescue, enacted by Quasimodo “with the speed of lightning,” sends the crowd into an uproar. This is Quasimodo’s famous heroic moment and the narrator is very careful to couch this heroism as an act of rebellion. “[Quasimodo] stared down the human justice from which he had snatched its victim, those judges, those executioners, all that force of the King’s, which he, the meanest of the mean, had foiled with the force of God!” In this moment of rebellion against the rule of law and the authority of the monarch, the narrator notes, “Quasimodo was really beautiful.” So much for a reading that attaches no political significance to the novel.

Victor Who? or, Quasimodo Superstar!

When Disney added The Hunchback of Notre Dame to its library of animated classics in 1996, scholars were quick—and in many ways correct—to dismiss the adaptation as just another example of the Disneyfication of literary culture. Hugo’s great-great grandchildren were not so dismissive. They wrote two open letters to the media decrying the adaptation, most angered by the fact that Disney did not place Hugo’s name on posters advertising the film. Their take on the film is best summed in their own words—“vulgar commercialization by unscrupulous salesmen.” Michael Williams, a writer for Variety magazine, saw less of a problem with Disney’s decision. He writes,

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56 The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, 323-24.
58 Disney did not even include Hugo’s name on their movie posters, much to the anger of Hugo’s living descendants. For further details see Michael Williams, “Disney’s ‘Hunchback’ irks Hugo’s progeny,” Variety, March 12, 1997, http://www.variety.com/vstory/VR1117342764.html?categoryid=38&cs=1. Williams’s report is based on an open letter to the Liberation newspaper written by four of Hugo’s great-great-grandchildren. Perhaps Disney thought that naming two of the film’s animated gargoyles Victor and Hugo would be enough homage for Hugo’s descendants?
“Exactly what Victor Hugo would have made of the pic is a matter for conjecture. No shrinking violet when it came to putting his name about, he might have appreciated the fact that the toon version of his classic has prompted a resurgence of sales of his writings.”59 Whatever might be said of Disney’s decision to downplay Hugo’s name in their animated adaptation, it was a smart marketing decision based on the company’s consumer base. Victor Hugo does not draw five-year-olds to theaters; Quasimodo does.

Quasimodo also draws in older consumers—those actually reading the novel. For anyone picking up Hugo’s Notre-Dame for the first time, Quasimodo always serves as an introductory guide. His status in contemporary popular culture has become so great that there is virtually no chance that first-time readers have not encountered him in some form before picking up Hugo’s novel. This is a result of repeated adaptations and appropriations. Like many of the most famous nineteenth-century fictional characters, Quasimodo has been elevated to iconic status through adaptations of Hugo’s novel. Quasimodo has been reworked so many times on movie screens that editors of new editions of the novel cannot help but engage the novel’s cinematic history. Consider the following opening remarks to the 2002 Modern Library Classics edition of The Hunchback of Notre Dame by Elizabeth McCraken:

For a moment, let us forget Quasimodo.

You know him already, of course. He is one of the most famous fictional characters of all time, a creation so indelibly described that—even if you have never seen an illustration, on paper or canvas or celluloid—you would recognize him walking down the street . . . . The bell ringer of Notre-Dame requires no introduction at all.

59 Ibid.
we often know just enough about great novels to dissuade us from reading them. In the case of *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, I blame Quasimodo. Not the one who lives between the covers of the book but the one who haunts the world at large, the sweet Beast who falls in love with the unattainable Beauty, that whiff of melodrama about him, the human heart awoken by love. Actors want to play him in movies and musicals. They’ve made him into a goddamn Disney character, in a cartoon whose moral is that good triumphs, evil fails, and people will accept you for your essential niceness even if your face is, well, a little lopsided.60

Quasimodo, only one among a handful of key characters in Hugo’s historical romance, including Claude Frollo, Esmeralda, Phoebus, and Gringoire, now overshadows all of them. McCraken blames Quasimodo for overshadowing Hugo’s novel; however, she would be more correct to blame the full adaptation history of the novel because the changes that she points out, including the focus on the hunchback, have been consistently repeated for almost two centuries. Quasimodo has been repeatedly brought to life in feature-length productions by Lon Chaney in 1923, Charles Laughton in 1939, Anthony Quinn in 1956, and an already-established Anthony Hopkins in 1982. Many of these memorable movies are notable for their respective actors’ legendary performances of Quasimodo—not for their textual faithfulness to Hugo’s novel.

Unlike the novel, which McCraken describes as “merciless,” Disney’s animated film reconfigures all of the characters and incidents of plot to reconstruct the story into a moral tale that fits the company’s socially conservative vision of gender, race, class, and

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60 *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, xi-xii.
authority that is packaged under the guise of innocent, utopian fantasies. The animated film is pure Disney. The morally decrepit and purely villainous Frollo is cast as a crooked judge (not a religious man) and a new, benevolent Archdeacon is introduced as the cathedral’s human face. The conclusion of Hugo’s story is changed to allow Esmeralda and Phoebus a traditional, happily-ever-after ending. Quasimodo is a good-natured, devoted friend to Esmeralda, who is the object of his affection, but this relationship is not presented as erotic. Over-the-top musical numbers are performed by the human characters along with non-human sidekicks; Esmeralda is the embodiment of female virtue and democratic justice (albeit a sexy, stripper-like, embodiment of justice); Phoebus epitomizes masculine heroism; Quasimodo emerges as a kind-hearted, but misunderstood outcast who throughout the course of the film finds acceptance among the people he has always longed to join. All of the ingredients of the classic Disney recipe are added, brought to a boil, covered, and simmered for 87 minutes. This is the classic Disney formula. It could not be more different than Hugo’s novel.

But Disney does not hold up as an effective straw man in the case of The Hunchback of Notre Dame. When compared to the novel, most of the “faults” contained in the animated movie can also be found in the story’s full adaptation history, one that goes back nearly 170 years. Disney refuses to portray religious men as corrupt? Well, so does the 1923 silent film and its 1939 follow-up. Disney does audiences a great disservice to Hugo’s novel by giving Esmeralda a happy, heterosexual, traditional

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61 Disney’s modus operandi has been explored in the following books: Henry A. Giroux, The Mouse that Roared: Disney and the End of Innocence (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 1999); and Elizabeth Bell, Lynda Haas, Laura Sells, eds., From Mouse to Mermaid: The Politics of Film, Gender, and Culture (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1995).

62 For a close analysis of Disney’s adaptation, see Kellie Bean’s “Stripping Beauty: Disney’s ‘Feminist Seduction,’” in The Emperor’s Old Groove: Decolonizing Disney’s Magic Kingdom, ed. Brenda Ayres and Susan Hines (New York: Peter Lang, 2003): 53-64.
ending? Esmeralda and Phoebus are also united at the end of the 1923 silent film; the 1939 film laughably pairs Esmeralda with Gringoire. If Disney can be blamed for anything regarding the animated film that might cause literary scholars disgust, it is potluck plagiarism. The cartoon production is nothing more than a stew of previous adaptations with a few new, added spices. However, the films mentioned above are, as this chapter has demonstrated, not the originators of the happily-ever-after ending in *Notre-Dame*’s popular history. The adaptations of the 1830s began the “Disneyfication” of Quasimodo two centuries before the mega-corporation crammed Hugo’s massive novel into its narrow, commercial, animated mold. Just as in the case with Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, the changes made to Hugo’s *Notre-Dame* in adaptation should be credited to the nineteenth-century adaptors that altered the story for ages to come.

McCranken blames Quasimodo and his various incarnations in popular culture for overshadowing Hugo’s historical novel; however, the venue where her defense of the novel appears is also guilty of the same commercialization. Although she repeated refers to the novel by its French title as opposed to the English title “which Hugo hated,” the 2002 Modern Library Paperback Edition is titled *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, not *Notre-Dame de Paris, 1482*. Throughout her introduction, McCranken refers to the English title when referring to the popular history of the story, but not Hugo’s “great work of literature,” which is usually referred to by its historical title. Unfortunately, her attempt to rescue the novel from Quasimodo’s celebrity is thwarted by the publishing house’s investment in yet another mass paperback edition of Hugo’s novel. It would be bad business practice to publish a popular edition of Hugo’s novel under its original title. The publishing company must make a return on its investment and its ultimate goal is to

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sell as many $11.95 paperbacks as possible. Of course, this mass market strategy does not apply to all recent editions of the novel. A 2008 edition of the novel published by Dodo Press utilizes Hugo’s original title. However, it is safe to say that the later edition, priced at $35, will not move nearly as many copies as the less expensive paperback titled after the novel’s most popular character. This is the model of today’s culture industry, one that has been inherited from the culture industry of the past.
CHAPTER FIVE

Keeping it Real: Uncle Tom “Mania” and the Marketing of Authenticity

Like *Frankenstein* for Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley and *Notre-Dame* for Victor Marie Hugo, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* catapulted Harriet Beecher Stowe to international fame. Stowe’s novel broke all previous publication records both at home and abroad; the author received unprecedented royalties from her American publishers. The novel was an international hit from the instant it hit the scene in its entirety in March of 1852. Within two months of its full publication in America, at least six English publishers took advantage of the absence of an international copyright and over the next three years pirated an estimated one and a half million copies of the novel in England alone.\(^1\) These editions were aimed at all possible audiences and priced accordingly.\(^2\) Overall, the novel’s first-year sales were likely higher in England than in America, with an estimated half a million copies sold in the former compared with three hundred thousand in the latter.\(^3\)

English editions outnumbered American ones as did theatrical adaptations of Stowe’s novel. In autumn 1852, at least eleven distinct stage adaptations were competing for the attention of London theater audiences.\(^4\) Edward Fitzball (whose two adaptations


\(^2\) Bookseller Richard T. Cussons announced the receipt of five new popular works at his store, four of them editions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with the least expensive edition priced at 1s., an illustrated edition offered at 2s. 6d., another illustrated edition with a preface by the Reverend James Sherman at a slightly higher 3s. 6d., and finally a luxurious Library Illustrated Edition with cloth cover and gilt edges for about twice as much, 7s. 6d. See [Advertisements and Notices], *The Hull Packet and East Riding Times*, October 8, 1852: 1. Prices for some editions sold in London were much higher, up to 20 shillings.

\(^3\) These figures represent sales of the complete novel. In the United States, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was serialized in forty installments for the *National Era* beginning in March 1851.

of *Notre-Dame* in the 1830s were discussed in chapter four) provides the following glimpse into the Uncle Tom Mania that swept the London theaters in his memoir *Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author’s Life* (1859):

The publication of "Uncle Tom’s Cabin," the deservedly popular production of Mrs. Stowe, set all the managers mad to produce it on the stage. Every theatre nearly produced its version. I don't know whose was the best. I was engaged by three managers to write three distinct pieces, which I did to the best of my abilities: indeed, it did not require any remarkable ability, as it was only to select scenes and join them together.  

The first of Fitzball’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* adaptations premiered at the Olympic Theatre in September 1852. “‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ has been scissored into a nominal drama at this theatre,” reads a short review published on September 26, 1852, in *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, “‘Uncle Tom,’ like a black fever, will no doubt attack all the playhouses, and little ‘Topsy’—of any size and weight—be thick as blackberries.”  

Uncle Tom “fever” did in fact hit London that year, and not only at the playhouses. Scenes and characters from the novel were repeatedly reproduced on the stage, but they were also quite literally everywhere. *The Spectator* called it “Tom-mania.”  

An array of souvenirs, sequels, statuary, stationery, stockings, and song books

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“Tom-mania” was coined in “The Theatres,” *The Spectator*, December 4, 1852.
that sold for two shillings a piece made up a vast sea of items for sale in England. The array of derivative products available alongside the novel has been well documented by Audrey Fisch who writes, “The only thing that is clear is that nearly everyone in mid-Victorian England was consuming ‘Uncle Tom’ in at least some form.” Uncle Tom’s Cabin was, in the words of Marcus Wood, “a publishing and merchandising phenomenon.”

Existing scholarship provides several reasons that partially explain why “Tom-mania” instantly erupted on both sides of the Atlantic and why it easily took to the nineteenth-century stage in particular. One reason given by Linda Williams is the malleable nature of Stowe’s narrative, one that lends itself to multiple reconfigurations because of its inherent melodramatic qualities. For Williams, Stowe’s novel and, more importantly, the phenomenon that sprung up around it mark the beginning of “a long tradition of black and white racial melodrama” in American popular culture. As Williams explains, the novel that Henry James once famously called “a wonderful, leaping fish,” quickly moved from one medium to the next and was easily adapted to express a range of political sentiments in the years leading up to American abolition and continued to be reproduced decades after the American Civil War. Uncle Tom’s Cabin combined a perfect blend of melodrama and abolitionist politics to represent a crucial moment in American history. In other words, it was the right story at the right time.

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8 Cover art for one song book from the Adelphi Theatre adaptation can be found online, through http://www.peopleplayuk.org.uk/.
The novel’s place in the history of English abolition may also begin to explain its transatlantic popularity. For example, Fisch offers the following political and historically-grounded explanation for the novel’s popularity in England:

With abolition in the colonies accomplished . . . English abolitionists turned, in the 1840s and 1850s, to the task of putting their superior Christianity and philanthropy to work by influencing others to abolish slavery. American slavery was the predominant focus of attention; both the heinousness of American slavery and the ongoing relationship of embattled kinship between the United States and England fueled this focus.¹²

It appears that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was also the right book at the right time in England for a completely different set of reasons. By 1852, England was two decades distanced from full legislative abolition and could therefore boast of the moral superiority of British values (no matter how disingenuous that might appear to anyone acquainted with the history of British imperialism). At times, Uncle Tom merchandise such as stationery was sold by English abolitionists to raise funds for the campaign to abolish slavery in America. After 1852, no fictional characters were more directly associated with the movement to end American slavery than the characters in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

Fisch is also right to argue that a nationalist subtext that upheld English moral superiority was infused into Stowe’s novel and that was very much part of the reason for the novel’s popularity in England.¹³ This was true both of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in print,

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¹² Fisch, 29.
¹³ See Fisch for a closer look at how reviews of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and other periodical literature published in England infused a nationalist message into their interpretations of the novel and its popular adaptations and other commercial appropriations.
performance, and other productions. For example, when Mrs. Mary E. Webb, a biracial woman from Philadelphia traveled to England in August 1856 to give a dramatic reading of *The Christian Slave*, a three-act adaptation penned by Stowe, she evoked the following thoughts in one of the attendees at the performance:

THE great hall of Stafford House was on Monday last the scene of an event which would have caused considerable astonishment to any gentleman of the Southern States of America who might have happened to be present. A large audience was gathered together in that hall—one of the most magnificent in London—to listen to a lady of colour giving dramatic readings. The Duchess of Sutherland had devoted her mansion, for the time, to the service of a Mrs. F. [sic] Webb, and our Southerner would have been confounded and disgusted at the sight of what he would call a “tarnation nigger” being listened to with the most respectful attention by no inconsiderable number of the aristocracy of England.14

The reviewer goes on to give details of Mrs. Webb’s heritage—her mother was “of full African blood,” her “European” father from Spain—and her performance yet barely mentions any specifics related to this dramatic adaptation of Stowe’s novel. However, her national pride is made very clear in this passage. Surely, according to this writer, England should be proud of its inclusiveness and acceptance when compared to its American counterparts in the southern, slaveholding states. The novel was often read in England with such a nationalist message.

The melodramatic qualities of Stowe’s novel were well fitted to the popular English stage as well. Hazel Waters writes, “thematically, the novel had great dramatic potential; the stark black-and-white struggle of good against evil; the humble oppressed against a tyrannical oppressor; the narrative of bravery against all odds, with the ultimate prize of freedom as the goal.” The perfect blend of melodrama and abolitionist sentiment made *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* an easy text to adapt to the stage, especially for professionals like Fitzball who were well versed in the conventions of English popular theater, especially melodrama.

The explanations given by Williams, Fisch, and Waters certainly played crucial roles in fueling the transatlantic Uncle Tom phenomenon; however, whiles all three scholars discuss the commercialism that accompanied Uncle Tom “mania,” neither offers a clear picture of the entertainment industry that produced *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and continued to re-produce it in different media for different audiences for several decades after the novel’s publication. Fisch is right to emphasize the political and moral motivations behind the British fascination with Uncle Tom in its various manifestations. Waters offers a more comprehensive look at the Uncle Tom phenomenon in England; however, because her project differs in scope, the analyses that she gives of the dramatizations staged in London during the 1852-53 theatrical season do not link the Uncle Tom phenomenon to the popular practice of adaptation and its long, profitable tradition in England. Perhaps it is more appropriate to investigate how “Tom-mania” was fueled by an entertainment industry just as (and perhaps more) invested in turning a profit than in putting forth a moral argument for worldwide abolition.

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According to Marcus Wood, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* “constituted perhaps the first, and certainly the most significant nineteenth-century example of the public appropriation of a text in a world where political propaganda could use the resources of commercialized leisure and entertainment industries, and the techniques of consumer mass production. There was no precedent for the sheer volume of fragmentations and adaptations of the text.”¹⁶ For Wood, the explosion of adaptations and fragmentations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* should be taken as an example of how a political movement—abolition specifically—used the technological advances of the entertainment industry to advance a particular political agenda. In short, how abolition was able to adopt the tools of the entertainment industry in order to make its message available to the largest possible audience. This is quite possible. However, even though abolition was definitely being “sold” to English audiences in the merchandizing of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its derivative products, the profits from these sales usually did not go to support abolitionist causes. Instead, they went to the people who were putting on Uncle Tom—the publishers, theater managers, dramatists, actors, painters, and general laborers employed in this task. The popularity of Stowe’s novel put a lot of people to work in England in 1852 and those at the top of these adventures in adaptations profited the most. Perhaps it is best to approach the issue by investigating how the nineteenth-century entertainment industry capitalized on a particular political agenda and an exotic story in order to maximize its own profits, just as it did half a century earlier when abolition of British participation in the slave trade was one of the most debated topics of the day and abolitionist paraphernalia were some of the hottest commodities on the market.

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¹⁶ Wood, 83.
In this chapter I argue that the major force behind “Tom-mania” in England was a well-established commodity market where abolition had proven to be a profitable product for well over half a century. By the mid-nineteenth century, technological advances coupled with an ever-growing middle class set the stage for an explosive market in luxury commodities that extended to all areas of cultural production—to all of the commercial, popular appropriations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* offered for consumption in Victorian England. In order to ensure that Victorians would consume Uncle Tom in some shape or form, a desire had to exist for this particular product or, better yet, around an array of items derived from a single product. Looking at advertisements for both the novel and its many theatrical adaptations, it becomes clear that in addition to offering the “story” of Uncle Tom, Topsy, Eliza and George Harris, what was being offered to English readers, theatergoers, and other customers was not only an abolitionist cause, but more precisely an authentic encounter with slave life in America. The appeal behind this supposed authentic encounter was of course varied. For some, Stowe’s sentimental story of slave life in the southern United States sparked interest for its Christian, abolitionist message. However, “Tom-mania” was not simply fueled by the moral message of Stowe’s novel. For many, to experience Uncle Tom in some shape or other was to participate in the mass consumption of an authentic piece of American culture, further exoticized in the figure of the American slave. This was true of the record-setting novel, its theatrical adaptations, and the many Uncle Tom products that were for sale in 1852 and for many years thereafter. However, what largely fueled Uncle Tom Mania in England in the second half of the nineteenth-century was not a commitment to worldwide abolition, but instead a
commodification of an “American brand” of black culture that was offered for public consumption on a global scale.

**Uncle Tom “Mania” at a Glance**

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was an immediate hit in America, but its instant popularity abroad put the novel in a category of its own. The absence of international copyright invited the mass production of editions, illustrations, adaptations, and other Uncle Tom commodities. Within four months of its full American printing, Stowe’s novel began to appear in English editions. At least five additional publishers brought out their own editions in England soon thereafter, many printing multiple editions priced for different target audiences. For example, in September, the publishers Clarke and Co. offered five different editions of the novel, ranging in price from 6d. to 7s. 6d. The most expensive edition was advertised as “The Gift Book of the Age.” According to an advertisement in the *Morning Chronicle* published on September 11, 1852, the various Clarke editions constituted at least 155,000 copies of the novel in England, not counting copies of the publisher’s wholesale edition that was “intended for the million.” Sampson Low and Son was another London publisher that brought out *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* for multiple audiences at different prices. A luxurious illustrated edition was available from this publisher starting at fifteen shillings with optional upgrades bringing the total price of the book up to twenty shillings. *A Peep into Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, a children’s book based on

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17 [Advertisements and Notices], *The Morning Chronicle*, September 11, 1852. Following the advertisements for the five editions by Clarke and Co. is a warning to other publishers about reprinting the work. This warning was largely ignored.
Stowe’s novel also available from Sampson Low and Son, was intended for the Christmas season. This edition was priced starting at five shillings, “cloth extra.”

Expensive illustrated editions also sold quickly enough to keep publishers interested in Stowe’s novel despite the fact that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was printed in English periodicals at a much lower cost to the reader. It is difficult to estimate the total number of copies printed in England in 1852, but it is safe to say that a copy of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was never hard to come by in London that year. An article appearing in *The Morning Chronicle* on September 16, 1852, gives a clear picture of the proliferation of textual versions:

“Uncle Tom’s Cabin” may not be destined to be the book of the age, but no one can question its claims to be the book of the day. The tale in its score of editions, pirated and legitimate, and selling at all prices, from crowns and half-crowns down to sixpences, is in everybody’s hand, and its merits or demerits in everybody’s mouth. We hear of one edition in the thirty, of another in the fifty, and of a third in the ninety thousandth of its sale. We have illustrated editions, and newspaper printed editions, and editions in parts and numbers, and altogether the circulation is a thing we should think unparalleled in bookselling annals. Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe has suddenly started up from the provincial obscurity of New England to be the great literary notability of the day. Her book has made an equal hit on both sides of the Atlantic; and despite the piracy which

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18 [Advertisements and Notices], *Morning Chronicle*, December 21, 1852: 8.
prevails around us here, we suppose, and we hope, that the lady has at
once achieved a fame and a fortune.\textsuperscript{19}

Stowe did achieve fame and fortune from her novel, but the mass circulation of the novel
and derivative products in England predominantly served the former. While Stowe may
have received record-setting advances and royalties from her American publishers, Jewett
and Company, to the tune of more than ten thousand dollars in four months, she earned
very little on the English editions (when publishers bothered to pay her at all) and
definitely made nothing on pirated editions, theatrical adaptations, and commodities
derived from the novel.\textsuperscript{20} These encompassed a large market in England, including a
sequel to the novel titled \textit{Uncle Tom in England} published the same year; several
theatrical adaptations, an almanack illustrated by George Cruikshank, wallpaper patterns,
ornaments, coffee, china, board games, children’s books, and at least one known card
game were also popular in England in 1852. None of these brought in a penny for Stowe.
Similarly, abolitionist groups saw very little of those profits.

However, a lot of other people capitalized on the sensation that surrounded \textit{Uncle
Tom’s Cabin}. London theaters, for example, were quick to put Uncle Tom on stage. No
fewer than eleven adaptations were produced in the fall of 1852—less than seven months
after the publication of the novel in its entirety in America.\textsuperscript{21} The 1852-53 theatrical
season in London included the following offerings: \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, the Slaves’
Life in America} played at the Standard Theatre; The Royal Marylebone Theatre put on
\textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, Negro Life in America} in early October; the Victoria Theatre

\textsuperscript{19} “Uncle Tom’s Cabin,” \textit{Morning Chronicle}, September 16, 1852.
\textsuperscript{20} Stowe’s earnings were record-breaking and reported in \textit{The New York Times} on July 12, 1852, and in the
\textit{National Anti-Slavery Standard} on July 15, 1852. In England (if publisher’s advertisements are to be
believed), Stowe had a financial interest in the Clarke and Co. editions.
\textsuperscript{21} Birdoff, 144.
offered *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, The Fugitive Slave* within weeks; another adaptation by Fitzball was concurrently playing at the Olympic.\(^{22}\) The Strand offered a three-scene burlesque titled *Uncle Tom’s Crib; or, Negro Life in London* written by William Brough, billed alongside entertainment by an “African troupe.”\(^{23}\) An adaptation by Shepherd and Creswick opened on October 27 at the Surrey Theatre. Sadler’s Wells produced *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a pantomime. Astley's Amphitheatre put on an “equestrian version” of the novel.\(^{24}\) The City of London Theatre followed suit in January 1853, acquiring a trick pony from Astley’s in order to stage its own spectacular adaptation that promised “to be a first class production.”\(^{25}\) The Britannia produced another version later that summer.

More editions of the novel were printed to keep up with the furor for Uncle Tom. On page and stage, Londoners certainly had their pick of Uncle Toms during the 1852-53 theatrical season.

Fitzball, a seasoned veteran of the trade, was simultaneously commissioned to adapt Stowe’s novel by three theater managers. Armed with the proven formula of “select[ing] scenes and join[ing] them together” and what one reviewer calls a “practiced hand,” he quickly produced three adaptations that differed enough to satisfy the managers and patrons at the three venues.\(^{26}\) The first adaptation premiered at the Olympic Theatre.

\(^{22}\) Advertisements for these four adaptations appear side-by-side in [Advertisements and Notices], *The Era*, October 3, 1852: 1; and again on the following Sunday in the same column in *The Era*, October 10, 1852: 1. The four adaptations are also advertised alongside one another in “Public Amusements,” *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper*, October 3, 1852. Another adaptation, *The Slave Hunt; or The Happy Days of Uncle Tom* also appeared at the Victoria later in the season.

\(^{23}\) “Theatres, &c,” *The Era*, October 24, 1852: 10. William Brough was also responsible for penning a burlesque adaptation of *Frankenstein* in 1849. He also wrote another burlesque at the height of Tom-mania loosely based on the same subject titled *Those Dear Blacks!* that was performed at the Lyceum in November 1852. For a discussion of this work see Waters, 166-67.


\(^{26}\) The review where Fitzball is described as having a “practiced hand” can be found in “Theatres, &c.,” *The Era*, September 26, 1852: 10.
on September 19. Another adaptation opened on Sunday, October 24 at the Eagle (also known as the Grecian Saloon). An advertisement in *Reynold’s Newspaper* for this adaptation reads: “First night of UNCLE TOM’S CABIN. Mr. Conquest has made arrangements with that talented play-wright, E. Fitzball, Esq. to put it on the stage in a dramatic form, regardless of cost.”\(^{27}\) Very little contemporaneous commentary exists regarding the quality of Fitzball’s three adaptations and none that does exist can help to paint a precise picture of what the average theatergoer thought of his productions. However, we do know that Fitzball’s adaptations were staged as elaborate and expensive productions “regardless of cost” and that the most spectacular elements of the adaptations made up the primary allure for the casual theater patron. Throughout the year, thousands of theatergoers witnessed some version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on any given night. With three adaptations thriving in the theatrical marketplace, there was a good chance that theatergoers were seeing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as dramatized by the famous “Terrible Fitzball,” who received his nickname for his sensation melodramas.

The best attended of the three adaptations was written for production at Drury Lane. The premiere of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, The Horrors of Slavery* at this theater gives us a glimpse at the frenzy of “Tom-mania.” Fitzball offers the following account of the attendance at his piece at one of London’s largest venues: “The crowd to witness the representation of ‘Uncle Tom's Cabin’ at [Drury Lane] was so immense, that many accidents occurred from the pressure outside. In the theatre not a word was heard, from those who could not obtain seats . . . kicking up the most appalling noises in the galleries.”\(^{28}\) Fitzball is not exaggerating the size of the crowd. His account is supported

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\(^{27}\) [Advertisements and Notices], *Reynolds's Newspaper*, October 24, 1852: 8.

\(^{28}\) Fitzball, 2:261.
by The Times: “The house was full from the pit to the very highest gallery. The pit was
crammed to suffocation; those who abode in the boxes were evidently distressed with the
heat, and how those fared who occupied the topmost seats is very difficult to understand
and very unpleasant to imagine.”29 The crowds at Drury Lane were impressive, excited,
and determined to see Uncle Tom’s Cabin on stage.

So were London theater managers. Fitzball tells the reader that the piece
commissioned for Drury Lane drew large enough crowds to be picked up by the
management of the Queen’s Theatre at the end of Drury Lane’s Christmas season.
Fitzball appreciatively writes as follows:

. . . although he had already played a piece on the same subject, [Mr.
James at the Queen’s] did me the honor to revive mine at his theatre with
the greatest care and attention; and being a first-rate artist, assisted by his
equally talented son, painted some beautiful scenery himself, especially
the Sea of Ice, which contributed immensely to the run of this piece . . . .30

Two things become clear in these two excerpts from Fitzball’s memoirs. First, Uncle
Tom’s Cabin was sure to draw a crowd wherever it was played. Theatergoers flocked to
Drury Lane to see the latest Uncle Tom. The management at the Queen’s Theatre was
apparently eager to produce Fitzball’s adaptation even though they had already staged
another dramatization of the novel. The manager at the Queen’s Theatre was confident
that Fitzball’s piece was sure to draw a crowd and made sure to offer new scenery (read
additional cost) to stage the revival, an effort that proved effective in this case. This was
true of adaptations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin in general, not only those written by Fitzball.

30 Fitzball, 2:261-62.
During its first week, the version staged at the Standard saw a house that “was crowded literally to the roof.” A review of the adaptation staged at the Adelphi ends with the following simple four word sentence: “The house was crowded.”

The second thing that becomes clear from Fitzball’s account is that the principle draw for theatergoers was apparently the spectacle of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, not a desire to see a faithful adaptation of the novel represented as a drama. As Fitzball notes, “not a word was heard” of the adaptation at Drury Lane because of the loud crowd that had assembled there. The theater was packed to capacity by people there to see the latest rage, not to hear a play based on a popular text. Similarly, Fitzball attributes the success of the piece at the Queen’s Theatre to new scenery provided by Mr. James and his son, especially the “Sea of Ice” that provides the background for Eliza’s climactic escape. The dramatist gives no commentary as to the quality of any of the three adaptations he wrote for representation that season, nor those written by competing dramatists. The fact that Uncle Tom could always draw a crowd worked to the advantage of all the writers who were employed to adapt Stowe’s novel for the stage, and Fitzball gives no indication that he felt threatened by the competition. On the whole, Fitzball’s tone indicates little difficulty in writing three distinct pieces. In additional, he does not demonstrate any artistic attachment to them. Adaptation was business as usual, and in 1852 *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was an adaptor’s dream come true.

Like Fitzball, Mark Lemon and Tom Taylor also penned a very successful adaptation of Stowe’s novel that received a lot of interest in 1852. Their version, *Slave Life; or, Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, premiered at the Adelphi in November. The adaptation was

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staged eighty-three times that season with O. Smith playing the humble, eponymous hero of the piece. Despite the piece’s obvious popularity, at least one review questions this particular casting decision. “We doubt not,” writes the reviewer, “that Mr. O. Smith would rather play any one of his customary white villains than this black perfection of mankind.”33 The adaptation by Lemon and Taylor was nevertheless one of the most successful attractions at the Adelphi that season. However, as this review makes clear, like the most successful dramatizations of the day, the adaptation owed its success to its sensational representations of a few spectacular scenes without regard to textual faithfulness to Stowe’s novel:

In bringing forward a series of effective scenes, sometimes without immediate assistance from the novel, the authors have shown great talent. Mr. Shelby’s corn plantation, with the groups of singing and dancing blacks, the cotton plantation of Legree, the escape of Eliza across the frozen Ohio, and the representation of Mrs. Shelby’s boudoir and Eliza’s bedroom in a double scene, are especially well contrived, and by a careful mise en scène become very effective tableaux. The blocks of ice on which Eliza effects her escape are real platforms, which tremble under the feet of the actress, as she springs from one to the other, and Miss Woolgar, when she reaches the far distance, obtains the applause which would be bestowed on an actual feat.34

The reviewer praises the Lemon and Taylor adaptation staged at the Adelphi on three basic elements: (1) the picturesque scenes selected for representation, such as the

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33 Ibid.
34 Ibid.
plantation scene complete with black characters singing and dancing (a required scene for staging *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*); (2) the use of modern stage techniques, such as the double scene (what would be called a “split-screen” in today’s film terms; and (3) the special effects used to stage the sensational climax coupled with Miss Woolgar’s execution of an impressive physical feat. None of these have much to do with the moral content or abolitionist politics of Stowe’s novel, and the reviewer sees no problem with the dramatists’ decision to eschew the “immediate assistance” of the novel whenever the writers felt they could do a better job entertaining the crowd at the Adelphi. The piece was a hit and was even revived at the same theater for the 1874-75 theatrical season, more than twenty years after the onset of “Tom-mania.” Adaptations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* would continue to be produced throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century with new technological innovations and theatrical gimmicks introduced to keep audiences amused for decades after the abolition of slavery in America.

**Buying into Abolition**

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* began as a novel in 1851. By 1852, it had become a brand. Its commercial success reached across industries. The publishing and theater industries found a royalty-free goldmine in Stowe’s novel. Artists, composers, and shopkeepers followed suit. In 1852, Uncle Tom was everywhere. An anonymous American abroad reports of Uncle Tom’s ubiquitous presence in England as follows:

Uncle Tom's Cabin is still selling. It is a marvellous book—a revolutionary book. It is really wonderful how it has influenced not only a

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35 For a contemporaneous review of the revival that also discusses the original production of *Slave Life*, see “Adelphi Theatre,” *The Times*, February 15, 1875: 8.
tender vein in our common nature, but also art, in its various
departments.—Cruikshank is now illustrating it in an admirable manner.
The music shops are full of songs and melodies about and from Uncle
Tom. The great run at the theatres is owing to the representation of "Uncle
Tom's Cabin." The windows are full of beautiful illustrations of the
various scenes in it; and, by the way, the book is full of pictures. Passing
through Cheapside the other day, all of a sudden, I saw in a window, a
sable face, with bright eyes, shining teeth, with a most quizzical comical
expression—undersigned in large letters—"Topsy."  

The correspondent is fascinated by what might easily be called Uncle Tom (and Topsy)
overload. Everywhere one looks one can find Uncle Tom for sale—in print, at the theater,
in shop windows. The phenomenon described above is heavily visual. The novel’s run is
surely impressive and even “revolutionary,” but the writer is clearly more amazed by the
proliferation of plays, illustrations, and pictures that adorn the streets and shops. “By the
way,” he tells us, “the book is full of pictures.” Pictures of Tom, Topsy, Eliza, and Little
Eva sold the novel, the plays, the pottery, and the games to anyone interested in owning a
piece of the most popular story of the day. Some products, like the ones mentioned
above were closely related to the novel. However, others were not. According to
Birdoff, creameries, bakeries, dry-goods emporiums, and other shops borrowed their
names from the novel. Unlike illustrated editions and stage adaptations necessarily tied
to the characters of the novel, items such as “Uncle Tom’s new and secondhand clothing”
and “Uncle Tom’s pure unadulterated coffee” show the extent to which Tom and Topsy
had become the salespersons of the age. Birdoff jokes, “From these thriving

36 "Uncle Tom’s Cabin in England," Frederick Douglass’ Paper, December 31, 1852.
commodities one would suppose that Uncle Tom was rather gainfully employed, and even rich enough to buy out all the slaveholders in America.”

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was undoubtedly the first novel to attain this level of merchandizing success. However, it is important to note that many earlier novels also received their fair share of popularity through similar means. *Frankenstein* and *Notre-Dame* certainly enjoyed a popular commercial life detached from the respective novels. Two-penny prints of T. P. Cooke and O. Smith playing Frankenstein’s Creature circulated heavily in the 1820s. Illustrations and memorabilia depicting Quasimodo and Esmeralda were popular in the 1830s and the same may be said of Dickens’s characters in the 1840s. Theatrical adaptations of all of these were popular throughout each respective decade. These were notable predecessors that no doubt influenced how the entertainment industry approached Stowe’s novel. But in the 1850s, the characters of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* stole the show and did so in a way that had never been done before—at least not by literary characters. What made *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* different was not that it was a “better” novel than those that came before it, nor that it was a more “political” novel than those by the authors listed above. Instead, what made *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* a marketing phenomenon was that it was explicitly tied to a very profitable political movement. An almost identical merchandizing phenomenon occurred in England many years before Stowe came upon the idea (described by her as a powerful picture) that would become the world’s first international bestseller. In fact, Stowe’s novel may very well just constitute a single chapter in the history of the commodification of slavery, abolition, and black culture in general—one that made its first significant mark in the late eighteenth century.

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37 Birdoff, 144-45.
In *The Birth of a Consumer Society: The Commercialization of Eighteenth-Century England* (1982), historians Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J. H. Plumb trace the economic and political underpinnings of the “consumer revolution” that emerged alongside the Industrial Revolution. For McKendrick these concurrent revolutions were dialectical as “the consumer revolution was the necessary analogue to the industrial revolution, the necessary convulsion on the demand side of the equation to match the convulsion on the supply side.”\(^{38}\) Collectively, the three historians argue that the last quarter of the eighteenth century was characterized not only by a boom in the sheer number of goods available for consumption due to mechanical innovation, but also by a notable spike in the demand for consumable goods. The birth of consumer society “required changes in attitude and thought, changes in prosperity and standards of living, changes in commercial technique and promotional skills, sometimes changes even in the law itself. Above all it required the commercialization of society.”\(^{39}\) We see exactly the same language used to describe the Uncle Tom phenomenon more than half a century later. As John Ross Dix writes in 1853:

“Uncle Tom” is not only a miracle of itself, but it announces the commencement of a miraculous era in the literary world . . . Such a phenomenon . . . could have happened only in the present wondrous age. It required all the aid of our new machinery to produce the phenomenon; our steam presses, steam-ships, steam-carriages, iron roads, electric


telegraphs . . . . But beyond all, it required the readers to consume the books, and these have never before been so numerous . . . .

This analysis of the popularity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in England is firmly grounded in the age of technological innovation, mechanical reproduction, and consumer culture. The analysis comes from the mid-nineteenth century; however, the phenomenon described is not one that emerged spontaneously alongside the publication of Stowe’s novel. Instead, it had begun approximately one full century earlier and continued to grow and expand its reach.

These myriad changes simultaneously infiltrated multiple areas of cultural production. The emergence of a market in political artifacts, for instance, runs alongside the commercialization of leisure, which also coincides with a boom in daily periodicals advertising the latest fashions and entertainments. “The consumer revolution of the eighteenth century,” J. R. Oldfield tells us, “not only affected the household economy, moulding tastes and preferences within the private sphere, but created a market in politics, the public sphere.”

Oldfield finds a fruitful example in the commercialization of abolition at the turn of the nineteenth century. The mass production of abolitionist cameos, medallions, wax seals, commemorative medals, engravings, paintings, and political cartoons was heavily responsible for the mobilization of British popular opinion in the years leading up to the Slave Trade Act of 1807. However, that is not to say that the abolition movement was the primary beneficiary of this trend. According to Oldfield:

40 Quoted from John Ross Dix [George Spencer Phillips], *Transatlantic Tracings: or, Sketches of Persons and Scenes in America* (London: W. Tweedie, 1853), quoted in Fisch, 15.

Abolition, like any other new idea, was open to commercial development and exploitation. Viewed in this light, anti-slavery artifacts not only provide an insight into the beliefs of those who made, commissioned, purchased or used them. They also reveal how eighteenth-century consumers were influenced and exploited. Entrepreneurs . . . had an intimate knowledge of the workings of the market, and through their ingenuity they ensured that abolition became a commodity to be purchased and possessed.  

Although some of the people commissioning these items were compelled by genuine abolitionist sympathies, Oldfield’s study also uncovers “a market ripe for exploitation” in abolitionist artifacts. This market held strong for more than half a century. Abolitionist objects, especially pottery, were popular throughout the 1820s and 1830s until the abolition of slavery in the colonies.

British and American slave narratives both sold well from the late eighteenth-century onward, Olaudah Equiano’s The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa the African (1789) being a well-documented example of an earlier best-selling abolitionist work. The market in fictional abolitionist works based on true events was also significant as shown in the case of the Obi phenomenon (discussed in chapter two) at the turn of the nineteenth century, where a novel, a pantomime, a melodrama, children’s books, and other adaptations sold strongly. The market in abolitionist artifacts remained strong through the abolition of slavery in the British colonies. In the late 1840s, it re-emerged in a new form—the American abolition

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42 Ibid., 161.
43 Ibid., 163.
movement was making itself visible in London by American slaves giving lecture tours and the publication of at least two major American slave narratives: the famous *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* (1845) and *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (1849), a lesser known work but one that served as primary source material for Stowe.\(^{44}\)

Both Douglass and Henson embarked on lecture tours of England following the publication of their respective autobiographies. Douglass was met by particularly large crowds and gave an estimated three hundred lectures over the course of twenty months. Other former slaves also played the English lecture circuit. English audiences were eager to see speakers, buy books, and purchase paraphernalia in any way connected with American abolition.

But they were also interested in attending black entertainments that were in no way connected to abolition—those that were just for the purpose of entertainment. This is the moment of *Uncle Tom’s* birth. Hazel Waters describes it succinctly: “To understand how ‘Tom mania’ operated culturally, it has to be seen in context. Alongside the mid-nineteenth century vogue for troupes of blackface—and some genuine black—entertainers was another popular enthusiasm, for tales of slavery told be ex-slaves themselves. It was this that provided the context for Uncle Tom’s success.”\(^{45}\) “Genuine” blacks and authentic ex-slaves were in high demand in England in the year leading up to the publication of Stowe’s novel. As soon as the novel showed signs of success in America, the entertainment industry offered it up for mass distribution and repeated consumption using the proven crowd-pleasers of the day. It was under these conditions

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\(^{44}\) Josiah Henson, *The Life of Josiah Henson, Formerly a Slave, Now an Inhabitant of Canada, as Narrated by Himself* (Boston: Arthur D. Phelps, 1849), http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson49/henson49.html

\(^{45}\) Waters, 156.
that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was offered as an authentic reproduction of slave life in America, with its adaptations and derivative products making the same claims of authenticity. The next two sections of this chapter address the “authentic” claims that surrounded the Uncle Tom sales phenomenon both in print and performance.

**Authentic Reproduction**

Slave narratives sold throughout the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries in great numbers. Although they appealed to abolitionist sympathizers, “No doubt part of their appeal was their sensationalism, albeit under sober guise,” writes Waters.\(^46\) This “sober guise” relied on the validity of the claims put forth by former slaves, which is to say, on the authenticity of the narrative. The major slave narratives of the period were titled and advertised as authentic memoirs, regardless of whether or not some of the details of the narrative may have been changed or exaggerated for any number of reasons, including for marketing purposes. The titles of Equiano’s and Douglass’s respective narratives, and especially that of Henson, emphasize the identity of the authors in ways that bolster their credibility as the real thing. Their narratives blend logical arguments with emotional examples to show the true horrors of slavery.

Although *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was marketed as a novel—a fiction—similar claims of authenticity were made about its contents. These claims were first brought forth by Stowe herself. The final chapter of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is a defense of the characters and situations presented by the author. The opening reads as follows:

\(^{46}\) Ibid., 156.
The writer has often been inquired of, by correspondents from different parts of the country, whether this narrative is a true one; and to these inquiries she will give one general answer.

The separate incidents that compose the narrative are, to a very great extent, authentic, occurring, many of them, either under her own observation, or that of her personal friends. She or her friends have observed characters the counterpart of almost all that are here introduced; and many of the sayings are word for word as heard herself, or reported to her.47

Stowe describes herself not as a novelist, but instead as a reporter. She sticks by the facts relayed to her by friends, acquaintances, and other eye witnesses, as well as those seen with her own eye. In other words, they are “authentic.” The remainder of the chapter is a defense of the factual basis of the novel. She concludes with a list of former slaves who have achieved financial success—many worth several thousand dollars—by means of an education and the right opportunities. The author’s intentions are well-meaning, but problematic considering that she usually relies on white authorities to corroborate her account of slave life. For example, the following statement introduces the list of successful former slaves: “The author gives the following statement of facts, on the authority of Professor C. E. Stowe . . . with regard to emancipated slaves . . . given to show the capability of the race, even without any very particular assistance or encouragement.”48 In addition to being highly problematic, this final chapter serves as a major narrative departure from the rest of the novel. The author’s “Concluding Remarks”

48 Ibid., 627.
mark a complete shift in tone from the sensational, melodramatic novel that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is known to be. Here, Stowe is preoccupied with proving that the picture that she has presented to the reader is indeed accurate and based in the reality of slave life in the southern states of America. She offers a contrasting example in presenting the list of former slaves now living prosperous lives in the northern states. For Stowe, the authenticity of her fictional narrative lies in its accurate portrayal of the brutality of slavery and its corroboration by contemporaneous slave narratives and interviews with individuals who have known prosperous blacks living in the Northern states. The last chapter of the novel shows that Stowe was invested in presenting her narrative as an authentic representation of plantation slavery and anticipated that her novel would be met with some resistance.

She was right. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* certainly had mass appeal for the American abolitionist movement; however it also attracted many detractors infuriated by Stowe’s portrayal of the South. Stowe was also right to anticipate that her novel would be attacked precisely on the grounds of its authenticity. But Stowe was no psychic, nor could she see into the future. She knew that her novel would be attacked on such grounds because in January 1852, while the novel was still being serialized, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin as It Is: The Southern Uncle Tom*, the first Uncle Tom play (or more precisely anti-Tom play) was staged at the Baltimore Museum.\(^4^9\) It would be the first attack on Stowe’s claims of authentic representation. More would follow later that year.

As the subtitle of the anti-Tom play shows, much of the novel’s early criticism came from southerners who questioned the northern author’s depiction of plantation life

in general and her description of the lives of slaves in particular. Plays and printed materials attacking the authenticity of Stowe’s novel appeared almost immediately in America. The latter came in the form of negative reviews and anti-Tom books with the aim of undermining Stowe’s anti-slavery stance, such as W. L. G. Smith’s Life at the South; or, “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” as It Is: Being Narratives, Scenes, and Incidents in the Real “Life of the Lowly” and Mary Eastman’s Aunt Phillis’s Cabin; or, Southern Life as It Is, both published in 1852. Eastman’s “Concluding Remarks” take Stowe on directly (as she does in much of her novel) precisely on the grounds that the story told by Stowe is inauthentic because it is highly illogical. She defends her position as follows:

This whole history is an absurdity. No master would be fool enough to sell the best hand on his estate; one who directed, and saved, and managed for him. No master would be brutish enough to sell the slave who had nursed him and his children, who loved him like a son, even for urgent debt, had he another article of property in the wide world. But Mr. Shelby does so, according to Mrs. Stowe, though he has many other servants, besides houses and lands, &c. Preposterous!

Eastman’s critique is directed at the probability of the narrative and it is obvious that she simply does not believe a word of it. For Eastman, the story of Uncle Tom’s sale is absurd on two counts—emotional and economic. It is hard for Eastman to believe that Mr. Shelby would sell a slave to whom he had such a close attachment, especially if he had other slaves and possessions to sell off in his place. Tom was obviously Shelby’s best worker, and selling off more hands would make more economic sense than losing

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50 For a negative English review of the American pro-slavery book, see “Uncle Tom Cabin As It Is,” The Times, November 11, 1852: 3.
such an invaluable slave. However, to state that “this whole history is an absurdity” seems an odd attack to launch at a work of fiction. One wonders if Stowe would have been fine just ignoring the attack simply because what she has produced was, by her own account, a novel (albeit one based on true events). Stowe, however, did not leave these attacks unanswered. In 1853 her publishers put out a response to her American critics, A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin, Presenting the Original Facts and Documents upon Which the Story Is Founded, Together with Corroborative Statements Verifying the Truth of the Work. The debate would continue to play out on the popular stage in America, with drastically different dramatizations popular in both the North and the South.

England also had its share of Uncle Tom spin-offs including the anonymously published Uncle Tom in England; or, Proof that Black is White: An Echo to the American ‘Uncle Tom’ (1852), but these did not share their American counterparts’ penchant for discrediting Stowe’s novel. Instead, they appeared as supplements to the novel, supporting an abolitionist position and sometimes even taking on criticism that may have appeared in the English press. For example, directly underneath an advertisement for a “handsome” edition of Uncle Tom’s Cabin listed in a September 1852 issue of The Times, we find a second advertisement for a non-fiction supplement to the novel: “In the press, and will be published in a few days, price 1s. UNCLE TOM’S COMPANIONS. This work will be a complete vindication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and a refutation of the criticism of The Times, by giving the lives of remarkable fugitive slaves.” The two-hundred-plus-page book by John Passmore Edwards, whose full title is Uncle Tom's Companions: or, Facts Stranger Than Fiction: A Supplement to Uncle Tom's Cabin: Being Startling Incidents in the Lives of Celebrated Fugitive Slaves, featured abridged

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52 [Advertisements and Notices], The Times, September 25, 1852: 3.
accounts of the lives of several well-known fugitive slaves including Frederick Douglass, James Pennington, Josiah Henson, William Wells Brown, Henry Bibb, Henry Hyland Garnet, Moses Roper, and Peter Wheeler. Also included in the volume is a reproduction of one of Douglass’s speeches given during his time in England. The edition sold for one shilling and was very successful as a double-spin off of slave narratives and Stowe’s novel. *Uncle Tom’s Companions* went through at least three editions in the first year proving that although Uncle Tom was the title character of a well-known fiction, he nonetheless had many real friends.

Editions, sequels, spin-offs, adaptations, and other derivative products for sale in England emphasized various authentic features of their individual Uncle Toms. Expensive editions were brought out with new illustrations. Newspaper reprints of the novel advertised themselves as original in the faithfulness to Stowe’s text. An announcement for a reprint of the full text of Stowe’s novel in *Reynolds’s Newspaper* on August 22, 1852, reads: “OBSERVE! In next Saturday’s Number, will be commenced a reprint of that extraordinary American work entitled *UNCLE TOM’S CABIN; OR NEGRO-LIFE IN THE SLAVE STATES OF AMERICA*. By Harriet Beecher Stowe. *This will be the only faithful reprint of the work issued in this country.*”\(^{53}\) In a market crowded with textual Uncle Toms, *Reynolds’s* claimed to be the one, true original; the “only faithful reprint” of the American text. Yet despite claiming fidelity to the American original, the *Reynolds’s Newspaper* reprint of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* eschews the novel’s original sub-title “Life Among the Lowly” for the more ethnographic “Negro-Life in the Slave States of America,” the same subtitle used by the Clark & Co. editions (who also advertised their editions as “genuine”).

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\(^{53}\) [Advertisements and Notices], *Reynolds's Newspaper*, August 22, 1852: 8.
Changing the sub-title of the work for publication in England was a marketing decision that mirrored the vogue for authentic slave narratives. The publication’s financial interest in maximizing reader interest is made clear in the following “Notice to Advertisers” that runs directly beneath the announcement of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in the next issue: “The circulation of *Reynolds’s Newspaper* approximates FORTY THOUSAND COPIES weekly, and is read by a large portion of the Middle Class and by all the intelligent members of the Working Class.” Get in on this edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* calls the notice. In offering an authentic reproduction of the American text for its English readership, *Reynolds’s Newspaper* was guaranteeing an audience for their advertisers. As it turns out, in addition to all of the products that Uncle Tom and Topsy sold in England, these characters were also good at selling advertising space in periodicals.

Tom and Topsy also drew crowds in theatrical spaces. Each production promised audiences something new and original. All of the advertisements that appear in the major London periodicals make reference to the realistic quality of the scenery, costumes, songs, dances, and other musical entertainments included in the pieces. Like the other adaptations discussed in this study, the dramatizations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* that took over London stages in 1852 were, for the most part, not seen as “serious” entertainment. Some reviewers had positive things to say about certain pieces and individual performances; however, the general consensus among reviewers was that the pieces being offered up for performance at various venues were attempts to cash in on the latest vogue. The latest vogue included presenting *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as a true representation of American slavery and this was reflected in reviews, advertisements, and the general
marketing of the adaptations. The titles of the pieces staged at the Standard Theatre
(*Uncle Tom’s Cabin; or, The Slaves’ Life in America*) and the Royal Marylebone (*Uncle
Tom’s Cabin; or, Negro Life in America*) certainly suggest this. The vogue also extended
outside of London. One adaptation staged on February 1, 1853, at the Theatre Royal
Manchester was titled *Uncle Tom’s Cabin: A Drama of Real Life.*\(^5\) Clearly, theatergoers
were being promised an authentic representation of real life in a land foreign to most, but
known to all.

By and large, theaters emphasized the use of realistic scenery, situations, and
characterization in their productions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin.* Like the Adelphi review
reprinted in an earlier section of this chapter, all reviews and most advertisements
mention the beautiful scenery and the expensive props used to put on the show. Most
productions were praised for their realism, and theaters promoted what they believed to
be the most authentic aspects of their productions. For example, the Adelphi production
boasted of director Madame Celeste’s recent trip to the United States, a move that Birdoff
argsues lent “further authenticity” to the production.\(^5\) Most reviews also mention the
acting company’s execution of songs and dances, specifically plantation songs and
dances performed by black characters, which for the most part were played by white
actors in the earliest dramatizations of the novel staged in both the United States and the
United Kingdom (this would change later). Reception of the adaptations largely
depended on the actors giving convincing performances of the American characters,
especially the black characters in the piece. The dramas by and large receive the most

\(^5\) *Uncle Tom’s Cabin: A Drama of Real Life* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1853).
\(^5\) Birdoff, 147.
praise with regard to the actors’ authentic reproductions of black dialect and song. The reviewer from *The Times* has this to say of the Adelphi’s presentation:

> Aunt Chloe is, indeed, only a small personage, but she is rendered very effective by Miss Collins’ hearty good humour and her command of the negro dialect. The music of the piece comprises several melodies of the “Ethiopian” character, but graceful above the general average, and deriving an additional grace from the unpretending manner in which they were sung by Miss Laura Honey.\(^{56}\)

According to the reviewer, Collins and Honey give very natural performances of black dialect and song, and these are some of the most commendable aspects of the performance. Collins’s “command” of negro dialect and Honey’s “unpretending” performance of “Ethiopian” songs deserve appreciation and, the reviewer tells us, the company was deservedly showered with applause at the end of the performance.

The general popularity of the performance of black dialect, song, and dance in adaptations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is documented by Waters, who writes, “Part of the appeal of Stowe’s novel for dramatists was that much of its racy, naturalistic dialogue could be transferred wholesale to the stage. Hence the same passages of dialogue recur in versions that differed widely as to their overall thrust, plot outline, or which characters were included and which omitted.”\(^{57}\) This makes sense. However, instead of placing the appeal in the pens of dramatists in appreciation for the dialect depicted in Stowe’s novel, perhaps it is more accurate to say that the use of black dialect in the *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* adaptations was what audiences expected to see when attending a performance of *Uncle*

\(^{56}\) “Adelphi Theatre,” *The Times*, November 30, 1852: 8.
\(^{57}\) Waters, 157.
Tom’s Cabin. This was due mostly to one factor—an established market in slave narratives, minstrel shows, and other black entertainments that were thriving in England in the decade leading up to “Tom-mania.” In fact, it is even more accurate to say that the main appeal of seeing Uncle Tom’s Cabin on stage had more to do with seeing an already popular form of entertainment (melodrama and minstrel shows) rewritten to reflect the scenes and incorporate characters of the most popular story of the day. This was a proven profitable formula by the mid-nineteenth century. The reason that it moved so fast in the case of Uncle Tom’s Cabin was that the formula had proven successful so many times before that publishers, theater managers, and others saw the potential of Uncle Tom’s Cabin from the start. They also immediately picked up on the most effective way to market their derivative Uncle Toms—offering them up as authentic reproductions not only of the novel, but also of American slavery in general and the plantation culture of slaves in particular.

What the rather disparate examples given above show us is that whether in print or performance Uncle Tom’s Cabin was surrounded by the rhetoric of authenticity. Stowe claimed that her novel was an authentic presentation of American slavery. Pro-slavery Americans denounced her work as inauthentic. Supplements to the novel supporting its authenticity were published in both the United States and England. Both pirated and legitimate editions of the novel circulating in England promised an authentic reproduction of the American original. Adaptations advertising the authentic representation of black dialect, songs, and dance took over the London theaters. Illustrations from the novel guided readers and other consumers in forming a more authentic picture of both American slavery and African-American culture, no matter how
misrepresentative those images were at times. All were offered to the public as authentic reproductions. The language even extends to paintings inspired by Stowe’s novel. With regard to the thirtieth exhibition of the Society of British Artists held in the spring of 1853, a reviewer for The Times writes, “The furore created by Mrs. Beecher Stowe’s great work has of course caused a plentiful crop of compositions from Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The best of these by far is No. 544, Mr. Whaite’s picture of “Uncle Tom reading his Bible.” It is a true negro head, and admirably painted . . . .”58 Instead of the painting’s authentic reproduction of the novel’s central theme, it is the artist’s ability to capture a “true negro head” that guides the positive review of the piece. (One wonders what a “false” one would look like.) This example, along with the previous ones, shows that no matter what form Uncle Tom took after 1852, he always came with a figurative certificate of authenticity, regardless if it was genuine or not.

One particularly useful example of how central the marketing of authenticity was to the Uncle Tom phenomenon of the nineteenth century came in the summer of 1877 when Josiah Henson made yet another tour of England, where he was greeted by Queen Victoria and others as “the real Uncle Tom.” Henson gave public appearances and charged admission for his lectures. However, not everyone was ready to accept Henson as the real thing. He was accused of identity fraud in the Saturday, June 23, 1877, issue of The Illustrated Police News:

> It is never pleasant to be undeceived, and doubly disagreeable when the result is “finding out” some one. Hence we may expect the many thousands who paid their shillings to see “the real Uncle Tom” to be very irate at Mrs. Beecher Stowe for informing them that in “the Reverend

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58 “Society of British Artists,” The Times, March 31, 1853: 5.
Josiah Henson” they saw only a venerable African, and not the hero of her famous novel. The reason is simple. The Uncle Tom of the book never existed. Like the rest of the characters in it, he was a composite personage, made up of bits of negroes here and scraps of other Ethiopians there. But to use the language of the authoress herself, “the life of the Rev. J. Henson furnishes many of these, but not all. He was not Uncle Tom; neither was any person that I know of.” The fact is, that for some time past “real Uncle Toms” have been very plentiful in the United States. But the aged Ethiopian who so recently visited us was stamped in public esteem as the genuine article. Lords presided at his rather garrulous lectures, and to the average Briton the name of a nobleman supplies the place of facts.59

Although the writer’s tone might seem outrageous to today’s reader, Fisch explains that throughout the second half of the nineteenth century many impostors professed to be the “real” Uncle Tom in order to collect charity from anyone willing to believe their claims of authenticity. Uncle Toms could be found on the streets of major American and English cities for several years following the publication of Stowe’s novel. Some of these impostors even managed to accumulate considerable sums of money before getting caught in their schemes. One notable arrest occurred in Hull in January 1853, where the Reverend Alfred Thomas Wood allegedly accepted donations for a church in Liberia under the pretenses that George and Eliza Harris were members of his congregation.60

While it is unclear if Henson had deliberately billed himself as the real Uncle Tom for the purposes of his English tour in 1877, both he and Stowe were very much invested in this connection in the mid 1850s. Henson and Stowe shared the same publisher. When Henson’s memoirs were revised and reprinted in 1858, the new edition included a preface by Stowe, a decision made by their publisher. Although the 1858 edition did not explicitly name Henson as the “real” Uncle Tom, an updated edition published in Canada in 1881 overly emphasized the connection between Henson and Stowe on both the cover and title page of his autobiography, essentially giving the autobiography the new title “Uncle Tom’s Story of His Life” with the actual title of the work delayed (see Figures 12 and 13 below).

Figure 12 (Left). Cover of the 1881 edition of Henson’s *Autobiography* published in London, Ontario by Schuyler, Smith, & Co.
Figure 13 (Right). Title page of the same work.
Both images are available online through the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill’s *Documenting the American South: Primary Resources for the Study of Southern History, Literature, and Culture*, http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson81/henson81.html
“Authentic,” “genuine,” “true,” and “real” were without a doubt the most repeated words accompanying the sale of Uncle Tom from the 1850s until at least the late 1870s. However, this trend did not start with *Uncle Tom Cabin*. Instead, it was the continuation of the consumer vogue for abolitionism and, more importantly, the market in black people and culture which by 1852 had been strong for over six decades in England. In the years leading up to the publication of the novel, black lecturers and performers toured the British Isles and the Continent in considerable numbers. The marketing of their speeches and performances also relied on the same language in advertisements. Britons flocked to see “authentic” former slaves tell their stories of bondage and escape. These lectures took on many forms, and although serious in tone, Fisch notes that they often also included elements of performance and spectacle such as the unveiling of scars and the display of chains and other instruments of slavery. She writes:

The circulation of American slave narratives forms part of the general commercialization of American abolitionism in England. The African-American men and women who journeyed to England to escape the tyranny of the Fugitive Slave Law or to promote the struggle to abolish American slavery found themselves in demand: to lecture on their ideas about slavery, to display their black bodies and any personal scars which might bear testimony to the torture of American slavery, and to tell their stories. English desires to see and hear all about American slavery were nearly insatiable, and African-Americans found themselves constructed as just so much more abolitionist “product,” consumed by English audiences
who could not get their fill of “Uncle Tom,” no matter what shape or form he assumed.\(^\text{61}\)

Although the demand for such lectures began approximately five years before the publication of Stowe’s novel, it would continue for at least three and a half decades, into the late 1870s and be taken to the next level in 1878 when a new American troupe arrived ready to perform *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* as it had never been performed before across the Atlantic—featuring scores of “real” former slaves. The next section discusses how the marketing of authentic blackness—especially black bodies—in popular entertainments greatly influenced “Tom-mania” in England, but also applied to the commodification of black culture more broadly, both before and after *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*.

**The Real Thing**

As the previous section of this chapter demonstrates, the marketing of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in print, performance, painting, and other media shared a common language that emphasized authenticity in multiple ways. In print, much was made of the authenticity of Stowe’s representation of plantation life in the South. In performance, productions were praised for the use of realistic scenery and costumes, as well as for actors’ abilities to accurately portray black stereotypes—speak like slaves, sing like them, dance like them. Illustrations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were also marketed for their genuine depictions of slave life. For example, an advertisement for the expensive illustrated edition of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* published by Sampson Low and Son (being the “Author’s Genuine Edition” according to the publishers) showcases “upwards of One Hundred Illustrations from Drawings from Nature, by Artists who have for some time been

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\(^{61}\) Fisch, 53.
engaged in the study of the Habits and Manners of the Slaves of the United States.”

While the sheer number of illustrations included in this edition is impressive in and of itself, what is more interesting is the fact that instead of emphasizing the aesthetic quality of the illustrations, the publishers instead provide background information on the artists and their first-hand knowledge of slave “habits” and “manners.” In other words, the artists’ talents are deemphasized in favor of their supposed exposure to and expertise in the lives of real slaves. These pictures depict the real thing, accurate portrayals of slaves and slave customs—or so the publishers claim. Consumers were looking for the real thing and this is but one example of how the products offered for sale promised just that.

Of course, the irony in all of this marketing of authenticity was that the products offered for sale could never claim to be more than a realistic copy of the original. No matter how talented or how hard they may have tried, the English writers, dramatists, actors, and illustrators that disseminated Uncle Tom in English popular culture could only strive to provide their customers with their best imitation of American slave life, imagery, song, and dance. This often led to the dissemination of racist stereotypes and caricatures that took their cues from blackface minstrelsy, which was widely popular in both countries at mid-century. Although one might imagine that the target audiences for theatrical adaptations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and blackface minstrel shows would be different, this was not the case. Minstrel shows and adaptations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin sometimes shared the same stage on the same night in London. In October 1852, for example, Uncle Tom’s Crib, the “great hit” at the Strand Theatre, was followed by entertainment by the famous “African” Troupe. The evening’s entertainment at this theater was advertised in The Era on Sunday, October 31, 1852, as follows:

62 [Advertisements and Notices], Morning Chronicle, December 21, 1852: 8.
UNCLE TOM’S CRIB. To be followed by the Laughable Songs and Eccentricities of the African Troupe, which are received nightly with shouts of laughter by crowds of the elite. After which, Price, the American Dancer, and wonder of the world, will appear in his celebrated Plantation Dance. The whole to conclude with Sambo’s amusing description of the Opera of the Bohemian Girl, with all the popular Songs of that Opera.  

In this evening’s program, a burlesque of Uncle Tom’s Cabin is the lead-in for the nightly feature, musical entertainment by the “African” Troupe, a company comprised entirely of white American singers and dancers in blackface. In fact, the company for both entertainments is the same—Dumbolton’s “African Troupe” who first performed in London around 1845. By 1852, they had added this burlesque of Uncle Tom’s Cabin to their repertoire and were “drawing great houses” at the Strand with their evening of blackface entertainment, where Uncle Tom’s Crib was just one of their many acts.

As one might easily imagine, white actors doing their best impersonations of black slaves call to mind highly problematic issues too obvious and too numerous to discuss at length here. These are best summarized by Michael Pickering who argues that “For the majority of people during the Victorian and Edwardian expansion of Empire, ‘nigger’ minstrelsy provided perhaps the major source of knowledge of the ‘negroid’ type, and the views this knowledge engendered were ideologically loaded . . . .”

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63 [Advertisements and Notices], The Era, October 31, 1852: 1.  
64 “Correspondence; Great Britain. Meeting of Parliament--Literary Novelties--General Intelligence--Theatricals, &c.,” New-York Daily Times, November 5, 1852: 2. This article is available online at http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9C04E6DE1438E334BC4D53DFB7678389649FDE.  
analysis of blackface entertainments staged in London in the second half of the
nineteenth century rightly demonstrates how blackface minstrelsy participated in the
circulation of racist stereotypes that closely followed the principles of that infamous
Victorian pseudo-science, physiognomy. However, although Pickering sees the
popularization of such stereotypes as a direct consequence of the decline in London’s
black population over the course of the century, black performers and lecturers enjoyed a
period of high visibility in the years surrounding “Tom-mania”. These included both
abolitionist lecturers and music hall entertainers who began touring England in the mid-
1840s, half a decade before “Tom-mania.”

Entertainments featuring black performers were popular in England at least as
early as 1851, approximately one year before Tom-mania spread on both sides of the
Atlantic. Minstrel shows were popular in England just as they were in America at mid-
century. Because of its popularity, most of the adaptations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin staged
in both countries during the 1850s blended melodrama with minstrelsy. Although the
early adaptations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin were performed by white actors in blackface,
troupes of black entertainers toured England performing minstrel shows at exactly the
same time as adaptations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin took over London theaters. Much like
the Uncle Tom adaptations described above, minstrel shows featuring black performers
(although separate entertainments from the adaptations) were marketed for their authentic
portrayal of plantation life and culture performed by “genuine” negroes.

The year leading up to the publication of Uncle Tom’s Cabin was particularly
productive for American black entertainers both in London and in the United Kingdom
more broadly. They primarily performed in music halls and the shows they put on were

66 Fisch’s book American Slaves in Victorian England provides a full picture of this phenomenon.
accordingly comprised mostly of song and dance. Like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its
derivative works, advertisements for these earlier shows employed the language of
authenticity to sell tickets, with the smaller music halls in constant competition with
larger entertainment venues. An early advertisement published in the *Daily News* for an
engagement at Gothic Hall next door to the Haymarket Theatre in the summer of 1851
reads as follows: “REAL DARKIES from the SOUTH. . . . . Having just arrived from
America that celebrated TROUPE of REAL SABLE HARMONISTS, consisting of seven
real negroes, whose concerts throughout the cities of the United States have been
crowded nightly.” 67 Approximately one month later in late August, the troupe had moved
to Soyer’s Symposium, opposite the Crystal Palace. An advertisement for this production
published in the *Morning Chronicle* announces, “Inimitable performances of the Chinese
Pagodatique Orchestra, and a band of real Negroes, direct from the United States of
America, will give an entirely New Entertainment, called A Plantation Festivity.” 68 This
troupe was marketed to London audiences as the real thing—real blacks from the
southern states of America singing their authentic plantation songs and performing
genuine plantation dances.

Similar shows were staged into the fall and winter months in London. Although
it is not clear if the troupe appearing at the Linwood Gallery in October was the same one
that had toured the area the previous summer, the advertisements are very much alike.

As *The Era* reports:

**PERFORMANCE OF NIGGERS.**— The Linwood Gallery, Leicester-square,

was filled last Friday night by a crowded audience, assembled to witness a

67 [Advertisements and Notices], *Daily News*, July 23, 1851.
68 [Advertisements and Notices], *Morning Chronicle*, August 18, 1851.
“new American entertainment and opera Buffo by real Negros,” and to hear a lecture on Bloomerism, by a lady of reputation. The negroes are genuine ones, and enter into the fun of their performance with great gusto. The director of the bones department works away with surprising energy, while the tambourine performer twists himself about in a manner that sets aside all anatomical theories . . . .

This group of black entertainers was a hot commodity in the summer of 1851. What appears to be the same troop of performers (or an identical act) took their show on the road to Dublin later the same year. As in London, Dublin newspapers also advertised the performances as representing an authentic picture of so-called negro “character” presented by those best qualified to provide such a picture. An advertisement appearing on the front page of the *Freeman’s Journal* reads as follows:

**THIS EVENING . . . The Second of a Series of BUFFA OPERAS!** For which the inimitable HAVANNA OPERA TROUPE OF REAL NEGROES! (From the Rice and Cotton Fields of America), Are engaged, who faithfully pourray the peculiarities of the Ethiopian Race, which cannot be delineated by any of their imitators, who use cork to black, and they wish it to be distinctly understood, that individually or collectively, they challenge the world. They will make their First Appearance in Dublin in THE OPERA OF LUCY-DID-LAM-MER-MORE!!

The announcement makes clear that the novelty here is the use of actual black actors straight “from the Rice and Cotton Fields of America” with all their “peculiarities,”

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69 "Latest Theatrical Mems.,” *The Era*, October 19, 1851: 15.
which cannot be effectively portrayed by white actors in blackface. According to this publication, the most appealing feature of this entertainment is its authenticity, something infinitely lacking in blackface minstrelsy.

The popularity of “Ethiopian concerts” featuring black performers continued well into the following year. At least two entertainment venues in London featured a “Band of Six Real Negroes” the following spring. In the May 23, 1852, issue of *The Era*, advertisements appear side by side announcing the musical group. The first, advertising for the Surrey Music Hall reads:

SIX REAL NEGROES every evening. This complete band of Sable Harmonists are perfectly electrifying crowded audiences, in their inimitable Swash-away Burlesque Operas, Summersaulting, Dances, varied Vocal, Instrumental, Laughable and Quizzical Entertainments.71

The second advertisement for an engagement at St. Helena Gardens announces its season featuring “an Unrivalled Concert and Bands, Grand Vocal and Instrumental Entertainments, Burlesque on Operas, and Comic Effusions by the renowned Band of Six Real Negroes (their second appearance in London) . . . .”72 Both performances are billed as “inimitable” and “unrivalled” by competitors, presumably minstrel troupes featuring white casts in blackface as opposed to actual black performers.

Obviously, the lack of black actors in the early English dramatizations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* staged in 1852-53 was not due to a lack of black performers in England at that time. Black troupes were touring Europe before Stowe penned the opening chapters of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and continued to do so for several years after the height of “Tom-

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71 [Advertisements and Notices], *The Era*, May 23, 1852.
72 Ibid.
mania.” What kind of shows did they put on? Plantation-themed extravaganzas, mostly. However, oddly enough, they were not putting on Uncle Tom. As far as one can tell, the use of actual black actors in dramatizations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was not one of the “authentic” features of the English adaptations staged in the early 1850s. The fact that these black entertainers were not incorporated into theatrical adaptations is an odd omission that would not change for twenty-five years.

The change came in 1878 when the American Jarrett & Palmer UTC Company toured Europe performing an adaptation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* written by George Fawcett Rowe. The five-act production had high visibility. During its London run, this version was simultaneously produced at two theaters daily, in the afternoon at the Royal Aquarium and in the evening at the Princess’s. A third company also under the direction of Jarrett and Palmer was performing in Manchester at the same time. The production ran for several months in both cities and would later travel across the country, then across the British Isles, and later across the Continent. Why was this specific production of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* so successful despite the fact that it appeared twenty-five years after the height of “Tom-mania”? Because no one had done what Jarrett and Palmer had done—cast *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* with black actors, singers, and dancers. The following promotional card for the production which circulated in London in 1878 provides a clearer picture of the authentic features the company claimed for its adaptation.
The advertisement for Jarrett and Palmer’s version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* is useful in demonstrating how promotional materials promised audiences an authentic and original theatrical experience despite the fact that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had a twenty-six year history on the stage by 1878. First, the Jarrett and Palmer advertisement emphasizes the scenery and props used to create a “Realistic Plantation Scene.” The second and by far more interesting feature is the promise of “scores” of black actors described here as “Genuine Freed Negro Slaves Recently from the Southern Section of the United States of
America.” The promise of an authentic show is made clear in the emphasis on “real” plantation scenes and “genuine Negroes.”

Knowing that none of the popular adaptations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* staged in England through the mid-1870s featured black actors or entertainers in their casts, Jarrett and Palmer easily found a new take on an old subject. They set off to find talented black actors with casting calls for “100 octoroons, 100 quadroons, 100 mulattoes, and 100 decidedly black men, women, and children capable of singing slave choruses.” Although their adaptation was staged with considerably fewer actors than they advertised for, Jarrett and Palmer found enough talent to form three distinct UTC companies and after respectable runs in Philadelphia, New York, and Washington, D.C., took their production on the road—or more accurately, across the ocean—with approximately sixty black entertainers in each company comprising the cast of “genuine” former slaves. A period of real bondage in the American South (one of the promises made in the advertisements circulated in England) was not an actual requirement for getting the part so long as the actors could sing and dance and—more importantly—so long as they looked like “the real thing”—or at least what the theater businessmen considered an accurate representation of the so-called “negro character,” which was drawn directly from blackface minstrelsy. As Mr. Evarts, the New York casting director, explains to a *New York Times* reporter in February 1878, “‘We have a Topsy that is a Topsy. . . . . Our

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73 Identical marketing was used outside of London as well. In Bristol, “At the Fifth Avenue Theatre ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin with real Negroes’ has been the attraction,” in “Theatrical Memrs.,” *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, May 4, 1878. The punctuation in this periodical includes “real Negroes” in the title of the production, emphasizing the novelty of this adaptation.


Topsy can sing plantation songs like a born slave. Her nose lays right flat down on her face, too. She was made for the part. Why, she stands on the stage and turns a somersault without touching the floor. That's the kind of a Topsy we have." Of course, this was only one of several Topsys working for Jarrett and Palmer in 1878, since at least three different ones were touring Europe at the same time. The separate acting companies under the Jarrett and Palmer UTC Company embarked on a tour of England in August of 1878 and continued to tour the United Kingdom and large cities on the Continent for approximately nineteen months, after which they returned to the United States, where they continued to perform *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for another decade.

Did the Jarrett and Palmer production make good on its promise to offer audiences an authentic theatrical experience? For those looking for a long night of spectacular amusement, the answer would be yes. For those interested in seeing a well-written, faithful adaptation of the novel, the answer would be no. According to the following review in the September 2, 1878, issue of *The Times*:

*Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, as presented on Saturday at the Princess’s, cannot be said to have any dramatic interest, properly so called, but the audience had no reason to complain of want of entertainment during the period of more than four hours which the performance occupied. The camp songs of the slaves were excellently sung by the Jubilee Singers; real negroes in great numbers grouped themselves picturesquely upon the stage and danced their quaint plantation dances. Woolly-headed negro children hopped and tumbled about among the legs of the older players. The “greatest banjo-player in the world,” Mr. Weston, a negro gentleman, performed

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76 “Sweet Singers Wanted . . .” 8.
admirably on his selected instrument. There was much good acting, beautiful scenery, and fine—too fine—language. The promise of the posters which have recently decorated London was kept to the eye. . . . . But it seems to have been thought sufficient to bring at great cost all the ingredients of a good play without taking the trouble to combine them into a dramatic unity. 77

The Jarrett and Palmer production kept their promises to visual displays and this, as the reviewer explains, was done at “great cost,” a four-hour long extravaganza performed by “scores” of black actors. The production was loosely linked to the characters and some scenes from Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The real showcase was the musical entertainment performed by “real” black entertainers who were supposedly also “genuine” former slaves. A London correspondent for the New York Times corroborates this conclusion writing as follows: “Everything and everyone must be sacrificed to the negroes. They are a novelty in a London theatre, and the pit and gallery will want them all the time.” 78

The Jarrett and Palmer production may very well be called the product of a great marketing plan that was not only destined to take England and Europe by storm, but instead was precisely designed to do just that. According to an obituary for Palmer published in the New York Times on July 21, 1879, the latter partner was an especially industrious business man with a fortune estimated at $100,000 at the time of his death, most of it earned in the theater business by knowing how to capitalize on a sure investment:

His last venture was a characteristic one, and would hardly commend itself to a less enterprising man. It occurred to him that slave life, as it existed in the South in ante-war days, had never been truthfully depicted in Europe, and he resolved to produce “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” across the water with genuine Southern darkies in the cast. He secured the service of a number of them who could sing and dance in a tolerable fashion, and, after playing them here and in Philadelphia with marked success, he took them to England in December last. Large audiences greeted the novel entertainment in all the principle cities of the United Kingdom, and when public curiosity began to wane the company was taken on the Continent. It is now playing in one of the chief cities in Hungary.\textsuperscript{79}

Setting the writer’s racist comments aside for a moment, what emerges in this obituary is a very well-developed theatrical business plan: find a so-called novel idea, engage the appropriate actors, test-run the show in a few major American cities to gauge its potential for success, and then travel abroad with the show. Once a particular audience pool is exhausted (English audiences in the example given above), move the show to a new venue (theaters on the Continent). Reinsert the writer’s prejudices and a clear sense of what the major commodity being advertised and sold was—not only plantation songs and dance, but also the display of “genuine” black bodies. Once its European prospects were exhausted, they production returned to the United States. The company continued to perform for approximately a decade after Palmer’s death, most likely to the benefit of the surviving partner in this theatrical business duo.

How did Palmer know that this business venture would prove successful? He simply adopted all of the marketing techniques that had worked during the height of “Tom-mania” in the 1850s. First, he took a political issue that had proven itself profitable for nearly a century—abolition. Next, he considered what narrative was most closely associated with it—Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Finally, he commissioned the five-act drama written by George P. Rowe, and made sure that the play reproduced much of the drama of the novel, especially its domestic sentimentalism. According to the obituary, Stowe’s novel is taken as a “truthful depiction” of slavery in the South before the American Civil War, much like the claims of authenticity made by Stowe and others in the 1850s. The marketing strategy is the same in 1878 as it was in 1852 in its emphasis on authenticity and realism. The major difference between the Jarrett and Palmer production and its theatrical progenitors was simply that the American business partners took the next logical step in re-packaging Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the domestic melodrama, and the minstrel show for a new generation. Emphasizing the rhetoric of authenticity that made Uncle Tom a hit in 1852, Jarrett and Palmer offered audiences a new and improved product in 1878. Uncle Tom’s Cabin—now with real negroes!

A correspondent for the New York Times reports that at the height of its popularity in London, the Jarrett and Palmer production was taking in approximately $1,000 nightly. In its final weeks, that number had dwindled to a few hundred dollars a night. Regarding the close of the production in London, the same writer explains that despite waning interest in London, the show will most definitely go on:

In the provinces . . . Messrs. Jarrett & Palmer are still adding to their worldly wealth. The sable performers, the “Jolly Coons,” the jubilee
songs, are received with unbounded applause in the country theatres; and although London was expected to yield a steadier and more prolific influx of gold to the American coffers, the New York managers will make a considerable sum by their venture. Their enterprise is not yet half-exhausted. . . . [T]hey contemplate a tour throughout Europe, visiting the cities of Paris, Berlin, Vienna, St. Petersburg, and the other great centres of art and amusement.  

The Jarrett and Palmer productions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* of the late 1870s did eventually reach many Continental cities as planned by the business partners. Their success in re-introducing *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* to both Western and Eastern European countries more than a quarter century after “Tom-mania” had peaked in England was a result of closely following the marketing plan that had made Uncle Tom a merchandizing phenomenon in the 1850s. In putting together a show for Europeans, Jarrett and Palmer simply picked up on the global audience that had readily consumed *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in some shape or form in the 1850s. During that decade, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was translated into more than twenty languages. There were French and Finnish editions, as well as editions in Danish and Dutch, Polish and Portuguese, Spanish and Swedish, Arabic and Armenian. Adaptations were staged in every major European city. Paris and Berlin saw Uncle Tom on the stage. There were Russian adaptations and Italian versions as well. Jarrett and Palmer’s 1878 business venture came with a built-in international audience eager to see “the real thing.” The Jarrett and Palmer UTC Company promised audiences just that by basing their entire reproduction of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* around a “novel” idea—casting black entertainers to portray black characters on stage.

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Jarrett and Palmer’s adaptation of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* marked a major shift in the way that Stowe’s novel would continue to live in adaptation for another half century. Although white actors in blackface had dominated the London stage adaptations of the 1850s, after 1878 black actors were more in demand. “Tom shows” traveled all over the world and black entertainers became the major draw for theater audiences (as opposed to the novel written by a white, American woman on behalf of enslaved blacks in America). “Tom shows” became a mini-industry of their own where black entertainers were able to earn a wage for their nightly performances. The introduction of black actors, singers, and dancers into the entertainment industry certainly opened up career possibilities for black entertainers that would have not been imaginable a century before. However, when one takes a close look at the way that black entertainers were incorporated into the Uncle Tom phenomenon—as minstrel show performers that reinforced black stereotypes—Jarrett and Palmer’s UTC Company (and the acting companies that followed in their footsteps) becomes less revolutionary in its “novel idea.” Jarrett and Palmer’s production of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* took a novel about abolition and adapted it in such a way that the international stages where the UTC Company performed became a new plantation—a place where black labor was once again exploited with the aims of turning major profits for white managers.
CONCLUSION

Going Global: Birth of an International Entertainment Industry

I would like to return briefly to a passage from John Ross Dix’s *Transatlantic Tracings: or, Sketches of Persons and Scenes in America* (1853) quoted in the previous chapter. The author (whose real name was George Spencer Phillips) writes:

“Uncle Tom” is not only a miracle of itself, but it announces the commencement of a miraculous era in the literary world . . . Such a phenomenon . . . could have happened only in the present wondrous age. It required all the aid of our new machinery to produce the phenomenon; our steam presses, steam-ships, steam-carriages, iron roads, electric telegraphs . . . .

As this passage makes clear, the international success enjoyed by Stowe’s novel was not perceived by contemporaries as a sign of the novel’s inherent greatness, or any similar sentimental argument that might be made for the novel’s broad appeal. Instead, what becomes apparent is that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*’s global success had more to do with technological advances in printing and travel that made it much easier to print and distribute the novel than ever before. In other words, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* would not have enjoyed the level of success that it did had it not been for the industrial revolution and the technological advances of the modern period. Technological advances also made adaptations easier to stage. Steam ships, carriages, and international trains made it much easier for acting troupes to take their adaptations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* on the road. By

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1853, according to this writer, the stage was set for a global entertainment industry that could bring novels and their adaptations to audiences that would have never been reached in earlier years. Dix’s observation adequately illustrates how the literary and theatrical landscape had changed by the mid-nineteenth century.

Although the popular history of Uncle Tom’s Cabin serves as a productive example for showing the nineteenth-century entertainment industry shaped the culture industry of the later century, the emergence of an international entertainment industry did not begin with a single text. Together, the examples included in this dissertation show that an international entertainment industry began to emerge at the turn of the nineteenth century. Adaptations of Obi, Frankenstein, and The Hunchback of Notre-Dame, should also be considered in the history of an emerging international entertainment industry. Although this study has focused on adaptations developed for presentation in London theaters, all of the examples included in this dissertation also shared some international success. Obi was without a doubt a phenomenon in England, but Fawcett’s pantomime was also staged in New York and Philadelphia. Adaptations of Frankenstein were most successful in London; however, there were also many French adaptations of Shelley’s novel, and the actor Thomas Potter Cooke, the first man to bring Frankenstein’s Creature to life on the English stage, toured France playing the famous monster. Theatrical versions of Hugo’s Notre-Dame de Paris also played to an international audience, with adaptations staged in France, England, and the United States. Although none of these examples attained the immediate global visibility enjoyed by Stowe’s novel in 1852, they are nonetheless early examples of how a for-profit entertainment industry that relied
heavily on adaptation began to emerge in the late eighteenth century, and how it played out not only in London theaters, but also on stages throughout the world.

None of the theatrical adaptations discussed in this study are set in England. Instead, they are international in their settings, yet their themes and plots are strikingly domestic. The international reach of the texts selected for this project should not come as a surprise; neither should the diversity of their geographic settings. Gilbert Cross explains, “At first domestic dramas embraced foreign settings rather than those of the English village. The emotions, sentiments, and situations, however, were perfectly familiar to the audience.”2 Although the English adaptations of Three-Fingered Jack, Frankenstein, Notre-Dame, and Uncle Tom’s Cabin represented many different genres, all of them emphasized idealized representations of the domestic sphere, and should therefore be included in any history of domestic drama on the English stage. The uniform reliance on domestic themes and stable images of the family among all of these adaptations tells us a lot about the influence of domestic narratives in popular media throughout the nineteenth century including fiction and drama.

The popularity of domestic narratives both in print and on stage is reason to take a closer look at how these narratives functioned in nineteenth-century England in a broader political context. Mary Poovey explains that the “domestic ideal helped depoliticize class relations at mid-century . . . partly by helping subsume individuals of different classes into a representative Englishman, with whom everyone could identify, even if one’s interests were . . . not served.” Moreover, the idealized image of woman and the

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Poovey’s work demonstrates how domestic ideals were promulgated through medicine, law, literature, education, and nursing. My study extends this argument to the popular theater of the nineteenth century. Through the history of the novel in adaptation on the nineteenth-century English stage, we see how domestic narratives were added to the plots of the dramas in order to promote desirable domestic images and imperial ambitions.

Overall, the addition of domestic storylines in the adaptations of Three-Fingered Jack, Frankenstein, and Notre-Dame, completely undermined the politics of the originals. In adaptations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, sentimental images of plantation life placed more emphasis on the spectacular songs, dances, and scenery of the adaptations staged in London so that to the modern reader, the plays seem to hold less political power than the novel. The nineteenth-century adaptations of these four stories idealize the domestic sphere, reinforcing traditional, conservative values both with regard to gender norms and imperial pursuits. The nineteenth-century adaptations of these stories replace the social critiques found in the primary sources with stable images of the domestic sphere and British moral superiority. Three-Fingered Jack is only portrayed sympathetically when he is fighting to avenge the wrongs committed against his family, not when he is simply rebelling against colonial authorities. Frakenstein’s family is generally spared in adaptation, with only the guilty parties punished at the end of the melodramas staged in the 1820s. Esmeralda is saved from the gallows, and paired with a husband and long-lost mother who will take care of her. English adaptations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin played up the immorality of American slavery in order to present England as a morally superior

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country, despite the fact that the adaptations relied on similar racist stereotypes that played out in the American South.⁴

_Uncle Tom’s Cabin_ enjoyed an unprecedented international success. For that reason, it is often seen as the first text to have such a large impact on the development of a modern entertainment industry with an international reach. It is no wonder that scholars such as Linda Williams situate the Uncle Tom phenomenon as the beginning of a long tradition of melodramatic entertainment about racial tensions. For this reason, Williams laments that feminist interest in the popular, “watered-down” adaptations of _Uncle Tom’s Cabin_ has been scarce:

Though [it] may be right that these stage versions lost much of the emotional, religious, and political power of Stowe’s jeremiad, it is a mistake to assume that Uncle Tom in blackface had no cultural power. To consider Uncle Tom apart from its black face embodiments on stage and screen is to misunderstand the complex workings of racial sympathy that grounded all future melodramas of black and white.⁵

For Williams, _Uncle Tom’s Cabin_ and its popular adaptation are important for their collective impact on representations of racial tensions for more than a century, as well as for the role that melodrama as the dominant mode of expression in both the United States and England played in shaping discourse on both sides of the Atlantic, as well as throughout the world.

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Williams’s suggestion that feminist scholars should take more interest in popular adaptations of novels despite their tendency to simplify narratives is important for several reasons. First, the major element that these “watered-down” adaptations share in common is their tendency to significantly alter the politics of the events and novels that were prepared for stage representation. The adaptations of Three-Fingered Jack, *Frankenstein*, *Notre-Dame*, and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* staged in England throughout the nineteenth century downplayed social critiques present in the originals, specifically when they were tied to revolutionary and enfranchisement movements. For example, Shelley’s feminist critique of masculine individualism is wholly eliminated from nineteenth-century dramatizations of the novel. The story, as it unfolded on the stage, warned against defying nature by presenting violent rebellion as the only possible outcome of going against established norms. The nineteenth-century adaptations of the story never present the Creature’s rage as justified, implicitly suggesting that rebellion is rarely (if ever) an acceptable response to wrongs committed against an individual or a group of individuals. Hugo’s novel was similarly stripped of its republican sympathies. Instead of the extended critique of judicial corruption and justification of rebellion against authorities that Hugo lays out in *Notre-Dame de Paris, 1482*, nineteenth-century adaptations of the novel stage in England focused solely on the domestic plot of the novel, and even altered the plot so that Esmeralda is ensured a stable, happy family life at the end of the dramas, despite the fact that she dies at the end of the novel, the unfortunate victim of corrupt soldiers, judges, and, of course, religious authorities. The adaptations of the story of Three-Fingered Jack and *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* also erase radical critiques of slavery from their plots. Three-Fingered Jack’s historical rebellion against colonial
authorities in Jamaica is reconfigured on the stage as a domestic story that emphasized Quashee’s commitment to his family and subservience to his master, as opposed to accurately portraying the history of black resistance in the West Indies in general, and Jamaica in particular. The adaptations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* similarly focus on domestic narratives and musical spectacles to entertain theatergoers. By emphasizing plantation spectacles, the adaptations undermined Stowe’s feminist call to end abolition in the United States by reinforcing stereotypes about the American south and black culture. For these reasons, feminist scholars should be more interested in popular adaptations, specifically their reliance on sexist, racist, and nationalist stereotypes in order to promote normative images of gender, race, and nation that fit Britain’s political objectives both at home and abroad.

The second reason that Williams’s argument makes sense is that the nineteenth-century stage was a public space that had specific pedagogical aims. Nowhere is this more pronounced than in the domestic dramas that dominated the stage. Cross makes a similar claim:

Eighteenth-century sentimentalism and the early nineteenth-century trend toward the patriarchal Victorian family helped turn romantic verse-dramatists (as well as the writers of melodrama) toward domestic subjects. The domestic drama had a message: prescriptive morality . . . the morality prescribed by convention, sentiment, and contemporary manners. It was, so to speak, Sunday-school morality taught to make children docile and
obedient. The plays presented idealized patterns of feminine marital behavior, Victorian-Christian gentlemanly sentiments, and family virtues. Although it remained largely ignored for almost a century, recent scholarship has reaffirmed the importance of nineteenth-century popular theater in popularizing idealized images of domesticity, and appropriate manners. In other words, the English popular stage promoted fairly homogenous images of gender, class, race, and empire throughout the century even as these images were repeatedly contested in other areas of cultural production, as well as through legislative acts and violent uprisings. The domestic drama, in other words, performed an ideological function that naturalized gender roles and class relations; in many ways, its aim was the “consolidation of bourgeois power.”

The proliferation of the novel in adaptation on the nineteenth-century stage also suggests that, just as popular theater played a role in the development of a British national identity and promoted imperialist agendas, it also participated in the development of a popular literary history. This study has suggested that scholars should seriously consider the extent to which adaptation has played a role in the formation of the current literary canon. *Frankenstein* again serves as a useful example. Although feminist scholars may have recovered Shelley’s novel and made it a cornerstone of the literary canon by publishing scores of articles and books in the last three decades, this may have never happened if *Frankenstein* had not been adapted for the stage in 1823 and proved popular in adaptation for almost two centuries. What makes *Frankenstein* different from Shelley’s other novels? Why have *Valperga* (1823) and *The Last Man* (1826) not

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garnered the same critical attention? The answer is simple. *Frankenstein* is the only novel authored by Shelley that has enjoyed an afterlife in multiple media. A serious study of the novel in adaptation suggests that canon formation is also influenced by the masses. Many of the novels that are now considered classics may have never survived had they not been widely accepted by a mass audience, and consistently reconfigured for future generations. This approach to the study of the novel in adaptation suggests that canon formation is as much tied to commercial practices as it is a part of academic, cultural interests.

Because the aim of this project is to demonstrate that nineteenth-century popular theater played an important role in the emergence of a modern entertainment industry that reached a mass audience through the repeated use of celebrity, spectacle, the idea of “timeless” themes, and authenticity, I would like to conclude by reaffirming nineteenth-century popular theater’s influence on twentieth- and twenty-first century cinema. Feminist film scholar Laura Mulvey provides the following useful acknowledgement of melodrama’s impact on Hollywood film:

Hollywood is not the only national, mass-entertainment cinema to have produced a melodrama genre . . . . [However,] Hollywood was not only a culturally and economically dominant cinema produced by the economically and culturally dominant United States, but also the ‘primal scene’ of modern mythologies. Its myths were specifically American, historically and ideologically, but it also exported the glamour of America and its Utopian modernity, simultaneously recycling narrative patterns, aspirations, and personifications that were close enough to folk tradition to
be familiar to most moviegoing audiences. Hollywood thus created a chimeric monster for contemporary cultural theory, turning out movies that both demand and evade politics.⁸

For Mulvey, Hollywood melodramas especially “demand and evade politics” by their continued reliance on traditional marriage as a method of resolution to most problems. As this study has demonstrated, popular dramatic genres such as melodramas and domestic dramas functioned in much the same way during the nineteenth century in England. Although Mulvey’s comments pertain to Hollywood and its exportation of American values to the rest of the world, from the sole perspective of an “economically and culturally dominant United States,” England was in much the same position of power in the nineteenth century. For this reason, it is imperative that scholars interested in the popularization of certain narratives and their repeated use of gender, racial, and cultural stereotypes to promote a unified image should look to the nineteenth-century popular stage in England to find the beginnings of a culture industry often mistakenly assumed to be a product of the twentieth century.

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⁸ Laura Mulvey, “‘It will be a Magnificent Obsession:’ The Melodrama’s Role in the Development of Contemporary Film Theory,” in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, ed. Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill (London: British Film Institute, 1994), 121-22.
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