The Nineteenth-Century Home Theatre: Women and Material Space

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my three siblings, Jill, Mark, and Dan, because we acted out our own version of parlour plays as the "Make Me Laugh" game when we were younger at our grandpa's house. We invented this simple but invigorating game which almost always pitted the girls against our two younger brothers. One pair would wait in the living room while the other pair planned and choreographed how to get the waiting two to laugh in a certain period of time (usually five minutes). You received one point per person who laughed, and first team to a pre-decided number won the overall game. While Mark and Dan's team was at a distinct disadvantage because Dan was youngest and thus laughed much more easily, our game was also dependent upon props. The rules were that you were not allowed to touch someone (tickling was just unfair though you could still come obnoxiously close), and every object in the bedrooms of our grandpa's house was fair game to incorporate into a skit. I vividly remember being excited about uncovering "fancy" vintage objects and clothing to incorporate—including old sequin dresses that I otherwise was not allowed to wear—but also the suspense of what objects would be used by the other team. Mark and Dan once came out as Batman and Robin, and used hair retrieved from a hairbrush as armpit hair. If I have infused even a small portion of that joy and laughter into this recovery of Victorian parlour theatre, then this is a happy future book indeed.

Chapter 1

Introduction: The Home Theatre in Context

The impact of women on Victorian culture and the public sphere is most often framed through the novel, and scholarship has been quick to emphasize—with good reason—the intensities of the novel-reading process within the imaginative lives of Victorian women. Yet, however intertwined feminist studies and the Victorian novel have grown, the neglected genre of drama offers a fascinating alternative through which to uncover the enormous social force of women, as both producers and consumers, within the nineteenth-century literary market. By bringing together the culturally meaningful spaces of theatre with the Victorian parlour, the home theatre provides a path from the most interior mental spaces of writing and reading to a type of "acting out" otherwise unavailable for its female writers and actresses.

The most familiar example of a home theatrical for scholars today is likely the (rehearsed but thwarted) production of *Lovers' Vows* by the characters of Jane Austen's *Mansfield Park*, or the home play in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women.* Indeed the overwhelming majority of home plays which literary critics do mention are examples of theatricals performed in novels, but not home plays themselves. In distinguishing home theatre as worthy of critical attention in its own respect, one should be wary of confusing parlour theatricals with home productions of tableaux, which represented static scenes or brief pre-cinematic "moving pictures"—such as the oft-noted example in which *Daniel Deronda*'s Gwendolen acts as Hermione from *The Winter's Tale*. Nor are home theatricals an equivalent to charades, as occurs in *Jane Eyre*, in which the actors use a scene or scenes to act out a word or phrase guessed by the audience. Rather, home theatricals are true plays, though their time of representation, most often fifteen to forty minutes, was often shorter than public stage drama.[1] Indeed, T.H. Lacy's extensive and often reprinted guide *The Amateur's Hand-Book and Guide to Home or Drawing Room Theatricals* insists in his initial two pages that small casts, realistic acting, comedy, and shortness are essential to the successful parlour play:

> I know of no pleasanter evening's amusement than is afforded by either witnessing, or assisting in, the performance of a sparkling one-act comedy, played by some six or seven intelligent *ladies and gentlemen*, who, if they have not professional experience, certainly understand and can appreciate the dialogue, and are utterly free from all those absurd professional conventionalities, redolent of anything but actual life, which unhappily are but too often met with on the public stage.
>
> On the other hand, I can conceive nothing more hopelessly dull and tiresome than to witness a number of amateurs enacting a long five-act play, more especially a tragedy.[2]

Lacy's suggestive italicization of "ladies and gentlemen" reinforces an amateur's ability to perform without compromising class status. Middle-class amateurs, according to Lacy, are perhaps the classiest actors. They occupy the position most conducive to realistic acting. Possessing the capacity, not found in the lower classes, to understand a drama in order to deliver their lines and actions with appropriate nuance, they are also unburdened by the conventional theatrical flourishes ingrained into professional actors. The rest of Lacy's language concisely puts forth the comedic and realistic innovations of Victorian parlour theatre.

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[1] While most parlour plays had a short run-time, they were occasionally longer—at least in print. The longest home theatrical that I discovered was B.L.C. Griffith's 1892 *Between the Acts*, which conveniently notes "TIME IN REPRESENTATION. [as] Two hours and a quarter" (4) for its actors on a prefatory page also listing costumes and properties. However, advice for amateurs often recommends performing shorter plays or cutting long ones. Many recommendations are similar to that found in C. Lang Neil's 1904 *Amateur Theatricals, A Practical Guide* in Ch. II "The Choice of a Play," that the chosen piece "should be new enough to interest, and not too long to tax the powers of the actors or the patience of the audience. Preference may be given to some of the many comediettas and one act plays which have been written, one might imagine, with the view of forming a repertoire for amateurs" (45). Harriet L. Childe Pemberton's *"Twenty Minutes" Drawing-Room Duologues, Etc.*, advertises its properly timed productions in its title, but also notes that "[t]he average time of performance of the duologues ia a quarter of an hour; the monologues would hardly take so long; and I do not think that "The Science of Advertisement" takes more than thirty-five minutes" (4).

[2] T. H. Lacy, *The Amateur's Guide* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, November 1870), 6.

While thus far home theatricals have tended to be mere accoutrements to studies of fiction, Victorians themselves sometimes directly used home theatre as a way to extend the power of their novels, and at least a few thought of Austen, just as does the modern scholar, when contemplating home theatre. For instance, in 1895, Rosina Filippi wrote *Duologues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen, Arranged and Adapted for Drawing-Room Performance*.[3] Filippi's work indulges the Victorian amateur actress's fantasy of being a character in an Austen novel. In her volume, one is given a chance to personally reject the advances of Mr. Collins, win a battle of wits against Lady Catherine as Elizabeth Bennet, enact the friendship of Catherine and Isabella in *Northanger Abbey*, or take part in a number of other scenes taken from Austen's fiction. In other words, this is an example of the Victorian woman's reading imagination—a topic which has long preoccupied scholars—becoming more fully activated by writing and performing for the home theatre.

The Nineteenth-Century Home Theatre: Women and Material Space recovers the nineteenth-century parlour play, demonstrating the importance of theatre and acting in the everyday life and domestic spaces of Victorian women. Existing Victorian theatre scholarship needs to push beyond the focus on a select number of male playwrights such as Wilde, Shaw, and Pinero, which limits the introduction of additional questions and issues. As my research cultivated from the British Library, the Houghton Library, and other archives reveals, the hitherto overlooked parlour play occupied a literary marketplace dominated by women, most frequently the authors and the intended actors of home theatre. The nineteenth-century parlour play offered unprecedented dramatic opportunities for middle-class Victorian women to both perform and write for the theatre. My project complicates our thinking about gender, the

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3. Rosina Filippi, *Duologues and Scenes from the Novels of Jane Austen, Arranged and Adapted for Drawing-Room Performance* (London: J. M. Dent and Co., 1895).

everyday, and domestic practices in the nineteenth century, through restoring the centrality of amateur performance to discussions of the middle-class Victorian woman's identity and daily life. The parlour drama unsettles and refines the official histories of drama by disclosing the important role of women's theatre-writing and amateur performance.

Scholars of theatre have long privileged public stage performances as the only legitimate form of theatre. Drama is rather uniquely considered among the genres in having a most pure form available for study: drama written for and practiced on the public stage. Despite the acknowledged theatricality of the Victorian era, most literary critics have ignored the immense influence of amateur theatre within popular culture, and the communicative reverberations between amateur theatre and public stage plays. The parlour play is a genre necessary to our recovery of Victorian theatricality, while the fact of this widespread genre's having been ignored is an indication of something lacking in the way scholars tend to treat drama generally. Other genres are more commonly seen as offering a spectrum of valid ways to participate in that form: for instance, reading a poem either aloud or silently, to oneself or a group, are considered to be equally true though different means of experiencing it. In addition, drama, unlike prose and poetry, requires a social element in its most basic form; a divide has long existed between closet or read drama and public performance. Perhaps the difference with which drama has been treated historically—the sense that only certain plays are worthy of literary criticism—is rooted in the Romantic era's legitimate playhouses and the legislation surrounding the production of plays, or in the Victorians' sense that the national public drama was somewhat lacking, or even in the sheer difficulty of studying so transient an art form, a performance which happens in an irrecoverable moment in a specific space. My point is that the study of theatre generally divides sharply along the closet/performed boundary, to consider either a (private) textual reading and/or a (social) performance reading—and considers *only* those dramas performed on the public stage. Yet, theatre in nineteenth-century popular culture included a much broader spectrum of experience: parlour theatricals performed in everyday life in ordinary parlours by and for middle-class Victorians, as well as private yet more accessible benefit performances such as those performed in town lecture halls, schools, or in the last years of the nineteenth-century, during "Bath Amateur Theatrical Week." Through its use of domestic space for performance and everyday Victorians as actors, the parlour play operates between the normally marked categories of the private and social. Thus, even more so than the narrow selection of printed plays that is commonly considered by scholars, this genre bridges treatment by the divergent methods of reading a play either as text or enacted work.

For instance, take prolific midcentury parlour playwright Eliza Keating, who exemplifies the transition from earlier forms of home charades and tableaux to theatricals. On October 10, 1855, in what is likely her first letter to T. H. Lacy, her long-time publisher through the 1860s, Keating writes perceptively that: "I shall be enabled to have many copies subscribed for among my own friends – as the Charades were all got up by them – and people are fond of seeing in print – the nonsense they perpetrated in private."[4] Later on November 29, Keating's third letter from this series of correspondence discusses the appropriate order for her table of contents. However, she explains tellingly that her personal copy of her plays "is briefly among [her] private friends." She adds, explaining "I forget the order in which they come," but relays to her publisher—as if ensuring or finalizing—what she considers their self-evident titles: "Blue-Beard," "Phaeton," "Cataline," and "Guy Fawkes." Keating's dramas were performed both prior to and concurrently with their publication; this is just one instance of home theatre negotiating an unusual dynamic between print and performance. Keating's persuasive case for the ensured popularity of her *Acting Charades*, before it even reached print, shows how this genre enabled a woman playwright to spread her work to neighboring households and beyond.

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[4] E.H. Keating. *Three Letters to T.H. Lacey, 1855, no date, Accession #15628,* Special Collections, University of Virginia Library, Charlottesville, Va.

My project shows how the parlour play, by manipulating categories of private and social, became a crucial tool for empowering Victorian women. Private performance often reflected the same social concerns as did public drama, but enabled a direct, participatory experience—a spectator could easily become an actor. The parlour play crosses and manipulates several otherwise steadfast boundaries regarding performing, gender, and space: the play is of course read before it is acted by its middle-class performers. (It was sometimes revised or adapted as well, as recommended by amateur acting guides, and reflected by annotations in extant texts). In this regard, the parlour play text demands that readers read not just once but many times, sharpening their spoken interpretation with each iteration, and altering the written text with changes to their lines and blocking, with an eye for the resulting performance. The performers were very often women, who would otherwise be unable to maintain respectability while acting on a stage. The audience and performers were often friends or members of the same group, from the same school, neighborhood, or charity; in essence, the audience/performer boundary could easy shift with the next production. The play itself most often occurred in a parlour, a space normally considered domestic and private, or less commonly in more communal ordinary spaces such as schools or churches or lecture halls. The fact that the actors of the play were in a position to be finally granted social sanction to act and given a place of expression, combined with this fluidity of performers/audience, of the parlour/stage, and of reading/acting/writing, made this genre into a unique means of shifting established cultural norms.

The Nineteenth-Century Home Theatre is invested in the cultural potency of particular spaces: the parlour play endows the ordinary Victorian home—including its language and objects—with the dramatic, to transform the imaginative and physical lives of many middle-class Victorian women. The home as setting also impacted the parlour play's development. While some playwrights suggested elaborate changes to setting, others often suggested, as did Rosina Fillipi in her adaptations of Austen, that though "essential that the accurate costume of the day should be worn," the setting of "these scenes should be represented with no scenery whatever—(by scenery, I mean stage, proscenium, footlights, and curtain)."[5] Nevertheless, no matter how fantastic the nature of a play was—fairy tale plays were popular, props could get extravagant—one never lost the awareness that it was occurring in the daily space of the parlour. In this manner, my project changes our understanding of the intersection between theatre and gender by reshaping our understanding of how theatrical realism developed: less as a remarkable transformation brought about by Ibsen at the turn of the century, and more as a common domestic practice controlled by women in the preceding decades.

The simultaneously private and public space of the parlour allows home drama to shift cultural and behavioral mores. While the parlour playwright's didactic thrust covers a range of possibilities, from the conservative, as in Eliza Keating's *The Talisman, or, Truth may be blamed but it cannot be shamed*,[6] to the transgressive, as in H. J. Byron's *Sensation Dramas for the Back Drawing Room*,[7] the home drama in general emerges as a method for teaching women to be independent, assertive New Women. The parlour play, besides helping to initiate theatrical

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5. Filippi, vi.

6. Eliza Keating, *The Talisman, or, Truth may be blamed but it cannot be shamed, a drama in one act for male characters only* (London: T.H. Lacy, 1800s).

7. H. J. Byron, *Sensation Dramas for the Back Drawing Room* (London: T. H. Lacy, 1864).

realism, sanctioned women's behavior—in writing but especially acting—in ways otherwise restrained by society. My project argues for the rise of the popular parlour play in the years 1860-1900, as growing from earlier Romantic era impulses and culminating in the explosion of Ibsenite theatre during the fin-de-siècle.

In this introductory chapter, I discuss how the home theatrical evolved from the mix of dramatic forms popular in the Romantic era, and I provide representative examples of how amateurs put on theatricals and were otherwise instructed by guides and prefaces to both act and produce plays. My overview paints a picture of the importance of the parlour theatrical within daily Victorian life. In both their prefaces and plots, playwrights drew clear analogies between real life and home theatre. Home theatre was meant to influence ordinary life—as suggested by playwrights' pointedly realist and feminist storylines, their educative message about the importance of social acting, and their suggestion about the freeing capacities of acting theatrically. As I justify my own recovery of this genre, I also describe the sometimes enigmatic process of recovering plays from archives. While explaining the actualities of the home theatre form—the size of the pamphlets, or variety of costuming, for instance—I also point out the ways that this genre provided an accessible writing and publishing outlet for nineteenth-century women. In this regard, I draw on a series of recently archived letters that mid-century playwright Eliza Keating wrote to her publisher T. H. Lacy. This introduction largely relies on accounts of home theatricals in nineteenth-century periodicals; I draw upon details from autobiographical accounts, legal cases, advertisements, and articles about producing plays. Because most scholars will be unfamiliar with the women playwrights in this project—and because I wish to demonstrate the widespread impact of home theatre—I conclude by anchoring home drama within the life of Dickens. However, as I suggest throughout, the real stars of this project are the yet unknown nineteenth-century women performers and writers of this genre.

Origins and Evolutions of Home Theatricals

Nina Auerbach's somewhat deceptively titled *Private Theatricals*, which focuses on the theatricality of novels, popular fiction, and autobiographies though not on actual private theatricals, suggests the implicit need of Victorian scholars to recover this genre.[8] My project was initially inspired by the few pages on home theatre in Kate Newey's *Women's Theatre-Writing in Victorian Britain*. *Laboring to Play,* by Melanie Dawson, a nineteenth-century Americanist, focuses on home entertainments more widely—charades, parlor games—in mid-nineteenth century America. No one has yet written a book focusing entirely on home theatricals. Part of the delay in a recovery of this genre is undoubtedly due to its ephemerality.

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[8] While Victorian theatre at large is underrepresented in scholarly work, one hopes that increasing digitization will remedy this: the past few years have seen the creation of two collaborative websites, that of the 19CTC (The Nineteenth Century Theatre Caucus) and RAPPT (Researchers of Amateur Performance and Private Theatricals). To date, these are lists of researchers interested in nineteenth-century theatre, to aid in potential collaboration. The Victorian Plays Project includes over 360 printed Acting Editions published by T. H. Lacy from 1848 to 1873, but this is truly only a portion of the plays available. A more valuable if as yet harder to use resource is the Readex collection of microcards of virtually all nineteenth-century British and American theatre, which would someday make a valuable electronic aid. The newly digital resources of libraries and other organizations such as Hathitrust have made archival work easier, though sometimes trickier if pages have been left out of electronic versions. Digitization in general has transformed research on parlour plays. In 2007, when I first began work on home theatre as the lone undergraduate in Greg Kucich's "Romantic Era Drama" graduate seminar, I was inspired by a few pages on home theatricals in Kate Newey's *Women's Theatre-Writing in Victorian Britain.* This initiated my first flurry of Interlibrary-loans, and thus began my early acquaintance with microcard and microfilm readers, as well as the obstacle of a subpar printer attached to the microcard reader for aid. As only half of any page would print clearly at a time, I printed each page twice, once with the top half clear, once with the bottom half clear, and then taped these together. This whole process took so long that I read all plays as I printed them. The fragile format of home theatre pamphlets makes them much harder to physically track down (as the author in an 1856 *Bentley's Miscellany* reminds us, their "copies of 'Lacy's Acting Edition' were a disgraceful sight, tumbled, and thumbed, and torn beyond belief").8 The small size is similarly no aid in preservation; a series of *Carpet Plays* indicates, on a prefatory page, that they hope "[t]he little square, paper volumes will easily slip into the pocket." To a great extent I have relied on the physical evidence—pamphlets, books, microcards, microfilm—called forth by plentiful Interlibrary Loan requests, and my own combing through booksellers' listings, as libraries often thought not to acquire these slight home play tracts.

While the quantity of uncatalogued letters and documents related to women's publishing of parlour plays is unknown, in the summer of 2013, I discovered an online listing of three of Eliza Keating's letters to T. H. Lacy on Abebooks, which the UVa Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library kindly obtained for my project.

Theatre is notoriously difficult to study in eras before plays were filmed for documentation or printed works necessarily saved, and parlour plays were most often printed as soft-cover pamphlets or otherwise bound in or produced as (more easily recovered) larger book collections of multiple plays. I concentrate on nineteenth-century British home theatricals though I include American plays in every chapter of my project as well, especially in Chapter Three which focuses on the nationalism of home drama. Many plays were published on both sides of the Atlantic, especially after the friendship of American Samuel French and British Thomas Hailes Lacy led them to serve as one another's publishing agent. Samuel French built a monopoly of dramatic publishing based out of New York by buying up publishing plates; a history of his company notes that while he:

> catered for both the professional and amateur theatre, it was French's role in encouraging amateur dramatics that allowed him to dominate American play publishing. From his premises in Nassau Street, New York, he supplied everything the budding amateur dramatic group might need—make-up, wigs, costumes, lights, and even sets, as well as the plays themselves—everything, in fact, apart from acting ability.[9]

Moving to London, French bought out Lacy's British-based business in 1872. He left his son in charge of the New York operations, and thus strengthened the transatlantic publishing connection.[10] While I concentrate more on plays for adult performers, I also include plays for children, especially in Chapter Two, as these often reveal gendered norms of behavior for both children and adults.

The home theatrical developed into an increasingly middle-class entertainment dominated by women, as playwrights, actresses, and consumers. The parlour play, a primarily aristocratic entertainment in the 1700s, evolved throughout the nineteenth century into a form of social gathering essential to the middle-class. As American Sarah Annie Frost writes in her preface to her own 1868 *Amateur Theatricals and Fairy-Tale Dramas*:

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[9] *Truly Yours, One Hundred and Fifty Years of Play Publishing & Service to the Theatre* (London and New York: Samuel French, Ltd.), 1.

[10] Ibid., 5.

> In the gay circles of fashionable society, amateur theatricals have, in a great measure, taken the place of the old routine of piano-forte music, singing, dancing and small talk, and are also superceding the old money-raising expedients of concerts, balls, and fairs for charitable purposes.[11]

Women made up a large contingent of the home theatrical market—on both the writing and the acting sides of the equation. Gwenn Davis and Beverly Johnson discuss women as "particularly active in writing for home performance," and though these women realized their plays' performance would be contained to the drawing room, they still "hoped to demonstrate some dramatic sophistication and literary skill."[12] Women were also important consumers of home theatre in the niche markets for just women or girl performers. Victorian women gained from home theatre's reputation as an arena in which women could act without compromising their femininity or dignity by appearing on a public stage.

Despite the neglect of the parlour play, the powerful undercurrents of pre-Victorian home theatrics may be traced in even our most canonical literature. Shakespeare's potentially most familiar play, *Hamlet*, may be seen as demonstrating the manipulative emotional power of home theatrics: though a court performance lacks the privacy of a parlour drama, Hamlet's self-produced play-within-a-play is designed to result in "guilty creatures sitting at a play." The closer the theatre is to you—in physical proximity as well as theme, the more capable it is of making you feel. (Even in professional drama, a spectator generally wants to be closer rather than farther from the action.) The closeness of quarters in home theatre, the plots of which often reflected real-life situations, permit this type of theatre to have more transformative effects upon viewers than earlier nineteenth-century theatre such as the public stage pantomime. The comedy of parlour plays makes their either implicit or radically explicit social critique accessible and acceptable. Parlour plays often depend on the marriage plot, and experiment with gender roles and innovative ways for women to become more autonomous and powerful in courtship situations. However, no matter what the thematic content, parlour plays generally feature women in starring roles—this holds true for most multi-character plays and practically always in monologue plays.

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[11] Sarah A. Frost, *Amateur Theatricals and Fairy-Tale Dramas* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, Publishers, 1868), 3.

[12] Gwenn Davis and Beverly Johnson, *Drama by Women to 1900: A Bibliography of American and British Writers, Volume 3*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, xvii. 1992.

The Victorian parlour play may also be aligned with and seen as an extension of the Romantic era's tendency to experiment with dramatic form. As Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer so eloquently argue of similarly neglected Romantic-era plays, to understand British drama at the turn of the nineteenth century means we must not "limit ourselves to a consideration of tragedy and comedy of manners but must also explore the melodrama, the burletta, the harlequinade, the extravaganza, the comic pantomime, the dramatic romance, and the farce."[13] They note that contemporary Romantic reviews criticized plays for generic confusion, and that this "jumbling" often carried a "political, and often radical significance."[14] This type of generic jumbling is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in the Victorian parlour play. (And perhaps, the reluctance of Romanticist literary critics to investigate non-normative theatre as suggested by Cox and Gamer is, as I will suggest, equally a problem in the Victorian period.) While unstudied Romantic and Victorian theatre shares a political refusal to fit into neat generic categories, printing plays in the Romantic era, as well as presumably for Victorian parlour playwrights, was also a way to fly under the radar of theatre censorship. Though most parlour theatre is comedic, it often uses comedy to carry a more subversive message, and traverses various dramatic conventions through permitting women a unique opportunity to act not just comically, but to act at all.

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[13] Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer, "Introduction," *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama*. (Broadview Press: Orchard Park, NY, 2003): xviii.

[14] Ibid., xxiii.

The parlour play can be seen as a development from many earlier theatrical and cultural tendencies—out of the Romantic era's aristocratic theatricals and plays meant for reading to plays performed by the middle-class. On a broader level, the eighteenth century's popular closet drama grew into the Victorian fashion for printing plays for home performance. Parlour plays were clearly primarily meant for performance, as indicated by performance-related amendments left in texts by previous owners, anecdotes of parlour playwrights performing work, and the prefaces to play volumes and amateur acting guides. However, some parlour plays do function as solid reading as well as performing material, especially the elaborate and lengthy monologues such as Florence Bell's "A Hard Day's Work" (in which a woman retrospectively narrates being "on the move all day, mentally as well as physically, about other people's business").[15] One can also imagine a Victorian woman reading through a volume of collected plays in order to choose one for performance, perhaps even envisioning herself or her friends in various roles as she goes. Fiction and reading demonstrate, in fact, how Victorians wholeheartedly embraced the concept of home theatre.

Victorian theatre guides draw upon earlier fiction to attest to their era's own relative ease surrounding home drama. C. Neil Lang's *Amateur Theatricals, A Practical Guide* uses earlier fiction to describe changes from the eighteenth to nineteenth-century parlour plays. After quoting from *Mansfield Park* to demonstrate difficulties arising in production, Lang points outs that "Miss Edgeworth also alludes, in the clever novel 'Patronage,' to similar jealousies and differences attendant on private theatricals, and it would seem, from what is said by these writers, that amateurs of old were more ambitious than they are now."[16] In other words, Victorians appear, at least to Lang, to not be so preoccupied with the ego of individual performance. He draws attention to the now foreign ways in which amateurs tried to maintain a distinction from paid actors: Lang directly quotes several pages from Edgeworth's novel beginning with her description of amateur audiences' initial resistance to applauding—this genteel silence distinguished "between professional actors and actresses and gentlemen and lady performers," but "was so dreadfully awful that they preferred even the noise of vulgar acclamation" (27). Victorians, by all indications, had no resistance to applause, and in general, Lang suggests amateur performance is much more accessible for the ordinary Victorian than her predecessors:

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[15] Florence Bell, "A Hard Day's Work" *Chamber Comedies: A Collection of Plays and Monologues for the Drawing-Room* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co; and New York: 15 East 16th Street, 1890), 237.

> …the conditions of life have changed so much that the amateur of present time stands at a great advantage over his ancient prototype. The facilities of travel bring him in closer contact with the various characters on the stage of life, theatrical taste is more widely disseminated, prejudices have become softened, and all things appertaining to the drama are not only tolerated with a good natural complacency, but often made use of to promote some charitable or social function. The drama may be said to be very much with us right now. (29-30)

Home drama thus feels like a natural extension of the general amiability towards the theatrical in daily life.

While this era's public stage drama may have been considered by both today's scholars and Victorians themselves as part of the large lapse in the prestige of theatre between Congreve and Ibsen, Victorian parlour plays were very much part of the daily lives of a wide cross-section of the Victorian population. Their purposes of performance encompassed a spectrum of privacy, from intimate family gatherings to larger plays held in public spaces to raise charitable funds. As an example of the diverse enjoyment of amateur theatricals, the annual festivities of "The General Theatrical Fund," recorded in *Reynold's Newspaper* in 1859, that the first toast of the evening went out to:

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[16] C. Lang Neil, *Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd., 1904), 27.

> "The Army and Navy," alluding to the great love the officers of the united service had always evinced for the drama, and their special addiction to private theatricals, leading them, even during the storming of Sebastopol, to hold rehearsals amid a hurricane of grapeshot, to write their own pieces, to paint their own scenery; and though they could not hope to rival the achievements of Stanfield, of Roberts, or of Beverley, they had produced some pretty effects by means of Harvey's sauce and anchovy paste.[17]

Fundraising plays remained fashionable throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century for a broad field of performers. A "Postscript" in *The Examiner* of February 7, 1846 notes "[t]he impulse which has been given to amateur theatrical performances by the example of men of letters is, it seems, producing most beneficial results" and records that *John Bull* and *Charles the Second* will be performed that evening at the Strand Theatre "in aid of funds of the Printers' Pension Society"—"the gentlemen sustaining the characters being in nearly every instance members of the printing business."[18] More than fifty years later, in 1896, *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* details the success of the third annual Bath Amateur Theatrical Week, "in aid of the funds of Bath Royal United Hospital."[19] The week of amateur performances opened with:

> a crowded audience to witness a performance of the comic opera, 'Rip Van Winkle.' The programme arranged for the week is, if anything, more ambitious than those which have preceeded [sic] it; the opera, which will also be played on

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[17] "THE DRAMA, MUSIC, ETC.," *Reynolds's Newspaper* (London, England), Sunday, April 24, 1859; Issue 454. For further information about shipboard theatricals in the Victorian era, see the work of Mary Isbell.

[18] "Postscript," *The Examiner* (London, England), Sat. Feb. 7, 1846.

[19] "Bath Amateur Theatrical Week," *The Bristol Mercury and Daily Post* (Bristol, England), Tuesday, October 27, 1896; Issue 15121.

> Thursday and Saturday evenings, and at a matinee on Wednesday, is in itself a very difficult work for amateurs to essay, but in addition there will be performances of “The Rivals” on Tuesday, repeated on Saturday morning, and on Wednesday and Friday “A Pair of Spectacles” will be produced. The last named will be under the stage management of Mr Frank Morris, but with that exception the whole week is under the management of Dr Lionel A. Weatherly, as far as the stage is concerned, and he has for months been engaged in the work of preparation, and as been indefatigable in his efforts to make this year a record.

While revealing the actual mechanics of the week in terms of number of performances, plays, and the potential for leadership roles, this article singles out the women of the orchestra of “Rip Van Winkle”; this musical accompaniment, “greatly augmented by amateurs (including several lady violinists), gave a most careful rendering of the instrumental score.” Benefit amateur performances further complicate the private/public divide: money is transacted but not for “work,” and women are seen by an even larger, though presumably still select, audience. Philanthropic performances, though sharing suspicious similarities with public theatre, would still likely include an audience populated by friends and family of the performers. The most private family or inner-circle amateur performances would be those most likely to diverge from the formalism of public drama; the atmosphere of intimacy between relatives or close acquaintances in a small space breeds a less strict sense of the play produced. For instance, in the most private plays rather than those before larger benefit crowds, it would be more common for actors to be acceptably disarmed or thrown off from their performance by outbursts of laughter from their audience. When considering parlour plays as a genre, one should be aware of the range of productions throughout the century and their varying purposes and degrees of privacy.

By the latter decades of the nineteenth century, plays are described less as being performed by male groups, and are more often clearly produced by and advertised for women performers—of a variety of classes and professions. The *Liverpool Mercury* in 1887 includes remarks on "ENTERTAINMENT BY LIVERPOOL NURSES" and describes how:

> [t]he nurses at the City Hospital, Parkhill, Dingle, have given an entertainment consisting of tableaux and a short parlour play entitled "Britannia's Tea Party." Kindly interest in the successful entertainment was shown by the matron (Miss Givins), Dr. Kennan (the resident medical officer), and Dr. Robinson, his predecessor in the office, gave musical selections. The nurses also rendered interesting songs. Mr. Lee kindly manipulated the limelight.[20]

Thus while women's roles contributed to theatricals in a wide range of ways, the parlour theatrical itself took a variety of shapes throughout the nineteenth century.

The parlour play, while growing naturally out of earlier modes of home entertainment, is also quite different from the charade or individually produced tableau; over the 1860-1900 period, theatricals appear to largely replace these earlier forms. Previously, while charade and tableaux volumes coexisted, charades were much more common. By the latter decades of the nineteenth century, when charades do appear, they are included in much smaller numbers within a volume of theatricals. Occasionally home theatricals incorporate tableaux into the stage action. However, these are used not à la Joanna Baillie to generate a moment of sincere reflection, but are a tongue-in-cheek comedic pause, as in these two brief tableaux from "Romantic Caroline," both triggered by women fainting.[21] First, the romantic Caroline chases her banal confectioner husband around the dinner table with a knife, but then acts as if she is the victim:

> *Spriggs.* Caroline, leave the knife alone.
> [*He tries to escape from* CAROLINE, *who follows him, and upsets the furniture in her course, and throws the plates on the floor.*
> *Car.* But I have defenders now. (*Calling out, still pursuing her husband*) Help! They will not let you torture me thus! Help!
> *Spriggs.* I? I torture you? You will wake every one in the house.

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[20] "Local News Entertainment by Liverpool Nurses," *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), Monday, January 11, 1897; Issue 15298.

[21] Joseph Hatton, "Romantic Caroline; A Farcical Comedy in One Act" (London: 9 Titchfield Terrace, Regent's Park, 1874). References cited parenthetically in the text.

> *Car.* Help me! The wretch! Ah! ah!
> [*She falls disheveled and fainting on the sofa. The doors open quickly. The* PENNYMANS *and* PAUL *come in hurriedly, partly dressed; the* PENNYMANS *from the left,* PAUL *from the right. Music from the orchestra.* (15)

The sudden onslaught of entering characters framing the fainted Caroline is repeated later, when Mrs. Pennyman, Caroline's mother, faints ("Ah I shall not survive it!") in a culmination of melodramatic behavior by her fellow characters:

> *Car. (falling on her knees before her mother; indignantly to* SPRIGGS). Let me save my mother, sir! You can kill me afterwards!
> [MRS. P. *faints – tableau.* (25)

"Romantic Caroline," written in 1874, exhibits the unrestricted energy and fun of the parlour play, with punctuating moments of comedic tableaux—in which women star as the prime comediennes. Mixing elements of melodrama and tableaux, home drama takes the best of established dramatic forms for its own—revising the expected source of laughter, the expected aggressor within a marriage.

Parlour plays are related to the British pantomime through the common home theatrical content of the fairy tale. Fairy tales often depend on scenes of miraculous transformation, as did the pantomime, during which the Fairy Queen traditionally changes all of the typical fairy tale characters into the characters of the harlequinade. Many mid-century parlour playwrights began by writing pantomimes and shifted to parlour plays, presumably because this genre was becoming more popular and thus more profitable. For instance, throughout the early 1860s, Henry J. Byron, second cousin to Lord Byron and a prolific dramatist, was probably best known for his extensive repertoire of often rhyming pantomime plays, with titles such as *Blue Beard!: from a new point of hue*[22] and *Aladdin, or, The Wonderful Scamp!*,[23] but Byron also wrote an exuberant collection of amateur theatricals, *Sensation Dramas for the Back Drawing Room,*[24] which includes “The Mendacious Mariner; or, Pretty Poll of Portsea and the Captain with his Whiskers,” and “Taffy was a Welshman; or, The Child, the Chouse, and the Cheese,” among other enthusiastically worded selections. Eliza Keating’s parlour plays often use material similar to that found in the panto, such as her (at least) ten separately sold *Fairy Plays and Home Burlesques* published by T. H. Lacy in the 1860s which include the feminist revision “Blue Beard: or, Female curiosity!! and male atrocity!!!: an extravaganza in two acts.”[25]

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[22] Henry J. Byron, *Blue Beard!: from a new point of hue, a burlesque extravaganza* (London, New York: S. French, 1860).

1860 appears to be a launching point for the home theatre in both Britain and America. One might correlate this rise in popularity with a rise in sensation fiction by women featuring strong female roles during this period. Sensation novels, like parlour drama, also include a complex negotiation of realism; while the plots of sensation fiction may be tinged with the gothic, they are grounded in contemporary life with consequential actions like crime and punishment, and technological developments like trains. The parlour play’s popularity can therefore be attributed to this increasing preference for the realistic. However, as I suggest in Chapter Two, home theatre can be seen as evolving from etiquette culture and advice books, as well as from changes in education. Women who wrote parlour plays often took advantage of the

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23. Henry J. Byron, *Aladdin, or The Wonderful Scamp! An original burlesque extravaganza in one act* (London: T. H. Lacy, 1861).

24. Henry J. Byron, *Sensation Dramas for the Back Drawing Room* (London: T. H. Lacy, 1861).

25. Eliza Keating, “Blue Beard: or, Female curiosity!! and male atrocity!!!: an extravaganza in two acts” (London: T. H. Lacy, 1860). This work was republished in New York and London by S. French in 1865. (London based Lacy built a partnership with American Samuel French around 1860.) The ten fairy plays advertised for “sixpence each – post free” are 1. Beauty and the Beast., 2. Blue Beard., 3. White Cat., 4. Cinderella., 5. Yellow Dwarf., 6. Aladdin., 7. Puss in Boots., 8. Little Red Riding Hood., 9. Sleeping Beauty., 10. Ali Baba.” Please see back unpaginated matter of Keating’s “Little Red Riding Hood” for this listing as well as more full list of “Lacy’s Dramas for Private Representation.”

educational function of the home as a way to rationalize their dramatic work, whether writing for children or adults.

Home Drama Form: Staging, Etiquette, and Female Authorship

I have noted that the Romantic theatre figured in nineteenth-century home plays. In 1859, American Eliza Lee Follen republished Maria Edgeworth's home plays "Old Poz," "Dumb Andy," and "The Grinding Organ," as part of her compilation *Home Dramas for Young People*, which contains only theatricals written by women.[26] Follen's 441-page volume also includes three charades and various other contemporary women writers' theatricals: the now relatively unknown Miss Lucy Aikin's "Alfred" and "Master and Slave," Mrs. Anna Jameson's "Much Coin, Much Care," and Mrs. Pulsky's "The Sleeper Awakened," which accompany the only still recognizable selection today, Mrs. Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Extracts from Christian Slave," a shorter selection of Stowe's own dramatic adaptation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Follen, writing at the very beginning of the surge in theatrical popularity, still sounds like an apologetic Romantic woman writer in her preface: while she has been responsible for compiling the volume she has done so "at the request of the publishers" (v). Her own theatrical "Mrs Peck's Pudding" begins the volume, but is:

> …simply a little story dramatised, that was published in Hood's magazine many years ago. The wit and fun were ready at hand, and have received little addition. The plot, if a conclusion so simple may be called a plot, is nearly all that is original in the little comedy. (vi)

Yet, despite Follen's professing a closing hope to merely "add some thing to the cheerfulness and blessedness of Home, that sacred place where we first learn of Heaven," her preface tantalizingly offers an example of women collaborating in her other self-written work included in the collection: the charade "Partington," her writing of which was "aided by two [unnamed] friends" and a performance of which was "acted once with great success, provoking repeated shouts of laughter from the audience" (vi). Later Victorian women are more forthright about their own productions inspiring printed plays, as well as unrepentant about having authored or rehearsed them with their friends.[27] Indeed, occasionally a playwright cannot resist divulging the circumstances of authorship, as American Emma Brewster does at the end of her play "Aunt Mehetible's Scientific Experiment," one of thirteen theatricals in her 1880 collection *Parlor Varieties, Plays, Pantomimes and Charades.* [28] Brewster's bracketed addendum to this playscript is proud of "Aunt Mehetible's Experiment" originating as an opportunity for a group of schoolgirls to prove themselves to their teachers and peers:

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[26] 26. Eliza Lee Follen, *Home Dramas for Young People* (Boston and Cambridge: James Munroe and Company, 1859).

> [The above was written ten years ago, under the following circumstances: There was to be a school exhibition, and six girls were left out of the exercises as having no particular talent worth exhibiting. The author wrote this play, taking herself the part of Aunt Mehetible, and rehearsed the girls in secret. When all was prepared, and the president of the school was let into the secret, he declared the little play the best thing on the programme. It was given the place of honor in the

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[27] *The Ipswich Journal* recorded for posterity a prologue, which the writer here directly compares to those of eighteenth-century public stage, written specifically for a home theatrical performed by soldiers. A "grand amateur theatrical performance was given at the Ipswich Theatre on Thursday evening, in aid of the fund for the relief of the distressed Lancashire operatives. The performers were officers of the 10th Depot Battaltion, from the Colchester camp." The article notes that "[t]he proceedings commenced with a prologue, spoken with much ease, and with a manner calculated to put the house in a favourable mood for the evening, by Major Adair. The lines, which have the true ring of the theatrical prologues of the eighteenth century, were as follows:--

Ere we begin to tread these mimic boards,
And do our best to move your laughter's chords,
One word. No bard his kind assistance lends,
In flowery lines, to welcome here our friends!
But lo! on me devolves the arduous duty
To greet this formidable Line of Beauty!
A trying task for any bashful Saxon—
(I'd rather go and fight 'gaint "Stonewall Jackson").
[…]
Beam, then, Bright Eyes! upon our efforts rude,
And deep shall be our Thespian gratitude!"

See *The Ipswich Journal* of Saturday Dec. 13, 1862 for full prologue.

[28] Emma Brewster, "Aunt Mehetible's Scientific Experiment," *Parlor Varieties, Plays, Pantomimes, Charades* (Boston: Lee and Shepard Publishers; New York: Charles T. Dillingham: 1880), 75-83.

> entertainment, received with immense éclat, and covered the "untalented" girls with glory. It has been used several times under similar circumstances, to use the willing but superfluous young ladies of schools or literary societies, and has ever met with the greatest success. (82)

Brewster anecdotally remarks that while Aunt Mehetible must be an artful actress, "there is no acting whatsoever required for the other parts" and she "earnestly recommends it to all perplexed teachers or presidents of societies, with superfluous girls on hand" (83). She basically agrees that the supporting roles require no talent at all; in essence, even "redundant" women may find a character to play. However, she offers evidence of the home theatrical buttressing up girls otherwise ignored by their peers or teachers, and is proud of having written herself out of her former "talentless" situation. Women writers of the Victorian era sound a lot like their Romantic predecessors in their traditional educative slant on theatre-writing, in which they are making otherwise useless bodies useful, but they are also more upfront about the fact of their authorship.

As I discuss in Chapter 3, American Sarah Annie Frost elevated the patriotism of the home drama by adapting Romantic work, specifically Susanna Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* and Isaac Bickerstaff and Charles Dibdin's *The Padlock*, for the home stage. A preface to her volume of home plays harkens back to the recognizable and still desirable style of acting by the Romantic greats, while pushing for the necessity of realism in home theatre productions:

> But ever in the road of the amateur Siddons, Keans and Davenports, stand the great stumbling blocks of scenery and costume, limiting the choice of plays to the very few that do not stray beyond the limits of the drawing-room or attic. To make a forest out of gilded wall paper, guide a stream across a velvet carpet, plant a garden on the hearth rug, drop a cataract from the mantel-piece, or a precipice from the chandelier, was found too great a stretch of scenic ingenuity, while costumes were equally unattainable and puzzling. The Saratoga trunk held no costumes for Queen Elizabeth or Portia, and Hamlet or Othello sighed in vain for a wardrobe in a valise.[29]

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[29] S. A. Frost, *Amateur Theatricals and Fairy Tale Dramas, A Collection of Original Plays, Expressly Designed for Drawing-Room Performance* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, Publishers, 1868), 3.

While Frost notes the limitations of parlour scenery and costume, and other parlour guides often advertise themselves on the title page or in the preface as requiring no extensive apparatus to put on, other plays go full force into creating elaborate backdrops, props, and costumes.

Florence Bell's 1890 *Fairy Tale Plays and How to Act Them*, a collection of home theatricals written for children—featured in Chapter Two—includes one of the most extensive sets of extra-theatrical material: a thirty-five page introduction whose extensive elaborations reveal much about expectations for producing a play, whether for children or adult performers, and thus are categorically listed here. Bell, one of the most prolific parlour playwrights—of the entire second half of the nineteenth century—is featured in every chapter of my project. Here, she nicely introduces how gender factors into even a child's participation in a home theatrical, how learning a specific demeanor for a theatrical impacts one's manner in real life situations, and the overall complexities involved in more advanced productions. Bell's lengthy introduction includes the following:

1. Advice for the adult directors of the children's plays, including: adjusting the number of "supers" for large school plays or smaller private plays, inserting dances, installing scenery, screens, and curtain (see fig. 1, p. xiv), rehearsing lighting and installing footlights (see fig. 2, p. xv), raising platforms and arranging a place for a prompter, how to prompt, and general advice for stage managers, who:

   > must not be disheartened, if, when the performance takes place, his company invent an entirely new series of enormities, both of omission and commission [….] a misfortune which it is impossible to guard against, as the fertility of children's invention in this respect is quite unlimited. (xviii-xix)

   Note that while Bell provides a diagram of a very traditional stage and proscenium, many other plays more often did away with this altogether.

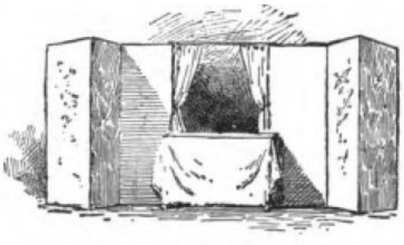

FIG. 1.

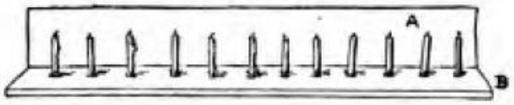

FIG. 2.

2. A lengthy discourse on a child's posture and bodily placement. Bell compares behavior in a theatrical to that in real life:

> As regards general deportment, however—standing, walking, sitting, moving—most of the maxims that apply to private life apply with still greater force to the stage, where, since the attention of the spectators is riveted on the performer, it is still more necessary to stand well, walk well, and sit well, than it is in daily life, where error in these respects may hope sometimes to pass unperceived. (xx)

Gender impacts how Bell dwells on a child's general deportment. Her descriptions of the many attitudes that boys might assume---especially their inadvertent talent for comic confusion and inaptitude in romance—with their accompanying six illustrations are a fascinating glimpse into the Victorian exactness which was teaching children bodily behavior:

> Feet also appear to be extremely inconvenient parts of the person, especially those of boys. […] He is quite likely, at a moment when he is playing a leading part and should be sitting gracefully and easily in his chair, both feet on the ground in front of him, one a little before the other, to adopt the attitude shown in fig. 3, which could only be tolerated as an expression of comic despair or bewilderment, and is not suitable in moments of romantic emotion. Or else (fig. 4) he sits with his feet straight out in front of him, the heel of one on the toe of the other, which makes them look as big as possible; or (fig. 5) he puts them as far back under his chair as possible, resting on their toes. Or else he combines these three movements by shuffling and scraping his feet in and out with lightning rapidity, all the time he speaks. Sometimes also (fig. 6) he curls his legs tightly round the front legs of his chair, a position which it is very difficult to get out of in a hurry. (xxi-xxii)

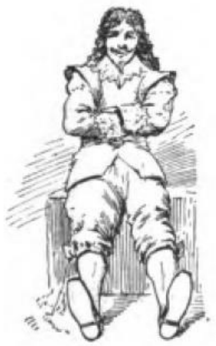

FIG. 3.

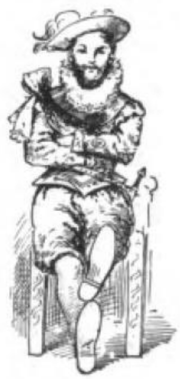

FIG. 4.

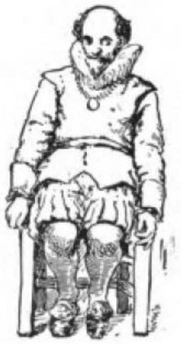

FIG. 5.

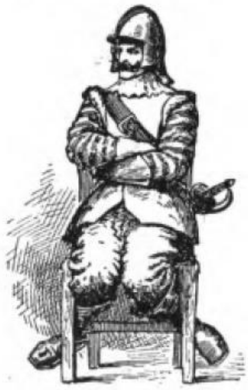

FIG. 6.

Interestingly, Bell assumes a type of gender equality towards children's behavior: "[a] girl is just as likely to assume any of these attitudes as a boy, but she has the advantage of having her outlines modified by drapery" (xxii). A girl, Bell notes, must be particularly careful, when sitting sideways to the audience:

> that her gown should fall in loose folds on the side towards the spectators (fig. 7), instead of having, as is more commonly the case, most of her drapery on her wrong side, which gives the effect of its being tied tightly round her legs (fig. 8) (xxii, figures from xxiii):

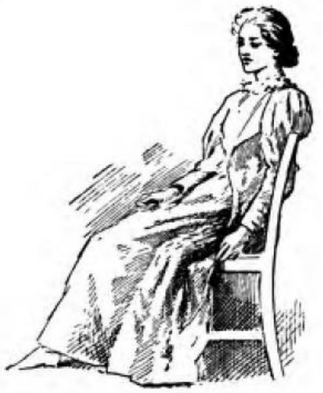

FIG. 7.

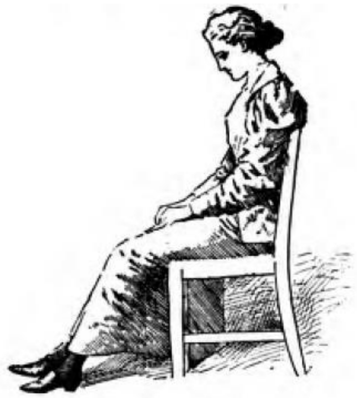

FIG. 8.

For Bell, girls likewise have trouble presenting themselves gracefully in scenes of romance, and tend to appear inappropriately indignant:

> Some girls have a habit of always standing with their arms tightly folded in front. […] I have seen a schoolgirl play a love scene in the attitude shown in fig. 9, which was not well chosen for that occasion, although it might suitable have been adopted at a moment in which the part demanded an expression of indignation or

> of determination. As a general rule, if a girl wishes to fold her hands and arms in front of her and keep them still, let her cross her hands only, not her arms (fig. 10). She must beware of standing with her arms a-kimbo, especially when playing a part which demands grace and refinement. (xxiv)

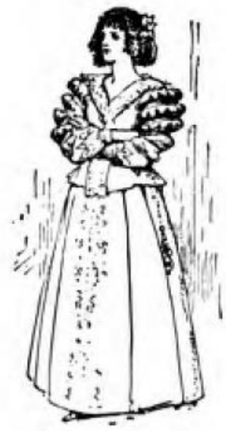

Fig. 9.

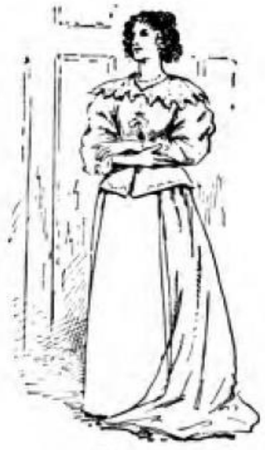

Fig. 10.

3. Rehearsing particular kinds of scenes. For instance, occasions for eating and drinking require special rehearsal; Bell anecdotally relates how, in the dining scene required in "Beauty and the Beast," she "once saw Fatima rendered speechless in the middle of the scene, from having embarked too eagerly on a large lump of Turkish delight, a substance which does not make for elocution" (xxviii).
4. The process of applying makeup, which "in the case of child-actors [should] be very sparingly used" (xxxi) unless "the character to be played is an old one, with a wrinkled, discoloured face" (xxxii).
5. Appropriate props and how to have them ready offstage. For example, "[w]ooden swords, cardboard shields, &c., can always be made to look effective by having strips of gold or silver paper pasted on to them" (xxxi). I discuss Bell's more involved props, such as the construction of an ogre's head, in Chapter Four.

Other plays have suggestions for scenery or costume which are less extensive than Bell's. For instance, William Hodson's "Jack and the Beanstalk: A Moral and Intellectual

Rhodomontade, Direct and in Verse"—which the author notes was "*[f]irst produced in private, 29th December 1869*" and has a time of representation of 55 minutes—includes directions for creating a precisely colorful backdrop and engineering a moveable beanstalk.[30] The precision of detail and painting-like color presumably reflect the actualities of the first production by the author and offer a rare glimpse into the means of putting on a play:

> SCENE—For a Parlour or Drawing-room, the Scene may be arranged as follows:—Provide four or six large sheets of brown paper, glue them together at the edges, with charcoal outline a piece of landscape, trees, &c., extending about five feet from the part intended for the ground. With powdered colours, size and water, paint in blue and white for the sky, the clouds, &c., with white only, shaded with white and blue and red ochre; then pure blue for the distance—same and yellow ochre for middle distance, and yellow ochre and Vandyke brown for foreground, adding bits of rustic work. When the ground colour is dry, then paint a large vine over the top and sides of the scene, and on left a porch and sign board, "Mangling Done," this being hung up against the wall, with addition of clothes line and wash-tub, forms the first scene. The Beanstalk is made by a long strip of brown paper to reach from floor to ceiling, about eighteen inches wide—and old flower-box with a piece of blind-roller serve for the practical machinery, the stalk being drawn from the box to the ceiling of the room by means of a piece of twine run through a ring near the cornice of room—curtains may be festooned at the sides, and these when let down, should conceal the first scene, and form the second—the Giant's apartment. The third scene is the first repeated. The Giant should conceal himself at the wing, and jump off at the proper time from a side-board or high chair. Jack should hide himself behind the beanstalk on a chair or stool for this scene, and for the end of the first scene. (2)

This production appears to indicate that Keating was not the only author to first produce and then publish her work. The prefatory matter includes additional representative details about dress, for each of the five characters: Giant Blunderbore "*a well known Giant, distantly related to several Fairy tales*," Jack "*a Giant-killer and a young lady-killer*," Lucy "*a girl of the period*," Mrs. Blunderbore "*a girl of a former period*," and Mrs. Marplot "*Jack's mother—inclined to give him a Jack-hiting* [sic]" (2). Interestingly, this version of "Jack" is rather unusually written as a collaborative production between adults and children—most plays are either for adults or children but not both simultaneously. Both Jack and Lucy should be played by “a youth” and “a young lady” respectively, and while the Giant is presumably played by an adult, both older women, Mrs. Blunderbore and Mrs. Marplot, are each to be “[p]layed by a gentleman” (3). Lucy’s suggested beflowered dress is typical of young girls in performances: “[a] short dress of white muslin, short skirt over, hair in curls, head-dress of flowers, white kid gloves, white boots and tassels,” while the Giant’s apparatus includes “Nankeen trousers, well stuffed at the calves,” and the men disguised as the Mrs. characters are a match for the younger girl in terms of feminine garments: Mrs. Blunderbore’s outfitting for example includes “[f]ull skirt and undergarments, the body of dress may be made of yellow glazed lining cut square, head-dress or tiara of same with white muslin hanging down, boots and tassels, white kid gloves” (3). This theatrical takes the roles of women to heart in an unusual manner, as the men in female roles mourn the lack of autonomy presented by a woman’s life. Mrs. Marplot opens the play with a song and the lines:

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[30] William Hodson, "Jack and the Beanstalk." (London: T. H. Lacy, 1869). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in the text.

> I’m forced to do this washing for my son.
> ‘Tub be or not tub be”—it always follers,
> I must get up that young scamps’ fronts and collars (4)

Mrs. Blunderbore, the giant’s wife, is likewise slave to a (larger) man’s whims, singing to herself the plaint of her exploitative marriage:

> We married in haste—of love had a taste,
> But alas a change came soon arter,
> My giant so dear took to treating me queer,
> I began to feel I was a martyr.
> I cook and he eats, but the kind of treats
> I get are those I could barter,
> For with sniffling and crying I’m sure I am dying,
> Or I’ll first make a hole in the water. (11)

Though performing and writing home theatre was dominated by women, this theatrical—written by a man, and in which men supply grown women's parts—still works to show comically a woman's confinement by life roles. By placing men in both women's clothes *and* their femininely slavish relationships towards sons and husbands, the laughter directed at these male actors appears especially unsettling to the gendered norm (perhaps especially with the giant treating his wife "queer").

While Bell's introductory matter and Hodson's "Jack" provide examples of more detailed productions, other theatrical volumes expounded upon their simplicity of production as an advertising point. In Sarah Annie Frost's preface, she specifically aims to "to supply dramas that will not draw too heavily upon the ingenuity of the aspirants for parlor applause, or exceed the limits of papa's generosity, that can be made effective with modern furniture and dress."[31] D. Lawler and T. H. Lacy, in the introduction to "The School of Daughters" in *Home Plays for Ladies, Part the First*, note that "[f]or the representation of this little Drama, no dresses are requisite beyond those which are readily available," the two countrymen may be simply attired in "long smock frocks, and round hats," and if painted scenery is not used because of "its cost, and the trouble it entails, [the author] would recommend that the stage be hung round with curtains; and prior to each scene change, a neatly written placard be affixed on the back, describing briefly the locality of the scene about to be represented" (See figure below).[32]

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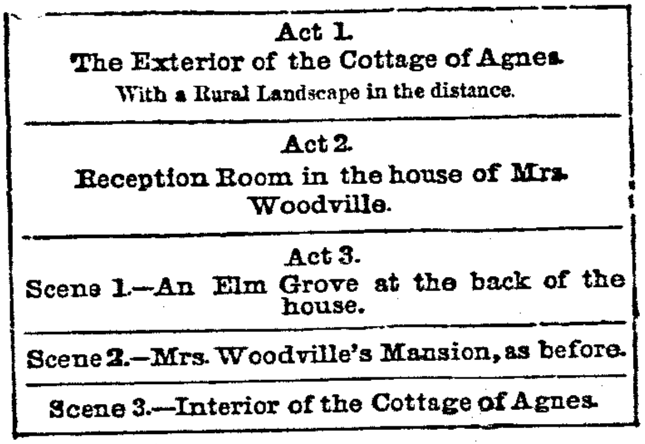
[31] Frost, 3-4.

[32] D. Lawler and Thomas Hailes Lacy, "Introduction" to "The School for Daughters" in *Home Plays for Ladies, Part the First* (London: Samuel French, Ltd., and New York: T. Henry French, date unknown), 4. The other two plays in this volume are "Mrs. Willis's Will and "The Duchess of Mansfeldt."



Act 1.
The Exterior of the Cottage of Agnes.
With a Rural Landscape in the distance.

Act 2.
Reception Room in the house of Mrs. Woodville.

Act 3.
Scene 1.—An Elm Grove at the back of the house.

Scene 2.—Mrs. Woodville's Mansion, as before.

Scene 3.—Interior of the Cottage of Agnes.

An article "Drawing Room Dramas" in the December 25, 1880 *Liverpool Mercury,* likewise suggests a simplicity of home performance: "as home-made cakes are regulated as to the number of plums they possess, but are all the better eating because they are not too rich, so a home-grown play should be homely, and not too ambitious."[33] The *Mercury,* in this excerpt and reprint of "Christmas Entertainments, and How to Get them Up" from the "Boy's Newspaper," reflects that oftentimes the preparation for a home play is the most fondly remembered aspect of it, but—perhaps most exciting for scholars of theatre and realism—this excerpt explains how objects already present in the home are easily subsumed into the production:

> [T]his preparation, as far as possible, should cover every detail: the home wardrobe should supply dresses, the home furniture and screens become curtains and properties for the stage, the only *outside* requirements, perhaps, being the wigs and whiskers or moustaches. But, at the outset, it should be borne in mind that those directing the preparation of these home performances should aim after requiring as little assistance of this nature as possible, and for two reasons—one on the score of expense, and the other that, with the necessary limitation of space between actors and onlookers, facial make-up and embellishment can never be done strict justice to, but, on the contrary, present an unkempt and inartistic appearance which should be avoided.

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[33] "Drawing Room Dramas," *Liverpool Mercury*. Saturday Dec. 25, 1880, Issue 10238. While the *Liverpool Mercury* attributes this article to "Christmas Entertainments and How to Get them Up," in the "Boys' Newspaper," a shorter and unattributed version of this same article was printed in *The Aberdeen Weekly* a few days later on Monday Dec. 27, 1880 (Issue 8062). This shorter version leaves off the first couple sentences of the original, but includes all material from which I have quoted as well.

While blatantly fake makeup and other such alterations should be avoided, circumstances dictate the nature of the entertainment; a "performance on a large scale [may serve] as amusement to a throng of juvenile guests, or it may be on a much smaller scale, for the benefit of the paterfamilias, the family, and the servants." A woman's 1850s autobiographical account reinforces the homemade nature of the play apparatus during her family's Christmastime performances:

> Now, if Mr. Stokes, who will treat everything with such breadth of colouring, informs you that we got our moveable theatre from Thespis and Son, and all our dresses, new, from the costumist of the Lyceum, one of us two has been misinformed, as I understood from Leonard that he went to Levi's, the theatrical man, and got all the gentlemen's things on hire, except the wigs; and, for us [women], we made our own habiliments, under the direction of a distinguished artiste—mamma. The village carpenter put up the stage and the footlights; and the all-accomplished Mr. Stokes painted the side-scenes and the curtain. "For a ten-pound note, and with the desctruction of the back-drawing room," as Uncle John complacently observed, "we did it all."[34]

The destruction of the back-drawing room was not an infrequent occurrence—in which women perhaps took a particular joy. An earlier *Bentley's Miscellany* account of 1838 "Family Dramaticals," introduced by the author as a letter found "upon a sequestered road, within a short distance of a celebrated watering place" (83) and supposedly merely reprinted, contains too many precise details to be pure fiction. The letter writer, according to his testimony, was a former professional actor (unbeknownst to his neighbors, as he has "changed his name"), and is invited to his neighbor Stickleback's for private theatricals. The professional/amateur divide plays a bit of an opposing role here, as he—and perhaps that particular pronoun is key—"had too much honourable professional labour to resort to such private acting for amusement." Upon first visiting the Stickleback residence, the day prior to the play, he "thought the house appeared rather defective in furniture" though this is resolved upon stepping into:

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[34] *The Private Theatricals at Cheshant* , Bentley's Miscellany, 39 (1856), 162.

> the room where the play was to be enacted, and beholding the fittings-up, the dresses, and the decorations. I am convinced that hardly a floor was left covered by its respective baize or carpet; that the windows were all despoiled of their curtains, and that the bedsteads were reduced to what sailors call "bare poles," by having resigned their valances, &c. to furnish forth the 'tirings and properties of the entertainments. These, as we were informed by a bill printed with the ordinary hand-types used for marking the household linen, were "Pizarro; or, the Invasion of Peru; or, the Death of Rolla: a variety of singing and dancing; and the romantic romance of the Blind Boy; or, Rodolph, the Usurping Prince of Sarmatia, and Kalig, the Faithful Courtier!"

The author carefully absolves the patriarch of the family from the illicitly outrageous proceedings occurring in his own home: "old Stickleback himself […] was entirely ignorant and guiltless of them all, since the whole design was privately concocted between his wife and family, who also took the opportunity of his absence from home to astonish their acquaintance by such a display of taste and talent" (86). In this manner, the home play is a true domestic takeover by the wife, who indeed appears to take great pleasure in dismantling the home from its ordinary state: "The proscenium of the stage was formed by the opening of two folding-doors, which, I was assured by Mrs. Stickleback, who appeared to have no little pride and complacency in pointing out the most preposterous of the arrangements, were absolutely taken off their hinges." The author's description of the lighting is most amazing of all, and worthy of attention for imparting the intricacies and ingenuities behind home performance:

> In my own poor notions of such matters, a large table-lamp on each side the stage, and another suspended from the ceiling of the audience-apartment, would have respectably and sufficiently lighted the front. But, no! the Sticklebacks had a soul and conception far beyond such every-day contrivances. When we were all seated in staring and silent expectation, we heard the steps and loud whisperings and disputings of several persons in the adjoining narrow passage, carrying some large heavy vessel full of liquid, which ever and anon seemed to give a lurch, and then to wash over the edge, to the great dismay of its bearers. At last the curtain was partly raised, and four persons appeared, carrying—mind, I'll swear for the

> truth of this, whatever you may think,—four persons appeared, carrying a large trough of new bright tin, of sufficient capacity for half a dozen swine to feed at, if there were disposed to be accommodating, three parts filled with lamp-oil, in which were floating a multitude of small pieces of cork, with a lighted wick attached to each! With much labour, and no little spilling of the said oil, these most extraordinary footlights were borne to the front, and set down: but when the prologue came forward, they were found to be so smoky, so offensive, and so much in the way,—for the whole machine reached to the middle of his, the said Prologue's legs,—that they were at once unanimously voted out, and were removed with the same labour and mischief; their place being then supplied by a row of candles set upon the floor. (87)

The skeptical male author reveals illuminating anecdotes about the play itself: for instance, about "the prologue, which was, doubtless, home-made, and quite like the generality of such compositions, having a great deal about "*our* cause," and "*your* applause," without which many persons think an honest prologue cannot be written" (87), and how the immediate family were given starring roles: "a few select friends of similar taste and qualifications were permitted to gather up some scraps of the family glory by personating the inferior characters, or appearing as soldier, priests, and virgins" (87). The female characters appear, like Mrs. Stickleback, to irritate him most for their evident inability to tread a medium ground between booming and whispering:

> Miss Judith Marcia Stickleback, as *Elvira*, was, I am persuaded, distinctly heard for three doors off on each side of the house, as well as by all who passed it, such was her noble anxiety 'to top the part,' as *Bayes* says; whilst the narrow stage appeared too little for either her soul or body. Little Miss Kitty Stickleback, on the contrary, was so lisping, and mincing, and languishing, as *Cora*, that one half of her speeches could not be understood, and the remainder were never heard at all. (88)

Stickleback returning in the midst of the performance, likewise places the most blame on his wife, and "swore roundly that if ever he should find his dwelling so turned out at windows again, he will have his wife indicted for keeping a disorderly house" (90). Despite the author and Mr. Stickleback blaming the women of the household for their enthusiastic theatrical production, the drama allows them to overturn typical domestic circumstances.

Parlour Plays in the British Periodical: Law, Entertainment, Autobiography, and Advertisement

Reviews in newspapers reveal the reception of public drama, but seldom indicate private staging. Yet periodicals sources do reveal much about the actual performance and the role of theatricals within society. A survey of home theatricals in periodicals over the nineteenth century shows not only how the genre evolved—away from an activity confined to the rich uncle's country house during holidays— but also how it retained an aura of fun and transgression. Throughout, periodicals demonstrate that the acceptability of private acting often depended upon its label of privacy, while theatricality and acting itself retained a tinge of the illicit.

It is fitting that I include in my historical survey of home drama, how periodicals themselves note the expansive imperial history of the home theatrical. An 1874 article in the *Temple Bar* began with the private/public difference in Greece and Rome:

> As in Greece a man suffered no disparagement by being an actor there was no disposition to do in private what was not forbidden in public. The whole profession was ennobled when an actor so accomplished as Aristodemus was honoured with the office of ambassador.
>
> In Rome a man was dishonoured by being a player. Accordingly noble Roman youths loved to act in private, excusing themselves on the ground that no professional actor polluted their private stage.[35]

The anonymous author explains the aristocratic and royal origins of home drama in Italy, France, and England—in the last, a focus on the royal daughters and wives is noticeable:

> In England, private theatricals are to be traced back to an early date. We go far enough in that direction, however, by referring to Mary Tudor, the solemn little daughter of Henry the Eighth, who, with other children, acted before her royal sire, in Greenwich Palace, to the intense delight of her father and an admiring court. Henrietta Maria, Queen of Charles the First, is remembered in court and theatrical annals for the grace with which she played in pretty pastoral French

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[35] "Private Theatricals," *Temple Bar*, 40 (1874:Mar.), 390.

> pieces, assisted by her ladies, on the private stages at Whitehall and Hampton Court. The private theatricals of the Puritan days were only those which took place surreptitiously, and at the risk of the performers being arrested and punished. (397)

The Irish have a comparatively respectable amateur theatrical history:

> From the day in 1544, when Bale's 'Pammachius' was acted by amateurs at the market cross of Kilkenny, to the last recent record of Irish amateur acting, in the *Dublin Evening Mail*, this amusement has been a favourite one among the 'West Britons.'

The article's outline of ancient times and the separate notice of Ireland, home to the rather unpleasantly termed "West Britons," make imperial claims even in the midst of cultural comparison.

Other in-depth periodical accounts offer a glimpse into the vital role of theatricals in everyday life. The following two legal accounts involving theatricals demonstrate, in the first, an interesting case in which a town insists on having home theatre, and, second, the provoking nature of the relationship between the sexes as a result of private drama. In 1872, *The Ispwich Journal* records the attempts of an amateur theatrical company to get a license to perform in their town lecture hall.[36] This lengthier article details the intricacies of the legal process embroiling the town in heated debate:

> There has been considerable discussion in the town within the past few days upon the subject, as to whether or not a licence [sic] could be granted under the circumstances, as it will be remembered that some short time since, a company of theatricals, under the management of Mr. Geary, performed in the Lecture Hall, a license having been granted by the justices for the period of two months.

The right to home theatre was taken quite seriously; the townspeople as amateur actors believe the amateur/professional divide alters an earlier prohibition against performance in the lecture hall. Though the town at large is greatly in favor of putting on plays, the drama's potentially raucous nature worries authorities. The legal difficulty first arises when the original company dissolved and a second, professional troupe visited, but their license

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[36] "Sudbury Amateur Theatrical Company," *The Ipswich Journal* (Ipswich, England, Saturday Jan. 6, 1872, Issue 6969).

> was refused by the Magistrates, in consequence of the opposition which was then made manifest. Mr. F. M. Francis, corn merchant, and Mr. A. Rowe, hair-dresser, complaining that their premises being so closely connected with the Lecture Hall, that stage representations there became an intolerable nuisance to their families. The decision of the Justices was looked upon in an indignant form, not only by the lessees themselves, but by a large majority of the inhabitants.

An appeal for the second company was then filed and tried at

> the last Borough Quarter Sessions before T. H. Naylor, Esq., the Recorder, who after a long investigation dismissed the appeal, alleging as his reason for doing so, that the nuisance had been sustained, but intimated that if at any time the nuisance was abated, the Magistrates might then see fit to reverse the decision.

Retrospectively, one wonders how the nuisance might be abated during performances if never permitted in the first place. The townspeople of Ipswich evidently agreed that this law was nonsense, and took matters into their own hands; "[s]ince the dismissal of the appeal, a Dramatic Society has been formed in this town, and a feeling prevailed amongst its members, that they being amateurs, a license was not necessary as in the case of professionals." However, when "large posters were freely distributed, announcing a dramatic performance to take place on Wednesday evening, for the benefit of a local charity, known as "The Soup Kitchen,'" the original opponents of the lecture hall dramas—we may assume this to be the hair-dresser and corn-merchant—"loudly declared that if an attempt was made to carry out a stage play in the Lecture Hall, in direct violation of the judgment which had pronounced in their favour, that steps would be taken to enforce the law which rendered every performer liable to a penalty of £19." Though "the gentlemen of the stage were by no means undaunted, [they] determined, after an interview with their opponents, to risk the chance of an information being laid. But, after mature consideration, they thought it the better plan to do everything fair and above board, and gave notice of an application to be made for a license in the proper order." This action resulted in a special sitting in which "Mr. C. W. Goddard, the Secretary, on behalf of the Company of Amateurs, made some remarks, in the course of which he stated that the object of the Society was to afford harmless and innocent amusement to the young men of the town, as well as to the inhabitants generally, the profits arising from the entertainment going for a charitable object." Special attention is paid to the back-and-forth of tenacious opinions regarding the amateur group's legality:

> The Mayor remarked that the present Bench of Magistrates had the power of overturning the Recorder's opinion […] Mr. King said that the view which the Recorder took was one bearing upon an immoral character, one of the Company at that time being brought before the Magistrates; and further than that, it was alleged that rehearsals took place on Sundays.

A license for two nights for the amateur group was ultimately granted, and *The Ipswich* ends by naming those in the play, including a guest public stage actress, and praising the townspeople who may now be considered as "specimens of local talent."

Decades earlier, in 1840, before the printing of parlour plays skyrocketed, a piece of legal reporting retains the notion of the scandalous nature of any theatrical activities. *The Morning Chronicle* takes from the *Lincoln Gazette*, "BREACH OF PROMISE OF MARRIAGE," which offers the first evidence of a parlour play being produced at a pub, and takes a rather jovial tone though discussing a man's refusal to follow through on his promise to marry. Miss Caroline Bowman, a twenty-three year-old milliner "sued her faithless swain" John Andrews, a saddle-maker, "some few months younger than the lady."[37] Almost as though the trouble all began at a parlour play, the article launches from the point of the couple's acquaintance, which:

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[37] "Breach of Promise of Marriage" in "Court Circular," *The Morning Chronicle* (London, England), Friday October 30, 1840, Issue 22131.

> …began in 1836, in an amateur theatrical party at a public house, and in process of time the spruce young milliner, "who loved not wisely but too well," became pregnant, being confined in the middle of 1838; he promised to marry her as soon as he was twenty-one, and gave a written promise, "I, John Andrews, most solemnly swear that I will marry Miss Caroline Houldsworth Bowman;" yet promises are, like pie-crusts, made to be broken, and the gay deceiver has since married a Miss Fish.

While at trial, various attempts to blast Miss Caroline Bowman are recorded in the paper:

> it was attempted to be shown that the lady, like the celebrated Miss Cundy in the song had "got another sweetheart," but this, however, failed of proof. It was also endeavored to be proved that she had said she was glad to be rid of a drunken sot, who had ruined himself by his love for theatrical people, and that she wished Miss Fish good luck of him.

While the article deals with these second claims more ambiguously, the jury ultimately decided in the woman's favor.

Later, more autobiographical periodical accounts verify the amateur theatre's capacity to throw men and women together in close proximity. In *Bentley's Miscellany* in 1856, a woman recalls performing home theatricals at her Uncle John's at Cheshant.[38] This magazine article, rather than reporting events, acts as entertainment, and suggests a lighthearted narrative style made it acceptable for women to write publicly about otherwise private family activities—just as acting, despite being inherently public, became acceptable if private or domestic. An unforeseen dilemma arises when one man's grandfather "had had a fit" (163) and would be unable to act his role. The author recounts Uncle John's reaction upon receiving a letter with news of the ill player: "Would Annie [the authoress's cousin]—dearest Annie—object to let the footman make love to her in the unavoidable absence of the strange gentlemen?" Though Annie evidently had no objection to this unknown grandfather playing a role opposite her own, this disastrous news sends her "retir[ing] to the prompter's box in tears, declar[ing] she wouldn't submit to it." The day is saved when a Mr. Hughes telegraphs for “a friend of his—one Mr. Rooke—from London, and that he would be down by the next train” (163). The home theatrical acceptably unites utter strangers—no matter what their gender—in close physical proximity and amiability.

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[38] *The Private Theatricals at Cheshant* , Bentley's Miscellany, 39 (1856), 161-164.

Apparently, a difference of both class and gender was quite another matter. This news that Mr. Rooke will complete the dramatis personae sends the cast into joyous raptures, during which they reappropriate their lines to express their happiness:

> “My son, my long lost son!” ejaculated Uncle John, from the dresspiece, as he threw himself into Leonard’s arms.
> “There’s sixty thousand pounds upon the mantelshelf, and it’s yours,” said Mr. Stokes, from the first farce.
> “If the thanks of a lonely maiden are worthy of your acceptance, sir, take them, oh, take them for Mr. Rooke,” misquoted Annie from the second. (163)

Lines otherwise make themselves into their ordinary lives during rehearsal: “[o]ur copies of ‘Lacy’s Acting Edition’ were a disgraceful sight, tumbled, and thumbed, and torn beyond belief; we had found them in our pockets in the most sacred places, and had caught ourselves responding from them on the most unfit occasions” (163).[39] The new actor Mr. Rooke arrives at the train station, appearing initially nervous—probably, as the author supposes “our stage names—under which the manager insisted upon introducing us—rather confused him” (164)—but otherwise cordiality is an immediate effect of acting in the theatrical:

> And how soon we did get acquainted, and how pleased we were with him immediately! And this, indeed, is one of the pleasantest attributed of private theatricals, that there is no preliminary coldness and ceremony, but we either like one another or not, at once. Three nights from that very day Mr Rooke was in our boudoir, and Carry and I were putting vermilion on his nose. (164)

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[39] As I and the other members of the Victorian Theatrical Society at the University of Virginia can attest, lines especially during the intense rehearsal period end up embedding themselves within everyday conversation. (For some reason, this appears to be a phenomenon of amateur rather than professional acting. I imagine this is due to amateur actors more frequently seeing each other in daily activities; we are thus provided with greater opportunity for casual theatrical moments, as a truly unique species of inside joke.)

In the author’s account, the home theatrical itself is a very woman-centered event; her sister Lilly is responsible for instigating the family’s Christmas plays, because she “had been to some ‘Tableaux Vivants’ at the Williamses, in October, […] and she could never get it out of her mind.” Lilly sways Uncle John to the idea of home theatricals:

> So, “Uncle, dear,” she whispered, one night, when Uncle John had got his handkerchief over his eyes after dinner, and was “going off,” “don’t you think we could have some tableaux, or charades, or private theatricals, *here*, now?”
>
> “Some what?” said the dear old gentleman, rather snappishly. “ ‘Private theatricals?’—Private fiddlesticks!”
>
> “Yes, dear Uncle John, of course,” she answered (for when Lilly “goes in for a thing,” as Leonard says, there’s nothing like her in this world)—“of course we must have private fiddlesticks, and, if possible, a drum… (161)

If women appear to coyly instigate family theatricals, men sometimes use home drama as an occasion to behave in an otherwise unacceptable manner. The author notes how at the assigning of roles in the home plays:

> Mr. Hughes said, very rudely, on my asking him what he was fit for, “The husband, the loving husband, miss,” and threw himself upon his ridiculous knees, in which attitude he was caught by the under-housemaid. (161-2)

A second lengthy autobiographical account by an F. C. Burnand, printed in *Macmillan’s Magazine* in 1873, includes his eerie anecdote about his role as Bluebeard in a home play:

> Fatima was considerably taller than her Bluebeard; but this difference exhibited, in the strongest colours, the mysterious moral ascendancy which Baron Abomelique had gained over his unhappy spouse, and I waved my wooden scimitar over the kneeling Fatima’s devoted head (who begged me to content myself with cutting off her locks) with a bloodthirsty air. There was something soothing to my wounded feelings (for since Cavander had appeared I had had scarcely a word from Alice) in having her at my mercy, even in a play, for a few minutes. [40]

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[40] Burnand, F. C., *My Time, and what I've done with it: Chapter XVII. Ringhurst Theatricals*, Macmillan's Magazine, 28 (1873:May/Oct.) p.352, col. 2.

Thus periodicals verify the unique power of home theatre to renegotiate gendered norms, disrupt the ordinary domestic structure (both in terms of people *and* furniture), and rally an entire town to a cause.

I close my discussion of home drama as described in periodicals with an example of perhaps the only known extant description of an invitation to a home theatrical, and a brief illustration of how one can recover information about home theatre from newspaper reviews. An 1858 *Manchester Times* account of "Private Theatricals" includes, in its description of performances attended at a Mr. and Mrs. Reimers' house, an intricately detailed sketch of the persuasive invitation card received by the article's male author:

> "Mr. and Mrs. L. R. request the pleasure of Mr. Layne's company on the evening of Thursday the 16th inst." That may be called the letterpress of the invitation, but, as a whiff of the entertainment in store, we received a very handsome illuminated card, designed to express in anticipation the joy that awaited us on the aforesaid evening. Here on the card might be observed a figure of Christmas, with huge beard and jolly face, unrolling a mighty scroll, which said that a "soirée musico-dramaticale hokipoki-nonsenseicale, but of course amicable, would take place;" whilst a signboard pendant from a giant tree announced that the name of the mansion in which Music and the Drama would tumble over one another was *The Elms*. Around the scroll and underneath the tree sundry little Cupids and airy sprites careered, some capped with inverted goblets as helmets, and others bestriding champagne bottles, and letting them off like sparks of artillery at people who longed for instant execution. In the background of the card an orchestra with multitudinous choir was reared on the summits of bottles of wine—a perfect colonnade of inspiration; whilst a merry crew of holiday youngsters were represented as waiting for the perfect development of the scroll with happy faces and bursting cheeks. It was not in human nature to withstand such an invite, and Mr. Reimers knew it when he sketched the card.

Surely not all theatricals were such elaborate affairs—likely, Christmas plays were accompanied by more formal trappings such as invitations—and many were advertised by word of mouth only.

Finally, newspaper's advertisements and recommendations for books often included theatrical volumes. To take one example, both the *Pall Mall Gazette* and *Daily News* include

Mary Healy's *The Home Theatre* under recent book reviews just before Christmas in 1871. Both papers imply the volume makes an appropriate Christmas gift, but group Healy with children's books though her volume itself never suggests it was meant for child performers. Under "CHILDREN'S BOOKS" the *Pall Mall* writes that Healy's volume "contains six pleasantly and brightly written domestic plays. They are amusing to read, and strike us as exceedingly well adapted for drawing-room representation."[41] The *Daily News*, meanwhile, seems interestingly unsure of how to categorize Healy, explaining she "has provided in 'The Home Theatre' a volume intended probably for the use of amateur theatrical performers" while including notice in the same paragraph of an additional volume: "Dean and Son make ample provision for the same taste by producing five "Parlour Plays for Parlour Actors," by an Experienced Amateur. Each play is sold separately at the not exorbitant price of 6d."[42] My findings suggest that children's theatrical books were more likely to be reviewed. These publications also reveal what contemporary material would be considered a gift equivalent to the play volumes. For instance, a January 1, 1887 notice of "Recent Poetry and Verse" in *The Graphic* pays special regard to another children's play book:

> We must especially note a charming juvenile extravaganza, "The Sleeping Beauty," a musical version for performance by children, by the Countess of Jersey (Hatchards). It is all that a parlour play should be; easy to learn, not too long, with touches of genuine humor, and written in verse which is simple without being bald, and at times almost attains to the dignity of poetry. Lady Jersey should be a favourite with young folk this Christmas time.[43]

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[41] CHILDREN'S BOOKS, *The Pall Mall Gazette* (London, England), Friday, December 22, 1871; Issue 2140. p. 11, column 2.

[42] "CHRISTMAS GIFT BOOKS," *Daily News* (London, England), Wednesday, December 6, 1871; Issue 7989. P. 5, Column 5.

[43] "Recent Poetry and Verse," *The Graphic* (London, England), Saturday Jan. 1, 1887, Issue 892.

Next to notice of Lady Jersey's volume is Messrs. Macmillan and Co.'s "new edition of Lord Tennyson's poems, which is well suited for a Christmas present." Poetry was more generally connected to home theatre in dramatic recitations such as Harriet Childe-Pemberton's *Dead Letters* [and X], but prose's relationship to the home drama illustrates the inventiveness of home productions.

The Penny Illustrated Paper suggests the profound and widespread popularity of home plays, when it recommends a piece of its short fiction as easy to adapt to a home play.[44] An entire bottom border of the newspaper page is given over to large print text: "THE ABOVE "P.I.P." STORIETTE will be found AMUSING as a COMEDIETTA for the HOME THEATRE." The story, "The Gentleman-slavey," by T. Mullett Ellis, consists largely of dialogue and could be easily translated from prose to dramatic form, and follows a typical home theatre marriage plot. The tale culminates in the engagement of Mabel, a "lady-slavey," to a fellow servant who is actually an aristocratic gentleman. Both Mabel and her betrothed are in fact of higher blood and can now leave domestic service, but as if to top off the dream-like nature of this tale, Mabel's lover explains to her skeptical fellow "lady-slavey" that his role in certain ways is unchanged: "I'll be [Mabel's] gentleman and her slave too." The ease with which this fictional story was made into a drama suggests other tales or newspaper material could be easily converted to a home theatrical production.

Women's Playwriting Beyond Public Theatre: Accessibility of Drama and Eliza Keating's Letters

Beyond the rich material in periodicals, the prefaces, introductions, and other authorial notes in theatrical volumes themselves, as I have suggested, would reward further investigation into the actual performance of home theatricals. The scholarly detective work behind this project held additional challenges. Until recently, there was bias against preserving popular domestic literature and nineteenth-century women's writing was largely dismissed before the recovery efforts of the past decades. The neglect of nineteenth-century drama has especially obscured the domestic productions I study here, and yet this genre offered a refuge for women playwrights who otherwise had difficulties publishing or having work performed on a public stage. The perils of women publishing public stage drama throughout the Romantic and Victorian eras have been long documented. Generally speaking, a woman needed a male patron to ensure her success or had to be of a theatrical family in the first place—even before she conquered the largely male-dominated world of stage managers and theatre owners. For example, Cox and Gamer describe Hannah Cowley's break onto the theatrical scene, in her first success *The Runaway* (February 1776), as dependent upon Garrick at Drury Lane for support.[45] Once Garrick retired, Drury Lane management failed to position Cowley's plays for a proper run. Cowley only became successful when she switched theatres and premiered *The Belle's Stratagem* at Covent Garden; this move initiated a run of her hits at that theatre, including *A Bold Stroke for a Husband*. The title of Cowley's *The Belle's Stratagem* may be traced to Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem.* Of course, the title of Cowley's *A Bold Stroke for a Husband* indicates its genealogical relationship to Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*—Centlivre's play, featured in Chapter 3, inspired American Sarah Annie Frost's parlour play adaptation of this same work. In this regard, despite the animosity or neglect women playwrights faced in their dramatic work, we can trace a more supportive shared tradition.

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[44] "PIP Autumn Tales," *The Penny Illustrated Paper and Illustrated Times.* (London, England), Saturday, October 15, 1898; pg. 246; Issue 1951.

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[45] Jeffrey Cox and Michael Gamer, "A Bold Stroke for a Husband *by Hannah Cowley*," in *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Era Drama*. (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press Ltd.), 1.

However, even at the end of the Victorian Age, women faced massive prejudice in the gendered realm of public theatre. Susan Carlson and Kerry Powell have described how women often hid their gender when submitting plays or until after initial reviews of performances were written.[46] To take a more particular example, Tracy Davis's discussion of Netta Syrett's *The Finding of Nancy* demonstrates the gendered difficulties in store for a woman along the route to producing a public stage play.[47] Syrett's *The Finding of Nancy* won a contest sponsored by the Playgoer's Club in London in 1902; the winning play would be produced by George Alexander, the stage manager of St. James's Theatre, which had produced Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest* in 1895. Syrett's public stage play, like most parlour plays, takes the challenges of women's relationships to heart: the protagonist Nancy finds contented domestic bliss as a mistress. However, after her lover's institutionalized wife dies, she rejects his proposal of marriage. Nancy inherits money and falls in love with a captain, but her past emerges with scandalous results; the play concludes with her back in the same contented domestic situation as mistress to her original lover. As Davis explains, the first performance was a sensation, with actor Max Beerbohm sending flowers and a congratulatory note to Syrett's box midway through the play, and the palpable support of the spectators:

> Following each act, the audience's ovations compelled the cast to take multiple curtain calls, and at the end, "the audience rose *en masse* and yelled, shrieked, shouted, stamped and nearly went mad." They demanded to see the author, and Syrett was required to improvise a speech.[48]

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[46] Susan Carlson and Kerry Powell, "Reimagining the theatre: women playwrights of the Victorian and Edwardian period," *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*. Ed. Kerry Powell. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 237-256.

[47] Tracy Davis, "The Finding of Nancy (1902)" *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-Century British Performance*. Ed. Davis. (Buffalo, NY: Broadview Press Ltd., 2012): 643-9.

[48] Ibid., 648.

Beyond the physical theatre however, reaction reflected the gender of the author. Despite Alexander's business partner Mary Moore praising the play and the St. James's Theatre's history of producing problem plays—including those by Wilde and *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*—George Alexander was dissuaded from putting on a series of additional afternoon performances lest they "sully the purity of the St. James's Theatre."[49] Syrett herself was fired from her teaching job because the press incorrectly read the play as autobiographical,[50] and reviewers' particular linguistic choices reflected the play's female authorship. Davis lays out the paradoxes within one review, which described Syrett's work as "a rather militant pamphlet on the subject of the social disabilities of women, addressed to the rather limited public which occupies itself with these questions," as "restricted in its appeal [and] not treated with a very thorough knowledge of the theatre or of theatrical effect" but as simultaneously containing "writing which is quite delightful [and] shows a cultivated intelligence and a grace of style."[51] Perhaps women parlour playwrights were relieved to avoid such a style of review, and instead to gather in more private accolades from friends, who awaited a published volume eagerly because they themselves had acted in the manuscript version.

Home drama offered women authors an opportunity to publish drama without relying upon winning a contest nor upon the support of a male-centric public theatre apparatus. Anecdotes such as those related in Mary Healy's "Aunt Mehetible's Experiment" suggest publishing home drama grew organically from girlhood play or writing. Other evidence suggests the same is true of adult women's authorship of parlour plays. Keating's three letters, written over the fall of 1855, are likely her first to her longtime publisher, as Lacy produced the majority of Keating's material over the 1860s. The fortunate discovery of these letters suggests alternative routes for research besides relying upon unsubstantial or unrepresentative holdings of popular literature in libraries. Keating's work as a whole offers a look into the transition from the typical charade to the theatrical; some of her writing occupies a medium ground in which the individual scenes of the charade are more fully fleshed out into a drama. Her letters divulge both her shrewd business sense and the vitality of her own home plays within her social circle.

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[49] Ibid., 648, quoted from Syrett's *Sheltering Tree*, 122, 125-6.

[50] As Davis reports, Syrett then exclusively wrote for a living. See p. 644.

[51] Ibid, 644. Quoted from "The Theatre," *Speaker*, 17 May 1902: 191.

As these short letters are the only known correspondence between any parlour playwright and publisher, I transcribe them in full here, maintaining Keating's spacing and pagination. Keating's first letter reveals that two months have lapsed since she first discussed publication with Lacy. I hypothesize that this two-month delay in writing was likely caused by the preparation of her manuscript, as Keating is otherwise precise about the publishing process. From the outset, she is attuned to selling her work, noting that her friends will be eager to obtain her printed copies, which they have already performed in private. This remark substantiates my claim that women parlour playwrights were often inspired to publish home drama from their own experiences acting or directing home plays. While offering a ready audience, Keating proposes a price of three shillings would be profitable for each volume, "particularly if it were stitched in a pretty cover of fancy paper – binding we might dispense with." Her underlining here, the only of any of her letters, emphasizes her desire for input into the aesthetics and production of her work. She smartly and implicitly sets a deadline for Lacy, remarking that she hopes to hear "at [his] earliest leisure […] on what terms [he] would publish" her plays and reiterates at her close that she "cannot do any thing in the way of subscription" until she knows "what the probable expense would be." In this manner, Keating's persuasion of her publisher to produce her work on her terms would likely not have happened in the world of public theatre.

[4. front of page, right of crease – end of letter]	[1. front of page, left of crease – beginning of

be sold – I was thinking that three shillings might repay – I shall be glad to hear from you soon – as I cannot do any thing in the way of subscription without know [sic] what the probable expense would be I remain Truly Yours Eliza H. Keating.	letter] 23 Gt. [Great] Charles St. Birmingham October 10th 1855 Sir, When I had the pleasure of seeing you in Wellingborough at some two months since you kindly promi sed to read and give me your opinion of some Acting Charades which I had written for private performance.
[2. back of page, left side of crease] I have now forwarded a fair copy of them, and should feel obliged if at your earliest leisure you could let me know on what terms you would publish them. I shall be enabled to have many copies subscribed for among	[3. back of page, right side of crease] my own friends – as the Charades were all got up by them – and people are fond of seeing in print - the nonsense they perpetrated in private – The four Charades I send - will with title page and Preface form the whole of the manuscript – I should require to know at what price the book would

Her only undated letter is her second one, written between October 10 and November 29, 1855. In it, she excuses herself for not having returned Lacy's communication sooner, as she would have done "had [she] not met with an accident, which for some time incapacitated [her] from writing." Perhaps this letter, the shortest of her three, was yet challenging for her to write. Keating's half-disclosed details generate curiosity about the rest of her life; one wonders what respectfully unnamed accident halted her. She discloses that Lacy forwarded 100 copies of her plays, so though we have not his half of the dialogue, he appears retrospectively as an encouraging correspondent. Other details are more recoverable: I suspect the postscript's mention of a Mr. Thirlwall may refer to Connop Thirlwall (1797-1875), who, according to the

Dictionary of National Biography, was "historian and bishop of St. David's," just thirteen miles from Wellingborough.[52] While Keating kindly offers to add Thirlwall's book to her own account, I also wonder whether a sort of name-dropping might have come into play here.

	[1. front page, right of crease, beginning of letter] 23 Gt. Charles St. Birmingham Dear Sir, I received the 100 copies you forwarded, and should have acknowledged the receipt of them ere this had I not met with an accident, which for
[2. back of page, left side of crease] some time incapaci tated me from writing You did not enclose an invoice with the sheets – will you let me know what I am in your debt Truly Yours – EH Keating	[3. back of page, right side of crease] P.S. I directed my friend Mr. Thirlwall to call in Welling[borough?] for a copy of my Charades – which you will add if you please to my account – To T. H. Lacy Esquire

The last letter suggests a middle-class audience for the proposed publications; Keating agrees with Lacy's evident suggestion that it is "quite right to make the volume of Charades as cheap as you can – for people now like to have a great deal for their money." She persists in offering her own recommendations about selling her volumes, wondering whether it may be "possible to get the volume published by Christmas." Keating is evidently more ambitious than in her first letter; no longer willing to dispense with the binding of her volumes, she instead hopes "they will be bound in bright-colours – as they sell better.” No longer hoping for a mere three shillings, she now suggests that “perhaps half a crown would pay.”

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[52] J. W. Clark, "Thirlwall, (Newell) Connop (1797–1875)," rev. H. C. G. Matthew, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, May 2006, http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.its.virginia.edu/view/article/27185 (accessed December 5, 2013).

[Front of sheet one] 23 Gt. Charles St. Birmingham To Hailes Lacy Esquire Nov. 29th 1855 Dear Sir, I think you do quite right to make the volume of Charades as cheap as you can – for people now like to have a great deal for their money My copies I can sell at the price you mention – [Inefass?] Cornish will order	[front of sheet two, evidently an addendum to her letter] Would it be possible to get the volume published by Christ mas – I hope they will be bound in bright-colours – as they sell better – Can you give me an idea of the price – perhaps half a crown would pay -
[Back of sheet one] theirs direct from you. My own [ale.?] is briefly among my private friends – I suppose the following title, and Dedication will be sufficient – your name as Publisher being added to the Title Page – I presume the names of the Charade are very evident – Blue-Beard - Phaeton - Cataline Guy Fawkes – I forget the order in which they come – I remain Dear Sir Truly Yours EH Keating	

In chapter two, I present a first step toward recovery of this nearly forgotten writer. Keating joins some canonical Victorians who were involved in home theatricals. Amongst them, unsurprisingly, was Mary Elizabeth Braddon, who “on several occasions, […] performed in amateur theatricals in her home in Richmond."[53] An entirely separate project could cover the home dramatics of the canonical Victorian writers. As it will be sufficient to provide a context for my later discussion of parlour plays, I will limit this concluding discussion to a foray into Dickens' home theatre.

Dickens and Home Drama

Dickens, arguably the most theatrical of Victorian novelists, might well be expected to have participated energetically in home theatre. "Charles Dickens as Dramatic Critic," an ambitious historical piece from *Longman's Magazine* in 1883, comments on Dickens' famous readings of his fiction as a species of home drama, shaped by his own history as a performer in home plays:

> He obtained great applause as an amateur actor, and he became famous as a public reader of his own books; his readings, in truth, closely resembling actings, or suggesting rather the readings of an actor than of an author. He was particular always on these occasions as to the arrangement of his gas-lights, that his expression and play of face might be properly seen and appraised. With this view a special 'gasman' ever accompanied him upon his tours in the provinces. He resorted to much 'stage-business,' and employed sundry 'stage properties,' when he judged that he could in such wise the better enforce or illustrate the intention of his books. The copies of his stories from which he read in public were marked with as many 'stage directions' as are contained in the acting editions of a play. (30-31)

Dickens' premature death as a result of his strenuous reading tours may be reframed as a persistent enthusiasm for the trappings of home theatre—as a late resurgence of what many other accounts describe as his early boundless energies as amateur stage manager for his family and friends.[54] While the reading tours became tantamount to a traveling one-man Dickensian drama, a sense that the theatre was Dickens' true passion pervades his fiction. Dickens' particular breed of theatricalism—idiosyncratic characters, a blend of the real and comic and sentimental—suggests an affinity with not just the drama at large, but home drama more specifically.

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[53] "Note on the Text," *Married Beneath Him: A Play by M. E. Braddon* (Hastings, U. K.: The Sensations Press, 2000), 1.

[54] See Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 2011) for an in-depth discussion of Dickens' involvement in theatre, including his early aspirations to be an actor.

Just a few months after Dickens' death in 1870, *Macmillan's Magazine* published the anonymously written "Mr. Dickens' Amateur Theatricals. A Reminiscence" in which the author describes his own participation in Dickens' parlour theatricals beginning eighteen years earlier, when just a child.[55] He argues that Dickens' performances in home theatre positively impacted his fiction; "The Frozen Deep," depicted in the account as a culmination of Dickens' involvement in home theatre, also initiated, as he explains, a development in Dickens' fiction:

> The production of "The Frozen Deep" has a literary interest for the reader of Dickens, as marking the date of a distinct advance in his career as an artist. It was during the performance of this play with his children and friends, he tells us in the preface of his "Tale of Two Cities," that the plot of that story took shape in his imagination. He does not confide to us what was the precise connection between the two events. But the critical reader will have noticed that then, and from that time onwards, the novelist discovered a manifest solicitude and art in the construction of his plots which he had not evinced up to that time. In his earlier works there is little or no constructive ability. "Pickwick" was merely a series of scenes from London and country life more or less loosely strung together. […] But from and after the "Tale of Two Cities," Mr. Dickens manifests a diligent pursuit of that art of framing and developing a plot which there can be little doubt is traced to the influence of his intimate and valued friend Mr. Wilkie Collins. (214, 2—215, 1)

The *Longman's* article on Dickens as dramatic critic corroborates this link: "[h]is novel of 'The Tale of Two Cities' may be said to have originated in his love of acting."[56] Mentioning also Dickens' own note in his novel's preface, the author adds how Dickens originally conceived of *The Tale* as a drama. He requotes Dickens' words:

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[55] "Mr. Dickens' Amateur Theatricals: A Reminiscence," *Macmillan's Magazine*, 23 (1870:Nov.-1871:Apr.) p.206-215.

[56] Cook, 32.

> ‘A strong desire was then upon me to embody [*The Tale of Two Cities*] in my own person, and I traced out in my fancy the state of mind of which it would necessitate the presentation to an observant spectator, with particular care and interest.’[57]

Nor is *The Tale of Two Cities* the only novel with the traces of the home drama. The *Macmillan’s* author—present with Dickens in his theatricals—draws an additional link between *The Pickwick Papers* and Dickens’ performance of O’Hara’s version of Henry Fielding’s *Tom Thumb*:

> It has often been noticed how rarely [Dickens] quotes in his books, but the reader of “Pickwick” will remember how in an early chapter of that immortal work Mr. Alfred Jingle sings the two lines:—
> “In hurry, post-haste, for a license,
> In hurry, ding-dong, I come back.”
> They are from Lord Grizzle’s song in “Tom Thumb.”

Parlour play scripts were often altered by their performers, and the Tom Thumb tale was no exception, “further abridged and added to by the untiring master of our ceremonies,” who was of course Dickens. This play starred Mark Lemon as “the giantess Glumdalca, in an amazing getup of a complete suit of armour and a coal-skuttle bonnet.” This article quite delightfully places

> Mr. Dickens [in] the small part of the ghost of Gaffer Thumb, singing his own song, on the occasion, a verse of which may be quoted, if only to illustrate the contrast between the styles of the earlier and later burlesque. In O’Hara’s version the ghost appears to King Arthur, singing :—
> “Pale death is prowling,
> Dire omens scowling
> Doom thee to slaughter,
> Thee, thy wife and daughters;
> Furies are growling
> With horrid groans.
> Grizzle’s rebellion.
> What need I tell you on?
> Or by a red cow
> Tom Thumb devour’d?
> Hark, the cock crowing [*Cock crows.*

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[57] Ibid.

I must be going.
I can no more!" [*Vanishes.*

Mr Dickens' substituted lines were as nearly as we remember, the following :—

"I've got up from my churchyard bed,
And assumed the perpendicular,
Having something to say in my head,
Which isn't so very particular!
I do not appear in sport,
But in earnest, all danger scorning—
I'm in your service, in short,
And I hereby give you warning—
[*Cock crows*
Who's dat crowing at the door?
Dere's some one in the huse with Dinah!
I'm call'd (so can't say any more)
By a voice from Cochin China!" (208, 2)

While Dickens may have enjoyed rewriting drama for the home environment, his fictional characters often possessed direct home theatre equivalents. In the farce *Mr. Nightingale's Diary,* Dickens embodied four or five various characters, one of whom was an old lady; off stage, Dickens referred to her as Mrs. Gamp from *Martin Chuzzlewit*. This character similarly had a "droll extravangance of incongruity" and, unable to remember the species of bird which correlated with the title character's surname, consistently called him by various other birds, including "Mr. Skylark" and "Mr. Robin Redbreast" (210, col. 2). In fact, the *Macmillan's* author delights in tracing an evolving theatricalism throughout Dickens' career:

> His love of the stage, and his familiarity with every aspect of it, are apparent in almost everything he has written, from the "Sketches by Boz," in which he described an evening at Astley's (which, by the way, may be compared by those who like to trace the growing power and the perfecting touch of a great artist, with a description of the same scene in the "Old Curiosity Shop"), to the casual mention in the unfinished "Mystery of Edwin Drood" of the picture of "Signor Jacksonini the clown, in the act of saying 'How are you to-morrow?' quite as large as life and nearly as melancholy. (212, 2)

The *Longman*'s author simply states that though Dickens "made no sterling or enduring contribution to the literature of the stage," his novels "abound in dramatic qualities; they are indeed pervaded by a sense of theatrical effectiveness."[58] This same *Longman*'s piece not coincidentally marks the close of Dickens' dramatic criticism with a specific fragment of his praise of Fechter's Claude Melnotte. In a letter to Lord Lytton, Dickens wrote: "I felt that I should have been very proud indeed to be the writer of the play" (42).

The type of theatre to which Dickens more specifically gravitated may be aligned with the home drama's propensities for comedy and a natural manner of acting. *Longman's* remarks Dickens' general dramatic preferences tended towards comedy, rather than the serious or supposed high-brow. Dickens was unaffected by Rachel and angered by the applause granted to Madame Ristori; "[w]ith the classical drama he had little sympathy" (32). Upon seeing Alexandre Dumas's version of "Orestes," Dickens wrote: "if I had not already learnt to tremble at the sight of classic drapery on the human form, I should have plumbed the utmost depths of terrified boredom in this achievement" (32). On the other hand, "for farce, indeed, he always maintained a decided relish"—by all accounts, he venerated comic actor Charles Mathews—and "his admiration of Frédéric Lemaître moved him strongly in the direction of melodrama" (31-2). The autobiographical reflection by the amateur actor in *Macmillan's* comments on Dickens' particular stage style as characteristic of home players:

> Mr. Dickens as an actor, was amateurish; but it is only another way of saying that he was not of the stage, stagey. If there was a certain ease and *handiness* which the practice of the art as a profession might have brought to him, he at least escaped the tyranny of those conventionalisms which the best actors (at least of our own time) have not been able to resist. (209, 1)

This description sounds decidedly similar to the advice given by T. H. Lacy, in the opening of my chapter, on what makes amateur actors successful: they "are utterly free from all those absurd professional conventionalities, redolent of anything but actual life, which unhappily are but too often met with on the public stage."[59] Perhaps the ambivalence with which Dickens saw some of the dramatic adaptations of his novels resulted from the intense sincerity which surrounded his private theatricals. *Macmillan's* describes Dickens' "*earnestness* [as] quite beyond" his idol Mathews (211, col. 2), and *Longman*'s relates one particularly telling anecdote about Dickens' attending an adaptation of *Oliver Twist*:

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[58] Cook, 29.

> …he did not really object so much to the transfer of his books to the stage; what offended him was, that they were usually converted into such very inferior dramas, that they were produced before his stories were completed, and that they sometimes anticipated and prejudiced his concluding chapters. He attended a performance of 'Oliver Twist' in 1838 at the Surrey Theatre, and in the middle of the first scene he is said to have laid himself down upon the floor in a corner of the box, and to have risen again only when the curtain had fallen. (38)

While Dickens may appear as the final canonical capstone to my introduction, he drew many other prominent Victorians to participate in home theatre. An 1858 *Manchester Times* article focused on Wilkie Collins indicates Dickens persuaded him to produce "The Lighthouse," intended originally for the public stage, first as a private theatrical at Tavistock House before it was brought to the Olympic Theatre in 1857.[60] The *Macmillan's* account sets up the scene of Dickens' Tavistock theatricals as a who's who of Victorians:

> There was Thackeray towering in bodily form above the crowd, even as he towered in genius above them all, save only one: Jerrold, with the blue convex eye, which seemed to pierce into the very heart of things and trace their subtle resemblances: Leech, with his frank and manly beauty, fresh from the portrayal of "Master Jacky," or some other of the many forms of boyhood he knew so well: Mark Lemon, "the frolic and the gentle" (dear to all us younger ones, irrespective of blood-relationship, as "Uncle Mark")…

The account goes on to include brief introductory sketches of Albert Smith, Augustus Egg, Frank Stone, and Stanfield, before alighting upon Dickens as central organizer and motivator of theatrical activity. The *Macmillan's* author explains that Dickens' home theatre was of the genre but beyond it; "*[p]rivate* theatricals in one sense they were; but the size and the character of the audiences which they brought together placed them in a different category from the entertainments which commonly bear that name."[61] The author feels his public reminiscence of Dickens' private theatricals "is scarcely to intrude upon the domain of private life." This feeling of the appropriateness of publicity probably resulted from Dickens' celebrity but also his male-dominated theatrical circle.

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[59] T. H. Lacy, *The Amateur's Guide* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, November 1870), 6.

[60] "William Wilkie Collins" *From the Critic.* "William Wilkie Collins," *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), Saturday, June 19, 1858; Issue 28, 1.

Occasionally, Dickens' performances were reviewed in the manner of public dramas. *The Derby Mercury* details Dickens' 1852 amateur performance of E. L Bulwer's *Not so Bad as we Seem; or Many Sides to a Character* to benefit the Guild of Literature and Art; the play had been compressed into three acts, which perhaps led "the piece [to] f[a]ll ineffectively upon the audience."[62] However, high praise was given to the acting—Dickens as Lord Wilmot demonstrated his "appreciation of character, and capability of delineating it" especially in a scene in which his character, disguised, reveals himself in his sympathy towards a failing author. Wilkie Collins played Mr. Shadowly Softhead, a double to Dickens' character, of whom "it would be difficult to speak in terms of too exalted communication." The afterpiece of *Mr. Nightingale's Diary* received special praise due to Dickens and Mark Lemon's quick changes through various characters,[63] and two of Stanfield's painted scenes from the night gained compliments: “one in particular, was distinguished by a breadth and brilliancy of light, and a warm glow of colour, such as is very rarely to be met with, even in easel pictures; the other was marked by that quiet tone of colour and breadth of effect which constitute so charming a feature of this artist’s productions.” Dickens’ theatricals were home drama of an exclusive variety.

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[61] *Macmillan's*, 206, col. 1.

[62] "Amateur Theatrical Performance," *The Derby Mercury* (Derby, England), Wednesday, September 1, 1852; Issue 7166.

[63] According to *Macmillan's,* "Mr. Dickens played on Mr. Gabblewig, in which character he assumed four or five different disguises, changing his dress, voice, and look with a rapditiy and completeness which the most practiced "entertainer" might envy. This whimsical piece of extravagance had been before played by the same actors in the performances for the benefit of the Guild of Literature and Art, but has never been printed, except privately for the use of the original actors" (210, col. 1)

The *Macmillan’s Magazine* author traces the evolution of Dickens’ home theatricals to the more involved productions they would become, from the “earliest efforts [which] were confined to the children of the family and their equals in age, though always aided and abetted by the good-natured manager [Dickens], who improvised costumes, painted and corked our innocent cheeks, and suggested the most effective business of the scene” (207, col. 1). Their first performance was of Albert Smith’s “little burletta of ‘Guy Fawkes,’ which appeared originally in the pages of his monthly periodical, the *Man in the Moon*.” Another early play performed by the children, including the then youthful author, was “‘William Tell,’ from the late Mr. Robert Brough’s clever little volume ‘A Cracker Bon-bon for Evening Parties.’” Once Dickens and Lemon joined the cast of actors—sometimes disguised in the program as a surprise for the audience—the productions apparently grew in size and detail. Dickens and Lemon, when first performing alongside children, took subordinate roles:

> In Mr. Planché’s elegant and and most witty fairy extravaganza of “Fortunio and his Seven Gifted Servants,” Mr. Dickens took the part of the old Baron Dunover, whose daughters so valiantly adopt man’s attire and go to the wars; Mr. Lemon contenting himself with the *rôle* of the Dragon, who is overcome by Fortunio’s stratagem of adulterating the well, whither he usually resorted to quench his thirst, with a potent admixture of sherry. What fun it was, both on and off the stage! The gorgeous dresses from the eminent costumier of the Theatres Royal; our heads bewigged and our cheeks rouged by the hands of Mr. Clarkson himself; the properties from the Adelphi; the unflagging humor and suggestive resources of our manager, who took upon himself the charge of everything, from the writing of playbills to the composition of the punch, brewed for our refreshment between the acts, but “craftily qualified,” as Michael Cassio would have said, to suit the capacities of the childish brain, for Dickens never lost the *maxima reverential* due to children, and some of were of *very* tender age. (207, col. 2)

Evidently, children's ages were listed on the program, except in the case of one wee child, merely "announced in the bill as having been 'kept out of bed at vast expense'" (208, col. 1). The *Macmillan's* author emphasizes the collegiality and spontaneous nature of the Dickens' theatricals community. After this performance of Planché:

> when we were restored to our evening-party costumes, and the school-room was cleared for dancing, still a stray "property" or two had escaped the vigilant eye of the property-man; for Douglass Jerrold had picked up the horse's head (Fortunio's faithful steed *Comrade*), and was holding it up before the greatest living animal painter, who had been one of the audience, with "Looks as if it knew *you,* Edwin!" (208, col. 1)

Through this casual mention of painting celebrity Edwin Henry Landseer, the *Macmillan's* author thus anticipates Chapter Four's discussion of the use of private objects as props.

As Dickens' theatricals expanded, "The Lighthouse" was one of the first plays sustained by mostly adult parts, starring Dickens, Lemon, Collins, and featuring drop-scenes by Stanfield of both the Eddystone Lighthouse and an interior room (209, col. 1). The *Macmillan* author describes with emotion how John Forster, hidden by the curtain, eloquently recited the prologue to "The Lighthouse," which he believes to have been written by Dickens. Midway through quoting the prologue from memory, the *Macmillan's* author adds a dramatic parenthetical note about the movement onstage: "(Here the green curtain rose and discovered Stanfeld's drop-scene, the Lighthouse, its lantern illuminated by a transparency)" (209, col. 1).[64]

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[64] The prologue was as follows:

"A story of those rocks where doomed ships come
To cast their wrecks upon the stones of home:
Where solitary men, the long year through,
The wind, their music, and the brine their view,
Teach mariners to shun the fatal light,—
A story of those rocks is here to-night:
Eddystone Lighthouse"—
[note on curtain rising on Stanfield's scene]
"in its ancient form,
Ere he who built it died in the great storm
Which shivered it to nothing—once again

The success of “The Lighthouse” led to Collin’s writing of “The Frozen Deep,” now the most well-known of the Dickens’ home productions.[65] One particular point of the *Macmillan* author’s account of “The Frozen Deep” is worth especial notice for its implications about gender in private plays. While the men of the Dickensian theatrical circle receive ample press in the *Macmillan’s* account, the ladies are rather brushed aside. In fact, the author implies the women, true ladies during the acting of “The Frozen Deep,” could not find adequate counterparts if the drama were transferred to a public stage:

> The charm of the piece as a whole, however, did not depend so much upon the acting of the principal character, fine as it was, as on the perfect refinement and natural pathos with which the family and domestic interest of the story was sustained. The ladies to whose acting so much of this charm was due are happily still living, and must not be mentioned by name or made the subjects of criticism in this place: but the circumstance is worth noticing as suggesting one reason why such a drama, effective and touching in the drawing-room, would be even unpleasing on the stage. (214, col1-2).

Refusing to either name, criticize, or most noticeably, to direct outright praise towards the ladies of Dickens’ play is striking in contrast with the otherwise overflowing detail and compliments in

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Behold out-gleaming on the angry main.
Within it are three men,—to these repair
In our swift bark of fancy, light as air;
They are but shadows, we shall have you back
Too soon to the old dusty, beaten track.”

We quote from memory, and here our memory fails. We are not aware that the prologue was ever published, or indeed the play for which it was written; though “The Lighthouse” was performed two or three years later at the Olympic… (209, 1)

65. The author very nicely sums up the plot of “The Frozen Deep”: “The success of “The Lighthouse,” performed at Tavistock House in the January of 1856, and subsequently repeated at Campden House, Kensington, for the benefit of the Consumption Hospital at Bournemouth, induced Mr. Wilkie Collins to try his dramatic fortune once more, and the result was the drama of “The Frozen Deep,” with an excellent part for Mr. Dickens and opportunity for charming scenic effects by Mr. Stanfeld and Mr. Telbin. The plot was of the slightest. A young naval officer, Richard Wardour, is in love, and is aware that he has a rival in the lady’s affections, though he does not know that rival’s name. His ship is ordered to take part in an expedition to the polar regions, and, as we remember, the moody and unhappy young officer, while chopping down for firewood some part of what had composed the sleeping compartment of a wooden hut, discovers from a name carved upon the timbers that his hated rival is with him taking part in the expedition. His resolve to compass the other’s death gradually gives place to a better spirit, and the drama ends with his saving his rival from starvation at the cost of his own life, himself living just long enough to bestow his dying blessing on the lovers; the ladies whose brothers and lovers were on the expedition having joined them in Newfoundland. […] (213, col. 2, 214, col. 1)

favor of those (men) involved in Dickensian home performance. The author goes on to insist that, in the current age, in order for private performance to serve as refuge for true theatre, it requires a rare performer of finely tuned sympathies—such as Dickens, continually described as possessing this rare nature—to ensure the parlour drama is successful. The ladies, whose tragic roles surround the tragic hero Richard Wardour (Dickens), perhaps possess this sophistication of sympathies, but the author uses this moment in which women amateurs act well to implicitly digress on the disgrace which is (women) acting on the public stage:

> Such a drama depends for its success on a refinement of mind and feeling in the performers which in the present state of the theatrical art must of necessity be rarely possessed, or if possessed must speedily succumb to the unwholesome influences of that class of dramatic literature which alone, if we are to credit the managers, is found to please at the present day. […] While the true drama is under persecution in public, it must find shelter in the drawing-rooms of private houses and the willing co-operations of the talent and refinement of private life. No theatrical performance can satisfy an educated taste in which the characters of ladies and gentlemen are sustained by representatives who cannot walk, speak, and act as ladies and gentlemen. (214, col1-2).

One can read behind the lines of this article to see these women perhaps truly getting into their parts—the nature of home theatre enthusiastically supports this brand of "overdoing it," because home drama is essentially fun and play for the performers themselves as well as the audience.

Women had plenty of opportunity after the Dickens' theatricals of the 1850s to become their own self-endorsed and self-written comediennes. Rather than dwelling on the intricacies of "The Frozen Deep," I end with the *Macmillan* author's telling memory of Dickens' own unexpected comedic improvisation while performing in the now lost farcical counterpart to this play. This instance—if it would be crass or at least unmentionable by the *Macmillan* author's standards for ladies—is tellingly like other comedic moments performed by women home performers over the second half of the nineteenth century:

> The same amazing fertility and rapidity of invention, in which Dickens stands without a rival as a humorist, often served him in excellent stead, in the sudden substitution of extempore remarks known to the professional actor as “gag.” On one occasion in a farce (we forget its name) played after “The Frozen Deep,” one of the characters having occasion to disguise himself for the moment in the chintz-cover of the sofa, Mr. Dickens suddenly observed, to the astonishment of his fellow-actors, “He has a general appearance of going to have his hair cut!” a comparison so ingeniously perfect as to convulse everybody on and off the stage with laughter. (211, 2)

When Dickens took “The Frozen Deep” on the road to Manchester for two charity performances, he removed his daughters from the ladies’ roles. According to some accounts, he realized his female family members could not project enough to reach the larger crowd at Manchester, but his decision was likely influenced by the professional/private acting divide.[66] Amongst the professionals recruited to fill the ladies’ roles for the more public revival was an eighteen-year old Ellen Ternan, who performed alongside her older sister and mother; Ternan would become Dickens’ mistress, and so one of the more infamous liaisons of the Victorian era developed from home theatre. However, the *Macmillan* author, in his critique of women in the original performance of “The Frozen Deep,” introduces more forthright explanation for replacing the ladies’ roles with professionals: the Dickens women outperformed Dickens. If not permitted to take their show on the road, nothing could stop these women from introducing their own energies into the performance when contained to their own home.

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[66] See Philip V. Allingham, “Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens,” http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/collins/dickens1.html. Allingham describes the replacement of the Dickens women due to lack of projection ability.

Chapter 2

A Parlour Education:
Reworking Gender and Domestic Space in Ladies' and Children's Theatricals

SCENE.—*A Hotel sitting-room. Door R. Window with closed curtains R.C. Door L. Table, chairs, &c.*
Mrs. Trembleton standing at the door with bag in her hand, speaking to some one outside.

Mrs. Trembleton.—No, I want nothing else to-night, thank you: this room will do quite well. I should like to be called at half-past seven, please. [Comes forward.] So here I am at my journey's end, actually in a hotel by myself, for the first time in my life. It feels very strange! I wonder if I did right to come? What will my husband say—my dear George? Will he be pleased, or displeased, at the bold step I have taken? At any rate he will not be able to taunt me again with being a coward, afraid of my own shadow, as he is so fond of saying, afraid of stirring a step unless he is there to support and guide me. For it was most daring of me to leave home in his absence…

—from "A Woman of Courage," *Chamber Comedies: A Collection of Plays and Monologues for the Drawing Room* by Mrs. Hugh (Florence) Bell, 1890.

"This room" which will "do quite well" is the hotel room in which the character Mrs. Trembleton is alone for the first time in her life, the room in which she finds herself after secretly leaving her home and affirming that she can no longer be called a coward by "dear George." However, this room is simultaneously the domestic space in which the amateur actress plays her role, not alone, but to her audience of friends, with the real George perhaps included among them. The simultaneity of space in this opening scene is important in understanding the ability of home theatre to reeducate the Victorian woman as to her role in any space in which she finds herself. Performance, of course, always involves this spatial duplicity, but amateur home theatre's softening of the division between performer and viewer, within a familiarly used space, makes the transformation of acting accessible and possible as an everyday event. If space has memory, subsequent non-acting moments within the parlour can pick up impressions of those otherwise transgressive acting moments. (Perhaps, memorized lines are recalled at an apt moment in which "Mrs. Trembleton" wishes to choose for herself, whether a truly bold step or not.) Similarly, the inevitable drift between rehearsal and non-rehearsal moments opens the door for actors to casually discuss, play, and test out various means of playing pieces of their roles—for their roles to casually embed themselves in the functioning of their real-life selves. Despite the satirical cast of the character's name, Mrs. Trembleton—a name which she later lives up to by falling prey to the common parlour play plot device in which boots are placed behind a curtain—or perhaps precisely because of this comedic tone, a roundabout and thus more penetrating subversion occurs here. But if comedy triggers a united response from an audience, which in turn propels social revision, the amateur actress who plays Mrs. Trembleton governs her domestic stage for the play's duration in a way unlike her ownership of space during everyday life—"*It feels very strange!*" No matter how the actress chooses to play her lines, both she (and the author, Bell) not only effectively dismiss everyone else from her own space during her one-woman nine-page monologue, she dismisses the question of her husband's pleasure or displeasure at her acting for herself; all that matters is she is now "most daring."

The home theatre encourages an education for Victorian women and children which works by subverting from within the domestic space, a space particularly endued with a sense of flux at the midcentury moment at which parlour plays shot into popularity. The parlour offers just the right intermingling of privacy and publicity to allow for an easier social recoding of gender norms and expectations. In addition, the possibilities of joining the particular resonances of parlor and theatre as educative tools stand opposed to a newly systematic structuring of school space. The argument that parlour plays are both educative and transformative is strengthened by the presence of particular niche markets of home plays for both Victorian women and for children; the similarities between children's patently educative school plays and women's plays make the social recoding within the latter all the more apparent. Many theatricals were directed for school use, but other niche market theatricals such as those written as part of the many plays "for Ladies" series, exhibit the same educative intent. While the drawing room or parlor is clearly not quite a school, it is a space intensely concerned with the display of proper social skills, rules, and movement.

After tracing a historical connection between female playwrights and didactic theatre, starting with Joanna Baillie and progressing through women-to-women writing of the first half of the nineteenth century, this chapter investigates, first, the abundance of parlour plays which revolve around the marriage plot, through which both women's and children's plays transmit the rules for proper behavior during proposals of marriage. As acceptance of the suitor appears as the only option, these scenes disclose the lack of autonomy that the marriage option presents for women. Within this chapter, I will examine the most overwhelming parallels between these niche markets of parlour plays. Through an examination of the crossover content between children's and women's theatricals, one gains a more nuanced understanding of home theatre's mission to reeducate women within (and outside of) the domestic space. Performance of a parlour play might never involve physically leaving the parlour, but these theatricals use their given space to destabilize domestic rules from within. I especially focus on the importance of the trends of both comedy, and of metatheatrical acting within the theatricals, where a female character takes on another role in order to ensure the best possible outcome of suitors. Second, my focus will shift to fairy tale home theatricals. Fairy tales, besides often revolving around a marriage plot, are also the most commonly shared content of both women's and children's theatricals. If an acting of the marriage plot within a parlour play enables a transformation of the domestic, the fairy tale theatrical draws out all of the creative, transformative possibilities of the home stage.

Women and Educative Theatre

> If the "Home Dramas" should be so fortunate as to add some thing to the cheerfulness and blessedness of Home, that sacred place where we first learn of Heaven, and where Heaven begins, my humble but earnest efforts will be well rewarded. – Eliza Lee Follen, "Preface" to *Home Dramas for Young People*, 1859.

The educative possibilities of the home theatre as realized by Victorian women are an outgrowth of earlier socially condoned theories about the proper aims of especially women-authored drama. Joanna Baillie, as the most well-known public playwright (of either gender) of the early nineteenth-century, illustrates an earlier association between theatre and education, which subsequently evolves in the writings of Victorian women. Baillie, as Anne Mellor and others have noted, was admired by other prominent influences on the Victorians such as Lord Byron and Walter Scott, both of whom were responsible for staging or remounting various Baillie plays.[67] For Victorian women, Baillie would have served as role model in her authorship of theatrical theory, especially because her lengthy preface to her popular *Plays on the Passions* (1798) would have been clearly attributed to Baillie,[68] but also because, as Mellor argues, Baillie was a product of the "counter-public" feminist sphere of women which emerged in later eighteenth-century Britain, of a female reading audience's demand for female authorship. This particularly feminist literary counter-public, as I argue, is fully realized in the niche markets of the Victorian lady's parlour plays. The concept of a feminine counter-public usefully continues

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67. Anne Mellor, in "Joanna Baillie and the Counter Public Sphere," quotes Scott as claiming Baillie was "certainly the best dramatic writer whom Britain has produced since the days of Shakespeare and Mattinger" (559) and Byron wrote she was "our only dramatist since Otway & Southerne." Scott helped stage *The Family Legend*, her first commercially successful stage production, in 1810, and Byron helped Drury Lane to restage *DeMonfort* in 1821.

68. Baillie admitted her authorship two years later on the opening night of the Siddons and Kean-starring *De Monfort.* "*Orra,* Joanna Baillie," *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama*, Ed. Jeffry Cox and Michael Gamer (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2000), 113-114. *The Plays on the Passions* included *Count Basil: A Tragedy*, *The Tryal: A Comedy*, and *DeMonfort: A Tragedy*.

a complication of the doctrine of separate spheres which tends to produce an unnecessary critical polarization between the supposed feminine domestic and the masculine public. Ben Griffin, Lucy Delap, and Abigail Wills have pointed out that since Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall's groundbreaking *Family Fortunes*, perhaps too much writing on the history of gender politics has centered on whether or not gender relations can be framed or not by the "separate spheres" philosophy.[69] A parallel discussion has occurred in nineteenth-century American studies; Cathy Davidson explains: "Contemporary exclusion of women from the American literary canon motivates binaric thinking; binaric thinking inspires a way of conceptualizing the nineteenth century that is itself binaric"[70] but:

> for all the utopic appeal of loving female worlds, the binaric version of nineteenth-century American history is ultimately too unsatisfactory because it is simply too crude an instrument—too rigid and totalizing—for understanding the different, complicated ways that nineteenth-century American society or literary production functioned.[71]

While the notion of separate spheres may appear somewhat fallible and pigeonholing to studies of domestic space, it has yet to be examined in the context of the women-to-women writing of the domestic theatre, new spatial possibilities in the joining of theatre and home, and the resulting potential for social recoding. Additionally, with Baillie arguably preceding Victorian gender separation, the drawing of a continuum from her theatrical work through her Victorian literary descendants serves as yet another means of expanding previous work on gender politics.[72]

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[69] See Ben Griffin, Lucy Delap, and Abigail Wills's "Introduction" to *The Politics of Domestic Authority in Britain since 1800* for a more thorough overview as to the potential limitations of the ideology of separate spheres. As Chris Vanden Bossche explains "the idea of separate spheres was so widespread that its influence can be detected everywhere in Victorian literature, [though] it seldom appears there as a rigid doctrine. Rather, the ambiguity built into the idea enabled writers to produce endless variations on the marriage plot, and so to reimagine marriage and the social relationships it symbolized" (90).

[70] Cathy Davidson, "Preface: No More Separate Spheres!" *American Literature,* Vol. 70, No. 3, *No More Separate Spheres!* (Sep., 1998), 444.

[71] Ibid, 445.

Of most use here, to start, is Baillie's clear anticipation of a Victorian philosophy which merged acceptable "ladylike" theatre with education. Mellor regards Baillie as one who "consciously used the theatre to re-stage and revise the social construction of gender" (561). Theatrical education and the writing of the social codes of gender go hand-in-hand in the later nineteenth century.

In particular, Baillie's insistence that "theatre is a school in which much good or evil may be learned" (104) rests in what appears to be an essentially Victorian notion of sympathy.[73] In her "Introductory Discourses," Baillie explains drama's primary purpose as a means of education through the tracing and subsequent revealing of a particular hidden passion on the stage; as the audience follows the development of character, they can know and correct their own deficiencies. Drama, of all the various types of poesy, provides most opportunity for realizing that ultimate educative maxim for Baillie that "[i]n examining others we know ourselves" (74). Sympathy, a core Victorian value, is for Baillie responsible for the self-education which occurs during play-viewing: "The highest pleasures we receive *from poetry, as well as from the real objects which surround us in the world,* are derived from the sympathetic interest we all take in beings like ourselves" (81, emphasis added). Thus sympathy on the stage works just as sympathy in reality. James Robert Allard explains that Baillie's "keen awareness for the multiple ways in which drama and 'real life' converge in the theatre" revolves around the audience's critical examination of a passion's means and ends, in which they compare the drama's treatment of a passion not just to other depictions of it, but to their own memories of witnessing it in others and experiencing it themselves.[74] Baillie, then, shares the home theatre's goals of "practicing" a behavior for application to real life.

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[72] 72. As Poovey and others have described, the 1830s saw the start of increasing economic hardships at the same time that the range of socially acceptable activities for middle-class women decreased: "whereas in the 1790s, middle-class women had worked as janitors, plumbers, butchers, farmers, seedsmen, tailors, and saddlers, by the 1840s and 1850s, dressmaking, millinery, and teaching far outstripped all other occupational activities" (127).

[73] 73. Joanna Baillie, "Introductory Discourses," *Plays on the Passions (1798 Edition)*. Ed. Peter Duthie. (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 2001), 104.

Baillie chose as the subject for her earliest comedy *The Tryal* (1798) a private theatrical occurring among aristocratic women in a domestic setting. As in many Victorian theatricals to be discussed later in this chapter, *The Tryal*'s plot revolves around a choice of suitors and a potential marriage. While Baillie's influence on the subsequent Victorian generations has been all but ignored, her demonstrated trust in theatre's educative and sympathetic potential solidifies what I see as the shared goals of Baillie and later female dramatists. As Catherine Burroughs' elegant analysis of *The Tryal* discovers, this play "presents amateur acting as the means by which certain women can assert themselves, even if only temporarily, over the plot that shapes their domestic lives" (271). Yet, while Baillie and the Victorian female home dramatists share a similar focus on maintaining autonomy through acting within the constraints of the marriage plot, the later theatricals build upon Baillie's foundation. No longer does the male character, as in *The Tryal*, have the last word in restoring order, and neither are home theatricals purely aristocratic entertainment. On a widespread level, parlour plays presented transformative educational opportunities to middle-class Victorian women, teaching them to deploy acting as a skill to control behavior in order to gain a desired outcome in social situations.

One may wonder whether acting out the marriage plot is in fact the best method of bringing a type of intellectual rejuvenation to Victorian women. The overwhelming majority of women's and children's parlour plays involve a marriage plot. This could seem in some way more socially constricted than the novel because the theatrical "rehearsal" of a marriage proposal occurs in the space in which a proposal would or could occur; a naïve eye could view this type of performance as mere prepping of the female participants for the inevitable, or at least hoped for, proposal. However, while marriage-plot novels undoubtedly were read in parlours, the "realness" of the marriage-plot play as a performance, and its social rather than private nature allow for a social renegotiation not available in the act of reading. Space, here, is the home theatre's educational advantage.

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[74] 74. James Robert Allard, "Joanna Baillie and the Theater of Consequence," in *Staging Pain, 1580-1800: Violence and Trauma in British Theater*. Ed. J. R. Allard and Matthew R. Martin. Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 175.

Indeed, by providing an actual, real place in which to act out the marriage plot, the home theatre has an educational edge over what scholarship has tended to see as the entrapment of women novelists' ambitions within the domestic. The spatial advantages of performance provide dramatic alternatives to the apparent restriction of choices in the novel, between pursuing a vocation or adhering to the home. Laura Morgan Green explains the weird dynamic of novelists being strained or confined by the marriage plot, especially as bound up with intellectual growth: "even as women's intellectual ambitions assumed importance in such narratives [in novels], and in the authors' own lives, novelists continued to thread those ambitions through the needle's eye of a plot of courtship and marriage that, if it bent under their weight, nevertheless refused to break".[75] Morgan attributes this clinging to the domestic plot to the potential placelessness women faced as a result: "whatever the protestations of the reformers, the extension of higher education to women, and their incursion into public spaces and competitive relations previously reserved for men, dislodged women from their narrative status as a special kind of subject, a private subject, with a special kind of story—a story about domestic relations" (xii). The theatre as a school within the home offered a unique opportunity to grow intellectually through performance without dislodging participants *spatially* from the place that they were socially expected to occupy. Performance at home offers all the benefits of a familiar, comfortable, somehow socially "licensed" surrounding, however unsettling to the contemporary gender hegemony (or not) the performance actually was.

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[75] Laura Morgan Green, *Educating Women: Cultural Conflict and Victorian Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), xi.

And I would like to suggest that no matter what the content of a play—whether "subversive" or not—performance in the home always results in a reflection on one's identity and one's actions which accompany that identity. The parlour play is a mix of the familiar (surrounding, plot) and unfamiliar (acting as a new character) which could not be anything other than unsettling. In addition, the home theatre's fixation on the marriage plot means any reflection on self or the self's motives inevitably generates some mental negotiation of the period's gender relations. One must remember that Victorian women amateur actresses were part of an era in which even Fanny Kemble sometimes felt ambivalence about her presence as an actress on the public stage. In an 1863 *Cornhill* article, Kemble explains, "[t]here is something anomalous in that which we call the dramatic art … combining elements at once so congenial and so antagonistic to my nature." [76] Yet however Kemble might have felt something was essentially non-theatrical about the British as a whole, she, as Valerie Sanders notes, "never lost a sense of exhilaration at *becoming* the part she was playing."[77] Home theatre allows escape from what Green finds as the frequently "both externally imposed and internally generated" (8) anxieties about convention following female intellectuals outside of the home. While in a sense home theatre can be seen as providing "training wheels" for women to act differently outside of the parlour, it can also be seen as a victory in thwarting the intellectual constraints on women, as beating the social codes of gender from within. One is, oddly enough, socially free to perform within the domestic space.

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[76] 76. Fanny Kemble. "On The Stage," *Cornhill Magazine* 1863 Volume 8 (December 1863), 736.

[77] 77. Valerie Sanders, *The Private Lives of Victorian Women: Autobiography in Nineteenth-Century England*. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1989), 109.

Especially when compared with the newly institutionalized and rationalized congruity of Victorian school space, the domestic space is a domain of relative mobility and creativity, however still influenced and in touch with social and cultural forces it may be. At midcentury, school space became not only increasingly professionalized, but also built around a specific, reasoned, and structured congruence of school building architecture and desk space; a child's brain could quite literally, it was believed, be guided in development by enforcing particular spatial aspects of the school.[78] Mental cultivation could be directly determined by architectural landscape, though the insistence on constrictive linearity and regularity in education was not met without resistance—constructed similarly along the lines of the spatial, but also the domestic. Elizabeth Gargano finds firstly, that authors such as Dickens (perhaps the most theatrical Victorian novelist) "juxtapose[e] a *circularity* associated with the natural human form and free unimpeded human movement against a rectilinear order emblematic of school architecture" (29 emphasis added). Secondly, while Green found that the domestic encroaches on the plots of women novelists, Gargano finds "the rhetoric of domestic education permeates the nineteenth-century literature of education at a time when schooling increasingly takes place outside the home" (49)—the domestic becomes a critique of standardized pedagogy. The theatre, aligned with a type of fluctuating and fluid mind space, and the domestic, opposed to educational institutionalization, allows the home theatre to present itself as the midcentury's answer to an overabundance of partitioning of both mind and space. The parlour derives a power from its secure privacy and refusal of hierarchy beyond that of blood ties, but, as the crux between public and private, is the ideal space of cultural reconfiguration.

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[78] 78. Elizabeth Gargano, *Reading Victorian Schoolrooms: Childhood and Education in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

Besides the shift in education space, various mid-nineteenth century historical changes must be cited for both the proliferation of home theatricals around 1860, and the appearance of subsequently more independent female characters within the Victorian private theatre. In the mid-1800s, the appearance of the more independent female role and the appearance of more home theatricals generally has to do with a shift in the nature of women-to-women writing. Baillie deserves credit within *The Plays* for enduing female characters with, as Mellor puts it, "voices of rational moderation" (562) and making male characters "prey to unregulated passion," but other writing by women specifically for women underwent more widespread changes in regards to the middle-class woman's identity as autonomous and happy subject. Though Coventry Patmore's "Angel in the House" was originally published in 1854, Green notices that beginning in the 1850s women began to write books on women's education that "altered the discourse of the preceding generation's domestic homilies" (12). Unlike earlier tracts, such as Sarah Stickney Ellis' of the 1840s, which placed an emphasis on duty, obligation, and sacrifice, and in which "the self was the enemy to be repressed," newer works, though continuing to place women squarely within the home, emphasized development of intellect, reasoning, and happiness. The 1860s, which catapulted the parlour play into popular consciousness, also saw the emergence of women sensation fiction writers such as Rhoda Broughton, Mary Braddon, and Ellen Wood.[79] Sensation fiction's rise is relevant because it reset the acceptability of the dramatic and risqué plots as subjects for women writers and readers (as well as brought these stories often to the public stage). If many middle-class women were largely self-educated throughout the middle decades of the nineteenth century, their reading provided by the feminine counter-public quite dynamically and drastically changed in favor of a less restrained, more active woman. Within schools and homes, theatricals would have been part of a subversive representation of educational space contributing to this more mobile vision of womanhood.

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[79] "Conditions of Literary Production." *The Victorians*. Ed. Philip Davis, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 249.

The mid-century cultural flux and the dynamicism with which theatre can challenge the domestic has been widely acknowledged by criticism, though these ideas have yet to be brought to an appreciation of the home theatre's paradigm-shifting capacities. Mary Poovey among others has shown the "representation of woman was … a site of cultural contestation during the middle of the nineteenth century"[80], while Nina Auerbach agrees that woman, defined unequivocally as wife and mother, is called into question by Victorian theatricality. With a corresponding mid-Victorian rise in parlor play popularity, the home theatre is then arguably an important site in which these domestic cultural contestations are worked out by the women themselves, through the ritual aspects of performance.

The fact that some women wrote both domestic tracts and parlour plays suggests that authorship of home theatre was meant to be both educative and to fit neatly within the stereotypical feminine ideal. American writer Sarah Annie Frost exemplifies the easy publishing transition from lady-oriented tracts to home drama. While continuing prolific work for magazines such as *Godey's Lady Book*, Frost wrote *The Ladies' Guide to Needlework* (1877) and the etiquette guide *Frost's Laws and By-Laws of American Society* (1869), but most frequently published parlour play collections throughout the 1860s and 70s. Florence Bell, a British author of much focus later in this chapter, demonstrates a similar relationship to more traditionally domestic material as well as the potentially risqué home theatre market. Looking not only at the

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80. Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 9.

proficiency of these women writers in both these areas, but also their plays written specifically for children, highlights the educational goals of home plays—whether their aim was to inculcate more traditional notions of behavior or not.

The Marriage Plot and the Home Play

I lay groundwork for the rest of this chapter by showing how comedy works in Baillie's *The Tryal*, to set up acting as a weapon of choice for women in both the marriage market and social world, in a manner more fully developed by Victorian women's parlour plays. *The Tryal*, besides serving as precedent for the metatheatrical acting to follow in Victorian parlor plays, also places judgment of a woman's behavior at the center of its comic plot, and suggests that acting is a primary means by which social behavior—especially that surrounding courtship—can be recoded or re-ritualized, as well as the ways in which courtship behavior is guided by a type of social acting to begin with. While Baillie certainly did not shy away from tragedy, her choice of comedy for *The Tryal* also provides a point of connection to the women writers following her. Comedy, whether because simply more suitable to a home environment, or because viewed critically (albeit rather naively) as a lesser form of drama than tragedy, more suitable for women to attempt, is more often the focus of parlor plays.

The Tryal acts as a development within *The Plays on the Passions*. Rather than a microscopic intensity on one character's internal state and a specific passion, *The Tryal* concentrates on the female characters' camaraderie and prowess gained through acting. Harwood, the character-specimen upon which the passion of "love" is investigated, is less important than his reaction to his beloved Agnes's actions and whether her behavior has any effect, or should have any effect, on what appears to be his infatuation rather than true love. The play's true central character, the upper class Agnes, switches place with her lower class cousin

Mariane—thus initiating the first metatheatrical moment in which acting allows for a testing ground of a new, otherwise impermissible type of behavior for both women. Propelled by the temporary state of identity exchange, the already engaged Mariane "frolick[s] it away [and] plays the deuce amongst [the fortune-hunters]" (I.II.p.203), those men who have ignored her but now mistake her rank and availability, and Agnes enjoys freedom from "all the dust and chaff of the community" (I.I.p.196) whom she otherwise attracts as suitors.

While Harwood does distinguish himself by his definite preference for Agnes, despite her apparent lower status, his doggedly persistent affection for Agnes no matter how she behaves suggests that he himself is an unworthy mate for her. Harwood is unaware that Agnes uses the "acting" of bad behavior to test his affections; while she initially thrives off reports of Harwood's unwavering adoration for her, she decides later—only with the help of her uncle—that she wants someone who will love her justly rather than someone in love with the idea of being in love. Thus, on more than one level, acting within the play permits an otherwise unattainable weeding out of potential mates. Rather than suggesting that women should put on a better-than-normal, or a fawning or feminine type of behavior in order to hook a man, Baillie's play suggests nearly the opposite: abandon pretentions of social class, behave badly, and evaluate the man's worthiness in order to be married most sincerely. Besides granting woman a surprising degree of determination and agency in the decision to marry, the most obvious gendered reversal here places the man in position of hopeless romantic, as a man of feeling—Harwood faints upon opening the letter revealing Agnes' acted treachery, and another character exclaims: "See how his lips quiver and his bosom heaves! Let us unbutton him: I fear he is going into a fit" (V.II, p. 290)—while Agnes is positioned as shrewd, intelligent actress and puppet-master of the other characters. This bit of gender reversal and sexual innuendo, in which

Agnes "*sprinkles* [Harwood] *over with lavender*" and potentially starts unbuttoning him, is directly caused by Agnes's acting. As the older Colonel Hardy tells her: "You have managed finely indeed, to put Harwood into such a state, with your mummery." While Baillie may not have clearly intended the women of her audience to take on the behavior of Agnes, *The Tryal* models how a parlour play influences real life behavior, and Baillie clearly inspires the themes of succeeding Victorian women parlour playwrights.

Comedy is useful here in pointing out gendered norms, and works as comedy because of operating on these known, external values. In fact, comedy is a becoming tool in social revision for both Baillie and her literary descendants because it presupposes comparison to standards of seriousness, and can suggest reasons why these standards ought not to be taken so seriously or are perhaps ridiculous in the first place. As the supposed lesser of the two pure dramatic genres, comedy is more accessible to women writers, but also ironically the more helpful form in social reworking.[81] Michael Silk explains when pairing tragedy and comedy, "we pair them *in that order*," but his explanation that this ordering has everything to do with the innate bias towards seriousness in everyday life *also* points out the dismantling effect of comedy upon normative behavioral expectations: "'I was only joking,' we say – but never, 'I was only being serious.'"[82] And while Silk later repudiates the belief that the comic only is comparative, the relationship of jokingness or seriousness to the everyday is relevant to the home theatrical's peculiar machinations. It is, after all, much easier to picture an audience—or the cast members in rehearsal—provoked to laugh rather than sob in unison. Actors recognizable as "one of us" as in the home theatre make it harder to imagine not laughing even at tragedy. If Baillie's play also gestures towards the importance of the comic more generally for Victorian home dramatists, her plot also embeds this unifying woman-to-woman communication across class lines as the heart of the laughter.[83]

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[81] Scholarship has well documented how 18th and 19th century culture viewed women as incapable of writing tragedy. More particularly, Ellen Donkin has explained how, for eighteenth century women dramatists, "lack of education may partly explain why [they] tended to gravitate towards comedy rather than tragedy, since comedy could utilize contemporary domestic situations with little risk of exposing their ignorance of classical references" (93). Later, Susan Carlson finds women playwrights to be especially drawn to "comedy's investment in social protocol and issues of relationship" (260), no matter whether the author's politics were progressive or more traditional with respect to issues surrounding gender and marriage. Comedy historically speaking, but especially in the times relevant to this project, has often provided an exceptionally conductive outlet for women trying to break into the dramatic scene and to propagate their political agendas, whether explicitly or not.

[82] Michael Silk, "The Autonomy of Comedy," *Comparative Criticism Volume 10: Comedy, Irony, Parody*, Ed. E. S. Shaffer. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 18.

Perhaps most importantly for a comparison with nineteenth-century plays, Baillie's *The Tryal*'s plot is first driven by the solidarity of Agnes and Mariane in coordinating their acting-centered plot (as in an early scene in which Mariane purposefully and provokingly addresses Agnes only, while her fawning suitors attempt to attend to her). However, this early faith in female friendship becomes more ambivalently patriarchal over the last act, in which Agnes' Uncle Withrington is responsible for the suggestion that the girls' wiles have actually revealed Harwood to be an unsuitable suitor; thus while Agnes originates the final test of Harwood, she only questions her lover's preference because of her uncle. The Victorian plays need no such higher interference in their actresses' display, suggesting a historical shift from Baillie's day, when marriage contracts were more broadly understood as between men.

In fact, in examining the parallels between theatricals written specifically for children and those plays written with women as the intended actors, women-to-women writing and camaraderie is placed center stage over alternative patriarchal forms of governing and schooling. Crossover content, or those plots found in both children's and ladies' theatricals, offers a lens through which to examine the aims and reaches of the home theatrical more generally, as well as the intended spatial and social effects of these plays. I will now focus on the particularly educative intent of the parlour space, especially as organized along the familiar marriage plot of the Victorian novel. Children's plays (often performed in schools as well as homes) and women's plays both transmit the rules for proper behavior during proposals of marriage, which easily extend to a recoding of proper feminine conduct more generally. While disclosing the lack of autonomy that the marriage option so often presents for women, the home theatricals reveal a means of escaping the accepted norm of submissive feminine behavior, and suggest that marriage and proposals rather highlight a unique life stage upon which acting is permitted a freer expression, and serve as a source of power. In many cases, independence and an education beyond ladylike accomplishments is emphasized through strong female protagonists—this moral often made blatantly clear through a juxtaposition of a stereotypical "Angel in the House" figure with a female character who recognizes the importance of interests beyond the parlour. The more enlightened character almost always is more successful in capturing a husband. Finally, within the theatrical, the female character is often able to get the marriage she wants by "playing the part" of a powerful woman. This play-within-a-play "acting" of theatrical characters promotes female agency within the play's marriages, but also suggests an alternative way to "act" to gain agency for the real women and children performers, by drawing attention to the superficiality of social behavior in general.

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[83] While a more modern tradition rather ironically says that women can't "do comedy" from either the producing or receiving end (but especially as comics or authors), contemporary Victorian authors such as George Meredith called for "cultivated women to recognise that the Comic Muse is one of their best friends," that "Comedy is the fountain of sound sense; not the less perfectly sound on account of the sparkle: and Comedy lifts women [actresses] to a station offering them free play for their wit, as they usually show it, when they have it, on the side of sound sense" (**). Comedy especially indicates a nation's measure of equality between the sexes, since "where women are on the road to an equal footing with men, in attainments and in liberty—in what they have won for themselves, and what has been granted them by a fair civilisation—there … pure Comedy flourishes," but home theatre furthers rather than just indicates the level of health of Victorian men-women relations.

Within the limited scholarship on home theatricals, Katherine Newey and Melanie Dawson offer differing opinions about the agency and type of education that the plays present to women.[84] Newey discusses the conservative ability of the plays "to teach the signs of respectability and gentility" (142), while Dawson finds more ambiguity in female characters' metatheatrical "acting," where putting on a particular front, especially during courtship within the plays, seems to offer a rare sanction for women's theatrical skills. To Dawson, dramatic skills or subversive acting is only necessary "until a woman acquires some sort of domestic authority" (12); the theatricals remain ambiguous in their endorsement of women's acting after marriage, though before the event, their dramatic skill clearly allows them a means of manipulating an otherwise pre-determined situation.

However, I would suggest this "acting" functions as a gateway to agency by handing control—through the direction and actual acting—of marriage over to women. The popularity of metatheatrical acting-within-the-acting suggests an awareness on the part of the women playwrights that acting could be a powerful means of recoding behavior, to gain otherwise unavailable control over a situation. (Women were not, as is still the case, responsible for doing the proposing, only for going through whatever necessary steps to ensure that such a proposal occurs.) If the rise of home theatrical texts through the 1860s coincides with turbulence surrounding marriage as an institution, due to an increased availability of divorce, and an introduction of wife-initiated divorce, the ability to act out a marriage proposal would have been a small method of regaining a sense of order. Finally, the widely documented overabundance of, and resulting nationwide anxiety about, unmarried women in mid-Victorian England would have made the marriage plot theatrical both practical on some level, as well as fantasy-fulfilling to its actors. William Rathbone Greg's influential 1862 essay "Why Are Women Redundant?"

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[84] See Kate Newey, "Home and Nation" in *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005. 135-168. See also Melanie Dawson, "A Woman's Power: Alcott's 'Behind a Mask' and the usefulness of dramatic literacies in the home." *ATQ* 11.1 (1997), 19-41.

explains the widespread cultural consciousness that "[h]undreds of women remain single in our distorted civilization because they have never been asked at all" (10), and that nearly 30 percent of British women above age 20, and about "1,100,000 women in the best and most attractive period of life [between ages 20 and 40], who must be classed as unnaturally, if not unintentionally, single" (12).[85] The home theatre would at once be a method of practicing behavior to encourage, elicit, and know "how to act" during a proposal, as it would have been a type of wish-fulfillment for the unmarried woman.

Acting, in rehearsal and repetition, offers a method of anxiety-relieving control which actually extends easily from the more classifiably ladylike etiquette manuals popular earlier in the nineteenth century. Even for the feminine ideal portrayed in Sarah Stickley Ellis' manuals, a woman's conversation topics were to be studied and deliberate, avoiding that banal though common theme which is "prevalence of *self*" (128), and advising talk with her husband be "[n]ot conversation upon books, if her husband happens to be a fox-hunter; nor upon fox-hunting, if he is a bookworm; but exactly that kind of conversation which is best suited to his tastes and habits" (120).[86] A woman's talk was to be rehearsed for a particular "role," even if this were not precisely acting. In the "ideal" world of Florence Bell, adults' lives would use more explicitly theatrical formulas as an aid to communication. In her semi-parodic but semi-serious *Conversational Openings: Some Hints for Playing the Game of Small Talk and other Society Pastimes* (1899), Bell envisions how difficult society would be without formulas such as "How do you do?" or "Thank you," and suggests additional phrases in order to save time and avoid awkward pauses in conversation.[87] She then goes on to diagram the only possible reactions to certain conversational openings and exits according to different situations such as "Children's Opening" (which advises restraint to those answering the question "Are your children quite well?") and "Regretful Surprise Ending" (which advises responses that ensure the guest will not be trapped at the hostess' party), and in a chess game analogy, maps how either "Black" or "White," her two imaginary conversationalists, may socially come out on top, or "win," in a precise number of moves. Bell exposes the formulaic possibilities of a real society here, but suggests a still-formulaic alternative. Bell's awareness of this patterned theatricality of everyday life, and the potential to manipulate it, make her childrens' fairy tale theatricals more clearly an attempt to inculcate a model for the future behavior she wishes to cultivate in adults, emphasizing speech and bodily placement to create new patterns of behavior. As an extension of etiquette manuals, theatricals work to more craftily build social codes through behavioral rehearsal.

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[85] 85. William Rathbone Greg, *Why Are Women Redundant?* (London: N. Trubner & Co., 1869).

[86] 86. Sarah Stickley Ellis, *Women of England, Their Social Duties and Domestic Habits* (London: Fisher, Son, & Co., 1845).

Within home theatre, children were thus subject to indoctrination in the ruling behaviors of their culture at the same time as they were encouraged in their theatricality by adults. Anne Varty has documented the extensive participation of children in the Victorian theatre, especially as promoted and watched by adults, who were fascinated by the "complex negotiation of spontaneity and repetition" which arose when children performed. Fanny Kemble herself uses children as a means of explaining the dramatic versus the theatrical; children are naturally dramatic, but become theatrical when aware of being "objects of admiring attention." [88] As Varty explains:

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[87] 87. Florence Bell, *Conversational Openings: Some Hints for Playing the Game of Small Talk and Other Society Pastimes* (London: Edward Arnold, 1899).

[88] 88. Kemble, "On The Stage," 733.

> The license to act out an authentic self that was nevertheless learned, repeatable, and various was the special preserve of the child actor … The child actor has neither a face nor a mask, but unsettles by possessing both in equal measure. The acting child is simultaneously itself and other, authentic and pretending.[89]

Repetition, typically deemed a frightening signal of inauthenticity, is recast in children's performance as "a founding principle of moral education."[90] The quick exchanges of repetitive dialogue in plays such as Bell's "Rather a Prig" or "Little Petsey" in her *Nursery Comedies: Twelve Tiny Plays for Children* appear to verify this redirection. The child performer's odd conjunction of acting self and real self, combined with home plays' educative attempts, make the home theatre the perfect stimulus for an invigorating mode of self-creation and modeling—a fact which was recognized by the adult female authors (and often spectators) of children's theatricals. Considering this fact, the immense proliferation of children's fairy tale theatricals by these female dramatists becomes an attempt at both a recovery/relearning of a younger authentic yet othered self when the fairy tale plot is transferred into adult theatricals. Varty's recovery of the accounts of schoolteachers such as Constance Milman, who enjoyed her own costuming and orchestration of the children's plays, just as much as her own children's performances, offers evidence that adult women could vicariously feed off the performances of children to generate and recover an enthusiasm within themselves.

Children's home theatricals parallel their narrative counterparts in redefining the Victorian woman, and these parallels illuminate the educative purpose present in theatricals for

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89. Anne Varty, *Children and Theatre in Victorian Britain: 'All Work, No Play'* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): 12-13.

90. Ibid., 235. See also Rebecca Stern's *ELH* article "Moving Parts and Speaking Parts: Situating Victorian Antitheatricality" for a discussion of how repeated behavior for the Victorians became an especially theatrical phenomenon which revealed artifice and inauthenticity—the idea of rehearsing behavior became frightening by implying that repeated actions could just as easily be "performed" offstage, in the social theatre, as in any onstage drama.

the adult woman, which actually reinforce and expand female agency. As theorists have shown, children's literature as a genre is more likely to sanction cultural change; Edith Honig has recognized that angelic portrayals of women in adult Victorian fiction are absent from children's literature, replaced with empowered females, and that these liberated female images affect the lifeview of Victorian children.[91] Thus, the influence of the power of performance combines with the liberated woman of children's theatricals to make this home theatre genre an especially efficient means of establishing new cultural norms.

The abundance of theatricals written specifically for Victorian girls can be contrasted with the relatively small proportion of parlour or school plays written for only boy performers; this ratio of plays produced along gender lines can be situated within the significant discrepancies that existed between girls' and boys' formal schooling throughout the Victorian era. If the rigidity of formal school space contrasted with the education offered by the parlour, the theatrical became a freewheeling source of corrective energy to the deficiencies of a traditionally delineated and gender-biased school environment that persisted through the end of the nineteenth century. Only in the 1870s did the goals of secondary schools for girls start making strides from teaching girls how to catch husbands to educating them in a more profitable, thorough mental and physical sense.[92] Yet, girls' education remained a point of contention through the remaining decades of the nineteenth century. As Frances Power Cobbe wrote, in her 1862 essay "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?"—a response to Greg's *Why are Women Redundant?:*

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[91] Edith Lazaros Honig, *Breaking the Angelic Image Women Power in Victorian Children's Fantasy* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1988).

[92] Ray Strachey. "Educational Progress. 1870-1900" *The Cause: Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (London: G. Bell & Sons, Ltd., 1978), 246.

> It is in the nature of things disgraceful and abominable that marriage should be made the aim of a woman's life. It can only become what it is meant to be, the completion or crown of the life of either man or woman, when it has arisen from sentiments which can never but be bespoken for the convenient fulfilment of any vocation whatsoever.[93]

Education and the advancement of women in the arts and sciences, according to Cobbe, is the solution to avoiding marriages of interest, and leading instead to marriages based in love:

> let their education be pushed as high, let their whole position be made as healthy and happy as possible, and there will come out once more, here as in every other department of life, the triumph of the Divine laws of our nature… We shall make single life so free and happy that they shall not have one temptation to change it save the only temptation which *ought* to determine them—namely, love.[94]

However the larger British culture might have been awakened to the need for more adequate schooling for girls, however related to the ability to make a "proper" marriage or not, the reality of formal education was that girls were treated remarkably differently, and that the home plays might have lent a way of playfully both enacting and challenging "acceptable" behavior or dress in a mode not available elsewhere. Even so late as the preface to the 1897 *Education of Girls and Women in Great Britain*, Miss E.P. Hughes writes of this incongruity between the sexes' education, noticing "the difference in both spheres has been very marked in the past, and is still considerable" (vi-vii). Hughes goes on to suggest that educational equality has advanced, but needs to continue; members of a community are so closely linked that the advance guard of men cannot progress until the rear guard of women has advanced also. "The education of girls is not merely a woman's question – thoughtful men have never so regarded it. It is a human question, one that concerns everyone" (viii). Yet, Hughes qualifies her statements with her suggestion that

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[93] Frances Power Cobbe, "What Shall We Do with Our Old Maids?" *'Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors': Victorian Writing by Women on Women*, Ed. Susan Hamilton (Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press, 1995), 63.

[94] Ibid., 87-88.

"it is better to spend a little less money on boys' education, and help the girls, rather than doom the boys to live in homes governed by badly educated wives and mothers" (viii). Women were still educated for womanhood, for men, but not beyond this limited scope, which is sadly emphasized by this supposedly progressive book reinforcing this fact. Honig discusses Victorian society's expectations for girls: "clearly, they were the mothers of tomorrow and were constantly being groomed for their role as future Angels in the House" (67). Julia Swindells, in her investigations of women's autobiographies, finds that school imposes gender restraints by emphasizing ladylike manners and sewing. For the women whom Swindells investigates, "there is little substantial diversity in the perceptions of the autobiographers" (130). Almost all harbored illusions of self-improvement, but "almost all discover the actuality of school is at odds with those illusions" and find their conflation of learning with formal schooling to be dismantled.

The home theatricals address this educational difference, not without some resentment. Carleton Case's *Awful Boots*, a play in his *Fun for Friday Afternoons* collection of plays for schoolchildren, revolves around Emma's choice of one of two suitors.[95] Case, though an American male author, provides a useful example of how childrens' plays often unite these prominent educative and marriage-plot-centered themes. Emma's younger cousin Jack, who is to help her decide on a husband, tells Emma that she must favor one or the other, as he himself has never liked two girls equally: "I like one a spell, and then I like another a spell" (38). Emma answers, "Yes, that's boy style"—to which Jack replies indignantly that he is not a mere boy because "I'm fifteen, and I'm studying algebra." Emma draws attention to the gendered freedom that boys have to use girls for "a spell," as opposed to the situation of women who must commit themselves for an eternal spell of time. Jack's freedom is closely tied to his education, his "algebra," which frees him from marriage as his only goal. Several lines later, Emma questions Jack as to his thoughts of marriage for himself, which illuminates the result of their educative differences:

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[95] Carleton Britton Case, *Friday afternoon dramas [Fun for Friday afternoons]: help over the hard places of the usual Friday afternoon rhetoricals: dramatic dialogues of known excellence, adapted to presentation by school boys and girls.* (Chicago: Shrewesbury Publishing Co., 1917).

> Jack. Why, I've been thinking of that for some time. Not thinking of marriage for myself, but trying to solve the question as to whether it is better to marry or to remain single. No, indeed, I am not thinking of marriage for myself. I have a work to do. I am going to astonish the world. (38)

Emma is presented with no option but a choice between suitors, but Jack can reject the option of marriage entirely, something of which Emma is incapable, because his education allows him the ability to change the world.

Home plays were undoubtedly for amusement, but Victorian entertainment was often equated with education. With the rather unsatisfying nature of school for girls, home theatricals emerge as a means of "schooling" the school's idea of a female education, both at school and at home. Florence Smith cites the advice of American domestic advisor Catherine Beecher in 1858: "the only legitimate object of amusements is to prepare mind and body for the proper discharge of duty."[96] Titles of plays written specifically for children reflect their concern with moral guidance, such as Eliza Follen's *Honesty is the Best Policy* or Keating's *The talisman or, Truth may be blamed but it cannot be shamed*. In Smith's research of periodicals that published children's theatricals, she finds that "dramatizations were often lessons in morality" and only "occasionally" were for entertainment alone (6). Sometimes though, the educational lessons were subtler. Megan Norcia sees children's home theatricals as reflecting the political and social agendas of their parents and society, specifically finding these innocent games shaping an imperial consciousness. Even without providing a direct moral lesson, theatricals educate children in the other cultural rules of their society—I would suggest those surrounding domesticity and marriage.

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[96] Florence C. Smith, "Introducing Parlor Theatricals to the American Home" *Performing Arts Resources: Performances in Periodicals.* 14. (1989), 2.

While many childrens' plays deal less directly with marriage for age-appropriate reasons, these theatricals often enforce a more progressive view of marriage and gender. In Florence Bell's "The Surprise," the last of three childrens' plays included at the conclusion of a larger collection for adults, *Chamber Comedies*, the author makes clear with a footnote immediately after the title that "[t]he [eight] characters in this play can be acted by either girls or boys, the names being changed."[97] In Bell's "Jack and the Beanstalk," another children's play in the same collection, Bell adds the benevolent character of "Grumps" as the Ogre's wife to transform the story equally into one of troubled domestic relations, or, what happens when one is married (literally) to an ogre, just as much as it is of a boy's magical adventure in gaining wealth for himself and his poor mother.[98] Grumps saves Jack from being eaten by her husband by hiding him, but otherwise is abused by the Ogre while displaying submissive feminine characteristics, first complying with her husband's request that she "sit on the doormat, in case anyone should disturb [him] should [he] go to sleep," and then telling the Ogre: "Now you have everything comfortable. Your hen and moneybag—and your armchair" (296). Elsewhere, the ogre first thinks his wife is to blame for his disappearing gold—"I believe Grumps has been taking some!" (297) and tells her it is "very kind of me to let you sit there [on the doormat]—very kind, do you hear?" (298). Evidently for complying with such insulting behavior, Bell drops Grumps abruptly out of the play—Jack rather morbidly and nonchalantly mentions to his mother: "I believe

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[97] Florence Bell, "The Surprise," *Chamber Comedies* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), 317.

[98] Florence Bell, "Jack and the Beanstalk," *Chamber Comedies* (London: Longsman, Green, and Co., 1890), 287-301.

[Ogre] killed her the day I left the castle" (300). Thus, even those plays not traditionally associated with the marriage plot are often molded to form a commentary on appropriate domestic relations—often occurring, like the fairy tale plays, in a way to suggest that perhaps the "magical" space and literal Ogres are in fact less different from the real space and real husbands than may first appear. In "Jack," this spatial aspect is especially drawn out by the death of Grumps and destruction of Ogre and the beanstalk leading to this place of monstrous relationships.

Florence Bell's "Beauty and the Beast" (which, like "Jack," was both among both the three children's plays included in *Chamber Comedies* and in her children's collection of fairy plays, discussed later) more explicitly deals with marriage in a children's play, specifically drawing out marriage as a type of removal from the space of the childhood home.[99] This attention to spatial demarcation, like the Ogre's space in "Jack," functions as a comment on British domestic interactions, similarly to the plays for adult women. The play's spaces are marked as appropriate for a specific gender, while Bell carefully develops a dialogue about the differences between female-female versus male-male communication within these spaces, and comments on how either gender acts differently when the other is not around. At the same time, the actresses and actors of the play learn to not value superficial and materialistic marriages through the comic outrageousness of the characters they are playing.

If "Jack & the Beanstalk" partially disguises the realness of the theatrical's domestic configuration through the inhumanness of the characters, "Beauty and the Beast" filters domestic relations through orientalism, setting the play conspicuously not in Britain. (As if the turbans, costumes, and foreign names weren't enough, Beauty's father Abou Cassim quickly and comically hammers the strangeness of the space home: "[*Looks up first in one direction, then in another.*] I never can remember where the sun ought to be in the afternoon. I wish people used watches in Turkey" (112).) However, Fatima and her two sisters Ayesha and Zuleika display, at least in their father's presence, the spectrum of outcomes of a traditionally passive British feminine education.

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[99] Florence Bell, "Beauty and the Beast," *Fairy Tale Plays and How to Act Them*. (London: Longmans Green, 1910), 109-138.

Fatima, called "Beauty" by her father, is all Angel in the House—"I've packed all your things, father, and got everything ready" (118)—while her sisters Zuleika and Ayesha, as in many variations of Bluebeard, provide a counterpoint to Fatima's selflessness. These two sisters, undifferentiated as characters, become a sort of "Dark" Angel in the House, comically making lists of material goods they want their father to bring them. Yet, once their father departs, the three sisters are no longer given dichotomous aspects by Bell—at one point Fatima and Ayesha share dialogue—and instead unanimously reject ladylike or unproductive activities in a set of exchanges ("I don't care about making toffee," "I don't care about blowing soap-bubbles," "I don't care about painting." (117)) to culminate in the three girls enthusiastically clapping their hands and deciding to dance together in the home, capping the end of the first scene in what becomes a celebration of the father's absence despite their own lack of mobility.

The father's trip away, the reason for which is never fully explained, becomes a means of showing an especially masculine-marked outdoor space when Abou Cassim mistakenly picks a rose, which he had promised to bring Fatima, from the garden of the Beast, or "Prince Furryskin." Abou's life is spared when he agrees to the Prince's "promise to give [him] the first living thing you meet when you get inside *your garden*" (120, emphasis added), which of course happens to be his daughter Beauty. The parallel garden spaces emphasize the relative agency of the male characters in the non-domestic space, especially as this place becomes a market of exchange for "Beauty"—giving the daughter for the rose or the father's life. Similarly to the gender-oriented camaraderie that ends the girls' scene, the men bond throughout the garden scene but in a way which weirdly relegates even Fatima's beauty back to the father:

> *Prince* (*starts*). Your daughter, did you say? Is she beautiful at all?
> *Abou Cassim.* Very, very beautiful—she is considered particularly like her father.
> *Prince*. Oh, indeed—she must be a beauty then! (120)

While one can read the Prince's enthusiasm for Abou's beauty as a side effect of being a Beast—Abou is currently a tasty treat—the homosexual undertones exist only in the male-male scenes. Indeed, the scenes with male roles are the only sexual ones, period, while the girls alone onstage become almost directionless. As opposed to the girls' happy dance within a contained space, the men conclude their scene by leaving their space, and tying their characters through an echoing if unfriendly bit of song dialogue, the third refrain of which they sing in unison:

> *Prince.* Now please walk out at my garden gate—
> You'll find it is better for you not to wait,
> In case I might take such a fancy to you,
> I might gobble you up in a minute or two,
> And then of you there'd be no more,
> So I think you have better go out of the door.
> *Abou Cassim*. Very well, I'll walk out of your garden gate—
> I think it is better for me not to wait,
> In case you might take such a fancy to me,
> You might gobble me up in a minute or three,
> And then of me there'd be no more,
> So I think I had better go out of the door. (120)

Only male characters are permitted outside of the play's living or dining room spaces and into the garden, at least until the conclusion, a very deliberate move on the author's part.

In fact, Bell has Fatima meet her father not in the garden upon his return home, but within their living room despite the wording of the Prince's request. At a second point at which Bell could easily have shown Fatima into the garden mid-play, she instead chooses to bring her back into her original domestic space, in a set of scenes which reinforce a correspondence between the rational and persistently home-oriented qualities of the heroine.

> *Fatima*. Now I should like to go back to my father again, please.
> *Prince* (*gets up*.) What, and leave me?
> *Fatima*. Yes, please.
> *Prince*. Then I shall die of grief.
> *Fatima*. Oh no, you won't.
> *Prince.* You shall do as you like, Fatima—you shall not think me unkind as well as ugly. But, first, would you like to take a turn round the garden, and see if I can find another rose for you?
> *Fatima*. Yes, please.

Along with the lesson of politeness embedded in all of Fatima's "yes, please" responses, is a surprisingly staunch reasonableness in her assertion of "Oh no, you won't" to the Prince's potential death by grief at her absence. Additionally, rather than carry the couple off to the garden, the following scene opens with Fatima's original desire coming true; she is suddenly transported back to Abou Cassim's drawing-room. The play uses this scene, from which the Prince is absent, to comment on the stability of the original home as the one "good" girls prefer best:

> *Zuleika.* I do wish we had been there! Why didn't you stay, you silly girl?
> *Fatima*. Because I wanted to come back and see you all again.
> *Abou Cassim.* Good girl, Beauty, very good girl, she likes her home best—that's what all good girls do.

The theatrical concludes with Fatima rescuing the no longer beastly Prince from his garden in a reaffirmation of their marriage and the traditional ending—albeit in a ridiculous sense, as Fatima's primary motivation is Prince Furryskin's changed appearance and his pointing out that she shall likewise be a beautiful young princess: "That's nicer still! Of course I will, then!" (133). Yet despite the ending marriage, Bell writes a youthful power into this play's Fatima, whose girlhood undermines the reshifting familial bonds of marriage. Abou's repeated "good girl" comments reinforce the message that one's father's house is better than one's suitor's, though it is Fatima's character, in her earlier interaction with the Prince, and then with her family, that make it possible to return to and recapture the pre-married state. At last, her family follows her to witness her accepting the Prince's hand in the garden, so she is able to never fully leave off the associations of her original home space. This clinginess can be read as part of the dialogue over Victorian anxiety over what was viewed as a drastic bodily and personal transformation from virtuous maid to married woman; Helena Michie argues, "after the sexual apotheosis accompanying marriage … [t]he middle class woman became, in the cultural imagination, a different person."[100] Admittedly this play's performance by children necessitates an age-appropriate portrayal of relationships, yet this version of Fatima cultivates a reassuringly insistent lesson that closeness to one's father's home corresponds to the winning of the new home space with the Prince. In other words, after marriage, at least in this universe, not too much changes.

Yet, despite the evident comfort of Fatima's post-married home, Bell takes care in "Beauty and the Beast" to emphasize the marriage market's association with a particular brand of femininity. Abou Cassim loses Zuleika and Ayesha's parcels of presents from his trip (because "the camel who carried them died of fatigue in crossing the desert") near the place in the text where he first realizes Fatima is lost: "I have sold my daughter to a beast!" (122). While the loss of the daughter is made comparable to the loss of the presents, Bell hints that the cultivation of an environment in which Abou is willing to materially indulge his daughters' vanities, is also one in which daughters likewise end up being "sold." However, the play reinforces the childhood home as a place of comfort in opposition to marriage throughout, not only in Fatima's abrupt return back to her father's and sisters' house—in what seems a particularly child-appropriate abscondment—but also in her only solo speech of the play, when first in the Prince's drawing-room:

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[100] Helena Michie, "Under Victorian Skins," *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture.* Ed. Herbert Tucker. (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc.: 1999), 420.

> 'Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
> Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home.
> A charm from the skies seems to hallow us there,
> Which seek through the world is ne'er met with elsewhere,
> Home, home, sweet, sweet home.
> Be it ever so humble, there's no place like home. (126)

Surrounding the play's various lessons—that the list-making sisters will not marry, that one cannot literally die for lack of a lover—the home as a space of protection and seat of childhood emerges as the most fundamental consideration for the characters and author.

Theatricals for adult women are certainly more nuanced and complex in their development of the marriage plot than children's fairy tales, particularly in their ability to teach the actresses lessons through the act of performing. Like the children's plays, those for ladies often use comedy, strong female protagonists, and perhaps most interestingly, women-women dialogue centered on marriage which offers a critique as it arrives at the conventional marriage conclusion. For example, "Yes—or, No" by Mary Healy is a peppy and hilarious 23-page duologue between a young widow Lady Townsend and her maid Nancy, in which the widow lets loose on the fickleness of men as she waits for her lover to show up at her door.[101] Nancy is meanwhile, discouraged by her employer in her love for the gardener as Lady Townsend explains "A young girl is much better without a husband, or at least with a husband three times her own age, like my poor Sir Richard" (120). Nancy and her employer are clearly friends, and share an over-willingness to take their men back after they miss their appointments, while Lady Townsend supplies a steady harsher commentary on the condition of women—*and* of men—that

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[101] Mary Healy, "Yes—or, No," *Home Theatre* (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Low & Searle, 1871), 113-138.

Nancy readily absorbs. For instance, when Nancy explains there was a good "reason" why her lover failed to show up for their walk, Lady T. cuts her off: "In love, there is no such thing as reason. A lover should be able to compass the impossible" (118-119). Much of Lady Townsend's dialogue, while mocking the ideal of love, deeply believes in and is disappointed in it; the added humor makes the play, however, a pleasure in its emphasis on the companionship women can offer each other across class lines, despite the failure of men to live up to the fairy tale standard.

Lady Townsend serves as an excellent example of the home theatrical's strong and witty female protagonist, able to transform the home play with a truly artful dramatic character and social commentator. Lines by the widow to her maid include such less than covert criticisms of men, as: "[women's] little innocent vanities are simply food for that great and all-devouring monster—masculine vanity" (132) along with such gems, upon receiving her lover's flowers, as "Flowers in January are like the rare smile of a stern man—far more precious than any ordinary person's good nature" (126). Particularly illustrative of the way "Yes—or, No" is able to criticize traditional feminine activities while poking fun at Lady Townsend's impatience at her suitor is a portion of the opening scene, in which Lady Townsend is struggling with some worsted, and waiting on her lover's visit.

> *Lady T.* …I am sure that clock is wrong; when was it regulated?
>
> *Nancy*. Last Monday, my lady, and the man said it had not varied two minutes in the month.
>
> *Lady T.* He did not know what he was talking about! O dear, O dear! what stupid work this is. Nancy, if Miss Sharp [almost assuredly named with Thackeray's character in mind] should call, mind you admit her. I am in the very mood to listen to her dissertations on the degradations of our sex! I declare I do not wonder there are so many stupid men in the world; henceforth, when I look at their heavy-eyed, idiot faces, I shall say to myself: "Their mothers, I am sure, worked innumerable sofa cushions of uncomfortable magnificence—no wonder their sons are fools!" There now, my worsted

> is in a snarl—oh, how stupid! [*Breaks off the worsted, then throws her work away and upsets the basket of wools.*] Now I feel better!
>
> *Nancy.* Shall I pick them up, my lady?
>
> *Lady T.* No, they never looked so nice before—I feel quite kittenish when I look at the pretty soft balls rolling in every direction. Have you not done watering those absurd plants? they are drooping, of course they are; plants cannot live in a room like this! Come here, I think you began a novel to me last night, only I fell asleep just as the hero was threatening to blow his brains out; suppose we see whether his resolution held good? (115-116)

The end to this thread of discussion shows Healy the author's ability to situate herself within the larger Victorian canon, while maintaining Lady Townsend's character. Thereafter, a page later, when Nancy begins the described tale anew—"This, if you remember, my lady, is the letter John wrote to Jane, with the pistol lying on the desk by him. 'By the time you receive this, I shall be a corpse. I loved you. You knew it—you trifled with me! I die.' " (117)—her lady can only answer with:

> Dear me, what a tragic young man! and so curt too; his short sentences are rather like the snap of a dog. Ever since Trollope, novelists think it is necessary to write in short barks. I suppose it would be difficult to find one sentence of eight words in that whole thick volume. Suppose we leave the spasmodic young gentleman to put an end to himself comfortably. Tell me, Nancy, did you never feel as though you wanted to tear your duster into small strips, and knock your looking-glass into atoms? (117)

Continuing the heroine's ability position her tale and character within literature more generally, she compares her worsted to Penelope's weaving ("Penelope makes me think of lonely women waiting for wandering men who never come back. I am sure I never should have waited so long for Ulysses; he was not worth so much patience; beside, patient women are nearly always fools" (135)), and performs a close reading of her lover's note, with which she is first enthralled, but thereafter decides he shows no remorse, in quite eloquent terms:

> *Lady T.* [*Reading over the note.*] "To obtain my pardon and a cup of tea at the same time"—that does not sound exactly—what shall I say?—exactly penetrated with remorse, does it?

> *Nancy.* Not particularly.
>
> *Lady T.* And yet he ought to feel remorse, real remorse. "To obtain my pardon!"—to obtain it, mind you!—not to pray for it—not to tremble lest should be withheld—but to obtain it. It sounds almost as though he had said, "What I wish for, I can obtain, almost without asking for it. I shall take my pardon like my cup of tea—because I want it, and it is sure to be given to me!" Really, Mr. Cavendish, this is a little too much!
>
> *Nancy.* But how does your ladyship know that these thoughts passed through his mind?
>
> *Lady T.* How do I know? Easily enough. I have had considerable experience of the world, considering my age, and this experience.

"Yes—or, No" ends with Lady Townsend pulling off flower petals as a way to determine whether her lover, who has finally arrived—impeded not by neglect of his beloved but rather by a steady fall of rain—should be admitted. Though her choice of method might indicate some clinging reliance on overly romantic notions of courtship, when she ends on a "no" petal, her choice to "smite the silly flower" (137) and say yes, is a way of at least feeling as though she has some agency in the wooing process, over which she actually has never had control (she had no choice in her first husband) and still has little agency, as she has waited the length of the play for Mr. Cavendish, however benevolent he truly is. Victorian women acting and spectating the roles of the two female characters could likewise regain some sense of control over the feeling that "women have the hardest part of life assigned to them—passive endurance" (122-123). The play comically engages with clichés about women's behavior towards men, in their fretful analyses on men's whereabouts and motives. Thus, Victorian women could learn to both laugh and feel more aggressively about their position in society, especially as in the theatrical, this type of behavior results in an amiable suitor's visit.

Florence Bell's theatrical "A Chance Interview" from her *Chamber Comedies; and collection of plays and monologues* perhaps best encapsulates the most popular themes of the subgenre of the marriage plot parlour play, focusing on the proposal as its subject while reversing traditional gender roles to give the female character the majority of the wit and power in this situation.[102] The play's plot builds to the proposal at the conclusion, all the while working to reconfigure the traditionally occupied position of each gender during the proposal, and talking openly about what sort of woman makes the best wife.

Colonel Perceval has come upon a visit to a Mrs. Greville to ask for her daughter's hand, though this never-seen Mrs. is preparing for a ball (and already the Colonel begins the gendered commentary: "at this time? …She will be two hours too early—unless she means to dance a *pas seul* before the other people come" (21)). The Colonel thus is left to contemplate his fate for fifteen minutes while he waits, in a way which emphasizes his agitation rather than the boldness of his step: "It is a foolish plan, an embarrassing plan, for a man to have to come and ask formally for the hand of his future bride. In fact, I had no idea how embarrassing it would be" (22).

The Colonel's lengthy opening monologue, justified by Mrs. Greville's absence for the moment, allows Bell to reveal his backstory to the audience: "I am as foolishly agitated as I was that day when I went to Kate Vernon's house on a like errand, and found Lord Rockmount's carriage at the door—that well-appointed brougham, which I verily believe was as powerful an advocate of his suit as Lord Rockmount himself" (22). Bell interestingly flips the traditional anxiety of the proposal towards the man; it's not the woman anxiously hoping for someone to ask her to marry, but the man hoping to get to the woman first. While the Colonel himself comes across as less than manly as he nervously fidgets, while waiting for his interview, he compares his would-be bride with his old love, in a way which pits a submissive against an independent conception of wifehood:

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[102] 102. Florence Bell, "A Chance Interview," *Chamber Comedies; and collection of plays and monologues* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), 21-37.

> Yes, Kate was delightful to be in love with, certainly—exactly the woman to be in love with, but perhaps, after all, not the woman to marry. As a wife she might be less satisfactory. Now Mary Greville—dear little Mary! so gently, so sympathetic, so domestic, so exactly the kind of woman to find smiling at one's fire-side—always the same, no moods, no flightiness—a woman who would be sure to always think her husband right! that is my idea of married happiness. Whereas Kate!! (*Smiles at the recollection*.) No one could expect that of her, certainly. No one could imagine that she would always be the same, with her impressionable nature vibrating to every passing wind of fancy, 'full of tears, full of smiles,' an endless variety of aspects—now full of brilliancy and wit, now of tender melancholy. Heigho!" (22-23)

The Colonel, in denial as to his true feelings, fails to realize his advocacy of and desire for a more feeling woman; however, his complaints about women more generally while waiting for Mrs. Greville illustrate both his and Bell's connection of a traditional femininity with lack of woman's progress: "It has been calculated, I believe, that a woman spends one-fifth of her life in doing her hair. No wonder she doesn't succeed in doing much else" (23). Bell gives a male character rather than a female one the initial monologue on what makes the best wife. However, the Colonel is unaware of what he truly wants or even communicates. The Colonel's lines slyly advertise themselves as an advice column from men to the women watching the theatrical—"this is what we actually like"—but also suggest to the men of the performance a more fine-tuned awareness about what their preferences in wives actually may be.

Lady Rockmount, Colonel Perceval's long-lost love interest, who is now widowed, strengthens the case for strong-willed and witty womanhood, when she arrives in Mrs. Greville's parlour to accompany the unseen hostess out for the evening. The couple's initial reactions, in which the man is bashful and unable to recover himself, and the lady is composedly and nonchalantly unflabbergasted, reinforce Bell's reversed proposal dynamics in which the woman is now the director. As Lady R. laughingly explains after seeing the Colonel, who has been dramatically dreaming of her: "You were the very last person in my thoughts at that moment"

(23). Lady Rockmount is not only the rhetorically stronger character—she herself confidently points out "You admit that I have some command of language, don't you? … More command, perhaps, than you have?" (31) while describing him as her "timid, monosyllabic friend"—but she is able to see through Col. P's "acting" of a sort, in his attempts to, firstly, disguise the real reason why he is visiting Mrs. Greville and secondly, disguise his true feelings towards Lady R. herself. The Colonel's entrancement by Lady R.'s intelligence occurs through her running witty circles of dialogue around his ill-disguised intentions for visiting ("Now, now, my good friend! I am not as blind as a mole, nor do I share its propensity for burrowing to the foundation of things" (26)), as well as her command of language in a performance-oriented sense: when the maid enters, she quickly and quite literally directs her partner, whose interest in the Greville daughter has at this point waned:

> "Well, don't let us be absolutely silent when she comes in—let us be talking about something! [*As door opens Lady Rockmount speaks loudly*]—and whatever you may say about the Primose League" (33).
>
> [*Door opens*. *Col. Perceval standing with his back to it, trying to recover himself.*

By contrast, the Colonel commits a doubly bad performance crime through his poor lying ability (despite the following protestation, the audience and Lady R. know he has tried to propose before) and his stage-fright at having an "audience":

> Col. P.: I cannot stay---I really can't. I will write to Mrs. Greville. You know what a shy and awkward creature I am. As I told you, I am not accustomed to this kind of thing, and I couldn't do it for the first time with an audience—I positively couldn't. (32)

Lady Rockmount offers to intervene on the Colonel's behalf, and to act as advocate for his proposal, a prospect which she very much seems to enjoy: "Nowadays everyone helps on these occasions: the father helps, the mother helps, the daughter helps herslf—often to a very desirable morsel, ha! ha!" (28). Of course, throughout their ensuing dialogue, it is Lady R. who ends up bagging a proposal by the Colonel, as she successfully drags his story out of him that he did once try to propose to her, but was thwarted by the presence of her first husband's carriage. The theatrical concludes with the couple agreeing to marry, awkwardly enough in a parlour which is neither of their own, which reflects a meta-level of the marriage plot theatrical itself, in which proposals are acted out through parlours belonging to potentially none of the involved actors or actresses. The ability to direct, coordinate, and read another's actions, no matter whose parlour space is being used as proposal space, proves invaluable in enabling the clever woman's marriage or even re-marriage in this case.

Parlour plays work to reconfigure gendered social codes through a proliferation of strong female roles and purposeful dialogue on the relationships of men and women. Further, marriage plot parlour plays are self-conscious about their ability to teach behavior particularly in wooing or proposal situations; this awareness is emphasized by metatheatrical acting often occurring throughout the theatrical, as a sort of step by step guide for the actress in how to act to gain a suitor. Meta-acting is utilized along a spectrum of situations surrounding marriage, so that while the proposal event itself is not always placed squarely within the main action of the plot, it and the subsequent "I do" are never far off-center stage. As the following examples of marriage plot plays demonstrate, the play-within-a-play was a valuable and variously deployed tool for female home dramatists to explicitly advocate the power of acting, whether during an actual proposal or not, for the middle-class woman and amateur actress.

In the 1868 *Amateur Theatricals and Fairy-Tale Dramas* collection by Sarah Annie Frost, one of the most productive American theatrical writers, the play "A Young Amazon" provides a clear case of the trifecta of those theatrical conditions which most expressly maneuver social mores into new possibilities: the play-within-a-play, the comedy, and the marriage plot.[103] Just as is common in other plays, the acting is generated from an opening duologue between the two female characters, in which Kate, the protagonist, is in utter dismay at the news that a suitor will soon arrive to propose to her. The women's conversation is at once surprising, not only for Kate's clear articulation of precisely how much she does not want to marry the suitor, but also for Flora's straightforward insistence that her friend has the right to do entirely as she pleases in refusing him. It further breaks from standard expectations when Kate's compares her current situation to the "stale" story of a three-volume novel:

> Kate. (*Impatiently.*) Well! well! It is not well! It is all very ill! I don't want him to come! I don't want him to propose to me! I don't want to marry him!
>
> Flora. Tell him so, then, and send him about his business.
>
> Kate. But I can't.
>
> Flora. Can't? What are we all coming to! I thought it was one of our inalienable privileges to refuse a disagreeable suitor.
>
> Kate. But *I* can't in this instance.
>
> Flora. Why not?
>
> Kate. I thought you knew all about it. It is as stale a story as a three-volume English romance. Walter Elliot is my first cousin, son of papa's brother. Now, these brothers had an only sister, who married a millionaire, and was left a childless widow with command of property of immense value. Three months ago she died, leaving everything in her possession to Walter and myself *if*—mark that if—*if* we marry each other. If either refuses the other, the whole property goes to the one rejected. So, under the circumstances, father has given me an imperative command to accept my cousin's offer. (40)

Frost, however, does not allow the three-volume novel trajectory to play out in her theatrical, as acting interjects itself into the plot (besides the meta-acting, even on the level that this, her chosen form, *is* a theatrical rather than a novel). Kate strikes upon a "tip-top scheme!" and calls to Flora and Harry Graham, her true beloved, for "a black wig, some walnut dye, a pair of green spectacles for Flo, an immense riding whip, a pistol, a French horn" (42), upon which Flora inquires as to her sanity:

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[103] Sarah Annie Frost, "A Young Amazon," *Amateur Theatricals and Fairy-Tale Dramas: a collection of original plays, expressly designed for drawing room performance* (New York: Dick and Fitgerald, Publishers, 1868), 38-54.

> Flora. (*Seizing* KATE *by the shoulders, and looking into her eyes.*) Katherine Elliot, have you taken leave of your senses?
> Kate. No, only scheming to take leave of my lover. (42)

Acting provides a means of taking back control of the courtship situation, especially presented as an escape from a more docile domesticity here; Harry, in a moment of reflection on Walter Elliot, first imitates him in "*an extremely dandified manner*" and then comments that this rival "[t]hinks ladies were created to be gentle, obedient slaves to their husbands" (41). In response, Kate constructs an idea for a theatrical of sorts, in which she arranges her household, friends, and herself to portray herself as a gun-toting, gambling very New Woman.

The tables are turned so thoroughly upon the expectant Walter, as Flora calls him "our hero and victim" (43), as he comes to visit Kate, that rather than propose to his cousin, he is startled even into the suggestion that she might be a lesbian. He first encounters Flora, who launches, as she chuckles to herself, "[her] part in Kate's drama":

> Flora. But, although I am sure she must have intended to be at home, with her numerous engagements, riding, driving, practicing with the pistol and bow and arrows, the race and bet, she probably forgot all about you.
> Walter. Encouraging, upon my word. I—(*aside*) I think I'll pump this woman. (*Aloud.*) You are Miss Elliot's governess, I think you said?
> Flora. (*Angrily*.) Sir!
> Walter. I—I beg your pardon. I—how have I offended?
> Flora. I am Miss Elliot's *companion.*
> Walter. Her friend, then, I am sure.
> Flora. (*Stiffly.*) I hope so, sir. (43)

Harry is meanwhile disguised as Patrick O'Ryan, an Irishman, introduced as Kate's "dearest friend" (44) to Walter, and Kate herself bursts onto the scene nearly firing her gun at Walter:

> Kate. (*Suddenly starting to her feet.*) What a shot! (*Points to* WALTER'S *head.* Look, Pat! the top curl. (*Takes her pistol from her belt and aims at* WALTER'S *head.*) Now, cousin, what will you bet I can't singe that curl, and never touch your head? (44)

When Walter is less than enthusiastic about his hair being singed off, Kate as the young Amazon does not allow her real lover to stand up for her, but again takes charge:

> Harry. (*Fiercely.*) If you mean to cast any insinuation upon the skill of my pupil, sir, you will have to answer for it to *me,* to *me*, sir, the best pistol-shot in the country.
>
> Walter. (*Nervously.*) I am sure, sir—you misunderstand me—I never meant—
>
> Kate. (*Contempuously.*) Let him alone, Pat! He is *afraid.* (45)

Throughout the theatrical, Kate's character is given the most assertive, intelligent, and aggressive lines; she clearly coordinates and directs the meta-play occurring to take back control from what otherwise would be the preordained match.

Indisputably, Kate is portrayed as a very good actor, so comfortable in her role that Flora comments in an aside to Harry: "How well she does it" (46). Kate has no trouble spouting off Amazonian lines, as when she calls out for "cheese and sausages" and "coffee as strong as wildfire" (47), but also has a knack for the appropriate amount of acting which will manipulate Walter to just the right extent. In other words, Kate, while enthusiastic, is not acting into a vacuum or for self-absorbed showiness, but to great purpose. Her New Woman-esque lines are calculated to inculcate fear: "You see there is nothing like practice in aiming. Why, my hand used to shake dreadfully, but now it is steady as an iron, excepting now and then it is apt to jerk, and I want to correct that" (49). When Walter does not relent, she switches acting gears—"I'll try the tender dodge and finish him" (47)—and draws back to a comically overblown, frightening portrait of the gentle female:

> Tell me how lovely I am—tell me how you adore me—tell me my eyes are like twin stars—my cheeks like blush roses, my lips like cleft coral, my smile—(*Smiles with an exaggerated expression of tenderness. Another long pause*.) (48)

But it is finally Kate's cumulative turn back to Young "Amazon" declarations, that she will practice trying to singe all his curls when they are married—the assumption that the event *will* happen clearly scares Walter—and that she can "no more live without flirting than [she] can without air" (49), and her final burst into "Camptown ladies" which is her "favorite song" (49) that seals the deal for Walter.

The conclusion of "A Young Amazon" might leave one wishing that Frost was just a bit more harsh in her final treatment of Walter; once he gives up his cousin, Kate reveals her real self to him and offers to share the fortune with him rather than pocket it all for herself. One would have liked her acting to perhaps have never been disclosed, and for the heroine to keep the well-earned money entirely to herself, but perhaps this more moderate and relatively docile ending presents acting itself less as outrageous last resort, and more as accessible tool to be deployed at the ordinary woman's convenience. Kate's concluding admission to Walter allows her easy slide back into a more conventional and traditional marriage—albeit to the suitor she desired all along:

> You doubtless thought you were condemning me to an old maid's forlorn existence, when you penned this most eloquent epistle, but (*blushing*) you have only rejected a heart that long ago passed out of *my* keeping— (54)

While the virtuously reddening heroine on one level appears to resort back to a more complacent female, the audience is still overwhelmingly left with the impression of Kate sighing to Walter that they are "not likely to be interrupted" (48), and as one who insists that "Flirting is as much a part of a girl's education as riding and shooting" (48). Yet, if the slope is a rather slippery one from tenaciously acting as the anti-wife to choosing to play the role of pleasant and blushing bride, "A Young Amazon" at minimum endues all of women's roles with vivacity and agency, in particular one in which learning how to flirt is parallel to the development of acting skills.

These educational plays-within-the-plays, widespread throughout the theatricals, serve to re-encode a particular ethics, and not just in situations where one must gain a suitor. Bell's "A Modern Locusta" is a duologue between Mrs. Vernon, a younger and happily married woman, and Mrs. Merrinder, a woman who has previously been married, but is now about to marry Mrs. V.'s uncle.[104] The audience but not the happily simple wife Mrs. V. realizes that Mrs. Merrinder is the very same woman known as the "Modern Locusta," of whom Mrs. V. had just read in the paper—this woman ran away from her first husband with another man whom she afterwards married and supposedly tried to poison. Throughout their dialogue, Mrs. V. comes across as too harshly judging her fellow women: "That's how we help to keep other women straight, by turning our backs on them when they behave badly." (180). Mrs. M. instead suggests, as does the piece as a whole, that more female camaraderie is needed on every level. However, acting interestingly is the vehicle that allows Mrs. M. to see the folly of the society that she hoped to rejoin, as Mrs. V. thinks it would be amusing, once tickled with the idea of "tricking" her uncle that Mrs. M. is the Modern Locusta, to act the hypothetical (but real) situation out: "Let's rehearse what we should say when we told him, and what he would say" (182).

> Mrs. V. He is broken-hearted, and in despair. He struggles between his love and—[*Hesitates for a word.*
> *Mrs. M.* And his honour.
> *Mrs. V.* And his honour—exactly. And—and—but I am not clever enough to imagine the rest of it. You must go on now.
> *Mrs. M.* Perhaps I had better imagine what *I* should be saying and doing in the meantime.
> *Mrs. V.* Ah yes, just so. What would you be saying?
> *Mrs. M.* I would say to you—What, can you, a woman, thus lightly brand another with being the vilest of her sex? Can you judge her, and dismiss her to everlasting ignominy, without another thought—hardly even knowing of what she is accused? (183)

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[104] 104. Florence Bell, "A Modern Locusta," *Chamber Comedies; and collection of plays and monologues* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), 171-186.

Acting in this play reaches a certain limit for the unimaginative, or those too restricted by social mores, such as Mrs. Vernon, though Mrs. Merringer is able to break through those same ethics to communicate an otherwise impossibly-blunt truth (by Mrs. V.'s standards) through the same process. Acting is thus presented as freeing—Mrs. V: "Oh go on. You do act splendidly!" (184)—though the conclusion in which Mrs. Vernon finally realizes the truth, results in a more ambiguous ending, with Mrs. M.'s exit and Mrs. V.'s burying her face in her hands. Yet, for the actresses and audience involved, acting advances itself as a means of arriving at truth beneath social construction; the judgments towards women depicted in the newspapers and espoused by Mrs. Vernon, are presented as in need of a more critical eye.

"An Engaged Girl" by Elizabeth Hyde, as a representative example of marriage plot plays for women, demonstrates the variety possible within the trend of metatheatrical acting prevalent in this particular subgenre of parlour plays.[105] The character of the "engaged girl" in this theatrical organizes all of the metatheatrical acting which occurs, though this acting does not happen, as it usually does, in order to secure a suitor, but instead to trick her friends as to her suitor's identity in a way almost cruel to their own eagerness to be wooed themselves. Amongst the group of five girls at a summer resort is Aline Dacre, whom the rest know to be engaged to her father's law partner, but who assume her fiancé is also old like Aline's father. Playing off her friends' assumptions, Aline never tells her friends her betrothed's name or age, so they have no idea that her fiancé is actually Jack Brewer, a wealthy man known as "the *greatest catch in New York!*" (4). When the other girls grow excited "to make an impression on" (7) Jack, upon learning he will soon arrive at their resort, Aline decides to keep up her game, sending a note to Jack to act as though he doesn't know her, and thus, as she explains, "fool them all and make them think you prefer me to the rest of them even though I *am* engaged." Throughout the play, Aline as actress clearly reigns as despot over the other characters, especially her fiancé, of whom everyone else is in awe. This is more especially as she threateningly insists on her play being played out:

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[105] Elizabeth A. Hyde, "An Engaged Girl: a Comedy" (Chicago: T. S. Denison, 1899), 1-18.

> Aline. (*Stamping her foot.*) *Will* you listen, sir? To *forget*—I mean it—that you have ever seen me before, and to make believe that we are perfect strangers. H'm, it's easy enough. It will be for me, sir, *very* easy, if you don't behave yourself. (7)

The audience is given hints that the real life Aline has men swooning over her on a regular basis, as her friends indicate her resort time has been spent a little flirtatiously, "riding all morning with Ned Hall, and boating all afternoon with Mr. Clare, and then finish up by dancing four times with Leslie" (5), but Bell connects this power of Aline's to her being an actress in real life, unlike the other characters. Just as her soon-to-be-husband is reluctant to take his assigned role seriously, Aline's aunt, also in on the act, explains the awkwardness of acting for her as compared to her niece:

> Mrs. D. Well, you *will* have your own way as usual, but you mustn't be too cross, dear, if anything I say gives it away. I'm not used to private theatricals in real life. (13)

Aline, while not an antagonistic character, is presented as being very self-aware in regards to the acting process. Her character, more than any others, has quick changes of stage directions—going from "*Laughing*" to "*Demurely*" to (purposefully) "*Confused*" all within the first half-page of her trick on her friends. Nor can she understand why the other girls have not figured her out:

> Aline [*Taking up her hand-glass and surveying the back of her gown.*] They must be dreadfully stupid. But, of course (*sighing*), they think it's just one of my "shocking flirtations." Hump! (15)

Besides manipulating her friends however, her scheme is also one which even more slyly secures her future husband. Jack's speech contemplating his part shows his fears that Aline may actually desert him should he desert her assigned role:

> Jack. (*Yawning.*) Well, 'tisn't often a fellow's called upon to play the part of leading-man with as little notice as *this*. I know I shall make a bungle of it and disappoint Aline. I wonder what she'd do—she surely wouldn't—(starting up). But no, she's not that kind. I've got to be careful, though, and the nearer it gets to the time the more squeemish I become. (8)

"An Engaged Girl" draws a clear line between those characters for whom acting comes naturally, and those for whom it does not, with a clear correspondence between acting well and success on the marriage market. The ability to act convincingly for women in "An Engaged Girl" enables a woman to get engaged to whomever she likes in the first place, and allows her to continually reassert her superiority over the other women unable to do so.

Fairy Tale Plays and Spatial Transformation

Home theatre is already located at a nexus of respectability and transgression, balancing the subversive potential of the stage with the protection of domestic space. Fairy tale home drama especially crosses thresholds between categorical states of being. Not coincidentally, the most commonly shared content of both women's and children's theatricals also often contained a marriage plot: fairy tale home plays. If an acting of the marriage plot within a parlour play for adults and children transforms the domestic, the fairy tale theatrical draws out all of the creative, transformative possibilities of the home stage. Fairy tale plays create their own space-within-a-space that breaks down the divisions of private/public, respectable/indecent, self/character. Here, I will focus on the works of two of the most prolific female authors of parlour plays: Florence Bell, best known as the co-author of *Alan's Wife*, the infamous 1893 play in which a woman kills her deformed child, and the currently more obscure Eliza Keating, whose home theatre oeuvre throughout the 1860s is nothing short of prolific. The spread of thirty years between my chosen authors makes a comparison even more relevant for pinpointing the enduring characteristics and mission of the fairy-tale parlour play. These two authors are worth investigating for demonstrating a continuum between Keating, a basically unrecovered yet productive (and presumably very successful) home dramatist, and Bell, one of the more “famous” female playwrights who worked on both sides of the public/private theatre threshold. Additionally, I will be comparing Bell’s children’s theatricals with Keating’s dramatizations of fairy tales for adults. Especially interesting are the revisions which these female authors give to the “accepted” version of the fairy tale, often providing, in Bell’s case, alternative endings, such as the option in *Red Riding Hood* to raise the curtain to reveal Red Hiding Hood’s remains after the disobedient girl is eaten by the Wolf, or complete reworkings of the original tale, as in Keating’s *Bluebeard; or, Female Curiosity!! and Male Atrocity!!!*, which transforms the original Bluebeard story of the woe of female curiosity into one which instead celebrates female intellectual freedom.

The nineteenth-century was a period characterized by new categorizations of space—and a recognition that space was able to be mapped. This insistence on mapping led to a new obsession with increasingly detailed maps of cities, but also a refiguring of less definably physical borders such as the aforementioned private/public dichotomy, or spaces designated according to gender or class. Especially in an empirical context, as discussed by Helena Michie and Ronald R. Thomas, the Victorian era was one of a systematic restructuring of space and experiences of space.[106] Fairy tale theatricals participate in this reorganization on multiple fronts. While Caroline Sumpter has recently argued that the British press was responsible for keeping the fairy tale current throughout the nineteenth-century, my attention to the thirty years which separate Keating’s and Bell’s plays suggests home theatre as an alternative answer or additional explanation for the persistent presence of fairy tales in Victorian culture.[107] However, Sumpter's argument also implies that the fairy tale plot puts the private theatre in direct dialogue with the public press—additional evidence for the home theatre's especial blurring of the spheres. The fairy tale itself is already spatially complex; the plot is both familiar and exotic, in that it is in some sense already known or "foretold" by memory, but is also thought of as originating in another place (such as in *The Arabian Nights*). The explicit orientalism or otherness of tales such as Bluebeard works to reinforce this effect. The fairy tale combines the experience of a vertical transmission from generation to generation with the horizontal transmission or translation from another culture or nation.

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[106] 106. Helena Michie and Ronald R. Thomas, *Nineteenth-Century Geographies: The Transformation of Space from the Victorian Age to the American Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003).

Despite this, when theatre critics have recovered women's involvement in the fairy tale home play, they are reluctant to see such content as disruptive of traditional space. Varty, in her analysis of Milman's 1891 "Doll Dramas" finds their "potential liberation from convention is confirmed by Milman's rejection of traditional fairy-tale material as the basis for her plays."[108] Newey is more willing to recognize a subversive underlayer to the fairy tale plays, since she notes that the fairy tale story was the traditional opening of the pantomime. The pantomime, of course, involved a scene of miraculous transformation, in which the Fairy Queen changes all of the typical fairy tale characters into the characters of the harlequinade. While concluding that "[o]bviously these plays do not contain the spectacular transformation scenes of early nineteenth-century pantomime," Newey admits that authorial disclaimers to simplicity often belie the elaborate nature of the plays' proposed stage setups and costumes.[109] These two critical positions unwittingly place the fairy plays along a continuum of transformation—as a "parlour"-

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[107] Caroline Sumpter, *The Victorian Press and the Fairy Tale* (London: Palgrave, 2008).

[108] Varty, 247.

[109] Newey, 139.

ed down pantomime (in conversation with and embedded with recognizable allusions to the original), but also as anticipatory predecessor to the subversion which Varty reads in Milman's 1890s non-fairy tale plays. This ability of fairy tale theatricals to disrupt the status quo becomes apparent in the works of both Keating and Bell, in which the plays are transformed in rather drastic or surprising ways from their standard traditional content.

Florence Bell and Eliza Keating: Popular Playwrights of the Parlour

Florence Bell, whom Newey suggests was "involved in some of the most interesting intellectual projects of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries," is only lately being recovered as a historically important dramatist. The details of her life, as compared with Keating, are well documented. Bell was born in 1850 into a well-to-do London family—her grandfather became lord mayor of London, and her father was physician to the British embassy in Paris, where she received a private education.[110] In 1876, she married industrialist Hugh Bell (and thus also became stepmother to explorer Gertrude Bell), and in the 1890s, produced the bulk of her not insignificant literary output, a time during which she often consulted with one of her closest friends, actress and playwright Elizabeth Robbins. Angela John's *Dictionary of National Biography* account suggests Bell's *At the Works*, a study of the manufacturing town of Middlesbrough, home to her husband's ironworkers, as perhaps her most well-known legacy[111], but clarifies how vital the theatrical was to Bell throughout her life: at age 76, she "organized an ambitious pageant … [which] lasted for more than three days, had a cast of 118, and was attended by the queen and Princess Mary."[112]

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[110] "Bell , Florence Eveleen Eleanore, Lady Bell (1851–1930)," Angela V. John in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.its.virginia.edu/view/article/41106

[111] *At the Works* is indeed fascinating in its focus not only on manufacturing—one chapter charts the "Genesis of the Town" and the second takes over 100 pages to describe in detail "The Process of Ironmaking"—but also on the domestic life of Middlesbrough's inhabitants—the second longest chapter of nearly 75 pages is "Wives and Daughters of the Ironworkers" and another focuses entirely on the working class's "Reading Habits."

Before the publication of *Fairy Tale Plays and How to Act Them* (1896), Bell had already—albeit anonymous—subversively forayed into the public theatre when she co-wrote *Alan's Wife* (1893) with Elizabeth Robbins. In *Alan's Wife*, Bell demonstrates her aptitude for altering plots; Katherine Kelly describes how Bell and Robbin's version deviates from Elin Ameen's Swedish short story from which it is translated in order to "foreground the modern mother."[113] Kelly particularly credits Bell with the change in the story's location from Sweden to the north of England.[114] Even without considering how the mother-child relationship in *Alan's Wife* might show Bell's children's theatricals in a new light, her involvement with projects such as this collaboration with Robbins suggests a closer look at her children's theatricals is necessary.

Bell's 35-page introduction to her *Plays* confirms the educational purpose to her fairy tales with its insistence on guiding the romping child actor's speech and bodily placement. Bell's tone is not overly didactic, but somewhat bemused at the possibilities for correction: "It is of greatest important to learn to stand still: not to shift from one foot to the other, or to fidget with the hands. Indeed, the hands of amateurs on these occasions seem to be so extraordinarily in the way, that they give the impression of appendages being worn for the first time." Four diagrams follow which depict various ways which boys incorrectly position their feet while sitting. This type of stage detail, so funnily if insistently wrought into the directions, is characteristic of Bell, which makes her stand apart from other home playwrights including Keating.

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[112] Angela V. John.

[113] Katherine E. Kelly, "*Alan's Wife*: Mother Love and Theatrical Sociability in London of the 1890s" *Modernism/modernity* 11.3 (2004), 543.

[114] Ibid., 542.

Certainly, much less is known about Eliza Keating than Bell. If she is mentioned at all by scholars, she is cited as the "typical playwright" for the home theatre market, in Newey's words.[115] Before her *Home Plays for Ladies* series in the 1860s, her earliest publication appears to be *Outlines of Ancient History, being intended as a short description of the Chain of Time* (1823) which details religions and customs for various continents and cultures in each chapter and is dedicated "by special permission" to the Duchess of Kent. She composed the words to *Glide on my bark*, a music piece by Charles King in 1829. Her only extant prose piece is *Raymond Bury: a tale; founded on T. Hood's poem "The Haunted House"* (1853).[116] *Dramas for the Drawing Room; or, Charades for Christmas* (1853) appears to be her first theatrical venture, published by the same Thomas Hailes Lacy who issued her later deluge of parlour play texts. She revisited the fairy tale plot blended with pantomime throughout her career; in 1858, she submitted *A Pantomime entitled Little Red Riding Hood* to the Lord Chamberlain's office, and in 1860 she submitted another pantomime, *Gosling the Great & Harlequin Prince Blue Bell, or, Baa Baa Black Sheep, Little Bo Peep and the Fairy of Spring*. This evidence supports a more transformative reading of her Little Red Riding Hood parlour play, which contains the character "Prince Flower Bell" disguised as "Hyacinth"—in addition to the double-identity of Red Riding Hood herself as "Bluette." The Bluebeard story was also reworked in her *Charades for*

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[115] Newey, 139.

[116] Eliza Keating, *Raymond Bury* (London: Arthur Hall, Virtue and Co.,1853).

Christmas.[117] Her attempts to break into the public theatre via the pantomime genre allow for a more pantomimic reading of her parlour plays, in all their transformative glory.

Both Keating and Bell emphasize the importance of acting delivery in various prefaces to their play texts, though Bell is much more adamant about the details of scenery and stage movement. While Bell provides detailed charts for on-stage movement, separate instructions for on-stage dances, and directions for making costume components such as animal heads or creating trees to be used as scenery, Keating's stage directions occasionally resort to the more improvisational "[t]o describe it [the Haunt of the Fairies] would be useless."[118] In her introduction to *Charade Dramas for the Drawing Room*, Keating affirms that in terms of setting "[h]omely and queer contrivances, if frankly offered, will be cheerfully received" but that "it ought to be a point of honour that the words of the part be correctly committed to memory."[119] This discrepancy between the two authors in terms of stage setup is probably related to the more commercialized aspect surrounding Keating's book, which advertises for full scenery backgrounds which can be purchased, complete with limelights. (Thus, Bell is attuned to the potential creativity of the children's production, while Keating is either more invested in not providing directions for an "ogre's head" since it can be purchased, or alternatively, is more in touch with the realities of affordability or having more spontaneous performances.) Along similar lines, Keating and Bell both pay elaborate attention to the musical aspects of their plays, though Bell usually provides the actual musical score within her text, and Keating usually cites the name of a known song to which she sets new words. However, for both authors, this rewriting overtop popularly known lyrics accounts for almost all of the theatricals' music—and accordingly positions the plays in dialogue with nineteenth-century culture.

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[117] See Hermansson's *Bluebeard: A Reader's Guide to the British Tradition* for a description of Keating's charade.

[118] Keating, *Little Red Riding Hood; or, the Wolf, the Wooer, and the Wizard!!!: A Fairy Burlesque* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, ca. 1864), 7. Hereafter, all parlour plays by both Keating and Bell are cited parenthetically within the text.

[119] Eliza Keating, *Charade Dramas for the Drawing Room* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1853).

Little Red Riding Hood: Out of the Woods into the Drawing Room

As written by both dramatists, *Little Red Riding Hood* sanctions a transformative space through its acting; both versions start with an interior cottage scene, followed by a woods scene, concluding with another interior cottage scene which, as in traditional versions, is drastically different from the first. Bell and Keating's changes to the typical plot emphasize this alteration of the interior, while Little Red Riding Hood clarifies their respective authorial signatures upon a particular play.

Bell's *Little Red Riding Hood* exemplifies details of her collection as a whole, such as her specificity in stage details; this play involves a Wolf's head being made by following directions for the animal's head in her lengthy introduction, and she notes in her diagram of the woodland scene: "N. B. The chestnut tree is more easily made than any other." Bell characteristically retains the traditional roles, whereas Keating occasionally renders them unrecognizable. In Bell's version, "Widow Catherine" is the mother to "Jenny," otherwise known as Little Red Riding Hood. Jenny is comically badly behaved; for example, in stage directions for her entrance she slams a stack of books down on the floor as she returns from school. Bell adds a "Neighbor Slapps" character as Widow Catherine's friend who incessantly refers to her unseen daughter "Polly," who is the anti-Jenny. The existence of Polly in the offstage space, where the "good" children are, interestingly frees the stage space for Jenny's bad behavior—simultaneously making the offstage and post-production drawing room a place where children will be good, as it is also creating a space within that drawing room where they can be bad. This complex manipulation of space is drawn out in Bell's atypical additions to the second scene, in which Jenny sings as she meanders off her path in the woods. Bell adds the somewhat creepy direction that the "Wolf nods his head in time to music" for Jenny's song, but rather than the Wolf then surprising her, it is Neighbor Slapps who jumps out of nowhere to scold her for lingering, before the Wolf's entrance. Neighbor Slapps becomes a stand-in for the Wolf, which somewhat complicates the otherwise clear good/bad child dynamic put forth on the most basic level as the moral.

Finally, Bell's ending has no huntsman rushing in to save the day; rather she gives two endings, one which is provided as an alternative—"as a concession to the popular prejudice in favour of a happy ending" (106). The first ending involves Jenny as a "naughty little girl" being eaten by the Wolf. The eating is not shown onstage, but the curtain drops down at the moment of attack, to then rise on Jenny's cloak, frock and shoes lying at precisely given points of the stage. (Bell seems to get some morbid enjoyment out of the Wolf's song which is sung at different points, depending upon the ending chosen by the performers: "if [the play] ends by her being eaten, the WOLF is to sing it at the end, after the curtain has risen on JENNY's remains" (104).) Jenny's evaporation from the stage space in the version in which she is eaten, then positions her in the same non-stage space as Polly. The alternative ending further complicates the otherwise clear moral lines of the play, since Neighbor Slapps rushes in and hits the Wolf on the head with an umbrella. However, Granny is still eaten, rather than saved, and Jenny expresses more satisfaction at her own preservation than concern for Granny. In other words, the conciliatory happy ending not only results in no Granny, but Jenny's selfish motives are reaffirmed, and the audience is left with a rather ominous repetition of Neighbor Slapps' appearance from the woodland scene, especially since she takes Jenny out of her Granny's cottage at the conclusion.

Keating's "Little Red Riding Hood; or, the Wolf, the Wooer and the Wizard" has a much larger cast of thirteen named characters, composed mostly of fairies or supernatural creatures, and is set in Germany. Besides Keating's more pantomimic dramatis personae, her play's Shakspearean allusions and metatheatrical references—characters tell one another to "take a pose that's plastic" (1) and "the proper thing / For him is to soliloquize, and then sing" (10)—give Keating's play a more global feel than Bell's.

"Little Red Riding Hood; or, the Wolf, the Wooer and the Wizard" is completely changed from the typical Red Riding Hood tale, and involves a Duke who is in debt to a character named Hobblegobblewitz, and is thus sent after Red Riding Hood, whose identity is disguised under the name "Bluette." Bluette is meanwhile the object of affection of Hyacinth, a disguised "Prince Flower Bell." Much of the action is moved forward by the help of Amaryllis, the head fairy who knows the true identities of the main couple. The flower names, of course, help establish this home theatrical's descendancy from the pantomime, which traditionally contained the flower-named character Columbine, as beloved to Harlequin.

In Keating's woods scene, the men of the play, both good and evil, collapse into an overwhelmingly negative category. Hyacinth, the play's supposed protagonist, is given a sort of ridiculous and girly aspect by Keating's dialogue and description; he is "*a remarkably pastoral Shepherd, in light brown, profusely trimmed with pink, white straw hat with pink and silver ribbons, a crook twined with roses and ornamented with pink streamers*" (10-11). Hyacinth's character description clarifies the potential for cross-dressing and enduing girls with strong yet still feminine parts. As does Bell, Keating uses music to enhance the eeriness of the woodland scene, noting during the Duke's evil song that "[g]reat effect will be given to this performance if the artists engaged contrive to play out of tune, and particularly out of tune"?. Hyacinth's song, following directly on the Duke's, has its own element of perversity, which repeats the refrain of "Where are you hiding, little coquette? / But never fear, I'll find out yet" (28-9). As Neighbor Slapps distorts, so Hyacinth distorts the ordinary lines of audience sympathy, through his close alignment with the play's most malignant character. Besides the anxiety caused within the play by the two women being simultaneously chased by two different men, this between-cottages moment also involves a pantomimic dependence upon several magical props and the intervention of a talking Jackdaw.

The women emerge as the more dominant figures by the conclusion of Keating's version. The power of the play is left with Bluette as she evades the Duke— by "*bonnet*[ing]," or otherwise feminizing him, to blind him with his discarded hat, which also connects his costume with Hyacinth's—and finally with Amaryllis, the woman-behind-the-scenes who has been guiding the action all along, as she decides for both Hyacinth and Bluette that they will be married. However, perhaps more odd is Keating's manner of staging the standard scene in which Red Riding Hood recognizes the wolf at her grandma's. Rather than an actual wolf disguised as grandma, here the Duke actually changes into a werewolf, because of a previous curse by Hobblegobblewitz, *while* Bluette looks at him. The Duke's embarrassment as he realizes what is happening to him, at this moment when the wolf-figure is usually the most powerful, flips the power dynamic of the scene to make the Duke the subject of the woman's gaze—a reversal which is capped off when he is blinded by Bluette's bonneting of him at the conclusion.

Sleeping Beauty: Awakening Wit

Examining the Sleeping Beauty plays demonstrates the progressive educational pull of home theatre because both authors seize upon the tale's traditional representation as a means of criticizing typically prized female "accomplishments." In Bell, the Queen obviously wears the pants in the royal relationship, as she constantly gets the last word after the King's dialogue. During the announcements of the fairies' various gifts, Bell uses their doubled reactions as a sub-commentary on those qualities that are actually worth having.

> *Mistress*: From the Fairy of the River, the most beautiful voice that was ever heard; and from the Fairy of the Sea, the gift of being more musical than any one in the world.
> *King*. How delightful! I shall make her play and sing to me all day.
> *Queen*. I shan't think of letting her do so; she will ruin her voice if she does.
> *King*. That would be a great pity, certainly.
> *Mistress*. From the Fairy of the Forest, the gift of painting better than any artist that ever lived.
> *King*. How truly charming that will be! She shall paint my portrait in oils.
> *Queen*. No, she shall not. That would be an absurd waste of time.
> *King*. Well, I only thought—
> *Queen*. Oblige me by thinking for a little without speaking, instead of speaking without thinking, as you generally do. [*To* CHIEF MISTRESS.] Go on, please. (305)

The forgotten invitation to Malvolia is portrayed as being the King's fault, while Malvolia herself, as she curses the baby, inquires sarcastically "But has no one given her a useful feminine art? Is she not to be able to use her spindle?" (308). The competitiveness of the ladies of the court, in combination with the king's noted lack of wars waged, anticipate Bell's final setting in which womanhood reigns. A brief "between time" occurs before the royal household, frozen mid-action, is awoken by the princess receiving her kiss. At this new point, one hundred years in the future, the prince informs the well-slept household that "People talk of queendoms now, not of kingdoms" (333).

In Keating's "The Sleeping Beauty; or, One Hundred and Eighteen Years in as Many Minutes," the omission of one fairy's invitation to the royal christening is thoroughly portrayed as a social drama between the fairies—the omitted invite is a clear case of social snubbing, and when Avarita is finally admitted, she is given the plates with "[a] common willow pattern—blue and white— / Not even china" (11). Society's falseness leads to Sleeping Beauty's final trouble; after the "bad" fairy criticizes the others' gifts—"nothing useful in the list's included," she decrees the princess's death for eighteen years hence, primarily to prevent the baby from becoming "a fast young lady— [who will] Smoke cigarettes, at steeple-chases ride, / Bet on the Derby, and Fate knows what beside." When "Amoretta," the Sleeping Beauty, finally pricks herself on the spindle, it is because, as another character tells her, "when you were little you were never made to work" (18). Bellamore, as prince rescuer, is similarly aligned with Hyacinth's passivity as male "hero," and is only enabled in action by other strong female fairy characters.

Bluebeard: Entering the Forbidden Chamber

The concept of space is especially important within the story of Bluebeard, for as Casie Hermansson describes, the spatialized aspect of the story's setting correlates with the story's progression in telling; in "the linear narrative drive towards the end, towards the forbidden chamber, there [one also discovers] the story's own end."[120] The threshold is crossed first when Fatima enters Bluebeard's castle, and again when she and her sister enter the forbidden chamber and discover all of Bluebeard's previous wives have been murdered. While Hermansson elsewhere emphasizes Bluebeard as intertextual matrix with "particular relevance for women writers and women readers alike," the orientalism of this tale loads the staged space with even more significance for Victorian women. If both acting and imperial spaces had associations with prostitution, then a Bluebeard home theatrical becomes a magnified locus of these concerns. Phillipa Levine has linked the difficulties of maintaining the domestic space within colonial spaces to the Victorian concerns about the brothel, especially as it proliferated within the "Other" space of a colony. Her description of the brothel is uncannily similar to the anxieties about the private theatre:

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[120] 120. Casie E. Hermansson, *Reading Feminist Intertextuality Through Bluebeard Stories* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 45.

> [t]he brothel was a difficult site for Victorians because its existence, its presence, and its placement blurred so many of the fundamental categories of Victorian order, challenging proprieties and geographies. The brothel was a paradox, a space of private activity made public, a place where the always opposed ideas of work (for women) and pleasure (for men) melded, where the carefully formulated attributes of "home" and "business" were necessarily blurred.[121]

As previously discussed, the private theatre is similarly located at a cross-point between public/private and business/domestic, but the association of the actress to the prostitute is another link between Bluebeard's many wives in the home play and the anxieties about the brothel outside England that Levine notes. The placement of the Bluebeard "brothel" within the English home then particularly disrupts the safe and sacred boundaries which ordinarily surround it. When Charles Perrault, one of the founders of the fairy tale genre in print, wrote *Le Barbe Bleu* near the close of the seventeenth century, he importantly added the character of Anne to his tale.[122] This gave the more exotically named Fatima a sister, which was carried into most subsequent versions of the tale; in English versions of Bluebeard, the Anne character serves as English/home-oriented double to the Other/exoticized Fatima main character who is married off to Bluebeard.

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[121] Phillipa Levine, "Erotic Geographies: Sex and the Managing of Colonial Space," *Nineteenth Century Geographies: The Transformation of Space from the Victorian Age to the American Century* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 149.

[122] Hermansson, 15.

Bell capitalizes upon the exoticism of the Orient by sandwiching her *Fairy Plays* between the Orient—opening with "Ali Baba" and closing her collection with "Bluebeard." In her "Bluebeard," Anne and Fatima's costume directions are grouped under one heading, which emphasizes the contagion which flows from the othered sister to the "English" one. However, within the plot, Anne is presented as the feisty rebellious counterpoint to Fatima's curious lack of curiosity. An opening exchange shows not only Bell's utilization of this discrepancy, but her use of the home theatre space to demonstrate this point:

> *Fatima*. Oh, sister! I wish you were contented with your lot.
> *Anne.* Contented! I have nothing to be contented with,
> *Fatima.* (shocked). Nothing!
> *Anne*. No, nothing. First of all, we're as poor as church mice—in fact, I'd much rather be a church mouse, then at least I should see people coming in and out; here I see no one.
> [*Goes to window, L.*
> *Fatima.* We have this beautiful castle to live in.
> *Anne*. (*turning round to her*). What's the good of that? I want fine clothes, plenty to eat, carriages to drive in, horses to ride. We can't spend the castle, or wear it, or eat it, or drive about in it. Of course for our father, or our brothers Guy and Brian, it is different. They can go out, if they choose, with a hawk on their wrist, and bring us back something for dinner.
> *Fatima*. I shouldn't like at all to have a hawk on my wrist.
> *Anne*. (*with contempt*). You! Of course not. You scream if you have a fly on it. But for my part I should welcome a fiery dragon—it would, at any rate, be something to think about! (338)
> [*She leans listlessly against the wall at side of window down stage, and looks out.*

In the remainder of the scene, Anne continues to look eagerly out the window at Bluebeard's prosperous castle overflowing with luxuries, and is exuberant when any other character (always a man) enters her home space—first their male servant bringing food, then her brothers and father, and finally Bluebeard himself. Yet, even if Anne complains that "women have nothing to do but embroider" (338), Fatima is the one who recognizes the unfairness of her father allowing

Bluebeard to marry one of his daughters: "Oh, how terrible it is that our father and brothers should be so ready to sell us to the first bidder!" (343). To Anne, "prostitution" of the self is irrelevant because marriage presents an opportunity of escaping her contained space, which of course is a "castle" within the English drawing room. Just as Anne is looking always out the window, and Fatima's eyes are continually cast down, Bell adds her characteristic touch to Bluebeard when she directs him to "*roll his eyes ferociously first at one, then at the other* [sister]" (344).

Keating's "Bluebeard; or, Female Curiosity!! and Male Atrocity!!!" already comments on the intended "moral" of the original Bluebeard—to discourage curiosity—by additionally exclaiming the real wrong of Bluebeard's wife-murdering tendencies. The reversal of the rights and wrongs as they are normally gendered is carried out by the play's equating Irene, the "Anne" character in this version, with Selim, Fatima's secret lover of whom her father disapproves—this occurs through Selim's echoing of Irene's dialogue. Even more suggestively of a gendered power reversal is Fatima's hiding of Selim in a closet in her house so that her father cannot find him; she reappropriates and anticipates Bluebeard's own closet full of murdered wives, though in this case, her father discovers Selim and he is freed. Finally, Bluebeard "dies" when the three braids of his beard are cut off by the male rescuers of the women, but then rises again to deliver a message which aims to deter curiosity before falling to the stage with the final curtain. The staggering unmanliness of Bluebeard's death via braidcutting is emphasized by Keating's explicit Othello-ization of Fatima, which precedes it. First, Irene and Fatima both manipulate Bluebeard into a terror by purposely reminding him of previous wives—asking him to bring them a "headdress" from town and then wiping his forehead with a handkerchief while mentioning Othello's murder of his wife. Fatima only enters the forbidden chamber because she thinks Bluebeard is cheating on her, since Irene tells her, after looking through the keyhole, that many other women are in there; she then actually becomes an Othello within the Bluebeard plot, to Bluebeard's Desdemona.

The reworking of the fairy tale plot for both Keating and Bell provided a gateway within the home theatre to transform the parlour not just into a stage for acting, but for critiquing Victorian social institutions. Most especially, the fairy tale home theatrical allowed for both Victorian women and children a means of examining and relating to their inhabitation of space, and thus of their inhabitation of their own bodies. As a result, the stage permitted an imaginative escape of the containers, both physical and mental, in which they were otherwise positioned. The fairy tale, whether through returning to the renewed parlour after an excursion in the woods, fast-forwarding to a land of "queendoms," or entering the "brothel" of the drawing room, embedded a widespread manipulation of space to those typically denied such an entrance in the nineteenth century.

Chapter 3

Beyond the Home (Drama): Imperialism, Painting, and Adaptation in the Home Theatrical

Whether or not generating a sense of nationalism was a home performance's primary aim, home theatricals tended to produce national feeling in their audiences and actors. This is due first to theatre's tendency to bond performers or spectators in a sense of unified experience, but second and more importantly, because the home is always bound up with and defined against the foreign, or what is not the home. As Bridget Bennett explains, "[h]ome never simply signifies itself in such a reductive manner [as being merely home], is never simply universal, but is always situated within complex constellations of the domestic/national, foreign/imperial."[123] Amy Kaplan's landmark article "Manifest Domesticity" established the feminist principle of linking the opposed spheres of gender to the domestic versus the foreign:

> When we contrast the domestic sphere with the market or political realm, men and women inhabit a divided social terrain, but when we oppose the domestic to the foreign, men and women become national allies against the alien, and the determining division is not gender but racial demarcations of otherness. Thus another part of the cultural work of domesticity might be to unite men and women in a national domain and to generate notions of the foreign against which the nation can be imagined as home.[124]

As Kaplan explains, not only is "a sense of the foreign […] necessary to erect the boundaries that enclose the nation as home"[125] but women then control the contours of the nation by patrolling the boundaries of the domestic. Kaplan's argument is amplified when applied to home theatre, a genre already wrought with its sense of domestic space: in home drama, women writers, actresses and even spectators affirm themselves as part of the nation while supervising the construction of national identity through the domestic. Home theatricals featuring national themes negotiate national identity on a tangible (rather than abstract) level of domesticity—they are a literal production of patriotism within the home.

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[123] 123. Bridget Bennett, "Home Songs and the Melodramatic Imagination: From 'Home, Sweet Home' to *The Birth of a Nation*," *Journal of American Studies*, 46 (2012), 172.

[124] 124. Amy Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity," *American Literature: A Journal of Literary History, Criticism, and Bibliography* 70.3 (1998 September), 582.

[125] 125. Ibid.

Home theatricals are highly and almost necessarily concerned with place. As a bringing together of the public/theatre with the private/domestic, this genre already finds itself in a privileged position for experimenting with the cultural resonances of particular places. This broader spatial occupation arises in fairy tale home theatricals, which already associate the make-believe borders between "real" and fairyland with national boundaries. However, when a play is set not in fairyland but the homeland or a foreign land, the ease with which make-believe borders are crossed creates consequences of varying anxiety—from proud flag-bearing patriotism, a comic disarming of foreign threats, to a use of multiculturalism to substantiate a woman's claims to writing. For instance, British parlour playwright Harriet Childe-Pemberton's brief introduction to her collection *Dead Letters* (1896) emphasizes the cosmopolitan nature of her stories. She writes: "A version of 'The Freak of Gwendolen' is to be found, I think, in one of Mark Twain's books; while the story contained in 'The Sea-Bird's News' I heard from the lips of one who was resident in Australia at the time when the incident actually happened."[126] Meanwhile, in her fairy-play "Sunbeams at Home," the character Jack runs away to Africa, and Esmeralda is from the magical "Sunbeam Land." In American Elizabeth Hyde's "An Engaged Girl" (1899), the central characters, besides the engaged girl herself, are "Phyllis Foster, Anglomaniac" and "Winifred Mercer, Southern girl"—the latter of whom has a pronounced accent throughout the play ("Ah reckon we haven't forgotten anythin'. Are these youah gloves,

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[126] Harriet Childe-Pemberton, *Dead Letters, and other Dramatic and Narrative Pieces* (London: Ward, 1896), v.

Miss Foster?”).[127] A woman writer who professes her nationalism and cosmopolitanism in her home theatricals often uses these themes to legitimize her claims to drama. At the same time, her plays write herself into inclusion into her nation. This is similar to women using the educational associations of home as an excuse to write home drama, but nationalism substantiates women’s writing in perhaps a more progressive way—by implying national membership. Foreign references and influences saturate the home play genre in general, though British-American exchanges are most prevalent.

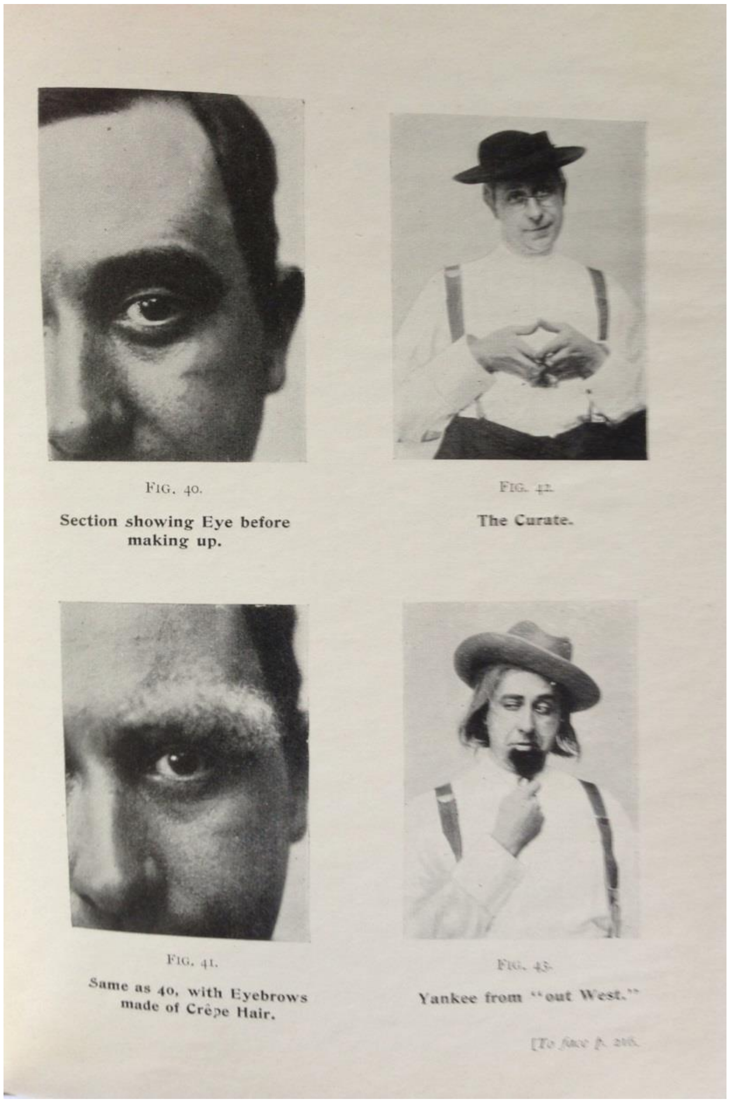

Fig. 40.

Section showing Eye before making up.

Fig. 42.

The Curate.

Fig. 41.

Same as 40, with Eyebrows made of Crêpe Hair.

Fig. 43.

Yankee from “out West.”

[*To face p.* 206.

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[127] Elizabeth A. Hyde, “An Engaged Girl: A Comedy” (Chicago: T. S. Denison and Co., 1899), 6.

Photographs from C. Neil Lang's Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide (London: C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd., 1904) *show: (left-hand column) how to apply eyebrows and (right-hand column) picture the same man dressed as both a British curate and an American "Yankee from 'out West.'" The man is dressed similarly in suspenders and hat for both characters, though as an American he is outfitted with additional hairpieces including a goatee.*

The home theatre uses the power of national images—whether explicitly depicted by tableaux or onstage flags, or implicitly through references to national stereotypes—to reinforce patriotic sentiment. One consequence of studying images in home theatre is that an intense correlation between home drama and painting becomes evident, especially in the precision demanded by home theatrical staging. As feminism often accompanies patriotism in home theatre, the ties between the domestic domain and a wider national discourse are perhaps surprisingly strengthened by the art of painting.

Theatre—and home theatre, specifically—is an overlooked mode by which one can examine the intellectual exchange between nineteenth-century Britain and America. Scholars have more readily and easily tracked imperial and national reactions within other, less ephemeral forms of art—paintings, sculptures, texts. Painting, in particular, has traditionally played a leading role in scholarly discussions about the interconnectedness of image and nation, but painting is also necessary to understanding the development and nationalism of home theatricals. Revisiting our understanding of home theatre and painting gives women writers larger control—just as Kaplan's theory suggests—over what have been considered nationalistic images. While tableaux and charades preceded the development of theatricals proper, many women first wrote tableaux or charades before turning to plays. What has gone unrecognized about tableaux is just how closely they were meant to duplicate or at least closely resemble real paintings. This allows a discussion of nationalism in home plays to add to current discourse on national images, and affect our understanding of how a tableaux or a theatrical was intended to be viewed.

American Sarah Annie Frost wrote adaptations of British eighteenth-century playwrights for post-Civil War America; these plays are the specific focus of the latter half of this chapter. However, Frost also highlights the overlooked connection between painting and theatre more generally in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In at least two of her works on tableaux, she emphasizes that the reader should remember above all that the effect produced should mimic a painting. A brief background in Frost's instructions serves as necessary preface to the rest of this chapter, in showing the intensity of the national images of later theatricals, and of theatrical staging more broadly. Tableaux vivants, in effect "living pictures," can be considered a cross-breed between theatre and painting.

Frost's preface to her 1869 *The Book of Tableaux and Shadow Pantomimes* speaks of tableaux as paintings in regard to tone, color, grouping, and scenery:

> The first thing to be remembered is the fact that the representations are *living pictures*, and, therefore, must resemble, as closely as possible, painted pictures. To ensure this appearance, regard must be paid to artistic effect in grouping, attitude, light, and color. Too much color will produce a glaring, vulgar effect; while too little will look dull and sombre. The more scenery and larger space that can be allotted to the performance the better the effect will be, but a parlor may be arranged, with but trifling expense, to represent the principal scenes required.[128]

The very specific means through which the "painting" effect must occur, involve a rather mystical separation of stage picture from spectators with light and other visual effects:

> The first requisite is a frame, which must fit exactly the space in the front of the stage. A platform stage is not necessary, but, where it can be conveniently arranged, is much more effective. The frame of wood should be at least a foot in breadth. The front must be covered with yellow cambric, with large rosettes of yellow gauze or lace at regular intervals, to represent carved work. Over the whole frame covering the space, that the pictures may be seen behind it, strain a piece of coarse black lace. Down the two sides of the frame, at the back, place candle brackets at regular intervals, to light your pictures. Candle light shows out

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[128] 128. Sarah Annie Frost, *The Book of Tableaux and Shadow Pantomimes* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1869), 9. Subequent references cited parenthetically.

> color and complexion must better than gas, and you can easily soften or brighten your light by the number of candles used. (9-10)

Later in 1878, Frost includes an even more detailed orientation for those preparing tableaux, in her collaboration with Henry T. Williams in *Evening Amusements: Or, Merry Hours for Merry People* from his *Williams' Household Series*.[129] Frost's lengthy description of planning tableaux appears directed to the female reader, as she again emphasizes creating rosettes to decorate the tableau frame, and now adds how to group colors of dresses. Persistently concerned over artistic effect, Frost reminds her readers several times throughout that their creation is to imitate a moving painting.

According to Frost in *Evening Amusements*, the tableau is quite popular as well as precise: "[t]here are scarcely any young people who have not assisted either as performers or audience at a *tableau* party, and even the little folks are often allowed to take part." (316). These productions are anything but haphazard, but rather "should be well studied and carefully arranged to produce really good artistic effects" with "all margin given to picturesque costuming and effective furnishing." Above all, Frost's most important maxim is that: "It must be remembered that these mimic scenes are living pictures, and are intended to imitate, as closely as possible, painted pictures."

Quantities of figures and colors, as well as viewing arrangements should mirror those of a painting. Frost goes on to warn against over-crowding the stage—"a very common fault, performers and furniture being forced in till all the effect is lost"—and using too many colors—"[t]he colors should be few and artistically blended, and vivid ones used very sparingly."

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[129] 129. Henry T. Williams and S. Annie Frost. *Evening Amusements: Or, Merry Hours for Merry People, Comprising Fireside Games, Tricks of Conjuring, Tricks in Cards, Riddles, Enigmas, Fortune-Telling, Charades, Tableaux, Home Occupations, etc. etc. Vol. V. Williams' Household Series* (New York: Henry T. Williams, Publisher, 1878). Subsequent references cited parenthetically in text. I suspect Frost wrote much if not all of the tableaux and charade section at the conclusion of this volume, as the style is hers and many of her suggestions are merely expanded from the ones of her earlier volume.

However, a sense of joy should persist should the subject allow it: "a somber effect is to be avoided, excepting in gloomy subjects, prison scenes, or others of that character; and even in these, a little drapery of a bright tint gives effect to the whole." Ideally, correct viewing distance is aided by a raised platform, in a special barn or room set aside for the purpose:

> The most effective place for *tableaux* is on a raised platform, at least twenty feet from the front row of seats for the audience; but in a parlor, where this is not practicable, the *tableaux* can be well arranged upon the same level as the audience. If, however, a room can be obtained, or a barn, where the platform can be raised, by all means have one. *Tableaux vivants* being intended to represent, as nearly as possible, painted pictures, the first thing to be considered in the imitation, is a good frame in which to set the groups.

Frost's frame directions reveal the precision of even the framing process, in regards to fabric and lighting choices; they also measure how her ideas have evolved from her 1869 description. She advocates the home-made over the rented tableau frame.

> The limits of the stage must govern the length and breadth of this frame, which should be about a foot or a foot and a half wide, and of wood. Over this strain tightly a yellow cambric, the unglazed side out, as a shining frame detracts from the pictures. When the cambric has been tacked on, cover it with yellow tarlatan put on in long folds, across the top and bottom, up and down on the sides. At each corner, put a large rosette of the tarlatan, and another one in the middle of the top and side pieces. It is a very handsome addition to put over the tarlatan bands of black cotton velvet or cloth about an inch wide, and set on about an inch from the outside and inside edge. The frames used for pictures can be hired in cities for the evening, but they must be very large, and being quite clumsy to manage are liable to injury. The home-made frame is quite as effective.

One detail in particular shows the pre-cinematic nature of the tableaux. Coarse black lace or tulle stretched across the frame acts as basic lens. However, this effect could be filtered by an additional layer of fabric to convey an eerie atmosphere: a thickness of blue tarlatan, an open-weave fabric often used in evening gowns, was brought down and stretched across the frame on top of the lace, or simply fastened above the frame when not needed.

> Across the top of the frame inside, tack a piece of coarse black lace or tulle, strain it tightly and tack it across the bottom; then tack at the sides. It will be even if

> done in this way. Tack over this one thickness of blue tarlatan for ghastly scenes, and let it be fastened up until required. Upon each of the lower corners sew a loop, and have a nail on the outside lower corner of the inside of the frame, that will hold the blue tarlatan down firmly when required. Up and down the sides of the frame, fasten candle brackets, about one foot apart, and have wax candles in these to light the pictures. Foot-lights can also be used, but are not so effective as the lights at the sides. [316-7]

Leaving no detail unremarked upon—certainly we may assume Frost was also rather specific in her later adaptation choices—she concludes by discussing grouping and coloring of dresses, appropriateness of furniture, and how one should select a scene for portrayal from an art gallery. In general, gray is an apt choice to balance other colors, and less furniture is preferable:

> If parlor scenes are given, a carpet must be used for the floor. In all other scenes, a dark gray linen on the floor is the best to throw out the colors. Artistic grouping and harmony in coloring are very important considerations, and should be carefully studied and rehearsed. A study of good paintings is most useful, and the furniture and accessories are to be carefully managed. […] The performers should bear in mind that a dress, which alone is beautiful, becoming, harmoniously blended, may ruin the effect of the one beside it, or be itself ruined by another one that contrasts too sharply or is too nearly like it. Where two such dresses, those that near each other are necessary in one scene, artistic grouping requires them to be placed far apart, or separated by neutral coloring. We have seen an exquisite *tableau* spoiled by scarlet ribbons nearly touching a pink silk dress, where some cool gray, or even white between, would have left such a dress becoming and tasteful.
>
> Furniture must always be strictly appropriate, and as scanty as the scene will permit. […]
>
> In the selection of subjects, the best field is a picture-gallery. When the scenes are selected, each performer should carefully study the costume and attitude of his or her character in the picture, and the manager should study the picture as a whole. The effect is almost certain to be good. […] the next desirable choice can be made from collections of engravings. Where it is practicable, it is a good plan to color those chosen, and arrange the figures and costumes by this guide. Again, the poets offer vast fields for choice of subjects, and history an unlimited supply.[130] [317]

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[130] Frost continues: "If there are to be many evenings given to the amusement—as for charity—it makes a pleasant variety to give one evening to Historical *Tableaux*, one to Shaksperian [sic] *Tableaux*¸ and so on, with one evening for miscellaneous subjects. Where children may be trained to keep still, they always add greatly to the beauty of these living pictures."

If image-making is intrinsic to “nationhood” as scholars have long suggested, the visual picture of theatre, in home entertainments such as tableaux and theatricals, might further reveal how a nation understood itself, especially because the Romantic and Victorian audience was much more aware than a contemporary audience of the correlation between painting and theatre. The home theatre, presenting mobile rather than static images, “home grown” from within the domestic, is a natural if disregarded means of investigating the Victorian era’s nationalistic impulse. Having established this node of painting, home theatre, and patriotic sentiment, one expects to find certain periods of history, such as the post-American Civil War era, to be filled with specific visual, almost pre-cinematic, national moments. Frost’s home theatricals, published throughout the 1860s, and detailed through this chapter, attest particularly to the patriotism of images within home drama.

Briefly examining Frank Bellew’s *The Art of Amusing* by way of introduction, I then discuss an American theatrical starring British characters, and a British theatrical featuring Americans. Both plays, while interrogating constructions of “British” and “American,” also manipulate expected gender norms. I use these respective British and American sentiments to set the stage for the heart of the chapter: the work of American Sarah Annie Frost. Frost’s often intriguingly nationalistic tableaux and charades provide a gateway to my analysis of two of her later home theatricals, which adapted earlier eighteenth-century British public stage drama. Both Frost’s rewritings of Susannah Centlivre’s *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* and Bickerstaff and Dibdin’s *The Padlock* show that nationalism and feminism often went hand-in-hand within parlour theatre. In my conclusion, I gesture towards other means by which parlour theatre reflected nationalist and imperialist concerns beyond the American-British spectrum: particularly the integration of French material and characters, scrutiny of regional differences throughout the British Empire, and the popularity of Oriental plays. If nationalism was often accompanied by a furthering of women's concerns—most often penned by women—my closing suggests how the comedy of home theatre commonly built the nation by reinforcing the fact of the other.

Image as Nation: **The Art of Amusing *and* Washington Crossing the Delaware**

Iconic image can also be performance. For instance, the process of painting *Washington Crossing the Delaware* mimicked the enactment of a home theatrical, in a manner which carefully interwove the theatrical with the national. Creator Emanuel Leutze borrowed a replica of Washington's actual uniform from the U.S. Postal Service, insisted upon using American tourists in Düsseldorf as models, "all the German models being either too small or too closely set in their limbs for his purpose," and in the painting process itself "kept a cask of beer nearby and constructed a battery of flags, ammunition, and cannons in the room, 'to give a more decided *tone* to the place.'"[131] Thus, the final product of the painting was thought to rely on the theatrical "set" and process of its construction—relying on the belief that authenticity of setting increases validity of creation, or more specifically that Americans' physiques cannot be realistically imitated by anyone other than a true American. This brief history hints at the conceptions of national identity to be revealed by examining parlour theatricals for explicit or implicit nationalistic content.

American Frank Bellew was known less for his collection of home entertainments, *The Art of Amusing*, than for being the first to perform a caricature of Uncle Sam and for his influential drawings of Lincoln that humorously lengthened the features of the president.

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[131] 131. Carrie Rebora Barratt, *Washington Crossing the Delaware: Restoring an American Masterpiece* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2011), 6-7.

Perhaps then, it is unsurprising that Mr. Puttyblow's dramatic monologue opening Bellew's parlour play "Bullywingle the Beloved" references—and subtly satirizes—a certain nineteenth-century painting which portrays especially American subject matter.

> Now, I think I could paint a picture of Washington Crossing the Delaware in a style of art equally creditable to my feelings as an artist and an American citizen. I'd make Washington—yes—I would not make him as they generally do, in a great, big, comfortable boat, with a new suit of clothes, looking up to heaven, while a lot of other fellows are shoving the boat through lumps of ice with hooks and pikes, and things of that kind. No! I'd make him swimming across, with the stars and stripes between his teeth and a horse-pistol of the period behind each ear. That's what I should call something like a picture.
>
> – Mr. Puttyblow, Artist character in "Bullywingle the Beloved" from *The Art of Amusing* by Frank Bellew (1866)

As reinforced by the speech of the rather Dickensian-named Mr. Puttyblow, Bellew clearly believed in a specific image's ability to represent America. Yet, as the farcical theatrical progresses, the audience learns to take Puttyblow's artistic opinion a bit less seriously—as directions for a portrait, "by Puttyblow," to be copied for the actors' use as a play prop conclude: "the worse the picture, the funnier the effect."[132] Even these nuances, shifting as they do around Puttyblow's talents (or lack thereof) in portraying things American, craft a theatrical conception of nationhood. However farcical the home theatrical may appear, it dealt with questions of nationhood and identity.

Bellew's trust in the power of images—especially those theatrically presented—can be affiliated with today's nineteenth-century transatlantic studies which tend to discuss cultural exchanges in terms of the image. Current research critiques the exclusive traditions of American iconography, and its tendency to reinforce canonical images predominantly white, male, or rooted in the Puritan. Other recent studies uncover the viewpoints of those obscured by an imperialist framework. Transatlantic studies generally aim to correct canonical blindness directly related to image or myth-making. For instance, Tim Barringer argues that the tendency to view "American Art" as a homogenous and autonomous national school of art, animated by the United States' particular culture, ignores the essential hybridity of the nineteenth century U.S.: "the centrality of image making to the process of nation-building explains the fierceness with which national identity is employed as a taxonomic strategy for art and in art history."[133] Conveniently for my purposes, Barringer takes as his example for the power of the image the painting deep within the Metropolitan Museum's American wing, *Washington Crossing the Delaware* by Emanuel Leutze, who was actually born and trained in Germany but considered an American for his early years spent in Philadelphia. While Barringer and many other critics concentrate on images as a means of conducting transatlantic studies, the combined theatrical and transatlantic qualities within the *Washington* painting itself serve as example of how the complexities of theatrical evidence reveal more elusive, potentially provocative cultural mores.

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[132] 132. Frank Bellew, *The Art of Amusing* (New York: Carleton, and London: S. Low, Son & Co., 1866), 166. See Carrie Rebora Barratt's *Washington Crossing the Delaware: Restoring a Masterpiece* for a thorough overview of the painting's history; Bellew's character Puttyblow may be reflecting shifting views of the *Washington* painting: "By 1864, …critical opinion had done an about-turn, and Leutze's picture came under attack as theatrical and contrived" (9).

Washington Crossing the Delaware is already transatlantic in the artist's dual-nationality and its creation abroad. More so, the painting formerly existed in double: the original, half destroyed by fire, was restored and remained in Germany until a British air raid destroyed it in 1942, while the second copy, enlarged and revised, has been prized in America since 1851 and recently emerged from a 2012 conservation effort which has made it the masterpiece of the American wing of the Metropolitan.[134] Images are often the weaponry of choice for those attempting to juggle, interpret, and situate political opinions and social constructions on both sides of the Atlantic or across other boundaries. Even the *Washington* painting's early days indicate the circuitous yet more revelatory history of nineteenth-century cultural exchange to be obtained through the dramatic.

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[133] Tim Barringer, "A White Atlantic? The Idea of American Art in the Nineteenth Century," *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 9 (2009), 2.

[134] See Barratt for a detailed history of production and physical travels of each version of the painting.

Frank Bellew's *The Art of Amusing*, like Leutze's painting, enjoyed a transatlantic reception, published in both New York and London in 1866. Bellew's hitherto unexamined work validates the pervasiveness of the home theatrical in British and American nineteenth-century culture, and the role played by this genre in shaping "nationhood." The 300-page collection, which includes over 150 illustrations by Bellew himself (as he proudly advertises in the introductory pages), covers 28 chapters with instruction in various parlour amusements and tricks. Chapter content ranges from the straightforward "Chapter XXV.— Charades." to the more ludicrous sounding "Chapter XXVI.—The art of transmuting everything into coral." The volume's humor and popular appear befits the author's reputation; Bellew was friends with both Mark Twain and Charles Dickens. In a common citation, Dickens described "Frank Bellew's pencil [a]s extraordinary. He probably originated more, of a purely comic nature, than all the rest of the artistic brethren put together."[135] *The Art of Amusing* is intent on inscribing theatricality into the everyday home; a sense of benevolent trickery and the theatrical potential of everyday scenarios underlies the volume, as evidenced in the following chapter titles and contents: "Chapter XII. Hanky-panky, instruction in the art" in which is described how to appear to knock one's knuckles or skull violently against a hard surface without actually injuring oneself, but in a manner which will "make the ladies scream, and every one else thrill of horror"[136] or "Chapter XX.—Theatrical red and green fire, how to make them.—How to get up a theatrical storm" in which is described how "[t]hose red and green lights which lend such a glory to the final tableaux of fairy pieces on the public stage, can easily be introduced into private parlor performances [in a manner] quite inexpensive and very easily managed" (232). (Bellew anecdotally notes that "Warning, however, should be given to all asthmatic persons to vacate the ranch before firing off.")

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[135] 135. This quote from Dickens can be attributed to many sources, but is found originally in "Caricature in America," *All the Year Round* 41 (1878), 300.

The Art of Amusing is written to buttress and revise national identity; specifically, Bellew intended *The Art* as a remedy for a fundamentally American tendency to work too hard. His entire prologue argues Americans have a relative lack of amusement when compared to other nations. He adopts a lighthearted yet gently moral tone for the volume, intended for his countrymen:

> Perhaps one of the great social faults of the American is, that he does not amuse himself enough, at least in a cheerful, innocent manner. We are never jolly. We are terribly troubled about our dignity. All other nations, the French, the German, the Italian, and even the dull English, have their relaxation, their merry-making; but we—why, a political or prayer-meeting is about the most hilarious affair in which we ever indulge….
>
> We have seen, ourselves, in England, in a stately old castle, a party of lords and ladies—for we, like the boy who knew what good victuals were, having been from home several times—even we have seen good company—we say that we have seen a party of lords and ladies, knights and dames of high degree, and of mature years, romping and frolicking together, like a lot of children, playing *Hunt the Slipper*, *Puss in the Corner, and Blindman's Buff*, without the remotest idea that they had such a thing as dignity to take care of; and no one seemed to have the slightest fear that any one of the party could by any possibility do anything that would offend or mortify any one else. (7-9)

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136. Bellew, 135. All subsequent citations to *The Art of Amusing* are made parenthetically.

At the same time, Bellew suggests Americans have improved, and now enjoy skating clubs, "cricket and base ball [sic]" but that primarily, the current mode of theatre needs to be more integrated more into daily life:

> Theatre-going, our chief amusement, can hardly be reckoned a healthy relaxation, though well enough now and then. Sitting in a cramped attitude, in a stifling atmosphere, is not conducive to moral or physical development. What we need are informal social gatherings, where we may laugh much and think little, and where dignity won't be invited; where we need not make ourselves ill with bad champagne and ice-starch, nor go into the other extreme of platitudes, ice-water and doughnuts: but where both body and mind will be treated considerately, tenderly, generously. (10)

This often humorous discourse is peppered through the narrative which smoothly transitions from parlour trick to anecdote, from personal tale to play dialogue, as shown by the table of contents listing for "*CHAPTER VII.—Pragmatic and didactic discourse.—Aunty Delluvian, her party.—The duck and double-barrelled speech.—The dwarf.—Trick with four grains of rice.—Riddles, etc."* Easily weaving the theatrical into both morality and the everyday, this chapter argues also that the inability to correctly ration labor is tied to an American-specific work ethic. "Mankind in general, and we modern Americans in particular, are perpetually striving to come a 'gouge game' over nature" (83).[137] Bellew asks the reader to compare himself to a race horse, and consider the effects of racing two to three times a day versus racing at more widespread intervals: "Why should you treat yourself so much worse than a horse? Is it because you are —? No, you have simply adopted a bad national custom" (86).

The Art persuades Americans to let up on themselves by amusing themselves and others more—primarily through introducing a more carefree theatricality in the home—and thereby becoming "so much healthier, so much kinder, so much better Christians" (84). Interpreting comments directed to Americans becomes more involved when considering the British readership of *The Art*, who may simply have felt assured of their own joviality, but undoubtedly compared their nation's sense of work and fun with the United States. Bellew's work roots a nation's identity directly in its dramatic associations. The homeland here is determined directly by the amusement found within the home.

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[137] The interesting phrase "come a 'gouge game'" most likely refers to the gouging out of eyes. Here, it is humans working against nature.

Current transatlantic scholarship has rightly recognized that America is less a type of receptacle for European influence, and more, as Barringer has put it, "a fluid entity within a global commerce of images, objects, and people… one node within the flux of an Atlantic world."[138] Kate Flint adds that American creative energy was defined by its requiring an authority as a condition of its being, but one that was "emphatically not British, but European." [139] Yet, while other examinations of transatlanticism have emphasized, as Flint notes, the European rather than British quality of the exchange with America, home theatricals are a genre that primarily operates around an American-British centric universe. The plays foreground cross-references to Britain in American theatricals and America in British theatricals, overshadowing allusions to characters from or settings in other nations. So while I am expanding transatlantic studies beyond the examination of the image-based, to include a neglected genre widely shared in homes or the frequent tendency to rely on shared print material (such as the American *Harper's Magazine*), I am continue to examine the theatrical sphere as one of American and British interchange.

Some attention has already been paid to the transatlantic reception of public stage playwrights such as Boucicault, which is a refreshing step toward repairing the general neglect of nineteenth century theatre. But, in this project, I examine how the parlour theatrical as a more middle-class experience, within the home, was involved in the creation of national identity, both in Britain and America. Some additional complexities and nations are of course involved here. For instance, Chapter Five's Florence Bell's "The Public Prosecutor" and Chapter Four's American Emma Brewster's "The Christmas Box" are among the home theatricals adapted from French stories. While French inspiration is behind most though not all adaptations which are not British or American in origin, never does a play clearly note a source directly from French or another nation's home theatre. More common sources are folk tales, novels, or public stage plays.

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[138] Barringer, 6.

[139] Kate Flint, "Response to Tim Barringer, A White Atlantic?" *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century,* 9 (2009), 4.

Linking the dramatic tendencies of Britain and the U.S. is a nineteenth-century idea; even Fanny Kemble's article, "On the Stage," printed first in the British *Cornhill Magazine* (Dec. 1863) and shortly thereafter in the American *Harper's* (Feb. 1864) suggests both Britain and the U.S. share a lack of drama as compared to other nations.

> The Italians, nationally and individually, are dramatic; the French, on the contrary, theatrical; we English of the present day are neither the one nor the other, though our possession of the noblest dramatic literature in the world proves how deeply at one time our national character was imbued with elements which are now so latent as almost to be of a doubtful existence; while, on the other hand, our American progeny are, as a nation, devoid of the dramatic element, and have a considerable infusion of that which is theatrical, delighting, like the Athenians of old, in processions, shows, speeches, oratory, demonstrations, celebrations, and declarations, and such displays of public and private sentiment as would be repugnant to English taste and feeling; to which theatrical tendency, and the morbid love of excitement which is akin to it, I attribute the fact that Americans, both nationally and individually, are capable of a certain sympathy with the French character, in which we are wanting.

This distinction between theatrical and dramatic is a subtle but nationally-driven one. While the "dramatic" appears here to be more robust and natural as in the present-day Italians and past generations of the English, that which is "theatrical" is more contrived or forced as in the French and Americans. While implying the Americans as British progeny are mostly devoid of the dramatic, Kemble does indicate they tend towards the theatrical in their entertainments—a suggestion refuted by Bellew's "lighten up" dialogue but substantiated by the very fact of his volume. The "amusement book" genre is more prevalent in America than Britain, though a love of parlour theatricals links the middle-class in both countries. I move now to the intriguing ways in which parlour plays redeploy nationhood, and show how both British and American women shared common goals in their parlour playwriting, including negotiating the boundaries of home, theatre, and country. I am additionally interested in examining how nation and gender, as means of categorization, often overlap in this genre, which should be unsurprising given the large percentage of parlour playwrights, audience, and actresses, who were women. While previous scholarship has connected the work of women within the home with their participation in the larger category of "nation" through their specifically theatrical practices, this has been analyzed primarily in the context of plays working towards the female vote.[140] Perhaps more importantly, the American home theatrical displays the same thematic and ideological tendencies as its British counterpart, bridging and sharing what is conspicuously British.

Gender in American and British Home Theatre: Starring in Home Theatre across the Pond

I now juxtapose two home theatricals—one American and one British—in detail, as a way of exploring how nationhood and international relations can be conveyed through this genre. While neither of these theatricals pauses on nationalistic tableaux as do those by Sarah Annie

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140. Katherine Newey, "Home and Nation" *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave McMillan, 2005), 144.

Frost, they work with stereotypes of the respective citizens of each nation. This "image" of the American or the Brit often accompanies a specific feminist viewpoint. Both of these particular nation-oriented theatricals are by men; perhaps, not coincidentally, both male playwrights composed other works that reveal a willingness to give women important roles or voices. The American Benjamin Lease Crozer Griffith, otherwise lost-to-history, published collections of parlour plays from the early 1890s through about 1910. While none of Griffith's plays have prefaces or introductory material through which to hear his voice more directly, many exhibit the familiar feminist tendencies of the parlour play. For instance, the character listing of his lengthy (two and a quarter hour) "Between the Acts" (1892) includes "'Dick' Comfort, *married, yet single*," and "Edith Comfort, *Dick's wife. 'Unknown, unhonored, and unsung*'" (5), the trouble of the plot originates in Dick not telling others that he is actually a married man. Similarly, Griffith's "A Mistake in Identity" follows the common two-woman duologue format, between a girl May and her visitor Lottie.[141] Lottie mistakes May as the cousin of the girl with whom the offstage man is in love, rather than recognizing her as the beloved herself; Lottie causes confusion by singing Fred's praises of his beloved, leading May to think her man has been courting her actual cousin.

> Lot. Now, that's just like men, isn't it? When they really care for a girl, they try to appear indifferent.
> May. Yes; they are so unreasonable.
> Lot. Perhaps they are afraid of being laughed at. (6)

Griffith's plays reinforce that the audience of the home theatrical is one to whom this marriage-oriented, lady-directed dialogue would be appealing (reflecting at minimum, smart business sense, if not his own views).

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141. B. L. C. Griffith, "A Mistake in Identity: A Sketch" (Chicago, T. S. Denison, 1894), 6.

I then investigate a play from the British James Ware Redding, who while also fairly undiscovered, has an intriguing authorial past. Redding published parlour plays mostly in the 1870s under his real name, but earlier, mostly in the 1860s, wrote penny dreadfuls under the pseudonym Andrew Forrester—and has been recently discovered to have invented the first female detective, Mrs. Gladden, a figure who, as Christopher Fowler explains, was probably based on details of real-life murder cases, and who "solves mysteries in the way we have come to expect: by visiting crime scenes, talking to witnesses, and adopting subterfuge to hunt down murderers."[142] Considering the primacy of strong female roles in home plays, it is both unsurprising and significant that the creator of this female role turned to home theatricals later in his career. Redding's choices to publish under his real name for home plays and a pseudonym for his shorter sensation fiction validates the respective social status of these genres. Home theatricals were a respectable entertainment, above inexpensive melodramatic fiction. Additionally, the timeline of his move from penny dreadfuls to the parlour play market in the early 1870s corroborates my argument that the home theatricals rose to popularity over the latter decades of the nineteenth century, and suggests either status or financial gains offered by this explosively popular genre made Redding's clear break a smart one.

In American Benjamin Lee Griffith's 1894 "Not At Home," the play's sole characters are the American William B. Hastie—expect many puns on the speed of his name—and the Brit Reginald Buckthorne—a slightly more dignified, less scheming and slower speaker.[143] Both men are fighting over the same American woman in her parlour, where they have both come to propose. To encapsulate the plot: the two gentlemen figure out after they are ready to duel one another that their beloved has written them both the same letter, and they agree to leave her, parting as friends rather than rivals.

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[142] The connection between Andrew Forrester and J. W. Redding has only recently been made. See Christopher Fowler's November 2012 article "Invisible Ink: No 148 – James Ware Redding." *The Experiences of a Lady Detective* was a collection of seven cases, published in 1864.

[143] Benjamin Lee Griffith, "Not at Home" (Chicago: T. S. Denison, 1894). Subsequent references cited parenthetically.

Masculinity in the American sense is contrasted with the British; while both men experience the same situation, the American Hastie is at once more benevolently conniving, confident, and slightly less smart in his efforts to win the offstage Helen, while the British Buckthorne is more straightforward, speaking fewer asides, but also much more docile. "When am I to be killed? Next Thursday?" (7) is Buckthorne's response to participating in a duel with the American.

Hastie and Buckthorne's echoes of each other while experiencing an identical situation reveal much about national stereotypes. Hastie opens the play with "Evidently that maid servant likes me. A proof that the almighty dollar is monarch of all" (3); his ensuing long monologue culminates in his acting aloud and alone various imagined ways he will propose to Helen. In Buckthorne's introductory speech, he changes Hastie's sentiment: "I believe that maid servant doesn't like me. I really can't say why not…" and ponders aloud a love of poetry and desire to be alone. Hastie, meanwhile, in his efforts to scheme Buckthorne, whom he recognizes as a rival—"I believe he is the Englishman Helen is always praising" (5)—ironically ends up fooling himself:

> Hastie: Look here, my friend, if I were you I wouldn't take such an interest in Miss Burton.
> Buck. Why, I have a rival?
> Hastie: You most certainly have.
> Buck. May I ask his name?
> Hastie: The name is of no consequence.
> Buck. Oh, but it is, you know. I thought perhaps he might be the man Miss Burton praises so continually.

> Hastie. (*Interested*.) Praises him, does she? What is his name?
> Buck. I—I think it's Swift.
> Hastie. (*Aside*.) Never heard of him. Another rival. (*To* Buckthorne.) Yes, that is the man.

Hastie, of course not realizing that Buckthorne has remembered "Hastie" as "Swift," suggests a duel as the "best way to get rid of them both" (6). A joke is made then of Hastie's own mental slowness, when he tells Buckthorne, who inquires about the imaginary man he will fight, that Swift is "A very slow sort of chap. You'll have no difficulty with Swift, with such a name, sir."

Shenanigans result when both men realize the other's true identity. Buckthorne, piqued at his honor being insulted, "*[t]akes off glove and throws it at* Hastie's *feet*," then shouts "I challenge you to mortal combat" (7), only to have Hastie fabricate a nationally prescribed way to duel in order to choose the weapon that suits Buckthorne the least:

> Hastie. (*To* Buckthorne.) Are you a good swordsman?
> Buck. Not very.
> Hastie. (*Aside*.) He may be deceiving me. I must find out in some way. (*To* Buckthorne.) By the American code there are certain preliminaries to a duel. (*Takes pencils from pocket and gives one to* Buckthorne.) This is to determine the nature of the weapon to be used. (*Buckthorne takes paper from pocket and awaits instructions.* Hastie *strikes attitude.*) En garde, sir! (Buckthorne *takes notes*.) En garde, sir! (Makes a thrust at Buckthorne, *who awkwardly tried to ward it off.*) En garde, sir! (*Another thrust.*)
> Hastie. (*Aside.*) Very good. I will choose swords. (*Picks up glove.*)

Throughout, Hastie continually makes up an American code to duels as he goes along, fitting it to his purposes; this includes such amendments as sending in a substitute for himself in the duel, and arranging every outcome so that *he* will marry Helen. Yet, in the conclusion, both men realize the beloved is playing them both, and thus the theatrical concludes with a most unexpected proposal, one of a nationalistic "bromance":

> Hastie. Rivals once—
> Buck. But comrades now.
> Hastie. Let us act in unison in this matter.
> Buck. How?

> Hastie. Get some refreshments.
> Buck. A good idea. Then I propose—
> Hastie. (*Quickly*.) And I accept. (*They walk out arm in arm.*)

The theatrical brings a type of equivalence between its central characters, as well as between the sexes. Both Hastie and Buckthorne have been scammed, but both men and women (in the form of the unseen Helen) are schemers. Love, in this parlour play, falls short in its duel with nationalism, especially in the suggestion that women are less angelic than either they or nineteenth-century society would pretend. "Not At Home" marries the United States and Britain in a competitive camaraderie, and proposes that the real bonds and images of home extend much farther than one's parlour—perhaps reaching across the Atlantic.

British playwright James Redding Ware's "A Woman will be a Woman" (c. 1880) attests to the intricacies with which nation and location are subtly woven into the marriage plot, one of the commonest of theatrical storylines.[144] In this case, the play is determined by the physical appearance of a character who is never seen onstage, but is returning from time abroad in the United States. The theatrical has just two central characters: Lady Alice, who has just altered her appearance by powdering her hair white, and her landlord, the Colonel, who comes to kick her out since her lease is up—but this turns out to be a sneaky marriage proposal. Lady Alice, surprised, learns the continual "repairs" to his property were made in order that the Colonel might build up friendly relations with her. The Colonel, also surprised, discovers that Lady Alice's powdering her hair is a test for a returning lover, who has spent the past two years in America. Her explanation of her disguise reveals the theatrical's moral about gender relations:

> Lady Alice. You know Mrs. Chapone Douglass?
> Colonel. Her husband is a great friend of mine.

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[144] James Redding Ware, "A Woman will be a Woman" (London: Dicks Standard Charades and Comedies, c. 1880).

> Lady Alice. After three years' marriage, the poor woman had a typhoid fever, which left her with gray hair. Very well. Well, her husband married her for love, and adored her—until her hair turned gray; and now he never comes home from the club until two in the morning, and won't go out with her. What do you say to that?
>
> Colonel. Ha! (17)

When the Colonel defends the captain's actions, Lady Alice questions the taste of men at large: "Be wise, intelligent, sincere, devoted, and your geese of husbands care nothing for you, unless your hair is their colour, or your nose shaped to their liking. Be frivolous, foolish, mean, idiotic, and they will remain faithful, unless your hair goes a little gray, or they discover a pit-mark, and then—there you are, left to yourself for life!" While the Colonel admits man is a "coarse creature, who loves through his eyesight," he suggests that both sexes must submit to this "law of nature." Ironically, Mr Carleon, the returning lover from America—the Colonel only knows him as a man who, there, "tried to marry the daughter of a rich shoddy fellow" (18)—turns out in the conclusion to be, in Lady Alice's words, "as bald as an egg" (20). Lady Alice very kindly, though "*with a light scream*" (19), asks the Colonel to return a lock of Carleon's hair to him, which she figures Carleon may want.

Plays which invoke nationhood tend perhaps unsurprisingly to reach towards a newfound solidarity, but just as frequently do so along the lines of gender as of country. "A Woman will be a Woman" ends in a similar leveling between characters as "Not at Home"— just as both Hastie and Buckthorne find their circumstances identical, both the Colonel and Lady Alice eventually must fall under that law of nature which correlates attractiveness with appearance. In "A Woman will be a Woman," women are just as fickle as men, but this equivalence ends in a traditional intra-British marriage rather than a refusal to marry and a transnational male friendship. Both plays suggest that women are less Angels in the House than either they or nineteenth-century society would pretend—in fact, they are sometimes "Not at Home" at all, or are stubbornly themselves, as Redding's title indicates. While "Not At Home" unites the United States with Britain against womanhood, "A Woman will be a Woman" makes a more discerning womanhood representative of truly British union.

Sarah Annie Frost: Transnational Adaptation

The work of Sarah Annie Frost, one of the most productive American female parlour playwrights, offers multiple methods through which nationalism casually embedded itself within a wide variety of home entertainments. For example, in her comedy "Mr. John Smith," the character Mr. Jones leads "[a] *full chorus of male voices behind the scenes*" in a lengthy song echoing the phrase "red, white and blue" and praising liberty:

> May the memory of Washington ne'er wither,
>   Nor the star of his glory grow dim;
> May the service united ne'er sever,
>   But e'er to their colors prove true,
> The army and navy forever,
>   Three cheers for the red, white and blue.[145]

Frost exhibits no lack of national spirit especially in such scenes as these, which demonstrate the use of the parlour play as a tool to instigate and celebrate national pride. More usefully, Frost strengthens the argument that the parlour play is a source of transatlantic dramatic sharing between Britain and the United States, especially in terms of Americans appropriating older British material in an attempt to legitimize their theatrical practices. In her preface to her *Amateur Theatricals and Fairy-Tale Dramas* (1868), Frost straightforwardly acknowledges: "[t]he authoress trusts that those who recognize the old English comedy, 'A Bold Stroke for a

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[145] 145. Sarah Annie Frost, *Amateur Theatricals and Fairy-Tale Dramas* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, Publishers, 1868), 21. Thereafter, text is cited parenthetically. As she notes in her preface, "John Smith," "the longest of the comedies" within the collection, is "intended for an entire evening's performance, and in the hands of a talented company will admit of infinite variety" (4).

Wife,' and the comic opera, 'The Padlock,' under their new titles, will pardon the larceny, as their favorites appear in more modern costumes, and better adapted to the manners of the present times" (4). Frost suggests her collection expands the current repertoire of plays available to amateur actors, because these plays do not rely "too heavily upon the ingenuity of the aspirants for parlor applause, or exceed the limits of papa's generosity" (3) and may be "made effective with modern furniture and dress" (4). However, her real reasons are also to rewrite the politics of Centlivre and Bickerstaff/Dibdin to be suited to America—especially sensitive in the years following the American Civil War when she published her books.

Frost's first collection for the home theatre, *The Parlor Stage* (1866), is a collection of acting charades, acting proverbs, charades in tableaux vivants, and proverbs in tableaux.[146] While no parlour plays are included in the volume, this first book can be seen along the playwright's path towards the theatricals of her later works—thus substantiating my claims that, first, charades and tableaux were largely replaced by theatricals and, secondly, that Frost's theatrical work supports a nationalistic bias. In *The Parlor Stage,* sprinkled within her "Charades in Tableaux Vivants," among common charade words such as "Falsehood" and "Novice," are directions for "Washington": a first tableau representing "Washing" sentimentally depicts two women dressed as "Irish girls" (360) in addition to a little girl with her own tub and bench "washing, with a face of grave earnestness, a doll-baby's frock," a second tableau depicting "Ton" which spotlights a woman "in a rich négligé receiving two callers" (361) dressed in the height of fashion. Directions for the final tableau depicting "Washington" are reprinted in full here:

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[146] See introduction, "The Home Theatre in Context" for full description of these various parlour theatrical activities.

> This tableau, if arranged with taste, is very beautiful and effective. In the background, the middle, stands a high sideboard, upon which is a bust of Washington. Over it is draped a flag, the stars and stripes. Upon two chairs, one on each side of the sideboard, which should be covered with drapery, are two little girls, dressed in white, with blue rosettes and crimson sashes, who hold above the head of Washington a laurel wreath. In the foreground, two soldiers, in the continental uniform, present arms to the conqueror.
>
> The uniforms and bust can, if not owned by the performers, be hired at a very trifling expense. This tableau is very effective, if well-grouped.
>
> "Hail Columbia" or "The Star Spangled Banner," played slowly, adds very much to the effect. (361)

The national pride of this tableau stands out from other more traditional word choices, such as "Penitent," "Mendicant," or "Mischief," especially in the note that if the household does not own soldiers' uniforms, these may be rented at low cost. The use of the feminine sentimentalizes and softens the scenes, from the Irish girls and the young girl in "Washing," the wealthy woman with a choice of suitors in "Ton," to finally, the two young girls dressed in red, white, and blue who salute Washington. While the bust of Washington—which a household would presumably own—is the centerpiece of the final scene, America becomes associated with a more woman-centered structure, especially as the pointedly girlish innocence of the first washing scene comes full circle in the flowered and sashed girls of the final tableau. The soft and slow playing of national songs in the final scene may add "very much to the effect," as Frost states; in her later theatricals, she capitalizes on this use of song to reinforce national sentiment, and alters original British dramas to include more women.

Frost's *The Book of Tableaux and Shadow Pantomimes* (1869) includes two nationalistic tableaux, "Old and Young America" and "The Latest from the Front," which portray different ends of the emotional spectrum when a soldier returns to his family, or alternatively the family receives news that he has been killed.[147] These tableaux are not placed alongside each other within the volume, but again sprinkled throughout more expected material such as "Waiting for the Verdict" or "Bashful Lovers."

The first tableau of these tableaux, "Old and Young America," sentimentally portrays multigenerational soldiers in "a farm kitchen." Frost's directions for her moving pictures more generally contain much greater detail than other collections of tableaux. Each description of a scene doubles as guide to the actors and a type of readable, almost novelistic, dramatic kernel. In "Old and Young America," for instance, standing upon a large table in the center of the rustic kitchen is:

> a little boy, profile to the audience. He is dressed in a short white night-dress, bare-legged and bare-armed. Upon his head is a soldier cap made of newspaper, and in one hand is a toy musket. The child must be as young as can be kept motionless, pretty and well-formed, with a merry, bright face. Facing him, standing erect, is and [sic] old man, as venerable as white hair and beard will make him, dressed in the full Continental uniform of the Revolution, buff and blue. He is holding a musket at "order arms," and one hand is raised in salute; the attitude erect and very stiff. The child must attend in precisely the same attitude, as if being drilled.
>
> Left of background, facing audience is a young woman, dressed in a neat chintz, linen collar and white apron, who holds some sewing in her lap, but is looking at the child with a proud but sad air, as if memory was recalling some sorrowful thought.
>
> Right of background is an open door, and just entering this, is a soldier, young and handsome, and wearing the full uniform of a lieutenant of the present day. His sword is buckled to his side, and in one hand he carries a carpet bag, as if just coming home. None of the others perceives him. His attitude is that of one just springing over the door-still, but arrested by the sight of the group in the foreground. His hand is raised to dash away a tear, while he looks proudly at the little descendant of the soldierly father and grandfather. (20)

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[147] 147. Sarah Annie Frost, *The Book of Tableaux and Shadow Pantomimes* (New York: Dick & Fitzgerald, 1869). While this volume was published after Frost published at least one volume of parlour plays, it is clear she wrote charades and tableaux vivants before writing theatricals.

Subsequently, in the second tableau, "The Latest from the Front," the scene is again repeated almost unusually as "the kitchen of a farm-house" where now, rather than a little boy, "dinner is standing upon a table, the chairs pushed back from it, the piled up plates untouched, as if the paper had arrived just as the family were about to dine." Similarly, again tears are shed, but now of grief at news of a soldier's death. The nearly identical specific setting of farm kitchen makes one wonder whether Frost perhaps heard or witnessed the sad version in this place, and reimagined it to be the happier substitute. Alternatively and practically speaking, she may have been providing a range of theatrical options to her performers—perhaps an especially wise move as families may have actually experienced or expected to undergo one of these scenarios. Rehearsal may have alleviated the trauma or continued the joy of each respective scenario, if it had actually occurred.

Perhaps a more stimulating interpretation may read both of these tableaux, "Old and Young America" and "The Latest from the Front," as a unit—occurring chronologically within the same family, though representing different generations. Specific details of the latter tableau, which appears just seven pages past the first within the volume, allow it to be read as the consequences of the first moving scene's young bare-limbed babe growing into a real soldier. In this context, "The Latest from the Front" also represents the "latest" or "most recent" of the two tableaux; it showcases the troubling result of the inevitable foreshadowing of the first, when the audience and the mother both look upon the young boy and imagine him becoming a soldier like his (returning) father and grandfather. In other words, this latest tableau disturbingly depicts what becomes of the first's "Young America." "The Latest from the Front" again highlights an elderly gentleman, in this iteration now an "old farmer," seated in an arm chair, who "leans forward upon a cane, one hand raised behind his ear, listening intently" while in the right foreground “a lad of about fourteen is seated upon a low stool, with an open newspaper in his hands.” Three other women, of various ages, are throughout the foreground and background. The most convincing evidence for the chronological reading is a particular female character present in both scenes. Rather than the young mother fondly reminiscing, “hold[ing] her sewing in her lap” (20) as her husband returns in the background, now:

> Left of foreground, an old woman is seated, profile to the audience, leaning forward as if listening. She has let her knitting fall to the floor, and her hands are clasped together and raised, her eyes looking upward as if in despairing prayer.

Her specific display of emotion in hearing that her son has been lost is buttressed by that of the girls surrounding her, just as the young girls are used for sentimental effect in “Washington”:

> Left of background, a young girl in the plain dress of a farmer’s daughter, has just fallen upon a chair, as if in a fainting fit, her head dropping, and her hands falling nerveless at her side.
>
> Right of background, another girl, younger then [sic] first, is standing facing audience, apron raised to her eyes, as if weeping bitterly.

The old man is to look “doubtful of his own hearing, but deep grief must be upon all the others” including the young boy who reads. Frost’s *The Book of Tableaux and Shadow Pantomimes*, is as I have suggested, fascinatingly imaginative reading in itself, with a necessarily cinematic quality because she describes the theatrical action in so much depth. Her book of tableaux works as both dramatic literature and drama, and is reminiscent of earlier Romantic closet drama, with which Frost was definitely familiar.

Closer inspection of dramatic history reveals a potential trail of inspiration from Romantic Era public stage playwrights to British and American nineteenth-century women who wrote home theatre. In Chapter Two, I discussed how Joanna Baillie’s *The Tryal* inspired the basic plot elements of both marriage and the concept of acting as taken up by home dramatists. I proposed Frost as the author most closely related to Baillie; from Frost’s direct adaptations of

Centlivre and Bickerstaff/Dibdin, we know she was intimately familiar with earlier theatre. In this chapter, I examine how nineteenth-century America's national concerns are transformed in home theatre from earlier British stage sources. I move first from Frost's adaptation of Susannah Centlivre's *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* as "Wooing Under Difficulties," to her adaptation of Isacc Bickerstaff and Charles Dibdin's *The Padlock* as "Bolts and Bars." Both plays exhibit close attention to key details of the original works, but emphasize American nationhood while giving women characters more lines, larger roles, and more opportunities to "put on an act" within their parts. While much of canonical nineteenth-century American literature is lacking in female characters and authors, Frost's home theatrical adaptations for America appear to mean rewriting source material, not just for her country, but also for women. In my discussion of both Centlivre and Bickerstaff/Dibdin, some background information on the plots of their respective works is necessary; these plays are likely unfamiliar to a modern audience, and understanding the original intent is key to seeing the precise manner in which Frost selectively adapts each plot for national purposes. This grasp of the source material especially sheds light on Frost's alterations in regards to gender, and additionally in the case of Bickerstaff/Dibdin, race and class.

***From* A Bold Stroke for a Wife *to* "Wooing Under Difficulties"**

Susannah Centlivre's original 1718 play indivisibly intertwines national unity with the marriage union.[148] The heroine Anne Lovely may only keep her fortune of thirty thousand pounds if she marries with the approval of all of her guardians, who are "four Men, as opposite to each other as the four Elements" (11); thus, her unnatural father sought to virtually ensure her maidenhood. Anne lives with each guardian for three months out of the year, in a situation reminiscent of that faced by Persephone—despite Centlivre's claim of her narrative's newness.

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[148] Susannah Centlivre, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife; A Comedy* (London: J. Hodges, 1749). http://discoverarchive.vanderbilt.edu/.

Hence, the quest for English marriage between guarded maid and soldierly hero establishes itself on somewhat mythical grounds. Anne's four guardians, symbolically "Avarice, Impertinence, Hypocrisy, and Pride" (13), are actually: Tradelove, a change-broker; Periwinkle, a "virtuoso" obsessed with travel; Obadiah Prim, the Quaker who secretly flirts with his maid; and Philip Modelove, an old Beau of French tastes. The guardians represent vices to be conquered in order to maintain and continue English purity, quite literally figured in Anne's marriage continuing the basic familial unit.

A Bold Stroke for a Wife draws parallels between a man's sexual appeal to women and his ability to defend his nation. The Prologue, spoken by a woman, asks and answers its own question of why soldiers prove so alluring to the opposite sex: military men captivate most not by their ability to defend women (that would be "both impolitick and wrong, / And only suits such Dames as want a Tongue") nor their "Eloquence and fine Address" but by "Courage, that they bravely dare / To Storm the Sex at once." Soldiers do not take "no" for an answer: they "act by us [women] as in the rough Campaign, / Unmindful of Repulses, charge again: / They mine, and countermine, *resolv'd* to win." While this violence suggests a type of rape, a soldier is presented as the only man capable of the resourcefulness and persistence necessary to win a woman's love *and*, within the plot, able to conquer the obstacles presented by the multiple guardians. In the play, most of this ability to charge again and again involves the army hero Fainwell's ability to put on additional and various personas in order to trick each guardian.

If Centlivre's play continually asks what constitutes a truly "English" subject, its resounding answer is anything which is not French. *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* focuses on distinguishing Englishness from French characteristics—beginning with Centlivre's dedication to Philip, the young Marquis and Duke of Wharton, in which she appeals to him to:

> Defer no longer then, my Lord, to charm the World with the Beauty of your Numbers, and shew the Poet, as you have done the Orator; convince our unthinking *Britons*, by what vile Arts *France* lost her Liberty; and teach them to avoid their own Misfortunes, as well as to weep over *Henry* IV, who (if it were possible for him to know) would forgive the bold Assassin's Hand, for the Honour of having his Fall celebrated by your Grace's Pen. (v)

She elsewhere praises Philip as savior to a blessed nation after the death of his father the Marquis; he is one to whom "[The English] Grief had been inconsolable, if Heaven, out of its wonted Beneficence to this Favourite Isle, had not transmitted all his shining Qualities to you, and Phoenix-like, raised up one Patriot out of the Ashes of another" (v). When Centlivre does insert herself into the dedication, her main point that "the Plot is intirely new … not borrowed from our own, or translated from the Works of any Foreign Poets"(vi) becomes, in the Prologue, a means of distinguishing this adamantly *English* play from French works; the drama includes "not one single Tittle from Moliere" (vii).

Throughout the play, the particular air of a person indicates his national affiliation, though as Fainwell's ever-shifting character makes clear, this particular ambiance about a person is quite changeable. Philip Modelove, the French enthusiast, is the first guardian whom Fainwell must win over. Modelove sees in the English soldier, disguised in elaborate apparel, an unmistakably French quality:

> Sir Phil. …Pray, Sir, if I may take the Liberty of enquiring,---What Country is so happy to claim the Birth of the finest Gentleman in the Universe? France, I presume.
> Col. Then you don't think me an Englishman?
> Sir Phil. No, upon my Soul, don't I.
> Col. I am sorry for't.
> Sir Phil. Impossible you should wish to be an Englishman!—Pardon me, Sir, this Island could not produce a Person of such Alertness.
> Col. As this Mirror shews you, Sir. (18)

Of course, showing Modelove his own reflection is an ingenious move, which proves the opposite of what Modelove takes as Fainwell's meaning: the mirror actually shows that France cannot produce a man as "alert" as an Englishman, so much so that he utterly lacks self-awareness, both in the sense that he needs an Englishman to hold up a mirror for him and in that he is unaware of being tricked. The mirror taps into larger eighteenth-century concerns over stability of identity; as Lisa Freeman has explained the stage "reflected and capitalized upon, rather than concealed and compensated for, the general 'crisis of character' that was of such widespread concern in eighteenth-century culture."[149] *A Bold Stroke*, if not quite a play about a play, is engrossed by "acting" as a concept. As Freeman goes on to argue, eighteenth-century drama has been largely ignored in discussions of plays about plays because the forms of subjectivity found on the eighteenth-century stage are not available for the kind of scrutiny that theorists typically use to interrogate a society's ontological anxieties.[150] As I argue, however, *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* may be seen as grounding national angst—the question of what constitutes being English—within the individual angst of character.

Modelove repeatedly insists that the finely attired Fainwell is pervaded by an actual atmosphere of Frenchness: he first believes Fainwell is "positively French, by his dancing *Air*" (17, my emphasis) and later tells him, "[y]our Vivacy and jauntée Mien assured me at first Sight there was nothing of this *foggy* Island in your Composition" (19, my emphasis). Fainwell pretends to likewise praise Modelove as clearly a fellow Frenchman: "One may plainly perceive it.—There is a certain Gaiety peculiar to my Nation (for I will own myself a Frenchman) which distinguishes us every where" (18).

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[149] Lisa Freeman, "Plays about Plays," *Character's Theater: Genre and Identity on the Eighteenth-Century English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 47.

[150] Ibid, 48.

The play insists that Englishness is defined by marriage between two English subjects, and in the purity of English laws and ladies.[151] Modelove may be more of an English pretender than a true Frenchman; Modelove admits to Fainwell, whom he takes as a legitimate Frenchman, that he is of French extraction because his father was French. In other words, Modelove is a leaking of French influence into the English composition of the nation. Modelove may be just one of many who contribute to such dilution; in speaking of Fainwell's alias, Modelove explains: "The *La Fainwells* are *French*, I know; tho' the Name is become very numerous in *Great-Britain* of late years" (19). Nor does Modelove believe in marriage, explaining that he "won't affront a million of fine Women to make one happy" (20). Fainwell, meanwhile, nearly betraying his disguise, jumps to defend England and its women. While on one hand, his Englishness appears to give him the strength and flexibility to impersonate, on the other, nationhood acts as limitation upon how far one will go when acting:

> Phil. I was sure you was *French* the Moment I laid my Eyes upon you: I could not come into the Supposition of your being an *Englishman*: This Island produces few such Ornaments.
> Col. Pardon me, Sir *Philip*, this Island has two Things superior to all Nations under the Sun.
> Sir Phil. Ah! what are they?
> Col. The Ladies, and the Laws. (19)

However, the English/French divide is not so straightforward as one might suppose, and perhaps this is part of the play's anxieties along with Fainwell's easy impersonation of the enemies of English culture. Both Anne and Fainwell use the language of the French to describe their romantic situation. Anne explains that "[t]here's something so Janteé in a Soldier, a Kind of *Je ne sçai [sic] quoi* Air, that makes them more agreeable than the rest of Mankind" (16), while Fainwell sees his future victory in a particularly Francophone light: "Now if I should cheat all these Roguish Guardians, and carry off my Mistress in Triumph, it would be what the *French* call a *Grand Coup d'Eclat*" (29). Perhaps Anne's quip especially points to the problems in isolating or translating Englishness; no English word can quite substitute for "Je ne sais quoi" nor can she quite pinpoint the indefinable quality which is the "something so Janteé" in English soldiers. Despite Fainwell's success in acting as though he belongs to the groups of each of the anti-English guardians, the plot removes all nervousness about nationhood and of marriage when Fainwell stably inhabits his English self at the conclusion:

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[151] See Margo Collins, "Centlivre v Hardwicke: Susannah Centlivre's Plays and the Marriage Act of 1753" *Comparative Drama*, Summer 1999, 33.2 for a discussion about the renewed popularity of *A Bold Stroke* for a latter eighteenth-century audience. Collins sees this as related to new concerns over establishing the legality of marriage as brought about by the Marriage Act of 1753.

> I have as much Aversion to what he [Philip Modelove, the Frenchman] calls Dress and Breeding, as I have to the Enemies of my Religion [such as the hypocritical Quaker]. I have had the Honour to serve his Majesty, and headed a Regiment of the bravest Fellows that ever push'd Bayonet in the Throat of a *Frenchman*; and notwithstanding the Fortune this Lady brings me, whenever my Country wants my Aid, this Sword and Arm are at her Service. (71)

Acting by the Fainwell serves to reveal how untrue each of his enemies is—each is easily duplicated. Affiliation with one's nation is obstinately and ultimately not "acting" but sincerity. Frost, in her parlour play written more than a century and a half later, does not quite take this approach.

In Sarah Annie Frost's 1868 "Wooing Under Difficulties," a revision of Centlivre's play from her collection *Amateur Theatricals and Fairy Tale Dramas*, the male protagonists are members of the United States Army—respectively, the wounded hero Capt. Henry Beales, Lieutenant Everett Hartley, and veteran soldier of 1812, Colonel Carleon—who do battle against "*a miser,"* "*a lady of fashion*," and "*an old maid*" in order to help Capt. Beales win the hand of Nellie Hartley, the Lieutenant's sister. The most major character changes from Centlivre's work are that Frost diffuses the camaraderie of the nation's military throughout the characters rather than spotlighting the lone hero-soldier of Fainwell, who frankly talks more of his trips to Bath than of actual battles. In fact, Frost replaces all of the formerly mercantile-based characters with soldiers. Instead of Centlivre's merchant Freeman as sidekick to the hero, Captain Beales is aided in his "battle" to win Nell by fellow soldier Lieutenant Hartley—also Nell's brother, as if to emphasis the familial aspect of the nation. Tradelove, the only business-based guardian of Centlivre's play, is the only guardian Frost replaces fully in both idea and being. The Lieutenant describes this last guardian to Nell's lover:

> Lieut. H. A man after my own heart. A veteran of 1812. Need I say more?
>
> Capt. B. You give me new life! After such formidable obstacles as the maiden aunt, and miser, to hear of *this* guardian lifts a heavy load from my heart. (60)

Frost slightly simplifies her plot for the home drama by eliminating the need for a fourth strategy to win over this last guardian. However, this alteration simultaneously cements the military's centrality to the narrative. The play itself is set in 1847, a conspicuous choice by Frost since it places the plot before the Civil War which had ended only a few years before her 1868 volume. Additionally, the reference to the War of 1812—sometimes called the Second War of Independence—would have brought back for Frost's audience a time when the United States' enemy was Britain and the national focus was on a unified identity rather than internal divisions. Making the fourth guardian a veteran of 1812 would inevitably conjure up the benevolent post-war period, called "The Era of Good Feelings," celebrated as a time in which bipartisan divisions were all but erased. Perhaps Frost saw her own theatrical writing as contributing to another unifying calm after the storm of her own generation's war.

Frost's adaptation of *A Bold Stroke for a Wife* is a natural choice for two main reasons: the original work's politics are readily appropriated for her own purposes, and Centlivre's drama is intensely interested in characters disguising themselves. A character taking on additional personas in order to meet a particular end is a trademark of both comedy at large and Frost's home drama scripts in particular. In Centlivre, the purity of nation is preserved by the soldier, without much help from Anne, who when onstage, mostly interacts with the Quaker's wife and fights or cries over accusations about the respectability of her dress. In Frost, the heroine is, like the soldier hero, able to impersonate to help win her desired match. The heroine's relative involvement in her own "rescue" may be seen as a difference from the agency of women writers from a century earlier; Freeman has noted that even Centlivre,

> one of the most successful playwrights period in her time, felt constrained in many of the direct addresses associated with her dramatic texts either to mount her own argument for her sex or to sanction such declarations by those who authored some of the prologues and epilogues to her plays.[152]

Instead, Centlivre's prologues reveal how female dramatists "staged their own authority by taking advantage of … an antipathy to foreign entertainments and persons." Perhaps one can see Frost's use of American sentiment in her play as operating in a similar method, to give her own voice authority—or, by first thoroughly soaking her play in patriotism, she is able to slip in more progressive moments for female characters. Within Frost's "Wooing Under Difficulties" though, the heroine is not just "Lovely" but also able to "Feign well."

In other respects, Frost's plot expands upon the suggestion of military heroism in Centlivre's. The male protagonists are authentically and precisely dressed, in a manner reminiscent of Leutze's insistence on Washington's replica uniform: stage directions call for, amongst other things, the "*[f]ull dress uniform of a Captain in the U.S. Infantry*," "*Lieutenant's uniform of U.S. Infantry,*" "*[f]ull dress Colonel's uniform, of the year* 1812" as well as elaborate plain clothes costumes for other scenes, including useful disguises for their characters, and four specific and detailed costume changes for the heroine Nell.[153] Frost clearly assumes that a household would possess (or rent, borrow, or sew) these uniforms; perhaps used within a theatrical exercise, the real uniforms form new memories on top of more solemn remembrances, enabling a happier revisiting of war. The familiar marriage plot theme is figured in terms of war-like language—as Captain Beales exclaims, of his previous battle injury, "[t]hat wound is healed, but ah! there is another, since inflicted, deeper, and I fear incurable!" (56). Similarly, in Centlivre's opening scene, the hero Colonel Fainwell discusses the unquenchable wounds of love (received during a recent stay at Bath) with his merchant friend Freeman; Freeman's reply similarly frames a battle against a woman as a comically animalistic one: "Women, like some poisonous Animals, carry their Antidote about 'em—Is she not to be had, Colonel?" (9). Frost, like Centlivre, enjoys the eloquent "turn of phrase" though her language appears to combine the militaristic with the mythic. Just as in the original plot, the requirements of the heroine's father's "unjust and imperative will, gives each of her guardians absolute power during three months of the year" (59), but the renaming of the heroine as Helen, now not of Troy but of America, would seem to reinforce the already latent mythic tendencies of plot.

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[152] Freeman, 73.

Just as does Frost's "Washington" tableau, "Wooing Under Difficulties" works to elevate the role of women in nation-building. Within the narrative are indications that Frost paid close attention to her "translation" of the Centlivre plot; she tries to stay true to the story in smaller aspects when possible. For instance, in both plays, the heroine has two names: in Centlivre, she is called mostly Anne but sometimes Nancy, while in Frost, she is called Helen but also Nellie. In Centlivre's play, Fainwell tries to slip Anne a note but it slips to the floor and Obadiah Prim grabs it. Anne then, in perhaps her most vigorous move, grabs it from the Quaker and tears it into pieces. In Frost's play, Captain Beales successfully passes this note to Nellie. The alignment of the plots on smaller matters highlights the altered aspects of Frost's drama, many of which place women in more central roles. One of her greatest changes in adaptation, as I have mentioned, is that Nellie acts not passively as Anne does, but energetically within the plot to win over her guardians. The other greatest change with regard to women characters is that two of the three guardians who require handling are women, both of whom may be "conquered" by acquiescing to the stereotypical feminine vice of vanity. These older female guardians, who quite literally represent impediments to a successful marriage, are symbolically juxtaposed with or replaced by the more strategic—though still marriage-seeking—Nellie. Frost's play moves through situations with all four guardians, from vain Aunt Margaret to miser John Hosmer to old maid Rebecca Singleton to veteran Colonel Carleon, and thus alternates between female and male guardians. The theatrical appears in this regard to require equal effort towards satisfying both sexes so that the concluding marriage and national celebration may occur.

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[153] This abundance of costume changes is unusual among parlour plays, though fairly often costumes are suggested with some specificity.

Female roles are highlighted in the female guardians, who are not exactly malicious antagonists, but are used to critique old-fashioned feminine values, whether they acquiesce to or stand against them. In "Wooing Under Difficulties," Periwinkle the virtuoso is replaced by Aunt Margaret, who is described by the Lieutenant to Captain Beales as:

> a woman of frivolity and fashion. Up all night, at a ball or a concert, to sleep till noon, drive or pay calls till dinner, to again dance the night away. To please her you must pay your court to pleasure, air your newest uniform, don your courtliest graces, practise your ball-room steps and bows, and fan her vanity with your most winning compliments. (59)

Captain Beales initially has great success with his tactics of flattery, which include indulging Aunt Margaret's propensity to denigrate the portraits of other women which surround her own at a nearby gallery:

> Mrs. H. And that forward chit—Miss Simmons—with a pink muslin dress and red ribbons—
>
> Capt. B. Faugh! She must look like the measles!

However, when Capt. B. gets Mrs. H. away from Lieutenant and Nell and flatters her, she actually worries that the captain is in love with her, a situation which "will never do!" (62). As she exclaims in an aside to herself, once she realizes she is the subject of the Captain's (false) flattery: "No, no, matrimony once sufficeth for me. My last husband was a tyrant and I enjoy my regained liberty too much to give the power to rule into other hands" (62). She decides to manipulate the situation by taking on the more traditionally masculine role in "selling" her niece on the marriage market—though she does play directly into their hands—while the Captain more femininely acts here:

> Capt. B. (*Aside.*) I'll play coy. (*Aloud.*) Your niece—I—do—not—see—how.
>
> Mrs. H. Nay, my dear friend, let us be frank. I have no fancy for a second husband; yet, I own I like you well—would willingly have you for a relative, so if you like my niece, there—. (62)

Other critics have commented that Centlivre's play is a nearly perfect description of what Eve Sedgwick's *Between Men* defines as marriage, as primarily an exchange of a woman between two men. Mrs. Hartley perhaps emphasizes the homosocial desire latent in the source play, through her willingness to barter her niece in order to nab her own slice of flirtation, explaining: "I should like to attach him to my train." Finally, her last comment to this potential follower appears to recognize that she has been taken in by his flattery, but that she is perfectly fine with that: “Nay, put on a wooer’s face, and, believe me, *you* can conquer, anywhere” (62); Mrs. Hartley, on some level, is okay with being taken in if it means she is paid extra attention as a result.

Meanwhile, Quaker Obadiah Prim is replaced by miser John Hosmer, who mistreats Nellie and whose consent for her marriage must be bought. In Frost, religion is largely removed from the play; on a macro level, the Quaker as frequent eighteenth-century character is replaced by nineteenth-century miser. Importantly from a gender perspective, John Hosmer, the only male guardian who requires winning over, is also the only truly malevolent character. Hosmer forces Nellie to be an indentured servant of sorts, tabulating his bookkeeping à la Bob Cratchit in order to earn her keep for the three months she is under his care. A sort of rewriting of Scrooge who never repents, Hosmer brutally chastises Nellie for miscalculating her numbers by two cents. His cruelty serves a purpose, because in Frost’s play, if Nellie “leaves the protection of any one of her guardians without the free consent of the same, that guardian is entitled to claim a quarter of her property” (66). While Nell resolves to suffer so that “not one penny of [hers] shall go to swell his hoards” (66), Captain Beales gains Hosmer’s support by offering him “smuggled” (67) diamonds and gold at low cost—and an even greater bargain if the miser also throw in Nellie as a old-fashioned type of wife: “I want a wife—a woman to cook for me—sew and scrub” (68). When the Lieutenant, Nell’s brother, enters and “objects” to his sister being sold in this manner, Nell’s acting ability is put on center stage:

> Nellie: Nay, brother, no violence! (*Looking contemptuously at* Capt. B.) There is no fear of my marrying this man.
> Lieut. H. (*Aside.*) How well she feigns.
> Capt. B. (*Fawningly to* Nellie.) Nay, pretty one, why so coy. Let me prison this lily white hand. (*Takes her hand, and slips a note into it*.)
> Nellie. Unhand me, sir! (*Secrets the note*.)
> Capt. B. All women play the coquette. (68)

Captain Beales's comments that "[a]ll women play the coquette" simultaneously points to Nellie's particular acting while making her act a part of the stereotypical coquetting of women. However, while Captain and Lieutenant may frequently act, Frost never directs any particular attention to their prowess in this art of feigning.

In a third transformation of Centlivre's characters, the old beau Philip Modelove is supplanted by Rebecca Singleton, the well-recognizable spinster type, initially described by the Lieutenant as:

> An old maid sister of my mother's, who hates my sister for each beauty, grudges her every charm, is envious of her youth, and would wither her if she could. Having been a flirt in her youth, she is a prude now, rails against men and matrimony, and would shut Nellie up in a box before she would see her married, while her own matured charms bloom unheeded. To win her, you must provide her with a husband, for she will never consent to have Nell married first. She pretends scorn of all mankind—an aversion to the married state—but, sour grapes—you understand? (59-60)

When Nellie stays with Rebecca Singleton, she is forced to wear a dress not befitting a woman of her age; while Captain Beales quite likes this "costume," Nellie refuses to quite succumb to his fawning and calls him out for his blatant flattery:

> SCENE III. *–A parlor handsomely furnished.*
> *Curtain rises, discovering Nellie seated upon a sofa, knitting;* CAPT. BEALES *on a low stool at her feet, playing with her ball of worsted.*
> NELLIE. Have done sir, you will ruin my work.
> CAPT. B. Coquette! Do you know how snowy white those taper fingers look, against the scarlet wool?
> NELLIE. Can't you find anything more original than that to say?
> CAPT. B. What greater happiness can a lover desire than to sing the praises of his lady. How *piquant* and saucy you look in that dress, Nell.
> NELLIE. Nonsense! This is one of my aunt's freaks. She is afraid her charms will appear more mature than ever, if I am to wear the dress suited to my years.
> CAPT. B. A reverend sum
> NELLIE. Eighteen, sir—and so, to make me appear more juvenile, she insists upon my wearing this absurd costume, during my visit here. It is all quite suitable for a child of six summers.

> CAPT. B. I cannot quarrel with what is so becoming.
> NELLIE. Flattery is as natural to you as breathing. (69-70)

This interchange, at least, would appear to make men the true coquettes, especially considering that Captain Beales is able to pursue Nellie unhampered mostly because the Lieutenant has been pretending rather than really courting Miss Singleton. Nellie description of her aunt's drastic personality change now that Aunt Rebecca is the object of attention almost makes her the object of sympathy: "[h]aving lived so long unsought, her head is fairly turned by the Count's flattery and attention… charms her out of her frigidity into coquetry. Her hauteur is turned into smiling graciousness; her reserve into confidence; her malice into kindness; her sarcasm into flattery" (70). Frost implies the spinster stereotype is cold through no true fault of her own, and may be made amiable through just a little attention and (even just the appearance of) love. The Lieutenant quite comically if relentlessly pursues Miss Singleton, though Nellie becomes the real star of the show when she not-so-naivëly interrupts her aunt's tête-à-têtes with the Lieutenant:

> LIEUT. You pale the rose in your hand, when you press it against that glowing cheek. Ah, let me rob you of the sweet blossom which has pressed your lips.
> MISS SINGLETON. (*Coquettishly, holding the flower back.*) How, would you turn thief?
> NELLIE. My dear Aunt!
> LIEUT. H. (*Springing up.*) Confusion!
> NELLIE. Did you knit four rows here or five?
> LIEUT. H. That confounded girl is always in the way.
> MISS S. (*Pettishly.*) I have forgotten the pattern. (71)

Nellie is ushered away, but only moments later, just as the Lieutenant prostrates himself to declare his love, she reenters singing:

> "Oh, 'tis love, 'tis love, 'tis love,
> That keeps the earth in motion!
> Oh, 'tis love, 'tis love, 'tis love,
> That makes the world go round!" (72)

Then pardoning herself, she rather triumphantly "*[c]rosses the room*" to exit. Becoming ever more "daring," the Lieutenant calls Miss Singleton by her first name—"Ah, Rebecca—pardon! I am too bold"—and clasps her around the waist, all the while wondering "[w]here the deuce is Nell?" As Miss Singleton falls "*[s]inking into his embrace*" (72), Nell again runs in yelling that "all the violets have been rooted up by the pigs!" Nell leaves, the Lieutenant picks up where he has left off, only to have Nell rush back to ask "Auntie, shall I set the dog on those pigs?" The actress who plays Nellie gains a unique territorial control, not only within the play over her guardian, but also over the space of performance itself through her persistent entrances, exits, and movements. The Lieutenant very convincingly argues that giving the Captain permission to marry Nellie would allow him to pursue his beloved Rebecca unheeded; Auntie then proceeds to give her blessing to Nell's marriage to Captain Beales. In *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, the four guardians have no idea that anyone else has consented to the heroine's marriage until the conclusion, but here Rebecca Singleton gives her permission with full knowledge that only Colonel Carleon remains to be conquered—to some extent making her a helpful accomplice.

The scene with the last guardian—different from any of the guardian scenes in either play—reabsorbs the drama into a new world, where the real historical past of the American nation is relived. Both the Captain and the Colonel star in detailed pre-cinematic monologues in which their starring battle scenes—taken from real U.S. battles—are recounted. For Frost's audience, this shift within the play further blurs the lines between the dramatic and the real, while using the play to cope with the recent effects of the Civil War. In the Captain's case, the Lieutenant acts as champion on his behalf, and argues the Captain's military prowess makes him a man worthy to be Nellie's husband. Talking with the Colonel, the Lieutenant emphasizes this suitor is "a brave soldier to boot! … at home now, recovering from a wound received in April at

Cerro Gordo, a month before I was sent home with dispatches" (76-77). The Colonel inquires as to where the Captain was wounded, as though the depth and placement of the wound reveals something about his character; the Lieutenant returns that it was "in the breast" and "won gallantly" during "hours of hot fighting" of "six thousand men against fifteen thousand" (77). The Lieutenant then launches into one of the two lengthiest monologues in the drama, a solemn speech in which Captain Beales emerges as a hero—in a now almost classical American recounting of a battle scene. It is no coincidence that the following scene could just as well be describing Mel Gibson's scene in the 2000 film *The Patriot*:

> Captain Beales was everywhere… cheering forward the men, and fighting with coolness and courage. Three times the color bearer fell. As the third victim reeled back in death's grasp, Beales, springing forward, caught the flag from his stiffening fingers, and, waving it high above his head, dashed to the front and scaled the hill before us; a moment later, while the men followed him in hot, eager haste, he stood erect on the breastwork, the flag firmly planted beside him. On swept the columns of men, pouring into the entrenchments from all points—the enemy wavered, broke and retreated, but while still the gallant officer held his post, the dear old flag in his hand, one of the retreating Mexicans turned and fired upon the conspicuous figure. He fell, but another officer caught the tottering staff. (77).

The centrality of the flag image within this story resembles that in the mythic portrayal of Washington in his portrait while crossing the Delaware. Likewise, the larger battle in which this scene is set, that of Cerro Gordo, has a mythic cast within American history: Cerro Gordo, a real battle in which the outnumbered Americans drove back the Mexican army, was remembered as "the Battle of Thermopylae of the West" for the resemblance between American strategy and the Greek's tactics against the Persians. The Colonel's response to the Lieutenant's hero narrative reflects a similar militaristic enthusiasm while sidestepping mention of his ward: "How the old martial fever dances in my veins! This gallant soldier shall meet no grudging welcome here" (77). His first words to the Captain reflect their shared citizenship more than an interest in Nellie: "[w]e need no formal introduction, when we wear the same honorable dress, fight under the same glorious old flag" (78). Frost's concentration on the U.S. flag draws attention to the timing of her play—because during the Civil War, Americans were not fighting under the same flag—especially as her play hints that its 1847 characters will face greater conflict in the not so distant future: the Colonel tells both of the younger men that "[a]h, you boys are but beginning the struggle of life—a soldier's career lies glittering before you" (78), just as is generally implied by both of Frost's patriotic tableaux. One's life should always reflect glory back to the flag:

> take an old man's advice—so live in your exposed life that if death meets you on the field the world may honor your cause the more for your sakes—or, if the sword and bullet spare you, lay up for the future such memories that when age dims your eyes and bends your stalwart frames, you may turn up your dying glance to the dear banner of your country, proud to know that you have never disgraced its folds. (78)

Colonel Carleon's speech similarly neglects the surrounding narrative of the Centlivre plot to reabsorb the actor and spectator in a real military past:

> I was a youngster when I won my straps—full of fire and patriotic zeal. I commanded a company when Jackson repelled the British from New Orleans. Well do I remember that eventful day. We were entrenched behind barricades of cotton bales, in one line, a thousand yards from end to end. Steadily presenting an unbroken front, the columns of scarlet coats advanced upon us. Not an order, not a whisper broke the dead silence of our line as we waited for the word to fire. My heart beat almost to suffocation as I watched the advancing columns, heard the tramp of thousands of feet approaching us—saw the long line of glittering bayonets shining with deadly brightness. Suddenly the order rang out on the air. Every gun was in position—rapidly the words followed, till "Fire!" rang out—echoed by every officer from end to end—the foe fell like grain before the sickle. (*Rising*.) Again and again the deadly hail swept the advancing columns—till, with broken disordered ranks, they turned and fled! Cheer after cheer broke from every lip, as our brave boys sprang to the top of their barricades—the old flag floated out on the breeze exultant (*excitedly*) with scarcely a man less—for, on that memorable day, but seven Americans fell—we saw the field strewed with our dead and dying foes—(*Sinking back exhausted*.) Everett—your hand—I—faint—air— (79)

Here, the fainting and gasping acts again as a type of climax. Both the Lieutenant's speech about the Captain's glories and the Colonel's remembrances of his own destabilize the surrounding dramatic narrative; functioning like messenger's speeches in classical drama, both men's monologues interrupt the Nellie plot. William Gruber has argued that retrospective narration in drama, rather than being less "real" than staged violence, is often more useful in activating the "mechanisms of visual perception and the visual imagination."[154] While an entire battle cannot be reasonably staged within the confines of a parlour, Gruber's points about the impact of narrated violence would hold especially true for Frost's war-scarred audience, making their mental drawing of the scene a sort of vivid reliving of trauma, perhaps a way of coping with the past. These moments also work oddly similar to the reading rather than acting of Frost's collection of tableaux. Gruber argues that narration is not the laziness of avoiding staged action but may be used to more powerful effect—as proved by its use in modern cinema where believability of images is now almost no factor. For instance, Gruber explains, in a scene in the film *Jaws*: an old sailor's tale of a shark attack proves more frightening than any flashback scene: he tells of a shark's "black eyes, like a doll's eyes," and a victim who "[b]obbed up and down in the water, just like a kinda top"—while the audience may never have seen a shark actually attack, the specific well-known details of the dark doll's eyes and the bobbing top aid a mental reconstruction of "what might be called the felt experience of seeing a shark attack" (21). This more participatory scene of violence would have been especially moving for the spectators of "Wooing Under Difficulties," though in a manner which might first appear to abandon the women of the narrative.

However, while men temporarily becomes the sole dealers in nationhood, the Colonel's near fainting when telling his tale imparts a femininity to his feeling for his country. This "authorization" of traditionally non-masculine emotions as those belonging to true soldiers is affirmed by the subsequent speech of both the Lieutenant and the Captain. When the Colonel recovers from nearly fainting, he insists that the other men not call for Nellie as:

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[154] William Gruber, *Offstage Space, Narrative, and the Theatre of the Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

> COL. ‘twill only alarm her for nothing. (*Smiling*.) I am quite well again. Fie! you soldiers, and look alarmed?
> LIEUT. H. Truly, yes, sir—and not ashamed to own to fear.
> CAPT. B. (*Drawing a long breath*) And relief when the scare is over. (79)

At this pause in which the domestic (fainting, relief at a loved one’s recovery) is subsumed into the militaristic, Nellie enters singing four lines of the Star-Spangled Banner—a song created during the War of 1812—*and* wearing a “dress [which, she explains] was made for [Colonel Carleon’s] special delight—the army blue and tricolor decorations” (80). However, not willing to be the only admirer of Nellie, the Colonel suggests that Nell is quite aware that someone else would equally enjoy “the effect of army blue and black eyes, scarlet flowers and jetty locks”—this “patriotic lady” would equally gladden another’s eyes. The persistent attention to the flag appears to be refocused; as Nellie is literally wrapped in a flag, the woman replaces the symbol of the nation from the battlefield. Winning Nellie becomes winning the flag; the romance is described in terms of a conflict:

> COL. C. Everett has told me that Dan Cupid, in the guise of a handsome Captain of infantry, has been besieging your heart—
> NELLIE. (*Blushing.*) And carried it by storm!
> CAPT. B. (*Advancing.*) Lay down your arms then, and surrender.
> NELLIE. (*Rising*.) Eaves-dropping! Oh, that I had known it! I would have fired such a volley of sarcasm and plain speaking into that corner, that you would have verified the old proverb about eaves-droppers. (80)

Nellie, not to be taken like Anne Lovely, does not submissively take the news that all parties present are aware where her affections rest. However, just as her impending marriage is set, Nellie is the messenger who combines this news with a triumph from the field:

> NELLIE. But have you heard the news?
> ALL. What news?
> NELLIE. The fall of Puebla! (81)

Amid exclamations of "the old flag forever!" and "dear old flag!," the flag is brought to the front of the stage, all three characters together sing the national anthem with several additional refrains of the Star Spangled Banner—presumably the audience would join in to sing along with the actors, or perhaps be ushered to stand by the cast. The play ends in tableau, of which the flag is the centerpiece—rather than a clear joining of Nellie to the Captain, the whole group is framed by the nation:

> COL. C., *kneeling on one knee, raises the folds of the flag to his lips.* NELLIE *stands erect, holding up the flag up with one hand*. CAPT. B. *and LIEUT. H.* at each side, hold up a drawn sword.
>
> CURTAIN FALLS. (82)

The Siege of Puebla, in 1862, was the final substantial threat to American forces stationed throughout central Mexico. Frost's narrative thus moves through recent American battle history, from 1812 through present-day engagements, while following Centlivre's plotline. However, Frost brings nationalism to the forefront through the use of her army heroes from recent history, and gives the feminine a more hearty role in the nation, by highlighting the feminine qualities within true heroism, and vivifying the flag through her heroine.

From The Padlock *to* "Bolts and Bars"

In Frost's volume, immediately following "Wooing Under Difficulties" is her second rewriting of an eighteenth-century drama, an adaptation of Isaac Bickerstaff and Charles Dibdin's comic two-act operatic afterpiece *The Padlock* titled "Bolts and Bars."[155] Like "Wooing," this parlour theatrical inserts U.S. army officers into heroic roles within the marriage plot, though, lacking in descriptive battle scene monologues, the play appears at first to only subtly reflect post-Civil War politics. Nonetheless, Frost's choice to adapt *The Padlock* is a political one in the first place. Today *The Padlock* is best remembered for the character of Mungo, one of the first examples of blackface, but even the nineteenth-century British and American cultural imagination would have recognized Mungo as a significant character, especially as made famous by black actor Ira Aldridge. Aldridge, an American who found more success touring widely in Britain, included portrayals of Mungo in his repertoire alongside representations of more involved characters such as Othello in order to demonstrate his range. *The Padlock*'s Mungo largely represents a stereotype of black characters, similar to that of nineteenth-century stage Irishmen—he is often drunk and characterized by an "authentic" accent—though in Bickerstaff/Dibdin's play Mungo is not without intelligence and sometimes defends himself in monologue from his master's treatment. Frances Botkin has argued that as "[a] black actor of indeterminate origin who played a variety of roles—black and white, comedic and tragic—Aldridge embodies the possibilities for challenging racial stereotypes" and that "[i]n both white and black roles, Aldridge reorganized the priorities of transatlantic performance culture." [156] On both sides of the Atlantic then, nineteenth-century stagings of race could be a means of reinforcing or renegotiating accepted ideas of race.

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[155] Bickerstaff wrote the text, while Dibdin composed the music and played the role of "Mungo" in the first productions.

Evidence suggests the home theatre was not without its own attempts to stage race. Bernth Lindfors, who has written extensively and beautifully on Aldridge's life, argues that Charles Dickens' own private theatricals may have drawn on Aldridge for inspiration. More specifically, Dickens' family may have staged a "musical pastiche called *O'Thello*" (13) written by Dickens sometime in 1833 or 1834. As Lindfors argues, "the phenomenon of a black actor [Aldridge] playing Othello at Covent Garden in April 1833 would not have escaped young

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156. Frances R. Botkin, "Being Jack Mansong: Ira Aldridge and the History of Three-Fingered Jack," in *Race, Romanticism, and the Atlantic*. Ed. Paul Youngquist. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013), 149, 151.

Dickens' attention" (14), especially with, first, the preceding press controversy over whether a black actor could take a role at a patent theatre, and, second, the by now entrenched portrayal of black theatrical incompetence.[157] "*Othello the Moor of Fleet Street* [was] put on at the Adelphi just a few months before Aldridge went on stage at Covent Garden" (16). Lindfors additionally notes that in 1833-1834, Dickens wrote the short story "Mrs Joseph Porter 'Over the Way'" which "appears to be […] a zany burlesque of his own efforts to stage and star in a private theatrical based on *Othello*" (16). Lastly, the apostrophe added in Dickens title may indicate, as Charles Haywood argues, that the Irish were the subject of the play's satire, though Lindfors suggests it may have also been a way of Africanizing the pronunciation. As the Irish were often depicted as darkly-skinned, both meanings—a sort of double-entendre of black Irishness—could also have been a possibility. Although what remains of the playtext cannot confirm these speculations, it appears that, at least in Dickens'case, Aldridge's vast influence made its way into the private theatre. Conversely, in the case of "Bolts and Bars," Frost adds to the reception of Mungo by leaving his character out entirely.

Cutting a portrayal of Mungo from a home theatrical can be read as both a political action and as a practical one; somehow blackface in the home theatre feels almost impossible, especially in the United States. The unlikelihood of a successful post-Civil War home play starring a newly free black American as a slave is perhaps an extreme understatement. Blackface, more traditionally the realm of male than female actors, seems at odds with the home theatre's position on gender and its greater number of female characters, though the parlour play was not entirely free of racist tendencies. In American home theatricals, the lone racist staging of a black character which I have found is in American playwright Emma E. Brewster's 1880 "Eliza's Bona-fide Offer" where at a boarding school, one of three obnoxiously-depicted girls has kept up a correspondence with a man whom she believes to be a dark-eyed perfect brunette. Eliza is about to exchange photos with her lover, from whom she expects an offer any day. However, with the last flowery letter comes a photo of the black gardener of the school, who the girls recognize as "our black Sam!" (184). Eliza, fooled by an unknown trickster, now runs offstage. The curtain closes with the most intolerable of the girls holding up the photo for the audience with a racist remark. Of course, significantly only Sam's picture—rather than the gardener himself—appears. For the most part, black identity is almost never staged in the private theatre.

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[157] In fact, one of Dickens' idols, Charles Matthews who along with Frederick Yates co-owned *The Adelphi*, had been staging a "series of comedies and skits lampooning a blundering black Shakespearean" (Lindfors 16). Matthews' popular "African Tragedian" in *A Trip to America* from nearly a decade earlier transformed, as Lindfors explains, from "stereotype into a veritable archetype of racial inferiority."

However, blackface in home theatre may have been more accessible at least in Britain in the earlier decades of the nineteenth-century. In my introductory chapter, I described an 1838 account of "Family Dramaticals" in *Bentley's Miscellany*, energetically narrated by a supposed former professional actor who wanders into his neighbor Stickleback's private theatricals. The narrator exaggerates his account at the expense of the amateur players (which he makes clear are led by the mother of the household, without patriarchal approval). However, he does take a disdainful view of his youthful neighbor's enthusiasm for impersonating black performers:

> After this, which was about half-past eleven o'clock, one of the younger fry of the Sticklebacks, who was considered to be endowed with no little portion of the *vis comica*, came forward in the habit of a worn-out scarecrow, having his face duly varnished with Brunswick black, to charm the audience with the tasteful melody of "Jim Crow." The next entertainment was to have been Madame Vestris's Savoyard song, by *Cora*, for which purpose a *real* hussar-dressed monkey had been hired from a *real* Savoyard, and securely tied to a chair in the green-room. About the middle of the *second encore* of the previous elegant melody of "Jim Crow," however, a loud and hasty knock was heard, at which the performers, who knew that they were acting without the paternal license, turned pale under their

> paint, most of the audience fell into consternation, and the hostess started up, exclaiming, "My stars alive! if there arn't Mr. Stickleback, after all!"[158]

The author at least appears critical of the taste level of the Sticklebacks, if generally against the lack of men or professionalism in their productions.

Near the time of the American Civil War, the only instance of blackface in home theatre I found was in a British volume. Henry J. Byron's *Sensation Dramas for the Back Drawing Room* includes plays which pun at the expense of the Scottish, Irish, Welsh, Indians, Native Americans, the English military and just about every other imaginable group, including black Americans. Most of the short plays mocking other races are more ridiculous or over-the-top than offensive, often playing with melodramatic and gothic clichés such as discovering unknown relatives and inundating the unsuspecting audience with clever rhymes and unexpected bursts of song. However, the theatrical on black Tennessee slaves, "The White Rose of the Plantation; or Luby Rosa, Sambo Don't Come" includes offensive stereotypical characters and opens with the narratorial voice mocking the American slaves described:

> *SCENE.—A Cotton Field, in which several* NEGROS *are picking the plant.* OVERSEERS *with whips are looking on; and in the back distance is distinctly observable, lending an enchantment to the view without interest. Two* OCTOROONS *and one* MACCAROON *are down in front, and one old* NEGRO *with a hump is up in the back.* (95)

The play does make a heroine out of Rosa, who sings of how she first met her love Lorrimor, who has not yet married her—"But as there was no church, / He left me in the lurch, / And marry me of course why he could not, not, not" (97)—and now she has been sold miles away. Rosa, however, as a "white rose" is presumably a heroine because she is much lighter skinned than her fellow slaves. Within the play, Rosa is confronted by the comically named Growls, the overseer of the plantation. Growls, in a manner indicative of Byron's comedy, rather pathetically weeps to Rosa of his past sins before proposing marriage to her.

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[158] The Author of "Tales of an Antiquary," *Family Dramaticals*, Bentley's Miscellany, 3 (1838), 89

> GROWLS. […] I was scarcely four when I killed my father, in a mortal struggle, and he was soon followed by my mother, who crossed my path and shared his fate. I had a brother—a little chubby boy—all innocence, frill and freckles—ask me not what became of him, 'cos I don't know. He was took away—far away, and I, *I* was left along with my own dark thoughts, a small looking-glass, and my own 'orrid reflections. Rosa, my 'art is full and my 'ome is empty. Be my bride. (97)

Growls is alternately either pitiful or mean, while Rosa alternately either conforms to stereotypical feminine behavior or stands up for herself. In this manner, the play fluctuates between a wholly melodramatic mode and one more sympathetic to the plight of this female slave. For instance, take the following exchange, in which Rosa refutes Growls' evidence that he was kind to her:

> GROWLS. Remember how kind I have been to you, how I have winked at your being late in the field, and how when a remorseless master has compelled me to administer chastisement to you I have dispersed the blows as much as possible over your beautiful black—I mean back. It always went against me to do it.
>
> ROSA. I beg your pardon, it went against *me.*
>
> GROWLS. Girl, your replies madden me. You must and shall be mine.
>
> *Duet.*
>
> Lubly Rosa, Sambo scum,
> Isn't fit to wed you——
> ROSA. (*with intelligence above her station*) Tum, tum, tum.
> GROWLS. Say, you'll wed your faithful Growls
> He's got a tea-pot and six tow'ls.
> Oh, Rose, cold black Rose,
> I'm brimful of affection from my topknot to my toes.
>
> ROSA. You plead with an eloquence few women could find it in their hearts to resist, but——. [98]

By the duet, Growls has lapsed back into the speech of comic puns, and Rosa adopts the passive resistance of a dainty heroine. Growl's subsequent speech, a mock version of Marlowes's "A Passionate Shepherd to His Love," pokes fun at the wilderness of America:

> GROWLS. Then away to a happier clime with me, where the boathook grows on the ketchup tree; where the roaring wind on the billowy deep keeps infant kids from their beauty sleep; where the wild bee hums all the newest airs, and the mustard plant grows thick on the stairs; where the possum hops in his light canoe, and the bounding brothers of Cariboo toss cabers high in the blithesome glee; where the oozly bird and the lively flee, the whistling oyster, the golden fleece, the great balloon, and the new police, dance round and round to a Christmas tune, while the street boys bellow out "Yar bar-loon," and the youthful sprigs of the house of Smith are sent with slaps up to bed forthwith, and the maid of Athens entwines her locks with pages torn out of Box and Cox, where all is revelry, all delight—will you come, my Rosa, so right and light; will you come my Rosa, and off we goes—a—if you'll be Growl's *cara sposa.* [98-99]

"The White Rose of the Plantation" is thus equal parts racism and nonsense verse. However, Byron's British nationality and Growls' poetic American allusions to "canoe" and "Cariboo," etc. perhaps indict the American slavery system especially. Though the play ends with the overseer deciding to "starve [him]self into a premature decline" (101), and the heroine Rosa united to her love Lorrimor, in order for their marriage to occur, his blackface must be washed away. A young black slave Cincinnatus comes to Rosa's defense when Growls is about to make off with her. When Growls objects, Cincinnatus calls for, in succession, "a basin of warm water—," then "a piece of soap," and finally "a rough towel" and begins to wash his face, "*looking up at intervals with his face a pale brown*," and then "*with his face a paler brown still*," and until finally he "*looks up clean*" (100). Lorrimor, whose race was never referenced earlier in the play, is revealed to have been Cincinnatus in disguise, and was merely "anxious to see how [Rosa] behaved [her]self in the humble capacity of a cotton picker" (100).

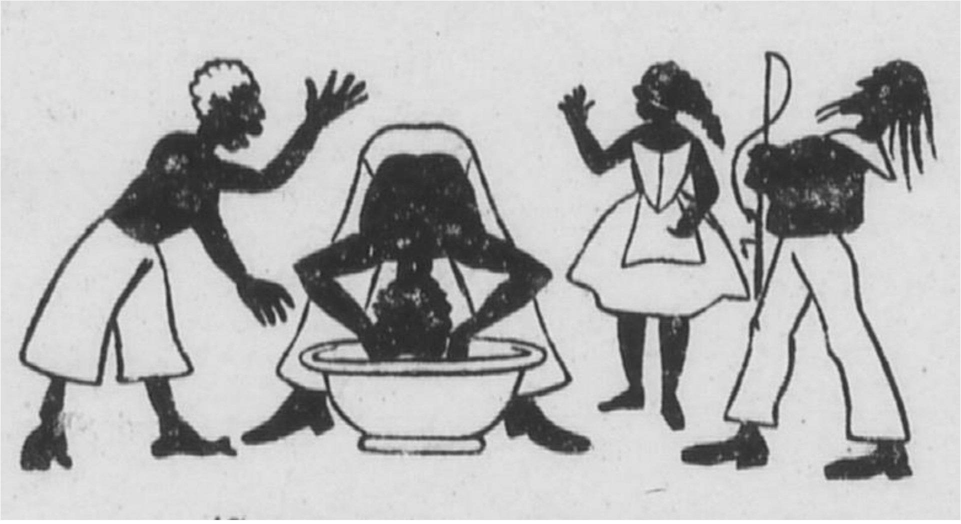

Illustration from "The White Rose of the Plantation" (100). The text never actually indicates that Cincinnatus washes his face, but instead inserts this illustration in the middle of the text just before he "looks up with his face a pale brown."

For Frost, omitting Mungo may also have offered a simpler way of staging the play without engaging racial politics in the aftermath of the Civil War. However, Frost can usually be counted on for attentiveness to her source material—cutting Mungo was certainly not mere playwright's shortcut—and she is always thoughtful about the position of women in her texts. For example, certain key situations in "Bolts and Bars" directly reverse those in Bickerstaff/Dibdin's play—proving she worked closely with *The Padlock*—but additionally her alterations elevate the female characters. These reversed parallels make it easier to read the absent Mungo in the two female characters of "Bolts and Bars." Frost emphasizes that the maiden-heiress Julia and her maid Letty are battling an unjust selling of the former into the marriage market—here, made tantamount to a market of slavery. The vivid physical abuse which Julia suffers under her father has no correlation in the source play except for Mungo's mistreatment. Besides cutting Mungo, Frost's two most drastic changes are elevating the role of the maid Letty to make her a conspirator with and protector of Julia, and making Julia herself undergo an awakening from naiveté and complicity to rebellion over the course of the drama.

Thus respective classes and genders are brought to an equal playing field. Frost makes Letty and Julia a team of womanhood; Letty inspires Julia to recognize the reality of her situation, to "be firm and spunky" (98) and that she has "such a chance to become a heroine [her]self" (94). While this same situation is somewhat implied in *The Padlock*, Ursula's attempts to motivate Leonora towards the more appropriate match are driven more by obtaining a more attractive and younger man than by any notion of justice for her mistress. In "Bolts and Bars," Letty and Julia's bond is the strongest in the play, beyond that of Julia and her true beloved, Captain Moore of the U.S. Army.

The Padlock is an apt choice for Frost to adapt for home theatre. The machinations of the plot depend upon a jealous man and his need to keep his future wife not just from other men, but from spaces beyond the house or room where she is locked. In terms of keeping the wife figure within or without certain spaces, *The Padlock* as home theatrical is in keeping with the genre's larger fixation on space and gender. More specifically, *The Padlock* resembles the Bluebeard tale, also a popular eighteenth-century British play as George Colman the Younger's version, as well as a story commonly adapted for home theatre; both Frost and Florence Bell wrote parlour plays of Bluebeard. The Bluebeard tale similarly centers on a badly matched marriage and spaces where women are not allowed to go.

It is important to remember that Bickerstaff/Dibdin's original play was a comic opera; though I do not intend to undermine the play's stance on gender or race, what might otherwise be a more serious commentary is made more light and humorous when set to music. In *The Padlock*, Don Diego has contracted Leonora from her parents; "she was to live in the house with [him] three months; at the expiration of which time, [he] entered into a bond of four thousand pistols, either to return her to them spotless, with half that sum for a dowry, or to make her [his] true and lawful wife" (2). The figure of Diego, much older than Leonora, harkens back to the ill-matched older male character within Restoration plays who obsessed over preventing his younger, naïve woman from making him a cuckold. Diego, true to his descendency from characters like *The Country Wife*'s Pinchwife, eventually has all preventative measures overridden and his fears proven true. Diego, at the conclusion, appears to accept what he sees as his fate, as an aging man unfit for Leonora, and sends her off with well wishes though he dismisses both of his servants, Ursula and Mungo, the latter with no money whatsoever.

Early on, Bickerstaff/Dibdin's play comically zooms in on spatial concerns, while portioning spaces specific to gender, class, and race. All three characters—Ursula, Mungo, and Leonora—who begin under Diego's command are forced to give over control of where their actual body is allowed to go. Diego's obsessive locking is exhibited when he hands off his extensive set of keys to Ursula, his elderly housekeeper: "There is the key of it; there the key of the best hall; there the key of the door upon the first flight of stairs; there the key of the door upon the second; this double locks the hatch below; and this the door that opens into the entry" (1). In a way, the aging Diego feminizes himself by infringing on his own housekeeper's keys and duties, and shows an inability to allow her actual control of what is supposed to be her domain. Later in the play, Ursula is irked to discover that Diego has installed a padlock on the entire residence to which she does not have the key; this scene is the turning point in her allegiances, from her master to Leander:

> *Leand.* Have you the key of this padlock too, madam? Here's a padlock upon the door, Heaven help us, large enough for a state prison.
> *Urs.* Eh---how---what---a padlock!
> *Mung.* Here it is, I feel it.
> *Urs.* He was afraid to trust me then---
> *Mung.* And if de house was a fire, we none of us get out to save ourselves.

> *Leand.* Well, madam, not to disappoint you and the young Lady, I know the back of your garden wall, and I'll undertake to get up at the outside of it, if you can let me down on the other.
> *Urs.* Do you think you could with your lame leg?
> *Leand.* O yes, madam, I'm very sure.
> *Urs.* Then, by my faith, you shall; for now I am set on't---A padlock! Mungo come with me into the garden. (14)

Leander's disguise as a cripple (like Horner is impotent in *The Country Wife*) endows him with the right amount of mobility at the right times. Mungo is to some extent the odd one out, because the compulsory over-mobility of his position is its own slavery. As he explains in monologue:

> What e'er's to be done,
> Poor black must run;
> Mungo here, Mungo dere,
> Mungo every where;
> Above and below,
> Sirrah come, Sirrah go,
> Do so, and do so.
> Oh! oh!
> Me wish to de Lord me was dead. (11)

According to Jon A. Gillaspie, the phrase "Mungo here, Mungo dere, Mungo ev'ry where" sung by Dibdin as Mungo, "became a popular catchphrase."[159] If Mungo is capable at least of recognizing the wrongness of his situation, the same cannot be said of Leonora. Leonora's current unhappiness is related to a lack of mobility—even if she won't quite say, or can't quite understand how she is unhappy. Compared to Leonora's stereotypical passivity, Ursula appears comparatively energetic, so that one almost wishes she were younger and thus a match for Leander. (On another level, the play is very age-ist, and prevents both Diego and Ursula from triumph because of their lack of youth.) Diego reinforces the spatial depravity of Leonora's previous situation to her, as “a mean little house, ill situated, and worse furnished.” (4). She counters with perhaps her one grasping of argument, that at least there she “could look out at window, or go a walking in the fields,” but by and large, the would-be female protagonist is pitifully lacking in rebelliousness and comically oblivious to her own condition. While Anne Lovely could be counted on to at least tear a letter once in a while, Leonora lacks all self-perception. Her monologue after Diego first leaves her onstage alone, reveals her “true” state of mind is too reliant upon obedient reasoning (“it’s my duty to love him, because we ought not to be ungrateful”) and fear (“I wish I was not to marry him for all that, tho' I am afraid to tell him so”) to redeem her character. When Leonora first appears onstage next to Diego with her own bird on a string, she cannot recognize this mirror of her own situation, almost as Modelove misreads Fainwell’s mirror. In fact, Leonora’s song to the bird places her in the role of her warden Diego, with lines such as:

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[159] "Dibdin, Charles (*bap.* 1745, *d.* 1814)," Jon A. Gillaspie in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eee ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2013, http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.its.virginia.edu/view/article/7585 (accessed December 23, 2013).

> No, no, no
>   Sweet Robin you shall not go:
> Where, you wanton, could you be,
> Half so happy as with me? (4)

As a sort of “last nail in the coffin” of audience aversion for this heroine, Leonora explains to Diego that she does not dislike confinement, and sends him off with a kiss and willing complicity in whatever he decides—“I’ll do whatever you please” (5). The disgust of Leonora’s own foolishness in this May-December match is compounded by Diego’s departure from her with a particularly malevolent sexual glee:

> By some I am told,
> That I'm wrinkled and old;
>   But I will not believe what they say:
> I feel my blood mounting,
> Like streams in a fountain,
>   That merrily sparkle and play.

For love I have will,
And ability still;
  Odsbobs, I can scarcely refrain!
My diamond, my pearl---
Well, be a good girl,
  Until I come to you again. (5)

To complete her comic naïveté, Leonora has no idea of Diego's sexual intentions nor that Leander, the hero figure, believes he has been wooing her at mass each morning. In *The Padlock*, just as in *A Bold Stroke for a Wife*, the hero's success depends upon his ability to disguise himself, though here he has perhaps outdone himself. Despite Leander following his love "to the chapel of a neighbouring convent every morning before it was light […] in the habit of a pilgrim," Leonora has either been too unobservant or rapt in obedient prayers to notice this follower though her admirer clearly believes they have establishes a rapport. As he tells it: " I plant[ed] myself as near her as I could; I then varied my appearance, continuing to do so from time to time, till I was convinced she had sufficiently remarked, and understood my meaning" (7). (Later, even Leander appears to doubt the alertness of his beloved: "Have you not taken notice, beauteous Leonora, of the pilgrim who has so often met you at church? I am that pilgrim; one who would change shapes as often as Proteus, to be bless'd with a sight of you" (15).) The acting of Leander has a sneaky aspect to it, perhaps because slightly predatory but definitely because of its arrogance of success—almost like Rochester's gypsy act in *Jane Eyre.* Leander's other important act during the play is that of a "poor cripple," which he adopts primarily when speaking with Mungo. This act, used to discover Leonora's whereabouts at mass and to ultimately visit her during the play, is arguably more successful than that he adopts next to Leonora's pew (or, perhaps the latter is *too* successful). In Frost's theatrical, however, the only characters who get to act are Letty and Julia.

On some fronts, Bickerstaff/Dibdin's play changes the normative master-slave hierarchy. Leander, the character most allowed to theatrically act, is also as I have suggested the most easily physically mobile; unsurprisingly this unique freedom of physical movement interrupts the traditional social hierarchies of race and gender through acting. Leander disguised as guitar-playing "cripple" tells Mungo that "I'll give *your worship* a song I learn'd in Barbary *when I was a slave* among the Moors (12, emphasis added). Leander's language to Leonora compares his situation, in which she refuses to grant him her love, to her own, being locked away; he is a "captive" to whom "the means of life are den[ied]" because "[s]hut from the sun's enliv'ning beam" (22). However, while Leander is allowed to use the position of a slave to get exactly what he wants, the play fails to grant manhood to Mungo; in this sense, the ability to act can disrupt but ultimately—in this play—not move social boundaries. Towards the play's conclusion, Diego, explaining the failure of his extensive preventative measures towards Leonora's chastity, brushes aside Mungo as neither threat or relation to man: "I banish'd all that had the shadow of man, or male kind; and I stood continually centinel over it myself, to guard my suspicion from surprise" (29). However, Mungo is, significantly, permitted explicit dialogue about the despair of his own situation, where he is "lick[ed] every day with [a] rattan" (10). Despite his situation, within the play he interacts with other characters on an equal level, and is given the same amount of dialogue and delivers the same short individual monologues at the play's conclusion—his on Diego as cuckold. This, combined with Leander's ability to move between classes with acting, along with the original blackface actor's impersonation of another race, suggests—whether the play consciously does so or not—that race and class are flexible constructions.

Although some traditional social structures appear rattled in *The Padlock*, the play is ultimately indecisive on the value of women. While the mechanics of the plot value Leonora only as she is beautiful and worth money as a wife, Ursula's speech about the correlation between one's age and quantity of lovers appears to speak against society's treasuring of youthful women. However, Ursula directs this sentiment more to the women themselves as a warning, rather than suggesting men or society can change:

> When a woman's front is wrinkled,
> And her hairs are sprinkled
> With grey,
> Lackaday!
> How her lovers fall away!
>
> Like fashions past,
> Aside she's cast,
> No one respect will pay:
> Remember,
> Lasses, remember,
> And while the sun shines make hay;
> You must not expect in December
> The flowers you gather'd in May. (19)

Within the play however, the young beautiful woman Leonora is not really worthy of being valued as a heroine; she is too comatose to think for herself. Perhaps worlds of depth cannot be expected from a character taken from a two-act comic afterpiece. Still, like her former feelings for Diego, Leonora's sense of "love" for Leander is based merely on duty: "I should hold myself very ungrateful, if I did not do any thing to oblige you in a civil way" (22). Leonora undergoes no awakening experience with the entrance of Leander; she merely, as her conversation with Ursula shows, becomes convinced that following her new love is the more moral act:

> *Urs.* You see the young man that is gone out there, he has been telling me, that he's dying for love of you, can you find in your heart to let him expire?
> *Leon.* I'm sure I won't do any thing bad.
> *Urs.* Why that's right, you learned that from me; have I not said to you a thousand times, never do any thing bad? have not I said it, answer me that?
> *Leon.* Well, and what then?
> *Urs.* Very well, listen to me; your guardian is old and ugly, and jealous, and yet he may live longer than a better man.

> *Leon.* He has been very kind to me for all that, Ursula, and I ought to strive to please him.
> (23)

Both Leonora and Ursula's concluding monologues are similar to the manner of Ursula's first speech, in which she appears to protest a woman's relative position in regards to men but offers no solution but awareness and acceptance. Ursula finally suggests that according to the natural order, men are the dominant sex, though they should use brains not brawn to win their position. She insists on being allowed to "put in a word":

> That men should rule our sex is meet,
> But art, not force, must do the feat:
> Remember what the fable says,
> Where the sun's warm and melting rays,
> Soon bring about what wind and rain
> With all their fuss, attempt in vain. (30)

Leonora's speech suggests, almost surprisingly, a more equal relationship in marriage—"While each with tender passion burns, / Ascend the throne of rule by turns"—but her speech aims more for the prevention of cuckolding, "[s]ecurity, in mutual trust" (31), than a truly balanced relationship. Against the apparent fluidity of race and class provided by the drama, the position of women is resolutely fixed.

Frost's "Bolts and Bars" can read as a more progressive version of *The Padlock* updated for a nineteenth-century audience. Most main characters have realistic, American-sounding names—Julia is the heroine, Letty her newly acquired maid, Captain Leonard Moore the admiring newcomer—but the minister figure, who enters late and only briefly in the play, is called "Piousgood," and Julia's father and fiancé, a sort of conspiratorial pair often concurrently onstage, are respectively named "Saveall" and "Cautious." These symbolic names, reminiscent of eighteenth-century drama, indicate more broadly the outdated manner in which these characters—especially Saveall and Cautious—assume the world operates. The opening scene, between Saveall and Cautious, makes marriage into mere business transaction:

> CAUTIOUS. If there is any trouble about the money, you know, I'm off. You can't hold me to the agreement unless her fortune is settled upon me.
> SAVEALL. Remaining in the business—that was the agreement. It is to keep the money in the business that I am anxious for the match. (83-4)

Cautious goes on to suggest nonchalantly that he doesn't "know that it is necessary" (84) that he meet his bride-to-be ahead of time. In *The Padlock*, Leonora's parents never appear onstage and are only mentioned in passing, usually alluding to their deal regarding their daughter. However, in "Bolts and Bars" the mother is completely absent and never referenced. Thus, the bargaining about Julia's marriage only involves her father, now a central character and the person most cruel to his daughter. The highlighting of Saveall and Cautious as different from the rest of the cast emphasizes the male-male handoff of Julia's marriage; she is passively spoken of as a sort of possession to be moved about from household to household.[160] As the minister is likewise named more traditionally, Captain Moore's lone modern name amongst male characters feels gratuitous—as though Frost could not bear to marry her reformed heroine off to an ill-named outmoded partner.

Frost's other alterations bring out the importance of both Julia and Letty as characters, making them friends as well as stronger women than their eighteenth-century counterparts. In *The Padlock*, the aging housekeeper Ursula is mocked for growing amorous in the presence of Leander. While this situation is comic—Ursula says Leander "put[s her] so much in mind of [her] poor dear husband; … a handsome man [who had] a mole between his eye-brows, about the bigness of a hazel nut" (25)—it construes Ursula as a ridiculous fool in the eyes of the audience and Leander, who believes he "shall never get rid of her." The scene which Frost most clearly changes directly from the source play is the potential kiss between the housekeeper/maid and the handsome new wooer. In *The Padlock*, Ursula asks Leander for a kiss when he departs but is rudely refused:

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[160] Saveall responses to Julia's shy inquiries as to whether he likes her, with only "Humph! Well, girl, this is your home; for one month you are mistress here. Give your own orders, and try to be contented. In a month Mr. Cautious will take you to the city to your home for life" (88).

> *Urs.* Would you be so kind, Sir, as to indulge me with the favour of a salute?
> *Leand.* Ugh!
> *Urs.* Gad-a-mercy, your cheek---Well, well, I have seen the day; but no matter, my wine's upon the lees now; however, Sir, you might have had the politeness when a Gentlewoman made the offer.---But heav'n bless you. (19)

While Leander treats Ursula as a nuisance, he speaks of Leonora as his "charming angel" (8)—but in "Bolts and Bars," Captain Moore instead calls not Julia but the maid Letty an angel for aiding his cause with the former. Frost thus uses Bickerstaff's language to elevate Letty's importance, but she additionally has her maid turn away a kiss offered by the handsome officer:

> Capt. M. Letty, you are an angel. (*Offers to kiss her.*)
> Letty. (*Waving him back.*) Never mind that now! We have no time to attend to trifles now. Answer me a few plain questions.

The maid here takes back control of the situation, determined to work Moore into a logical plan for Julia's escape from her currently odd match. In doing so, she steers Captain Moore away from his romantic idealism—the same over-the-top mode of thinking which acceptably characterized Leander. In *The Padlock*, this extreme romanticism is part of the hero's expected love for Leonora; in Frost, comedy results from exposing the absurdity and falseness of this thinking, which is unmasked as less than sincere affection and more as being in love with the idea of love. The Captain and Letty's conversation continues with the Captain's overly affirmative answer to Letty's asking whether she may put a few questions before him:

> Capt. M. A thousand if you wish.
> Letty. I shall stop short of five hundred. First, do you love Miss Julia?
> Capt. M. Madly!
> Letty. That won't do. You want all your senses.

> Capt. M. Devotedly then!
> Letty. That is better. Now, secondly, are you ready to marry her at an hour's notice?
> Capt. M. An hour? A moment's.
> Letty. An hour will do. You can elope, then, whenever I am ready.
> Capt. M. I can, charming Letty.
> Letty. Then depend upon me, and be ready whenever I call upon you to elope with and marry Miss Julia.
> Capt. M. You little darling! Yes— yes—a thousand times. I shall always be ready!
> Letty. Once will do. (93)

Moore is revealed as a rather frivolous character; his affections appear to be readily displaceable when his terms of endearment are so easily used for Letty. Letty, meanwhile, takes responsibility for interrogating Moore as to his intentions regarding Julia, tempering his effluent enthusiasm, and for arranging a real solution to the problem that his beloved is already engaged.

Interestingly, while Letty persuades Moore away from his fictional tendencies, she uses fiction as a means to motivate Julia. Moore is not the only character whose course of action is directed by Letty; the maid also persuades Julia to find higher standards for her own treatment. Before arriving at her father's house for her impending marriage, Julia had been confined to the care of a spinster aunt in the countryside, where her father ensured she was kept isolated and educated "with no luxury but solid reading, and of this she [had] an unlimited supply—no frivolous pursuits [were] allowed her—no poetry left within her reach to feed romance—no fiction put before her to teach her folly" (84). Thus, for naïve Julia, part of the initial appeal of Captain Moore is his introducing her to her first novel; as she explains to her new friend Letty:

> JULIA… he lent me such a pretty book. There was not a word about science, or philosophy, or art, or logic, or anything in it, but just telling about real people, and what they said and did, what sort of houses they lived in, and who came to see them, and such things.
> LETTY. A novel, miss.
> JULIA. Was it?
> LETTY. Lor', miss, where ever have you lived never to see a novel before. (87)

The ensuing scenes with Julia and her father highlight both the unfairness of her situation and the importance of novelistic fiction in remedying it. The innocent Julia has unwittingly been flirting with Captain Moore, but is caught by her father and—in a scene uncharacteristic of parlour theatre—physically abused onstage. The combined name-calling, sobbing, and shaking of another character occurs neither in *The Padlock* nor in other parlour theatricals and thus is worthy of a longer excerpt here:

> Saveall. Come along! No hanging back! Come in!
> Julia (*Sobbing*.) You hurt me!
> Saveall. (*Shaking her.*) I hurt you? I'll half kill you! What have you to say for yourself, you wretched girl?
> Julia. (*Still sobbing*.) Wretched, indeed.
> Saveall. What excuses can you offer for your conduct?
> Julia. (*Drying her eyes*.) Excuse? I have done no wrong.
> Saveall. (*Passionately*.) No wrong! No wrong! You idiot! you liar! No wrong! Is it no wrong for you, a betrothed woman, almost a wife, to be sitting in the summer house holding loving converse with another man? Answer me that.
> Julia. You never forbade it!

The rest of the scene continues with more furious language on the part of Saveall, while Julia explains that she simply let Moore into the garden because the key was left in the gate and she innocently "like[s] him":

> Saveall. Very pretty, upon my word. I am fairly choking with rage. And you, deceitful girl, how dare you look me in the face?
> Julia. (*Shrinking back.*) Why are you so angry? You never forbade his coming.
> Saveall. Forbade his coming. Forbade. (*Shaking her.*) Are you an idiot? Now listen to me. I forbid you now ever to see him again, and I forbid you to step your foot into the garden until after you are married. Do you hear?
> Julia. I shall die shut up in here.
> Saveall. Then die! But go out you shan't. Go to your room, you wretched girl. Go! Instantly! And wait there until I come to you. [Exit Julia. (90)

Saveall tries to resume control of Julia's movement with the aid of many oaths regarding sending her to her room and cutting down all the trees in the garden—the means of Moore's earlier visits—but his daughter seems merely confused and downtrodden by his treatment.

Julia, whose initial demeanor is characterized by her first meeting with Cautious, where she curtseys with unraised eyes, is provoked ultimately not by her father's physical violence but by his burning of her newly acquired books:

> JULIA. My life is becoming too much like that of a galley slave.
> LETTY. I'm glad to see, miss, you're plucking up a little spirit.
> JULIA. Spirit! It would rouse resentment in a lamb! I am to wait here while my father burns all the novels you bought me, and (*crying*) I haven't read half of them.
> LETTY. Don't cry, when you have such a chance to become a heroine yourself.
> JULIA. I! a heroine?
> LETTY. Why not? I am sure you are ill-treated. (94)

Books, inspiring Julia and Letty to think of themselves in a heroic way, also help distinguish their friends from enemies. Saveall, after burning all of Letty's reading material, briefly reenters as if to reinforce this fact, declaring "[t]hat job's done" and "[n]ot another novel is to enter [his] doors" (95) while unjustly chastising his daughter: "you idiot, don't you dare stir from the house" (96). Here, ownership of books equates to a certain physical (and mental) mobility. Shortly thereafter, the Captain undoes Saveall's cruel actions: as Letty explains entering with "*her arms full of books*" "that angelic Captain has smuggled into the summer-house—all the new novels, and (*taking a note from her pocket*) this *billy doo*" (96). Julia associates the "brutal treatment" of the morning with what she has learned in novels, which, as she explains, "have at least taught me how a woman should be courted—and—and—I think I love the Captain" (96). Frost does poke some fun here at the unrealistic love portrayed between the theatrical's couple; rather than straightforwardly portraying Julia's and Moore's love as truly genuine, Frost subtly implies fiction is present in such sudden love. Just as Letty tries to ground the Captain's feelings in more realistic language, novels have convinced Julia both that any "unloving husband" who behaves like her father would be unbearable *and* that she should "escape with [Captain Moore]" (96).

In addition, books as props surround the next scene, in which Letty and Julia believe their hopes to be dashed but launch into an energetic plan to avoid marriage, à la Frost's other theatrical "The Young Amazon." Letty learns that Saveall has forced Julia to swear to never leave the house until she is a married woman; both women see breaking an oath as an insurmountable obstacle. Letty "*drop[s] her books to hold up her hands*" but continues to scheme; as though the books have imparted inspiration, she calls out—"a thought strikes me!"—and leaves. Julia, directed by her maid to "[l]ook over her novels," begins "*picking up the books*." Julia wonders, still rather conservatively, while "*look[ing] over the books*," "if any of these novels will inform [her] how a woman may break an oath and not perjure herself" (97). Then, the enraptured handling of volumes is disrupted by Letty's sudden return announcing Saveall's entrance; Julia acts to save her volumes by hiding them around the drawing room:

> Hide the books, Letty! Quick, quick! Give me "Aurora Floyd" to stuff under the sofa cushion; poke "Woman in White" in the coal scuttle; fling "John Halifax" behind the book-case; toss "Hopes and Fears" under the table; cram "Guy Livingston" in your pocket, and put the "Silent Woman" in the music rack.[161] (97)

Of course this naming of volumes likely indicates the books Frost saw as popular with her audience, but this language is also noteworthy for the clever integration of the volumes within particular drawing room spaces. This integration of fiction and parlour is a sort of illicit takeover of physical space by the women and their books, which are cleverly and precisely placed around the room—especially *The Woman in White* in the dark coal scuttle and *The Silent Woman* in the music rack, thus making her volumes appropriately hidden while the women of the respective titles are fundamentally changed, made darker and vocal, just as Julia herself evolves.

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[161] Works noted by Julia are as follows: *Aurora Floyd* (1863) by M. E. Braddon, *The Woman in White* (1859) by Wilkie Collins, *John Halifax* (1857) by Dinah Craik, *Hopes and Fears* (1860) by Charlotte May Yonge, *Guy Livingston* (1857) by George Alfred Lawrence, and *Silent Woman* probably refers to Ellen Wallace's 1852 novel *Lena, or, the Silent Woman*.

Just after this scene, the fiction critiqued by Frost in the Captain and Julia's love appears to seep more thoroughly into the theatrical—as though the integration of hidden books in the parlour stage space impart a fiction to the theatrical story itself. The action picks up steam and rhythm, punctuated by Julia's various acts which she adopts initially to disgust Cautious out of marrying her, and finally to do anything to avoid her prearranged match. Julia, in gallant heroine fashion, decides adamantly that she "*won't* marry old Cautious!" and that her father will "see that some of *his* obstinacy and temper has descended to his daughter" (98). Though Saveall has brought Cautious back to the home, Julia then calls "woman's wit to the rescue," and begins by "play[ing] the fool" (98)

> CAUTIOUS: You must not think, my dear—(*Aside*.) Why, don't she turn around? (*Aloud.*) I say, my dear, you must not think—
> JULIA. (*With a silly laugh*.) Mustn't I? Well, I won't. (99)

Despite offering up a frightening picture of her future behavior—"you can tell me how pretty I am in my new gown, and I'll giggle and get red in the face"—accompanied by an exhibition of her many feminine talents, including a song "*s[ung] through her nose, to a doleful psalm tune*," Julia is irritated to find Cautious not yet disgusted and decides to "try temper" (99) instead. When this outburst culminates in Julia boxing Cautious' ears, she runs offstage to hide and eavesdrop, eager to see if she has won a victory. Instead, in the fashion of a gothic novel, Saveall then reveals to Cautious that Julia is not really his daughter, merely his "brother's child, orphaned in infancy" (101) and he is only her guardian until she marries. Therefore, Cautious has to marry her at that moment in order to get his money. In further dramatic style, in a monologue after her enemies depart, Julia swears she "will not weep" and will "refuse to be his wife if [she] is murdered for it" (102). At the start of the final explosive barrage of dramatic meta-acting moments, Letty smuggles Captain Moore dressed as an "old woman" selling a "basketful of all such [wedding] things" (102), in order to get Moore together with Julia. Shoving the couple into "the inner room" of the parlour, Letty distracts Saveall by acting as though Julia is "really quite devoted to her future husband"(102) and is only bashful before him. Generally, acting in this theatrical only occurs as characters take up what is considered stereotypical womanly behavior or impersonate or make up a conventional female character.

As though the theatrical must end in a manner diametrically opposed to the business dealings in which it began, the play steamrolls through a series of moments which highlight Julia and Letty's acting prowess—seemingly allowing them to become heroines in an enacted novel. In her final moments of theatrical glory, Julia enters before Letty and Saveall, hand pressed to her head, pretending to have poisoned herself because she saw "[t]o escape! No way but death!" (105). Within a page, Julia mock-faints in Saveall's arms, Letty screams that her mistress is dead, Julia revives with such lines as "Hark! do you not hear music? An angel's chorus. Yes, I come, I come!" (106), and finally Saveall by now "numb with horror" (106) sends Letty for the doctor. Letty returns instead with Mr. Piousgood, again tosses him with Julia—and the still hidden Captain—into the inner room, where the couple is married. Thus, Julia prevents herself from being perjured; she is now able to leave the house because she is a married woman. (Thankfully, "Mrs. Leonard Moore" (108) had promised only to be married, and not specifically to be Mrs. Cautious.) Thus, the rapid-fire theatrical becomes more quickly like one of Julia's novels hidden in the cushions: the false father is confronted, Letty is absorbed into the newly formed Moore household, and the scene ends in tableau with the new family about to depart.

"Wooing Under Difficulties" could hardly be more pro-country, and perhaps from an artistic perspective, Frost would have had difficulties presenting two such patriotic plays back-to-back within her volume. (However, one might argue also that she has no trouble at all elsewhere waving the patriotic flag.) The preceding ultra-nationalist "Wooing Under Difficulties" may have made it easier to adapt this second drama of "Bolts and Bars" in a manner more consciously divergent from the source material, and divergent in a manner which strengthens the play's women. Perhaps the lengthy monologues of past battles got the war trauma out of Frost's system, or perhaps Nellie as literal American flag set the stage for an American woman to rewrite the work of two men—British and Irish—in a manner more clearly favoring her own gender and country.

Nationhood and theatre both imply insider/outsider boundaries: one is either citizen or foreigner, performer or spectator. If this shared dynamic further supports the use of theatre to investigate formation of national feeling, Frost also shows how crossing these boundaries—by making the audience part of the performance, as in the singing of the "Star Spangled Banner" at the conclusion of "Wooing"—can build an emotional connection to one's nation. While theatre, commonly thought of as the most social genre, may unsurprisingly work towards group emotion, home theatre, commonly bridging the gap from spectator to performer, can even more efficiently increase group feeling. No matter how much a performer or spectator may consider herself to be a patriot at the beginning of rehearsals or a performance, the acting of a parlour play can serve as a means to build a sense of camaraderie. In this same manner, theatre builds group feeling not just for patriots but also for women, as in Frost's "Bolts and Bars"—this is especially true if performers or spectators knew, as the author certainly did, of the original's female characters' relative want of agency and initiative. In this case, rather than lacking in nationalism because lacking in epic battles, "Bolts and Bars" supports the widely held belief that American women have a particular boldness.

Betsy Bolton has written how, in Britain, “connections between the female dramatist and the demagogue politician were encouraged by the ubiquitous late eighteenth-century analogy between theatre and politics, and by a changing understanding of the “public” addressed by national theatre and national politics alike” (2). Frost manipulates this earlier model by crossing borders of an otherwise gendered political realm in ways unavailable to her Romantic-era precedents. She alters British source texts for a new American nationalism and feminism, while more grandly her chosen genre of home theatre expands the notion of “public” into the traditionally private realm. Bolton goes on to explain how an analogy between theatre and nation elucidates a particular intersection between Romantic era women and national politics:

> Women’s spectacular presence on the dramatic stage became increasingly difficult to separate from their influence in other realms – especially because women’s presence on the Romantic stage signified in a wide variety of ways, ranging from the sentimentally vulnerable to the politically manipulative. Indeed, women’s status on the stage of the nation intensified the ambivalence of the theatrical analogy: in a display of vulnerability, women could be used to summon up the chivalric values of the nation; portrayed as politically powerful or manipulative, they embodied the internal corruption and the vulnerability to theatrical deception against which the nation guarded. (27-8)

Whether as Colonel Carleon nearly fainting onstage with the emotion of memory, or Julia and Letty confronting Saveall and Cautious, Frost brings out the wide range of ways in which women and traditionally feminine emotions can form a fresh conception of the American in the post-Civil War United States. Perhaps, Frost’s most poignant conception of America is representing the American flag, the most pervasive symbol of national victory and unity in her theatricals, as a female character, Nellie. Importantly, Frost does so in a manner which highlights rather than drowns out Nellie’s own voice. She is after all, the character who announces the American victory at Puebla. Nellie as vibrant, speaking, moving flag—the image perhaps most a stand-in for America—illuminates what I discussed in the opening of this chapter: how a mobile theatrical picture can offer depth in a national or transatlantic reading in a manner unavailable to more static art objects.

Concluding with Further Frontiers: Home Theatre Extending Empire

Playwriting can demonstrate the cosmopolitan learnedness of female playwrights when they use their theatricals to display cultural knowledge of other texts and places. I have highlighted Frost's work here within a pivotal moment in American history, but the potential for further investigations of home theatre as a tool for or against national formation is nearly limitless—especially perhaps in terms of French or Oriental material. Home theatre, in general, reflects mostly a British-American cultural circuit, but other niches of otherness remain open to research. I consider these concluding examples.

While French plays or texts fairly commonly inspire English theatricals, French characters often star as antagonists in otherwise English home plays. In American theatrical *Dark Deeds* (1876), written by "an experienced amateur," the heroine Edith Marchmont defends her aunt, Mrs. Armadale, from attempted poisoning and murder by her cousin, the very French-named Hubert Vavasour.[162] Mrs. Armadale makes Edith her sole heiress; her fortune will include "two large estates in England" (9). Hubert, alternatively, is not to remain close to home. Additional plans are made for Hubert to be sent off with rents recently collected from Mrs. Armadale's "Hampshire estate" "on the distinct understanding that he will, without loss of time, embark for Australia, and there commence a new career" (9). Before he can receive this second chance, a masked Hubert tries to steal jewels while his aunt sleeps, is apprehended and taken off with "transportation" (11) as his likely punishment. The stereotypical French villain, somehow a blood-relation of Edith Marchmont, is off to another British colony.

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[162] 162. An Experienced Amateur, "Dark Deeds: a Sensational Play in Three Acts" *Parlor Plays for Home Performance* (New York: Happy Hours Company, 1876). Text cited parenthetically.

Two final examples showcase how parlour playwrights often shied away from depictions of blackness, but Chinese and Japanese-themed plays were often quite popular for both children and adults. For example, Marion Adam's 1905 *The Slave of the Lamp; or Aladdin in Japan*, a parlour play for children, sets the Arabian tale of Aladdin in Japan.[163] Advertisements for cocoa and "children's powders" indicate mothers were reading the play; one speculates that setting up their children was almost a dress-up game for them. The character list of *Aladdin* appears to blend elements of British pantomime with (a British conception of) the Orient:

> (1) ALADDIN
> (2) PRINCESS SADI
> (3) WASHEE-WASHEE (*Aladdin's Mother)*
> (4) EL CHANG (*a Magician*)
> (5) GENI (*the Slave of the Lamp*).
> (6) ROSY PEARL
> (7) PINK PETAL } (*Japanese Tea-shop Girls*).
> (8) CHERRY BLOOM
> CHRYSANTHEMUM FAIRIES (PINK, WHITE, YELLOW, AND MAUVE). (1)

The author's explanation "On Staging the Play" notes that:

> the old and ever-popular story of Aladdin and his Wonderful Lamp [is] being laid in Japan for two reasons. First of all, because at the present time anything about Japan and the Japanese is more or less popular; and secondly, because it is more easy to "dress" a Japanese play than any other, unless it be a play with the costumes of our own time and country.

While equating the Japanese with the British—staging their foreign dress is tantamount to staging British dress—they are also a trend of the moment, a decoration for the more lasting pantomime, different from their own national integrity.

Third and finally, while Frost's theatricals are a high point of nationalist staging, perhaps a lower if potentially creative point is American Thomas S. Denison's "Patsy O'Wang: An Irish

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163. Marion Adams, *The Slave of the Lamp; or, Aladdin in Japan. A Musical Play. For School and Home Entertainments. Books for the Bairns.--No. 117,* Ed. W. T. Stead. (London, 1905).

Farce with a Chinese Mix-Up." The premise of the plot, explained by the author's "Synopsis and Hints to Players," rests on the national mobility of Patsy's character:

> Born of Irish father and Chinese mother and brought up in barracks at Hong Kong he has a remarkable dual nature. Whiskey, the drink of his father, transforms him into a true Irishman, while strong tea, the beverage of his mother, has the power of restoring fully his Chinese character. (78)

The play is self-consciously a mish-mash of American conceptions about the Chinese and Irish. The main characters, (the conspicuously named) Dr. and Mrs. Fluke, hire a new cook named Patsy O'Wang to join their current fully Irish servants Mike and Norah. While on the most basic level, the play appears very racist, the author acknowledges in his preface that his depiction, especially of Chinese, is a fiction rather than truth.

The author is careful to use accent as a means of distinguishing between characters, explaining that Patsy as Irishman speaks without a thick brogue: "[i]n Hong Kong his associations were with officers of the British army (as servant) and naturally he acquired the language of gentlemen" (3). In this regard, while the parenthetical addition draws a distinct line between Patsy and the British officers, the author grants a level of prestige to Patsy's Irish persona. Denison goes on to suggest his play should in no way be taken as an accurate depiction of the Chinese language:

> No instructions can be given here concerning the Chinese part except that the *timbre* and *tones* of the Chinese voice are very peculiar, and can be learned only by listening to Chinamen. The Chinese dialect as written here (and elsewhere in America) is at best but a poor imitation, but good enough to be funny, which is the only object in view. (3)

Indeed, much of the play uses the Chinese and Irish for humor while also poking fun at American conceptions of both nationalities. When Dr. Fluke wants to convince his wife that he should hire Patsy, he reminds her that her own "sister couldn't be induced to part with Weak Lung" (81), though Mrs. Fluke herself continually expresses such sentiments as "I hope the wretch doesn’t smoke opium” (84) and “Who knows but he may poison us all” (83). Before Patsy has a chance to appear onstage, a missionary Miss Simper arrives to recruit him for her mission school, explaining her “heart bleeds for the millions of Asia who sit in outer darkness” (83). Patsy as a Chinese man speaks poorly—“Um! Honk Kong blandy! make toddy likee time in Hong Kong. Dlink heap toddy” (89)—and presumably fits the doctor’s stereotypical description of him as “so intelligent, so docile, so affectionate” (83). However, once he drinks alcohol, Patsy transforms into an Irishman and intends to stay that way. A stubborn Patsy insists: “I won’t take a blessed drop of anything but poteen” (92).

The theatrical’s conclusion erupts into a celebration of Irishness. The family sits down for tea in an attempt to convert Patsy back, but he has a disguised funnel at his neck into which he pours all of his Chinese beverage. When concern mounts over the amount of tea that Patsy has apparently consumed—Dr. Fluke puts a hand on his stomach and exclaims “it’s as hot as fire! And distended like a balloon! (103)—the doctor rushes to force his stomach pump upon Patsy. In the ensuing struggle, Dr. Fluke pulls out the bag of water where Patsy has deposited all the tea. Mrs. Fluke and the Irish servant Mike comically believe that Patsy’s real stomach has pulled out, while Patsy uses this opportunity to declare where his true allegiances lie.

> MIKE. By the powers, you’ve pulled the sthomick clane out av’ ‘im. (*Pause*.) Is that what it looks like? I niver seed one before.
> Mrs. F. (*In door*.) Oh horrors!
> MIKE. Hadn’t yes better put it back, doctor? He may nade it.
> Dr. F. (*Is so astonished that he hold the bag by the tube for a few seconds. Drops it in disgust.*) What does this mean, you rascal?
> PATSY, (*Determinedly*.) It means you can’t fill me up with tea and turn me back into a Chinaman. They did that trick in Hong Kong!
> DR. F. (*Crossly*.) What are you now? Irish or Chinese?
> PATSY. Irish forever.
> Miss S. (*Sentimentally*.) Dear me! I'm so disappointed. I did hope we had got a real Chinaman.
> DR. F. But confound you man, I hired you for a Chinaman. A bargain’s a bargain.
> PATSY. That bargain is off.

> MIKE. (*Throws down pump.*) Then I'm aff, too. Two Irishman in wan house is wan too many.
> Patsy. Keep your place, Mike, I can do better. (*All dress stage, women L., men R.*) I'm in America now, the land of opportunities. I'm goin' into politics. Me ambition is to be an alderman and die beloved and respected by all.
> MIKE. Begorrah, the ambition of it! (28)

Here, America, the land of opportunities, appears to in fact allow one to switch races. Patsy's concluding air, "Pat Malloy" rephrased to "Patsy O'Wang," includes such lines as "And in this free Ameriky I'll have a word to say / I'm goin' into politics, I'll drink no more green tey" (105).

The nationalist parlour play ultimately suggests a flexibility of both race and gender. Even at moments where theatricals appear to confirm traditional conceptions of group identity, the mere fact of parlour impersonation of other nations, races, and genders suggests, on some level, that these categories are socially constructed. For the parlour actress, travelling beyond the borders of the nation or empire, whether through a play's distant setting or acting as a foreign character, is somehow safer when playing within the safety of an individual home of the home empire. The privacy of home performance makes getting into character easier; yet, at the same time that theatricals suggest the mutability of one's group identity, the easy retreat back into one's home perhaps grants solidity to the place one occupies outside the parlour stage. The home theatre of nineteenth-century British and America brought to life and reaffirmed national theatrical images, serving as mobile and living extension of the image-making of art central to nation-building.

Chapter 4

Props in Victorian Parlour Plays: the Periperformative, Private Objects, and Restructuring Material Space

> ENTER KATE *with a trap in which there is supposed to be a live mouse.*
> KATE. Sure, mum, I coort a mouse in a trap.
> MRS. B. Well, take it away. We don't want it here.
> KATE. Arl roight, mum. (*She starts towards the door and purposely drops the trap, and the mouse is supposed to escape.* KATE, JESSIE, *and* MISS LUCY *begin to jump around and scream.* AUNT BELINDA *calmly goes on with her sewing, and* MRS. B. *picks up a poker and deliberately starts in pursuit of the mouse.*) Arrah! Why did I do it at arl, at arl?
> MISS. L.: Oh! I am so frightened, and not a man in the house.
> - S. Jennie Smith, "Not a Man in the House," 1897.

The transformative potential of the home theatrical, specifically its ability to shift Victorian social codes regarding gender, is greatly enhanced by parlour playwrights' creative use of the prop. In S. Jennie Smith's "Not a Man in the House," the character of Mrs. B. thoughtfully stalks and slays the "mouse" with a poker, despite the protestations from the rest of the all-woman cast that "[they] never knowed a woman yet that could kill a mouse." In this instance, the imaginary prop activates the imagination of the actresses, while humorously enforcing the women's independence. In yet other cases explored in this chapter, a more concrete object is responsible for key scenes in which a woman gains control of her suitor's behavior; in S. Annie Frost's "The Young Amazon," the character Kate pretends to "shoot" a pre-cored apple from the top of an unwanted lover's head. In Mary Healy's "An Unexpected Guest," an exchange of kid gloves "possess[es] a magic power" to unite lovers.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the home theatrical's unique relationship to space, blurring the lines between parlour and stage, creates a new realm intermingling public and private where women performers especially found it easier to play with social mores. Yet the parlour play—

especially as it takes the marriage plot or the dynamics between women and men as the basis of its action—relies on the connection of theatrical language to the spatial transfiguration of the ordinary object serving as prop. That a specific type of language is used to transform space, or more specifically, objects, here, should be unsurprising, especially when one considers that the "I do" of the marriage ceremony is the most frequently cited example of performative language, or language that *does*. However, rather than focusing on performatives themselves here (which I omit not because of Austin's famous exclusion of all onstage would-be performatives) I turn the spotlight on the language *circulating around* instances of marriage in the theatrical, particularly, how this peculiar language is so often paired with props to become more manipulative and powerful than the actual performative utterance. In effect, I will show that throughout home theatricals, Victorian women relate differently to the domestic space through the peculiarly linguistic activation of an object's material space as potent, sometimes lethal play prop. Language attributes physical potency to the fictitious object. (The object may be physically real, but is fictitious in the sense that it is "acting" in a way other than its ordinary usage.)

Towards this end, I define this category of theatrical language by expanding upon Eve Sedgwick's term "periperformative" as first conceptualized within the Victorian novel; specifically, I demonstrate that this type of language depends upon a disruption of the formulaic performative and, importantly, a corresponding disruption in material space. By pointing to an overlooked way that the periperformative is connected to space and (very often) objects in, first, the Victorian novel, but more vitally, in the parlour play, one can situate the private play within a larger and decidedly Victorian way of looking at objects and language. I look specifically at George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* and the heroine Gwendolen being cursed by a gift of diamonds. This example is additionally useful because diamonds are frequent props in the parlour play; the class signified by a precious private object contributes to its spatially manipulative power. The periperformative, even more strongly than the performative, can rework the current power relations between two people, but *especially* between a person and an object. Secondly, I establish how the private prop functions more intimately than the public stage prop in its use, creation, and effect upon the audience. Private props, as opposed to public stage objects, tend to be private possessions; the repercussions of this private ownership impact perceptions of all material objects used in the theatrical.

The materiality of the objects themselves is vital to the social impact of the parlour play. The very thingness of the thing so often negotiates the power dynamic between (most usually) the couple depicted on stage. For instance, in “Romantic Caroline,” a theatrical I will discuss in relation to Eliot’s novel, the heroine’s knife makes her romanticism suddenly threatening, while her husband’s gift of diamonds allows her to accept an unromantic marriage. Things—here, parlour play props—appear to have agency beyond the inert space they occupy; as Bill Brown has explained: “no matter how much common sense convinces us that things are matter-of-fact and mute, concrete and self-evident, apprehending the *mereness* of things can become a difficult task.”[164] Brown, in his study of early twentieth-century American literature, finds that certain historical circumstances coincide with this widespread tendency to imbue things with an irrational psychology; as he explains:

> not incidentally, [these texts are] published in the era when the typewriter and the fountain pen and the light bulb began to flourish, an era of unprecedented invention in the nation known, since the Civil War, for its manufacturing ingenuity and capacity—an era when the invention, production, distribution, and consumption of things rather suddenly came to define a national culture.[165]

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[164] Bill Brown, *A Sense of Things: The Object Matter of American Literature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 1.

[165] Ibid., 4.

The suddenness with which things came to dominate society, is equally if not more so a factor for the literature of Victorian Britain in the parlour play heyday of 1860 through the years just after 1900, when the Industrial Revolution took hold and parlour decoration itself drastically changed. Reflected not just in Gwendolen's relationship to her necklace, but in Dickens' characters such as Silas Wegg or Mr. Boffin, things begin to overtake characters. The parlour play is an especially interesting study then, because rather than just writing about things, it uses these actual domestic objects, material for potential future dust heaps, that the Victorian household has bought or consumed in ever greater frequency.

The parlour play operates more potently through its use of *private* objects. A domestic object may be used repeatedly within everyday circumstances—the knife and other tableware featured in "Romantic Caroline" for instance—but then reappropriated for use within a play. This very fact seems to exaggerate the "liveness" of the object both when it is used in the play, and after, when reabsorbed into household use. Not only might Caroline's knife or her husband's boots feel different during the play because of prior use, but one can imagine that the performance alters the experience of handling Caroline's knife or Sprigg's boots after the fact, due to memory of their previous meanings. Private objects which appear in a parlour theatrical have much more personal implications than similar objects which appear on the public stage. The very fact that these objects—whether luxury or everyday—clearly *belong* to someone besides the theatre-at-large changes the way the audience regards them. A spectator may know or speculate while watching a parlour play from where certain props have come, or who amongst the cast is responsible for introducing them. Additionally, the more an object is worth to the person to whom it belongs *or* to the person who sees it, the greater its power of animation when it appears on the private theatre stage. This worth can be determined based on either sentimental value or actual value. Appearance on the private stage not only endows the object with metaphysical properties, but undoubtedly enhances its initial worth.

More nuanced distinctions of privacy—beyond whether or not an object is owned privately—may be assigned to personal belongings. Some, like hats, are designed for viewing, while others, like underwear, are meant to stay private. Play props can be secretly owned: for instance, the audience may not know who owns the hat worn by a character, or revelation of ownership can be part of the excitement of the play's rehearsals and post-production interactions. However, theatrical props tend to be those private objects which may be acceptably displayed, or which may elevate class status, such as jewelry.

Two basic distinctions (with categories that I shall detail below) exist among props used in private theatricals: first, according to value, luxury versus everyday objects; and second, according to the production and presentation, whether the prop is found, made, bought specifically for the performance of a play, or remains "offstage," mentioned but not seen. One might presume that most luxury objects were already owned by the household, and that items purchased for the performance would have no large market value. Props are distinguished from each other within the parlour play, foremost, on the level of the class they signify. The effect of using diamonds on stage is quite different from that resulting from an everyday pair of boots. Finally, not all objects were necessarily made or reused for home theatre. A small theatrical marketplace sprang up around home theatrical productions, with publishers often also selling backdrops, props, and costumes.   For instance, as shown in the next figure, many of the plays published by T. H. Lacy include advertisements for backdrops to be purchased for use in theatricals. C. Lang Neil mentions that expensive plays were those requiring "the purchase or hire of special scenery, costumes, and accessories."[166]

Beyond those two basic distinctions, parlour play props can be largely fit within five more detailed categories, according to their role and/or presence in the theatrical. While such categories are not exclusive—some props such as boots are both "threatening" and "non-luxury"—they may provide a framework for understanding the most common uses of theatrical props:

a. *Invisible, absent, or mentioned but not seen*. This includes descriptions of objects narrated onstage which may or may not later materialize. For example, in Florence Bell's monologue "A Woman of Courage," Mrs. Trembleton recounts her experience on her train journey to London of having encountered a man with "shiny boots and a large scarf pin"; in her mind, these accoutrements indicate this man is a threat and belongs to the mob. The boots later appear on stage in dramatic fashion, but the scarf pin only contributes to an imaginative picture of this potential criminal. I count this among props due to the vivid descriptive power of the narration (especially as cases of this kind often are accompanied by the person onstage acting as if they are seeing the object through their intense recollection). Alternatively, plays occasionally act as if a threat—physically invisible—is actually present onstage. In "Not a Man in the House," the "mouse" initially runs through the women, causing them to scream and jump about. No specific directions for construction of a mouse prop are given, so arguably the actresses could merely pretend as if a mouse was running about them. (Alternatively, one might stage this scene with a contraption involving a mouse on a string.)
b. *Threatening, violent, surprising*. In "Not a Man in the House," Mrs. Bing ends up catching the mouse, and holds up the dead creature by the tail in a triumphant scene-ending tableau. No matter how the actresses decide on constructing the mouse prop, it is threatening *and* surprising both when scampering about and when caught. If initially invisible, the "dead mouse" object in Mrs. Bing's hands might be even more startling. Often threatening props are tied to fears of a male intruder or criminal. In Florence Bell's "In a First-Class Waiting Room," the heroine Miss Timmersome is left alone in an already subpar railroad waiting

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[166] C. Neil Lang, *Amateur Theatricals: A Practical Guide* (London: C. Arthur Pearson, Ltd., 1904), 59.

room, when the porter departs with the fire-irons (after first stirring the fire) to keep others from “wasting the Company’s fuel!” [167] One is led to believe that Miss Timmersome wished to keep the fire-irons less for tending the fire, and more for means of protection in what she considers a dangerous place. The fire-irons are themselves a dangerous prop, as the porter calls them, “*the* most mischievous instrument that was ever invented,” but they are soon replaced with a more threatening if unexpected weapon. A strange man—who Miss Timmersome believes matches the description of a convict in the paper—enters the waiting room and decides to take the matter of tending the fire into his own hands; believing he has an ingenious solution to the missing poker, he “[s]*eizes up* [his] *chair and pokes the fire violently*” (126) with its legs. While this stranger inevitably ends up being Miss Timmersome’s long-lost cousin Walter, Miss Timmersome believes due to the chair-weapon that she is trapped in close corners with a man “of unsound mind!”

c. *Luxury or Non-Luxury (class indicators)*. In “Romantic Caroline,” the heroine is finally appeased by a gift of diamond earrings, which under normal circumstances would be beyond the means of her confectioner husband to purchase for her. Her husband, meanwhile, does a tremendous job throughout the play of flashing lower-class props, most notably his creaky boots.

d. *Supernatural*. These props frequently appear in fairy-tale plays. In Bell’s children’s theatrical “The Golden Goose,” Tom refuses to share his hamper of food with a grey-bearded man with a pointed hat that appears out of nowhere. Subsequently, Tom realizes his “beautiful luncheon has disappeared!” and shouts that“[t]he sausage rolls have turned to sticks! [*Throws out sticks as he speaks*.] The salad into dead leaves! [*Throws out leaves*.] The chicken sandwiches and jam tart into brown paper! [*Throws out brown paper*.]”[168] Other supernatural props are more straightforwardly “magical” objects that can manipulate the scene.

e. Letters or newspapers. These props can be effectively used to communicate important plot developments within a short time—a necessity of the home play genre—and eliminate the need for an actress to memorize any lines read from the letter or newspaper. Fairly frequently, the written page is actually a will or serves to otherwise determine who receives a gift. In Emma Brewster’s “The Christmas Box,” a mother opens a letter which reveals that one of her two daughters will marry a rich suitor, but the letter was partially ripped in opening it, leaving only

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[167] Florence Bell, “In a First-Class Waiting Room,” *Chamber Comedies; a collection of plays and monologues* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), 124. Thereafter, text is cited parenthetically.

[168] Florence Bell, “The Golden Goose,” *Fairy Tale Plays and How to Act Them* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), 204

"Mar"—which could be either daughter, Margueritte or Marie.[169] The coupling of letters with gifts allow for the latter to especially rework the power configuration amongst characters, as I show throughout this chapter. Letters often open plays, as in Harriet Childe Pemberton's duologue "Shattered Nerves" which begins with Mrs. Piercy-Sharp, a "nervous specialist" doctor, reading the letter of a hypochondriac patient waiting in the next room.[170] Monologues especially excerpt letters and other written documents with greater frequency, allowing the single speaker to both "interact" with those not present onstage and to have brief reprieves from often lengthy memorized sections.

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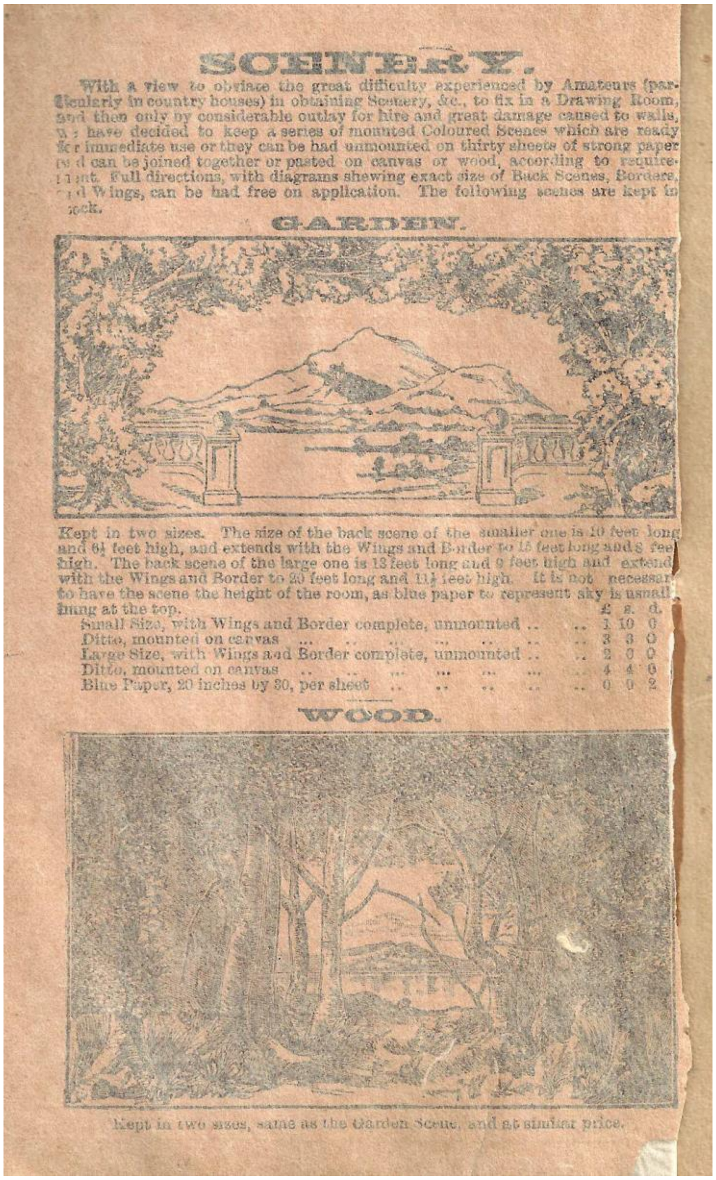
[169] Emma Brewster, "A Christmas Box," *Parlor Varieties: Plays, Pantomimes, Charades* (Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1880), 29.

[170] Harriet Childe Pemberton, "Shattered Nerves," *"Twenty Minutes" Drawing-Room Duologues, Etc.* (London: Samuel French, 1900), 31.



SCENERY.

With a view to obviate the great difficulty experienced by Amateurs (particularly in country houses) in obtaining Scenery, &c., to fix in a Drawing Room, and then only by considerable outlay for hire and great damage caused to walls, we have decided to keep a series of mounted Coloured Scenes which are ready for immediate use or they can be had unmounted on thirty sheets of strong paper and can be joined together or pasted on canvas or wood, according to requirement. Full directions, with diagrams shewing exact size of Back Scenes, Borders, and Wings, can be had free on application. The following scenes are kept in stock.

GARDEN.

Kept in two sizes. The size of the back scene of the smaller one is 10 feet long and 6½ feet high, and extends with the Wings and Border to 15 feet long and 8 fee high. The back scene of the large one is 13 feet long and 9 feet high and extend with the Wings and Border to 20 feet long and 11½ feet high. It is not necessar to have the scene the height of the room, as blue paper to represent sky is usuall hung at the top.

	£	s.	d.
Small Size, with Wings and Border complete, unmounted	1	10	0
Ditto, mounted on canvas	3	3	0
Large Size, with Wings and Border complete, unmounted	2	0	0
Ditto, mounted on canvas	4	4	0
Blue Paper, 20 inches by 30, per sheet	0	0	2

WOOD.

Kept in two sizes, same as the Garden Scene, and at similar price.

The above page is often reprinted as prefatory material in theatrical volumes published by T. H. Lacy. Alternative versions of the above image advertise for different backdrops for sale.

After very briefly expanding upon the importance of the object or material thing within the Victorian home, and within the Victorian novel *Daniel Deronda*, I will discuss several key instances of parlour play plots which operate around the manipulation of the prop.

Victorian Objects

The prop, even more generally as an object for the admiration of visitors, was of great importance to the Victorians. For instance, Frank Bellew's 1866 *The Art of Amusing*, printed in both London and New York, is a collection of parlour plays and other amusements which frequently operate around the manipulation of objects for entertainment. Early in the volume, he explains about the centrality of various objects for purposes of amusement:

> In the first place …we like a large centre-table. It is something to rally round, it is handy to put things on, and convenient for the bashful to lean against. On this table I would accumulate picture-books, toys, and knick-knacks—little odds and ends which will serve as subjects for conversation. If you can do no better, make a pig out of a lemon and four lucifer matches, or an alligator out of a carrot.[171]

As in *Daniel Deronda*, props for Bellew are primarily used as objects to convey a sense of magic or to displace regular space; he goes on to detail ways to trick visitors into attempting the "next door to an impossibility" (12) of blowing over a visiting-card bent at both ends and placed on a table, or getting a coin to appear to stay perpendicularly to the surface of a door (the tricks are explained to the reader). Similarly, parlour playwright Florence Bell often goes to great lengths to explain how to create props for home theatricals; for example, her *Fairy Tale Dramas* contains directions for "How to Make an Ogre's or Beast's Head" (xxxvi) of copper wire, papier-maché, and suggests, as materials for fur, "raveled string or tow, but better, the crimped plaits of hair bought at the wig-makers'" (xxxvii), in addition to including detailed scenery directions instructions for other plays, including a complex trapdoor for "Rumpelstiltskin" (50) and a specially added note in "Red Riding Hood" that "the chestnut tree is more easily made than any other tree" (92).[172] Sarah Annie Frost's play "The Young Amazon," relentlessly uses props to transform the heroine Kate into the Amazonian persona she adopts in order to scare off a potential lover; besides calling for "a black wig, some walnut dye, a pair of green spectacles for [her friend] Flo, an immense riding whip, a pistol, a French horn" (42) to aid in her disguise,

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[171] 171. Frank Bellew, *The Art of Amusing*, 11. All subsequent references will be cited parenthetically within the text.

[172] 172. Florence Bell, *Fairy Tale Plays and How to Act Them*. (London: Longmans Green, 1910).

Kate later shoots a pre-cored apple from this would-be lover's head.[173] In this manner, props often enable a gender inversion; Kate here becomes much more masculine—and thus less attractive to an undesired suitor. The eponymous heroine of "Romantic Caroline," a play I later discuss in relation to *Daniel Deronda*, takes the role of the cheating husband and aggressor in her marriage (though her parents interpret this inversely when they witness the married couple). Caroline's most potent prop is phallic—a knife. Similarly, Bell's diagrams of the ogres can be construed as phallic, or to otherwise suggest that a masculine threat can be masked as monstrous. Parlour props gesture towards the underlying gender relationships so important to the parlour play.

DIRECTIONS FOR MAKING AN OGRE'S HEAD OR BEAST'S HEAD

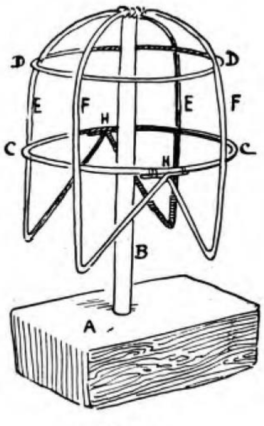

FIG. 15.

A, a stout block of wood; **B**, a piece of broomstick about 16 inches long, firmly fixed in the block of wood as a support during the construction of the frame of the head; C C, a ring of thin sugar-cane (known as flexible cane); D D, a similar ring—each cane to measure 38 inches, so that the rings are about a foot across; E E and F F, other canes, fastened at the top of the broomstick and arranged to support the two rings. (Fastenings to be very secure wherever the canes cross each other.)

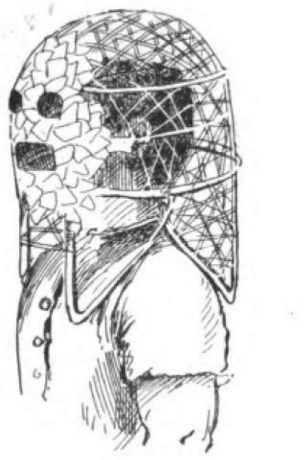

FIG. 16.

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[173] Sarah Annie Frost, "A Young Amazon," *Amateur Theatricals and Fairy-Tale Dramas: a collection of original plays, expressly designed for drawing room performance* (New York: Dick and Fitgerald, Publishers, 1868), 38-54. Hereafter, the work is cited parenthetically in the text.

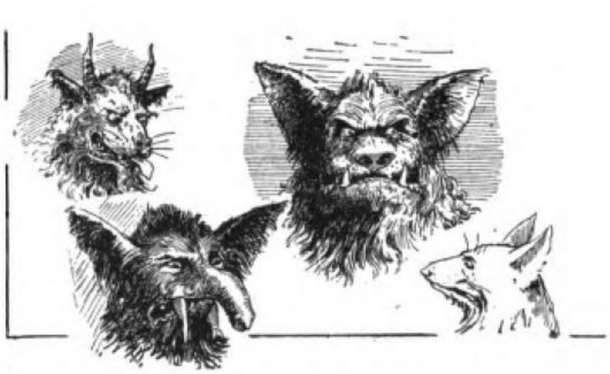

FIG. 17

Diagrams included with multi-page instructions on "How to Make an Ogre's Head" from Florence Bell's Fairy-Tale Dramas, xxxvi-iii.

The Victorian Object's Periperformativity: Daniel Deronda and "Romantic Caroline"

It may be helpful to provide an instance of the more general "expanded meaning" of the Victorian novel's object, in order to directly situate the parlour prop's particular material, cultural, and psychic energy within this spectrum of powerful Victorian material things. This brief though deep foray into George Eliot's use of objects and language in *Daniel Deronda* bolsters my study of the parlour play by showing the latter's awareness of and embeddedness within Victorian culture. I compare the example of Eliot to the theatrical "Romantic Caroline," which similarly negotiates a troubled marriage plot. These paired examples serve to introduce the rest of the chapter's discussion about props in the parlour play.

In analyzing *Daniel Deronda*, Eve Sedgwick has paid close attention to Lydia Glasher's letter accompanying her necklace to Gwendolen as transmitting a type of curse both to Gwendolen and her subsequent marriage to Grandcourt. What is most important about Lydia's letter for Sedgwick is what she terms its "periperformativity"; the letter is more powerful because it avoids the easily conventional linguistic structure of sentences we would now classify as performatives. Rather than Lydia's letter cursing Gwendolen outright, her language goes to great lengths to sidestep the first-person singular present indicative active formula characteristic of a performative:

> These diamonds, which were once given with ardent love to Lydia Glasher, she passes on to you. … Perhaps you think of being happy, as she once was, and of having beautiful children such as hers, who will thrust hers aside. God is too just for that. (*Daniel Deronda*, qtd. in Sedgwick, 76)

Sedgwick defines the category of the periperformative as utterances that, while not performatives themselves, are "*about* performatives and, more properly, they cluster *around* performatives" (68). In a strange sense, on the most basic linguistic level, the periperformative then manipulates the (expected) space of the performative utterance to become more potent. The letter also oddly clears Lydia Glasher herself, at least initially, out of the space of the letter by putting her in the third person. Formal letters and invitations often use third person, but Lydia's letter transitions to first-person midway through, thus highlighting the shift from "formal" (here a prophetic, curse-like sense) to personal: "His best young love was mine; you could not take that from me when you took the rest. It is dead; but I am the grave in which your chance of happiness is buried as well as mine."[174] Her letter as a whole functions as a curse, as made explicit by her concluding lines: "You took him with your eyes open. The willing wrong you have done me will be your curse" (359). Again, the language here is not a straightforward "I curse you" but a more compelling adieu which makes Gwendolen's past actions responsible for the curse now upon her. Gwendolen's "I do" to Grandcourt cannot be undone; likewise the "the willing wrong [she] has done [Lydia]" cannot be lifted.

While Sedgwick explains "it's not easy to say why" (76) these periperformatives are actually more powerful, I would venture to say their force lies almost entirely in their constant displacement of normal space. (As Sedgwick points out, it is much easier for someone to yell out "I dare you" than for a third party witness to creatively construct and answer with the periperformative retort of "Not on my account!" It is as if the creative energy involved in the construction of the not-performative phrase is subsequently transferred to the potency of the speech act itself. One can feel how the periperformative is related to, though is not, "wit.") Sedgwick acknowledges that the periperformative is "lodged in a metaphorics of space" (68), especially in how it always invokes a type of third party witness, and thus is inherently theatrical. However, she could more strongly emphasize the connection between the letter's verbal displacement of the expected/formulaic to a resulting psychic displacement in the actual, material necklace. As Sedgwick notes, the inversion in the word order of subject and object in the first sentence is such that "the diamonds themselves already seem to acquire an oscillating and uncanny agency" (77). The verbal is so powerful because it has a direct material analogue. Both Lydia's letter and Eliot's language surrounding it associate the letter's effect upon Gwendolen with the physical transfer of the diamonds. Lydia's letter makes a potential presentation of either letter or diamonds to Grandcourt into the same curse: "Will you give him this letter to set him against me and ruin us more – me and my children? Shall you like to stand before your husband with these diamonds on you, and these words of mine in his thoughts and yours?" (359). Eliot's language after the letter repeatedly insists on the commingling of letter's words, Gwendolen's interior state, and the diamonds: "Gwendolen's eyes were spell-round in reading the horrible words of the letter over and over again as a doom of penance." Yet, when she reaches to burn the letter, not coincidentally do the diamonds also roll onto the floor, essentially taking over the letter's role to insist that the written words still repeat themselves in her:

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[174] 174. George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda*. (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 359. Thereafter cited parenthetically within the text.

> [i]n her movement the casket fell on the floor and the diamonds rolled out. She took no notice, but fell back in her chair again helpless. She could not see the reflections of herself then: they were like so many women petrified white; but coming near herself you might have seen the tremor in her lips and hands. She sat so for a long while, knowing little more than that she was feeling ill, and that those written words kept repeating themselves in her.
>
> Truly here were poisoned gems, and the poison had entered into this poor young creature.

Gwendolen cannot escape the words though the letter is burnt, and sits inert on her chair much like the unmoving diamonds on the ground. Gwendolen is cast as the diamonds in this scene before even receiving the letter, when she first "threw herself into a chair by the glowing-hearth, and saw herself repeated in glass panels with all her faint-green satin surroundings" (358); Gwendolen admires herself sparkling in these repeated reflections, and even notices the housekeeper in the next room pausing, as she believes, to likewise admire her. Once the letter is burned, and the diamonds lie unnoticed on the floor, Gwendolen "could not see the reflection of herself then" (359) though it is again very similar to that of the diamonds: she is merely "white" from afar but shows a "tremor" up close like a jewel's twinkle. As Eliot's one-sentence paragraph insists: these "poisoned gems" are the same as this poisoned "young creature"; the physicality of both Gwendolen and the gems allow the curse to be basically deposited in them, and echoes of Lydia's words repeat in the diamonds themselves just as they do in Gwendolen's head.

Truly, the letter alone is incapable of affecting Gwendolen as strongly as the letter combined with the gift of the diamonds, especially as the return of this necklace to Grandcourt's second lover acts as a malevolent and dislocated repetition of Deronda's returning Gwendolen's turquoise necklace at the novel's opening. This first returning of a necklace is similarly supernatural—"[s]omething – she never quite knew what – revealed to her before she opened the packet that it contained the necklace she had just parted with" (20)—and similarly periperformative in a way which gives power to the letter writer—"*A stranger who has found Miss Harleth's necklace returns it to her with the hope that she will not again risk the loss of it.*" It is the tying of the displaced or periperformative language with a physical object (which is thus somehow shape-shifted from its usual state) that is the real spatial reorganizer. Just as periperformative language shape-shifts the power dynamics of the conventional performative (in which power lies straightforwardly with the speaker), the periperformative-associated object reworks the usual connotations and power structure of the material world in which it is set. On the most basic level, the owner or possessor of the necklace is unusually less powerful than the giver; the unnaturalness of this creates a vortex of malicious eeriness around the two necklace incidents, which feel more uncanny for their material grounding.

Marcel Mauss, in "The Gift," explains the anthropological roots of the obligation incurred in gift-giving or receiving; a gift is never free. Building from Mauss' theory, Margueritte Murphy has argued that *Daniel Deronda* explores the ethical ambivalence of gifting; because the meaning of the gift depends on the social system of which it is a part, the gift lacks a predetermined ethic outside of that system, and thus is not necessarily ethically superior to buying and selling as a way of transferring goods.[175] I argue that in parlour plays, class and rising commodity culture influence prop use. Similarly, Murphy notes that in *Daniel Deronda*, most gifts temporarily become commodities by being pawned. As Murphy explains:

> Gwendolen Harleth, the heroine of the British plot, "sells" herself through marriage, but as her payment is necessarily in gifts, the consequences of this act are compounded by ancient notions of social bondage and indebtedness, making it

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[175] 175. Margueritte Murphy, "The Ethic of the Gift in George Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*," *Victorian Literature and Culture* (2006) 34.1: 189-207. Murphy elaborates to explain that in fact, buying and selling at least at the moment of sale, at least implies an equilibrium, while relationship between donor and recipient is never equal. Murphy notes that according to the *OED*, "gift" is the Old English word for "payment for a wife" and that "gifts" in Old English means "wedding" (192). While addressing the plentiful criticism that suggests an unusual unreadability of Gwendolen's interior state, Murphy notes that while in Eliot's other novels, the rural characters are superstititous, here it is the more aristocratic Gwendolen suffers "fairly inexplicable bouts of superstition" (197).

> more than simply an act of self-commodification…. In effect, the villain of this novel is less the rational self-interested creature begot of nineteenth-century commercial society than a more ancient beast reveling in power and control through archaic mechanisms. (191)

One might even argue that the rise of consumer culture in the Victorian Era contributes to the object's uncanny effect in the period's literature: caught in this transitional zone towards materialism, the object pulsates with a leftover mysticism affecting characters in emotionally unsuspecting ways. "Giftness" —as Murphy and others have explained—on one level signifies an object's potential to stand in for normative and prescriptive cultural and social practices; on a deeper level it reveals a lingering and almost Freudian superstition about objects' intrinsic power in and of themselves. Derrida and others have insisted on the importance of intentionality in gift-giving, but Murphy emphasizes that when Gwendolen receives her turquoise necklace and the diamonds, the gift has a power apart from the intention of the donor. This is not, as I argue, merely that Deronda and Grandcourt are unaware, respectively, of Gwendolen's shame or Lydia's intervention, but has more to do with the wording of the letter accompanying the object, resulting from each gifting being a private act.

The diamond-letter coupling in fact unmistakably replaces the aura of shame earlier conferred by the turquoise necklace. Deronda's first impressions of a married Gwendolen make the diamonds the center of this uncanny repetition, and again Gwendolen herself is the white "flash" of a diamond:

> The white silk and diamonds--it may seem strange, but she did wear diamonds on her neck, in her ears, in her hair--might have something to do with the new imposingness of her beauty, which flashed on him as more unquestionable if not more thoroughly satisfactory than when he had first seen her at the gaming-table….there seemed to be at work within her the same demonic force that had possessed her when she took him in her resolute glance and turned away a loser from the gaming-table. (407)

The diamonds transform into an evil talisman of Grandcourt's power in his marriage to Gwendolen. Though she "burns the letter with an instantaneous terror" (424) and lies to her husband about the source of her scream when opening the diamonds, the text makes clear through a direct, lengthy repetition of Lydia's words as though repeated in Gwendolen's mind, "the words had nestled their venomous life within her." While Gwendolen herself is made analogous to a more green-colored gem, like turquoise with her "faint-green satin surroundings" before receiving Lydia's diamonds, it is after that she is repeatedly more cold, white, and diamond-like.

By no coincidence, the incident, which the text defines as "typical" (425) of Gwendolen and Grandcourt's marriage, and Gwendolen's post-married life, centers on the tainted diamonds enacting a mysteriously powerful transformation of Gwendolen. The "periperformativity" of Lydia's letter as reflected in the gift of the diamonds, in fact functions similarly to the manner of a play prop; I would like to suggest that all psychic/cursed/blessed objects can be viewed in this very performance-oriented sense. Materiality is perhaps rather ironically, a main contributor to the essentially psychic or trans-bodily. The very thingness of the thing is what allows for the psychic takeover of performance, in which one thing represents something which it essentially is not. The thing exists both as the thing itself, but also as the sender/gift-giver/curser's message wrought into the material universe. The fact that the object takes up space somehow ensures that the "magic" of the verbal is made real.

Joseph Hatton's 1874 theatrical "Romantic Caroline; A Farcical Comedy in One Act" uses props in a periperformative manner especially to circulate around the idea of marriage.[176] In this, and often in other parlour plays, the language and action transform when the prop appears—as the latter half of my chapter will explain, the private prop operates much differently within the theatre than the public stage prop. In addition, "Romantic Caroline" usefully introduces many of the more common types of props used in the parlour theatrical more generally. Hatton, most famous for his extensive journalism work, was also involved in the theatre. Though his *Dictionary of National Biography* account mentions his membership in the Garrick Club and his various writings for the stage, it omits his additional involvement in parlour plays, of which at least one other exists besides "Romantic Caroline."[177] Hatton thus is an example of the ease with which Victorian authors could extend their literary prowess to the home theatre, and the way that home theatre embedded itself within the larger Victorian culture. Indeed, this theatrical is carefully interwoven with references to Hatton's other literary exploits, in its careful placement of newspapers in the opening scene, and in the use, as in the similarly timed 1876 *Daniel Deronda*, of the diamond prop. Hatton must have been very aware of the significance of this luxury object as well, as he edited and annotated, along with A. H. Keane, Edwin Streeter's well-known 1882 collection *The Great Diamonds of the World, Their History and Romance*.[178] If home theatricals were a primarily middle-class entertainment at this point, and diamonds held a

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[176] Hatton's comedy, as the introductory page notes, was "founded upon the three-act comedy by Barriere and Thiboust." This play is the 1862 *Une corneille qui abat des noix, comédie en trois actes*.

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177. "Hatton, Joseph Paul Christopher (1841–1907)," Andrew Sanders in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eee online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, Oxford: OUP, http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.its.virginia.edu/view/article/33758. According to Andrew Saunder's DNB accounts, within Hatton's extensive literary output, he "also worked steadily for the stage. *Birds of a Feather: a Serio-Comic Play*, his adaptation of his story 'Kites and Pigeons', was published in 1871, and he later adapted *Clytie, Cruel London,* and *By Order of the Czar* for the stage, the first being produced at the Amphitheatre, Liverpool, on 29 November 1875 before transferring to the Olympic, London, on 10 January 1876. A dramatic version of Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter proved popular in the United States. His other works include *Old Lamps and New: an After-Dinner Chat* (1889) and *Club-Land, London and Provincial* (1890)." In addition to the 1870s adaptation of *The Scarlet Letter*, he also adapted the work of Frances Hodgson Burnett in *Liz, a drama in four acts: founded upon the novel of That lass O'Lowries* in 1877.

178. Edwin Streeter, *The Great Diamonds of the World, Their History and Romance, collected from official, private, and other sources, during many years of correspondence and inquiry* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1882). Subsequent references noted parenthetically in the text.

sort of mystique in Victorian culture, the diamond's meaningfulness as the last prop to appear cannot be overstated. Streeter's book, which catalogues in detail seventy diamonds, each with its own chapter, even opens with speaking of the diamond as "a symbol of power," "a talisman," (ix) and, usefully for my periperformative examples to come, explains this supernatural material quality as connected to language itself:

> Diamond in the English, and *Diamant* in the French, are both synonymous with *Adamant*, which comes directly from the Greek ἀδάμας, meaning literally the "untamable,"* the 'unconquerable.' The ancients properly estimated the character of the stone; and modern *savants*, who, standing upon the mountain tops of Science, have explored the sun itself, can tell us but little more of this splendid production of its creative ways, than is indicated in the Greek. (25-26) [179]

In other words, "Romantic Caroline" utilizes the full extent of romanticized and potent portent-endowed objects, as the other props build up to the determinative diamond prop finale.

The comedy of the play results from the character Caroline's highly melodramatic sense of romanticism; Caroline, already married to the confectioner Joseph Spriggs, finds herself still in love with her soldier cousin Paul, who unbeknownst to her has been long in love with her sister Juliet. Spriggs in fact is one of the few "normally" functioning characters in this drama and actually sincerely loves his wife, while Caroline's parents have evidently and perhaps unconsciously long supported her sense of drama throughout her girlhood—as Caroline exclaims in an aside after seeing Paul: "Down, my romantic soul! Why did they give me a fashionable education?" (11). If the play rather enthusiastically makes fun of a woman's dilemmas regarding marriage, props as they are introduced here bestow a particular power on the characters who manipulate them. Props not only control the direction of the plot, but just as in Gwendolen's situation, the jewel prop dictates power in a relationship. And, if Caroline's high-pitched comic melodrama could end up somewhat exhausting in its unceasing perversity (particularly as her protective parents leap to support her mania), her semi-hysteric state provides the actress with a unique opportunity to let loose. Meanwhile, the plot's quick turns, sharply spoken asides, and intricate interweaving of humor keep an artfulness to the theatrical which otherwise could be wearying with Caroline's consistently energetic misinterpretation of events. In order to understand how fully props are deployed in this play, it is first necessary to understand its intense awareness of storytelling and theatrical language.

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[179] It is interesting to further note the relationship drawn out in the footnote (see indicative asterisk within my quote) which goes on, within an elaborative etymology, to describe a correspondence between women and diamonds: "Few would, at first sight suspect that both "Madame" and her "Diamants" derive by many devious paths from a common original Aryan root, *dam* to tame."

Hatton effectively shapes the opening sequences, during which first Juliet and then Caroline are introduced to us: within their respective dialogue, both women construct analogies between the vivid stories they relate onstage to their *own* situations involving suitors. (On some level, the play almost appears as a satire of theatre's—maybe especially home theatre's—tendency to focus on proposals and marriage, especially as the home theatre genre abounds with energetic female roles like those contained in "Romantic Caroline.") First, Juliet melodramatically construes herself as a type of criminal for secretly loving her cousin Paul. The curtain rather unusually rises with Mr. and Mrs. Pennyman, Caroline and Juliet's parents, asleep in armchairs. Juliet, the only other character on stage, speaks the play's first (and hardly soporific) dialogue when she reads the *Daily Critic* to them: "The accused sits between the two policemen; his gloomy attitude reveals inward preoccupation. There is the inspiration of blood in the fiendish expression of his face…" Juliet clearly identifies with the "accused" seated near the two policing parents. Louisa, the servant, enters, with the *Army and Navy Chronicle*, which Juliet eagerly takes up for news of her cousin; Louisa's dialogue continues Juliet's own "play" in which she imagines herself as guilty heroine in the secret intrigue:

> *Louisa:* You like that paper better than the other, eh, miss?
>
> *Juliet.* Hold your tongue!
>
> *Louisa*. O, how soundly they sleep—the sleep of innocence!
>
> *Mr. P.* (*dreaming*). It is true, however. (*He snores.*)
>
> *Louisa.* (*laughing, and passing to the left of* JULIET). Look! Are they not happy? But what a noise it makes, the sleep of the just!
>
> *Juliet.* They would not be so happy if they had intercepted this. (*She shows her paper*.)
>
> *Louisa*. Rubbish! Is it a crime, then, to have a military cousin, and to look at the paper for promotions in the brave forty-ninth? (3)

Louisa's language is remarkable ("eh, miss?") for side-stepping what she actually is saying—that she knows Juliet's reasons for wanting the other paper—and instead mockingly contrasting Juliet's "guilt" with the innocent parents. Louisa keeps Juliet's illusions of criminality—triggered by the play prop—from going too far, but during Caroline's subsequent reverie, her parents perhaps unfortunately wake up to support their other daughter's self-delusions. Before Caroline enters, to develop her "role" in soliloquy, her parents suddenly awake with the sounds of Juliet and Louisa's departure, and catapult into a quick summary of the action preceding the play. Almost as though Hatton uses them as wind-up toys, the parents first rise from their armchairs, and then suddenly freeze their frenetic dialogue with a "*reseating*" on the sofa and near the newspaper stand, respectively.

> *Mr. P.* What was I saying? Yes, we are perfectly happy. Is it not so, Maria?
>
> *Mrs. P.* And we deserve our good fortune, George!
>
> *Mr. P.* During the thirty years that I followed the profession of a purveyor of refreshments—dinners from the bill of fare, 2*s*., 6*d*., 6*d*., and 5*s*.—I dare say, in the face of the whole world, that I have not failed one minute in my duties.
>
> *Mrs. P.* (*rising*.) And I, George?
>
> *Mr. P.* (*rising.*) You? You have been the noble companion of the toiler. And yet, in the midst of the bustle of business, you still found time to give me two daughters. Courageous woman, thanks!
>
> *Mrs. P.* At last we retired with forty thousand pounds.
>
> *Mr. P.* Joseph Spriggs asked us for the hand of our daughter Caroline.

> *Mrs. P.* We gave it to him.
> *Mr. P.* Is Joseph an honest man, think you?
> *Mrs. P.* Yes.
> *Mr. P.* Ah! Is Caroline happy?
> *Mrs. P.* Yes; though it was not a romantic match; she is a good girl, and will now descend to the ordinary duties of life.
> *Together.* Ah, we are perfectly happy! (4)

The Pennymans' exchange, typical of the melodrama-esque mode of Hatton's play, reveals a discrepancy between a woman's pre- and post-married life, in both Mrs. Pennyman herself, the "noble companion of the toiler," and in Caroline's "descen[t] to the ordinary duties of life." While Hatton rather helpfully lets the parents reveal an exposition here, Ma and Pa Pennymans' lines which conclude in unison become a structure which repeats over the course of the play, which otherwise has no act divisions or other markers of time. Then, Caroline, enters: "*rapt in a deep reverie. She raises her eyes, heaves a sigh, presses her hand to her side, and then snaps her fingers.*" Her parents behold her melancholy entrancement with concern (Caroline looking out the window: "(*in a hollow voice*) Always rain, always rain!"). When they prod their daughter for the reason for her troubles, she tells a story of her husband harming a dog, which is like Juliet's newspaper reading, a thinly disguised metaphor for what she sees as her own situation. Rising theatrically as she launches into her tale (indeed, the characters of "Romantic Caroline" rise and sit with great dramatic consistency), Caroline explains:

> Lately, a poor dog, a wanderer, entered the shop; it was plain to every one that the animal was hungry, thirsty. Mr. Spriggs gave it a brick; the poor brute went out with a tear in its eye. Mr. Springs had probably broken its paw. What is a dog to some natures? A brute to be struck, to be kicked. He drove it out: he has the right. He is the master. (6)

The dog is in essence a narrated prop here, especially if Caroline punctuates her speech with mock brick-throwing and kicking. The evident agitation of her parents, both of whom rise at this speech, shows they are beginning to believe Caroline a mistreated wife:

> *Mrs. P.* (*rising*) And you said nothing?
>
> *Car.* I? And what should I say, mother? There are some people to whom it is a savage joy to do harm to animals. There is a law against such people. But how seldom they put that law in force? Mr. Spriggs knows that. (*She walks agitatedly.*) In return he adores parrots.

Despite the continually overblown Caroline—we next meet her husband who in fact dearly loves her—the theatrical does make a statement about the difficulties for a wife in an actual abusive relationship despite the recent regulations regarding divorce.

Both Juliet and Caroline share a certain capacity for imaginative role-playing as their newspaper-reading and storytelling show—perhaps the only true difference between the sisters is the receptiveness of an audience to their theatrics. If the periperformative is about restructuring regular space, then Juliet and Caroline's language continually tries to do so by reinterpreting regular life through their more peculiar lens, in which they play imagined roles in a theatrical-within-a-theatrical. If Caroline's imagining the dog here is a less present "prop" of sorts, she soon learns to allow more available onstage props to aid her mental refiguring. In fact, the importance of the material object is conveniently and rather immediately introduced in the goods-selling of both Mr. Pennyman and Spriggs' professions, and grows with the props of the coming scenes.

If the diamond is the ultimate prop, Spriggs' unfortunate entrance is peppered not with jewels, but with those props indicative of a class which must work for a living. In a scene to be repeated at the play's conclusion, with quite different results—perhaps because his props themselves have changed class—Spriggs enters soaking wet from the rain, and "*shaking the* *water from his hat and placing it on the piano*" (7), begins an earnest welcome to his wife and parents-in-law. This entrance begins the trifecta of hat-flannel-penny props that indict Spriggs in "mistreatment" of his wife in her parents' eyes. In what has to be one of the more clever interchanges of the play, Caroline's language betrays her true thoughts about Spriggs:

> *Car.* (*feigning eagerness*). My dear husband! And you have been in the rain! Ah, you ought to change your things.
> *Spriggs.* Have I the time? A confectioner to change! And this is our busiest season! But I thought I must run round and see you all for a few minutes. I fear nothing. I have my flannel.
> *Car.* (*aside*). And I am married to this man, who talks of being a confectioner, and wears flannel! Why did I not die first? (7)

Of course, when Caroline tells her "dear husband" who has "been in the rain" that "Ah, you ought to change your things," she means, most explicitly, that her husband should change his clothes because he is soaking wet, but on another level, her language exposes her embarrassment over his job, and the "things" associated with him as confectioner, as revealed by her forthcoming aside. Caroline's language *is* quite periperformative here, in the sense that she puts on a show for her parents (the third-party witnesses) about how she interacts with her husband; this fact is precisely what changes the meaning of her language. Rather than coming right out and saying "My husband is abusive and lowly and I hate him," Caroline's stories and theatrically disguised distress prove more persuasive. Further comment by the parents then pursues poor Spriggs' wearing of warm but unfashionable flannel, which while not a prop clearly indicts Spriggs in a lack of suaveness:

> *Mrs. P.* Ah, you wear flannel?
> *Spriggs*. Yes. Red flannel. It is more genteel than white. I did not dare to wear it at the beginning of my married life; one is so formal in the honeymoon.
> *Mr. P.* It appears, my son-in-law, that you are not so at the present time certainly; I must say that (7).

Yet, the final straw in the drama displayed before Caroline's parents is the penny prop, which Caroline then immediately presents to her husband for the posting of her letter to a schoolfriend. The penny comes as the culmination of Caroline's willful misinterpretation of Sprigg's responses:

> *Car.* (*passing close to her mother*). No, I must write to Katy, my school-friend. You consent to that, do you not, my husband?
>
> *Spriggs.* Consent?
>
> *Car.* Ah, if that provokes you, I will not write. Your wishes are my commands.
>
> *Spriggs.* I do not say so.
>
> *Car.* Then you wish to read the letter? Very well. You shall read it, then you will put it in the envelope yourself. You will be so good? Thank you. Here is a penny for the postage-stamp. (*She puts a penny on the edge of the stand. Movement of the* PENNYMANS.)
>
> *Spriggs.* Ah, now! Come, Caroline.
>
> *Car.* Au revoir, mother! (*She embraces her, going to her father.*) Till to-morrow, father, my good, worthy father! (*She embraces him.*) Sleep well, both of you. It is good to sleep. 'Tis the luxury of the poor. (*Repassing her mother.*) I am going to write to Katy. (*To* SPRIGGS) You will not forget the postage-stamp, will you? The penny is there!
>
> *Spriggs.* (*laughing, without understanding*). Yes, I see it.
>
> *Car.* O, do not put yourself in a temper, my dear, before my father, before my mother; it is useless, it is perfectly useless! (*Aside, her hand on her heart*) O Heaven, give me courage! (7-8)

The parents, outraged by their five-thousand pounds dowry appearing to provide little actual return to their daughter, confront a confused Spriggs, and set themselves against the marriage of their other daughter altogether. Beckoning Juliet to their arms when she enters during this mayhem, her mother and father burst out, in Tweedle Dee and Tweedle Dum fashion: "Happily, you remain to us. We will not sacrifice you" and "O no! We will never marry you. You shall die beloved and protected—a cherished spinster" (9). Juliet, in questioning Spriggs about what has happened, is hilariously interrupted by "*Mrs. P.* (*taking her by the hand*). Do not speak to that man, Juliet. Go back to your room; shut yourself in your room." The earnestness with which the parents decide that their other daughter will be held a precious recluse and that their son-in-law is both violent and cheap, produces comic effect but also reinforces the marriage market at the heart of the home play.

Following the dripping wet hat and the penny, a knife and box of letters provide two subsequent props around which the stage action works. First, a knife scene builds upon the previous tension between Caroline and Spriggs. The innocent Spriggs, "*engaged with*" his supper—the stage directions make clear actual drink is poured, food eaten—becomes a subject of criticism (and theatrical imitation) by Caroline, who tells him he makes "odious" noises while eating and drinking—"You go gulp, gulp, gulp. (*Imitates him*.)" (13). Next, while Caroline fixes, we may suppose a pricier, headdress in the mirror, her husband's new, creaky boots come under attack until he quite cordially and casually replaces them with slippers. Finally exasperated at her husband—at whom she begins directing comments that had previously been confined to asides—Caroline appears to become unhinged in other ways as well, and ends the scene in a nearly lethal bit of prop deployment. Caroline has moved on from mere imitation of his drinking, to the more violent utensils:

> *Car.* An unknown malady is devouring me, and he eats chicken!
>
> *Spriggs*. But I have had nothing since the morning.
>
> *Car.* (*running to the stand*). That's how you love me, is it? Ah, you would wish to see me dead!
>
> *Spriggs.* I? Indeed!
>
> *Car.* (*taking knife from the stand*). You have no heart then? (*She goes round the stand*.)
>
> *Spriggs*. (*getting up)*. Caroline, leave that knife alone. Put it down.
>
> *Car.* Ah, I am nervous. My head throbs.
>
> *Spriggs*. Caroline, leave the knife alone.
>
> [*He tries to escape from* CAROLINE, *who follows him, and upsets the furniture in her course, and throws the plates on the floor.*
>
> *Car.* But I have defenders now. (*Calling out, still pursuing her husband*) Help! They will not let you torture me thus! Help!

> *Spriggs*. I? Torture you? You will wake every one in the house
> *Car*. Help me! The wretch! Ah! ah!
> [*She falls disheveled and fainting on the sofa. The doors open quickly. The* PENNYMANS *and* PAUL *come in hurriedly, partly dressed; the* PENNYMANS *from the left,* PAUL *from the right. Music from the orchestra*.
> *Mrs. P*. Those cries! What is the matter? (*She runs to her daughter*.)
> *Mr. P*. My daughter fainted! (*He pushes* SPRIGGS *to the left, whilst* MRS. PENNYMAN *assists* CAROLINE, *who is insensible*.)
> *Mrs. P*. He had been dragging her by the hair. (14-15)

Cycling through the dinner table props gets Caroline to her nearly extra-bodily state. Interestingly, if Caroline is also like Gwendolen Harleth in being an "actress," having a somewhat closer than usual relationship with her parent(s), and in feeling herself a mistreated wife (though Spriggs is nothing like a Grandcourt), both women also use knives towards the end of their narratives. Of course, the irony of comparison here is that Gwendolen is actually very much mistreated, but no one sees it. Similarly, no one sees Gwendolen actually wield a knife; she just locks it into a special drawer, the key to which she tosses in the sea (though again, Grandcourt's subsequent drowning in the sea is made to feel connected causally). Here, the action of "Romantic Caroline" moves forward with a total reshuffling of objects upset in the wake of the weapon-yielding Caroline.

Paul's box of letters from past loves, burnt on stage by Caroline, triggers the next major plot shift. Caroline, after finding out to her disappointment that she was her husband's only love—"You have burnt nothing on the hymeneal altar?" (19)—next confesses her love for Paul to her husband in an effort to "preserve unsullied the ridiculous name which has been bestowed upon [her]" (20-21). Caroline intends to dismiss Paul from the household herself as a means of protecting her virtue; thus, when Paul enters carrying a small box that he places on the mantel, Caroline quickly hides Spriggs in a nearby closet. Unfortunately—but of course—when Paul comes to tell Caroline of his love for her sister, she misinterprets this as his love for herself. As

Paul tells her of the yet unnamed woman he loves: "Nothing can separate us any longer. She is my present, my future, and as to my past, as to all those waifs of my amorous youth: there they are, you shall burn them yourself" (22). Paul basically enacts Caroline's fantasy about her husband having given up previous love interests as sacrifices for herself; though this actual burning of letters and other paraphernalia onstage is, in this case not quite on the hymeneal altar, but proof more of Paul's previously rakish lifestyle. (The stage directions seem to expect a real fire, certainly no difficultly with a fireplace in the parlour. These actors, unlike the modern reader, would remember the Romantic stage's love of special effects— in other words, a little fire is nothing.) Paul, as the stage directions explain, "*tak[es], as he speaks, some things, which he hands to* CAROLINE, *who throws them into the fire*). The letters of Kadondja, a beautiful Moor! Go. Some of Aïka's hair—an Algerian jewess. A king's daughter in Africa; her necklaces and slippers. Burn, burn all, my dear Caroline" (22). When the truth is revealed, Caroline, upset, tells her husband that she and he both will be going away to "place the ocean between [them and Paul]", and sends Louisa for "[Sprigg's] cloak, his travelling boots." Caroline then, becoming a director of sorts, "*[p]uts on* SPRIGGS *a fur cloak, then makes him sit down and put on fur boots, which* SPRIGGS *does mechanically*" (24). In other words, Paul's exotic props trigger Caroline's next "nervous" state in which she is able to dictate her husband's props and indeed absorb him finally into her "play." While Spriggs first objects to Caroline's proposal to move–-"But I cannot travel. I am a confectioner! I have an establishment"—he soon is overcome by Caroline's theatrical insistence that, yes, this *is* what will happen. By the time the Pennymans arrive on the scene (*Mrs. P.* He wishes to take my daughter from me! (25)), Spriggs "*who does not know what he is saying*" tells her parents "We will come back in ten years' time" and heads for the door.

Much of the play deals with the class into which one marries, reinforced by an interesting sympathy in the penultimate scene between Mrs. Pennyman and her daughter Caroline. Mrs. Pennyman tells her, “My poor child, I sympathize with you. A confectioner, and with such a name; and a man who drinks and drags you by the hair”—of course only part of which is actually true, though her statement makes marriage to a confectioner tantamount to hair-dragging. Both the names “Pennyman” and “Spriggs” sound like prop references; the move from established money to a twig, or other otherwise small growth, is indeed perceived as a step down the social ladder. Mrs. Pennyman then explains the situation to her husband in terms which feel probably rather uncomfortable to him:

> *Mrs. P.* What would you have thought if I had come to you and said: ‘Mr. Pennyman, with your waiter’s jacket, your buckled boots, and your napkin under your arm, you are no longer sufficient for my happiness, and I must have one with striped trousers, yellow facings, and a shoulder belt?
>
> *Mr. P.* (*solemnly*). Mrs. Pennyman!
>
> *Mrs. P.* And in fact, if, in the midst of effusions of an intimate intercourse, instead of ‘I love you, Mr. Pennyman,” I had cried out, ‘I love you, Mr. Redcoat,” what would you have done, George? (25-6)

According to both Mrs. Pennyman and Caroline, the lack of romanticism in the dealings of ordinary life is basically the same as the lack of romanticism in the props of ordinary life. This troublingly banal existence to which it is accepted that Caroline “will now descend” (4) since she is married, appears also to be clearly felt by her mother (“the noble companion of the toiler”), and her father, with their wholehearted shift to the melodramatic mode adopted by Caroline. And, by the play’s conclusion, even Spriggs himself trades his confectioner’s props for something more exciting.

The concluding scene transforms Caroline and Spriggs’ relationship through the use of the diamond prop. Spriggs’ soliloquy as he reenters is a new way of speaking for him; now that he possesses the diamonds, he becomes engrossed in the melodramatic world of the other characters. The opening of his speech here, in which he repeats his first entrance though now "*more wet than ever*" (29) begins the many parallels of this ultimate scene with earlier segments of the theatrical. Spriggs immediately brings up the question of Caroline's happiness as her parents' first speech does:

> Spriggs (*to himself*). I have reflected. My poor little Caroline! If she is alienated from me, it is, perhaps, because I do not make her happy. One sometimes believes oneself a good husband and finds oneself only a wretched animal; that happens to everybody. And she is romantic; I ought to humour her. I will win back her heart. In our honeymoon I read tales to her, and poetry, talked of lords and ladies, and the days when we should retire and travel. The other day Caroline desired to have some diamond earrings, and as I could not tell her why I refused her, she has perhaps concocted the story of the trooper. (*With emotion*) 'Tis all the same; she could well have concocted something else, for she has made me very ill. Yes. (*Touching his heart*) My heart is very heavy; but I have the earrings.

Obtaining diamonds is made equivalent here to a return to the honeymoon state. Interestingly, Caroline "could have concocted something else" besides the story involving her cousin—rather than the potential infidelity that causes her husband pain, the sense that his profession is so disheartening to his wife, and perhaps obtaining and being laden with the diamonds themselves, is what makes his own heart "very heavy." Hidden from sight, Caroline's family still believes that Spriggs means to harm their daughter, as Louisa, in the short meanwhile, had followed him to the druggists where she assumes he buys poison; Mr. and Mrs. P. remain afraid he has returned to "[s]lay her on her own hearth, in her own bedroom!" (30). In a ritual-like repetition of the scene in which Paul burns his billet-doux, Spriggs calls for Louisa to bring "some billets" for the fire to help bring about a romantic mood; here Hatton's slightly outdated word choice for "firewood" makes the parallels with Paul's letters more intentional.[180] As Spriggs continues, he

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180. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, use of the word "billet" to mean "a thick piece of wood cut to a suitable length for fuel," or the now obsolete definition as "wood so cut for fuel," was used more often from

explains he was all set to poison himself but saw a cheerful family at the druggists and "thought how happy Caroline and I might be if I were not a common confectioner… it had been the dream of my life to make money and retire; and then give her every opportunity for indulging her fancy for travel, diamonds, romance!" (31). Realizing his business may not make this vision possible, he lapses into a Caroline-esque suicidal melancholy: "The moon was shining. It shone when Caroline and I were married; and I thought if I kill myself Mr. P. will say I did it to create a scandal. Still the river fascinated me" (31). Caroline, listening, is touched. As Spriggs goes on, the combined tale and appearance of the earrings wins back his wife:

> *Spriggs.* (*continuing*). Then an idea struck me. I had fifty pounds in my pocket. Before I die, I thought, I will fulfill the last wish of my Caroline; it is a month ago. She wanted a pair of diamond ear-rings.
>
> *Car.* (*aside*). My poor Joseph, what a wretch I have been! I begin to hate my cousin Paul!
>
> *Spriggs* (*continuing*). I rushed back to the Strand; I bought these. (*Showing ear-rings.*)
>
> CAROLINE *bursts into a fit of sobbing, rushes upon* SPRIGGS, *and throws herself into his arms.*
>
> Caroline!
>
> *Car.* O, forgive me. (*Sobs.)*
>
> *Spriggs.* It is I who should be forgiven.
>
> *Mr. P.* Bless you, my children.
>
> *Paul* (*taking* JULIET'S *hand, and leading her to* MR. P.). Bless us, and give your consent to our union.
>
> *Mr. and Mrs. P.* We do!
>
> *Car.* (*putting ear-rings in her ears).* I—I love you, Joseph. I am happy.
>
> *Spriggs.* My own dear Caroline, you shall never complain again. I will not rattle my knife and fork, nor gulp my beer; my boots shall never creak…
>
> (32)

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the fifteenth through the eighteenth centuries. Only one citation is listed from the nineteenth century, in 1846, for W. H. Prescott's *History of the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, the Catholic, of Spain*: "He slept on the ground with a billet of wood for his pillow."

The drama comes full circle in many ways—just as the burning of billets somehow undoes or redoes Paul's burning letters, the opening dialogue between the parents on their and Caroline's happiness is finally laid to rest in Caroline saying herself "I am happy." Notice the barrage of performative utterances in this conclusion: Caroline's "forgive me," Mr. P.'s "Bless you," Paul's "Bless us," Sprigg's "Caroline, you shall never complain again," Caroline's "I love you." The only language that avoids this here is Spriggs' "It is I who should be forgiven" (rather than repeating his wife's "Forgive me"); he maintains control though this exchange. Caroline's succeeding "It is I who have annoyed him," which begins the play's ultimate speech, conspicuously echoes the linguistic structure of her husband's sentence—he, as giver of the diamonds, ends up controlling the play *and* its language—while Caroline simultaneously concedes that he was in the right all along. Spriggs does, however, give up his profession in a way; he promises in his very last words that "[w]e will live away from the shop, and retire in five years" (32), and is supported by Mr. Pennyman's exhortation to "double your business, and make haste and retire." In the conclusion, characters try to deny business and keep the diamond lifestyle anyway.

The subtle similarities with *Daniel Deronda*'s diamonds are intriguing—both sets of diamonds are prefaced first with a letter or letters and newspapers, and in both cases, the heroine either explicitly or implicitly threatens her husband with a knife.[181] Perhaps the diamonds are necessarily prefaced with letters, newspapers, and curses in order to more fully embed language, a talismanic quality, an extra-materiality within the diamond itself. One would imagine that in seeing “Romantic Caroline” performed, the props from wet hat to boots to burning exotic paraphernalia would have reached a pinnacle with the appearance of the diamonds. Props certainly climb a social scale throughout the theatrical. The diamond earrings of “Romantic Caroline” are clearly in dialogue with other props in sensation fiction, such as Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*, especially as the theatrical itself works in such a melodramatic mode.

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[181] While Gwendolen never actually brandishes her knife at Grandcourt, she feels guilt about owning this object which she views as a tempting potential weapon against her husband. She locks the knife into a drawer, the key to which she throws into the ocean. Grandcourt's drowning in this same ocean becomes connected in Gwendolen's mind to her having the knife in the first place, almost as though Grandcourt, by entering the ocean where her ill-intent was tossed, is thus "stabbed." This is another instance of a material object in *Daniel Deronda* having near-supernatural or curse-like properties.

Private Props

The study of props, until recently a neglected area of theatre studies, is especially useful in reanimating the ephemeral parlour play, for which the scholar lacks the usual resources available regarding public plays, such as reviews or advertisements. The same conditions of the performance—specifically, the everydayness— which obscure the details of how it occurred, are precisely those that make the prop important to the home theatre in different, expanded ways from the public stage prop. The parlour play prop is unique in that it is often a reappropriated object that already was or could be in the parlour. Thus, the prop here is a familiar object made unfamiliar by its appearance in the parlour's reassignment as a theatre space. Alternatively, the prop is made by the performers (often according to specific instructions given by the playwright herself) precisely for the performance—often with a central role in transforming the parlour into a new non-parlour setting. While a stage is always a stage, here a parlour, not always marked as a theatrical space, capitalizes on the prop as a means of converting it from ordinary use. The prop is more fundamental to creating the “theatre” of the home theatre.

Andrew Sofer, in *The Stage Life of Props*, examines this “power of stage objects to take on a life of their own in performance” while simultaneously noting:

> [t]ext-based scholars, who tend to dismiss objects as at best embodied symbols or at worst as plot devices, have largely neglected this phenomenon—that is, when objects penetrate the critical radar at all. Invisible on the page except as textual

> signifiers, props seduce our attention in the playhouse as they become drawn into the stage action and absorb complex and sometimes conflicting meanings. (2)

For Sofer, the importance of the prop is not just as a material object involved in stage action, but the way it occupies both spatial and temporal dimensions, moving throughout concrete stage space and linear stage time—props "trace spatial trajectories and create temporal narratives." Sofer argues that props additionally contain the meanings of plays previously performed that have become part of the culture's theatrical traditions; the planting of seeds in August Wilson's *King Hedley II* summons up (for the knowledgeable spectator) Willy Loman's seed planting in *Death of a Salesman*, Mama's plant in *A Raisin in the Sun,* as well as the seeds planted by Raynell in Wilson's earlier play *Fences*.[182]

However, this theory seems to demand a great deal of analysis on the part of the spectator enrapt within a particular public performance, but also requires that the spectator have seen both of the prop-containing plays, and perhaps, to have seen enough theatre overall to mentally associate the prop-based plays with one another. As I will show, Sofer's theory applies even more effectively to the private theatre. Sofer admits that one must begin with a "knowledgeable spectator." Thus, the very real requirement of theatre knowledge limits those experiencing this to a rather small intellectual or theatre-going elite. Plus, the initial use of the prop would have to be so publically striking as to recall the spectator out of her attention to the performance then at hand. In other words, the prop would have to especially drive at least a portion of the plot; while certain more symbolic actions may trigger this sort of attention in public theatre, this is much more common in private theatre. All private theatre props have a novelty to them, simply because of the more intimate experience of watching home theatre; the props in the amateur actress's hands feel less as though they have been institutionally placed there by the Theatre, and more as something she herself has constructed, found, or owned. As compared to the spectator of the public stage, the spectator of private theatre needs much less theatrical knowledge to construct additional meanings about or across props. Instead of having broad yet intricate theatrical knowledge, the private spectator or performer might only need to know something about the performers' or families' objects, or to have seen a few prior private theatricals by the same actors.

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[182] Sofer, 2-3.

Especially considering the latter requirement that the prop be striking, already the props to which this certain type of "accrued" meaning is available appears extremely limited on the public stage. One might also wonder what the actual effect of the accumulated meaning would be on the public spectator; in other words, is there any real benefit—or is it just a "noticing"—that occurs when one is in a position to notice the frequency of seed-planting or handkerchiefs in the theatre. Private props, on the other hand, make a more full use of Sofer's attention to accrued meaning for the more casual spectator.

Public plays, despite drawing audiences due to star power, tend to encourage spectators to lose themselves in the performance, but for amateur theatre, a portion of the spectating consciousness is very much aware—this is in fact part of the appeal— that one's friends are putting on the performance. (In private theatre, one might more likely associate the play with the group of friends known to put them on for instance—"I am going to see X and Y perform their new parlour theatrical" rather than "I am going to go see this or that play.") The plays of the public theatre are much more their own separate entities than the plays of the private theatre—the latter share certain undeniable familiarities from play or play, such as recycled props, often a nearly identical cast as well as audience (a classroom of the same children, a set of adult friends).

In the private theatre, connections are far more likely to be made between objects from play to play, because the transition or "borders" between private plays—and even from rehearsal to play—is much less distinct as compared to the relative "individuality" of a public play; thus, there is a greater trickiness in taking a spectator's attention out of the public stage's performance to recognize prop similarities (versus private theatre, in which this recognition, external to and beyond the play at hand, might actually be encouraged. For example, one spectator might note that a wig used on a woman in an earlier play, is now used to dress up a male actor.

In sum, home drama is exponentially more likely to share two important familiarities from play to play than public drama, which have a profound effect on how the prop is perceived: first, both cast and audience would often be composed of nearly the same set of people, helping to strengthen any parallels of prop usage, but this group would also more likely share the same theatrical "canon" of plays, to give repeated prop-usage a stronger effect, making it more likely to be discussed by audience after the fact, or set as a reasonable goal of the actors. (For example, actresses might decide to reuse an audience member's pair of new boots because they know it will provoke a specific audience reaction when they appear.) Secondly, the actual objects used as props were much more likely to be recycled from play to play than in most respectable public theatres. In the latter such a practice might be frowned upon or disguised, but in the private theatre, one can vitally "reuse" objects from real life, drawing a spatial and temporal trajectory such as Sofer describes. However, this trajectory has a much more profound impact than one from public play to public play, because it is now capable of moving interchangeably *from theatrical to real life to theatrical* and so on. Aparna Dharwadker's suggestion that "amateur" theatre may in fact indicate artistic boldness and a potential for grander meaning is perhaps nowhere more relevant than in the use of props.[183] The closeness of the audience to the prop objects changes their attention to them.[184] Private drama props themselves play a fundamentally different role as they so often are a driving force of the plot, and even those used for the purposes of creating setting are often explicitly integrated into the action. Since parlour plays were often shorter in duration, this also provided opportunity for prop objects to "sum" up a lot.

The manner in which an object means much more than the object's material space—though paradoxically, the material space is exactly what enables this expansive meaning—is especially relevant to Victorian culture and literature. This deeper material meaning is triggered not just from the theatrical past embodied in that object, as Sofer explains, but as I argue, also includes the cultural significance and more *general past* of that particular prop object. A parlour play prop can absorb all the cultural and stage meanings available to public stage props, but can also accrue meanings available only to privately owned or made objects. Gwendolen's diamonds only have their specific meaning because Lydia "owned" them first. While emphasizing the ways which this enriched meaning works for the parlour play prop, this sort of expansiveness of a material object's meaning, as I have tried to show, is often found throughout Victorian literature—most usually, as in the parlour play, around situations involving the marriage plot or negotiations of gendered power. Interestingly, even these object-based instances within the

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183. Aparna Dharwadker, "The Strains of Modernity: Recursiveness, Multilingual Literacy, and the End of Commerce," Lecture, Harvard Mellon Theatre School 2013, Harvard, MA, June 6, 2013. Video of lecture found online: http://thschool.fas.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=k76089&pageid=icb.page386654.

184. For instance, the group of actors involved in parlour play productions might accumulate their own set of props to be deployed in the theatre, thereby producing "private meanings" to the props known to the inner circle of actors or audience members. In the plays produced by the Victorian Theatrical Society at the University of Virginia for example, we recycled one of a set of matching "Mardi Gras" hats used for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, in an adaptation of W. S. Gilbert's play, for Queen Dollalolla in Henry Fielding's *Tom Thumb*, adding to the comedy of the second role. A audacious red wig, an alternate for the role of Lady Audley's Secret, was used by the Daftie in H. J. Byron's "The McAllister McVitty McNab; or, the Laird, the Daftie, and the Highland Maiden."

novel also often operate around particularly theatrical language, which suggests the power of the theatre to transform not only the identities of actors but also of objects.

Parlour Props in Action: Mice and Boots, and the Monologue

Parlour play props accrue, precisely as Sofer explains of public props, “intertextual resonance as they absorb and embody the theatrical past” (2). Whereas Gwendolen’s necklace carries a curse, parlour play props and characters recognize this same sort of material memory, both within an individual play and from play to play. Within home drama, certain props show up again and again; more common props are, evidently and intriguingly, letters, boots, and mice, but evidence also exists that props and characters of the private play were unsurprisingly sometimes inspired by public performance. For instance, in Mrs. Burton Harrison’s “The Mouse Trap” (1889), the widow heroine Mrs. Prettipet is terrified by a mouse inside her apartment; this is the only reason she admits her “incurable” (6) suitor. Mid-play, Mrs. Prettipet, who still has not explained to Mr. Briefbag that a mouse somewhere on the premises entirely explains her nervousness about being alone (which he mistakes for coyness and affection), shouts out: “For my sake (*à la Fanny Davenport, in Fedora*), kill him! kill him!” (11). At the same time as the mouse trope brings the couple together throughout the play, and unites this play with other “mouse” parlour plays, the actress playing Mrs. Prettipet receives a rare chance to imitate a favorite actress or to embody a culturally recognized, contemporary role. (One might imagine that this sort of cultural catchphrase—similar to “show me the money” for the 1990s—pervaded the home play in many instances not explicitly indicated by the author but which the audience widely recognized.) The stage rights to *Fedora* in America were bought by Fanny Davenport, who appeared in the first American production in 1883 and thereafter produced the play in circuit across the country; she, as an 1890 *New York Times* article notes, “achieved a great reputation" for her role in this play.[185] Interestingly enough, *Fedora* provides more evidence of a public stage play influencing the props of popular culture in its popularization of the fedora hat; French dramatist Sardou actually wrote the play for actress Sarah Bernhardt, who first wore a fedora during her performance of his play. Indeed, a *New York Times* review of 1887 makes clear the enthusiasm with which the audience related to the heroine:

> [t]here where 300 would-be Fedoras in the audience, in addition to the one on the stage. There were fat Fedoras and thin Fedoras, Fedoras modern and Fedoras contemporaneous with "She." There were Fedoras who would have spoken louder or stamped more or song-and-danced more than Miss Bernhardt if they had been doing it…[186]

So whether the actress playing Miss Briefbag wore a fedora or not, it is clear that the home play provided ample opportunity for those eager audience members to enact their own vision of a character, especially as helped by mutual props. However, the most overwhelming trend related to the parlour play prop is its force and usefulness in forcing a specific path to the stage action; the private prop operates by an exaggerated version of Chekhov's maxim that a gun on stage must go off by Act III. The parlour play prop can additionally be characterized by the play across and between theatricals of similar prop use, and by the prominence of props especially in the frequent marriage plot-based plays.

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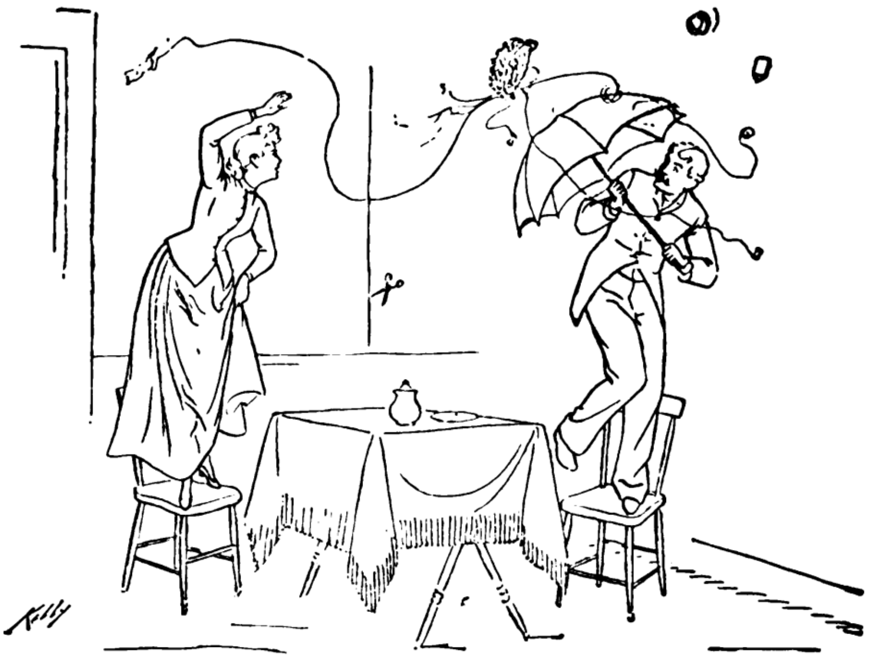
[185] For more on specific productions of Sardou's plays, see: Jerome A. Hart, *Sardou and the Sardou Plays* (Philadelphia and London: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1913), 390-391. Hart writes that *Fedora* was first played in America at Haverly's Theatre (later the Fourteenth Street Theatre) on October 2, 1883, and revived again at the same theatre in November 1884, Niblo's Theatre in January 1885, the Grand Opera House in March 1885, the People's Theatre, New York, in December 1887, the Star Theatre, New York, in April 1887, later in the same year at the Grand Opera House, and finally four years later at the Broadway Theatre, New York, in April 1891.

The New York Times published a small article on October 28, 1890 noting Fanny Davenport's reprising her role as Fedora in *Fedora* in Philadelphia before her New York opening in "Cleopatra" in December. "The house to-night was so crowded that it was found necessary to place the orchestra on the stage in order to accommodate some of the overflow. Miss Davenport acted Fedora with her usual force and spirit, and was ably supported by Melville McDowell and an efficient company. She was called before the curtain after each act."

[186] "Actors at the Matinee, They Applaud Fédora with Enthusiasm. Sarah Bernhardt's Genius Judged by the Severest of Critics and Pronounced Most Wonderful" *The New York Times*, 25 March 1887.

I will now compare a pair of plays containing one of the most frequently found props from the “*threatening, violent, or surprising*” category: two “mice” plays reveal how the parlour prop can deviously drive a renegotiation of gendered power. Mrs. Harrison’s “Mouse Trap,” previously mentioned, is in fact much less conventional than it may first appear; while the mouse prop is used, first, to bring a man inside the home, and second, to marry him to the heroine, the circumstances of the play do not entirely give Briefbag the upper hand. Briefbag is equally if not more undone by the realization that a mouse is in the house, explaining after he jumps onto a chair opposite Prettipet’s that “if upon earth there lives an animal that completely chills the marrow of my bones, it is a mouse” (11). Even after Prettipet offers her hand in marriage if Briefbag gets rid of their “common enemy” (12), Briefbag insists he will “die upon the spot” should he come into contact with the rodent. Prettipet herself is left to offer a variety of ideas on ways to rid them of the mouse—suggesting they poke open the door, “throw things” (which she does, and hits Briefbag), and make all the noise they can. Finally, Briefbag imitates a cat; this scares the mouse away, but certainly this rescue occurs under not the most masculine circumstances, as even he admits.

THE MOUSE-TRAP was first played in August, 1886, at the Sea Urchins, Bar Harbor. It was repeated at matinées of amateur theatricals, given for the Island Mission and other charities, January 13th and 14th, 1887, at the Madison Square Theatre in New York, when Miss Elsie de Wolfe played Mrs. Prettipet, Mr. Edward Fales Coward, Mr. Briefbag. This comedietta requires but one interior scene, with a practicable window facing audience. Both characters wear modern morning dress. As "patter" parts, the lines committed to Mrs. Prettipet and Mr. Briefbag should be spoken rapidly and with spirit.



From Mrs. Burton Harrison's Short Comedies for Amateur Players, 2.[187]

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[187] Both Edward Fales Coward and Elsie de Wolfe were members of the Amateur Comedy Club in New York, founded in 1884. De Wolfe later acted for the public stage. Edward Fales Coward (1862-1933) was a dramatic critic and playwright. He contributed to *The Theatre: Illustrated Monthly Magazine of Theatrical and Musical Life.* He wrote *King Stephen; an historical drama in seven tableaux completed from John Keats' fragment*, (New York: W. A. Burrows, 1912). According to the Internet Broadway Database, Edward Fales Coward wrote a musical comedy "'Round New York in 80 Minutes" which ran from November 6, 1899-February 24, 1900. Much more is known about Elsie de Wolfe (1865-1950) who eventually became best known for her work as an interior designer. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Elsie was "educated privately in New York and in Edinburgh, Scot., where she lived with maternal relatives. Through that connection she was presented at Queen Victoria's court in 1883 and introduced to London society. Soon after her return to New York in 1884 she became a devotee of amateur theatricals, then a popular form of charitable fund-raising." It is only after the death of her feather in 1890 that she then turned to the public stage. De Wolfe later became an interior designer, which at that time was "an almost exclusively masculine field." I see De Wolfe's groundbreaking work as a woman in interior design as supporting my claim that participation in home theatre resulted in the reconfiguring of social norms, especially

In contrast, S. Jennie Smith's "Not a Man in the House" uses a mouse incident to demonstrate the utter irrelevance of men within the home.[188] The entire plot works through a cast of five women (and several offstage men), led by Mrs. Bing, who like Mrs. Prettipet is also a widow and extremely eager to avoid remarriage. The play opens with "*Sewing implements, muslin, etc., all around*" (3), two characters hemming garments, and Mrs. Bing's monologue in which she luxuriates in the manlessness of her domestic space:

> Now this is what I call a home, and it was all planned and arranged by a woman, too. What do men know about the comforts and conveniences of a home, and why shouldn't a woman have her own way about the place where she spends the greater part of her life? (3)

Mrs. Bing goes on to explain that "no gentleman is to enter [her] house" (4) and that all tradesmen can be met at the door. The other female characters grumble about this to a degree—two in particular, repeatedly exclaim nearly identical asides ("Oh, if it should be John Wright!," "if it should be Hal") whenever a man *does* come to the door, in hoping that this is her lover. One woman wonders whether the window latches have been found secure, but Mrs. Bing only reminds her that they would be no safer with men in the house, as "[h]alf of them are cowards, anyhow" (6). The upkeep of the *material* conditions of the hearth is, ironically for my prop-based purposes, what makes the other women most question the absence of men. Yet Mrs. Bing asserts that she can replace her own window panes and move her own stove, and she grows contemptuous when her visiting niece compliments her on the simultaneously beautiful and cozy state of her abode, along with the suggestion that she "must have the brain of a man" (7).

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within the domestic space. See "Elsie de Wolfe" in http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/154188/Elsie-de-Wolfe.

[188] S. Jennie Smith, "Not a Man in the House" (Chicago: T. S. Denison and Co., 1897).

The second and last act of this play may end with a barrage of offstage men who invade despite Mrs. Bing's best intentions, but the first act concludes with an affirmation of the strength of this widow through the use of the mouse prop. When the servant Kate drops the mousetrap and thus lets the mouse loose, the rest of the ladies go into hysterics, while Mrs. Bing remains collected and "*gives a desperate blow*" (11). The curtain falls for intermission with Mrs. Bing triumphant, "(*Holding up a dead mouse by its tail*.) [and exclaiming] *And it was killed by a woman!*" (11).

Like the supposedly animated mice, inanimate pairs of boots are commonly used as home theatrical props, though no one must chase or kill them. This footwear is specifically gendered—it is a man's pair of boots, not a lady's, that consistently appears. Boots, which were presumably conveniently obtained for theatrical use, are the prop perhaps most used to underline the imaginative capacities of the female characters onstage. "Romantic Caroline" includes boots amongst its paraphernalia of props to suggest Sprigg's relative class inferiority and more importantly heighten Caroline's anxiety about her husband:

> *Car.* O, but what boots are you wearing!
> *Spriggs.* How, what boots?
> *Car.* They creak. They are noisy boots.
> *Spriggs.* They are new, you see. I changed my damp boots for them. Soon put that matter right. (*He knocks his foot several times.*) Take them off, and have slippers. (*They hear several knocks on the floor*.) Hold! Who's that knocking in that style?
> *Car.* (*sternly*). It is my mother, sir. You have woke her up.
> *Spriggs*. Ah, yes, with my boots. (*He goes back to the stand, slipping along so as to not make a noise.*) There now, they creak no more. 'Tis all the same. I'll leave that bootmaker. (*Here seats himself and continues eating.*) (13-14)

Boots, just as they are used to increase Caroline's mania, are most often used to suggest an intruder or other ominous masculine presence by placing them visibly behind a curtain, as in both Mrs. Burton Harrison's "Behind a Curtain" (1889) and Florence Bell's "A Woman of Courage" (1890). Both plays are monologues, and thus rely even more heavily upon props to provide motivation to actresses. Even Mrs. Harrison's prefatory notes to her play emphasize the special requirements of this form: "It is perhaps needless to suggest that to hold an audience by a monologue requires constant action on the part of the player, and unflagging spirit. This one was rendered by Mrs. Denison with the addition of original 'business,' adding greatly to its success" (48). Mrs. Harrison's plays—rather uniquely among home plays—specifically stress the success of the relatively more famous female figures who starred in the theatricals prior to the publishing of her collection. Just as one should perform the cries of Mrs. Prettipet with the emotion of Fanny Davenport in *Fedora*, an actress taking up Mrs. Harrison's collection would inevitably be aware of actresses' performances preceding her own. The higher class status of prior performances is foregrounded through the full title—*Short Comedies for Amateur Players / as Given at the Madison Square and Lyceum Theatres, New York By Amateurs*—and further drawn out in the text before each play. As I have discussed in the introductory chapter, brief notes which precede each play name the places, dates, and very often the people and associations involved in initial productions—for instance, the reader of Harrison's volume learns that the theatrical "Two Strings to Her Bow" was performed first at Sedgwick Hall, Lenox, September 27th, 1884, and "again at the Lyceum Theatre in New York, as part of a programme for the benefit of the Babies' Shelter of the Church of the Holy Communion" (84), or that "WEEPING WIVES was prepared at the request of Mr. George Riddle, for his readings, and has been repeatedly acted by amateurs. It is best known through the interpretation of Mrs. Oliver Sumner Teall as Delphine, Miss Alice Lawrence as Clotilde, [etc.]" and was performed both at the opening of the Tuxedo Club Theatre as well as "at the residence of Mrs. Arthur Murray Dodge, for the benefit of a Day Nursery" (16). Interestingly though, Mrs. Harrison in her preface, explains that in:

> …preparing for amateur use these English versions of French originals, I was inspired by a desire to furnish something in which my players might have the benefit of an untrodden field, and be spared comparison with professional predecessors. Few amateur aspirants bear in mind that, in selecting for performance the established dramas identified with the names of artists who have successfully interpreted them, they are exposing themselves to a two-edged sword of criticism. (i)

Thus, the would-be Fedoras, as named by *New York Times,* are given a chance to test their own theatrical abilities in home performance—in a manner that rather uniquely positions them outside the spectrum of celebrity stage names, but includes them among the potentially aristocratic amateurs named actually or implied through organizations named by Harrison. If boots are sometimes a class indicator, as in "Romantic Caroline," the names of actresses cited by Mrs. Harrison sometimes do similar work, but also create a feeling of community with subsequent actresses who embody the same roles. Scholarship may tend to denigrate British and American nineteenth-century theatre as the least developed of the arts. However, here is an example of the home theatre forming an aspirational ladder of influence based outside the regular spectrum of "making it" on the public stage, and instead operating on a purely amateur, though in this case class-aspirational, plane. Actresses of the volume, if not able to vacation in the American Lake District at Bar Harbor or Lennox (the latter of course frequented by Fanny Kemble), could at least know they were acting the same theatrical as the elites. At the same time, fundraising theatricals reinforce high society—and permit a lady to still perform and maintain respectability (despite the more public venue).

Some historical background of the author, Mrs. Burton Harrison, can provide helpful context for understanding the social critique within her plays. The author, also known as

Constance Cary Harrison, produced over fifty works of literature, and wrote extensively for newspapers and magazines throughout her lifetime. In Adrienne Dunning Rea's thorough encyclopedia entry on Harrison, she explains that Harrison aimed at a middle-class readership, and her work often revealed the "ambivalence of a privileged, affluent woman who was sometimes critical of the social conditions of her day," as in one of her best-known novels *The Anglomaniacs* (1890), a comedy of manners that parodied the modern-day social climber.[189] Intriguingly, she was also responsible for several important "props" of America; Harrison and her two cousins sewed the first examples of the Confederate Battle Flag during the American Civil War, and later, Harrison persuaded Emma Lazarus to write her poem which is inscribed on the base of the Statue of Liberty.[190] One might group Harrison with Hatton in their widespread literary exploits including the theatrical, and perhaps thus attesting to its popularity.

For "Behind a Curtain" specifically, Harrison indicates the theatrical is written "As Played by Mrs. Charles Denison at the Madison Square Theatre, Jan. 14, 1887" (48). This information, expanded on a subsequent page, explains that Mrs. Denison was formerly known as Miss Mathilde Madison and that besides Madison Square Theatre matinees, performances also occurred "during the Summer of the same year, at the Rodick House, Bar Harbor" as well as "by Mrs. Walter Andrews and other amateurs in private houses."[191]

In "Behind a Curtain," Mrs. Bellamy, a young widow eager to avoid remarriage—just like Mrs. Prettipet—arrives from the country to her New York hotel room, a place she had not expected to find herself, “a runaway!” (49). In perhaps an inefficient but what she considers a rather adventuresome escape, Mrs. Bellamy explains:

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[189] Adrienne Dunning Rea, "Mrs. Burton Harrison (1843–1920)" *Encyclopedia Virginia*. Virginia Foundation for the Humanities, 9 Jun. 2011. Web. 18 Aug. 2013.

[190] Ibid.

[191] Mrs. Charles Denison, evidently an energetic woman, performed in at least one public stage play (as Mrs. Harkaway in *Partners*, which opened April 9, 1888 at the Madison Square Theatre) and she appeared in a 1902 print featuring her portrait and her new role as president of the General Federation of Women's Clubs describes her as "a speaker of great force and a club worker of great efficiency."

> [i]t was the only way to save myself from that tiresome Captain Fitzhenry. Worn out with trying to keep off a proposal, I finally consented to receive him at twelve this morning. At twelve this morning I was on the train—“called to New York on business of importance.” Poor man! I should have liked to see his face when my butler gave the message. (*Laughs*.)

One has to appreciate her chutzpa; in explaining that she *does* have an excuse for visiting New York—her school friend Augusta is getting married—Mrs. Bellamy also reveals that this same friend Augusta was extremely jealous, first when Mrs. Bellamy married her husband, and then even more so when he “died, six months after, leaving [her] all that money” (50). Certainly, Mrs. Bellamy seems to treasure her single state; upon receiving a letter from the abhorred Fitzhenry just moments after setting foot in her hotel room, she insists she will never “sacrifice my life of enchanting independence for the sake of a man!” Fitzhenry’s epistle, which Bellamy reads aloud, quite perkily narrates how he bribed Mrs. Bellamy’s servants, tracked down her train, and spent the entire ride in the back car bored “in the company of a maiden lady, who ate lozenges” and ends in his persistent resolution to present himself the following morning to receive a final answer from his beloved.

In addition to this energetically evocative letter prop, Harrison consistently uses props to activate the actress’ imagination and movement throughout the monologue. As her note in the preface to “Tea at Four O’Clock” suggests, Harrison capitalizes upon opportunities for generating stage action; there she suggests that “[p]alms, screens, etc., scattered about the scene are useful in affording opportunities for ‘business,’ the dramatis personae changing places from time to time to avoid stiffness in their grouping” (54). In “Behind a Curtain,” the props provide the means through which Mrs. Bellamy can become more and more frantic while left alone in her hotel room. Over the course of her speaking, Mrs. Bellamy's imagination runs away with itself. Harrison includes frequent stage directions for the character to move either herself or more often her accompanying props as she becomes more fearful. Just after reading Fitzhenry's note, and realizing that "this is the first time [she] was ever at a hotel by myself," Mrs. Bellamy becomes almost spontaneously frightened: she moves to and fro, looking under the bed, decides she had "better barricade the door. (*Piles up chairs*.)" and promises aloud that "I won't be murdered without knowing it. My death shall make a noise in the world, I promise you" (50). The reader can hardly blame the nervous woman as the news that Fitzhenry so covertly followed her and thwarted her mission of escape would come as quite the shock, in addition to the fact that she would have to actually face him the subsequent morning.

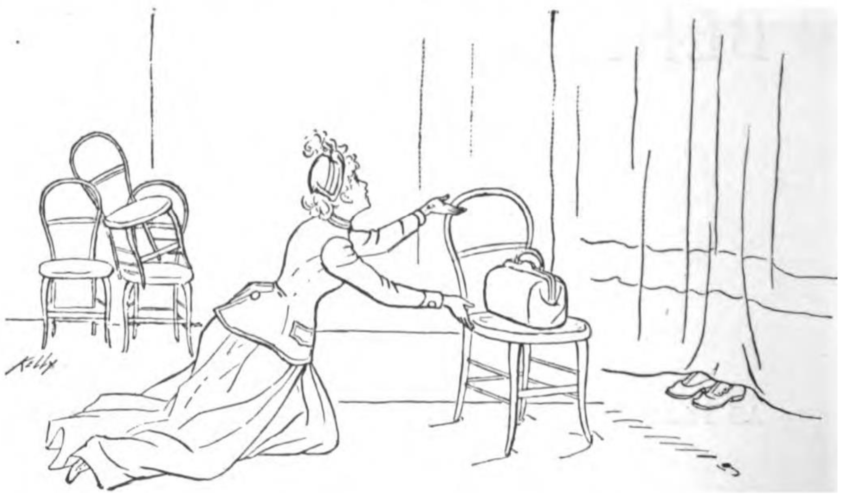
Besides boots, this theatrical also features a letter and a newspaper, likewise typical props in home theatricals. The newspaper terrifies Mrs. Bellamy when she picks it up in her room; complaining that these "horrid newspapers" (51) merely provoke such fears as those she is currently experiencing; she then reads of "a young and charming widow—chloroformed at—her *hotel!*" Her fears now thrown into a fever-pitch, poor Mrs. Bellamy begins to notice the curtains moving and fears she is to be murdered:

> (Drops book, looks again at curtain.) *I see his feet!* In great big boots, such as robbers always wear. Here I am, locked in with him. To reach the bell I'd have to pass that window. I'll die first. Horrible! To-morrow there'll be a new murder to put in all the newspapers. A widow, alone, unfriended, in a strange hotel. How could he know I have my diamonds in this bag? What will Fitzhenry say when he comes here at eleven to-morrow, and finds me weltering in my gore?

Just as in "Romantic Caroline," the diamonds reappear alongside boots. On one level, this seems an odd coincidence of material objects as diametrically opposed as jewels and footwear. On another level, this perhaps indicates that props in parlour plays often refer to class differences associated with gender: the woman is associated with the upper-class diamonds, the man with the lower-class boots. Bellamy tries to bargain with her imaginary intruder and exchange her diamonds for her life ("if he has a shadow of delicacy, he will accept them"). The following speech requires that the actress playing Mrs. Bellamy take out a succession of objects, sorting them by their luxury (or lack of) value.

> Oh, those feet, those feet. I dare not look at them again, and yet I must. Stay! If he is going to kill me for my diamonds, I'll offer them to him. … Here they are (*shows jewel case*), in this bag, most convenient for carrying in the hand. If you don't mind, I will keep one or two necessary things. My comb and brush, and my tooth-brush. They can be of no use to you. (*Takes out articles named, tears off bracelets and rings, puts them in bag, closes it, puts it on chair, pushes chair towards curtain.*) (51-52).

This momentum of movement around the props is reflected in her own hysteric psychological state; to back up her claim that she will be unable to "identify [the burglar] again, no matter how hard [she] might try," Mrs. Bellamy dramatically "[s]*huts eyes, stands center stage, ears stopped. Pause. Opens eyes*," and drops to her knees to beg for her life when she sees the bag of proffered possessions standing untouched. Just then, an offstage voice, begging pardon, explains a pair of boots has been left by a gentleman who previously stayed in the room; Mrs. Bellamy, yelling "Saved! Saved! (*Runs to door, throws out boots*.)"—one might imagine this boot-throwing to be especially dramatic—and decisively vows that "from this time forth I shall go nowhere alone. To provide for all contingencies, to-morrow at eleven I accept that dear, big, brave Fitzhenry" (52). This might be seen as a traditional resolution of marriage. Yet the hunted Mrs. Bellamy accepts the proposal-to-come out of utter fear. Further, more subtly, Mrs. Bellamy, negotiating with her intruder (who, for all purposes, might as well be Fitzhenry), seems to barter away her own class status or single status to keep what is most essential—her comb and toothbrush, but also, her individual self.



From Mrs. Harrison's "Behind a Curtain," Short Comedies for Amateur Players, 48.

The plotline of Florence Bell's "A Woman of Courage" is identical in central ways to Mrs. Harrison's play; both center on an overly imaginative woman who has fled a man and is now holed up alone in a hotel room for the first time. In both plays, the heroine directs her opening lines offstage to a member of hotel staff before launching into her monologue, and in both, the main plot device is her believing, due to boots placed just under a curtain, that she has an intruder in her midst. However, Bell's play, at nine full pages of text, is much longer than Harrison's, at just four. The similarity between these two plays indicates a shared cultural context and most likely a shared source in the French originals cited by Mrs. Harrison in her preface (especially as Bell wrote theatricals in French as well). Bell's monologue, which opens Chapter Two, has an additional layer of the ludicrous in our awareness that we are watching a very ridiculous character (as indicated by the name "Mrs. Trembleton"), whereas Harrison's Mrs. Bellamy is a highly intelligent and energetic woman unsettled by circumstances. Mrs. Trembleton, rather than fleeing a would-be proposal and arriving as Bellamy does in a "*room in a hotel in New York*" (50), has instead snuck off on her own, without the knowledge of her husband, and "come up to London alone, bringing the diamonds [her] dear mother left [her], to lodge them at the banker's" (227), because, as she explains, the great number of robberies lately around Richmond has had her jumping at every unexpected sound. The shared presence of diamonds in yet another theatrical is obviously striking, but so is the offstage male presence—whether of intruder or relative—which still largely motivates poor Trembleton's speech. The never-seen but continually referenced husband George makes clear that the British Mrs. Trembleton has never had the independence of the American Mrs. Bellamy:

> When George is at home I don't mind [unexpected noises] so much, as he is always ready to tell me how foolish I am, like a dear, good husband, and to suggest some plausible explanation for the sounds that fill me with terror. … I am a little ashamed of myself, I must admit, but after all, we all know that women are not as brave as men: it isn't expected of them, it would be unfeminine if they were. George always laughs at me most unmercifully for my want of courage—indeed, it is quite a standing joke with him. After all, it is perhaps rather a good thing that a husband should have some innocent little standing jokes at his wife's expense, it does her no harm, and makes him think he is a very witty fellow—but I have often pointed out to him that he has never seen me in any real emergency, brought face to face with a visible danger: then of course it would be very different. (228)

In a technique characteristically used by Bell, a female character agrees with misogynistic, gender-bound ideology—"it is perhaps a good thing that a husband should have some innocent little standing jokes at his wife's expense"—in order to make the falseness of such thinking clear to both actress and audience. On some larger level, this technique functions throughout the play to spotlight (while exploiting for comic effect) a weak view of womanhood. While one can see the events of the play, after this speech, as Mrs. Trembleton imaginatively creating this "visible danger" for herself to triumphantly confront and conquer, she elsewhere indicts the rest of womanhood in sharing in her irrational fears. Her sister, as she describes, is a far-gone version of herself: "if a puppy comes gamboling along the road towards her, [she] already sees herself under the care of Pasteur" (229). In an earlier incident (which similarly "predicts" the play by foretelling a version of the boots incident to come), Mrs. Trembleton herself is comically unable to learn from the experience of her maid. Back in Richmond, on the third night of this maid's watch over the diamonds, "the cat jumped out from behind the window-curtain, and the maid went into hysterics from sheer terror, thinking he was a man in a mask, while [Mrs. Trembleton], hearing the noise, fainted in the drawing-room, thinking that the maid was being murdered" (228). Part of the ingenuity of Bell's play is not just these moments which comically lay out events to come in the drama, such as the maid incident and Mrs. T's wishing to stand up to crisis, but her character's own imaginative ruminations in monologue.

Bell's monologue relies on Mrs. Trembleton's imaginatively narrating specific props, some of which later "materialize" onstage; overall, the theatrical progresses from a more imaginative existence in which Mrs. Trembleton daydreams, narrates past events, and literally loses herself in her imagination—"Where am I? I really believed I was doing it! (231-2)—to the reality of actual objects and the recognized truth that the boots are no intruder at all. The play is almost an exercise, for the actress of home theatre, in a controlled hysteria, in losing oneself in the acting experience before being recalled to the real parlour by the clapping at the drama's conclusion. Rather than later discovering through letter that she was indeed followed (à la Mrs. Bellamy), Mrs. Trembleton instead begins by reflecting on the frightening responsibility of keeping the diamonds safe during her train journey. Her monologue reveals her motivation for action in a way similar to an actress's addressing her own movement on stage. To thwart suspicions that she was carrying valuables, Mrs. Trembleton initially kept her bag secured in the netting over her head: "I did not like to cling too closely to them, for fear of arousing suspicion—but oh! how my heart beat when that man got in at the first station, that dark-browed man with shiny boots and a large scarf-pin!" (229-230). The "shiny boots and a large scarf pin" indicate signs of a "swell-mobsm[a]n" to our heroine; later in her speech, Trembleton comes to believe that this same man is an actual intruder in her hotel room on the basis of some particularly shiny boots. The play thus blurs the lines, through the use of the prop as a bridge, between recollected past and present circumstances.

Both plays are similar to the plot of Anthony Trollope's 1871 *Eustace Diamonds* in the need to protect diamonds during a train journey, though in the novel the woman is humorously the villain. The woman versus man dynamic of both Harrison's and Bell's monologues center on prop use; it is important that Mrs. Trembleton's diamonds were her "mother's diamonds […] – the diamonds she wore on her wedding day!" (232) and that saving them from the intruder becomes a matter of defending this female bond against the ominous male presence of the boots (which can also be seen to represent the doubting offstage George). The intrusive offstage hotel clerk in both Harrison's and Bell's plays, who brings the women back to their senses, is male. When comparing the two plays side by side, the gender dynamic emerges more clearly; considering the parallel nature (and close publication) of "A Woman of Courage" (1890) alongside "Behind a Curtain" (1889) the man from the train turned intruder from Trembleton's mind merges with the figure of Fitzhenry, who actually does track Bellamy through her train journey to her hotel. One household could arguably have performed these two plays in the same year.

Moving from mere past reconstruction of events, Trembleton's use of the actual key prop spurs a more imaginative, hysterical stream of thought. In a perturbed repetition of action, an insane rehearsal, Mrs. Trembleton frenetically locks and unlocks the door:

> [*Looks around her nervously*.] I will lock the door at any rate, then no one can attack me unawares. [*Locks door*.] Now I feel happier! But perhaps I

> had better double-lock it, that would be safer still. [*Turns key again.*] There, that was twice, I think. [*Tries to turn key back again.*] I will unlock it and see. Oh, dear, how stiff this lock is to turn! (230)

This action continues, with her taking the key out, and attempting—this time, failing—to put the key in once more. Now realizing she has "hampered" (231) her own key, and is trapped, "locked in—locked in at the roof of the house!," she runs to call for the waiter but the bellrope "*comes down in her hand*." All the props of her environment begin to turn on her. Resigned to her fate, and preparing herself for the courageous moment foretold at her arrival, she decides the best course of action is to plan for the worst, and imaginatively recreates the scene of a fire in her mind.

> Am I forgotten? No: the steps of my rescuer draw nearer. Breathless, blackened by smoke, he leaps into the room, where almost suffocated, but still calm and collected, I await him with a damp handkerchief tied carefully over my mouth—one moment more—the window—the dark—the frantic crowds below—one wild leap into the blackness of space——[*Covers her face with her hands, gasps shuddering.*] (231)

Worked into this frenzy in which she quite literally believes a fire to be raging, she recovers herself just in time to briefly fear a supernational apparition has joined her, but realizes she has merely spied the extinguisher and that, moreover, a ghost would not likely be "doubled up in such a small space, like a Jack-in-the-box" (232). The sense of an entrapped space in which all objects are evil portents or otherwise conspiring against her, contributes to this height of her mania.

Props and possessions, whether imaginative or real, then propel Mrs. Trembleton through the remainder of her adventure. She suddenly spies the most threatening presence yet—materially real, no apparition this time—when she: "[*Walks round, comes to window curtains R.C., whence a pair of boots protrude. Staggers back speechless with fright, pointing at them.*]

A pair of boots! [*Whispering.*] *A pair of shiny boots!!!* I am lost! It is he!" She recognizes the intruder is unable to escape because she has jammed the door locked—but rationalizing that he, being a malefactor, must have a false key as malefactors do, Mrs. Trembleton resolves to sit in the darkness, pretend to be asleep, and allow him to make off with her mother's diamonds in order to save her own life. However, more terrified than ever once in the darkness, she strikes up a match and "*looks furtively round her, sees the boots, she is close to them—starts away again at finding herself so near them, and darts to the other side of the room*" (233). The sudden stage movements, combined with the sudden shifts from light to dark to a match-lit stage, must have been especially dramatic and comedic, if perchance potentially eerie. Believing the curtains have shifted and the man is waking, Mrs. Trembeton tries to throw him off the scent through some additional "acting." She believes he has not heard her other speeches, and purposefully tries to sound overconfident now:

> I feel so independent! for, of course, as I am going back to-morrow, it was not worth while to bring anything but my things for the night—they just fill up my hand-bag, it is so convenient. It is so light I can carry it quite easily myself, so I am not afraid of its going astray—not that it would matter if it did, as there are no valuables in it. So that I really have nothing at all to think about. That is what makes my expedition so thoroughly delightful! (234)

In a way, she does reveal the anxiety and potential entrapment of maintaining possessions, in this potential suggestion that she *would* be free if unencumbered of the diamonds. Finally accepting that the boots have not moved—the right foot "looks stiff, inert" (234)—Mrs. Trembleton finds a bottle on the table labeled "laudanum" and believes she is locked in with a corpse, when the waiter knocks to tell her a gentleman who vacated the room that morning left his boots. Suddenly composed, Mrs. Trembleton send the waiter for a new key and asks for a new room on a more occupied floor, but concludes she is "not sorry to have had this experience" (236) which she believes will cause George to "at last agree that [she] must be a Woman of Courage." While not precisely revealing a lionhearted figure (though the actress of this role must have required both bravery and finesse), the women behind a successful Mrs. Trembleton—Bell and the actress—would have definitely shown themselves to be women of the utmost imagination.

In considering what one could call the props-centricity of both monologues, one should also consider the difference in rehearsing for a monologue versus a regular theatrical, the process of which was so inherently social. Since these types of plays always portray exceptional, eccentric, or frenzied characters, and because they could be easily rehearsed alone, monologues presented an opportunity to indulge in a freeing exercise without social judgment. In both monologues here, the women need the offstage voice, a kind of surrogate for the audience, to tell them the boots are just boots to bring them back to their regular senses—in effect, to remove themselves from the enrapturing effects of acting in the home theatrical itself. The appearance of both the boots and mice is important in causing surprise to the actresses present onstage—the appearance of either drastically shifts their understanding of the space that they formerly believed themselves to occupy.

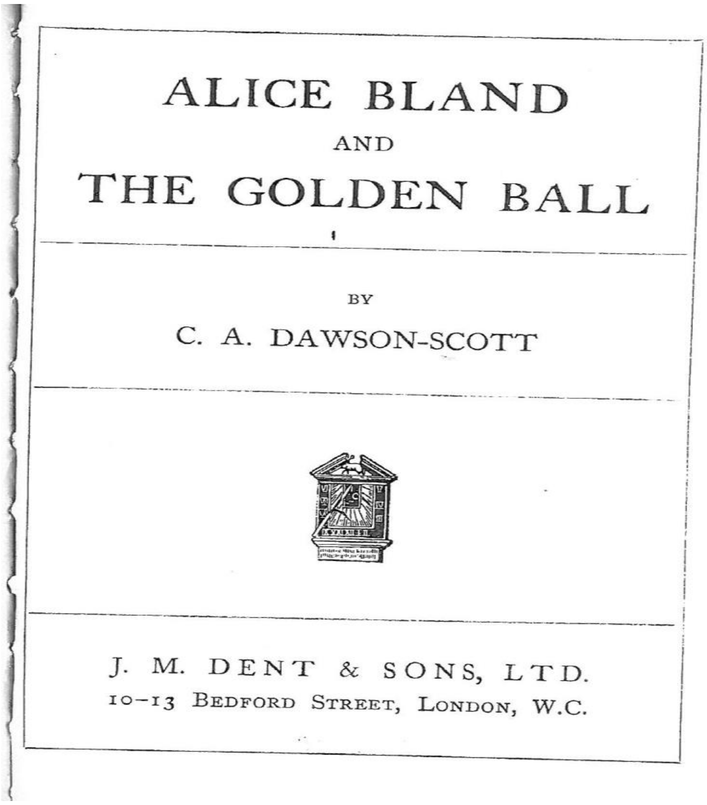
I have suggested that the nature of home theatricals requires a greater reliance on objects for movement and development. Additionally, monologue is an especially useful vehicle by which common props of the home theatre are revealed. Florence Bell's *Chamber Comedies,* then, is an excellent tool for examining props. Her collection, from which "A Woman of Courage" is drawn, contains 7 monologues—six for women, one for a man—among its twenty-two works. Those monologues which require fewer props center on the retelling of past events, as in "A Hard Day's Work" and "Oh No!"; these become nearly duologues when the actress embodies an additional speaker she encountered in the past. More often though, props direct the one-person plays. "A Waterproof" concludes through the reading of letters found in the pocket of a borrowed waterproof coat. "Not to be Forwarded," the single monologue for a man, involves both the reading of newspapers and a succession of letters received too late. In an especially captivating play, "The Reliquary," Alice writes, then rips up, then writes again her affirmative reply to her lover Frank's proposal—she believes Frank is devoted because he has been able to withstand attendance at her "private theatricals, where he's had to stand on the landing all the evening and look through the chink of the door—recitations in the afternoon, where he has sometimes been the only man in the room, poor dear, such was his devotion!" (249). Bell's inclusion of such a statement further reinforces the woman-centered nature of the theatrical, but Alice's actual decision about Fred occurs only after revisiting the contents of her trove of gifts from former lovers.

> Yes, I must turn out my secret drawer—my drawer of relics—all my precious souvenirs that have been lying there and accumulating with astonishing rapidity for the last five years, since my eighteenth birthday!—and now I am going to tear them up, throw them away, forget all the love affairs I've ever had, and subside into an ugly commonplace matron. Oh, how many things! I declare I've almost forgotten what they all are. I wish I had written their names on them when I put them away, as mamma does on her jams in the summer (250)

Her manner towards this line of objects values them both as important memories and commodities. She finds and reminisces about, in succession, a piece of pencil which reminds her of shy Bertie, a letter from an Irishman and letter and lecture flyer from a German intellectual (both good opportunities for the actress to bring out her accents), and a portrait of herself which belonged to Fred, her first true love who died in battle. Alice's letters and props function much as contracts with the man represented by each object. She is "almost afraid of" (248) her first letter to Frank before tearing it, as "it seems to [her] such a terribly important document," but going through her secret drawer of things, she is able to disobey the "stern and unvarying law of nature [that the letter] must go to the post" once sealed. Finally moving beyond and pushing aside this pile of objects from her drawer, she writes her second, more assured "yes" in reply to Frank. In other home dramas, to be explored in the remainder of the chapter, objects assume an even more overtly contractual role.

Props as Contract

The props in action of the preceding discussion, mice, boots, and objects such as Alice's letter, tend to renegotiate power in favor of women in the parlour play. They also often associate themselves with language that defines spatial and power dynamics in relation to the appearance of the prop. In general, parlour play props appear in scenes that restructure relations of exchange or contractual speech, or in scenes that draw out the shifting nature and social signification of the performance space as home. This chapter's two final in-depth examples, in the work of authors C. A. Dawson-Scott and Mary Healy, establish how props organize the gendered power relationships in the home theatrical, through contractual or spatial means. These props are blatantly periperformative.



ALICE BLAND
AND
THE GOLDEN BALL

BY
C. A. DAWSON-SCOTT

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10–13 BEDFORD STREET, LONDON, W.C.

The title page of Dawson-Scott's volume minimizes separation of the titles of her two plays.

C. A. Dawson-Scott's mini-collection "Alice Bland and the Golden Ball" unites the theme of women's independence with the centrality of props. C. A. Dawson-Scott, as she is most often cited on her title pages, otherwise known as Catherine Amy Dawson-Scott (1865-1934), had an extremely diverse literary career recognized by scholars though her parlour theatricals have never received critical attention. For instance, Yopie Prins, in situating the author at the center of her London literary circle, notes that Dawson-Scott "composed an epic about Sappho as her first book for publication in 1889… quite an extraordinary performance, written on the model of *Aurora Leigh* to announce the beginning of a new era for women writers."[192] However while Prins is entirely correct in affirming Dawson-Scott's writing as that of a pioneering feminist, her actual first book was not the *Sappho* poem but her earlier 1888 *Charades for Home Acting*.[193] Like Joseph Hatton, Dawson-Scott exemplifies that group of writers whose parlour plays supplemented a more varied literary output.[194] Besides her initial 1888 foray into the home theatrical circuit, Dawson-Scott published two parlour play collections, *Tom, Cousin Mary, and Red Riding Hood*, and *Alice Bland and the Golden Ball*, both through J. M. Dent in 1912. Dawson-Scott's return to the parlour play, more than twenty years after her first book, is interesting both in the context of her overall literary trajectory, and in her choice to pair the fairy-tale plays ("Red Riding Hood" and "The Golden Ball") not with one another but alongside more contemporary-themed material. As the title page of *Alice Bland and the Golden Ball* shows, a reader might at first have had trouble distinguishing the contents as two separate plays. However, placement of "Alice Bland" with "the Golden Ball" nicely groups together the central concerns of this particular genre—especially as united by the contractual nature of private props.

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[192] Yopie Prins, *Victorian Sappho* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 239. Prins also mentions Susan Brown's argument that Frances Power Cobbe inspired the Sappho poem. For more information on Catherine Amy Dawson Scott, see also her daughter Marjorie Watt's biography *Mrs. Sappho: the life of C. A. Dawson Scott, Mother of International P.E.N.*

"Alice Bland" is quite forcefully a New Woman play. "Alice Bland" is similar in ways to "Romantic Caroline" in that both take advantage of over-the-top character traits or manipulate clichéd beliefs for their purposes. However, the tone of "Alice Bland" contrasts sharply with a more lighthearted melodramatic mode such as that found in "Romantic Caroline." "Alice Bland" aims for a different type of realism in which the characters are still a little bit over the top if not in an idealistic or benevolent comedic way: one can recognize a stereotypic misogyny in the anti-New Woman characters who surround the heroine. “Alice Bland,” truly an entirely different type of theatrical than “Romantic Caroline,” compensates for its lack of nuance with an emotional charge and directedness. The play concerns the Bland family—the surname is no misnomer—comprised of Mr. and Mrs. Bland, and their three grown children, Annie, Alick, and Alice.

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[193] C. A. Dawson-Scott's *Charades for Home Acting* are available with a subscription to Cambridge University Press's electronic database *ORLANDO, Women's Writing in the British Isles from the Beginnings to the Present.* This site contains all of Dawson-Scott's works as well as her biographical information.

[194] Over her lifetime, she wrote multiple novels including *The Haunting* (1921), co-edited with Ernest Rhys (founder of the Everyman's Library) many collections ranging from *Mainly Horses* (1921) to *Tales from Far and Near* (1930), composed collections of poems, wrote more exotic psychic material including *From Four who are Dead. H. F. N. Scott, H. D. Lowry, George Dawson, W. T. Stead. Messages to C. A. Dawson Scott.* and (the perhaps especially intriguing) *Is this Wilson? Messages accredited to Woodrow Wilson received by Mrs. C. A. Dawson Scott*. She also edited both *The Guide to Psychic Knowledge* (1932) and *The Guide to Psychic Knowledge. No. 2. Questions from people on this side of death. Answers from people on that side of death.* (1932).

Props become the means by which characters, specifically the grown children Alick and Alice, are distinguished onstage; the play revolves around the worth of these nearly identically named, grown children, one of whom is a man, the other a woman. Bill Brown has explained that the plot of Mark Twain’s *The Prince and the Pauper* depends upon the object of the Great Seal, as the only object that distinguishes between two identical boys: “Although the boys themselves could care less about the seal, and though both are completely comfortable with their sameness and difference, the court submits to the object in its capacity to identify the subject (to whom they are subject)” (41). In this case, rather than the prop asserting a difference between otherwise identical characters, the props are introduced to correct society’s incorrect assumptions regarding worth which has led to a perceived difference. In a way, just as in Twain’s court, the law of the props must ultimately be recognized. Here, the world of the play recognizes an innate difference between Alick and Alice based upon their respective gender, and privileges Alick despite his drinking and general slothfulness and Alice’s strength and ambition. Yet, over the course of the play, props first expose this prejudicial treatment, and then intervene to reestablish Alice’s innate superiority over her society’s bias. The similarity of name and the parallelism of their initial stage action highlight the different treatment they receive based on gender alone.

Additionally, because so much of this older male-privileging bias is filtered through the mother character of Mrs. Bland, the play opposes an old against a new conception of woman.

The initial woman versus man, Alice versus Alick, dynamic is established through Mrs. Bland's interactions with both children over their respective watches.[195] When Alice fumbles for her watch and admits she forgot to put it on that morning, her mother answers: "(*with dignity*). At your age you might attend properly to the details of your toilet" (8). When Alice mutters "Hateful old watch"—as if saying "witch"—under her breath, her mother responds by telling her muttering is unladylike; her forgetting of her watch is made to directly indict her failure to live up to standards of womanliness. Meanwhile, Alick, unable to provide the time because he forgot to wind up his watch, is received "*indulgently*" by his mother, who excuses his presumed fatigue, and goes on to further excuse his staying out late the previous night. To visually reinforce the hierarchy under which the children are viewed, Alick has no obvious onstage occupation throughout the opening financial-related sequences, while Alice has been silently occupied with sewing. Just as the props in this play reveal the gender dynamic, they also follow other common trends of the home theatrical genre. Tracing props throughout "Alice Bland" is useful to a general study of the home play because this specific theatrical encompasses several other trends of this genre alongside its prop use. In addition to the more unabashedly feminist aims of the play, "Alice Bland" is similar to other home dramas in that the New Woman figure causes black-and-white divisions in the rest of the characters—they are either for her or against her—and in being intensely preoccupied with space as it extends or restricts freedom to women.

In feminist plays, a New Woman is often pitted against either a man or a more traditionally feminine woman. In "Alice Bland," she is pitted against both Alick and her traditional mother. This central opposition is extended to the supporting characters; everyone must take sides. Mr. Bland jumps to question Alick's laziness in contrast to his wife's favoritism. Annie, the elder sister, is a complacent version of Alice, content to have "food and warmth and shelter" (19), while Alice points out that "we [the sisters]—we live in this backwater—Duckton, Dullshire! Annie, it is as if we were shut up in a chrysalis" (19-20). Space, already so highlighted by the home theatrical genre, is central here: the play, set in "The Parsonage at Duckton, Dullshire" in a "*drawing-room, shabby, commonplace, old-fashioned*" (6-7), is somewhere in which marriage does not even provide a way out. To Annie's suggestion that the curates would be suitable partners, Alice replies: "Papa's life over again? No, thank you. Anything would be better than that" (21). The entrapment felt by Alice is usually put in spatial terms: in a Jane Eyre-like moment of wishing, Alice tells her sister: "At night, Annie, I look out my window towards London, and the sky in that direction seems to be lighter. If I could get there I should know what to do. Ah, if only—I could get—there" (22). Immediately after saying so, Alice is fairly taunted by the options to which she is limited by a woman: she is peppered with entrances of men who are going elsewhere or want to keep her where she is. Mark Booker, a shepherd whom she has tutored, arrives with news of a teaching position that will take him to Birmingham. The curate Mr. Saunders then enters, makes derogatory comments towards the shepherd as one rising out of his class, and quite terrifyingly and suggestively hints to an inattentive Alice: "I saw the Bishop yesterday, and spoke to him about the asylum chaplaincy. He said he would put in a word for me if I applied" (31), which to Saunders represents excellent possibilities of "[a] small but sufficient income, a cottage in those beautiful grounds, a pension for our old age. In these days of bustle so peaceful and alluring" (31). Saunders becomes home theatre's equivalent of Austen's Mr. Collins, in his worship of class and promise of an insanityproducing custody, an unvarying future boredom. Reinforcing Dawson-Scott's focus on her heroine's captivity, Saunders' proposal to Alice emphasizes his especially unsatisfying proffered abode:

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[195] 195. This family dynamic appears in Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*, though not especially a prop novel.

> Mr. S. (*eagerly*). You would like it?
> Alice. (*waking).* Like what?
> Mr. S. The cottage at the asylum.
> Alice. I? Not at all.

Alice appears to wholeheartedly reject marriage as the only way for her to advance beyond her parents' home: she refuses Saunder's proposal and, whether willfully or not, fails to understand that her former shepherd pupil has developed an adoration of her. (Mark, "*shaking hands with awkward fervor*" tells Alice upon departing: "I want you to be pleased with me—I want that more than anything" (29).) The emphasis on the marriage plot, space, and the divided sentiments causes by a feminist mentality—all trademarks of the home theatre repertoire—are driven by the presence of props.

Document props appear frequently in home theatre for obvious reasons: letters and newspapers, if lines are written on them, remove the necessity of memorization (for at least a brief time). Besides introducing a speech or an imitation of an offstage character's voice, such documents also assist in introducing new factors that drastically alter the plot. In the opening of "Alice Bland," Mr. Bland reads the London paper, and other documents are immediately referenced: the Penny Bank accounts (which are never fully explained but throughout are continually working to be balanced), and curiosity about the reading of cousin Maria's will (the contents of which are yet unknown). Ellen, the servant, enters with a telegram "*on a salver*" (13)—after reading it, Mrs. Bland announces in "*tones of ecstasy*" that Alick has been left 300 pounds per year by cousin Maria. While some characters are surprised at Alick, an unlikely investment, receiving money, his reactions to his newfound bit of prosperity reflect the play's interest in gender. Alick, in a characteristic misogynistic tone, tells Alice and Annie, that even though he believed his aunt disliked him, his being remembered in the will was logical:

> ALICK. But women are all alike when it comes to leaving money. They know jolly well that it ought to go to the men of the family.
> ALICE. I can't see it.
> ALICK. Cousin Maria did.
> ANNIE. What will you do now?
> ALICK. Do? (*He laughs.*) Why—nothing. (16)

Alick, though, rather than quite doing nothing, plans to use the money to marry "to please [him]self" (17) by proposing to a barmaid (named Cherry) whom he knows to be already engaged to another man. Especially when set alongside Alice's insistent independence and resistance to the shepherd, Alick is thus put in the traditionally feminine position of being overly preoccupied with marriage, of dreaming of marrying for "love" in a case where previously not possible—and even Alice pointedly tells Alick, "[a] man cant lean on his wife" (43). The next important props are brought by Alice's suitors: Mark's letter promising his teaching position, is read onstage by Alice, and Saunders's marked coin reveals it has been Alick who has stolen from the Penny Bank accounts. This latter becomes an ordeal when Mrs. Bland inadvertently reveals to Saunders that Alick took the coin, before she is forced to concoct a story about accidentally distributing marked coins from her purse to her son. Finally, Ellen just as in the opening, "*enters with letter on salver*," which is to contain details of Alick's inheritance. However, this letter from the lawyers, directed to Alice and read silently by her, and then aloud by the more just and open-minded Mr. (rather than Mrs.) Bland confirms she and not her brother was the recipient of the inheritance. Enclosed in the letter from the lawyers is another letter from Maria to Alice which explains the purpose of the money as escape; Maria writes to Alice: "I have always sympathized with your wish to get away from Duckton" (40). This news, contained in the letter and the letter-within-a-letter, endues Alice with "*a new, more independent tone*" (39) that leaves her able to refute both her mother and brother's reactions.

> ALICE. Oh, mamma, can't you be glad that I have it?
> MRS. B. Yes, of course, but what use will three hundred a year be to you—a girl. You have everything that you want.
> ALICE. I have a roof over my head, clothes to wear, and food to eat.
> MRS. B. That is what I said. (41)

Mrs. Bland in fact goes on to second Alick's own suggestion that Alice return the money to him anyways:

> MRS. B. (*firmly*). … This money would, as he says, make all the difference to Alick's career, while it can be nothing to Alice. She is provided for until she marries.
> ALICE. Until!
> MRS. B. Being a woman, of course she hasn't a career.
> ALICE. She hasn't anything.

Alice leaves her family just before the play's conclusion, despite their protestations. Annie refuses her sister's offer of protection should she join her—as Alice explains of her elder sister: "[f]or her the money [came] too late" (47). In her final dialogue, Alice tells her father that: "The old-fashioned woman went because some man beckoned; the modern, because the walls of home shut her in too closely. I must go and make some sort of life for myself, papa; it is the only wisdom" (47-48). Alice, after looking directly at her mother, who "forbid[s her] to go" (48), "*walks out of the room.*" As I will show in Chapter Five, Alice is one of many Nora-like heroines in the home theatre, whose exit provides a disruption to this otherwise characteristically comedic genre. Meanwhile, the play exhibits friendliness towards other developments in Victorian popular culture, such as detective fiction, through the investigative work involved in tracing the marked coin, as helped along by the developments introduced by the letters. When Mrs. Bland then complains of having an ungrateful child, she and her husband's dialogue ends the play:

> Mr. B. (*patting [Mrs. Bland] gently*). At least—she shows that she has courage.
> Mrs. B. (*contemptuously*). What is the use of courage—in a girl? (48)

In "Alice Bland," the heroine escapes from the parlour, while the audience is left to ponder what really might be her chances of offstage success. The play that follows "Alice Bland" shows similarly the entrapment of a girl within a specifically materialist and male-dominated system.

"The Golden Ball," which succeeds "Alice Bland," is Dawson-Scott's version of the Princess and the Frog fairytale. Her choice of fairy tale is significant: if ever a fairy tale used a conjunction of a prop and a promise to dictate a girl or woman's future, it would be the Princess and the Frog story. While the princess is clearly younger than Alice here—"Oh I've dropped my ball! My Golden Ball that daddie gave me off the Christmas-tree" (3)—the play is about the princess's subjugation to the possessions that *she* is supposed to possess. This often takes a surprisingly sexual tone despite the young age of the princess, which coupled with her being the only staged female character next to the frog and the king, makes the play feel less innocent than it otherwise might be.

Dawson-Scott rewrites the tale to emphasize the nature of promises. Shifting away from the characters as named in the tale's ordinary title, the focus is on "The Golden Ball" itself. The promise here is directly tied to a material object. When the princess drops her ball down the well, the Frog in the Well speaks (as the stage directions note "*from inside the well*") and asks what he would get for the ball's return. The princess offers, in succession, a variety of luxury material possessions which the frog rejects: she first offers, "I'd give you some of my pretty frocks," then very thoughtfully tries, "I've special toys for the water, things that float, you know boats and ducks" (to which the Frog responds "(*hastily*). N-not ducks"), and finally offers, "I'll bring you all the chocolates people sent me at Christmas. There's heaps and heaps of them, and mother wouldn't let me have them all at once for fear they'd make me sick" (5). Notably, this is the only mention of the mother. This princess has to do with masculine antagonists almost exclusively. The frog predatorily insists that her offers do not suffice:

> FROG. You are very kind, Princess, but I'm afraid I want more than that.
> PRIN. More than all my chocolates?
> FROG. Yes. I want you to say that I may come to the palace and eat out of your plate, and drink out of your cup, and sleep in your little white bed. (*Pause.*) Princess?
> PRIN. (*crossly*). Yes.
> FROG. Will you promise?
> PRIN. (*not at all as if she means it*). Very well. I'll promise anything you like, as long as you give me my Golden Ball. (6)

The frog's request is significant in that, having rejecting the princess' extraneous expensive props, he wants to use her more necessary, ordinary objects, to "eat out of [her] plate, and drink out of [her] cup, and sleep in [her] little white bed," the last of which is especially invasive. When the princess rather begrudgingly agrees here, the frog reminds her that "a promise has to be kept," and the princess' reply makes the promise sound as embodied as one of her frocks or chocolates:

> PRIN. I know all about promises, and what they are like, and what they are made for. Give me the Ball.
> FROG. Here it is then. (*She leans over and takes the ball.*)

This scene of exchange is especially interesting because we never see the frog onstage; he is just a voice through which the princess is able to get back her Golden Ball. (Perhaps this works similarly to the offstage voice of the male clerk in the boots monologues.) Furthermore, the princess tried, before the frog voice, to get the Golden Ball back through her own labor—searching for a long stick that might work, she finds only a twig which is too short, and then almost tumbles into the well herself. In other words, the promise is the only means capable of retrieving the Golden Ball; the borders of the material and linguistic become blurred.

The princess assumes, as we learn through an aside, that the (still unseen) frog will never show up at the palace, and that her father would never admit him if he did. But as her later dialogue reveals, she misunderstood the material nature of promises, explaining to her father, "(*nearly crying*). He wouldn't give me back my Golden Ball till I promised, but I knew all the time that promises were like pie-crust, only made to be broken" (8). While the king originally finished the princess' thought that the proper place for frogs "is in the water" (8), the knowledge of her promise changes everything for him. Mechanically, the king bluntly cuts off his daughter's succession of appeals and insists the frog be admitted: "Promises, little daughter, are not made to be broken—even by Princesses" (10). The promise thus conquers class status and trumps other luxury objects' material power.

Dawson-Scott never provides details of the Frog costume—one may imagine that if an actual frog costume on a human body were not used, a frog on string might stand in for the frog. If the latter, it would be a case of the ultimate embodied prop having control onstage, functioning as a sort of king of the other prop possessions used or mentioned, and in fact, the human characters as well. The frog first materializes onstage when admitted to the castle: quite suddenly, he "*leaps in and hops toward [the princess'] chair*" and then "*hops up into her chair and begins to eat her bread and milk; she [the princess] unwillingly draws up another chair, crying all the time*" (10). The frog's next entrance occurs in Scene III, in which the princess is initially in her bedroom alone, brushing her hair and planning to "to-morrow take [the frog] somewhere, where there's a duck!" (10-11). Unfortunately, these plans are interrupted by Frog, who again creepily talks offstage, and knocks and demands to be let in with a reminder that she "must keep [her] promise" (11). After threatening the princess by telling her that the king is coming soon, the frog is let in and "*jumps in past her, hops in bed, and covers itself over*." This final scene with the frog—his appearances culminate with this grand leap into the bed covers, in which the promise of sharing eating, drinking, and sleeping space is now fulfilled—strongly hint at threats to the princess' virginity. Of course, virginity is another state traditionally connected both to promises (to keep one's virginity until married), and spoken of as a possession (one "keeps" one's virginity or "gives" it away):

> PRIN. (*sitting down on floor, miserably*) I won't sleep with you, you horrid thing. I'd rather sit up all night. And I'm dreadfully tired. If I sit up I know I shall be ill to-morrow.
>
> FROG. (*from under the clothes*). You shouldn't have promised.
>
> PRIN. He doesn't care a bit how uncomfortable I am. (*Vigorously*.) I'll never promise anybody anything again as long as I live. (FROG laughs.) The wretch is laughing at me! (*To him.*) Well, I don't care, promise or no promise, you shan't sleep in my bed, so there. (*Falls on him furiously and pulls him out, and he jumps up as a* PRINCE. PRINCESS *falls back in amazement*.)

The prop now becomes human, if a frog prop was used to represent the frog-performer. As a real human prince, the frog can actually fulfill the threat to the princess' virginity, and her defense of her bed does nothing to stop the transformation. Over the course of this play, the Golden Ball drops out, replaced with fears of the frog. However, the king's dialogue (he immediately appears on the scene) reinforces how easily the princess might transition from her Golden Ball to boy prince as objects. As the king says: "now you will have some one *to play with*" (13, my emphasis). (Though, when the princess "*shyly*" replies that she "will like that"—a total transformation from her earlier attitude—her father tells her: "But you don't deserve it.") Indeed, the youthful, evidently yet-unmarriable age of the princess preserves the power of the promise and the object in this play. Upon learning the prince's "much too long" real name is "Gonsalvo-Alexandros" (13), the princess decides she will call him "Froggie" instead—in essence naming him almost as if she would a toy.

I conclude with a striking instance of a periperformative prop, again used in a marriage-plot, in Mary Healy's "An Unexpected Guest," a wealthy heir disguises himself as an artist tutor, and determines that of the two girls in the residence where he is employed, the orphan girl is, à la

Jane Eyre, the infinitely more good-hearted figure and better wife-figure when compared to the actually wealthy girl whose portraits he is made to paint. The couple is brought together when Nellie, the orphan, brings back a mysterious package, which she intends to give (the still disguised) Harry, who has been mocked by the mistress of the house for his inability to dress appropriately for the ball that evening. In the first of many periperformative speeches surrounding this package, Nelly refuses to tell Harry the contents of the gift:

> Nellie: I will not tell you—now!
>
> Harry. What a volume of reproaches is contained in that "now." You are angry with me?
>
> Nellie. A little.
>
> Harry. Because you overheard my words to Mattie Brown. Do you remember what they were?
>
> Nellie. Oh, yes! you said: I adore you as much as ever.
>
> Harry. Well; I only said the truth. (234)

Nellie's "now" operates as a "volume of reproaches"; her initial word expands voluminously, taking on a larger spatial meaning to have an alternative effect in this situation on Harry; in effect, they reveal more certainly that she cares for him. Likewise, both Harry's initial reply that he adored Nellie's "rival" just as much as ever—which is strictly true as he cares nothing for her—and his "Well; I only said the truth" disguise his intentions in a way which rely on Nellie as third-party witness to the original overhearing of his conversation. This periperformative language is concentrated in the play in instances focused on the material object of this package. Nellie reveals that Harry's gift is a white pair of kid gloves and a cravat purchased with her savings; she had overheard him being mocked for lacking ball dress essentials. After receiving the gloves, Harry periperformatively tells Nellie: "I am going to exact a promise from you" (237)—rather than coming right out and asking for her attendance at the ball. Finally, at the ball, the magnetism of the two is again concentrated in the gift of the gloves; Harry explains: "[t]hey possess a magic power, those same trifles, Miss Nellie. I will never part with them; they shall be the talisman of my life" (250). The language here renegotiates not just the object, but the distance between the speakers, including the gap between what may be heard and what is actually accepted. In effect, the materiality of the prop has a symbiotic relationship with spatial, periperformative language here; the verbal has a direct material analogue. This giving and manipulation of words directly correlates to physical objects; within the parlour play, this often enables the woman character to get exactly what she wants.

Chapter 5

Victorian Women, the Home Theatre, and the Cultural Potency of *A Doll's House*

Caroline (taking hold of [her husband's] hands). Your poor hands are icy; you are cold! (*Putting him into the armchair on the left of the fireplace.)* Place yourself there, near the fire (*covering him with the sofa cushions*). There, there; are you comfortable so? I will be a true wife, a drudge, a helpmate—anything but a silly romantic girl.
Spriggs (*crying out*). But you are stifling me! (*The two doors open. [Caroline's parents] rush in.*)
—J. Hatton, "Romantic Caroline"[196]

This scene in midst of home theatrical "Romantic Caroline" draws attention to Caroline's feelings of inadequacy as a wife—precisely speaking, how living as a "true wife" means being "a drudge, a helpmate," rather than a woman who indulges in romantic fantasies where she is not trapped in marriage, as Caroline now is, to her confectioner husband named Spriggs with creaky boots and a passion only for biscuits. To the watching audience, the actress playing Caroline, and perhaps especially to the suffocated actor portraying Spriggs, the message is that an imaginative wife quite literally can stifle or overwhelm a husband, but also that a wife is not herself (perhaps a bit of a "skylark" or perhaps a little crazy) when only her husband's servant. Yet, when Caroline's parents intervene here, as they often do, they believe not that their daughter is the aggressor, but that she is the innocent prey of Spriggs. Caroline's melodramatic and sometimes hysterical act convinces her parents that she is a neglected wife, while in reality her husband is merely just too boring for her. In this, as in other parlour plays, female characters act to reveal the unsatisfying nature of a woman's position in marriage, and take up a hysteric but also simultaneously rational type of acting to get others to behave as they want. This chapter argues that the popular practice of home theatre—through its characteristically strong female roles and inventive use of realism in the domestic setting—influenced the reception of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* in Victorian Britain. The home theatre, as a genre largely dominated by women, whether cushion-wielding or not, provided unparalleled opportunities for women to write, act, and watch their own versions of Nora in their own houses before Ibsen's play was performed on a public stage. A cultural phenomenon increasingly produced by the middle-class, parlour plays often featured Nora-type characters, occupied with their positions as wives and mothers and trapped in their domestic situations and spaces, while the theatricals themselves were actually set and performed in the real-life parlour. While "Romantic Caroline" was not authored by a woman, this play exemplifies how genre-wide, home theatre worked to provide provocative and energetic female roles, and on a grander scale, home theatre provided unprecedented opportunities for women to write theatre. Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, in return, highlights what is challenging and perhaps even radical in parlour plays, by placing them in a tradition of feminist thought, and establishing the prevalence of realistic private drama before more realist public theatre. Home theatricals, the previously unstudied, ostensibly private activities of women, are actually part of a more public, political history of gender and representation.

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[196] James Hatton, "Romantic Caroline; A Farcical Comedy in One Act." (London: 9 Titchfield Terrace, Regent's Park, 1874), 16. Subsequent references cited parenthetically within the text.

By recovering the prolific yet unrecognized work of Victorian women for the home theatre, both as playwrights and actresses, scholars can begin new discussions about how gender, speech, and acting work in any culturally-potent space. The influence of private theatre on fin-de-siècle public drama illuminates the unique force of the parlour play; as part of a feminine counterpublic, the private theatre acts on a broad social level that expands to include what is seen as the more legitimate public theatre. In this context, the magnetism of Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House* for nineteenth-century British women can be understood on a previously unacknowledged continuum with parlour plays of the later decades of the nineteenth century. Home theatre, just as does the women-dominated audiences of Ibsen's plays, results in a woman-centric theatre space. Both *A Doll's House* and home theatre foreground a woman's position in the home and provide a forum in which women can evaluate that position. In both cases, this reflective and theatrical mirror provides an outlet otherwise unavailable in late nineteenth-century society. While Ibsen is usually credited with first placing the domestic under evaluative surveillance within nineteenth-century British culture, I argue that women cultivated their own means of escaping or exiting the home pre-Ibsen. By acting in private theatricals, middle-class women used the acting process to suggest that acting itself could activate a more independent female identity, and become an important means of revising social codes. More particularly, by analyzing the similarity of Ibsen's themes to those in home theatricals, one can more thoroughly understand how the parlour play set the stage for Ibsen's championing by Victorian women. Ibsen and the home dramatists share a malleable view of social mores, and use the not-so-rigid borders of self/body and parlour/stage to reconstruct a new order through theatrical realism. In this context, Nora's "door slam heard 'round the world'" is a cumulative thunderclap of many previous exits by amateur actresses within their own homes.

As I have emphasized throughout my project, women made up a large contingent of the home theatrical market—both as writers and as important consumers of home theatre in the niche markets for all-female performers. Victorian women capitalized on the home theatre's reputation as an arena in which women could act and not compromise feminine respectability or dignity by appearing on a public stage.[197] At the same time as home theatre offered a "safe" space in which to act, it created an arena in which a free and creative exchange of dialogue could occur between women on womanhood—in the passage from written to acted play, and also quite literally in the creation of female characters on the parlour stage.

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[197] While some (mostly male) critics still protested about the respectability of the parlour play, popular opinion, especially by the late decades of the nineteenth-century, overwhelmingly supported the parlour play as a legitimate and safe form of entertainment fully in line with the rules of propriety. At a time during which the appearance of women on public stage was still viewed with suspicion, the private theatrical became an accepted and entrenched component of popular culture.

Likewise, Ibsen's plays, particularly *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*, are associated with the overwhelming support of Victorian middle-class women—in their translations of his work, enthusiastic acting and producing of his plays, and in greatly outnumbering men among the seats of any theatre's Ibsen production. Though Ibsen himself stated that his plays were not explicitly or primarily feminist productions, there is little doubt that his play *A Doll's House,* in particular, found favor with female audiences. Earlier criticism has argued that Ibsen was unconcerned with gender politics, but as Margaret Stetz and others have more recently recognized, "to say Ibsen was a champion of nineteenth-century women should be the start, not the endpoint of discussion."[198] Sally Ledger emphasized Ibsen's phenomenal reception in Victorian England, that translations of Ibsen in Western Europe coincided with "remarkable accolades for his dramatic representation of women and womanhood," which thus suggests that there was a special quality about Ibsen's work which appealed to these audiences in particular.[199] Victorian scholarship—if widely hesitant to move beyond connecting women to the theatricality of the novel—has especially emphasized Ibsen's phenomenal reception amongst women in Victorian England.

However, few have noted the specific conditions of Ibsen's reception among the communities of women with which he found the most unequivocal support. Katherine Newey notes "it is rare for historians to comment that it was largely the work of three women which

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198. Margaret Stetz, "Mrs. Linde, Feminism, and Women's Work, Then and Now" *Ibsen Studies* 7.2 (2007), 150.

199. Sally Ledger, "Ibsen, the New Woman and the Actress." In *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact.* Ed. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 79.

introduced Ibsen to English audiences … it was the otherwise obscure writers Catherine Ray, and Henrietta Frances Lord […] who provided the first translations, and Eleanor Marx organized the first performance of an Ibsen play *as a home theatrical* in Britain, as well as providing early translations of several Ibsen plays" (my emphasis).[200] Elizabeth Robins' life and work as an actress exemplified Ibsenite individualism, as scholarship has noted. Yet no studies have connected Robins' career to home theatricals—in spite of her close friendship with Florence Bell, one of the most productive parlour playwrights ever.[201] Robins, an American-born London actress, was known for her commitment to women's rights throughout her life, especially as shown through her theatre-writing efforts: besides writing *Votes for Women!*, a 1907 suffrage play, she collaboratively wrote *Alan's Wife* with Florence Bell. To generalize, the formation of collectives of women around Ibsen's work operates as a similar coalition to the type of female community formed around home theatre; just as women worked to translate, produce, and act in Ibsen's work, they collaborated in writing and producing home plays.

Both Ibsen and home theatre create a theatre in which women are spectators of themselves in society. Usefully among current criticism, Susan Torrey Barstow draws out the importance of the matinee performance of Ibsen's plays in forming a reflective female community, as "a space in which female spectators could reflect on their own situation. In public, in the company of other women, matinee spectators were able to observe domestic, middle-class femininity as it was performed and critiqued." This perspective supports my claim that both home theatre and Ibsen shared a mission to rework the social bonds of women with one another and their respective spaces.[202] The Ibsen matinee was above all a women-centered communal space built around women's own reflections on domesticity, but also an entertaining reprieve from domesticity's potential banalities; this idea of an energetic escape from domestic ennui becomes stronger when applied to the case of the home theatricals' relationship to Ibsen. Barstow's explanation of Ibsen's heroine's everydayness is profitably quoted at length here:

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[200] 200. Katherine Newey, *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 127.

[201] 201. Elin Diamond, "Realism's Hysteria," *Unmaking* Mimesis (New York: Routledge, 1997), 7.

> Their trials are the ordinary, familiar trials of pregnancy, childbirth, the double standard, sexual frustration, and, perhaps above all, boredom. … That matinee spectators encountered these new heroines not merely in books but in public theaters crowded with other women like themselves is itself significant. Matinee theaters … were among the few acceptable places in which unaccompanied bourgeois women could escape the monotony and loneliness of a still rigidly domestic existence.[203]

Barstow's strongest claims become more robust when applied to the case of the home theatricals' relationship to Ibsen and fin-de-siècle drama. While less potentially mob-like than the matinee, the more intimate and convenient nature of home performance works similarly to cultivate an environment in which theatre was an activity that hinged on the activity of women, through their writing, performing, and spectating. Not only did home theatre set up Ibsen's reception, but it made the large percentage of women at a matinee more familiar, because this was not the first time women had been brought together for a theatrical attempt at shifting gender or domestic codes.

In this chapter, I situate my own argument, that women home dramatists are more closely tied to Ibsen, within the existing critical dialogue on his connection to the nineteenth-century woman. I then look at Eleanor Marx as an interesting case to demonstrate how both Ibsen and the home theatre can similarly affect a Victorian woman's life, through manipulating the cultural

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202. Susan Torrey Barstow, "'Hedda is All of Us': Late Victorian Women at the Matinee" *Victorian Studies* 43.3 (2001), 387-411.

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203. Ibid., 389.

and spatial conception of "the domestic." Marx showcases how theatrical realism's pinpointed focus on the blurring of real/fictional boundaries enables the social and personal revolution possible in both Ibsen's and the home dramatists' work. Throughout, I connect Ibsen's work and the parlour plays' blurring of fictional/real with the larger Victorian captivation with authenticity. My examples are several theatricals, reflecting the same independent and/or hysteric and articulate ideal as Ibsen's Nora. As these parlour plays demonstrate, this genre abounds with roles which provide the amateur performer with a means of cultivating a freeing sense of self—through acting as this independent and articulate female character, or, as "hysteric" to loosen or break free of social behavioral restrictions altogether. That women clearly performed versions of Nora in their parlours both before and after *A Doll's House* changes how we understand the reception and initial impact of the play; for the women seeing Ibsen, the public staging of that play must have felt as though it was further legitimizing their many privately-acted Noras. Acting and agency for women become correlated in both *A Doll's House* and home theatre.

If the historicization of Ibsen's reception is generally lacking, a logical step towards bridging this scholarly gap is to more thoroughly historicize the women-centric theatre practices which preceded the late 1890s Ibsen explosion. The only well recognized connection of parlour plays to women's progressively more independent status at the turn-of-the-century is suffragette theatricals, though these plays tended to occur more frequently over the early 1900s, following Ibsen's emergence.[204] Nevertheless, scholarship has all but ignored the earlier but loud and adamant door slamming that happened in women's own parlours in their own plays, and which additionally made the subsequent suffragette plays a natural progression from established home theatre practices. Barstow demonstrates that Ibsen has been treated “biographically (was Ibsen a true feminist?), or thematically (what does Ibsen have to say about femininity?)” rather than “historically”; yet, many historical approaches merely “read the plays as texts rather than performances” (390). I would add that a historical context for Ibsen must include the environment of women-centric theatre practices in that era.

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[204] For instance, Robins' 1907 *Votes for Women!* is often thought of as inaugurating the age of suffragette theatre.

A Doll’s Home Theatre

In studying the plots of home theatricals, a few overwhelming trends emerge which highlight their revolutionary women-centric nature: these performances consciously developed and taught acting as a useful instrument for women while working within the domestic space, and place independent women—often women who either theatrically act *or* rationally collaborate—against the social codes of their time. Many heroines of home theatre are versions of Nora. Most theatrical writers, whether progressive or not, are clearly very interested in using the parlour play to comment on appropriate social codes for women. Often, an exaggerated Angel-in-the-House figure is pitted against a more independent woman; women could not only gain a sense of empowerment from the acting process itself, but this acting was clearly oriented towards getting its performers to have a belief in the New Woman as an ideal which they should adopt post-curtain. What becomes especially interesting, in comparing home theatricals to *A Doll’s House*, is the insistence of female home dramatists on using metatheatrical acting within their plays. In Ibsen’s play, as Nora explains to Mrs. Linde, (speaking of herself in the third person) “little Nora isn’t as stupid as everyone thinks.”[205] Nora is a type of actress, going in and out of her character as Helmer’s little spendthrift and “squirrel,” secretly keeping her copying job from him, but also reaching a sort of hysteria, an out-of-bodily acting through her dancing of the tarantella just before the play's famous concluding scenes. It is almost as if the acting (especially in the release of the tarantella, an acting more controlled—or not controlled—by her rather than Helmer) is what enables the final, rational Nora, to justify her exit from the home.

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[205] Henrik Ibsen, *A Doll’s House* in *Four Major Plays*, Ed. James MacFarlane (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

Similarly, in home theatricals, meta-acting occurs most often as characters within the play decide very clearly to put on an act, as more aggressive and independent women, in order to get what they want. Not only does meta-acting suggest something about the power of the most basic acting in any theatrical for Victorian women, it posits acting as a tool usefully deployed outside of the theatre.

Nor are the Nora characters of home theatre limited to plays for adult women. While the 1917 American children's theatrical, *At Cross Purposes*, takes place after the initial wave of Ibsen fervor, this play shows how consistently and fervently home theatre aimed towards a specific vision of womanhood—even in this later play for children, the heroine is of the Ibsenite type. *At Cross Purposes* is an illustrative display of feminine power when a misunderstanding arises between newlyweds: the bride Lucy sees a woman following her husband Edward and crying at her wedding ceremony. Lucy believes her husband has a lover—though the woman is really her future maid—and refuses to remain trapped in the confines of such a marriage. Slipping away unaided during their honeymoon travels, Lucy declares "I'll get a divorce," and stays alone in a hotel awaiting a return home.[206] Her husband Edward assumes she cannot have run off alone: "somebody has carried her off — she was simple and innocent — somebody has made her believe I sent him for her."[207] The confrontation scene, before the truth is discovered, emphasizes Lucy's independence. To Edward's suggestion that she meekly followed a stranger, she replies: "What? I follow? — are you crazy? … No, sir — listen to me — It was I — myself — that left you — of my own free will."[208] Within home theatricals, the independent woman replaces the submissive follower as the ideal wife. The home theatre's frequent use of reasoning and dialogue-oriented scenes which conclude in the New Woman's favor, as well as the use of meta-acting as an acceptable feminine tool, strengthen this genre's relationship to the Ibsenite drama. Not only did parlour plays influence the reception of Ibsen, Ibsen—whether explicitly referenced or not—influenced the content of the theatricals that occurred after him. While Ibsen's concluding dialogue and exit were unexpected by most of the Victorian audience, perhaps unsurprisingly home theatre dealt with the dilemmas of the domestic and feminine.

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[206] Carleton Britton Case, *Friday afternoon dramas [Fun for Friday afternoons]: help over the hard places of the usual Friday afternoon rhetoricals: dramatic dialogues of known excellence, adapted to presentation by school boys and girls* (Chicago: Shrewesbury Publishing Co., 1917), 63.

[207] Ibid., 64.

As a genre dominated by women, the parlour play almost inevitably engaged with women's issues and late nineteenth-century debates over New Womanhood. Characters in the plays reflected contemporary discussions about a woman's role in the home, family, and workplace. Putting these types of characters more precisely in a real domestic setting—so many parlour plays were conveniently set in parlours and waiting rooms—makes the comparison with Ibsen's newly realistic drama fairly straightforward. These theatricals, besides abounding with women who exhibit independent behavior in the face of their lovers, who take up acting (in ways either opposed or similar to Nora's initial "skylark act"), also more exactly direct, like the reception of *A Doll's House*, this discussion of womanhood amongst women. Besides the more overt conversation within the plays among female author, actresses, audience members, female characters speak lines which comment on proper treatment of one woman by another, often in cases where society deems one of them somehow socially reprehensible. In other cases, as in S.

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[208] Ibid., 66.

Jennie Smith's "Not a Man in the House," women characters perform a sort of "reverse doll's house" in which men are blessedly and conspicuously absent from the home/play space.[209]

For example, though Florence Bell's most famous theatrical collaboration was *Alan's Wife* with Robins, within her theatricals, a similar collaboration is emphasized in discussions amongst female characters as to their own rights as women. One might imagine the dialogue of these home plays reflecting the sort of contemporary debate that occurred among real Victorian women, especially as Bell and Robins held opposing views on women's suffrage.[210] This attention to rational argument within drama in order to question society's laws, is very obviously a shared agenda—and part of the innovation—of *A Doll's House*. Bell's play "The Public Prosecutor" (1890), included in her *Chamber Comedies* collection, is one of many parlour plays comparable to Ibsen, that emphasize reasoned discussion over action in order to highlight the gender bias within the existing social order.[211]

"The Public Prosecutor" capitalizes on the boundaries caused by space, status, and sex, to relate a woman's role within her marriage to her ability to form her own ideas outside of public opinion. The plot of "The Public Prosecutor" builds, in an astonishingly constructed set of sensational twists, through the dialogue of the two female characters, the genteel Aline and the reformed Madame Larivière. These women, from different social ranks, are responsible for unveiling (through discussion) the evidence in the play's murder plot which escapes the male characters. However, their conclusions quickly become a conversation about the injustice done to a woman's reputation by society—this serves as the underlying, real plot within the theatrical, beneath the more apparent plot of the murder case. Meanwhile, the two male characters, Philip (Aline's husband) and Jean Darcy, (Philip's uncle, also the detective or "public prosecutor" in love with Madame Larivière) come and go from the theatrical's parlour setting, instead excitedly rushing into what they view as the more relevant and masculine offstage world, where, however, their investigative search turns cold.[212]

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[209] S. Jennie Smith, "Not a Man in the House" (Chicago: T. S. Denison and Co., 1897).

[210] Joanne E. Gates, "Henry James's Dictation Letter to Elizabeth Robins: 'The Suffragette Movement Hot from the Oven'" *The Henry James Review* 31, no. 3 (2010), 255. Gates describes the opposing viewpoints of Bell and Robins on women's suffrage. Bell supported other women's rights but was anti-suffrage.

[211] Florence Bell, "The Public Prosecutor." *Chamber Comedies; a collection of plays and monologues for the drawing room* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), 55-79. Bell notes under the title that her work is "suggested by Boisgobey's 'Crime de l'Opera.'" Bell was fluent in French, and most likely read Boisgobey in the original French; however, a large majority of his works were also translated to English and thus could have been familiar to the reader of her play volume.

The women and men of "The Public Prosecutor," through their traits and interactions, create similarly gendered working connections to those found in *A Doll's House*. While the potential love interest between Madame Larivière and Darcy initially mirrors that of Mrs. Linde and Krogstad, the opening interactions between the married couple, Aline and Philip, parallel those of Nora and Helmer. The deceptively light-hearted bickering of Philip and Aline's opening dialogue immediately establishes a lack of understanding between men and women while setting up the main storyline:

> *Al.* Well, what am I to do if you will go on reading? I can't sit silent for ever, can I?
> *Ph.* Most certainly not, I should say from experience. (55)

Though Philip criticizes his wife's desire for activity and companionship, he admits to reading sensationalist coverage of the murder at the Opera House, being investigated by his uncle. Darcy, as Philip explains, is unfortunately behind in his investigation, and perhaps more unfortunately has been captivated by "the fascinating Madame Larivière" (56), whom he may be about to marry.[213] While both Aline and Philip agree Darcy's love interest is undesirable, Philip uses this moment to belittle his wife:

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[212] This parlour play contains a plot similar to that of Susan Glaspell's one-act 1916 play *Trifles* in which one woman's husband is found dead in the house. Two other female characters, going through the house, discover small clues ignored by the male investigators, and simultaneously express their sympathy for the wife (the likely perpetrator of the crime). Rather than revealing their uncovered clues, the women hide them to protect the wife.

> *Al.* Well, I must say Madame Larivière does not altogether inspire me with confidence. She is too—too——
> *Ph.* (*maliciously*). Too pretty?
> *Al.* No, no Phillip—you always think women are jealous of each other. It isn't that at all. But she certainly seems to have a manner which——
> *Ph.* Which men think delightful and women call bad style, eh? I know! Ha, ha! (56)

Philip's interruptions reveal the serious negotiation of power beneath the comic surface—especially as Aline views this as less than amusing:

> *Al.* You always laugh at me, Philip, as if I were so foolish. I know much more of the world than you think, I can tell you.
> *Ph.* I've no doubt of it, my darling. But don't be too worldly and clever, please. I like you best as you are, simple, unworldly, and trustful—and, joking apart, I am quite ready to agree with you that perhaps your instinct about Madame Larivière is right… (56-57).

Philip echoes Helmer's repeated sentiments of the sort that he "wouldn't want my pretty little song-bird to be the least bit different from what she is now" (5) and Aline recalls Nora's telling Mrs. Linde, "[*Wag*[ging] *her finger*] little Nora isn't as stupid as everybody thinks" (9). Similarly to Helmer's projected self-sufficiency and importance, Philip continually hints at his desire and ability to help his uncle solve the murder case, though it becomes clear, if not through his disregard of his wife, then through the dialogue of Darcy—"no—you have no turn, believe me, for criminal investigation" (62)—that Philip is no such detective. The audience, in both cases, gets the feeling both Helmer and Philip are compensating for something, using their absolute power within the domestic for their feelings of inadequacy without it.

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[213] The use of "Darcy" as well as the interactions in which Philip reads and ignores his wife's conversation are also suggestive of *Pride and Prejudice*.

Meanwhile, Aline and Madame Larivière grow collectively in a character trajectory similar to that of Nora and Mrs. Linde. Madame Larivière, just as Mrs. Linde does in her first talk with Nora, accuses Aline of being from a privileged background which prevents her from understanding her circumstances. But, if Aline initially appears to be this play's Nora, the viewer only now learns that Madame Larivière's first name is a noticeably similar "Dora." While one might argue that similar dramatic structures of both "The Public Prosecutor" and *A Doll's House* may simply derive from the prevailing social structure, the name similarities and the pivotal ending argue for a more direct Ibsen influence here. The preliminary lack of understanding between the pairs of women in both cases—Mrs. Linde insists Nora must have a man supplying her with money, and Dora confronts Aline about her prejudices—results in the plot's most important early revelations. Nora divulges she alone saved her husband through falsifying her father's signature, and Dora confesses in detail her accidental murder of Fanny, the victim from the case under investigation:

> *Dora*. …I had known Fanny Duval years ago, when I first came to Paris, but I had never liked her. The other day I at last met her again, when I was with your uncle. She advanced, smiling, to claim my acquaintance—I was foolish enough to receive her with marked coldness—foolish, inasmuch as I did not realise that I might be making a deadly enemy of her. She took her revenge! she wrote to me that evening, saying that she had found some letters of mine among the papers of a man we both knew, and that she would enclose them the next day to your dear uncle, Monsieur Darcy, unless I would go that same evening to the Opera, to beg them humbly from her myself. I went, in order that no trace of my past might remain to cast its shadow on my future ... I humbled myself by asking her for the letters—she drew the packet from her cloak, and gave them to me with words of mocking congratulation—I started forward angrily—she drew back—as she did so she fell, I thought fainting—and I left her. (76)

Fanny, in her aggression towards Dora, has fallen upon her own knife. One must notice the sort of *Middlemarch* play within-a-play involving a knifing at the theatre here, but more importantly, the plot of "Prosecutor" similarly depends, like *A Doll's House*, on the retrieval of a letter, which could be used for blackmail against a woman, whose future happiness in marriage depends on the contents of the letter remaining secret. In Nora's words, a disclosure such as Krogstad's letter to Helmer will ensure "this happy home of ours would never be the same again" (15) while Dora assumes the revelation of her unscrupulous past and involvement in the murder to her current fiancé will mean "a sentence of banishment—of death" (77). Neither Nora nor Dora succeed in retrieving their letters; in both cases, the failure of this mission intimately impacts each woman's reputation, but also directly results in her choice to abandon her previous domestic ideas of happiness. When Helmer reads his letter, his reaction—not one of sacrifice for his wife, as Nora dreams—leads to Nora's rational argument for the dissolution of their marriage and her resulting dramatic departure. Dora's failure to retrieve her letters from Fanny at the Opera House indirectly causes the former's death—her sudden lurch forward makes the surprised Fanny fall on her decorative knife.

When the contents of those letters, not recovered by Dora on that fateful night, are finally revealed, the results are even more dramatic to Philip and Aline's relationship as well as Dora and Darcy's. Philip somehow finds one of Madame Larivière's letters within the coat lining of the murdered woman, and in his return home, inevitably is struck by the comparison of his letter to the one his wife received from her visitor (currently hidden in an adjacent room) in his absence. Philip's exclamation—"Great God! am I mad? Aline— Aline—what can you, my wife, have to do with this horrible business?" (74)—sounds much like Helmer's own disbelief about his precious pet's behavior. Aline is forced to subtly lie to Philip, while her nervous reactions and refusal to let him see her letter create a hysterical manner similar to Nora's efforts to distract Helmer through her tarantella rehearsal. Philip eventually recovers Aline's letter, gets the full story from Dora, and though he believes her, decides that Darcy must know the facts of the case. Yet, the final blow comes not from any disclosure on his part, but from the manner in which he and Dora react to Darcy's inquisitiveness.

> *Darcy* (speaks with increasing emotion). Philip, Dora—what is this mystery? Your manner leads me to suppose that—that—no, it cannot be! the thought is too horrible Dora—oh, speak! the discovery cannot be connected with—with you!
> *Dora*. It is.
> *Darcy*. Good God!
> *Ph.* This paper was found inside the murdered woman's cloak.
> *Darcy* (looks at it). Ah!!
> [*He sinks into a chair, by the table, utterly overcome, his head on his folded arms.*
> *Dora goes sadly out. As she reaches the door she says softly* Good-bye—for-ever! (79)

Just like Philip's earlier reaction about his wife's potential involvement, here the contaminating suggestion of Dora's connection, rather than news about her actual guilt, is what crushes Darcy (though he may be assuming the worst). As in *A Doll's House*, the ending avoids any neat resolution and encourages a discussion after the curtain—about whether the relationship with Darcy is one that Dora should even desire, since he is so quick to abandon her, or whether she has no choice but to leave because of her reputation. Is Dora also at fault for not fully explaining herself, or is her departure a karmic punishment for her initial contempt of Fanny? Dora, unlike Nora, does not quite so clearly choose her own emotional exit, but both plots operate through layers of women's opinions of one another as dictated by an overly-rigid patriarchal society.

Interestingly, Bell's innovation here is to emphasize the recurring pattern of women's unforgiving opinions of one another as influenced by social norms—Aline's initial dislike of Dora, Dora's initial contempt of Fanny, Fanny's blackmailing of Dora in retaliation—which lead to the actual "murder" of one woman. The constant misinterpretation and mistreatment of the women by one another is a nested expansion of that in *A Doll's House*, in which Mrs. Linde's wrongly assumes Nora's "comfortable" situation is supported by a man kept illicitly in the background. Bell alters the Ibsen plot to scrutinize women's attitudes towards themselves and one another; the final departure of Dora is necessary only because of the prejudices within Dora and the other characters, though it destroys Dora's only hope for future happiness. Aline, as the only reformable character, suggests that a first step toward remedying this attitude is an increase in women's sympathy towards one another—as Dora confesses to Aline that "if you will only believe in me—your sympathy, your womanly support will be everything—you make me feel that my life is still worth enduring" (69). Lack of leniency towards other women is the true problem, not to be capped off by a dialogue between lovers. While Bell's brief prefatory phrase notes she was inspired by a French opera, the noticeable similarities with *A Doll's House* argue that this play was foremost in the minds of her readers and of herself. In "The Public Prosecutor," as sometimes in real life, the choice of exit is not quite the woman's own.

An exit from home drama shares parallels with Nora's exit—both have an afterlife, as they permit the theatrical to seep into the real post-play world. In home theatre, exits emphasize the minimal separation between spectator and actor: the already established friendliness between actors and audience, who would almost certainly be friends or acquaintances, highlights a lack of distance. Second, while the offstage space in public theatre feels like a transitional zone between acting and non-acting moments, from distinct stage to distinct ordinary space, in the parlour play this transition is largely undercut by the entire theatrical occurring within the home. Exiting in both Ibsen's drama and home drama is a part of their revolutionary aspect, but actually home theatre emphasizes all the supposed innovations of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*.

Ordinarily, the standard critical response to Ibsen's play is that, as Terry Otten quips, "when Nora slams the door at the end of the play, she announces the beginning of modern drama."[214] Much scholarly time is spent discussing, as Wendy Weckwerth explains, this "radical dramaturgical move by which Ibsen thwarted the well-made play's trademark tidy conclusion," thus initiating the beginning of theatrical realism.[215] However, while many parlour plays end in a happy union between lovers, many others conclude with a woman storming offstage to escape oppression, either as Madame Larivière does, sadly, or in a more positive spirit in which she looks to a brighter future. (No matter what her attitude, she is nearly always escaping from the injustices of her society or its laws.) Weckwerth goes on to describe how though Ibsen leaves room for and then thwarts the standard resolution, he also manipulates the basics of the well-made play structure: "he discarded exposition, limited cast size, emphasized middle-class settings."[216] In this manner, Ibsen's play parallels the home theatre's necessarily small casts and to-the-point plots, with which Victorian middle-class women were at that point intimately familiar and well-practiced. The home theatre space itself necessitated these dramatic conditions, later marked as Ibsen's innovation. This transformed spatial and aesthetic scale serves as perhaps the most important parallel between *A Doll's House* and Victorian conditions (in home theatrics and otherwise): a blend of theatricality and authenticity, a blurring of the real/fictional border. This happens on many levels through Nora's "skylarking" and tarantella-dancing and through the home theatre's heroines' meta-roles, but is more grandly enabled by the particular qualities of the space of the home. The content of the parlour plays themselves acknowledges that outright acting—as opposed to the acting of social manners—is a useful tool for cultural transformation within an everyday space.

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[214] Terry Otten, "How Old is Dr. Rank?" *Modern Drama* 41 (1998), 509.

[215] Wendy Weckwerth, "Playing with Dolls and Houses" *Theatre* 34.3 (2004), 134. Though as Toril Moi has pointed out, the insistence of the realists on claiming Ibsen's work has helped perpetuate the belief that his plays are "nothing but unselfconscious and boring realism" (261). Moi's work has recently drawn out the theatricality at the very center of *A Doll's House*. Additionally, while doctored versions of *A Doll's House* (with "corrected" endings) were performed in Britain, after the premiere of the first unbowdlerized version in 1889, even those who had not seen the true *A Doll's House* would have been inundated with newspaper reports of the play. In other words, the real version took over all celebrity.

[216] Ibid., 136.

The home as a setting activates the potential of *A Doll's House*, which like the parlour play similarly conflates traditional separations of space. To Una Chaudhuri, the home is both site of compulsion and site of difference; "this contradictory conditionality of the figure of the home—its status as both shelter and prison, security and entrapment—is crucial to its dramatic meaning."[217] Certainly this was a factor in home theatricals, whose dramatic signification was forced to shape itself around the home as a setting, and which one could 'exit' but yet 'not exit.' When a character exits the "home" within the home play, the amateur actor was still confined to the actual home in which the play was occurring. This is quite unlike the stage, in which the "home" is confined and limited to the actual space on the stage. The home of the private stage, owing to an inherent lack of exit, thus presents ever new possibilities for redefining cultural norms to carry into the "real" home. This affects the relationship between the home theatrical setting and the stage on which Nora performs. Home theatre—in which actors could become regular spectators after the conclusion of their part—allowed middle-class British women to bring this same mentality to *A Doll's House*, a parallel reinforced through the shared home setting. Nora does not leave the theatre of action, but continues to be "out there" somewhere. The amateur actress' exit is also an entrance, or re-entrance, back into the parlour space, a space which if not precisely her own parlour, has the intimate and social comfort of everyday life. This easy transition from stage to "real space" would unsurprisingly make residual aspects of

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217. Una Chaudhuri, *Staging Place: The Geography of Modern Drama* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997), 8.

character linger a little longer, especially for an amateur actress, however accustomed she may have been to other forms of recitation.

Eleanor Marx's Home Theatrical: Making Fiction Real

The actual staging of parlour plays becomes explicitly tied to Ibsen in the work of Eleanor Marx, certainly an advocate of social transformation and reform. Marx, the woman who in addition to Elizabeth Robin most maximized the effect of *A Doll's House* in Britain, began her engagement with the playwright through her own home theatrical, a staged reading of the Henrietta Frances Lord translation of *A Doll's House*, known as *Nora*. Marx, interestingly, provides more support for the easy translation of home theatre into the real woman's life, through the parallels between her life and Nora's, which play out even further following her acting of her home play. Eleanor Marx, best known as the beloved youngest daughter of Karl, fell in love with a man twice her age before spending most of her life in a free union with the political activist Edward Aveling; in many ways Marx's position as woman bound and manipulated by her ties to men parallels that of Nora, who was also the pet of her father, is involved in an intrigue with the older Dr. Rank, and is in a less-than-mutual marriage to husband Helmer. Rather than this overestimating the importance of Ibsen's work within Marx's life, the exceptional nature of her commitment to his work in a life otherwise dominated by political causes, as well as the eventual end result of her unraveling relationship with Aveling, testify to Ibsen's heroine's relatability and the extent to which the private acting of his work (or work from a similar vein as in the home theatre) can entrench itself into a woman's real life.

Marx was so invested in Ibsen's message for the middle-class woman that she learned Norwegian to translate his work. In her only work of fiction, she co-wrote *A Doll's House*

Revisited with Israel Zangwill.[218] This parody corrected *A Doll's House* based on the comments of the play's detractors, to show the true absurdity of a version in which his play "adhered to English commonsense," but unlike the earlier well known *Breaking a Butterfly* by Herman and Jones, professed to stay true to Ibsen's intention. Unlike the Herman and Jones revision, which substitutes entirely new characters to change the play almost beyond recognition, Marx and Zangwill's play largely works by reversing the position of Nora and Helmer in their dialogue—Marx's *Revisited* Nora becomes more and more melodramatic when Helmer confronts her; she "*sobs more and more hysterically*" and "*rises and stands with clasped hands*" and reluctantly obeying her husband's command to stay away from her children, "*leans her head against door of the children's room, then rushes hurriedly into the study.*" Helmer, meanwhile, pays off Krogstad to ensure his silence about the forgery, in a gesture of manliness ("we're men—not a couple of hysterical women"), and convinces Krogstad to subdue Mrs. Linde: "Of course I shall stop Christina working. I will make her my true helpmate by making her dependent upon me." When Krogstad reveals to her husband that Nora copied for money, she again reverts to the sensational and melodramatic, "*peeping in at the door*" to exclaim asides of "Saved!" or "Heavens! Lost!" Marx's reworking, one of many spawned from Ibsen's original, was published in the March 1891 edition of *Time*, a London socialist monthly, as well as sold separately as a pamphlet.[219] This version, so devoted to the juxtaposition of melodramatic and realistic, the passive housewife and independent woman, is presented similarly to the manner in which parlour plays were distributed, as small pamphlets in addition to volumes—though it is not clear whether Marx's version was meant to be performed. Further, this adaptation uses the common tactic of the parlour play, the portrayal of the excessively domestic woman as comic counterpart to the working New Woman. Thus, Marx's and Zangwill's *Revisited* is not only a critique of Ibsen's criticizers, but also a format suggestive of home theatrical's most common method of advancing an independent conception of womanhood. While this demonstrates how closely allied Ibsen's *A Doll's House* and its ripple-effect sequels were to women's home theatre, Marx herself also had produced *A Doll's House* as a home theatrical in her own home eight years earlier.

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[218] Marx produced countless political tracts. See Branislaw Jakovljevic's "Shattered Back Wall: Performative Utterance of *A Doll's House*" for a thorough treatment of Marx's translations of Ibsen.

[219] Bernard Dukore, "Karl Marx's Youngest Daughter and "A Doll's House" *Theatre Journal* 42.3 (Oct. 1990), 309.

Marx and her common-law husband Edward Aveling held a theatrical party in their home to perform *A Doll's House* in 1883, with invitees ranging among the most important social reformers of London.[220] To Newey, Marx's letter to Havelock Ellis, inviting him to her production, "is often cited as one of the defining moments of Ibsen's cultural translation into the English theatre."[221] In the home theatre production itself, Eleanor played Nora, Aveling played Helmer, William Morris's daughter May was Mrs. Linde, and George Bernard Shaw was Krogstad.[222] For Marx, the play had a very real reference to her own life. Newey has noted that Victorian "critics have commented on the irony of Marx and Aveling playing opposite each other, convinced that Ibsen's 'miracle of miracles' had already happened in their domestic Eden."[223] Yet, Branislaw Jakovljevic, in his argument for the performative effect of Ibsen's play, realizes that a horrific 'door slamming' follows this acting. The couple co-authored *The Woman Question*, which denounces the hypocrisy of English marriages. Meanwhile, Aveling, still keeping up his free union with Marx, married an actress under his playwright pseudonym, a secret which he kept for two years. After receiving a letter exposing Aveling's secret life (again, the similarities with *A Doll's House* abound), Marx, according to Jakovlevic, "summoned him home, and a 'stormy interview' followed. He left. Eleanor did not drown: she had a bath, dressed in white, retired to bed, and drank chloroform mixed with prussic acid. Eleanor, the reversed Nora, left a note: 'Dear, it will soon all be over now. My last word to you is the same that I have said during all these long, sad years – love.'"[224] Eleanor's suicide becomes her own unexpected exit, a real revision to the theatrical which was her partnership with Aveling. On one level, the confusion of the dramatic and the real here is similar to the home theatre's ability to move from stage-parlour to real-parlour—to intervene in the Victorian woman's real social dilemmas. On another level, a woman taking her own life is much more real than the action staged in (either home or public) theatre. Still, the events of Marx's life—from that first reading in her home, to her relationship with Aveling, to her tragic end—attest to the intense effect of *A Doll's House* in relation to and as relevant to its audience's lives.

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[220] Ibid., 109.

[221] Newey, 131.

[222] Cited in Ledger, 80, and Newey, 131, and Branislaw Jakovljevic, "Shattered Back Wall: Performative Utterance of *A Doll's House.*" *Theatre Journal* 54 (2002), 447.

[223] Newey, 132, quote is from 'Drury-Lane Theatre,' *The Times*, 7 October 1834, 2.

Parlour plays particularly manipulate the potential of realistic theatre—in the relatable character and setting—in order to cultivate a shift in the cultural codes surrounding women. The most common setting within the scene of the parlour play is the parlour; the ease of spatially transitioning from the real to acting moments potentially enables more real-life carryover of "lessons taught" by the theatrical, as it makes the theatrical itself more likely to deal with issues that would actually arise in the social arena. This realistic setting is also crucial to Elin Diamond's argument that Ibsen's realism positions the spectator to verify the truths of the realistic drama: "*Hedda Gabler* produces a subject who sees, and reproduces, a real relation between the signifier-signified-referent."[225] However, these truths can only be confirmed in reference to the spectator's life; as Diamond quotes the actress Elizabeth Robins, "How should men understand Hedda when they didn't understand her in the person of their wives, their daughters, their woman friends. One lady of our acquaintance, married and not noticeably unhappy, said … 'Hedda is all of us.'"[226] By permitting real middle-class women a chance to actually act as Heddas in their own plays, the parlour drama expands and deepens this feeling of theatrical reflection.

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[224] Jakovljevic, 448.

Perhaps the public's reluctance to let go of Ibsen's play after curtain is then even less surprising. Jakovljevic explains that "Ibsen's play was followed by an unshakable public conviction in the existence of a real Nora Helmer and a real doll's house."[227] Few if any plays have resulted in such an explosion of sequel writing as *A Doll's House*, including of course, Marx's, which reverses the roles of Helmer and Nora at the conclusion (ironically, making the plot more closely parallel her own later life). "[T]he outcome of Nora's exit was repeatedly imagined and reimagined, corrected, reversed, and questioned."[228] The public's discovery that Ibsen's play was based on a real woman facilitated the shift to thinking about the action post-door slam. As in Marx' life, the life of Laura Kieler, the real Nora, turned into a sequel to Ibsen's play. Again, space is crucial to meaning here, as the conclusion's use of offstage space alters the dynamic between off/onstage. "Nora's final exit is not seen or reported. It comes as a noise. This sound is raw and inarticulate [like Diamond's description of the hysteric], and there is nothing designed or artificial about it."[229] Nora's exit is also, as Jaklojevic and others have noticed, an entrance. Home theatre importantly restructures the ordinary movements of exit/entrance; any exit is reentrance back into the parlour, but the actress moves not into inevitable, inescapable prison, but a space where boundaries have potentially shifted and preexisting domestic associations can be reworked. Just as Nora's time spent in her all too real tarantella alters her reality, the actress taking up a parlour role may be taking part in a more controlled (or uncontrolled) hysteria which affects her real life behavior.

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[225] Diamond, 7.

[226] Ibid., 6.

[227] Jakovljevic, 441.

[228] Ibid., 443.

Rational Hysteria in a Dramatic Home: Women and Monologues

Home drama shared not just a living room setting with the emergent realism of public theatre, but also its fascination with precise true-to-the-action details, often including meticulous costuming. Nora's tarantella is powered in part by her metamorphosis of dress; similarly, in home drama, an acted hysteria (or any non-self state) was evidently easier to reach with the help of costume. This bodily "disguise" was initially seen as one of the more powerful transformative effects of the home theatre. More so than the memorization and speeches of home plays, the real power and enjoyment is in the "almost Indian transformation" of the actor.[230] Women seem especially susceptible to this type of change, as it removes them from the strict rules of propriety and dress required by their daily lives. As Percy Fitzgerald, a Victorian theatre critic and historian, wrote in a British periodical, "[t]here is no exception" to the enthusiasm of transformation: "the worn-down matron, who has run in fashionable shafts till she is fit only for some social-knacker's yard, will make a desperate effort, have herself braced-up, her 'coat' well curried, her harness renewed, and come ambling in with all the air and bearing of a fresher and younger animal."

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[229] Ibid., 443.

[230] Percy Fitzgerald, "Private Theatricals." *Belgravia: a London magazine*. 1 (1867: Feb.), 444.

However, as Fitzgerald's misogynistic horse-themed account makes clear, men—even if they professed otherwise—were not entirely comfortable with women acting in roles outside of those feminine ones which they were assigned. This is reinforced through Fitzgerald's description of an aunt playing the part of a male hero, who makes a spectacular appearance near a home theatrical's conclusion. By all indications, the aunt gives a successful, well-received performance, in which she has had to don a cloak, mustache, and large hat, and is unrecognized as herself by her audience. However, Fitzgerald insists that, at the moment in which Aunt cries out a pivotal line, she "falter[s] hysterically" and that the portrayal, while not at the moment, is upon later reflection, "grotesque." Just as in *A Doll's House*—whose male characters force a similar negative terminology on female characters—male spectators of the home theatre frequently insist upon applying the terminology of hysteria and abnormality to women acting outside what men perceive as their appropriate "domain." In both home theatre and hysteria, the behavior of women often shares a label of "unacceptability," but also offers potential for catharsis.[231] Hysteria in nineteenth-century culture has always been connected with acting; this is true even among those women experiencing "medically diagnosed" hysteria, who use theatrical language in their diaries.[232] According to Elin Diamond, "[a]ccusations of fakery ('cases' of nothing) were as common as the claim that women, prisoners of their uteruses, were

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231. Hysteria's symptoms cover a broad range of possibilities, but could be generally summarized as an emotionally provoked or based physical display. See: Amanda du Preez, "Putting on appearances: mimetic representations of hysteria." *De arte* 69 (2004): 47-61. Du Preez is one among the group of scholars who explains hysteria as a very physical manifestation—seen but not heard.

232. Lisa Koch, "Bodies as Stage Props: Enacting Hysteria in the Diaries of Charlotte Forten Grimké and Alice James" *Legacy* 15.1 (1998), 59.

by nature hysterical."[233] Diagnoses of hysteria in Western Europe peaked during the late nineteenth-century—in France, for example, they rose from 1% in 1840 to 20% of women in 1883—but especially in Britain, they concurred with a culture centrally occupied with theatricality/authenticity, frustrated in arguments over woman's proper position in the public domain, and as I argue, with the rise of amateur acting among middle-class women.[234]

Among home theatricals, monologue plays most often feature hysteric or eccentric central speakers—almost always women. These monologues, unique among nineteenth-century discourses on hysteria, do not straightforwardly critique the nervous, hysteric, or eccentric female figure. Instead, these plays star hysterics in often comic roles, and often explicitly align hysteric behavior—whether purposely "put on" or intrinsic to a play's character—with acting's ability to empower a woman to win a desired social outcome. The following three monologues, taken from larger collections by Florence Bell and Harriet Childe-Pemberton, show the range of excitable women who star in parlour monologues. The hysteric, when not emerging as an explicitly powerful figure within monologue, is often used to subtly critique social codes. She is never passive because she is the lone actress, but when her character is ridiculous, she highlights the unfairness of some part of her life's circumstances. No matter the play's content, the very nature of the performance—in which the individual female lead is a rollercoaster of energy—displays the "hysteric" actress in a way whose meaning she authorizes. The release of extraneous or nervous energy in performance legitimizes it.

Florence Bell's "A Hard Day's Work" features Geraldine, a woman whose "hard day's work" involves a continuous string of neighborly visits and run-ins where each time she sways a companion or acquaintance into reversing an impending, usually life-altering decision. Geraldine considers this part of her duty as an especially sensitive soul, to be "on the move all day, mentally as well as physically, about other people's business" because as she explains, she feels "a keen interest in all that surrounds me—I am too impressionable, too clear-sighted, too sympathetic."[235] Geraldine could be said to be a specifically intellectual hysteric; rather than merely retreating in and out of rationality within her own body, she uses her influence as she goes in and out of others' lives and drawing-rooms. However, the monologue form becomes a type of hysteria in itself, as Geraldine grippingly impersonates the speech of various other characters she encountered—so captivatingly in fact, that the reader (and presumably audience) nearly forgets Geraldine is the lone character represented. Rather than this ventriloquism vacating Geraldine's sense of self, this piece's interest depends entirely on Geraldine and her ability to discreetly manipulate (and impersonate) others.

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[233] Elin Diamond, "Realism's Hysteria," *Unmaking Mimesis* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 9.

[234] Ibid., 47.

Over the theatrical, she narrates that day's series of events, in which she unconsciously reveals herself as crafty and cunning while stalwartly believing herself to be setting the world to rights. Meanwhile, the audience deduces the various means by which Geraldine works her magic upon each unaware compatriot—we are able to see Geraldine's unspoken intent though her victim cannot. To understand the complexity of plot involved in this one-woman show, I have broken down the major storylines in which Geraldine the gossip intervenes. In this spirited and stunning accumulation of eleven-pages of monologue, Geraldine describes convincing:

1. her friend Fanny to check on her nurse's character with the one former employer who remains unreachable in Switzerland, though Geraldine reveals in conversation that she is most likely thinking of a different French maid;

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[235] Florence Bell, "A Hard Day's Work," *Chamber Comedies a collection of plays and monologues for the drawing room* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890), 237.

2. Lady Agnes that her daughter’s new fiancé was involved in a scandal—though Geraldine subsequently tells the audience, “I heard from a friend I met in the afternoon, that it was not Bertie Erskine, but Billy *Fitz*Erskine.” (239);

3. Sir Charles that the woman, Blanche, to whom he is about to propose is a notorious flirt—and, in looking at a portrait album as a not-so-innocent prop, Geraldine additionally draws attention to how “[t]he mother is a most extraordinary-looking old lady, and, as I said to Sir Charles, is certainly a warning to her daughter of what *she* will be like” (240);

4. Mary to not send her daughter to German boarding school for fear the girl will elope. When Mary’s husband steps in to argue that elopements occur as often in London, he is retrospectively termed a “[h]orrid, gormandizing creature” (246) who cares more for his tea than his children’s welfare.

After telling tales of traversing about town, from drawing-room to drawing-room, Geraldine ends her speech with her annoyance with Mary’s realistic husband, who appears to be the only one able to thwart her well-placed and precisely revealed gossip. However, Geraldine *again* has the last word when the husband’s speech reveals how successful her own day was in altering others’ major life events; “[h]e said only one thing that interested me, and that was, that he had met Sir Charles Porter this afternoon, who said he was going to the East” (247), implying thus that Geraldine has successfully convinced him to not marry Blanche.

The theatrical has an almost paradoxical relationship with movement; Geraldine supposedly has been on the move all day but her monologue itself, recited within the drawing-room, can only imaginatively travel—as is felt most, perhaps, by the actress reciting it. While Sir Charles is able to run away from his unwanted almost-betrothed, as Geraldine’s last words make clear, she herself cannot go anywhere:

> Heigho! *I* should like to go to the East, or to the West, or somewhere at any rate a long way off, beyond the reach of people who come to me for advice and sympathy—but I really don't like to do it. I don't feel as if it would be right to leave all my friends for so long. But there is time enough to think of it, after all—I won't trouble my head about it to-night, as I have a busy day, and an early start, before me to-morrow. I promised I would go to Lady Walmer's in the morning to help her to choose the new paper for her dining-room—I know if I don't go that she will take that horrid greenish-grey one she has set her heart upon, and which I detest! And now, to bed—for I am quite worn out, in mind and in body, by my hard day's work! (247)

Thus the theatrical, circling round alternate spaces and stories, seems to settle once again in the domestic, quite literally in the decision to avoid unpleasant wallpaper. Geraldine's great triumphs in "A Hard Day's Work" utilize foreign, non-drawing-room spaces—from Switzerland, France, Germany, "going to the East," and a repeated scenario in which a would-be lover is dismissed from a drawing-room: the scandalous Bertie Erskine, or perhaps Billy *Fitz*Erskine, is unfit for anyone's parlour, and Charles runs away from the parlour where he talks with Geraldine in order to avoid meeting Blanche's mother.

In other monologues, the hysteric takes the starring role. Both monologues in Harriet Childe-Pemberton's "*Twenty Minutes" Drawing-Room Duologues Etc.* star over-the-top female characters.[236] In "My Missing Spectacles," Aunt Maria spends most of the play looking for her glasses, which she believes her nephew George has hidden, though the spectacles are on top of her head the entire time.[237] During the course of the theatrical, Aunt Maria searches high and low within her drawing-room, where she finds and confiscates various objects for which George is actually responsible, by placing them in her pocket. The ordinary drawing-room betrays its regular domestic associations here; just beneath the surface—and even without the aid of glasses—an absent male presence has taken over control of the space. Aunt Maria, a traditional spinster figure, is shocked by what she can see *sans* spectacles when carefully investigating the crannies and nooks of her own parlour: in the stage directions, she "[c]*ontinues to search along the chimney-piece*" (81) where she finds George's photograph of a "bedizened actress!" wearing tights, "[s]*earches the sofa*" to find a pink sporting newspaper hidden behind the cushions, "[c]*omes upon a bottle of soda-water and a brandy-flask*" (82), along with several unpaid bills and what appears to be a love letter. Clapping her hand to her forehead, she finds her glasses but still persists in blaming George for their temporary absence. In a fluster after trying to read George's correspondence—now possible with her glasses—she drops all of the contraband out of her pocket and pushes her glasses inadvertently back up on her head. The contrast between Aunt Maria's unorganized bodily presence and George's omniscient presence sketched out by only by his objects generates an uneasy spatial anxiety, despite the piece's comedy, much like the hysteric's ambiguous control over her own body. With an imprecise and almost indefinable sense of invasion, Aunt Maria discovers that her conceptions about her very own parlour are wrong; indeed, the theatrical concludes with her fleeing like a suspect in her own home after hearing noises indicating George's return.

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[236] Harriet Childe-Pemberton's duologue "Shattered Nerves" features a nervous specialist doctor Mrs. Piercy-Sharp, M. D. and her client Lady Flora. Mrs. Piercy-Sharp's opening monologue involves her exclaiming that her patients try her so that she sarcastically debates opening a clinic for nervous young men: "I'm sick of being consulted by all these worrying women. I think I shall make a new departure and advertise myself, 'Mrs. Piercy Sharp, consulting specialist for nervous young men.' Oh! there are plenty of them about too. *Fin de siècle* young men" (31-32).

[237] Harriet Childe-Pemberton, "My Missing Spectacles," *Twenty Minutes" Drawing-Room Duologues Etc.* (London and New York: Samuel French, c. 1900), 80-86.

In Childe-Pemberton's "I and my Father-in-Law," the actress is no excitable spinster but a married woman who uses the acting process to insist on her own way financially.[238] Stepping in and out of various personas ultimately leads to her most desired outcome. Importantly, this happens not in a causal but a magical manner in which the boundaries between the theatrical's "real life" and "acting" blur. The unnamed speaker has had a row with her husband Jack because of overdrawing her account "for the third-time in the last twelve-month!" (57), and explains that: "in vain I argued that I *must* dress, *must* give to charities, must have everything that I want." As a result, Jack has sent for his father to "make [her] listen to reason" (58). Now awaiting Sir John's arrival and reflecting that she has previously told him that "I will never condescend to anything low, I like all things high—high game, high steppers, high rate of interest," her monologue then proceeds to act out the various manners she may "put on" in order win over her father-in-law. These various attitudes appear to offer the speaker excitement and relief from the impending meeting, through the release of the acting process itself and by suggesting her potential control over the situation. In all respects, she sees this future encounter as an event to be won; these characters which she adopts always result, within her imagined scenario, in her victory. Going in and out of character ultimately leads to the most powerful character in her *real* self at the theatrical's conclusion, as she progresses from more passive to manipulative acts. In essence, the acting process's potential to alter life itself is dramatized here.

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[238] Harriet Childe-Pemberton, "I and My Father-in-Law," in "*Twenty Minutes" Drawing-Room Duologues Etc.* (London and New York: Samuel French, c. 1900), 57-63.

She first acts out what she terms "the pathetic" (59) collapsing at an imagined Sir John's feet willing to learn finances—"Yes, I know! I know! call me anything you please—foolish, idiotic, mad as a hundred hatters"—until she imagines being pulled up and kissed on both cheeks "—and then he will say: 'Bless you my dear child;' and so the victory will remain with me." Next, the speaker appears to enjoy more thoroughly testing out "the indignant, very upright" (60) manner, which reverses her meekness of her first façade:

> Let me tell you, Sir John, once for all, that I am not accustomed to be addressed in such terms as foolish, idiotic, much less mad as a hundred hatters…When I—no, don't interrupt me, please—when I did your son the honour of marrying him, it was on the distinct understanding that I was to do as I liked.

Thus stamping her foot, “Sir John’s breath will be quite taken away,” he will murmur kindly in response, and “the victory will remain with [her],” though she is not quite sure she can imagine Sir John’s breath failing him. Penultimately, she puts on “the familiar and pert” (61) act which ends with an imaginary Sir John chucking her under the chin, “so—(*chucks herself under the chin*)—and call[ing her] ‘a little puss!’” Thus she is ensured that “the victory will remain with [her]” though she admits this nearly flirtatious behavior by Sir John is perhaps least believable of all. Her acting is interrupted by a letter being handed from offstage along with a request to admit a visitor. Presuming the visitor is Sir John, she sends off a message that she will see no one that afternoon despite this rejection “fall[ing] rather flat” (62) with her intended manner of receiving him. However, in a drastic turn of events, she then reads the letter to discover she is sudden heir to fifteen thousand pounds by a man to whom she once lent a hymn-book. For a moment, she pauses and accordingly imagines receiving Sir John while “*triumphantly, brandishing the letter*” (63). Then, dismissing her troubles with her father-in-law, she realizes the visitor was part of the firm attending to her newfound monetary glory, and thus takes her “*exit in a great hurry*” to catch the unexpected caller. On a different level, the similarities between her father-in-law and her husband’s names—“Jack” was often a diminutive of “John,” but the added “Sir” of the father adds to his sense of patriarchal authority—allow her easy dismissal of the father to stand for a dismissal of her husband’s sense of patriarchal control.

The unreasonableness of the speaker’s acting and the “real” plot collide in the letter with the inheritance news. Each of her three respective personas—the pathetic, the indignant, and finally the pert—become less and less likely to get her imagined reaction from Sir John. Neither is it reasonable to expect that the man who “always *said* he would remember [her] in his will” will actually provide her with a fortune because she lent a hymn-book. As her acting personas increase their respective wish-fulfillment quotient, the theatrical's plot itself becomes a wish-fulfillment. On the home theatrical stage, the power of acting to almost magically change the course of events is itself dramatized. On some level, working her way through her various "acts" to be put on before Sir John gives the unnamed woman the power to triumphantly confront and then move on from a would-be belittler.

Spaces of Realistic Theatre

The home theatre, like hysteria, disrupts traditional laws governing space and 'reality.' As Chaudhuri explains, "[e]arly naturalists sought to erase the difference between the public nature of theatre and the private world of experience." Home theatricals do exactly this. While home theatre was an accessible outlet for acting because the plays occurred privately, this fact itself could not undo the inherent publicity of their acting itself. Yet, private theatricals were also a private experience. This conflation of public and private in home theatre made it into a vehicle for shaping identity—just as hysteria is a particularly exuberant explosion of the private into the public realm, and just as the domestic settings of the late nineteenth-century public theatre were a part of the 'new' theatre with revolutionary potential. One may also relate hysteria, defined as private emerging into public, as working similarly to the movement of women's themes from the content of private theatricals to the public stage. The parlour play endues the parlour with cultural flexibility, which makes the public stage's 1890s shift to realism seem like the parlour play merely transplanted to more public venue. As Barstow suggests about the experience of an Ibsen production for the late Victorian audience: "Stripped of its social conviviality and devoid of glamorous spectacle, the public space of the theater became a strangely private place."[239] In other words, this newly realistic theatre is a lot like the parlour play. It is as if the public stage, tired of the caking of sensation, is burst from the inside with scenes which had been occurring in private theatre all along.

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[239] Barstow, 400.

For example, T. H. Lacy's 1870 *The Amateur's Hand*-*Book and Guide to Home or Drawing Room Theatricals*, reprinting an 1866 article from the *Pall Mall Gazette*, gives the history of the home play and describes the necessary spatial restrictions as an unrecognized advantage; too often public stage actors try to make their stage look like a drawing-room, while drawing-room actors fear the lack of illusion in presenting the drawing-room without the mask of a stage:

> The Theatre Royal Back Drawing-room is in London of so limited a size that there are not many plays which can conveniently be performed in it. Our genuine comedies have too many characters. Dramas of action require space and scenery. So the choice lies between farces and the *comedies de salon*—episodes of real life—for which we seem to have no English name. This being the case, it always is a matter of amazement to us that the first thing to be done is to circumscribe the given space as much as possible by the introduction of a miniature theatre. When actors wish to represent scenes from genteel everyday life on the stage, their object and the difficulty they have to overcome is to make it look like a drawing-room. Now the object of the amateur seems to be to make the drawing-room look like a stage. When he has already four walls, doors, windows, fireplace, all "real and proper," as Mr. Swiveller says, why in the world should he put up pasteboard imitations of them? If two exits are found necessary, and are not always found ready to our hands, this can be remedied by a couple of screens, and elbow-room, always a great desideratum, gained thereby. Amateur actors object to this simplicity of decoration on the score that they are too much at home in it—that there is no illusion; forgetting that to the spectators there is no possible illusion in the pasteboard room they erect for themselves, which has the effect of making its inhabitants looks preternaturally big. The conditions of a public theatre and an ordinary room are so different that the attempt to produce illusion by means of scenery should as much as possible be avoided.[240]

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[240] "Private Theatricals" from *The Pall Mall Gazette*, February 1866; Lacy, T.H. Ed. *The Amateur's Hand-Book and Guide to Home or Drawing Room Theatricals*. (London: T. H. Lacy, 1870, Seventh Edition), 70-71.

Through cautioning amateur actors from the use of clearly fake-looking scenery, the *Pall Mall* shows how lack of theatrical illusion in the parlour acting space is precisely why this type of theatre can work upon both its actors, who are "too much at home" in the uncircumscribed parlour, and its audience, who finds an overly altered parlour ludicrous. The uneasiness with which the actors view the unadorned parlour—the fact that they feel they have to do something to it—suggests not just an impulse to decorate but also a need to distinguish the space from its ordinary usage. Meanwhile, spatial limitations predetermine the repertoire of newly smaller public theatres—but "*comedies de salon*," the only actable alternative to farces, still feel vaguely un-English however real-life episodes may be steady fare for the home theatre.

While something about the parlour-stage makes its actors want to alter it, as other guidebooks suggest, scenery is quite often minimal. In Sarah Annie Frost's preface to *The Parlor Stage* explains of her plays: [t]hey are intended solely for performance by small circles of friends, in private parlors or saloons, and require but little trouble or expense to render them effective….The dresses are almost all of the present day, and properties such as are to be found in every well-appointed house, with the single exception of a curtain."[241] Even Frost's title, including the clause "*And Requiring No Expensive Apparatus of Scenery or Properties for Their Performance,*" highlights the ease with which one can put on her plays in the available space. Likewise, George M. Baker's "Preface" to *Amateur Dramas* advertises that his plays are easily produced: "The stage-directions are carefully noted; no scenery is required; the furniture and properties can be readily supplied; and all of the pieces can be represented in the house or

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241. Sarah Annie Frost, *The Parlor Stage, A Collection of Charades and Proverbs, Intended for the Drawing Room or Saloon, And Requiring No Expensive Apparatus of Scenery or Properties for Their Performance* (New York: Dick and Fitzgerald, Publishers, 1868), iii.

exhibition-hall."[242] Harriet Childe-Pemberton more particularly explains in her preface that her plays:

> have been written with a view to performance by amateurs, under the simplest possible conditions … a stage and footlights would tend to enhance their effect; but if these are not to be had, it does not affect the possibility of performance. I have myself taken part in several of them, simply standing up at the end of a drawing-room, without even the assistance of a curtain or of folding doors. (3)

She goes on to name the required properties for the plays within her collection, noting for example that "[i]n 'A Figure of Speech' there ought to be something that represents a window and a fireplace; but if quite impracticable, they might be dispensed with, without materially affecting the piece." Even Florence Bell's collection of children's fairy-tale plays, with its lengthy twenty-five page introduction, including discourses on makeup and correcting the posture and speech patterns of children, notes that:

> [t]he scenery described in the stage directions to the several plays, and shown in the illustrations to them, is intended only as a suggestion, to be carried out or approximated when possible. Thus, in one play the scene is laid out in a feudal castle, with vaulted rooms and medieval furniture; in another, in a subterranean cavern full of treasure; in another, in a tangled forest, &c. But, of course, it is taken for granted that if, as is generally the case in a drawing-room or a school, these, or any painted scenes are not available, they may be left altogether to the imagination of the audience.[243]

The parlour play, even if set in mythic lands as diametrically opposed to the drawing-room as possible, most often used a realistic or undisguised set.

However, on a deeper level, any disguise of the parlour is irrelevant because it cannot change the fact that the performance is occurring in the parlour, home, or everyday space. As even the *Pall Mall* suggestions reveal, parlour actors are intensely aware of the place in which their performances occur. Whether this everyday space undergoes a drastic theatrical alteration—such as it might for a fairy-tale play—does not matter: at its core, this space is still permeated by the feeling that it is the parlour (or whatever everyday space has been) appropriated for the play. Chapter 3 describes how the use of private objects as theatrical props changes their meaning post-play, the same holds true for space. The private performance space changes the nature of the performance itself; the everyday and private become blurred with the theatrical and public. Regular societal restrictions on behavior no longer apply: the actress is free to behave in ways which have the tint of rebelliousness because occurring in the space of everyday behavior, but which are deemed acceptable because occurring within the context of a dramatic performance. Nora's tarentella rehearsal in which she gets a bit too carried away is a good illustration of how this works for the home stage acting process too. Sanctioned by her dance, Nora is capable of expressing her emotions beyond the rules of the dance itself; sanctioned by the play, the actress playing Nora—especially in a home theatre context—can allow her inner self to pour into and beyond the character, just as Percy Fitzgerald's aunt, caught up in her well-received performance, may "falter hysterically." This flexibility of space allows for a mobility of the non-theatrical self as well.

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[242] George M. Baker, *Amateur Dramas for Parlor Theatricals, Evening Entertainments, and School Exhibitions* (Boston: Lee & Shepard, 149 Washington Street, 1866), iii.

[243] Florence Bell, *Fairy Tale Plays and How to Act Them* (London, New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), xiii.

Just as Ibsen and parlour plays share a potentially frightening realistic setting, they also share the portrayal of equally wide ranging female emotions as acceptable material for drama—from rational to lunatic. This spectrum of women's behavior is displayed in the pairings or groupings of female characters, and how they communicate with other women within the drama. As shown in "The Public Prosecutor," Aline and Madame Larivière traverse a range of emotional reactions throughout their conversation, but this dynamic is also true of female characters in other parlour plays and fin-de-siècle public drama. Besides Ibsen's work, Shaw's 1893 *Mrs. Warren's Profession* centers on a mother-daughter relationship troubled by external social pressures and "New Womanhood." Whether antagonistic or benevolent, relationships between women are the skeleton structure of any home drama, but also found in the most powerful turn-of-the-century public stage plays, especially as their topic is control of domestic space.

Perhaps the most overlooked innovation of *A Doll's House* is the collaborative nature of Nora and Mrs. Linde's relationship. To some extent, the critical emphasis on Nora's concluding discussion with her husband overshadows the important return of Nora's school friend; this allows Nora to drop the "squirrel act" and be frank about her circumstances with another character before her more rational discussion with Helmer. While a tension exists between the other male-female or male-male relationships in the play, that of Nora and Mrs. Linde—despite Mrs. Linde's initial reluctance to believe Nora has supported herself on her own—is perhaps the only consistently genuine bond.[244] Nora has been deceived about her relationships with both Helmer and Dr. Rank, the latter of whom is secretly in love with her, and Mrs. Linde until nearly the end of the play remains at odds with her former lover, Krogstad. Each woman furthers the other's respective case for independence by manipulating the man under her control: Nora helps Christine to get her job at the bank through her husband, and Christine insists to Krogstad that he should not try to retrieve his letter, that the big revelation would do Nora some good. Bell's "The Public Prosecutor"—as an example of an already women-centric home drama—can then be seen as drawing out latent aspects of Ibsen's play, in which the interaction between women, whether fueled by sincere concern or jealousy, plays a crucial role in society's laws and judgment.

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[244] 244. This effect is perhaps especially evident in performance; in the 2013 London production at the Duke of York's Theatre, Hattie Morahan as Nora and Susannah Wise as Mrs. Linde had an almost school-girlish quality to their talks. This production also had a revolving set, designed by Ian McNeil; the house spun faster throughout scene changes and "landed" for scenes at different angles, thus emphasizing the flexibility of the domestic space.

Parlour plays, frequently composed of all or nearly all-female casts, play with the variety of roles and emotions which can be acceptably portrayed by the amateur lady actor, and the ways which women are capable of interacting with one another and the larger world. Plays either position women of profoundly different attitudes—often, as has previously been suggested, the New Woman opposes the traditional—or use monologue to feature extremely eccentric, potentially hysteric characters. Most often, the most drastic shifts in a character's behavior are spatially-related, as when one character or another enters or exits the home.

For instance, in my final example for this chapter, Agnes Leigh's home play "Number Seventeen" is a duologue between a lively young woman and a misanthropic elderly lady whose home she mistakenly enters. These two women underscore the range of emotional possibilities for a female character, but their emotions are also controlled by their surrounding space. The play opens with the elderly Maria Jones's comic and lengthy rant against humanity.[245] Maria's opening monologue provides the actress with opportunities for motivated movement around the parlour, while she inevitably ends up comparing her neighbor's home situation to her own:

> What a detestable day! Early this morning the weather was so gloomy that I had to pull up the blinds in order to see at all, and now! the sun is shining so that it is simply ruining the carpet, and that idiotic girl, Mary Ann, never thinks of looking to see whether the blinds are down or up. (*goes to window)* Oh, there is that woman who has gone to live on the opposite side of the street. I wonder what her name is? Of course, she is sitting at her window looking as contented as a cat with a saucer of cream. I hate people who are always smiling and grimacing—humbugs everyone! Ten o'clock! She's on the lookout for the postman, I suppose. I notice that he never passes her door without leaving a letter. What a correspondence she has, to be sure. She might be a Secretary of State. And as to

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[245] Agnes Leigh, "Number Seventeen," (London: Samuel French, date unmarked). Based on Leigh's other stories, most likely this play is from the 1890s.

> visitors!—it's knock, knock, knock at her door all the afternoon. She ought to take example by me. I can say—and I am proud to say it—that I haven't a correspondent in the world, and thought I've lived in Littleborough for the last twenty years at least, I'm not on bowing terms with a single soul in the place except the doctor. I detest all my fellow-creatures and have fortunately persuaded them to recognise the fact! Why, what's this? The postman has passed her door and is coming to mine! … (3)

Maria continues her monologue, first by presuming the letter is for Mary Ann, and then when seeing it is indeed for herself, believes this unexpected billet must be an advertisement or a "begging-letter" (4). However, she does go on to read the letter: "Dear old Tots'—Dear old Tots indeed! The impertinence! Never since I was five years old has anyone had the audacity to address me in such a familiar style as this." The letter writer (of whose identity Maria still has not the faintest idea) goes on to explain that she has been unable to take her daughter with her to India, and thus is going to take Tots up on her offer to let the daughter stay with her. Maria is of course outraged—"I simply won't have it! I'll barricade the door. No one shall enter the house under any pretence whatever for the next ten days; not even to the butcher or the milkman shall the bolt be unfastened" (5)—but as she leaves to warn Mary Ann, the still unknown friend's daughter Lucilla enters. In monologue, Lucilla describes her beloved Aunt Tots, whom the audience can clearly recognize is someone other than this Maria Jones. However, Lucilla, in reading her mother's letter aloud in monologue, includes an important anecdote that her mother and Tots were old school friends and naughtily "given to mimic [their] old school mistress"; thereafter Lucilla repeatedly mistakes Maria's blatantly unreceptive and uncordial answers not as her own mannerisms but as taking up this old acting sensibility:

> MISS M. J. Lunatic! Mad woman! Stand off or I call the police.
> LUC. (*in shouts of laughter)* Mother said you were full of fun!

As they begin to have tea at Lucilla's suggestion, she again believes Maria is merely playing:

> MISS M. J. (*starts to her feet*) This is too much. I cannot let this go any further. (*puts her hand tragically on* LUCILLA'S *as L. takes the bread and butter)* Stop!
>
> LUC. (*delighted*) Oh, I love to hear you go on like that! That was the school-mistress again wasn't it? Now, as a reward, you shall have one extra bit of bread and butter, and I shall finish the remainder. (6-7)

Maria shortly thereafter starts for the police, but first looks again at the envelope of the letter announcing Lucilla's arrival. She discovers the address is not her own but that of the obnoxiously chipper woman across the street. Thus, the play revolves around distinguishing others' spaces from one's own, or otherwise infiltrating spaces where one does not belong; just as Maria's opening speech led her eye to her neighbor's more visited house, Lucilla describes her mission to take "Auntie Tots" by surprise in a nearly Poe-esque, creepy manner, how she "told the cabman to put down [her] box gently, gently, ever so gently outside the door, and [she] crept in on tip-toe" (5). However, the play is simultaneously about identity; as Maria realizes:

> I declare I'll go round to the police office. What's this letter though? "Miss Maria Jones, 34, Paradise-terrace." My name is certainly Maria Jones, but I live at 17, Paradise-terrace—not at 34. Why, not; 34 is where that perpetually cheerful, grimacing newcomer lives. *She* might appreciate this forward minx with her (*sarcastically*) playful, merry little ways. Stay, is it possible? (*eagerly*) Where is the envelope of the first letter—the letter addressed to "Dear old Tots"? (*finds it*) *That* is addressed to 34 also. Can that woman's name be Maria Jones too? Is she born to release me from an overwhelming creature who makes the tea in my own house, orders my servants about, and patronises me, *me*, Maria Jones, till I don't know whether I am standing on my head or my heels? I never thought to darken a neighbor's door, but to be rid of that child I would do anything. (8)

Identity is intensely, explicitly tied up to space as represented by the concept of one's address. The nearly uncanny matching names and virtually matching addresses renew our speaker Maria's emphasis on herself, as "me, *me*, Maria Jones" while her interesting home invasion of sorts has left her unable to place herself spatially ("I don't know whether I am standing on my head or my heels?") and doing something the old Maria Jones would have never thought to do ("darken a neighbor's door"). In one way, as Maria says, her double is born to release herself from herself.

Maria Jones of 17 Paradise-terrace is thus already changing, along with her space, by the time she has gone to alert the other Maria Jones. In the meanwhile, Lucilla reveals her slight perplexity at her beloved Tot's behavior and decides to amend their relations by aiding in her parlour decoration:

> Dear me! How stiff and uncomfortable this room looks. The table in the middle, and the chairs all planted against the wall, and not a sign of a picture or an ornament to be seen anywhere. I must show Auntie how nicely I can arrange a room, and when it is once done she will be so pleased she will always keep it so. Let me see—the table must be pushed back a little like this—(*pushes table*)—the armchair must come here—this chair here (*pulling chairs about*) No –that won't do—let me see. I will put the table here (*lifts it, as she does so a drawer comes a little open*) Oh! there's a drawer in this table—I must shut it up again (*peeps in*) Why, there's a picture in it. I hope the glass is not broken (*takes up picture*) Oh dear! how strange! it's Eric, Eric himself, my *him*, only in the kind of dress people wore about forty years ago. How extraordinary the likeness is! There is something written on the back in rather faded ink. (*reads*) "Maria from Eric." Eric! and it is a rather uncommon name too. *My* Eric was named after an uncle who died before he was born. What a sad story it was! He was a sailor and engaged to a very pretty girl in England. and when he died in Jamaica of yellow fever she shut herself up and would see no one—and though Mr. Montagu, my Eric's father, wanted to be kind to her, she left her home without leaving her address and he does not know what happened to her. "Maria from Eric." (*a pause*) Surely it is not the same? Can Auntie be that poor girl? But wouldn't mother have known about it and told me? (another pause) I think I will put the picture back. Perhaps Auntie hid it on purpose. Poor Auntie Tots! Oh, she is coming. I haven't time to hide it. (9)

Just when the theatrical seems about to resolve itself into a simple plot of mistaken identity—about which Lucilla is still persistently clueless—Lucilla goes about redoing the parlour space to make it more comfortable. This rearranging of furniture into a more benevolent configuration coincides with Maria's subsequent shift in feeling towards Lucilla; in the scene following her reentrance, she realizes that the girl's beloved is the nephew of her own long departed lover. Thus, the logistics of the parlour space itself, varying between stark and welcoming, permanent or moveable, are capable of directly manipulating one's mental attitude from one too enmired in routine to one more loose and changeable. A more loose and changeable parlour setup of course, is just what theatricals just like "Number Seventeen" would accomplish; as I have suggested, this flexible parlour-stage configuration activates a peculiar flexibility in actresses' own identities—perhaps a moment of recognition or insistence on their own "me, *me*."

The new furniture placement does not immediately cause Maria's newly sentimental attitude shift; when she reenters soon after Lucilla's speech, she can only exclaim: "What on earth! This is the climax! Who has been pulling my furniture about?" (10). However, Lucilla's actual shifting of the furniture, "*pulling chairs about*" and "*lift[ing a table] so a drawer comes a little open*" allows the otherwise hidden backstory to reveal itself. This bursting forth of interiority from the actual, physical furniture *is* a "climax" as Maria calls it, or a sort of last straw in the invasion of her home, but it also provides a climax of plot in allowing the hidden corners of the mind to also be revisited. Just as moving furniture or parlour objects that have settled into regular positions necessarily recalls memories of when they were perhaps placed there, Maria is forced to recall a time before the twenty years of hermitage in Number Seventeen.

The stage directions carefully position the two women to prevent Lucilla's unnoticed return of the picture: "MISS M. J. *goes between table and* LUCILLA*, so that* LUCILLA *is never able to get the picture back into the drawer without being noticed*" (9). Prior to seeing the photo, Maria explains to the persistently dense Lucilla the mistaken location and identity which has occurred:

> LUC. I only told the cabman to drive to the house of Miss Maria Jones in Paradise Terrace. Then you are *not* Miss Maria Jones?

> MISS M. J. My name *is* Maria Jones, but there is a kind of cheerful lunatic living in the house opposite mine who goes by the same name. I have just been to see her, and she expresses a perfectly incomprehensible pleasure at the idea of receiving a young woman with playful ways who will make her drink weak tea, and want to entertain a dreadful him at least twice a day.
>
> LUC. Do you mean that I have another Auntie Tots?
>
> MISS M. J. Your Auntie Tots, as you call her, lives over the way. I beg to state that I am *not* your Auntie Tots. (10)

Through these repeated explanations, in which Lucilla first believes she has two relatives, Maria Jones comes to finally convince Lucilla that she is in no way related to her Auntie Tots. Yet, along the way, Maria realizes she is connected to Lucilla in the relation of their past or present lovers. Lucilla can be read as ultimately succeeding in her invasion of Maria's life; her naming of her Eric in relation to Maria's Eric is similar to her takeover of Maria's bread and butter as her own (similar to her deciding to dole out one extra bit of bread to Maria in reward for her "acting" while "[she] shall finish the remainder"). On the level of possession, Lucilla enters her home, takes over teatime, rearranges the parlour, and finally *almost* takes over Maria's lover, as after all, her Eric is still alive, and Maria's is not. This infiltration of the home and identity does serve to revise Maria's own identity; it is the forced interaction with Lucilla and the cheerful neighbor which brings her back to herself. "Number Seventeen" then is unlike *A Doll's House* in that a woman's entrance into the home causes a breakthrough of identity, but like Ibsen's play in the intense engagement with space.

Home theatre legitimizes women's actions, emotions, and playfulness in the domestic space: what would otherwise be considered hysteric conduct allows the actress to enthusiastically free her behavior of social restraint by portraying a role. The plots of the theatricals send a clear message to their actresses and spectators that acting ability correlates with agency in life beyond the home theatre. Through theatrical realism, women critique their own social position and recreate the home space as essentially feminist. Women’s dramatic production in the home alleviates the ordinary constraints of the domestic to reshape it as an empowering place of creativity and energy.

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