The Transgressive Stage:  
The Culture of Public Entertainment in Late Victorian Toronto

By

Christopher David Marshall Ernst

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Department of History  
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Christopher David Marshall Ernst
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University of Toronto

Abstract

“The Transgressive Stage: The Culture of Public Entertainment in Late Victorian Toronto,” argues that public entertainment was one of the most important sites for the negotiation of identities in late Victorian Toronto. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, where theatre is strictly highbrow, it is difficult to appreciate the centrality of public entertainment to everyday life in the nineteenth century. Simply put, the Victorian imagination was populated by melodrama and minstrelsy, Shakespeare and circuses. Studying the responses to these entertainments, greatly expands our understanding of Victorian culture.

The central argument of this dissertation is that public entertainment spilled over the threshold of the playhouse and circus tent to influence the wider world. In so doing, it radically altered the urban streetscape, interacted with political ideology, promoted trends in consumption, as well as exposed audiences to new intellectual currents about art and beauty. Specifically, this study examines the moral panic surrounding indecent theatrical advertisements; the use by political playwrights of tropes from public entertainment as a vehicle for political satire; the role of the stage in providing an outlet for Toronto’s racial curiosity; the centrality of commercial amusements in defining the boundaries of gender; and, finally, the importance of the theatre—particularly through the Aesthetic Movement—in attempts to control the city’s working class.

When Torontonians took in a play, they were also exposing themselves to one of the most significant transnational forces of the nineteenth century. British and American shows, which made up the bulk of what was on offer in the city, brought with them British and American perspectives. The latest plays from London and New York made their way to the city within
months, and sometimes weeks, of their first production. These entertainments introduced audiences to the latest thoughts, fashion, slang and trends. They also confronted playgoers with issues that might, on the surface seem foreign and irrelevant. Nevertheless, they quickly adapted to the environment north of the border. Public entertainment in Toronto came to embody a hybridized culture with a promiscuous co-mingling of high and low and of British and American influences.
Behind the Scenes

It is easy when watching a play to focus all of one’s attention on the stage. The story unfolds as we sit evaluating, and hopefully enjoying, the experience. Of course, behind the scenes, a small army of people work tirelessly to make the show a success. Credit is due to many. Such is the case with this dissertation.

My supervisor Ian Radforth is a force to be reckoned with. A passionate social and cultural historian, I am deeply grateful for his help. From the beginning, when I first sat down in his social history survey, it was clear that I was going to learn a great deal. During a directed reading course, and then again as he shepherded me through comps along with Carl Berger, we spent hours discussing Canadian history. Later, these long talks turned toward research, writing and finishing my dissertation. Students are often blind to the pressures under which their professors labour. I certainly was. Only now am I able to appreciate the depth of his commitment in time. Not once, during these conversations did he ever make me feel rushed. I blush when I think about it now. He has been an excellent supervisor.

Cecilia Morgan was an exceedingly kind and close reader. Her comments on my dissertation were extensive and helpful. Her own work has provided an excellent model. The cultural and gender histories she has written are imaginative and compelling. As I was finishing up my bibliography, I noticed that I cited her more than anyone else. I deeply appreciate her encouragement and advice.

I don’t remember ever being in the history department when Steve Penfold wasn’t there. As his teaching assistant for several years, I learned a great deal—not just about how to teach, but why. His impact on my dissertation has been equally as significant. He pushed me to think critically and write clearly. His excellent sense of humour also helped me to put the entire thing into perspective.
As the departmental examiner, Jan Noel asked penetrating questions that helped me to think about my contribution in new ways. She also offered encouragement at a time when I needed it most.

Keith Walden was an imposing—yet even-handed—external examiner. I am thankful for his detailed comments and for his commitment to Canadian history. His *Becoming Modern in Toronto* was always within arm’s reach during the writing of this dissertation.

These scholars constituted my committee. They helped me find my way—and my voice—as a historian.

I also gratefully acknowledge the institutional support that I have received over the years. The Department of History at the University of Toronto offered several significant fellowships including the C. P. Stacey - Connaught Graduate Fellowship. Despite myriad forces demanding cuts of all kinds, the department has been supportive and understanding. I extend special thanks to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Ontario Graduate Scholarship (OGS). Both provided early and generous backing for this dissertation. It is also gratifying to thank the following: The McCuaig-Throop Bursary; the CCCJ Fiftieth Anniversary First Families Award; The M.S. McCullogh Scholarship in Canadian Historical Research; and The Vivekanada Graduate Prize. These awards buoyed my spirits and made it possible for me to finish my project. Their commitment to fund the study of Canadian history should be applauded. They made a crucial difference.

I am also beholden to the many talented and creative people who made up Massey College during my years as a Junior Fellow. I don’t think I have ever been around so many impassioned and intelligent characters in all my life. Especially wonderful were those who took it all with a grain of salt. I sincerely believe in the college’s underlying principles of interdisciplinary collegiality and the interconnectedness between all learning.
The Institute for Historical Studies at the University of Texas at Austin has been a home away from home. Through its support, and with special thanks to Alan Tully and Julie Hardwick, I have had a rich environment in which to explore ideas of transnationalism and the power of place. Thanks also to James M. Vaughn, Bob Abzug, David Crew, Anne Martinez and John Mckiernan-Gonzalez who have enriched both my scholarly and personal life.

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Thanks also to Paul Rutherford who helped during the early incarnations of this work. His comments shaped this project in important ways. Carl Berger spent more time than he probably should have discussing intellectual history with me. To say that I was in awe of his learning would be a gross understatement. Doris Bergen gave good council and boosted morale.
by, among other things, picking up too many tabs. Lynne Viola helped get my head around the transition from research to writing. Elspeth Brown enthusiastically shared her insights and her extensive bibliographies. Franca Iacovetta was always there with wisdom and a TA-ship when needed. She is a caring person who appreciates the necessity for humanity in the humanities. Arthur Silver was a fantastic mentor, taking me under his wing early on. Along the way, he proved to be a true gentle man all the while doling out sage advice and cold beer. It was an honour and a pleasure learning from all of these scholars.

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# Table of Contents

Abstract .............................................................................................................................................. ii

Behind the Scenes ........................................................................................................................ iv

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................... x

List of Illustrations ........................................................................................................................ xi

Setting the Stage .......................................................................................................................... 1

**Chapter One**
“After such a seed-sowing, what will the harvest be?” –
Victorian Toronto’s Response to Advertisements for Public Entertainment ....................... 24

**Chapter Two**
Performing Politics –
J. W. Bengough, Public Entertainment and Political Playwrights in Victorian Toronto ...... 129

**Chapter Three**
Blacking Up Toronto –
Public Entertainment and the Performance of Race ................................................................. 237

**Chapter Four**
Toronto the Good, Sarah the Great –
Sarah Bernhardt in Toronto and the Performative Boundaries of Gender ......................... 317

**Chapter Five**
Wilde about “Burny” –
Sarah Bernhardt, Oscar Wilde and Aesthetic Discourse in Late-Victorian Toronto ......... 376

**The Final Act** .......................................................................................................................... 442

Bibliography ..................................................................................................................................... 449
Illustrations

Figure 1-1 FAME 38
Figure 1-2 X-Mas Pantomime 42
Figure 1-3 King St. East (near St. Lawrence Market), 189? 43
Figure 1-4 Queen St. Subway (looking from the South), c1900-1920 44
Figure 1-5 Yonge St. South of Arcade (looking north), 189? 45
Figure 1-6 Yonge St. just North of Queen St., 189? 46
Figure 1-7 Yonge St. North of Queen St. (looking south), 189? 47
Figure 1-8 Great Band 48
Figure 1-9 Humphrey’s Specific Homeopathic Medicine 51
Figure 1-10 Gayety—Bay and Adelaide North-West Corner, c. 1910 73
Figure 1-11 Star—Bay and Adelaide North-West Corner, c. 1910 74
Figure 1-12 Auditorium Theatre, c. 1910 76
Figure 1-13 The Comique Theatre, c. 1907 77
Figure 1-14 Red Mill Entrance 183 Yonge St., c. 1911 78
Figure 1-15 THE UPSHOT 83
Figure 1-16 THE HUMOURS 84
Figure 1-17 AN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE 86
Figure 1-18 Rentz-Santley Girls 87
Figure 1-19 Minstrel Show 88
Figure 1-20 Opera Bouffe 89
Figure 1-21 Lucretia Borgia! 91
Figure 1-22 Two Headed Girl 92
Figure 1-23 Siamese Twins 94
Figure 1-24 THE REAL CHINESE GIANT 95
Figure 1-25 Siege of Sebastopol 98
Figure 1-26 French Spy 99
Figure 1-27 Aladdin 101
Figure 1-28 Jerusalem and the Crusades 106
Figure 1-29 Virginia Sherwood 107
Figure 1-30 Carlotta (top) 108
Figure 1-31 Carlotta (bottom) 109
Figure 1-32 Madame Dockrill 111
Figure 1-33 A FAIR LION TAMER 113
Figure 1-34 The Hippozoonomadon 115
Figure 1-35 The Hippopotamus 116
Figure 1-36 The Only Giraffe 118
Figure 1-37 Quite Obvious 125
Figure 2-1 THE COMING ATTRACTION 130
Figure 2-2 RIDING INTO POWER 145
Figure 2-3 HERE HE COMES 146
Figure 2-4 CLOSE OF THE PLAY AT OTTAWA 147
Figure 2-5 WAITING FOR THE ELEPHANT 148
Figure 2-6 Eastern Style Elephant 149
Figure 2-7 Jumbo 151
Figure 2-8 IN THE RING AT LAST 152
Figure 2-9 Simon Ebenezer 158
Figure 2-10 City of Toronto and York 159
Figure 3-20 Last Rehearsal 304
Figure 3-21 Testimonials 306
Figure 3-22 Dryden on Cow 307
Figure 4-1 THE STAGE OF TO-DAY 334
Figure 4-2 Dr. Martel’s Female Pills 350
Figure 4-3 Woman Attempts Suicide 352
Figure 4-4 The Great and Meagre Sara 359
Figure 4-5 Adieus 361
Figure 4-6 IMAGINARY CONVERSATION 365
Figure 4-7 INJEWDICIOUS GOLDWIN 368
Figure 5-1 Academy of Music 387
Figure 5-2 Missionary 390
Figure 5-3 THEATRICAL INVENTIONS.—I 394
Figure 5-4 HINTS TO PLAY-GOERS 395
Figure 5-5 A STAGE FARE 399
Figure 5-6 OUT OF ‘PATIENCE 426
Figure 5-7 A DUET FROM ‘PATIENCE 427
Figure 5-8 THE POLITICAL ‘BUNTHORNE 429
Figure 5-9 HOW LANGEVIN MIGHT SETTLE CHAPLEAU 430
Figure 5-10 OSCAR WILDE IN NEW YORK 435
Figure 5-11 THE LAST STRAW 437
Figure 5-12 At the Performance 439
Setting the Stage

VICIOUS AMUSEMENTS
An Evening Performance in Toronto’s Variety Theatre.
Foul Jokes and Viler Actions.
The “Can-Can” Dance Resuscitated and Embellished
A Female “Pug” Displays Her Skill.
Delighted Bootblack and Street Arab Spectators—Are the Police Authorities Cognizant of the State of Affairs? Will They Move in the Matter?¹

The headline was intentionally shocking. Coming across it after many tiring hours reading microfilm, I was instantly transported back to the Toronto I so longed to know. Its author described, in outrageous detail, his experience at one of the city’s most notorious—and popular—institutions:

. . . Toronto has its variety theatre, but, under the present management, it is unquestionably one too many. The Lyceum Theatre—its aristocratic name—is situated on the north side of King street, midway between Bay and York streets. Over the entrance leading to the place is nightly stationed what is supposed to be a band of musicians who, so to speak, “make Rome howl” with the unearthly music blown from their trumpets. The visitor makes his way along an arched alleyway to the place of amusement (!) where an admission ticket is purchased from a masculine looking female stationed at a wicket. The building, a very small one, is well filled with spectators, foul air and tobacco smoke. In the rear of the “pit” rises a gallery, its principal occupants being boot blacks and street arabs.

Following the example set by their elders seated in front, the lads sit with heads uncovered, blowing clouds of smoke from cigar “stubbs” or clay pipes, and ever and anon vigorously expectorating tobacco juice. The music of the orchestra . . . is drowned amid the noise of the boisterous youths, who clamor for the “rag” to be hoisted. In due time the “rag” is rung up, and the “beautiful minstrels” are presented to view. The scene that follows is almost indescribable. Jokes . . . of the vilest and most pernicious character are bandied between the end and middle men. These are received with loud shouts by the “gods” who attempt to improve on them, “just” as they say “to help the thing along.” This encourages the performers and they redouble their efforts to make their filthy sayings, if possible, plainer. A female (one of the beautiful) attempts to sing but she is recognized by some of the lads, who cry out “Bella McDonald, go home. Your mother wants you.” At the

¹ Mail, 13 October, 1879.
conclusion of the minstrel part of the program, the specialty performers are introduced. Bad singing and worse dancing appear to be the leading features of this portion of the entertainment. When the Sparring Exhibition between a man and a woman is introduced, it is thought by the uninitiated that the performance has got as low down in the scales of morality as it is possible to descend. This is a mistake: the choice morceau remains to be witnessed. While the “only male and female exponents of artistic boxing in the world” knock each other around the dirty stage, the excitement runs high, especially among the “unwashed” in the gallery. The woman appears to be the favourite and she is encouraged by such remarks as “You’re a brick,” “Now give it him with your left.” “That’s a daisy, old woman,” etc., etc. Three rounds are fought, lasting probably twelve or fifteen minutes, in all of which the female comes off first best. On retiring they are greeted with loud applause, and a demand is made for a further sample of their skill. The man, on behalf of the woman, pleads the heat of the room as an excuse for not prolonging the contest. The woman, however, speaks for herself, and says that “if her opponent wishes it, she will give him another round.” Her opponent has no wish in that direction, and the woman is looked upon as a heroine, and leaves the stage amid cries of “She’s gritty, you bet.”

The performance is brought to a close with as scandalous an afterpiece as was ever produced in the lowest “free and easy” of London or New York. “Paris by Moonlight,” in which “living statuary” is introduced, is an appropriate finale to the night’s performance, and to which the earlier part of the entertainment appears tame and innocent. The “can-can” dance, with all the improvements and flourishes is gone through. So utterly low and debasing was it, that frequent cries of “shame” were heard from different parts of the house during the progress of the dance. Amid the hooting, yells and cheers of the spectators, the curtain, descends—it could be hoped forever—on one of the vilest performances ever witnessed in this city.²

Embodied in this outburst of moral indignation are many of the themes at the heart of this dissertation: The transgressive excitement of public entertainment; the way it loudly called attention to itself in the public sphere; the anxiety over its corruption of youth; the way that it exploited racial Others while simultaneously opening avenues of interracial longing and ambivalence; the opportunities for performing gender in novel ways; and the struggle to assert middle-class standards of decorum and taste.

² Ibid.
Public entertainment was an important—if overlooked—aspect of Victorian Toronto’s culture. One of the main ideas of this work is the way public entertainment spilled over the threshold of the theatre and circus tent to influence important discourses such as race, gender and class. In so doing, it also radically altered the urban streetscape, interacted with political ideology, promoted trends in consumption such as international fashion and celebrity gossip, as well as exposing Torontonians to new ideas about art and beauty. Whether it was theatrical advertisements that carried transgressive images of variety shows into the street or the ways in which blackface minstrelsy provided outlets for political commentary, public entertainment was a vital force in nineteenth-century Toronto. Specifically, this study examines the iconoclastic attack on theatrical advertisements; the use by political playwrights of tropes from public entertainment as a vehicle for political satire; the role of the stage in providing an outlet for Toronto’s racial curiosity; the centrality of public entertainments in defining the boundaries of gender; and, finally, the importance of the theatre—particularly through the Aesthetic Movement—in attempts to control the city’s working class.

This is a work of cultural history. Although it looks at the theatre, it differs from theatre history in important ways. First and foremost, my analysis ranges widely over other forms of public entertainment. Torontonians amused themselves in many ways besides watching plays. Readers will quickly note that posters and billboards, political campaign material, circuses, freak shows and menageries are the subject of sustained analysis. Nor do I explore issues of aesthetic merit, dramaturgy, design or acting. My intention is not to uncover which plays were staged at which theatres and at what time. Instead, this work analyzes the complex intersections of public entertainment and the broader culture by asking the kinds of questions of interest to cultural historians. Important questions like: Was seeing Sarah Bernhardt going to lead to a rebellion by
Toronto’s women? And why, after Oscar Wilde’s visit, did some politicians start wearing sunflowers into the Canadian Senate?

Public entertainment, as this study demonstrates, was an important part of many Torontonians’ lives. And yet, the subject has been of little interest to Canadian historians. Not surprisingly, theatre historians have done the lion’s share of work. But, for the most part, they ask different questions than social and cultural historians. In the British and American context, historians and literary critics influenced by the cultural turn have recently looked to the theatre and other public entertainments to explore issues as diverse as its connection with subversion, politics, early feminism, racial ideology and the maintaining and challenging of ethnic, class and gender stereotypes. What unites these various accounts is their understanding that public entertainment significantly influenced, and was influenced by, the wider culture around it.

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Victorian Toronto was an outpost on the edge of empires. Situated on the border—both culturally and geographically—between an expansive British Empire and an expanding American colossus, Toronto was buffeted by the entertainment preferences of these two great powers. Despite, or perhaps because of this, Toronto audiences, for the most part, enjoyed the show. This occasionally troubles some who study Canada’s theatrical history in search of ‘indigenous’ Canadian drama. Writing during the heady days of Canada’s centenary, the historian Murray D. Edwards, for instance, laments the foreign influence—particularly American—on Canada’s early drama. “At the time local amateur groups should have been developing to professional status, encouraging playwrights, actors and directors of their own,” he deplores, “Canadians were sitting back and applauding the American or English stars, with the result that the growth of theatre in Canada was largely an artificial one.” To his mind, it was a shame that Canada became a “receiver of culture” instead of a creator.

On a similar note, lamenting Toronto’s preference for light entertainment—variety theatre, vaudeville, burlesque, blackface minstrelsy, melodrama and ‘mere’ spectacle—seems equally problematic. Criticism that focuses on the aesthetic merits of legitimate performances is not the concern of social and cultural historians. In a heated exchange of letters to the editor

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8 Ibid, 36.
over why there were so many empty seats at the elegant Grand Opera House, “A Lover of the Drama” insisted that it was not the prices keeping Torontonians out of the benches. “The high-toned taste of the people of Toronto,” opined the anonymous letter-writer “would fill the house if some leg drama were on the boards.” Rising to the city’s defence, Kate Stanley wrote into the paper fervently asserting that “the class that enjoys the ‘leg drama’ and the lovers of Shakespeare are not the same.” If prices were lower, she insisted, the right kind of people would fill the seats: “the men and women that really enjoy good acting and good plays are not as a rule, the ‘snobs’ and so called ‘upper ten’ of this city, but the reading class, those who have not been cradled in the lap of luxury.” Although I argue that there were plenty of Torontonians who enjoyed their Shakespeare as well as a bit of bare leg—often in the course of the same evening’s entertainment—it is not the job of historians to worry about the aesthetic merits of a play unless it is the concern of the subjects themselves. Toronto’s entertainment entrepreneurs were looking to turn a profit. They offered what audiences wanted. That, in itself, is worthy of study.

Instead of bemoaning what Toronto’s theatre lacked during the long nineteenth century, this study makes sense of the kinds of public entertainment people actually consumed. As theatre historian and author Robertson Davies reminds us, it is better to think of the nineteenth-century repertoire as more like today’s entertainment environment. People’s need for diversion is satisfied by a variety of sources including television and film. Torontonians were not content to watch Italian operas and renowned tragedians to the exclusion of all else. Many times, they wanted pleasant diversion and the theatre, in Davies’ view, provided for every taste. As a
result, there was, in his words, “a heavy concentration of trivial pieces.” And indeed, light entertainments far outweighed more serious fare. Variety theatre, for instance, was immensely popular in Toronto—in many cases it was little more than burlesque.

Toronto, however, was not a theatrical backwater. The latest plays from London and New York made their way to the city within months of their first production, sometimes much faster. By the late nineteenth century there were some 250 touring companies on the road. They brought with them the values and concerns of their time, refracted through the lens of national prejudice from the countries in which they were produced. These entertainments introduced Torontonians to the latest thoughts, fashion, slang and trends from more cosmopolitan centres. They could also confront audiences with some of the most pressing political problems of the day. Issues of concern in pre-Civil War United States—worked out, for example, through the various dramatizations of Uncle Tom’s Cabin—quickly came to Toronto bringing with them a sectional politics that might, on the surface seem foreign and irrelevant. Nevertheless, they quickly adapted to the environment north of the border. Public entertainment helped to create a transnational world linked by minstrelsy, circuses and Shakespeare. Toronto audiences could explore their imagined identities as British imperialists while simultaneously consuming a regular diet of Anglo-American entertainment.

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14 Ibid, 90.
16 Ibid, 187.
20 For a fascinating account that sheds light on the transatlantic nature of public entertainment through the experience of a Canadian-born actress, see Cecilia Morgan, “‘That will allow me to be my own woman’: Margaret Anglin, Modernity and Transnational Stages, 1890s-1940s” in Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-Present, eds., Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacot (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).
At the outset, I think some clarification of the term public entertainment is in order. It is a slightly inelegant expression—lacking the simplicity of ‘theatre’ and neglecting the hint of filthy lucre that comes with ‘commercial amusements.’ Although I do occasionally rely on the word theatre to comprehend such diversions as opera and blackface minstrelsy, the term public entertainment is much more inclusive, encompassing genres as diverse as circuses and blonde shows as well as Shakespeare and Italian opera. Commercial amusements could work, especially since amateur performances do not appear very much in these pages. From my perspective, however, it is too broad for this project. I do not, for example, include roller rinks and I tend to ignore musical concerts. The same goes for most sporting events. But above all, what appeals to me about the term is that it calls to mind the public sphere. Even though theatres and circuses have received little attention from historians of Canada, evidence suggests that they were a vital part of the city’s public sphere. Public entertainment inserted itself intrusively into the Victorian streetscape. It was a useful tool for promoting political criticism. It provided one of the most significant venues for the expression of interracial longing and ridicule. Finally, it facilitated the exploration of gender and class at a time of profound change. In that sense, the public in public entertainment is crucial.

Significantly, though, not all of the city’s public entertainment was to be found on a stage. Whether it was through closet dramas—plays intended to be read instead of acted—or political cartoons that incorporated tropes from circuses, blackface minstrelsy or Shakespeare, many Torontonians experienced performances on the page as well as stage. The same literary tradition accounts for the political campaign material analyzed in chapter two. Many at the time enjoyed reading plays in a way that seems unfamiliar to us today. This raises questions about the relationship of the public sphere to the various kinds of public space that feature so prominently
in this dissertation. The city street and the newspaper page are both public—but in different ways. The outrage generated by immoral theatrical advertisements at the heart of chapter one, for instance, occurred because the posters and billboards intruded so noticeably into the cityscape. All citizens, including children, were thus exposed to them in a way they might not have been if they were limited to the pages of a newspaper. Nevertheless, carnivalesque advertisements featuring shockingly underdressed female equestrians juxtaposed against serious news stories in the *Telegraph* or *Mail* hint at the ways in which the seeming sobriety of the page could be undercut by the transgressive forces of circuses and minstrel shows. Given, as I discuss in chapter two, the uses of literacy by the working class uncovered by social historians in recent years, the public space of a paper like the *Mail* or a magazine such as *Grip* appear less exclusive than earlier historians have thought. Similarly, the playhouse itself is something of a qualified public space. It requires an audience, preferably a large one for reasons of profit and excitement. But at the same time it erects certain barriers to access by charging admission and controlling entry. Rather than seeing these issues as separate from traditional public sphere theory, which is discussed at greater length in chapter two, they may usefully be added to ways in which understandings of the public sphere have been expanded and complicated by recent scholarship. The public sphere was never as pure nor as neat as some theorists would have us believe.

**Theatre and Everyday Life**

Fundamental to my thesis is the fact that public entertainment was central to Victorian culture. Evidence suggests that virtually every community in nineteenth-century Ontario has a significant theatre history.\(^{21}\) As early as the 1850s, public entertainments were a noteworthy part of the

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province’s life. And this entertainment was exciting and diverse. A dizzying array of shows, mixing high and low, characterized nineteenth century public entertainment and the province’s principal theatrical centre was Toronto. An important regional metropolis, the city was home to the largest and most vibrant public entertainment scene in Ontario. Although I have chosen to study Toronto, Montreal would also provide rich material for cultural historians exploring public entertainment. Rather than understanding the theatre of a city, however, this dissertation attempts to understand a city through its theatre. Consequently, Toronto—being the most significant city in the most populous and powerful province in the Dominion—warrants a sustained analysis of its public entertainments.

The city has a rich history of public entertainment going back into the first decade of the nineteenth century. Although I occasionally look to this earlier period, it is mostly to highlight important continuities with regards to discourses such as political theatre or the staging of racial curiosity. The bulk of my study, however, focuses on the period between 1874 and 1914. This was a time when public entertainment in Toronto came into its own. The 1870s saw a proliferation of spaces for such entertainments around the city. It was also at this time that the supply of so-called legitimate theatre could not keep up with demand. Thus, boundaries between high and low were porous. Indeed, as we shall see, high and low were far from fixed concepts when it came to the city’s entertainment—the one helping produce and define the other in an ongoing and often contradictory process. Audiences for a risqué variety show might return

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22 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
the following week to the very same theatre to catch a performance by a world-renowned tragedian.\textsuperscript{28}

The numbers only hint at this vibrant yet ephemeral history. Nevertheless, it is clear that the city could boast a lively variety of public entertainment, especially after 1874. It was in that year that three purpose-built theatres opened with a total capacity of over four thousand.\textsuperscript{29} Add to this, the 1,000 seat capacity of St. Lawrence Hall and, by 1879, the Horticultural Gardens and Pavilion with seating for some 2,500 more; this at a time when the city numbered some 56,000 people. By 1903, Toronto could boast of three legitimate theatres with a weekly seating capacity of 35,000.\textsuperscript{30} The numbers were even higher for more popular entertainments. The city’s four vaudeville theatres seated 150,000 weekly, roughly one-third of Toronto’s population.\textsuperscript{31} Even burlesque houses had a weekly seating capacity of 33,000.\textsuperscript{32}

For his part, the avid slummer and journalist C. S. Clark noted Torontonians’ passion for the theatre.\textsuperscript{33} Writing in 1898, he observed that “the three opera houses all cater for the best possible custom, and their efforts are well rewarded.”\textsuperscript{34} Good shows, he asserted, were well attended. “The Grand, the Princess, and Jacob’s & Sparrow’s each has its respective class of plays and comparative prices, and very rarely an inferior show comes to either.”\textsuperscript{35} Major

\textsuperscript{28} Aikens, “The Rival,” 253. Cecilia Morgan notes that Canadian tourists to Britain might take in a minstrel show or other raucous entertainment one night but enjoy a play by Shakespeare or Oscar Wilde the next. See Cecilia Morgan, ‘A Happy Holiday’: English Canadians and Transatlantic Tourists, 1870-1930 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 43-44, 196-201, 338-41.
\textsuperscript{29} Robert Fairfield, “Theatres and Performance Halls,” Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario, 1800-1914, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 218-32. The figures do not include less highbrow establishments nor saloons where entertainments were a regular feature. Nor do they include other respectable theatres, such as the Princess Theatre, Royal Alexandra Theatre, built in the late, 1880s, 1890s and early twentieth century.
\textsuperscript{30} Lenton-Young, “Variety,” 166.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} C. S. Clark, Of Toronto the Good A Social Study: The Queen City of Canada As It Is (Montreal: The Toronto Publishing Company, 1898).
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 197.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
holidays were seen as ideal days for taking in a show. On New Year’s Day, declared Clark, “The matinees at the theatre are crowded, especially by young people, and an effort is always made to have a good attraction.”

“In the afternoon,” on Thanksgiving Day, “the theatres are thronged with crowds young and old.”

A similar conclusion can be drawn from a rough contemporary of Clark’s. Writing in 1882, George M. Harrington produced a brief history of Toronto theatre. When it came to the period from 1860 “to the present day,” he omitted further description because he felt the plays were no doubt “familiar to, and were probably enjoyed by a majority of its citizens who still reside in the Queen city.”

In Harrington’s view, public entertainment was a regular feature of life for Toronto’s middle class.

Public entertainment was also an important part of life for the city’s underclass. Newsboys, ever-present on the city’s streets, were avid theatregoers. They “patronize all the theatres, their criticisms of which are really worth hearing,” pronounced Clark, “and their imitations or rather mimics of the different comedians are most creditable and put shame to the baser imitations we are obliged to listen to as being original and which we vociferously encore.”

Similarly, Clark noted that the busiest time for the city’s cheap lodging houses was just after the closing of the theatres.

Indeed, throughout Clark’s shocking account of Toronto’s seedy underbelly, the theatre and other public entertainments come up often, suggesting such diversions were a regular part of the quotidien. A smitten young man might try to charm the object of his affections by making her a present of some opera glasses, or a group of students from the university might run amuck.

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36 Ibid, 76.
37 Ibid, 77.
39 Ibid, 613.
40 Clark, Of Toronto, 83.
41 Ibid, 137.
42 Ibid, 7, 9, 34, 61, 79-80, 99, 103, 154, 169 and 198.
at the Grand. Clark also points out that churches began increasingly to resemble theatres and academies of music, attempting to capitalize on people’s desire for amusement. Of course, the theatres were also packed when there was something scandalous to be seen. Clark informed his readers that it was virtually impossible to get seats for one such performance. The show’s secret for filling the house was the “suggestiveness of the play and actors.”

From elegant playhouses to enormous tents, seedy burlesques to fantastic dime museums, Toronto had a variety of spaces in which to appreciate public entertainment. Although there are far better places to look than here for detailed accounts of the long and tumultuous history of the city’s playhouses, it is important to note some of the key venues and their seating capacity. For those encountering the city’s public entertainment past for the first time, there are a few things to keep in mind. Theatres were occasionally destroyed, all or in part, by fire. In addition, they opened and closed and reopened again, often under new names and ownership. Many theatre historians tend to focus on those more established playhouses where so-called legitimate fare was offered. But variety theatres—which only occasionally flirted with legitimacy—were far more popular than their more high-minded competitors. Dime museums, circuses, zoos and summer theatres also provided shows to patrons.

In the first half of the century, various taverns and hotels regularly offered guests entertainments such as minstrelsy, farces, acrobats and slack-wire acts. Two such establishments were the Apollo Saloon and Concert Room and the Terrapin. Both were well-known for their

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43 Ibid, 139, 80.
46 This brief account of Toronto’s various theatres is derived from Fairfield, “Theatres,” 218-32 and supplemented by the dissertations of Lenton and Aikens.
entertainments. These types of saloons persisted into the second half of the nineteenth century. In the 1860s, the Shakespearean Saloon, as the name suggests, was another popular drinking spot that provided shows for thirsty Torontonians. The most famous of these concert saloons, the Athenaeum, later known as the Varieties, was run by Denman Thompson during the 1870s.

As the century progressed, the city saw the construction of larger venues dedicated exclusively to public entertainment. Toronto was home to several important theatres between 1850 and 1915. The period from 1874 to 1900, was particularly productive. During this time the city saw the construction of six permanent theatres, as well as the conversion of six older buildings into theatres, the creation of three summer theatres, a cyclorama with a music hall, the construction of Massey Hall along with a variety of new halls that used their space for public entertainment.

As I have suggested, 1874 was something of a turning point with three important playhouses opening their curtains to the public: the Royal Opera House, the Queen’s Theatre, and the Grand Opera House. The Royal Theatre, or Royal Opera House, had seating for 1,450 and was described as beautiful and state-of-the-art. It operated until 1883, when it was destroyed by fire. Although it valiantly struggled to provide its audiences with respectable fare, the nature of public entertainment in nineteenth century Toronto made it difficult for such high-mindedness to prevail. One such lapse occurred when managers offered theatregoers a chance to see so-called living statuary. Also known as tableau vivant, it consisted of nearly naked

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47 Lenton, “The Development,” 64.
48 Ibid, 65.
49 Ibid, 73.
51 Lenton, “The Development,” 72. Not all these spaces remained open—or even standing—during this period. Lenton is making the point that the time was generally optimistic for entrepreneurs looking to profit from Torontonians’ desire for amusement.
52 Fairfield, “Theatres,” 221-22.
53 Mail, 25 February, 1879.
women posing as classical statues. One journalist railed: “The ‘Art Pictures’ presented by living models—all beautiful it will be understood—was another repulsive feature of the performance.”\(^{54}\) But there was more, the evening concluded with “an exceedingly gross representation of the can-can, where actual nudity was overstepped by glaring suggestiveness.”\(^ {55}\)

Glaring suggestiveness was more in keeping with the Queen’s Theatre. Unlike the Royal Opera House, the Queen’s openly admitted to its status as a variety theatre.\(^ {56}\) Holding some 1,000 patrons, it staged popular entertainments.\(^ {57}\) A less polite assessment of the kind of fare to be found at the Queen’s was provided by the *Mail*:

> On Monday evening the performers at that vile resort known as the Queen’s, or Theatre Comique, were at the opening of the performance in a beastly state of intoxication. Only one of the seven women performers was able to sing, while one of the men had to be carried out... A general row then ensued, chairs and pieces of furniture were hurled... and in a short time the place was utterly wrecked... It is about time this place was closed. The performances are obscene and wholly low, and those who nightly visit the place are for the most part gathered from the lowest back slums of the city. The police authorities will do well to look after and suppress this evil, which can only tend to disgrace, not only the street it is in, but the entire city.\(^ {58}\)

Despite the outrage it caused, the Queen’s continued for several years. It was a fire in 1883 that finally brought down the Queen’s, not the police.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, was the elegant Grand Opera House which was the third theatre to open in 1874.\(^ {59}\) It boasted seating for 1,323 people with an additional capacity for 500 more on campstools or standing. Fire destroyed the Grand on 29 November, 1879 but it quickly reopened on 9 February, 1880.\(^ {60}\) Some accounts put its new seating capacity at 1,707.

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\(^ {54}\) Ibid.
\(^ {55}\) Ibid.
\(^ {56}\) Fairfield, “Theatres,” 222.
\(^ {57}\) Ibid, 222.
\(^ {58}\) *Mail*, 28 December, 1881.
\(^ {59}\) Fairfield, “Theatres,” 222.
\(^ {60}\) Ibid, 225.
The Grand, as it was affectionately known, reigned as the city’s premier theatre until being surpassed by the Princess Theatre and, later, by the Royal Alexandra.  

Later spaces included the Toronto Opera House, also known as Jacob and Sparrow’s Opera House, which staged melodramas during the early 1880s. After fire damaged it in 1903, it reopened as the Majestic Theatre that same year with a seating capacity of around 1,687. Another important playhouse was the Princess Theatre, which opened in 1889 and held as many as 1,625 people. By 1907, the opulent Royal Alexandra Theatre was also luring Toronto’s elite. With a capacity for 1,525 of the city’s most fashionable people, it became the premier venue in Toronto.

Less luxurious were the host of other stages offering more popular fare. The Royal Museum, a dime show, replaced Jacob’s Royal Museum on Adelaide street. It provided yet another home for variety entertainments. Shaftesbury Hall, part of the Y.M.C.A. building, was used mostly for lectures and the odd concert. The Music Hall, part of the Mechanics’ Institute at Church and Adelaide Streets, was another venue. Occident Hall, on Queen Street near Bathurst, was also used. St. Andrew’s Hall offered a good stage for local amateurs. Smaller productions could be seen at Agricultural Hall, which briefly housed the Royal Lyceum Company after fire destroyed their theatre in 1874. And, for a short time the Holman Opera House converted the Adelaide Street Rink into a venue.

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61 Ibid, 223-35.  
64 Ibid, 228-32.  
65 Mail, 1 January, 1884; Grip, 5 January, 1884.  
66 Aikens, “The Rival,” Appendix One 220.  
67 Ibid.  
68 Ibid, Appendix 221.  
69 Ibid.  
70 Ibid.  
71 Ibid, Appendix 234.
1882 saw the opening of Toronto’s first zoo. It incorporated an open-air theatre the following year.\textsuperscript{72} There was also a large pavilion variously known as Pride and Sackett’s Popular Dime Shows, and later the Summer Pavilion. Its theatrical component consisted of a large tent that seated some 1,800 people and offered dime shows until it failed in 1884.\textsuperscript{73} Another space for cheap entertainments was the Royal Museum, which became the Theatre Royal and finally the People’s Theatre.\textsuperscript{74}

Those Torontonians looking for an escape from the summer heat of 1884 could take the ferry out to Mackie’s Summer Theatre. Part of Ned Hanlan’s hotel at Hanlan’s Point, it offered free shows to lure customers to the resort.\textsuperscript{75} Also of interest was the Cyclorama at York and Front streets which opened in 1887.\textsuperscript{76} In the summer of 1889, it began offering variety entertainment and freak shows. In this guise, it was known as the Cyclorama and Toronto Museum.\textsuperscript{77} The Musee opened up less than a year later, also relying on grotesques and variety entertainments to supplement its popular menagerie.\textsuperscript{78}

The world of public entertainments was, by its nature, ephemeral. Performances were often spontaneous, unscripted and fleeting. Sadly, these moments in time are lost to us. As the theatre historian Ann Saddlemyer observes, those seeking to uncover the theatrical past have mostly newspapers on which to rely.\textsuperscript{79} This dissertation is no exception. But I also explore other sources, such as posters and billboards, graphic satires, early photographs of the cityscape, ephemera from political campaigns, theatrical scrapbooks kept by middle-class women passionate about the stage, as well as council minutes, and petitions to city hall. And I approach

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid, Appendix 236.  
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid, Appendix 236-37.  
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, Appendix 237.  
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid, Appendix 239.  
\textsuperscript{76} Lenton, “The Development,” 94.  
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid, 99.  
these sources using interpretive strategies culled from visual culture and theoretical perspectives gleaned from gender and cultural history. In so doing, I offer new insights into the city’s history.

Public entertainment was one of the most important sites for the negotiation of identities in late Victorian Toronto. From the vantage point of the twenty-first century, where theatre is strictly highbrow and consumed by relatively few, it is difficult to appreciate the centrality of public entertainment in Toronto. Even for those who refused to patronize the theatre, public entertainment significantly influenced their lives. Simply put, the Victorian imagination was populated by melodrama, blackface minstrelsy, Shakespeare, dime museums, menageries, slack-rope walkers, circuses and burlesque shows. Studying the response to these entertainments, be it a fire and brimstone controversy over Sarah Bernhardt or the use of theatrical tropes in contemporary political criticism, greatly expands our knowledge of Victorian culture.

In playhouses and circus tents across the city, Torontonians were confronted with new ways of performing their gender, novel conceptualizations of race and shifting attitudes towards class. In each of the chapters that follow, I argue for the centrality of public entertainment to these larger discourses. Although American and British scholars have begun to explore these topics, historians of Canada have not. Analyzing the influence of public entertainment on the larger culture, my study suggests the importance of such amusements as blackface minstrelsy, Shakespeare and circuses to sense making for many in the city.

Torontonians turned to the stage for pleasure and amusement. When they did, however, they were also exposing themselves to one of the most significant transnational forces of the nineteenth century. My work contributes to a discussion of the forces of globalization in Toronto. British and American shows, which made up the bulk of what was on offer in the city, brought with them British and American perspectives. What are all too easily dismissed as
frivolous diversions may be usefully approached as important vehicles for spreading ideology.

Values such as consumerism or ideas about racial purity were regularly expressed in the entertainments Torontonians enjoyed. Any conversation about how British or American Canada was during the Victorian period needs to take into accounts the predilections of Canadian audiences. As American entertainment entrepreneurs cemented their hold over the Canadian market, they unwittingly hastened a process of cultural colonization. Historians hoping to understand Victorian Toronto must address this influential force.

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In much the same way as an advance man papered the town with posters to drum up interest for an upcoming show, the first chapter looks at the advertisements used to promote public entertainments. In many ways, it acts like an advertisement itself, hinting at what the reader will find in the rest of my work—touching upon themes that will become important as the story unfolds. Posters and billboards touting entertainments such as variety shows and circuses filled the city’s streets. They relied on, and embodied, a spirit of transgressive misrule. For some people, however, images of scantily clad women, violent crime and racial Others were too much.

Chapter one charts the response to these powerful images by groups such as the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Ontario Horticultural Association as well as influential individuals like Lieutenant-Colonel George T. Denison. It argues that their anxiety surrounding these representations of disorder is usefully approached by understanding their ‘over-reactions’ as the behaviour of iconoclasts.80

The response to indecent theatrical advertisements played out in council chambers and provincial legislatures and it is clear that politics regularly intersected with public entertainment.

80 In terms of iconoclasm, it is worth noting that as I write this, televisions, computers and newspapers are filled with images of protesters around the Middle East attacking posters of tyrants and toppling statues of dictators.
But the relationship went much deeper than mere moral regulation. Instead, as chapter two demonstrates, many people in Victorian Toronto conceptualized politics through blackface minstrelsy, circus performances and Shakespeare. Political playwrights such as John Simpson, Hugh Scobie, J. W. Bengough, William Henry Fuller, Nicholas Flood Davin, Henri Julien and Sarah Anne Curzon, used the carnivalesque licence of the stage to offer trenchant political criticism. Campaign officials and special interest groups such as the Industrial League also sought to influence voter opinion by linking their messages to public entertainment. Calling into question the *cordon sanitaire* between high and low—political history and popular culture—the second chapter of this study reveals the centrality of public entertainment to the public sphere and political life in the Dominion.

As the images of Canadian prime ministers Sir John A. Macdonald and Alexander Mackenzie in blackface suggest, Torontonians were fascinated by race. A heterogeneous city, especially in the second half of the nineteenth century, one of the main ways in which ‘white’ citizens satisfied their racial curiosity was through public entertainment. Racial performances, such as the immensely popular *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, while invariably trading in stereotypes, could also open up avenues for interracial longing. Interestingly, however, Toronto’s love-affair with burnt cork shows quickly spread from the stage to the wider culture. Although ambivalence characterized some racial performances, others easily tumbled into ridicule in the hands of certain cultural producers. From those prominent black citizens who petitioned city hall to ban minstrel shows to the appearance of blackface tropes in advertisements and political ephemera, evidence suggests that blackface began to colour the ways in which ‘white’ Torontonians saw the black Other.
But if the stage offered citizens an important medium through which to explore race, it was also central to defining the performative boundaries of gender in the Victorian city. Through an analysis of Sarah Bernhardt, particularly the controversy ignited by her visits to Toronto, the fourth chapter discusses the provocative questions raised by the great tragedienne’s ambiguous Jewishness and her unparalleled celebrity. To many, she signified a dangerous form of misrule characteristic of public entertainment. Detractors, such as the Reverend W. S. Rainsford, believed Bernhardt was a bad example. That she was widely accepted by cultural elites such as the Prince and Princess of Wales, irritated the likes of Goldwin Smith. Goaded by her status as a Jew, he saw in the accolades accorded to her the frightening signs of a social revolution. For others, such as the anonymous “Gunhilda,” the Divine Sarah was a model of female genius. She and others defended the actress against the gendered attacks of hypocritical clergymen and an outdated patriarchy. The chapter listens in on the heated debate, which hinted at a profound anxiety over the shifting roles of the sexes in the waning decades of the nineteenth century. Not surprisingly her gendered acts broke free of the confines of the playhouse and entered into the public consciousness in unexpected ways.

Many of the fiery exchanges surrounding Bernhardt revolved around her widely acknowledged genius. Several of her anonymous defenders relied on accounts of her sublime talent and the importance of art and culture to delegitimize the arguments of their more traditionally-minded opponents. In so doing, they introduce the topic of the dissertation’s final chapter: the Aesthetic Movement. Although aesthetic arguments appear in chapter one as part of the effort to control indecent theatrical advertisements, aesthetic discourse in Toronto was more often wielded by the supporters of public entertainment than its detractors. Certain cultural commentators such as journalists and theatrical critics, as well as some middle-class audiences,
adopted their own aesthetic performances to solidify their identities as cultured cosmopolitans. New codes of artistic appreciation allowed these would-be aesthetes to assert their hegemony within the contested sphere of the playhouse as well as the wider society. Aesthetic discourse was a kind of expertise that allowed its users to challenge conservative values that shunned the theatre. Although this fits with the conclusions of scholars who argue for the liberating qualities of the aesthetic, the discourse had a darker side as well. As bourgeois codes of taste and decorum took hold, working-class values within the public sphere of the theatre—such as drinking and making noise—became increasingly vulnerable to attack. There were limits, however, to the aesthetic. The chapter ends with a discussion of two of the most significant challenges to aesthetic hegemony: the ambiguous role played by a culture increasingly oriented towards consumption and the anxiety over unmanly behaviour engendered by the over-the-top performances of Oscar Wilde.

Just as the theatre spilled out from the playhouses into the larger world, themes from one chapter often cross over into another. The politics of public entertainment that I discuss in chapter two are simultaneously the performances of race that I analyze in chapter three. Similarly, the gender bending of chapter four enters into the discussion of Oscar Wilde’s performance of aestheticism in chapter five, which tumbles briefly back into an exploration of politics. The looseness of this is intentional and unavoidable. It reflects a methodological hybridity characterized by cultural history—especially the transgressive which runs throughout this study. But, more importantly, it signifies the nature of much of Victorian Toronto’s public entertainment. As in carnival, it is not easy, nor desirable, to impose too much structure and order.
The Toronto depicted in the following pages is one that most historians have not seen before. In pulling back the curtains on this exciting world, I hope my audience enjoys the show.
Chapter One
“After such a seed-sowing, what will the harvest be?”: Victorian Toronto’s Response to Advertisements for Public Entertainment

When Harriet T. Todd rose to address her audience, she spoke in martial terms. There would be a time for beating swords into ploughshares, but not in the midst of a campaign fought against such a powerful adversary and waged on so many different fronts. With uncompromising zealousness, the Superintendent of Purity in Literature, Art and Fashion for the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (W.C.T.U.), railed against immoral theatrical advertisements. Her 1893 report to the sixth convention of the Dominion W.C.T.U. was a chance to speak to her “soldiers,” who wanted “only the word of command to spring forward into action.” 1 Indeed, they had already waged a rearguard action against indecent theatrical posters and billboards in several Canadian communities. Their crusade against such advertisements was part of the wider temperance agenda of the largely middle-class W.C.T.U.—the nation’s largest non-denominational woman’s organization. 2 Todd noted proudly that in the Maritimes, “[p]rotests have been made against objectionable show bills. . ..” She paid particular attention to “one good sister” who “maintain[ed] the siege until every one was torn down by the order of the mayor.” 3

In an effort to rally her troops, the outraged Todd demanded: “What kind of show-bills are posted in your towns? Who cares enough to say whether they are impure, calculated to arouse wicked

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thoughts, or familiarize our boys and girls with scenes of bloodshed and cruelty?" A poster from a performance in Toronto entitled “Marriage Dramas,” which portrayed several indecent scenes, proved her point:

Three of the ten representations will be enough to convey an idea of its character. The first, “Marriage by Capture.” The picture shows a young girl with streaming hair, clothes half torn off, being dragged away by a ruffian. The next, “Babylonish Slave-Market,” there a crowd of girls in semi-nude condition are grouped on the ground in various postures, while one is in the block for sale.” [. . . ] only one more, “Elope ment, a Marriage at Gretna Green,” the title suggests the scene—and this is the education our pure Canadian girls are having by consent of their parents! After such a seed-sowing, what will the harvest be?5

The rhetorical question addressed what to many in the audience was a central problem with society.

One of the firing lines from which the W.C.T.U. waged their war on immoral showbills was in the press. Todd reminded her impatient troops that “[r]emonstrances against improper show bills have been made through the daily papers.”6 In a time obsessed with news and publicity, papers were understood to be critical in influencing public opinion.7 No doubt, in the minds of the assembled Christian soldiers, they were essential to the organization’s campaigns to pressure politicians to forbid immoral theatrical advertisements. After her grim assessment, Todd concluded her address on a more positive note by relating the success in Boston “in pushing their protest against indecent show bills, and compelling the authorities to forbid them . . .”8

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4 Ibid.
5 Ibid, pp 81-82. It was understood that Scottish law did not require parental consent for marrying minors. Gretna Green was the most convenient village on the Scottish side of the border with England and was, consequently, a popular place for eloping when one of the partners was not of age. Keith Walden notes that the entertainment was an amateur performance by Toronto elite. It would have included the children of important Toronto families, a point which frustrated Superintendent Todd. See Keith Walden, “Toronto Society’s Response to Celebrity Performers, 1887-1914,” Canadian Historical Review 89, no. 3, (2008), 387-88.
7 Paul Rutherford, A Victorian Authority: The Daily Press in Late Nineteenth-Century Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).
Toronto District W.C.T.U., for its part, carried out its own campaign. And, in 1894, was “pleased to report in regard to the matter of ‘bill posters,’ which have been such a disgrace to our city of late, having had an interview with the Mayor in regard to a more diligent supervision of these things.” The committee was convinced that the Mayor was “fully in sympathy” and that he “. . . deplored the evil influence of these advertisements on our children especially . . .”

The W.C.T.U.’s success on this and other occasions speaks not only to their media savvy but also the extent to which advertisements for public entertainment had become a serious issue. An article in the Toronto daily newspaper the *Globe*, appearing roughly eight years later, reveals the group’s knack for getting noticed. Under the headline “Indecent Posters,” the article reprinted a resolution passed at a district convention:

> Whereas the disgusting and obscene pictures flaunted on the billboards advertising “Wine, Women and Song” and “The Trocadores” are a disgrace to any city and an insult to the Christian womanhood of Toronto, resolved that we show our disapproval of such advertising by appointing a committee to wait on the Mayor and Council asking them to instruct the proper officers not to allow a repetition of the offence and to prohibit such forms of advertising in future.

With these theatrical advertisements squarely in their sights, the organization used the paper to publicly pressure the Mayor and local authorities. The fact that newspapers felt compelled to carry stories about the group’s efforts against showbills, and include lengthy and prosaic passages from the organization’s minutes, is a testament to the wider concern surrounding the effects of public entertainment and its advertising on society.

To many of Toronto’s inhabitants, playhouses and circuses were synonymous with disorder and vice. What is particularly interesting, however, is that the posters and billboards

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10 Ibid. Emphasis in the original.
11 *The Globe*, 1 October, 1901.
12 Ibid.
used to promote public entertainment were themselves highly charged sites for the negotiation of identities in the late Victorian city. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, and into the beginning of the twentieth, some Torontonians felt menaced by the seemingly ubiquitous advertisements touting plays and other forms of public entertainment. These posters and billboards were intended to catch the wandering eyes of consumers. Not surprisingly, they frequently relied on titillation and violence. As a result, they became outposts of misrule, colonizing virtually every aspect of the cityscape. Groups such as the W.C.T.U., and individuals like Lieutenant-Colonel George T. Denison, engaged in aggressive campaigns against these advertisements, which they characterized as violent and immoral.\(^{13}\) Nation-wide, the W.C.T.U. lobbied politicians and, in many cases, successfully managed to influence public opinion through skilful manipulation of the media. Newspapers carried story after story calling attention to the blight of theatrical and other forms of outdoor advertising, denouncing its immoral and aesthetic side effects.\(^{14}\) Toronto, as well as neighbouring municipalities in Hamilton and further afield in places such as Chicago, attempted to pass by-laws regulating outdoor advertising. Indeed, the discomfort generated by posters and billboards manifested itself in a wide variety of ways throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, such advertising continued unabated, insinuating itself into virtually every feature of the urban landscape.

To those troubled by these images, the response to the carnivalesque disorder of posters and billboards touting public entertainments was an attempt to control their proliferation in the

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\(^{13}\) Although historians have not pursued the topic, the efforts to regulate immoral advertisements for public entertainment may usefully be seen as part of the wider moral reform movement. For an interesting cultural history of social purity discourse in Canada, see Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993).

\(^{14}\) In so doing, they consciously compared Toronto to other cities such as Hamilton, Chicago and New York, further entrenching transnational links. These international congruencies were expanding daily, from advertising strategies borrowed or produced elsewhere to the international campaigns to regulate them. Although heightening certain people’s overall apprehension, they also expanded discourses of moral panic and the aesthetic. Please see Patricia Clavin, “Defining Transnationalism,” *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 4 (2005): 421-439.
public sphere. Their comments and actions reveal deep misgivings about the shifting values of Victorian society. For certain inhabitants of Toronto, the images of violence, eroticism, gender-bending and racial mixing that appeared on countless billboards, posters, playbills and dodgers represented a substantial threat to the status quo. To others, these images operated more as the entertainment entrepreneurs intended, connecting the subject whose gaze was captivated by the carnivalesque depictions to the play or circus being promoted.

This chapter examines the anxiety over posters and billboards touting public entertainments. These advertisements were pervasive and the debate surrounding access to (and excess in) the public sphere raged on in the newspapers, council meetings and taverns of the city. Exploring issues of carnival transgression and the fear of the power of images, it becomes clear that the emotional arousal that follows the captivated gaze raised concerns over crime and promiscuity, particularly amongst Toronto’s youth. The chapter then moves from the theoretical to the practical. After situating the advertisements in their historical context and present-day scholarly light, I move on to outline some of the efforts to crack down on these fearful images. Beginning in the late 1880s, the anti-poster discourse came into its own around the mid-1890s. The phenomenon continued, picking up an important aesthetic component, well into the first decade of the twentieth century. From municipal by-laws and attempts by the Ontario legislature to the laments of the W.C.T.U. and the Ontario Horticultural Association, authorities attempted to control these advertisements. Although laws were passed, they were constrained by a strong discourse of property rights and the city’s commitment to commerce. They were also occasionally ignored by entrepreneurs anxious to turn a profit. My analysis then turns to some of the fearful images at the heart of the debate—with a particular focus on women’s bodies which

15 Outdoor advertising, in general, relied on many of the same techniques employed in the promotion of public entertainment. Indeed, it is very difficult to separate the anti-advertising discourse surrounding public entertainment from that directed against other forms of marketing.
were so prominently featured in these posters and billboards. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief discussion of the billposter’s role as a Lord of Misrule—tempting audiences with his powerful images.

**Transgressive Advertisements**

As advertisements, the posters and billboards for public entertainment that cluttered Toronto’s cityscape were experienced in different ways. A pedestrian walking along King Street might or might not have noticed them. In other words, depending on the circumstances, the city itself consisted of spaces that could be intensely—or only partially—perceived. Nor were all of the posters and billboards transgressive and shocking—plenty puffed entertainments in a manner that was unlikely to raise too many eyebrows. In addition, many relied solely on text, foregoing images yet still intending to arouse interest. Although these advertisements did not generate the same invective as those which incorporated images, they were still fetishized by those anxious over their perceived intrusion into public and private space.¹⁶ Nevertheless, at some level, theatrical advertisements were intended to catch people’s eye. Many Torontonians no doubt found them exciting. Such was the case with the odd couple at the centre of the author Viola Roseboro’s short story, *A Pair of Players*, reprinted in the *Globe*.¹⁷ An aging actress and her effeminate young companion both share a dream: “To have freedom, freedom to talk about the theatre as much as they liked, with none to make them afraid, to be in a town full of billboards,

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¹⁶ The literary critic Anne McClintock offers a redefinition of the term fetish that usefully applies to these text-based advertisements. They may be seen as representing a “displacement onto an object . . . of contradictions that the individual cannot resolve at a personal level.” Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 183-85. Indeed, given the widespread anxiety over the billboard menace, it is likely that Denison and other iconoclasts turned all of these advertisements into fetishes. It is possible that the attenuated nature of the text-brief captions, along with the use of eye-catching devices such as exclamation points as well as large and colourful fonts, might have troubled reformers.

seemed to fill their cup.” And indeed, it probably filled the cups of a great many silent Torontonians who experienced these advertisements as part and parcel of life in a rapidly modernizing city. The liberty of the Victorian city, bursting with exotic and colourful advertisements for an ever-increasing range of entertainments, was seen by many people as emancipatory.

To others, however, the writing of a new and threatening disorder was, literally, on the walls. The Globe noted dryly, “Billboards, smoke, and flies, are according to recent discussion, the chief dangers of modern cities.” By pasting images of women’s bodies and criminal behaviour throughout the streets of Toronto, the posters and billboards crossed boundaries between public and private that made some citizens uncomfortable. The literary critics Peter Stallybrass and Allon White offer a way to account for this discomfort through their reworking of Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque into the more widely applicable concept of transgression. From their perspective, these provocative advertisements can be seen as a form of transgression or, “symbolic inversion,” that contradicts or inverts traditional norms and cultural codes. Images of nearly naked women, representations of miscegenation or illustrations of violent crime, plastered over the public sphere challenged more official messages of civic order and Protestant morality.

And indeed, it was the inversion of publicly accepted hierarchies that drew the ire of critics. For Stallybrass and White, the opposition between high and low forms the basis of

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18 Ibid. Cassius, the male part of this “unusual” couple, is described variously as speaking in a “queer, half-mincing yet masculine voice . . .” and as not “like the other boys. . . .Some ways he’s more like a girl . . ..”
19 The nature of evidence surrounding advertisements touting public entertainment means that historians will inevitably find more sources from those who decried the billboard menace than those who enjoyed, or even ignored, them. Not everyone was as concerned—or vociferous—as Denison.
22 Ibid.
“ordering and sense-making” in western culture. The high rejects the low, but the relationship is troubled by a significant ambivalence. The result is that although the dominant may attack the peripheral, there is, nevertheless, a psychological need for the Other that is so vehemently excluded. Thus, what is often at the margins socially is regularly “symbolically central.” To detractors, these advertisements were controversial precisely because they projected aspects of the periphery (sex, violence, crime, racial Others etc.) into the symbolic centre of Victorian Toronto’s culture. The theatres were bad enough, but they were relatively fixed in the city’s topography. The posters and billboards, however, spilled over from these relatively contained geographies running riot in the streets of Toronto the Good. The transgressive qualities of these advertisements had much to do with their potential for presenting contradictory and alternative ways of being. In the realm of carnivalesque transgression, novelty was paramount. New ways of thinking could be presented. Alternative ways of imagining the city—with flamboyantly coloured advertisements vying for dominance against church spires and imposing architecture of the city hall and provincial legislature—were encouraged.

The posters and billboards puffing diversions such as circuses and burlesques were an extension of the carnivalesque atmosphere of public entertainment. By inserting themselves into the streets some were desperate to imagine as orderly, they acted as a constant reminder of a world less abstemious than many cared—or subsequently have cared—to acknowledge. The visual clutter was a symbol of the disorder and the radical potentialities of a rapidly maturing

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23 Ibid, 3.
24 Ibid, 5.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid, 25.
consumerist culture. To critics, however, it was the power of these images to contaminate those who looked upon them that made them cause for concern.  

**The Power of Disorderly Images**

But how were these posters and billboards corrupting Toronto’s youth? Under the arresting title “ILLUSTRATIONS OF CRIME,” the *Globe* wrote in its headline that “COLONEL DENISON SPEAKS OF BILL-BOARD POSTERS,” and “Thinks Those Depicting Unnatural and Criminal Scenes Work a Vast Amount of Harm, Particularly to the Young.”

The celebrated magistrate lamented: “One does not need to go far to see a picture of a murder or suicide or some other form of awful crime.” “The attitude of the perpetrator of the deed and his victim is shown,” continued Denison, “and sufficient details accompany the view to give a person an idea of the entire action.” Denison listed a number of particularly gruesome instances: “In one place you can see a man who is supposed to be choking his daughter to death, in another it is a man tied to a railway track, or to a moving sawlog machine, or a pile-driver.”

The theatre historian Mary

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27 It is worth noting that moral reformers also advanced their respective causes using techniques similar to those used to promote public entertainment. The Salvation Army—whether through its carnivalesque marches so reminiscent of circus parades and its unsettling public performances by Hallelujah lasses—were keenly aware of drawing attention to themselves in public space. See, Lynne Marks, “The Salvation Army and the Knights of Labor: Religion and Working-Class Culture,” in Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 140-168; and Lynne Marks, “Hallelujah Lasses: Working-Class Women and the Salvation Army,” in Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks*, 169-188. They were also adept at using powerful images, such as the well-known drawing of “The Mighty Niagara of Souls”—so terrifying with its dramatic destruction of innumerable souls underneath a title printed in a font that could have been lifted from any one of countless billboards advertising some spectacular show. See Valverde, *The Age*, 36-38.


29 Ibid.

30 Ibid.  The sawlog machine was a popular dramatic device. *The Globe* ran an amusing story in which a naïve musician providing accompaniment for a play asks, “Is it the scene I saw on the billboards, where the villain is running the hero into the sawmill and the girl rescues him just in the nick of time?” *The Globe*, 1 August, 1896. A theatre program from Hamilton’s Grand Opera House carried images of two escaped convicts in a submarine as well as a heart-stopping scene on railway tracks with a train barreling down upon the protagonists. “Grand Opera House,” 5 November, 1902. Pringle Papers, Hamilton Public Library. Another advertisement from Hamilton’s Grand Opera House includes images of a little girl’s near drowning, gunplay, criminals planning to murder a woman, and a knife-wielding bad guy, all in one poster “Archive File, Theatre Programmes,” Shadows of a Great City, 20 March circa 1900.
Shortt observes that the infamous railway track scene form *Under the Gaslight*—which was regularly reproduced in thrilling advertisements—was believed by many of Denison’s contemporaries to be the cause of a significant amount of crime.\(^{32}\) Advertisements were particularly pernicious because of their prominence in the public sphere. “The harm may not come through the theatre itself . . .,” Denison elaborated, as “[m]any parents would not allow their children to go to a play-house where such productions are given.” The trouble was, these performances took place on billboards and posters from which parents could not shield their children:

> These are to be found in conspicuous places along the streets, where children on their way to school have plenty of opportunity for gazing at them. These young persons, after seeing these pictures in their many forms, gather the idea that all this villainy is a necessary factor in the ordinary business of life. They think that it is natural for men to shoot, stab and club each other, and that scenes of murder and bloodshed are common. Where the same style of billboard scenery is exhibited week after week there is a tendency among the young people to believe that life is full of such incidents as are depicted in bright colors along our streets.\(^{33}\)

Action was needed to stop the spread of this disorder and it was with a palpable sense of relief that Denison acknowledged that “that the Police Commissioners in Toronto are to be given power to regulate and censor the publication of posters.”\(^{34}\) He concluded the interview by remarking, “we would be justified in putting a stop to this hideous form of education for our young people.”\(^{35}\)

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\(^{32}\) Mary Shortt, “Victorian Temptations,” *The Beaver* (December 1988/January 1989): 5. In this particular case, the clichéd thrill is reversed and the hero is tied to the tracks before being rescued, in the nick of time, by the heroine. The play was first performed in Toronto on December 4, 1867, just four months after its New York debut. Mary Shortt, “From Douglas to *The Black Crook*: A History of Toronto Theatre, 1809-1874” (MA Thesis, University of Toronto, 1977), 164.

\(^{33}\) *The Globe*, 10 March, 1902.

\(^{34}\) *Ibid*.

\(^{35}\) *Ibid*. 
Denison had hit upon the central problem: the wandering gaze. These images captured the imagination of those who saw them. They acted as outposts of disorder, undermining the otherwise restrained cityscape with their transgressive power. The public nature of these images of vice meant that they were particularly worrisome. For Denison and the W.C.T.U., it was the posters’ ability to arrest the gaze of impressionable children—despite anything their parents might do prevent it—that was cause for alarm.

To better understand the fear of the power of these advertisements, I turn to art historian David Freedberg’s *The Power of Images*. Although his argument focuses largely on paintings and sculpture of a religious nature, it can be rewardingly applied to advertisements. Key to the power of images is the ability of “the sign [to become] the living embodiment of what it signifies.” There is a fusion between, for example, a statue and the body it represents. For the iconoclast, the marble turns to flesh. He or she becomes aroused by it, often angered to the point where violence is used to undermine the power of what is represented. Freedberg maintains that attacks on statues and portraits of reviled dictators, for instance, betray a similar conflation. Hurting the representation somehow hurts the represented. From this perspective, image is much more powerful than text. Masking their own discomfort with images, authorities attribute susceptibility to their power to the low, particularly women, children, the poor and the

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37 Freedberg does look at advertisements and political propaganda including ‘secular’ statues and posters but his primary focus is on “art” rather than advertising.
38 Ibid, 28.
41 Ibid, 413.
For Freedberg, the essence of the elite’s distrust originates in the emotional and physical arousal that images cause.\footnote{Ibid, 399. As Lisa Z. Sigel notes, a similar process occurred in Victorian Britain with regard to pornographic images. Images of naked bodies used by artists as “studies” were deemed obscene only when they fell into the hands of the poor. The consequences for looking at images were considered different based on class. Lisa Z. Sigel, \textit{Governing Pleasures: Pornography and Social Change in England, 1815-1914} (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 4.}

Freedberg’s notion provides a useful tool for approaching the response to advertisements peddling various public entertainments. Although one can understand the fury generated by the playhouses themselves, which frequently violated bourgeois standards of decorum and taste, it is intriguing that the posters and billboards used to promote public entertainments aroused a similar—if not greater—level of anger. I suggest that Freedberg’s fusion of signifier and signified took place in the streets of Victorian Toronto. As certain people gazed upon the posters depicting exotic races, inversions of traditional gender norms, violence, sex and any number of other ‘shocking’ forms of disorder, they became emotionally aroused. They attributed to these images a kind of power that, on the surface, would be more reasonably ascribed to the physical space of the theatre or circus itself. After all, the offensive behaviour was not taking place in the present, on the street in front of the viewer, but in some relatively distant and prescribed place. The confusion, however, turned the advertisements into a kind of fetish. Invested with an inordinate amount of power, posters and billboards transform into an extension of the transgressive disorder of the playhouse. Running amuck in the public sphere, to certain Victorian authorities, these images became sites every bit as transgressive as those they signified.

Occupying positions of prominence along main streets, across from churches, clacking along on streetcars and tacked up in residential and suburban neighbourhoods, these images threatened the established order by interjecting the transgressive potential for arousal into the
modern cityscape. They signified the changing values of modernity, presaging fundamental alterations in society’s core beliefs. The images of crime become criminal themselves as authorities attempted to regulate and expunge them. The poster becomes the playhouse, the image of racial mixing becomes a form of miscegenation. Reading the efforts of the W.C.T.U. or Lieutenant-Colonel Denison as expressions of iconoclasm allows the historian to make sense of their attacks on these images. To Toronto’s protectors of public morals, the wandering gaze of the child was prey to the contaminating presence of these advertisements in the public sphere. “Lewd and immoral theatrical representations . . . are openly given and the youth of the land are tempted to visit them by advertisements and placards, which disgrace our public streets,” bemoaned *The Mail*. “The windows of respectable shops are disgraced by the photographs of actresses in almost every attitude of nudity . . . [and] have no other object,” the author concluded, “than to tempt the virtue and deprave the morality of the community.”\(^44\) The misgivings expressed by authorities on behalf of others, must also be read as articulations of their own dread over the power of these images.

The modus operandi of such visual pollution is evident, although almost certainly unintentionally, in a cartoon from *Grip* entitled “FAME.”\(^45\) [Figure 1-1 FAME] Two street urchins stare speculatively at a poster with the seductive image of a female snake-dancer. The attractively shaped young woman is entangled in the coils of a large and threatening snake, the head of which, she holds in her diminutive hand:

First Gamin –“Who’s that actress? Kin you read the bill?”
Second Gamin –“No; but I guess its Sairy Barnart in that new snake play of her’s, ‘Kleepatry,’ they call it.”\(^46\)

\(^{44}\) *The Mail*, 23 October, 1879.
\(^{45}\) “FAME,” *Grip*, 24 October, 1891.
\(^{46}\) *Ibid.*
The point of the joke, of course, is that the woman depicted on the bill is not the infamous Sarah Bernhardt performing the suicide of Cleopatra but one of the many acts featuring female snake-charmers who performed an eroticized form of “Orientalized” dancing. It is easy to imagine the zealous women of the W.C.T.U. reading this cartoon in a completely different way. From their perspective, the infection of the impressionable children with an erotic image of a near-naked woman was more important than their struggle to interpret the poster.

The violent actions of an iconoclast are by definition extreme. The reactionary attacks by certain Torontonians on these advertisements, however, must be seen in context. The people behind these campaigns were, by most accounts, zealous in their efforts. They petitioned all levels of government. They made use of local, provincial, national and even transnational organizations. They wrote into newspapers, launched letter-writing campaigns and held public talks. It must also be taken into consideration that many of these activists were women whose forays into the public sphere were rarely easy, even under the guise of protectors of public mores. Their response to these images was aggressive, and that makes them significantly different than the vast majority of their fellow citizens. Indeed, it is through their ‘over-reactions’ that one begins to see the utility of approaching them as iconoclasts.

A similar cartoon appearing in the Hamilton Times shows a poster of an even more underdressed snake charmer with exposed arms, midriff and legs holding a large snake. Hamilton Times, 22 August, 1901. The Grip cartoon also hints at Bengough’s concern over the boy’s illiteracy. At one level, they are the butt of the joke, but they are simultaneously being fretted over. See, Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).
"FAME."

First Gamin—"Who's that actress? Kin you read the bill?"

Second Gamin—"No; but I guess its Sairy Barnart in that new snake play of her's, "Kleepatry," they call it."

Figure 1-1   FAME
Situating the Advertisements

The historical phenomenon of these posters and other advertisements puffing public entertainment present certain challenges to historians. One of the chief problems is their relative scarcity. They were, after all, ephemeral. Being delicate, inclement weather took its toll. So too would have the surreptitious destruction of them by iconoclasts. Vandals, those simply looking to get a laugh through graffiti, most likely ruined their share as well. (Frustratingly, these visceral responses, arising from moral indignation or street-humour, are also lost.) Much like outdoor advertisements today, these siren-calls to pleasure were seen as disposable. Posters and billboards were constantly torn down or covered over by other, newer temptations. George G. Foster’s 1856 account of New York’s seedy underbelly, described the jumbled layers of advertisements put up by competing billposters on the “calicoed surface” of the Park Theater. The “handbills lying like [fish] scales . . . one upon another,” created a hodge-podge of overlapping messages that read: “Steamer Ali—Sugar-Coat—and Pantaloons for—the Great Anaconda—Whig Nominations—Panorama of Principles—Democrats Rally to the—American Museum’—and so on . . .” In the marketplace, the chaotic voices of these advertisements rose up briefly, only to be drowned out by others. Promoting events which were themselves fleeting and of a particular moment in time, these expressions of visual culture were not intended to last. Their very nature was transitory.

48 Quentin J. Schultze suggests that although reformers anxious to remove outdoor advertising from the public sphere “preferred to use their professional skills in a way that dignified the anti-advertising movement,” he suggests that “. . . the surreptitious destruction of objectionable signs was by far the most effective measure . . ..” Quentin J. Schultze, “Legislating Morality: The Progressive Response to American Outdoor Advertising 1900-1917,” The Journal of Popular Culture 17, no. 4 (1984): 42.
50 Ibid.
As advertisements, few thought to preserve them. To make matters worse, the ‘indecent’ posters at the centre of this discussion were deemed even less worthy of protection by either enthusiasts of public entertainment or archivists concerned with chronicling the past. No definitive information exists with regards to overall numbers. Posters and the like were largely unregulated and easily produced. And although they required a larger investment, even billboards remained, for the most part, unfettered by government interference throughout the nineteenth century.\(^{51}\) No office was charged with counting them, a task which would have been daunting especially if it were to encompass all forms of outdoor advertising and not just those for circuses, plays and concerts.

Nevertheless, one can get a sense of the pervasiveness of the phenomenon. The Globe, for instance, ran a printing division that operated, under various names, for much of the second half of the nineteenth century. An 1855 advertisement for its Job and Book Printing Office suggests how common this type of visual clutter was in the Victorian city.\(^{52}\) Amongst the many jobs its printers could perform were listed: Railroad-bills, Pamphlets, Handbills, Concert Bills, Posting Bills, Newspapers, Steamboat-bills, Circulars, Bill Headings, Show Bills, Programmes and Stage Bills. The advertisement also informs customers that its staff can print in gold and colours, implying that as early as the 1850s it was becoming increasingly difficult to get one’s advertisements noticed. Just a few years later, the now renamed Steam Job Printing Office, emphasized their “New and Improved Styles of Type.”\(^{53}\) Constantly forced to come up with novel techniques to capture the attention of consumers, printers and advertisers regularly pushed boundaries as they spread the gospel of consumption. As another inducement, the shop had

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\(^{52}\) *The Globe*, 3 January, 1855.

\(^{53}\) *The Globe*, 7 March, 1859.
recently secured Mr. A. T. Houel, foreman of the “celebrated printing office of Baker & Godwin, New York.” Presumably, Houel’s services lent a certain cachet at a time of increased competition from other printers. Another response was their promise to offer prices that “DEFY ALL COMPETITION.” Entrepreneurs, whether in entertainment or dry goods, were demanding cheaper access to the public sphere. Coupled with the boast that it could make 10,000 handbills within 10 hours, one begins to understand the relative ease with which entertainment entrepreneurs could clutter the urban landscape.

Other evidence bolsters the claim that posters and billboards were an increasingly common feature of Toronto’s urban cityscape. The journalist and sensational slummer C. S. Clark noted, “Great and multifarious are the means employed to advertise this or that singer or artist.” So widespread was the practice of bill-posting and the like that, by 1908, Toronto earned the dubious distinction as “the best city for bill-posting on the continent.” And it showed, on the walls, fences and hoardings of the Victorian city. Some contemporaries, however, could not take the compliment and further evidence exists in the shrill voices of those who spoke out against posters and billboards. Even allowing for the hyperbole of outraged moralists, their attacks support the notion that these ‘indecent’ advertisements existed in considerable numbers. Photographs of the city’s main commercial thoroughfares, as well as some of its residential areas, indicate that posters, billboards and other forms of outdoor

54 The Globe, 7 March, 1859.
55 The Globe, 1 November, 1862.
56 Every advertisement I found made reference to modest or very low prices suggesting there was market pressure to be competitive.
57 The Globe, 1 November, 1862.
58 C. S. Clark, Of Toronto the Good A Social Study: The Queen City of Canada As It Is (Montreal: The Toronto Publishing Company, 1898), 198.
59 The Globe, 7 July, 1908.
advertising were a regular sight. [Figures 1-2 through 1-9] Evidence uncovered by scholars studying contemporary Britain and the United States supports this claim.  

Photographs beginning in the 1890s reveal Toronto’s commercial streets, including parts of Yonge and Queen Streets, practically electric with activity. Calling to mind a carnival atmosphere, huge signs dominate the viewer’s perspective. They hang, suspended over the sidewalks calling attention to themselves in a riot of colours and shapes. Giant billboards and sides of buildings are covered in text and images. Awnings fall from façades, draping the storefronts in a wash of brilliant hues.
Figure 1-4  Queen St. Subway (looking from the south), c1900-1920
Figure 1-5   Yonge St. South of Arcade (looking north), 189?
Figure 1-6  Yonge St. just north of Queen St., 189?
Figure 1-7 Yonge St. North of Queen St. (looking south), 189?
Figure 1-8  Great Band—Advertisements spread into residential areas, southwest Corner of Sherbourne St. at Carlton, c.1885-1895
Academics also agree that outdoor advertising, especially in the early years, was dominated by entertainment entrepreneurs. Although little secondary source material exists in the Canadian context, H. E. Stephenson and Carlton McNaught’s *The Story of Advertising in Canada* notes that the billposter was largely employed by circuses and other forms of public entertainment.  

Surveying the American scene, James Fraser concludes that printing for circuses and theatres was the essential genesis of what would evolve into the outdoor advertising industry. According to Charles Taylor and Weih Chang, circuses were the number one user of outdoor advertising in the United States, encouraged by pioneers such as P. T. Barnum. Theatres, however, were not far behind. By the late nineteenth century, they claim, local theatre owners often controlled their town’s outdoor advertising. Catherine Gudis contends that circuses, menageries and theatres were among the earliest and most prolific users of outdoor advertising. Billposting for other products had its origins in show business and, she avers, the expansion of public entertainment during the nineteenth century was vital to the industry’s growth. Her study concludes that many American billposting companies began life as outgrowths from local theatres and opera houses. Quentin J. Schultze calculates that as early as the late 1860s, there were approximately 275 billposting businesses in the United States. Gudis’ figures suggest that by the 1880s, theatrical advertising formed 80 percent of the billposting trade. And the numbers could be staggering. In 1888, Barnum and Bailey claimed

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65 Ibid, 50.  
67 Ibid, 18.  
68 Ibid.  
to have used 1.5 million sheets of posters that year alone.\textsuperscript{71} Local papers reported with pride the
number of sheets used for their city.\textsuperscript{72} Numbers could range from five to eighty thousand.\textsuperscript{73}

With all this advertising, abuses were to be expected. Gudis observes that the poster craze
of the 1890s was met with a chorus of detractors complaining of the immoral and corrupting
influence of such advertising.\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century, the industry faced
attacks from those who raised objections on moral grounds. Taylor and Chang argue that theatres
regularly posted advertisements on their facades and that, by the turn of the century, posters for
burlesques shows were a regular feature outside of playhouses.\textsuperscript{75} In the British context, Cyril
Sheldon concludes that immoral posters drew the ire of many with the indignation coming to a
head in and around 1890.\textsuperscript{76} Back in America, Gudis observes that depictions of women were at
the heart of the debate and that theatrical posters were specifically singled out.\textsuperscript{77} These
advertisements reveled in their bright colours and beautiful women, particularly those promoting
burlesque entertainments.\textsuperscript{78} [Figure 1-9 Humphreys’ Specific Homeopathic Medicine]
Reformers grew increasingly distressed over the effects on children of seeing posters and
billboards announcing immoral melodramas plagued with violence and women in revealing
outfits.\textsuperscript{79} These crusaders took issue not only with the display of the female body, but says
Gudis, also with the cavalcade of colours and images in the public sphere and the

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 15-17.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid, 26.
\textsuperscript{75} Taylor and Chang, “The History,” 50.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{77} Gudis, \textit{Buyways}, 26.
\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{79} Peter C. Baldwin, \textit{Domesticating the Street: The Reform of Public Space in Hartford, 1850-1930} (Columbus: Ohio
University Press, 1999), 61.
Figure 1-9 Humphreys’ Specific Homeopathic Medicine
consequences for the taste and manners of society—especially women, children and the waves of new immigrants.  

But, as this last comment suggests, concerns over advertising for public entertainment were not entirely limited to its immoral content. Indeed, as the century waned, anti-advertising discourse began to take an increasingly aesthetic turn. In her exploration of the campaign for billboard regulation by the Civic Club of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania, Kristin Szylvian Bailey observed that the organization’s earliest objections to outdoor advertising were largely based on public morals. By 1907, however, aesthetic concerns surrounding beautifying the city took on greater importance. In May of 1908, the Toronto Star, for example, could report that some residents around the Indian Road area of High Park had formed together “to organize an association” with an eye to discussing “beautification of the neighborhood.” Conversations included “billboard nuisances,” but also such aesthetic concerns as the “developing of lawns,” as well as “street and sidewalk improvements in keeping with that artistic part of the city.” Although never wholly subsumed, the moral crusade found expression in a new discourse that merged its earlier concerns with a greater emphasis on aesthetics.

Part of the burgeoning of the City Beautiful movement, municipal art leagues and a host of similar civic associations began to push for greater control over the public sphere. Reformers shifted their efforts surrounding outdoor advertising to include the education and elevation of citizens about the importance of aesthetics in outdoor advertising. Progressive elites in the United States privileged their own aesthetic standards over the poor, especially the immigrants

80 Gudis, Buyways, 26.
82 Ibid.
83 The Star, 13 May, 1908.
84 Ibid.
who were increasingly the target audience of advertisers.\textsuperscript{86} Toward the turn of the century, the British National Society for Checking the Abuse of Public Advertising (S.C.A.P.A.) launched a new campaign against outdoor advertising called “Beauty v. Business.”\textsuperscript{87} Described by Sheldon as “aesthetic crusaders,” S.C.A.P.A.’s efforts, disseminated in their appropriately titled publication, \textit{A Beautiful World}, were largely concerned with the unsightly effects of such advertising.\textsuperscript{88} The shift to include aesthetic alongside moral concerns within the anti-advertising discourse was important. In Toronto, particularly after the turn of the century, the two discourses often merged as detractors attempted to limit the power of these images.

**Cracking Down**

The \textit{Globe}, in May 1888, demanded that “something be done to clean up the litter of dodgers and paper scraps that lie around James street [sic] on Sundays.”\textsuperscript{89} “The sight is a disgrace to the city . . . ,” excoriated the reporter, and “a scavenger should be appointed to clean it up every Saturday night.”\textsuperscript{90} The last thing decent church-going Torontonians needed to see on the Sabbath was a bunch of discarded advertisements for dry goods or French plays. They, like litter, were a form of dirt left over from the market and the consumption it represented. Council Proceedings reported to the public carried news of “the Board of Works’ report” which had “brought out strong objections to the practice of littering the streets around the market with bills and dodgers . . . ”\textsuperscript{91}

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid, 37.
\textsuperscript{87} Sheldon, \textit{A History}, 102.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} \textit{The Globe}, 1 May, 1888. Although I believe that the newspaper’s concern—and city council’s response—was caught up in the fight against immoral advertisements, it was also part of a wider concern surrounding hygiene and clutter. For an account of the transformation of street cleaning in London from an attempt to please Oxford Street merchants into a radical campaign for social regeneration by the enigmatic and energetic Charles Cochrane, see, James Winter, \textit{London’s Teeming Streets: 1830-1914} (New York: Routledge, 1993), 118-134.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} \textit{The Globe}, 15 May, 1888.
So frustrated were elected officials that “. . . the Mayor was asked to bring the matter before the police commissioners.”92 In this case, outrage centred on the market, one of the geographic and psychological focal points of the disorder associated with consumption.93 The matter was deemed serious enough for the authorities to resort to the more coercive branch of their power, namely the police. Finally, the Globe carried word from city council that the by-law was to be “enforced in regard to distributing dodgers and other papers on the streets.”94 In reports dating from the turn of the century, these advertisements were clearly seen as a form of pollution: “Under section 557 the Councils may pass by-laws for preventing persons from throwing any dirt, filth, carcasses of animals or rubbish upon any street, road or highway. It is proposed to add . . . handbills and paper.”95 The anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that our behaviour surrounding pollution “is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.”96 Theatrical advertisements, tainted with links to the lurid realm of public entertainment, were matter out of place, as it were, classed with dirt, filth, and animal carcasses.

By the early 1890s, the issue of indecent outdoor advertisements began to reach a fever pitch. In January of 1890, the city passed “A By-law relating to Public Morals.”97 A wide-ranging enactment, by-law 2449 covered such offences to the public morals as begging, selling intoxicating liquors to minors, drunkenness and vagrancy, swearing and immorality, gambling, houses of ill-fame, indecency and bathing. For my purposes, it is the catch-all category of indecency that warrants greater attention. With the expansion of public entertainment, pressure

92 Ibid.
94 The Globe, 4 June, 1888.
95 The Globe, 26 March, 1900.
97 A by-law relating to Public Morals. No. 2449. (January 1890) City of Toronto Archives.
was placed on municipal politicians to control not only the performances but the posters and billboards used to promote them. Section 9 reads: “No person shall post up any indecent placard, writings, or pictures, or write any indecent or immoral words, or make any indecent pictures or drawings on any public or private building, wall, fence, sign, monument, post, sidewalk, or pavement in any street or public place.”

Classed with offences like prostitution and gambling, it is clear that certain authorities felt these advertisements were a serious threat to order. Interestingly, the by-law prohibits posters before it proscribes the very performances they were tacked up to advertise. Section 10 states that “No person shall exhibit, sell, or offer to sell, any indecent, or lewd book, paper, picture, plate, drawing, or other thing, nor exhibit any indecent or immoral show or exhibition, or perform any indecent, immoral or lewd play or other representation within the City.”

But this was not the only weapon available to those anxious to proscribe the power of these images. By-law 23, a by-law respecting the issue of licences in the City of Toronto enacted 1 May 1896, had expanded by 1903 to further regulate the promotion of public entertainment. Section 32a demanded that agents and managers of theatres, circuses and other shows “deposit a duplicate of every poster, picture, or handbill purporting to set forth, advertise or describe any drama, play, circus, performance, or show . . .” with the Chief Constable. The by-law also forced businesses or individuals “that may publish any poster, picture or handbill purporting to set forth, describe or suggest any of the genital organs or any function or disease thereof . . . [to] deposit with the Chief Constable, or in his absence with the Deputy Chief Constable, of the City

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98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 By-law 23. A by-law respecting the issue of licenses in the City of Toronto. (1 May 1896) an amended by-law No. 29 (20 May 1898), 40 (11 November 1902), 42 (13 January 1903) and 43 (10 March 1903). City of Toronto Archives.
101 Ibid.
of Toronto, a duplicate thereof . . .”102 In discussing nineteenth-century obscene photographs, Freedberg observes that such censorship involved the confluence of “good taste and the fear of realism.”103 The expurgation of genitals, he argues, demonstrates the tension between realism and offence.104 Although authorities might tolerate a classical body stripped of its authenticity, they would not brook any references to the grotesque reality of the human form with its genitals and accompanying afflications.105

If, in the opinion of the Chief Constable, or Deputy Chief Constable, “the said poster, picture or handbill is indecent, it shall not be posted or distributed in the City of Toronto.” “If any such poster, picture or hand-bill has been posted up or distributed before a duplicate thereof has been so deposited,” the by-law continues, “the offenders shall immediately . . . obliterate, remove or destroy every copy thereof.”106 The rhetoric of abjection emphasized by the emphatic repetition of annihilation (obliterate, remove, destroy), suggests that the presence of such public displays of indecency and realism represented a sustained attack on what to some was their delicate sense of Toronto’s idealized self.

By 1904, the by-law relating to public morals had grown. By-law No. 4305 retained the same categories as its earlier incarnation, by-law No. 2449, but expanded the sections regarding indecent posters and billboards to encompass any indecent “placards, play-bills or posters, writings, or pictures which are indecent, or may tend to corrupt or demoralize the public or individuals . . .”107 The wording of the revised by-law reflected the success of groups such as the

102 Ibid.
103 Freedberg, The Power, 354.
104 Ibid.
105 For the difference between classical and grotesque bodies, please see Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984) 303-367.
106 By-law 23. A by-law respecting the issue of licenses in the City of Toronto. (1 May 1896) an amended by-law No. 29 (20 May 1898), 40 (11 November 1902), 42 (13 January 1903) and 43 (10 March 1903). City of Toronto Archives.
W.C.T.U and individuals like Lieutenant-Colonel Denison in their campaigns to raise awareness of—and regulate—immoral theatrical advertising. The shift in wording, emphasising the corruption and demoralizing of society, added to the discourse surrounding the moral harm that these images engendered. Indeed, the revised by-law listed at length the public places where these indecent posters were prevented from appearing, including “on any public or private building, wall, fence, sign, monument, post, sidewalk, or pavement in or visible from any street or public place.”¹⁰⁸ It was their visibility, after all, which made advertisements peddling public entertainment so threatening to the body politic. As Freedberg proposes, much of the trepidation surrounding images emerges from the belief that they work directly upon our senses.¹⁰⁹ The image arrests a subject’s gaze rendering her helpless to resist the emotions that ensue.¹¹⁰ Its ability to enter into the individual’s mind through the eyes meant the virus was virtually unstoppable. Parents could keep their children away from the theatres but, as Lieutenant-Colonel Denison explained, they could not prevent them from looking at a poster advertising the most sordid details of that evening’s performance.¹¹¹

Interestingly, a 1904 by-law reveals some of the tension city authorities faced when it came to regulating posters and signs.¹¹² Section 45 of by-law 4317 introduced a new, almost paradoxical, twist in the city’s approach to the plague of posters: “No person shall pull down or deface any sign board, or any printed or written notice lawfully affixed.”¹¹³ The persistent fear caused by posters and billboards advertising everything from carnival grotesques to washing machines, no doubt led some citizens to act out against these disorderly images. It is hard to say

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. Emphasis mine.
¹⁰⁹ Freedberg, The Power, 358.
¹¹⁰ Ibid.
¹¹¹ The Globe, 10 March, 1902.
¹¹³ Ibid.
whether iconoclastic vigilantism, simple vandalism or pressure from local businesses reliant upon posters for advertising gave impetus to the new by-law. Section 46 suggests that city councillors were concerned with attacks on private property. “No person shall deface or disfigure any public or private building, wall, fence, railing, sign, monument, post, or other property,” stated the by-law, “by cutting, breaking, daubing with paint or other substance, or shall in any other way injure the same.”

Although signs advertising businesses were protected, the by-law makes no specific reference to posters or billboards. The latter occupied an ambiguous position in the minds of legislators. As we have seen, business owners had lobbied for their right to use such methods for promoting their goods and services and the city had reluctantly acknowledged their utility to commerce. Posters and billboards, however, were not exactly private property. Indeed, section 46 made clear that it was private property that needed protection from posters: “No person shall post, nail, or attach any poster, dodger, handbill, notice or advertisement on any telegraph pole, or, unless with the consent of the owner of such house, building or other erection.”

By-law 4406 from July of that same year, barred “notices or signs or advertising of any kind” on the covered ways and fences erected during the construction or repair of buildings “other than those of the owner or occupant, and these only in such form and style as may be approved of by the Inspector of Buildings.” These by-laws were enacted to deal with a perceived threat to public order. They suggest the extent of the concern local authorities felt in the face of increased pressure from voters, the press and the likes of Denison and the W. C.T.U.. Given the nature of late nineteenth and early twentieth century notions of private property, there was a certain amount

\[114\] Ibid.
\[115\] Ibid.
\[116\] By-law 4408. “A by-law for regulating the erection, and to provide for the safety of Buildings.” 6 July 1904. City of Toronto Archives.
of tension between the city’s desire to regulate posters and its understanding of their importance to commerce.

In the face of mounting criticism over the immorality of posters and billboards, the industry felt obliged to act, especially if it wished to avoid government intervention. The Associated Billposters of the United States and Canada (A.B.U.S.C.), established in 1891, became a significant force in shaping the outdoor advertising industry.\footnote{Ibid; Stephenson and McNaught, \textit{The Story}, 280-81.} By 1902, there were 19 Canadian members of A.B.U.S.C. operating as the Canadian Bill Posters and Distributors Association (C.B.D.A.), which represented 25 cities and towns.\footnote{Stephenson and McNaught, \textit{The Story}, 281.} A.B.U.S.C.’s efforts were in part directed toward the standardization of the industry as a whole.\footnote{Taylor and Chang, “The History,” 49; Gudis, \textit{Buyways}, 22.} Although it managed to bring about various ‘efficiencies’ in an otherwise chaotic industry, this was not its main concern. As the chorus of anti-advertising campaigners grew, scholars agree that the primary function of the organization was to ward off government oversight of the industry.\footnote{Taylor and Chang, “The History,” 47, 50; Gudis, \textit{Buyways}, 28.} As posters and billboards for theatre and burlesque shows became increasingly sexualized and violent, the public backlash prompted the A.B.U.S.C. to agree not to produce immoral advertisements.\footnote{Duke University, Duke Libraries, Digital Collections, Resource of Outdoor Advertising Descriptions, Outdoor Advertising Timeline:1850-1899, \url{http://library.duke.edu/digitalcollections/road/1850.html} (accessed January 28, 2011).} The decision was the earliest recorded instance of censorship over advertising copy in the United States.\footnote{Ibid.} The self-regulation extended to Canada as well.

An article in the \textit{Globe} from 1906 gives one a sense of the extent to which the C.B.D.A. was forced to address the concerns of the W.C.T.U. and its war against immoral show bills.\footnote{“WEEDING OUT BAD POSTERS,” \textit{The Globe}, 1 September, 1906.} The piece suggests that the billposters’ efforts were largely defensive in nature. The C.B.D.A.
held a meeting where they rejected a dozen “Objectionable Prints,” “which they were asked in
appeal to accept . . .”124 Was this merely a show-trial designed to give the impression of rigorous
self-censorship? Given the increased public scrutiny, the C.B.D.A. was no doubt pressured to
act. To their credit as lobbyists, the article portrays the C.B.D.A. as active participants in the
struggle for moral reform. They were the ones, “WEEDING OUT BAD POSTERS,” and
“TAK[ING] ACTION” against these immoral advertisements.125 So ‘successful’ had the
C.B.D.A. been that they “received a letter from the Canadian W. C. Temperance Union [sic]
endorsing their action against objectionable posters.”126 “The example of the Canadian
association has been followed,” continued the article, “by the United States association, who have
also received the endorsement of the National W.C.T.U..”127 It was a rare and welcome piece of
good press for the C.B.D.A..

More characteristic were stories calling for government intervention. In October of 1902,
the Globe reported that “much agitation against indecent posters seems at last to have resulted in
a really tangible reform.”128 Although theatrical advertising had by this point been regulated via
city by-law, at this time, “the weakness lay in the fact that no fault could be found until after the
objectionable matter had been displayed on the boards throughout the city.”129 New legislation
would allow censorship of “theatrical paper and other posters before [they were] put up or
distributed.”130 The Municipal Act was to be amended by the Legislature to allow Police
Commissioners, Chiefs of Police and other specially delegated city officers to prevent such

124 Ibid.
125 Ibid. That the reporter would invoke an agricultural metaphor in the title of the article reminds us of the extent to
which discourses of rural ideals were deployed when discussing issues of the corrupting influence of outdoor advertising.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 The Globe, 1 October, 1902.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
offending advertisements before they were displayed. It was hoped, noted the journalist, that bill
posters would be added to those requiring a licence and that a proposed fine of from $30 to $500
would solve the problem. The article concluded that, at present, only the Star Theatre submitted
its advertisements to a city inspector before being posted.\textsuperscript{131}

But the problem persisted. Four years later, the \textit{Star}, carried the headline, “Radical
Action to Suppress Theater Posters in Toronto.”\textsuperscript{132} The drastic measures included asking the
Dominion Parliament to “pass legislation . . . that will put the theatrical poster out of business by
prohibiting its importation or display, and confining billboard advertising to the use of type.”\textsuperscript{133}
Employing the the federal government against these powerful images was thought by some to be
the only way to stop the menace. Billboards reduced to using words instead of images were
assumed to be less harmful. When “a batch of objectionable” theatrical posters slipped through
the city’s censors, “white paper was pasted over the obnoxious parts.”\textsuperscript{134} Covering up images of
alcohol, violence and women’s bodies with white paper was only a stop-gap measure. The article
concluded, “Now comes the proposal to prohibit posters entirely.”\textsuperscript{135}

But censorship was not an easy victory for those making a fetish out of theatrical
advertisements. The \textit{Star} carried another article called, “Can’t Regulate the Poster Girl.”\textsuperscript{136} The
Ontario Legislature rejected a bill proposed by E. E. Fraser from Welland, who wanted Municipal
Councils to have the power to regulate the construction or erection of billboards. Noting “the
desecration of Ontario[‘s] landscape by the erection of unsightly billboards and advertising
devices,” the article quoted the politician as saying, “It’s been a disgrace for years, particularly at

\textsuperscript{131} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{132} \textit{The Star}, 7 March, 1906.
\textsuperscript{133} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{134} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{135} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{136} \textit{The Star}, 16 March 1909.
Niagara.” The politician’s concerns suggest that by now the issue of immoral advertising had taken on an aesthetic element. The sublime beauty of Niagara Falls was marred by billboards and posters. Nevertheless, as the title of the Star’s article reminded readers, the overt sexuality of the advertisements with their flagrant display of women’s bodies remained at the heart of public anxiety. But Fraser’s bill was thrown out after strong opposition. H. T. Kelly, for one, argued that the bill was “an infringement of private rights,” and objected that the “whole Province should not be penalized.” Kelly, according to the article, was a vehement defender of “private interests” against government regulation. M.P.P. Allan Studholme, interjected suddenly, “Oh, we’ve discussed this from a legal standpoint. Let’s look at it from a common sense one.” He went on “at length” about the “injustice [of the proposed bill] to the sign painter and lithographer.” Echoing the kind of pro-business, pro-rights argument of Kelly, Studholme was part of an opposition “so strong . . . that the committee finally threw [the bill] out.” The scantily clad poster girl would remain unregulated by the sober legislators at Queen’s Park.

Major H. J. Snelgrove, the president of the Ontario Horticultural Association, was gravely disappointed about Fraser’s loss. With billboards squarely in his sites, the Major addressed the yearly convention of horticulturalists. The Star noted that he “handled the billboard question with ungloved hands in his annual address.” Referring approvingly to Fraser’s bill, Snelgrove lamented that in committee “it was quietly strangled and committed to limb.” “Upon investigation,” he continued, “the Ethiopian in the woodpile was the Bill-Posters Union of

137 For an account of Niagara Falls, including efforts to regulate tourism to preserve its natural beauty, see Karen Dubinsky, *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1999.)
138 *The Star*, 16 March 1909.
141 *The Star*, 9 November, 1909.
Toronto.”

Despite being “heartily supported” by the press, the avid gardener, supposed that the bill “was not pushed with sufficient vigour in the House.”

Spoiling for a fight, the major rallied his troops to “take action again and fight the thing through to a finish.”

Opening another front, he advocated an attack on “the billboards monstrosity,” by going after owners of vacant lots. By renting out their fences they were guilty of “encouraging immorality and increasing [the] hideousness of the streets.” Once again, we see the easy congruence between moral and aesthetic concerns. “Where others beautify,” continued Snelgrove, “he debases, and does so sordidly and selfishly.” The solution was to tax these immoral despoilers “to the hilt.”

The Globe, in its “Woman at Work and Play” section, decided regarding “The Poster Nuisance,” that after much thought, “the weight of evidence was against this commercial development.”

The author explained that the opposition to billboards and posters was spearheaded by various civic and municipal associations which were now “receiving active and powerful support from business interests.” She likened the offensive posters and billboards to an evil spread by “the cupidity of ruthless advertisers.”

Again referring to these advertisements as an evil, she notes that objections to them included both aesthetic reasons and “social and moral” concerns. They “impair natural beauty,” and “degrade our standards of taste and culture.”

But they could also “increase peril,” “in some cases create unsanitary conditions,” and “lessen the delicacy of thought and refinement in the community.”

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144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
146 Ibid.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 The Globe, 30 June, 1909.
150 Ibid.
151 Ibid.
152 Ibid.
153 Ibid.
multi-faceted approach involving the clergy, the press, and even a boycott against unscrupulous advertisers.\textsuperscript{154}

Despite their efforts, four years later in 1912, headlines still read, “SIGNBOARD PLAGUE SWEEPS THE CITY,” “THE LAW IS NOT OBEYED,” “Signs Erected in Tiers to Overcome the Ten-Foot Limit – One Near Walmer Road and Bloor Street Rises Twenty Feet in the Air.”\textsuperscript{155} “Citizens are complaining about the big billboards spreading over the landscape in this city,” wrote the journalist. “What many people regard as a plague of big advertising signs,” he went on, “has come upon the city, and in almost every section where there is any vacant land the billboard rears its ugly head.” Like locusts descending on a farmer’s field, “the signboards seem to be growing in size as well as in numbers, and great is the outcry from citizens whose tastes do not lead to admiration of these structures.”\textsuperscript{156} “Protest after protest is received at City Hall . . .” continued the lament, “but still the work of erecting these blotches on the horizon goes merrily along.”\textsuperscript{157} One behemoth, which rose over twenty feet in the air, took up a prime spot across from the Trinity Methodist Church. That advertisers felt secure enough to put up an illegal billboard across from a prominent downtown church suggests the frenzied state of advertising in the city and the lengths to which some entrepreneurs were willing to go.

An outcry was raised, but the problem seemed to be too big to stop. “BILLBOARDS NEAR CHURCHES DOOMED,” read another Globe headline somewhat optimistically.\textsuperscript{158} “The unsightly billboard has invaded the neighborhood of some of the churches in this city.”\textsuperscript{159} The large board across from Trinity Methodist Church was mentioned as was another in the vicinity

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{155} The Globe, 13 July, 1912.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{158} The Globe, 1 August, 1912.
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid.
of the “Bathurst Street Methodist Church.””\textsuperscript{160} It was noted that such billboards also appeared in purely residential areas.\textsuperscript{161} The author might have mentioned that churches themselves were, at least according to C. S. Clark, making use of advertisements for their Sunday attractions. “Like the merchant, or the theatre,” wrote Clark, “the church of God advertises its wares to the wayfarer.”\textsuperscript{162} After providing his readers with several examples from various Toronto churches, he concludes sardonically, “I consider the above nearly perfect, you have the whole programme presented to you, no opera could do more than that.”\textsuperscript{163} Of another such advertisement, Clark pronounced, One step further—costuming the performers in tights—and the theatre is outdone.”\textsuperscript{164} But such self-reflection was not to be had by those angered by theatrical billboards. A great deal of moral outrage was recorded in, and perhaps encouraged by, the \textit{Globe}’s article. It ended, however, by conceding that “the committee is doubtful as to its power to refuse a permit for a signboard, if it does not interfere with the fire protection of a building or with the rights of any citizen, hence a report on the question will be obtained from the City Solicitor.”\textsuperscript{165}

The regulation of billboards and posters was not only justified on religious and moral grounds. As I have suggested, after the turn of the century, anti-poster tirades could also encompass an aesthetic discourse that carried currency with certain segments of society. To many people, these advertisements blighted the urban landscape. And in the long history of Toronto’s inferiority complex, local worthies could not help but compare their city with others that had done more to stop the advertising plague. The Municipal Art League of Chicago, where according to the \textit{Globe} “they make culture hum,” released a report listing guidelines for city

\textsuperscript{160} \textit{Ibid.}.
\textsuperscript{161} As with churches, certain segments of society were angered that these and other forms of advertisements found their way into residential areas. See also \textit{The Globe}, 16 February, 1914. See also my discussion above regarding advertisements in residential areas.
\textsuperscript{162} Clark, \textit{Of Toronto}, 158.
\textsuperscript{163} \textit{Ibid.}.
\textsuperscript{164} \textit{Ibid.}.
\textsuperscript{165} \textit{The Globe}, 1 August, 1912.
developers that “offers not a few excellent suggestions to other cities that might be named of the ‘go thou and do likewise’ variety.”\textsuperscript{166} Chief amongst these reforms were listed “the abolition of banners and advertising signs stretched across the streets and the regulation of billboards . . . ”\textsuperscript{167} The Windy City sophisticates also recommended “more aesthetic signs on business buildings, uniform designs for street newsstands and ‘improvements in decorative treatment of business wagons and trucks.”\textsuperscript{168}

Toronto newspapers carried stories of other American cities that took on the billboard menace. The \textit{Star}, for instance, reported that the politicians of Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, were particularly farsighted.\textsuperscript{169} The city council there responded to the anti-billboard campaign by passing an ordinance imposing a fine “upon any person erecting outdoor advertising contrary to the new restrictions.”\textsuperscript{170} It was forbidden to “paste, paint, brand, stamp, or in any manner whatsoever place upon, or attach to, any building, fence, bridge, gate, outbuilding, tree, or other object, upon any premises situated within 500 feet of any public building, church, school, charitable institution, park, or playground, any written, printed, painted, or other advertisement, bill, notice, sign, card, or poster.”\textsuperscript{171} Council had pretty much covered its bases. As if to highlight their forward looking good-governance, the article also noted approvingly that Wilkes-Barre was also the first city in Pennsylvania to set aside public money for the beautification of highways by purchasing and maintaining trees.\textsuperscript{172}

\textsuperscript{166} \textit{The Globe}, 16 February, 1901.
\textsuperscript{167} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{168} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{169} \textit{The Star}, 6 May, 1909.
\textsuperscript{170} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{171} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{172} \textit{Ibid}.
Reporting on another gathering of would-be aesthetes, the Globe championed their efforts “TO RID TORONTO OF ITS UGLINESS.”

Not surprisingly, they looked south of the border to take stock of the progress of “The Movement in Other Cities on the American Continent.”

In listing the many deficiencies of Toronto when compared to their southern counterparts, one prominent speaker cited “our hoardings for posters.” “And yet we get used to our streets with ruined perspectives, our hideous billboards and all the rest,” he opined “just because we Canadians have always seen them.” In an address to the Canadian Club, “under the auspices of the Guild of Civic Art,” a Mr. Woodruff of Philadelphia, “whose practical participation in a movement that may now be fairly described as national, if not continental,” proceeded to outline his thoughts on civic improvement.

Although a good deal of his talk was devoted to issues of public schooling and hygiene, he spent considerable time on more aesthetic concerns.

“Billboards, poster fences, and painted signs are not insanitary, [sic]” although the W.C.T.U and Lieutenant-Colonel Denison might think otherwise, “but they are decidedly unesthetic [sic] and quite unnecessary,” Woodruff concluded. Perhaps in an effort to shame Torontonians into taking the issue seriously, another article noted that “[m]ost of the big municipalities in South America control the billboards and allow only those signs posted which are passed on.”

“Boards not owned by the cities,” the piece claimed, “are taxed heavily in most places.”

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175 Ibid.

176 Ibid.

177 The Globe, 10 December, 1907.

178 Ibid.

179 The Globe, 27 April, 1910.

180 Ibid.
At the morning session of the Annual Convention of the Ontario Horticultural Association in November of 1908, amongst the usual business of electing officers and the reading of a “scientific paper” on modifying cobs of corn to fit into cans or jars, members still had time to attack obnoxious posters. The group was looking to increase its funding from the Department of Agriculture to keep up with a bumper crop of new members. Their novel solution: “The suggestion that a tax be placed upon billboards was unanimously carried.” With the Minister of Agriculture present, president of the association, Major H. G. Snelgrove, opened the meeting with a speech entitled “The Ministry of Beauty.” In the major’s site were the outdoor advertisements ruining the splendour of his province. Professor Hutt, of the Ontario Agricultural College, regaled members with the progress of the “Civic Improvement Movement.” He demanded action against the “erection of all advertising monstrosities.” For the professor, and the many esteemed delegates gathered for the annual convention, their anger over outdoor advertising was that it marred the beauty of their towns and cities. Hutt noted approvingly that Ontario’s civic improvement movement was having a profound effect on the overall beauty of the province. Members looked to other countries, especially Great Britain and the United States with admiration. Increased prosperity had allowed Ontarians to travel “to see what other countries were doing.” The Minister, for his part, read a letter from the head of the American Civic Association inviting its Canadian counterpart into a transnational partnership including the formation of a Canadian executive.

182 Ibid.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
186 Ibid.
But regulating signboards and other forms of advertising was not so easy in Toronto the Good. It was a city built on a deeply rooted belief in the sanctity of private property. Throughout the newspaper articles, speeches and council minutes runs a vein of insecurity over the legitimacy of efforts to crack down on these powerful images. The journalist who lauded the efforts of the Municipal Art League of Chicago mulled over the issue of interfering with private property.187 “To accomplish this,” mused the reporter, “would not necessarily be to infringe upon the rights of ownership or to leave no room for the gratification of individual taste.”188 “All that should be required of an owner is that he should consider the structure he may be contemplating not as an independent entity, but as a member of a group, and,” here quoting from the League’s suggestions, “‘bound to an orderly and a beautiful co-operation with the other members of the group, if they are not absolutely discordant and inexcusable.’”189 As if to rein in the excesses of its co-operative rhetoric, the Art League ended its flight of fancy with a *quid pro quo* to capitalism. The author of the article must have felt a similar pressure. He concluded the piece with an ambiguous question: “Does this smack too much of Bellamy and Sir Thomas More for the twentieth century?”190

Whether regulations were attempted for moral or aesthetic reasons, the debate invariably involved the individual or business’ right to private ownership. Attempts at passing by-laws often failed. “With a view to controlling the class of posters and bills put up in the city,” ran an article in early 1901, “Mr Caswell, at the request of Judge McDougall, submitted a by-law to provide for licensing of bill posters and distributors.”191 “It was thrown out,” however, “on the

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188 *Ibid*.
190 *Ibid*.
grounds that it would prevent merchants from distributing their own handbills.” Operators of theatres and other forms of public entertainment were often businesspeople above all else, as were the rest of the advertisers cluttering the streets with their posters and billboards. Councillors struggled with the dilemma of keeping their city clean and prosperous. Articles that waxed eloquent on the advantages of civic improvement frequently felt compelled to spend a good deal of time addressing the issue of cost and convincing readers that the outlay would be worth it. Aesthetic or moral arguments were not an easy sell. In a case from Hamilton, reported in the *Globe*, a “petition from a number of residents in the vicinity of Peter and Queen streets against the billboards erected there . . . was laid before the Legislation Committee . . . with a request that they be removed.” “The City Solicitor,” however, “advised that the city could not prevent the erection of advertising boards on private property . . .”

Advertisers had to stand out in a public sphere that was increasingly ‘littered’ with messages; size and volume were felt to be the best way to catch the wandering consumer’s eye. As another article noted, some billboards were erected in tiers to get around the city’s height restrictions. What is more, many advertisers did not rely on technicalities and loopholes to skirt the law, they simply broke it outright. The Canadian Billposters and Distributors’ Association admitted in a letter to the Minister of Customs that a duty on posters and advertising was often evaded. And what about those oversized billboards afflicting downtown neighbourhoods? The city’s fire chief speculated as to why Toronto suffered from this plague of

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192 Ibid.
193 See for example “TO RID TORONTO OF ITS UGLINESS,” *The Globe*, 21 March, 1906. Virtually half of the article is devoted to explaining issues surrounding the costs of the improvement schemes.
194 *The Globe*, 13 May, 1911.
195 Ibid.
197 *The Globe*, 1 September, 1906.
illegal and enormous billboards.\textsuperscript{198} Explaining the process to reporters, Chief Thompson observed that if he was informed of an over-sized advertisement, he and the City Architect could remove it. “Of course, if I am not told of a board that is higher than the by-law allows it stands,” he confessed. “I suppose,” hypothesized the Chief, “some people put up boards more than ten feet in height and take a chance on my not hearing of it. They pay big rent for the use of the land, and they try to get all out of it they can.”\textsuperscript{199} With applications for permission flooding city hall, many billboards escaped the watchful eyes of Chief Thompson.\textsuperscript{200}

Signs of the Time

As Keith Walden observes, Victorian Toronto’s culture was a “culture of the eye.”\textsuperscript{201} Few appreciated this more than theatres and circuses who worked hard to capture the gaze through new and ever more compelling promotional techniques. In their efforts to arouse the desire of potential audience members, they regularly pushed the boundaries of the acceptable. From posting billboards with scantily clad women and exciting images of exotic Others, to deliberately courting controversy and condemnation in the press, theatre promoters were a driving force behind the expansion of advertising.\textsuperscript{202} As we have seen, their efforts crossed lines that made some who gazed upon them deeply uncomfortable.

Photographs taken in 1910 provide but one example of what many contemporaries felt was the vulgar lengths to which theatres would go in their ceaseless encroachment into the public

\textsuperscript{198} The Globe, 13 July, 1912.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{200} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{201} Keith Walden, Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 119.
\textsuperscript{202} For an account that illustrates some of the lengths entertainment entrepreneurs would go to in order to promote their acts, please see Vincent Landro, “Faking it: the press agent and celebrity illusion in early twentieth century American theatre,” Theatre History Studies 22, (June 2002): 95-113. According to theatre historian Kathleen Fraser, astute theatre managers would write attacks on their own productions in order to ensure a full house. Kathleen D. J. Fraser, “Theatre Management in the Nineteenth Century: Eugene A. McDowell in Canada 1874-1891,” Theatre History in Canada 1, (Spring 1980): 51.
sphere. Their subject is a somewhat seedy, two-story building squatting on the north-west corner of Bay and Adelaide Streets.²⁰³ [Figures 1-10 Gayety and Figure 1-11 Star] With almost every inch of its ramshackle façade plastered with advertising, the viewer is struck by the tumultuous disorder. The effect is only heightened by the sober exteriors of the surrounding buildings. Advertisements run the gamut from a large bill-board for the Scotland Woolen Mills to innumerable “Geary for Mayor” signs. By far the most prominent puffs, however, are devoted to the city’s two chief burlesque houses. In direct competition with each other, the Star and the Gayety vied for patrons. A pitched battle of titillation was fought out for pride of place on the building’s cluttered surface. The Star used several smaller signs exclaiming, “STAR FOR REAL BURLESQUE.” As if casting aspersions on the quality of the Gayety’s burlesque was not enough, the Star also employed larger signs touting the major draw, women’s bodies. One poster, a full story high, shouts STAR—The BRIGADIERS—THE LEADERS IN BURLESQUE, LOTS OF PRETTY GIRLS.”²⁰⁴ The Gayety, taking the moral high ground by avoiding jibes at the competition, countered with brightly coloured posters promoting “VANITY FAIR,” “THE MOST TALKED OF SHOW IN BURLESQUE.” Presumably much of the talk centred on the show’s more risqué elements. No doubt it too had its fair share of pretty girls. Overall, one is left with an impression of chaotic energy. With titles like “THE THIEF,” in print almost as tall as a person, and an image of a couple passionately embracing, the viewer confronts a veritable Babel of advertisements speaking the frenzied and at times confusing tongues of the modern entertainment industry. The overall effect hints at that of the theatres themselves: jumbled and exciting misrule.

²⁰⁴ CAT Fonds 1244, Item 335.
Figure 1-10  Gayety—Bay and Adelaide northwest Corner, c.1910
Figure 1-11 Star—Bay and Adelaide northwest Corner, c.1910
Much the same can be said of the early movie houses that would come to dominate public entertainment. Striving to create an atmosphere of carnivalesque excitement, managers wanted customers to feel as if they were entering another world. Cinemas such as the Auditorium Theatre and the Comique were brightly lit and ornately decorated pleasure houses designed to tempt Toronto audiences to enter.\textsuperscript{205} [Figures 1-12 Auditorium Theatre, c. 1910 and 1-13 Comique] Hinting at the public’s desire for novelty, they reminded passersby that there were new films every day.\textsuperscript{206} The fronts of these movie houses boasted a kaleidoscope of colourful posters and, as in the case of the Comique, more permanent representations that included a beautiful if somewhat under-dressed young woman.\textsuperscript{207} The Atrium, Toronto’s first permanent cinema, opened in 1906 under John Griffin. It changed its name to the Red Mill Theatre in 1911.\textsuperscript{208} Pictures taken between 1911 and 1913 reveal a cavalcade of posters and people. In one, the viewer looks slightly down to the front entrance on Yonge Street.\textsuperscript{209} [Figure 1-14 Red Mill Entrance] Eight large movie-posters dominate the patrons milling about underneath. One depicts a man in blackface, glaring wildly. Another shows a woman provocatively posed on the lap of an admiring suitor. Beckoned by these and other equally compelling advertisements, the Red Mill Theatre attracted a healthy mix of patrons, including women and men of a variety of ages.

\textsuperscript{205} Comique, 1910. City of Toronto Archives. Modern print from copy negative. Fonds 1244, Item 320.
\textsuperscript{206} Auditorium Theatre, 1910. City of Toronto Archives. Modern print from copy negative. Fonds1244, Item 320C.
\textsuperscript{207} Ibid. Both movie houses had signs to this effect prominently displayed.
\textsuperscript{208} CAT Fonds 1244, Item 320.
\textsuperscript{209} Although I have not found evidence to prove the connection, it is likely that the name of the Red Mill Theatre was connected to the infamous Moulin Rouge.
\textsuperscript{209} Front of Red Mill Theatre. City of Toronto Archives. Modern print from copy negative. Fonds 1244, Item 320A.
Figure 1-12   Auditorium Theatre, c.1910
Figure 1-13  The Comique Theatre, c. 1907
Figure 1-14  Red Mill Entrance 183 Yonge St., c. 1911
Two photographs, however, show one of the city’s ever-present young street ‘urchins’ posing outside the entranceway. In the first, the viewer sees two well-dressed middle-aged women presumably on their way to a matinee. To their right, leaning nonchalantly against a post, the boy stares at the viewer. Many contemporaries would have read him as a parable of the moral pitfalls surrounding public entertainment. Behind and to his left, a sign reads “Children under 15 not admitted unless accompanied by . . .” This was exactly what the W.C.T.U. had been warning of.

As the historian Steven Maynard observes, playhouses and movie cinemas were potential cruising grounds for men and boys looking for same-sex encounters. In the context of rapidly expanding public entertainment, Maynard argues that street boys used sex to get into Toronto’s theatres. Older men paid for their admission after sex or used the theatre itself as a venue for the clandestine encounter. In the next photograph, the boy stands less than a poster’s width away from a respectable-looking man. Behind and all around these two anonymous Torontonians, emblazoned with lines reading “RED GIRL’S SACRIFICE,” and accompanied by

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211 Ibid. The clock inside a large case of advertisements read 2:30.
212 Ibid. The image is obscured but presumably it reads, “Children under 15 not admitted unless accompanied by an adult.”
213 Stephen Maynard notes that the relationship between 15 year old Arnold and 26-year old Thomas “appears to have been based on a mixture of economic need and an insatiable desire for the theatre.” Steven Maynard, “‘Horrible Temptations’: Sex, Men, and Working-Class Male Youth in Urban Ontario, 1890-1935,” *Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 2, (1997): 194-95, 207.
214 Maynard, “‘Horrible Temptations,’” 207.
215 Ibid.
stereotyped depictions of Indians in all their imagined glory, are posters advertising the day’s entertainment.

As reformers feared, posters and billboards enticed the city’s impressionable youth into a life of dissipation. And Toronto’s young street boys loved the theatre. The Toronto Vigilance Committee, formed in 1911, pointed out to the attorney general that although young boys might be forbidden to enter movie-houses such as the Red Mill Theatre without an adult, “these same minors can freely gain access to a theatre where a burlesque company is giving a risqué performance and there, in a smoke-beclouded atmosphere, both hear and see things extremely detrimental.”

Referring to the city’s omnipresent street boys, the journalist and avid slummer C. S. Clark reported to Torontonians, that “the larger boys spend a considerable portion of their earnings for tobacco and drink, and they patronize all the theatres, their criticism of which are really worth hearing . . .”

“The course of life which they pursue,” however, “leads to miserable results, as when a newsboy gets to be seventeen years of age he finds that his avocation is at an end, it does not produce money enough and he has acquired lazy, listless habits, which totally unfit him for any kind of work.”

The youth wanders the “large cities of the United States,” picking up habits that are “absolutely revolting.” Clark left no doubt about the nature of those habits: “The crime that banished Lord Somerset from London society [i.e. sodomy] is committed according to their reports, every night in some of the lodging houses in Chicago.”

Clark’s narrative of sexual danger suggests that he was following in the journalistic steps of pioneering ‘slummer’ Frederick Greenwood. The latter, according to the historian Seth Koven, shocked British readers with an account of homosexuality—including sex between men.

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216 As qtd. in Maynard, “Horrible Temptations,” 228.
217 Clark, Of Toronto, 83.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
and boys—run rampant amongst the inmates of London’s casual wards. The sordid accounts based on ‘undercover’ immersion in the seedier side of Victorian London spawned a legion of would-be imitators.\textsuperscript{220} So just what was this young boy doing in front of the Red Mill? Perhaps he was attracted by the Rabelaisian misrule of the posters or simply by the prospect of a brief respite from the ordinary world of poverty and indifference outside.\textsuperscript{221}

As we have seen from the angry reports of people such as Todd and Denison, advertisements hawking various entertainments were not anchored to theatre-fronts. Indeed, these temptations became more pervasive, carrying their messages into virtually every corner of the city. A photograph of a trolley on Yonge Street from the early nineteen hundreds shows the front of it plastered with an advertisement for an “XMAS PANTOMIME.”\textsuperscript{222} [Figure 1-2 XMAS PANTOMIME] An earlier picture shows the south-west corner of Sherbourne and Carlton Streets.\textsuperscript{223} [Figure 1-8 Great Band] The stately tree-lined avenues are quiet and residential in character. In the background, a church steeple rises serenely from a canopy of mature trees. In the foreground, however, a large poster mars the otherwise pleasant streetscape. It appears to advertise a “GREAT BAND.” Posters and billboards increasingly cluttered the urban landscape. A photograph of the Queen Street Subway shows a long fence papered with posters and the tattered remains thereof.\textsuperscript{224} [Figure 1-4 Queen St. Subway] Colonizing the city with their


\textsuperscript{221} It is also possible that he simply wanted to have his photograph taken. That in itself, would have been exciting.

\textsuperscript{222} Xmas Pantomime, circa 1900-1920. City of Toronto Archives. Modern print from copy negative. Fonds 1497, Item 263. Several photographs of the Hamilton Street Railway, in the collection of the Hamilton Public Library show streetcars advertising theatres and early cinemas such as the Savoy, Temple, the Princess and the Grand Opera House. Entertainments included Closing of the Circuit and An Idyll of Erin. See, “Hamilton-Buses-Hamilton Street Railway-Car #48,” as well as “Hamilton-Streets-King and James Streets Photo # 02577.”

\textsuperscript{223} South West Corner of Sherbourne and Carlton, circa 1885-1895. City of Toronto Archives. Modern print from copy negative. Fonds 1478, Item 11.

\textsuperscript{224} Queen Street Subway looking from the south, circa 1900-1920. City of Toronto Archives. Modern print from copy negative. Fonds 1497, Item 118.
transgressive messages, these advertisements insinuated themselves into the everyday lives of the people.

Bengough noticed the spread of advertising throughout his city. Many of his graphic satires included posters in the background pasted to fences. Sometimes, as in the case of several political cartoons, they are included to provide the viewer with information necessary to interpret the satire. In others, however, they appear as illegible signs of urban life, included—perhaps unconsciously—simply because they were such a common feature of the cityscape. In “THE UPSHOT (OR RATHER DOWNSHOT) OF IT,” he even adapted a theatrical poster to launch a trenchant critique of Sir John A. Macdonald’s protectionist policies. [Figure 1-15 THE UPSHOT] But Bengough, always an astute observer of the shifting culture, drew attention to the billboard issue through several graphic satires. In “THE HUMOURS OF OUR BILLBOARDS,” he depicts a scene common to Victorian Toronto. [Figure 1-16 THE HUMOURS] A large fence is covered over with a confusing Babel of posters for various products, lectures and plays. The posters mirror the disorder that many felt characterized public entertainments. They overlap and interrupt each other creating an at times incoherent jumble of images and text impossible to comprehend. To the likes of Major Snelgrove and Professor Hutt, the humour might be hard to find beneath the painful truth. To them, this cartoon presented a disturbing image of much that was wrong with modern culture.

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225 Grip, 7 May, 1881; Grip, 24 March, 1883; Grip, 28 November, 1885; Grip, 23 October, 1886.
226 Grip, 30 January, 1892.
227 “THE UPSHOT (OR DOWNSHOT) OF IT,” Grip, 25 October, 1890.
228 Punch made several graphic satires about theatrical and other forms of outdoor advertising in a similar vein to Bengough’s. See for example, Punch, “ADVERTISING IN EXCELSIS,” Almanack for 1886; Punch, “HOW WE ADVERTISE NOW,” December 3, 1887; and, Punch, September 6, 1890.
229 Grip, 2 May, 1874.
Figure 1-15 THE UPSHOT

THE UPSHOT (OR RATHER DOWNSHOT) OF IT.
(With acknowledgments to a certain theatrical poster.)
Figure 1-16    THE HUMOURS
Bengough offered up a similar critique of American advertising excess in another cartoon called “AN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE.”\textsuperscript{230} In it, a young couple, arm-in-arm, are out for a pleasant walk in the country. Instead of rolling hills and verdant fields, however, they encounter a landscape completely given over to advertising. A giant board in the shape of a liquor bottle touts the benefits of Mrs. Killslow’s soothing syrup. Crushem’s Corsets and Swatt’s Emulsion of Kerosene Oil, along with a host of other companies, block out the scenery completely. Rocks, mountains and even houses are covered with advertisements.

But Bengough was much less forgiving of those theatrical advertisements that relied on sex to fill seats. In 1885, Bengough chided the proprietor of the Grand Opera House after the appearance of the Rentz-Santley Novelty and Burlesque Company.\textsuperscript{231} An all-female burlesque show relying on low comedy and even lower neck-lines, Bengough did not approve. His condemnation included depictions of the posters that would have been used to promote the unseemly show. They tempt the public with life-size images of “AN ADAMLESS EDEN” populated by several buxom young women in revealing costumes.\textsuperscript{232} Posters such as the ones in Figures 1-19 and 1-20 were scattered throughout Victorian Toronto. They touted everything from suggestive \textit{tableaux vivants}, burlesque shows with pretty dancing girls, erotic opera bouffe, and

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{230} “AN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE,” \textit{Grip}, 16 April, 1892.
\textsuperscript{231} “THE MAYOR TO THE PROPRIETOR OF THE GRAND OPERA HOUSE,” \textit{Grip}, 21 March, 1885.
\textsuperscript{232} \textit{Ibid.}
\end{footnotesize}
Figure 1-17   AN AMERICAN LANDSCAPE
Figure 1-18  Rentz-Santley Girls
Figure 1-19  Minstrel Show
Figure 1-20  Opera Bouffe
living statuary—women wearing flesh-coloured tights and posing like classical sculptures so as to appear naked.

Posters also promoted notorious actresses such as Sarah Bernhardt, whose gender-bending adventures and adulterous relationships ensured full houses at virtually all of her Toronto performances. That actresses like Bernhardt reveled in their transgressive roles, preferring pleasure to propriety, challenged those whose understanding of gender was more traditional. Billboards and posters touting infamous women such as the lascivious and murderous Lucretia Borgia only added to the gender trouble. [Figure 1-21 Lucretia Borgia] Although the messages of many of these advertisements were hardly feminist in nature, they showed women new ways of performing their womanhood.\textsuperscript{233} By doing so, they exposed deep rifts in society’s core values. When religious authorities condemned them, for instance, attendance levels soared.

With some regularity, theatrical posters and billboards combined the erotic display of women with another of Toronto’s preoccupations: race. An example that combined these intertwined discourses heralded “The most Remarkable Human Being EVER BORN TO LIVE.”\textsuperscript{234} [Figure 1-22 Two Headed Girl] The advertisement depicts a set of bare-shouldered, conjoined twins in a dress with a pronounced décolletage. It stops shortly, and suggestively, just below their knees. The textual narrative of the poster links the racial history of the sisters to their


\textsuperscript{234} “1869 Two headed girl,” Baldwin Collection. Toronto Reference Library.
Figure 1-21  Lucretia Borgia!
THE WORLD'S WONDER IS HERE!
IMMENSE SUCCESS! CROWDED HOUSES!
THREE DAYS LONGER IN TORONTO,
At Agricultural Hall, Toronto, One Side of Yonge Street.
Thursday, Friday and Saturday, December 2, 3, & 4,
Afternoon and Evening:
TWO HEADED GIRL!
TWO SEPARATE, WELL DEVELOPED HEADS
AND
TWO SEPARATE AND DISTINCT SETS OF ARMS AND SHOULDERS!
All of Which Blend into One Body.

SEVENTEEN YEARS OLD.

In Perfect Health.

Two Separate, Well Developed Heads

And

Two Separate and Distinct Sets of Arms and Shoulders!
All of Which Blend into One Body.

The Most Remarkable Human Being
EVER BORN TO LIVE!

THE CLIMAX OF NATURE’S WONDERS!

FREAK OF NATURE
EVER SEEN ON EARTH!

From the creation of our five senses there has been nothing to compare with the Human Two Headed Girl. Person should be on hand a night of which a lifetime will never be forgotten.

ADMISSION:

CHILDREN UNDER 10 YEARS, 10 CENTS.

OPEN FROM 2 TO 4 AND 7 TO 9 P.M.

C. H. FREEDLEY, Manager.

The Daily Telegram Printing House, Bay Street, Queen City, Toronto.
status as freaks: “. . . born a slave . . . [and] of a bright Mulatto complexion, with Two Separate, [and] Well Developed Heads . . .” The poster contains a not so subtle sexual subtext. Presented as an object of interracial sexual longing, “her” status as “Mulatto” meant that the conjoined twins were themselves the product of transgressive sexuality.

Such racial grotesques provided Torontonians the opportunity to ponder the boundaries between their sense of self and these radically different others. An earlier visit by a pair of Siamese twins, the famous Cheng and Eng, was also advertised extensively around the city. Posters for their 1837 performance depict the conjoined pair in what audience members might take for traditional “Oriental” apparel. Even the textual depiction of them on the poster as, “CHANG-ENG,” with its umbilical hyphen, acts to emphasize their unusual connection. The image, plastered at various points in the city no doubt captured the attention of many. Suggesting the grotesque appeal of the image, the posters noted that admission came with either an engraved likeness or, for a little more money, a lithograph. [Figure 1-23 Siamese Twins] Posters tacked up in the market place, presented possibilities for sexual desire that many might not have otherwise considered. The Two Headed Girl’s racial origins might be read as a narrative of sexual danger, the moral plainly illustrated for all to see. For some, however, worried about the effects of such powerful images, the moral ought not to be seen at all.

I would like to juxtapose my discussion of the Two Headed Girl with another racial freak to illustrate the uses to which such people, and the posters that advertised them, were put. In 1885 a Chinese giant called Chang visited Toronto. Bengough commented that the “real Chinese

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236 Ibid.
"Giant" would be felt if Chinese immigrants were to "get a thorough foothold in Canada."237

[Figure 1-24 THE REAL CHINESE GIANT] Thus, such grotesques offered ‘white’ citizens an

Figure 1-23  Siamese Twins

237 “THE REAL CHINESE GIANT,” *Grip*, 12 September 1885.
avenue to discuss broader issues of racial or gender politics. In this case, a Chinese giant, threatening in his enormity, is inextricably linked to understandings of the ‘sinister’ significance of immigration to Canada of his fellow country-men. Within the cultural context of fears over Asian workers, posters for such public entertainments influenced the way ‘white’ people understood racial issues. What were the implications of the interracial desire expressed so publicly in an image of a “Mulatto” girl with two heads? Would posters depicting the Chinese Giant have stoked anxiety over racial degeneration? What, more importantly, would the children make of these images?

Bengough’s discomfort at being confronted with a Chinese giant, perhaps menacing him from the hoardings and billboards he passed on the way to work, suggests the racial anxiety that could be provoked by such advertisements. To many of his contemporaries, the liminality of theatrical advertisements depicting exotic Others provided a relatively safe place for them to explore racial difference. To those upset by the power of these images, however, depictions of racial Others were threatening. Literary critic Paul Brown maintains that colonial discourse requires risk if only to demonstrate the superiority of the coloniser. In other words, colonial discourse cannot merely state its pre-eminence, it must regularly perform it through triumph over danger. Depictions of battles between the armies of empire and their subjugated Others regularly appeared on the streets of Toronto. [Figure 1-25 The Siege of Sebastopol] With their exotic settings and edge-of-the-seat combat between the ‘white’ self and the coloured Other, these posters both confirmed and challenged racial tropes.

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An example of this is may be seen in an advertisement featuring Marietta Ravel in the lead role of the *French Spy; Or, the Fall of Algiers*. Playing at the Royal Lyceum in April of 1872, the poster promised “TERRIFIC SWORD PLAY,” a “WILD ARAB DANCE,” and a spectacular re-enactment of the “FALL OF ALGIERS.” Occupying the centre of the poster was an image of two men engaged in ferocious combat. On the ground, with his sword held defensively above his turban-wrapped head is a dark-skinned man with a bushy beard about to be killed. Standing over him is a ‘white’ man with his sword ready to crash down upon the prostrate Arab. In the topsy-turvy troubling of race and gender, Ravel’s performance strayed dangerously close to interracial and homoerotic themes. The famous actress played a mute named Mathilde de Marique. In the play, Marique impersonated a French soldier, who then passed as an Arab boy named Hamet, who finally went on to assume the costume of a harem woman. Indeed, as some posters for her performance point out, it was Ravel who engaged in the daring battle of broadswords depicted on the poster. Her fierce combat with the dark Other, complicated by her cross-dressing, thrilled Victorian audiences with its combination of violence and interracial desire. And yet, this kind of violent disruption of gender was precisely the kind of image people like Lieutenant-Colonel Denison wanted to keep from children.

Even if, as Paul Brown argues, there is comfort to be found in the depiction of the Other’s subjugation, critics of these powerful images recognized that they opened up young minds to otherwise hidden temptations. As I have shown with the poster of the “Two-Headed Girl,” interracial longing complicated any disgust engendered by the twins’ appearance in the public sphere. What might a young woman make of Ravel’s gender-troubling performance?

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239 “Marietta Ravel” R. Butland Collection. Toronto Reference Library.
240 The poster itself is constructed to preclude such judgments by claiming: “SHE IS NO MONSTROSITY; has no repulsive look about her in the least, but on the contrary is VERY INTERESTING.” Nevertheless, the fact that its designers felt compelled to include such an assertion is revealing.
Figure 1-25 Siege of Sebastopol
Figure 1-26  French Spy
As Homi K. Bhabha’s work on ambivalence and the instability of stereotypes demonstrates, such iterations or performances of race demand subtle attention to their effects.241 Each poster or billboard could open up imaginative possibilities that more traditional Torontonians found threatening. Although many such advertisements offered up stereotypical performances of gender or race, others were simultaneously complicated by an ambivalence—sexual desire in the case of the “Two-Headed Girl”—that impedes simplistic interpretation. The nature of these advertisements, posted all over the public sphere, reveals the extent to which they demonstrate “the repetitive, recursive strategy of the performative.”242 To detractors, provocative images creating interracial desire were precisely the kind of thing corrupting Toronto’s youth.

Another advertisement for Toronto’s Royal Opera House Company, which took its spectacular “Aladdin; or, The Wonderful Lamp” to the Mechanics’ Hall in Hamilton, gives a sense of the way Orientalism could blend the exotic with the erotic.243 [Figure 1-27 Aladdin] The poster depicts an exciting fantasy world of faraway deserts and mysterious grand viziers. An image of a magnificent genie, with a thick beard and ‘Oriental’ costume replete with a giant snake-covered staff, appears from a glowing lamp. A young man, with a long pony-tail, bows down before the frightening apparition. According to the poster, “upwards of 32,000” people saw the show in Toronto. One of the main draws was the “GRAND AMAZONIAN MARCH” featuring “20 YOUNG AND BEAUTIFUL LADIES.”244 The advertisement creates a mysterious and enchanting world. The Other could be threatening, but also strangely alluring.

244 Ibid.
Figure 1-27  Aladdin
When the Circus Comes to Town

As perhaps the single largest user of outdoor advertising for much of the nineteenth century, the circus was at the forefront of the negotiation over what was appropriate in the public sphere. Circus bills were notorious for their exaggerated claims. In one of Grip’s tongue-in-cheek marriage dramas, an incredulous husband asks his wife, “’What circus bill have you been reading now?’”245 Widely held was the belief that circus advertisements were prone to embellishment. Indeed, a trope of many a circus bill was a comment distancing itself from the hyperbole and downright lies of its competitors.246 But circus bills were also known for their displays of women’s bodies. When the circus comes to the imaginary town of Elgin, in Sara Jeanette Duncan’s The Imperialist, the farmers of Fox County stand “agape before the posters . . .”247 The narrator jests that “with all their chic and shock they cannot produce such posters nowadays, nor are there any vacant lots to form attractive backgrounds . . .”248 Published in 1904, the book made a joke of the simple farmers’ naïveté in the face of such suggestive advertising.

Even as the circus attempted to clean up its image, it could never completely shake off the perception of disorder and dissipation that clung to it.249 In a form letter to the Reverend Henry

245 Grip, 16 July, 1881.
246 An advertisement for the R. Sands Grand Multiserial Combination Circus and Homohippodeal Amphitheatre reads: “No half-way Circus, with a Stuffed Horned Borao [sic], and a manufactured Hippopotumus [sic], to gull the people with flaming handbills . . .” The Globe, 16 June, 1862. An advertisement for Adam Forepaugh and the Sell’s Brothers circus reads “NO FALSE STATEMENTS/ No Fake Figures/No Ridiculous Exaggeration.” The Hamilton Spectator, 4 June, 1904.
248 Ibid.
249 As late as 1905, newspapers were following the story of a violent crime spree perpetrated by a gang of circus workers in Quebec. 23 soldiers and 12 members of the provincial police were sent to arrest the gang, with orders to shoot if necessary, according to newspaper accounts. Some workers from the Lemon Brothers’ circus had abducted a young woman and attempted to assault her in a secluded place. After managing to attract help the woman escaped and local constable attempted to arrest the culprits. The situation degenerated into a battle between townsfolk and as many as 100 circus hands armed with rifles and revolvers. The circus hands shot a Native man named Robertson before fleeing on board their train. At their next destination one of the workers shot a young woman named Tremblay. Eventually, the authorities arrested 4 men, two of whom were described as “colored” and two others
Scadding, P. T. Barnum claimed that “It has been [his] earnest endeavour . . . to elevate the tone and character of public amusements, and to strip them of every objectionable feature . . .”

Although it is not clear whether the good reverend made use of the two complimentary passes Barnum included, it is fair to say that circus bills, just like the entertainments themselves, relied on images of scantily clad women, exotic and frightening animals and an overall air of carnivalesque misrule to lure audiences in.

A quick word about these advertisements is necessary. Those that appear in this section on circuses are taken from newspapers. Placed next to news from around the world and grave editorials about matters of great import, these circus advertisements were, to say the least, a visual distraction. They represented a temptation that must have been compelling to some, and dreadful to others. It is also likely, however, that these exciting and often transgressive advertisements were at least somewhat similar to, if less bombastic than, the ones pasted on the hoardings and billboards of Victorian Toronto. These bills were used over and over again.

Information specific to a town or city, such as date and location, was added by hand or stamped in ink. Given these practices, it is reasonable to assume that the advertisements appearing in local newspapers bore at least a passing resemblance to those pasted on the fences and billboards of the city. In that sense, they provide an archive of sorts, allowing insights into the kinds of images that aroused and enticed people as they went about their business. Entertainment entrepreneurs such as P. T. Barnum, Adam Forepaugh and the Ringling Brothers pushed the medium to

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250 "1875 Barnum p. 1" Toronto Reference Library.
251 It is safe to assume that the circus ads that appeared in Toronto’s newspapers were tamer than the ones pasted around the city. They were certainly less colourful.
extremes. When a circus came to town, Victorian Toronto and its surroundings for many miles, was papered by advance agents with titillating advertisements for these and other circuses.

Women—or perhaps more accurately, their bodies—were central to circus advertising. They could be made to look and sound exotic, or they could be made to look daring and wild. Invariably, when they appeared in the public sphere they were less encumbered by clothing than the likes of Superintendent Todd. Their availability to the male gaze—including that of Toronto’s youth—was essential to the transgressive pull of circus bills. In keeping with carnival traditions of inversion of hierarchy, these advertisements depicted women performing their gender in radically different and very public ways.

A great many of the circus bills relied on a discourse of spectacular Orientalism. The foremost expression of this might very well have been the Ringling Brothers’ 1904 extravaganza, “Jerusalem and the Crusades.” [Figure 1-28 Jerusalem and the Crusades] Billed as “THE BIGGEST SHOW ON EARTH,” the entertainment featured the “DELIVERY OF JERUSALEM/FROM THE SARACENS BY THE CRUSADERS.”252 They also described it as a “radiant and dramatic interpretation of the beautiful and romantic story of the Crusades.”253 The show was set “in the ennobling days of chivalry, when loyalty, bravery, justice and gentleness went hand in hand, and courtesy to an enemy and woman was a cheerful duty.”254 Courtesy might not be the only thought running through a chivalrous knight’s mind, however, were he to take in the advertisements for this particular performance.255 Prominently featured in their exotic and revealing costumes were the show’s “300 DANCING GIRLS.” A virtual harem, the women’s dresses drew attention to their breasts and exposed legs. In an advertisement that

252 The Hamilton Spectator, 28 May, 1904.
253 The Hamilton Spectator, 6 June, 1904.
254 Ibid.
255 The Hamilton Spectator, 28 May, 1904.
exudes carnival excess, the exoticism of deserts and Muslims merges with an erotic abundance of exposed limbs and bellies.

Another common feature of circus bills was the Equestrienne. With short dresses and dangerous décolletages they were guaranteed to catch the wandering eye of potential customers. Their daring acrobatic performances, at a time when horse[man]ship was still amongst the manliest virtues, wowed audiences throughout the nineteenth century. Madame Virginia Sherwood, standing on one foot while her horse raced around a track, was given centre stage—at least on the advertisement—for the R. Sand’s production that visited Toronto in 1862.256 [Figure 1-29 Virginia Sherwood] The bill noted that she was “the most popular, beautiful and daring Equestrienne ever seen.” No doubt, those promoting Carlotta de Berg would beg to differ.257 [Figures 1-30 Carlotta (top) and 1-31 Carlotta (bottom)] Both Madame Sherwood and Ms. De Berg share their advertisements with other enticing, if smaller, images. Several of these lesser depictions are of other women, including acrobats and equestriennes. Yet, both women completely dominate the advertisement in terms of size, placement and action. Carlotta de Berg, with bare shoulders and ample bosom on display, is depicted jumping from her horse and bursting through a hoop of paper. About to land on the back of her powerful beast, she stretches one beautiful and seemingly naked leg beneath her while her outstretched and uncovered arms reach out before her. Almost flying through the air, the daring woman, whip in hand, is described as “awak[ening] the wildest enthusiasm,” from all who see her. Her control of the animal, her beauty and her bravery are emphasized in both text and image.

256 The Globe, 16 June, 1862.
257 The Globe, 18 June, 1867.
Figure 1-28 Jerusalem and the Crusades
Figure 1-30 Carlotta (top)
Much the same holds true for a Barnum advertisement where the great promoter deigns to share the page with Madame Dockrill, “The Empress of the Arena.” [Figure 1-32 Madame Dockrill] Dockrill is shown at the reins of four seemingly wild horses as she jumps from one to another. Barnum must have known the irresistible draw of these wild women as the show also featured Miss Emma Lake, “American Side-Saddle Queen,” Miss Katie Stokes, “The Premier American Bareback Equestrienne,” Mademoiselle Linda Jean, “The Queen of the Flaming Zone,” and another daring equestrienne known as Signora Marcellus. No doubt their beauty rivaled their talent. So risqué were such women that G. F. Bailey and Co.’s Circus advertised a “Grand Morning Exhibition” for those “who, from religious or other scruples, do not desire to witness the Equestrian and Gymnastic Exercises.” A small consolation given that, at least from the perspective of the W.C.T.U., these circus bills had already worked their harm.

The wording of various circus advertisements suggests that audiences were keenly interested in the attractiveness of these female performers. Both Sherwood and De Berg were described in terms of their beauty and Taylor’s World’s Circus made a point of bragging about having “The Handsomest Ladies . . .” of any circus around Adam Forepaugh, the infamous American circus promoter, grabbed headlines with a contest for the world’s most beautiful woman. Although the fix was in from the start, papers reported that Forepaugh was willing to pay $10,000 for the services of the loveliest woman living. A queenly sum, the publicity stunt solidified the connection between circuses and the display of the female body. These women

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259 The Globe, 1 July 1867.
260 The Globe, 21 September, 1874.
261 The Evening Telegram, 25 February, 1881. Although applicants mailed photographs to Forepaugh from around the world, the winner was already chosen before the contest began. Louise Montague, a burlesque singer and actress, went on to “win” the prize and tour with Forepaugh’s well-publicized pageant Lalla Rookh.
The Only Show Where Will Visit Canada This Season.

The Coming Event!
The Men of the Amphitheatre Permanent
According by
A Galaxy of Stars!
Wait For Me! I am Coming!

P.T. Barnum's Only Greatest Show on Earth
Which Is Coming to
Toronto for Two Days Only,
Wednesday and Thursday, July 23rd and 24th.
Col. Portland and King Sts.
Afternoon and Evening.
When Mr. Barnum will be present and will have the
honor of addressing his audience from the Arena.

"We Will Go to Barnum's"

It is elaborated by, "Before we know it will be time to the Barnum's World.
Go To Barnum's: Showmen in the Arena and Not Show on Earth.
Go To Barnum's: Showman in the Right Side House.

Mrs. Emma Lake, 'America's Side-Saddle Queen.'

Mrs. Katie Stowers, the Premier American Baseball Equivocals-Speel, Kenda Jean, 'The Queen of the Kicking Jane.'

Rona, National, Dutch, and other artists certified to be the best by Barnum's staff.

Madame Dockrill, The "Empress of the Arena."

WEDNESDAY MORNING, JULY 23rd,

Arranged for October of some events and entertainment. Some notes of art and fable. For
more information, please contact Barnum's office.

"Gallop" off Barnum, written by himself, for audience in joy of life offerings. Diff. American, word-dust price, & c.

Barnum's Greatest Show on Earth, formerly America's Greatest Show, is the most popular entertainment in the world.

Figure 1-32 Madame Dockrill
violated conventional standards of dress and decorum while simultaneously reinforcing the availability of the female body for the male gaze. That they regularly did so in posters, billboards and newspaper advertisements meant, to detractors, their corrupting influence spread far beyond the big top. That desires were enflamed by wild equestriennes and nearly naked acrobats is evidenced by the prominence given to these women in the advertisements. Despite their grace and occasional aristocratic title, these women were low. As performers they were suspect, linked to prostitutes in the minds of many.\textsuperscript{262} It was shocking to see images of them wearing so little and doing so much in the sober streets and prestigious papers of Victorian Toronto.

One image, entitled “A FAIR LION TAMER,” is worth exploring in greater detail.\textsuperscript{263} [Figure 1-33 A Fair Lion Tamer] It shows a lovely young woman with a dress that stops just above the knees. Unsurprisingly, it also reveals her arms and much of her breasts. She is surrounded by a variety of wild beasts, including a lion, a lioness, wolves and other dogs. Trapped in a cage with such creatures, the “fair lion tamer” remains calm, placidly feeding scraps of meat to the animals that seem to be completely under her control. Unlike many other women in circus advertisements, she ignores the whip, which sits in the foreground of the image passing suggestively through a hoop. The image represents an inversion of the already topsy-turvy world of carnival. The traditional lion-tamer was male. He was a man at ease with wild animals and his display of manliness was a popular part of circus entertainments. By usurping his role, if not his dress, the woman here has transgressed even within the framework of Rabelaisian misrule. As a result, she must be visually controlled. Although a tamer of animals, she herself is tamed. Her collar is her necklace and her bracelets reminiscent of shackles.

\textsuperscript{262} Tracy Davis, \textit{Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture} (New York: Routledge, 1991), 78
\textsuperscript{263} The Canadian Illustrated News, 8 April, 1882.
Figure 1-33  A FAIR LION TAMER
She performs for the audience, the men, and women, paying to see her body exposed both to the danger of the animals and to their own relentless and prying gaze. This scene and countless others like it were reproduced in the newspapers and hoardings of the Victorian city.

When circus bills and other advertisements were not covered with images of wild women, they positively brimmed with references to the cost of the spectacle. An integral part of carnival excess, the focus on money revealed an important cultural shift. As I argue in chapter five, when it came time to judge a show’s worth, moral and aesthetic values were fast giving way to the values of the market. To some, it was threatening to see so much being spent on immoral diversions. As the century wore on, entertainment entrepreneurs increasingly emphasized the expense of the production as one of the central selling points of their bills. A similar trend may be seen throughout public entertainments with theatre promoters calling the public’s attention to the vast sums spent on renovations or particular shows. Newspapers also carried stories about how much celebrities were paid, amounts which must have boggled the minds of many contemporaries.\(^{264}\) Just as Forepaugh was willing to pay $10 000 for a beautiful woman to exhibit, other circus promoters grabbed headlines by spending even more for their exotic animals. In 1862, Toronto was visited by the Hippozoonomadon, which took its unusual name, at least in part, from one of its star attractions.\(^{265}\) [Figure 1-34 Hippozoonomadon and Figure 1-35 The Hippopotamus] The “GREAT BEHEMOTH,” large as he was, paled in comparison to his even greater cost. According to the advertisement, bringing him to North America took “OVER SIXTY THOUSAND DOLLARS,” and more than two years of travels through the “morasses and swamps” of his native land. An advertisement for the Ringling

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\(^{264}\) See Chapter Five.

\(^{265}\) *The Globe*, 16 June, 1862.
Figure 1-34 The Hippozoonomadon
Figure 1-35 The Hippopotamus
Brothers gave pride of place to an enormous giraffe.\textsuperscript{266} [Figure 1-36 The Only Giraffe] Calling it “THE ONLY GIRAFFE KNOWN TO EXIST IN THE ENTIRE WORLD,” the observer’s eye quickly moves to the fee paid for such a rare creature: “$20,000 WAS THE PRICE HE COST./Not a Million/Nor a Million Times a Million/Could Buy Another.” In case potential audience members were not impressed, they were reminded that some $3 700 000 had been invested in the show which accrued $7 400 in expenses daily. Similarly, The New York Circus, in the midst of a riotous cavalcade of images, made a “Special Notice to the Public!” wherein it informed them of the financial lengths to which it would go.\textsuperscript{267} Unlike “minor concerns which idle for months in succession,” the New York Circus was gargantuan and could “well afford to pay much higher salaries for talent.” It repeated this point twice. In addition, the advertisement stressed the immense cost of the special rail cars needed for such a large production. The Ringling Brothers’ spectacle, Jerusalem and the Crusades, made a point of touting more than tantalizing dancing girls. [Figure 1-28 Jerusalem and the Crusades] Articles, probably placed in the paper by advance agents, read like advertisements for the circus. “No circus in existence,” offered one piece, “could afford the fabulous expenditure of money invested . . ..”\textsuperscript{268} Its advertisements were a collection of fantastic images and a dizzying array of numbers: 1 200 characters in the cast, 300 dancing girls, 200 chorus singers, 50 musicians, 85 double length rail cars, 40 elephants, 108 wild animal cages, with a 3-mile long parade.\textsuperscript{269} The overabundance of acts and dancers and animals, the sheer superfluity of the spectacle, was linked directly to the excessive cost of the production.

\textsuperscript{266} \textit{The Hamilton Spectator}, 8 June, 1901.
\textsuperscript{267} \textit{The Globe}, 16 June, 1867.
\textsuperscript{268} \textit{The Hamilton Spectator}, 6 June, 1904.
\textsuperscript{269} \textit{The Hamilton Spectator}, 28 May, 1904.
Figure 1-36 The Only Giraffe
The emphasis on cost is seen in the newspaper accounts of the show, as well as in the advertisements which preceded it. Indeed, the transgressive qualities of saturnalian excess were conflated with carnival’s traditional preoccupation with gluttonous superfluity. Abundance was not enough. As such, the worth of public entertainments became in many ways commoditized. A show’s value was increasingly equated with its cost. The numbers, and the obsessive interest in them, plastered around the public sphere, served as a reminder to more conservative citizens that public entertainment was a truly powerful force. The vulgar talk of money was as good a sign as those glued to the hoardings of Victorian Toronto of shifting cultural values.

**Billposters As Lords of Misrule**

These transgressive posters and billboards did not paste themselves and it is worth noting the ‘in-between’ status of the workers whose job it was to cover the city with brightly-coloured, and frequently scandalous, advertisements. Much like the traditional Lord of Misrule, who ushered in and symbolized periods of holiday excess, the nineteenth-century billposter was a contradictory character of dubious morals. At once both mundane worker and harbinger of spectacular entertainment, he occupied a liminal space in the Victorian imagination. As such, interpretations of the billposter—and the posters he carried—oscillated between the lighter and darker sides of festive misrule. Some contemporaries viewed the billposter as innocuous, even spicing their accounts with hints of nostalgia. Others, however, saw little more than the human equivalent of all the violence and immorality pasted on the hoardings.

Sigmund Krausz’s 1896 *Street Types of Great American Cities* referred to the billposter as “an unmitigated nuisance, and his existence ought to be forgiven him only for the occasional

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270 It was common for ‘low’ people to be chosen as leaders of carnival. The Lord of Misrule is associated with British holiday traditions. For an account of the cultural significance of this figure, see C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963).
delight he furnishes the children.”

In many ways, the billposter was a sort of Pied Piper. His power over the young was compelling, and while seen by some people as harmless, others felt uneasy about his influence. An example of the former may be seen in a nostalgic piece entitled “When the Circus Comes to Town.” The account begins, appropriately enough, with the “billposters, with pails of paste and great rolls of gorgeously-painted paper,” plastering fences and walls with “dexterity and a total absence of enthusiasm.” It is important to note that in the narrative of this article, the arrival of the billposters ushers in a period of carnival where all kinds of strange sights may be seen. The workers’ matter-of-fact approach to their task is in sharp contrast with the excitement it generates in the pack of young boys, “who watch while the fore and aft of the great hippopotamus are slapped into the proper corner of anatomy and the whole animal in its native jungle is startlingly portrayed.”

The boys are transfixed by the billposters’ work. The author’s description of the effects of this process, however, undercuts the saccharine tone of the article. As the billposters do their simultaneously dull/exciting work, the images of wild animals—in particular “Great boa constrictors . . . [with] hideously attractive coils . . .”—are described as creating “juvenil nightmares.”

The gaze of the children is ensnared by the billposters, whose images of phallic snakes are so monstrously compelling to the boys that they

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273 Ibid.
274 A parade follows after the billposters have completed their work. The entire town shows up to watch. The excitement of the crowd is kept at “feverpoint.” There is a general “hubbub” in which dogs and children “run amuck.” Suddenly a thrill comes with the arrival of a brass band and “gilded caravans, from which issue blood-curdling roars . . .” A spectacle follows replete with “spangled ladies in all the colors of the rainbow . . .” “rows of camels . . . with gaily-dressed men of the desert perched on the humps . . .” The author expresses “ . . . fearful enjoyment of such close proximity . . . [to] fierce cannibals and crowned Queens . . .” The carnival misrule is characterized by Orientalist desire and greater sexual licence as evidenced by the public display of these underdressed women and men. Once the parade has passed, signalled by the “unearthly music” of the steam calliope, authority returns in the form of the police directing traffic. Festive misrule is over and “ . . . in ten minutes the street looks normal again.” Ibid.
275 Ibid.
276 Ibid.
lead to terrible dreams. Even in a sympathetic depiction of billposters such as this, the account, like the sleep of the children, is troubled by the rougher side of carnival.

In an earlier and less wistful article, a reporter for the *Toronto Mail* describes a conversation overheard by an employee of the paper and a group of street urchins, after one of them had managed to see the infamous actress Sarah Bernhardt in performance.277 Much of the article focuses on the boy’s inability to understand the sophisticated celebrity and the behavior of the more respectable members of the audience. In so doing, the rhetorical strategy of the piece situates the unruly youth as an inheritor of the rough, masculine culture of the working-class “gallery gods.” The “gallery boy” regaled his companions with the story of how he managed to attend the show:

> You see, boys, I laid out long ago to take in the show, and when the bill and programme feller struck the town I caught on to him and helped him to bill the city. I stung him for a pass, and he said, says he, come around on Saturday an’ I’ll try and squeeze ye in. You bet I wos sittin’ on the steps this mornin’ before the office opened waitin for that feller. I follered him around all mornin’, and before the show commenced he took me up to the gallery and winked to the man at the door.278

Displaying a brash initiative, the boy undertakes a form of apprenticeship to the billposter. The play which the pair advertised was the notorious *Camille*, treating the tragic affair of a tubercular courtesan played by Sarah Bernhardt. It is likely that the controversy surrounding the play, as well as the actress performing it, influenced readers’ interpretations of the boy’s relationship with the older man. Although it is difficult to accuse the billposter of corrupting the youth, who already shows signs of being irretrievably lost, he certainly made matters worse when he exposed the child to the rough gallery and such morally ambiguous entertainment. Provided with a fore-

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277 *The Toronto Mail*, 21 March, 1881.
taste of his future life in the cheap seats, the boy’s unruly fate is sealed in no small way thanks to the transgressive character of the billposter.

The carnivalesque qualities of the billposter are also seen in Frederic S. Isham’s The Strollers, which the Globe printed in serial form for the enjoyment of its readers. The story centres around “a gruff, silent man of the world,” called Saint-Prosper.279 A soldier and adventurer, his encounter with a “troop of strolling players” lightens the mood of the traveller in ways reminiscent of the effects of holiday misrule. Indeed, Saint-Prosper’s reaction to the actors is emblematic of their function throughout this part of the story. Their initial arrival in town brings out the worst in certain prominent citizens who denounce the frivolity of such entertainments. Before long, however, the carnival spirit takes hold of the townsfolk who soon enjoy the festive atmosphere of the theatre. The turning point of this particular part of the narrative takes place when Saint-Prosper offers to act the part of billposter and paste the troop’s showbills despite the town’s official censor. Thinking it beneath the position of such a man, the manager of the troop tries to stop the hero. “Oh, it’s a notable occupation,” counters the soldier, “. . . with a satirical smile.” “Was it not the billposters who caused the downfall of the French dynasty?” he asks rhetorically. Acquiescing, the manager then orders him to paste the “inflammable dodgers . . . everywhere, except on the tombstones in the graveyard.” Like any good billposter, Saint-Prosper proceeds to post the bills “Conspicuously before the postoffice, grocery store, on the town pump and the fence of the village church . . . ”280

The posters soon work their magic. His actions attract a crowd who marvel at the posters and begin to warm to the idea of such entertainment. The narrative thus follows a carnivalesque pattern where the rule of traditional authority is temporarily suspended. In this holiday mode, the

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279 The Globe, 11 October, 1902
280 Ibid.
citizens begin to reminisce about freer times and at least one couple uses the occasion to further their courting. The sexual undercurrent is extended with an irreverent attack on Silas, the town official most vehement in his opposition to the theatre. His “faded consort,” harkens back to their “wedding trip to New York,” before her husband became so “strict.” On their honeymoon, a time of sexual licence and release, Silas had even been so lenient as to take her to a production of Sheridan’s *The School for Scandal*. Her comments suggest that sexual frigidity is at the root of Silas’ opposition to the players. As such, he is the perfect target for the narrative’s various ribald insinuations. And it is significant that it is the billposter’s actions that immediately bring about the period of misrule that make such an attack on authority possible. Saint-Prosper’s last act on the job is to tack up one of the company’s bills over a wanted poster for a runaway slave. The gesture is unquestionably that of a good person and the narrative seems content to portray the billposter in a positive light. As if to undercut this depiction, however, the reader is never allowed to forget that the role is filled by a person who only ‘acts’ the part. Unquestionably, the hero is endowed with a higher moral fibre than your average billposter.

The cameo appearance of the billposter in Isham’s story, however, was unlikely to sway the tide of public opinion in favour of this particular profession. Their reputation was beyond repair. To a billposter—Saint-Prosper included—virtually no surface was off limits.\(^{281}\) This included the freshly pasted poster of one of his colleagues.\(^ {282}\) Such practices frequently led to violence and billposters could spend years battling one another.\(^ {283}\) Covering up another’s posters was also a way of finishing work early. Failing that, posters also made excellent kindling for the

\(^{281}\) Gudis, *Buyways*, 12; Sheldon, *A History*, 2. It must be noted, that Sheldon held various positions, including that of president, of several British post advertising associations. His analysis reveals a clear bias toward the period of standardization and professionalization of the industry that began in earnest in the late nineteenth century. Nowhere is this more clearly demonstrated than in the scattered encomiums to the industry’s efforts at self regulation and in his palpable frustration at those, such as the Society for Checking the Abuse of Public Advertising (SCAPA), who were less than impressed with these efforts.


most unscrupulous of the profession. Such behaviour did little to help the reputation of the nineteenth century billposter. Neither did their close relationship to circus and theatre managers. Billposters distributed tickets to upcoming performances in exchange for choice spots to place their advertisements. Unprincipled billposters happily traded their tickets for tobacco and alcohol. Perceived as idle, prone to violence and with a passion for drink and smoke, the billposter represented a challenge to emerging ideas of productivity and restraint. Like any good Lord of Misrule, he stood for values that were at once populist and selfish. As such, it comes as no surprise that as the outdoor advertising industry became increasingly rationalized and professional—in no small way thanks to pressure from moral and aesthetic reformers—the billposter himself was sacrificed to the new gods of profit and efficiency.

**Conclusion: Visible Means of Support**

By the final few decades of the nineteenth century, Toronto’s middle class was increasingly comfortable with public entertainment. Juxtaposed with the city’s cosmopolitan aspirations and affectations, the fear of theatrical advertisements seemed to many people as not only anachronistic but a bit ridiculous as well. Such was the sentiment behind a cartoon by C. H. McCulloch. At a time when many other newspapers were carrying headlines about indecent posters, the image appeared in the satirical paper, *The Moon*. Two men stare at a large poster glued to a fence. The object of their attention is “MILLE FRIPONNE,” the scantily clad star of an opera company. The younger of the two gentlemen holds a walking stick that thrusts suggestively from his hips, guiding the viewer’s eye to the woman’s name and profession printed at the top of the poster. His cigarette, however, is angled

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288 Ibid.
Rev. Dr. Saintly: "It's scandalous! If I had my way I'd have all such people arrested as vagrants."

Flipjack: "It wouldn't be any use doctor. They evidently can show visible means of support."

Figure 1-37 Quite Obvious
rakishly down, leading the gaze toward the woman’s chest and midriff, which unlike her head, is rendered in a much more substantial way. For the purposes of this cartoon—like so many of the advertisements on Toronto’s streets—it is the woman’s body that is of importance.

As for the two men, it is immediately clear what types of people they are. With his hat pushed jauntily to the side, high collar and walking stick, the younger of the two is something of a dandy. Ill mannered, as evidenced by his inability to control his gaze, his smoking and the uncouth way in which he thrusts his hand into the pockets of his trousers, the rowdy was no doubt at ease with the kind of entertainment the poster promised. His stern-looking companion, on the other hand, would never be seen in such an audience. The older man’s expression is one of complete disdain, as he glowers disapprovingly at the vixen on display. He too carries a stick, although his umbrella is decidedly un-erect, jutting out behind him and away from the poster. In his other hand, he holds a thick book, most likely the Bible, alluding to his preference for text over visual images. The deliberate placement of the book, between himself and the fearful image, forms a symbolic barrier. “It’s scandalous! If I had my way,” barks the Rev. Dr. Saintly, “I’d have all such people arrested as vagrants.”” Quicker than he looks, the witty Flipjack replies, “It wouldn’t be any use doctor. They evidently can show visible means of support.”

And indeed, it was “Quite Obvious” to many in Victorian Toronto that advertisements for public entertainment relied on women’s bodies and violence to lure audiences in. Entertainment entrepreneurs exploited carnival in an effort to endow their posters and billboards with an air of transgressive excitement. The images used to promote public entertainment were, to many, perhaps even to the majority of people, interesting diversions from the more mundane aspects of everyday life. Some no doubt found them exciting while others paid them little heed. To a vocal

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289 Keith Walden argues that the cartoon suggests a middle class increasingly comfortable with commercial entertainment. Walden, *Becoming Modern*, 280.
segment of society, however, these posters and billboards signified momentous cultural shifts. They cluttered the urban cityscape with frightening depictions of sexuality, violence and racial ambivalence. Everywhere these detractors looked, whether from the porches of their homes or the vestibules of their most holy buildings, images of disorder were descending upon the city like a plague.

Those who felt threatened by these powerful images saw their cause picked up by organizations such as the W.C.T.U. and the Ontario Horticultural Association as well as important authorities like Lieutenant-Colonel Denison and M.P.P. for Welland, E. E. Fraser. The press, in many cases, echoed their concerns while politicians struggled to pass legislation designed to control access to, and excess in, the public sphere. Posters and billboards became, to some, objects of dread. Running riot through the city, these chaotic images disrupted official narratives and became objects of fear, fetishized by their critics. The power of these images emerged from a confusion between signifier and signified. Although only advertisements, these posters and billboards were nevertheless endowed with a power proportionate to the fear which people attributed to the turbulent and disorderly environments of the theatre or circus. In the minds of certain Victorian authorities, these images became sites every bit as transgressive as those they signified.

But the images of violence, sexuality and racial mixing continued despite the best efforts of certain iconoclastic authorities. The young gamins from Bengough’s cartoons would no doubt have something funny to say about such posters, but what of the more tangible children who were the subject of scrutiny by the likes of the W.C.T.U. and Lieutenant-Colonel Denison? In a 1903 account of his annual report, Major Archibald of the Salvation Army made a direct connection between these images and delinquency: “Alarm is expressed . . . at the growth of crime among
juveniles, which is attributed to trashy literature and theatrical billboards depicting scenes of vulgarity and brutal violence.” It is important to reiterate that the perceived source of the problem was not alcohol, not truancy nor any of the usual suspects pointed to by historians of the period; it was obscene literature and filthy advertisements for public entertainments.

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290 *The Globe*, 3 December, 1903.
Chapter Two
Performing Politics: J. W. Bengough, Public Entertainment and Political Playwrights in Victorian Toronto

A series of advertisements for a great “TRAGEDIAN” are posted on the hoardings of a city street. Three passersby gaze upon the images, presumably discussing the upcoming shows. It is exactly the kind of sight one might have expected if Sir Henry Irving, Edmund Kean or William Charles Macready had come to town. Only in this case, the actor in question is better known for his political performances as prime minister. The satire is unmistakably the work of John Wilson Bengough—the longtime publisher and voice of the politically-minded, yet deeply comic, weekly magazine Grip.1 [Figure 2-1 THE COMING ATTRACTION] Entitled “THE COMING ATTRACTION,” the cartoon depicts a scene familiar to Torontonians.2 A humourist and social reformer, Bengough was drawn to the policies of the Liberal Party. Here we see him at his best: witty, allusive and slyly biting. A message pasted to the fence explains to potential audience members that “OWING TO THE EXPENSE OF THIS ENGAGEMENT PRICES WILL BE RAISED ALL OVER THE COUNTRY.” Through the familiar language of public entertainment, Bengough attacks one of the central planks of Macdonald’s government—its much vaunted National Policy. Like other political playwrights who dramatized Tory protectionism, Bengough used the world of theatre to render his criticism more complex. The significance of casting Macdonald in the roles of Shakespeare’s most sinister villains, the murderous Macbeth, and the truly evil Iago and Richard III, would not have been lost on Victorian Torontonians, steeped as they were in Shakespeare. The humour of the wily

Figure 2-1  THE COMING ATTRACTION
politician performing these murders barely masks Bengough’s contempt for Macdonald. In effect, the artist and political critic is publicly calling the Prime Minister of Canada a corrupt tyrant. A charge, I would argue, that was well-suited to the medium of public entertainment with its carnivalesque license. In effect, Bengough gets away with it because, like the clowns in Shakespeare who hold a mirror up to the powerful, he is a licensed fool.

Metaphors mixing politics and performance pervade our culture. We have expressions like ‘on the political stage.’ Pundits refer to crossing the floor as an ‘interesting bit of political theatre.’ And the histrionic style of our leaders in the House may at best be described as melodramatic. At its worst, Ottawa is a circus. Yet the relationship between politics and public entertainment is much deeper than many of us suppose. For political playwrights of the late Victorian period, their capacity to judge was deeply connected with their passion for Shakespeare and melodrama, with their obsession for blackface minstrelsy and circuses, and their penchant for acrobats and menageries. Through these popular forms of entertainment, they presented their audiences with thoughtful political criticism. Although I argue that this tendency to imagine the political through public performance was common amongst certain politically minded journalists, lawyers, cartoonists and writers in Toronto, nowhere is the connection between politics and public entertainment more apparent than in the work of Bengough.

The fusion of politics and public entertainment has a long history. For my particular purposes, I am going to discuss the topic from the perspective of the producers of these political plays. To demonstrate the ways in which they imagined their politics as performance, I ground this chapter in a case study of Bengough. But my argument extends beyond the well-known satirist and, throughout the chapter, I illustrate the connection between politics and public entertainment using the work of other political playwrights. In so doing, I explore the
phenomenon and suggest a possible reason for its presence in Victorian culture as well as its absence from scholarly debate. For certain Torontonians, their very understanding of politics and its history came from a cultural nexus where high and low frequently commingled. Political scientists and historians who are not sensitive to the irrational and carnivalesque qualities of Victorian politics often miss its connections with public entertainment. To give readers a better understanding of this tendency, I open with a discussion of Bengough and some of the ways in which his reliance upon public entertainment have been overlooked. Then, to establish that late Victorian Torontonians were heirs to a long tradition linking the transgressive force of public entertainment to politics, I briefly survey the city during the chaotic Pre-Confederation period. After that, the focus returns to Bengough and his use of Shakespeare, circuses and melodrama to advance his political thought. In each of these three categories, I endeavour to show how other political playwrights created their own performances using these themes. I then go on to explore the revealing ways in which Bengough and others approached both a national disgrace and a particular government program. The Pacific Scandal and the National Policy provided rich sources for political playwrights. Finally, I conclude with an instance of theatrical cross-dressing that hints, optimistically, at the transformative power of the transgressive elements of public entertainment when brought to bear on politics.

As the introductory image suggests, and as the evidence I offer up below confirms, Toronto’s political playwrights frequently explored politics through the matrix of public entertainment. Ann Saddlemeyer, for instance, notes of nineteenth-century Ontario that “there were a remarkable number of politically active theatrical pamphleteers . . .”3 These and other political playwrights wrote both for the stage and, for what Anton Wagner and Richard Plant call,

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the “theatre of the mind.”” Graphic satires that melded trenchant political criticism with theatrical motifs are also included in this analysis. Throughout the chapter, I refer to the authors of these diverse texts as political playwrights. Some plays were performed in theatres in front of audiences. Others catered to a public with an appetite for reading plays that were never intended for the stage. And, as we have seen, others took the form of editorial cartoons, borrowing from Shakespeare or circuses to add depth to their political satire.

The relative licence these performances demonstrate—their ability to level such attacks—comes from a long-standing tradition linking theatre and other forms of public entertainment with the transgressive tendencies of the carnivalesque. 5 The literary critics Peter Stallybrass and Allon White’s re-imagining of the carnivalesque through the transgressive offers a useful theoretical perspective from which to begin analyzing the nature of these political performances. 6 They note that as early as the Elizabethan period, the theatre and actors were feared by the state as potentially subversive. 7 The carnivalesque nature of public entertainment allowed greater leeway for political transgression. Political playwrights could adopt the licence of carnival with its riotous inversions of order. In some ways, as they satirized contemporary politics, they took on the role of the Lord of Misrule. 8 Put in terms of the transgressive, their plays generated the kind of excitement that comes from an attack on the high by the low other. When the seedy world of public entertainment ridiculed the noble world of honourable politicians—even late into the

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5 Mikhail Bakhtin, Rabelais and His World, trans. Helene Iswolsky. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984). To date, this work remains one of the most compelling accounts of the carnivalesque.
7 Ibid, 61.
8 Although the process of selecting a leader of Saturnalian festivities was a common practice dating back to antiquity, the Lord of Misrule is associated with British holiday traditions. There is a particularly appropriate connection to the theatre, especially through Shakespeare, who C. L. Barber argues regularly incorporated the character, and the structure of carnival, into his plays. See C. L. Barber, Shakespeare’s Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and Its Relation to Social Custom (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1963).
Victorian period—it resonated within a long carnivalesque tradition. These political discourses operated within a realm of popular culture saturated with public entertainment. Any attempt to understand the Victorians’ capacity to judge, must come to terms with this fusion of politics and public performance.

If this is so, then our understanding of the functioning of public opinion must be re-evaluated. What I am proposing undermines the rationality behind traditional public sphere theory if, from the start, it was already infused with notions of spectacle and carnivalesque. In *The Capacity to Judge*, Jeffrey L. McNairn explores the development of public debate and the creation of public opinion in Upper Canada from 1791-1854. As he demonstrates, the emergence of the public sphere in the British colony was thanks, in no small part, to the growth and development of newspapers and their ability to report parliamentary debates. As a result, politicians were increasingly accountable for their actions. “The debates of the assembly . . . ,” argues McNairn, “invited, even compelled, Upper Canadians to investigate how legislative outcomes were reached. The publication of parliamentary debates transformed newspaper readers into participants in the legislative process.” As one would expect, the author relies heavily on Jurgen Habermas’ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Our capacity to judge certainly owes a great debt to the Habermasian ideal of reading newspapers and transcripts from parliamentary debates. It was, however, also and simultaneously about public performances by acrobats and clowns, actors and trained elephants. Broadening our approach to include such political performances gets us closer to the way politics operated in the quotidian—

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11 Ibid, 160.
12 Ibid, 163.
rescuing it from a rationality that subsumes the complexity of political life in the high talk of traditional political criticism. The discussion that follows is an attempt to salvage an alternative way of understanding the nation’s political life from methodologies and theoretical perspectives that, intentionally or not, exclude the low.

Although some scholars have challenged Habermas’ theory for its inability to encompass contributions by non-elite men and women, my concern centres on the tyranny of the rational at the expense of the spectacle and transgressive which form an important part of performance. I argue that theories about the public sphere—at least in Toronto—must encompass the visual and performance-oriented ways in which so much politics was conducted. Cecilia Morgan, for one, observes of McNairn’s Capacity to Judge that it misses the fact that early politics was infused with emotion and performance. Carol Wilton, for her part, argues that politics during this period had less to


15 My discussion of Victorian Toronto’s political life focuses largely on a period much later than McNairn’s. My brief exploration of early political playwrights and political theatre, however, does suggest that even during York’s earliest days, some of its citizens approached politics through public entertainment.

do with elections and more to do with demonstrations and parades.\textsuperscript{17} Yet the suspicion of these more transgressive aspects of the public sphere is endemic to most traditional accounts. Paul Rutherford notes that towards the end of Habermas’ \textit{The Structural Transformation}, the author becomes particularly pessimistic about the deterioration of democracy by spectacle and the image.\textsuperscript{18} Habermas decries visual communication as a means for authority to dominate the public: it reveals the extent to which he is sceptical of the image and representational culture.\textsuperscript{19}

Indeed, in a system favouring rational debate, there is little room for unruly visual performances. That these performances were occasionally conducted in a riotous atmosphere of drinking and violence only makes the stage a less likely candidate for inclusion in the public sphere for those looking to find the enlightened discussion of a Vienna coffee-house or the sober atmosphere of an Upper Canadian library.\textsuperscript{20} Public entertainments—whether on stage or in newspapers—are excluded from the theories and histories of politics and the public sphere because they are not rational. The fusion of politics and public entertainment in Victorian Toronto was at times less civil than strict public sphere theory would allow, but it could be both participatory and deliberative.

\textbf{Political Theatre: Playwrights and Their Audiences}

Establishing hard numbers is difficult. Although some Torontonians, just like some Victorians in the United Kingdom and the United States, approached politics through the stage, the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Wilton makes an important case for the participation of non-elite Upper Canadians—particularly through the petitioning movement that relied on parades and demonstrations—in the province’s political culture. See Carol Wilton, \textit{Popular Politics and Political Culture in Upper Canada, 1800-1850} (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2000).
\item Paul Rutherford, \textit{Endless Propaganda The Advertising of Public Goods} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 20
\item \textit{Ibid.}
\item Interestingly, McNairn notes the importance of local inns and taverns which were “often the only spaces outside the home where large numbers of Upper Canadians regularly congregated and conversed.” Although he acknowledges the role this played in disseminating and encouraging political thought, he neglects to mention that taverns were also sites of performance by traveling actors, magicians and other entertainers. McNairn, \textit{The Capacity to Judge}, 149-150.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
phenomenon remains amorphous. This was not the dominant way of conceptualizing politics in the period, but it was significant. Across the Atlantic, the tradition was strong. From Shakespeare to *Punch*, political theatre was something with which the British were familiar. In addition to authors penning plays, graphic satirists in Britain frequently blended politics and performance. The same goes for the United States where cartoonists also mixed politics with public entertainment. Politics and public entertainment were similarly conjoined in nineteenth-century Europe. There, the ruling class took great pains to censor political theatre. Given that the theatre was the only form of mass entertainment and the only place, outside of church, where mass gatherings were acceptable, the concern over political theatre is not surprising.

Journalists, lawyers, writers and graphic satirists, in other words literate and literary types, were the majority of those producing political theatre in Toronto. These included such well-known nineteenth-century figures as Bengough, William Henry Fuller, Nicholas Flood Davin, Henri Julien and Sarah Anne Curzon. But the list is rounded out by a host of lesser known political actors like John Simpson and Hugh Scobie. Other political playwrights chose to remain

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anonymous, such as Sam Scribble whose *Dolorsolatio* was a light send-up of Confederation.\textsuperscript{25}  
Still other political playwrights included campaign officials and special interest groups hoping to influence voters. They authored political plays and created caricatures that drew from theatrical genres as diverse as opera and blackface minstrelsy.\textsuperscript{26} In some cases, political playwrights such as Scobie, Simpson, Davin and Bengough were politicians.\textsuperscript{27} And, as the list of politicians above suggests, politics and public entertainment comingled on both sides of the political fence. From the early days of the Family Compact—the tightly-knit clique of Tory families that dominated politics and society—and their reform opponents, through to Macdonald’s Tories and Mackenzie’s Grits, the theatrical stage was shared by conservatives and liberals alike.

Neither can we assume that women were completely excluded from the political stage. My analysis concludes with a discussion of one female playwright whose political theatre included two plays that centred upon women and their role in Victorian society. In these, as well as her participation in Toronto’s well-publicized “Women’s Parliament”—one of no fewer than a dozen held in at least four provinces—we see the transgressive ways in which some women approached politics theatrically. Although it is difficult to judge the extent of their participation, there is no reason to assume that political theatre was an exclusively male phenomenon.

\textsuperscript{25} One historian speculates that the author was either a “prominent citizen or possibly a civil servant.” See Murray D. Edwards, *A Stage in Our Past: English-language Theatre in Eastern Canada from the 1790s to 1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 145.
\textsuperscript{26} See Chapter Three.
In other theatrical centres in British North America, and later the Dominion of Canada, political playwrights also approached politics through public entertainment. New Brunswick, for instance, has a long history of political theatre dating back, according to Mary Elizabeth Smith, to the first Loyalists. Edward Winslow’s 1798 *Substance of the Debates in the young Robin Hood Society*, for example, was a dramatic sketch that argued for a government run by a Loyalist elite. The *Triumph of Intrigue*, appeared in *The New Brunswick Courier* in 1833, satirizing the Commissioner of Crown Lands and the new Lieutenant Governor, Sir Archibald Campbell. The journalist and publisher Thomas Hill’s *Provincial Association, or, Taxing Each Other* caused a riot at its opening in Saint John on 31 March, 1845. “The Government in Session,” appeared in the *True Humorist* between 13 December, 1865 and 7 April, 1866. “Northumbria,” appeared in *The New Dominion and True Humorist* between 6 March and 10 April, 1869 and was followed by “A Trip to Frederictonia and back for $12.00,” which was published as an afterpiece to “Northumbria” between 17 April and 1 May, 1869. Taking aim at the province’s Common Schools Act of 1871, the anonymous author of *Measure by Measure, or, The Coalition in Secret Session!* satirized local politics through an adaptation of Shakespeare.

In Quebec, *Les Comedies Du Statu Quo*, are amongst the most famous political plays in French Canada. Written in 1834 and attacking local politicians, the five plays followed in the wake of the Ninety-Two Resolutions calling for reform of British rule passed by Lower Canada’s

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28 Mary Elizabeth Smith, “*Measure by Measure* and Other Political Satires From New Brunswick,” *Theatre History in Canada* 5 no. 2 (Fall 1984), 173. 172-84
29 Ibid.
30 Ibid.
32 Ibid. In 1867 the *True Humorist* became *The New Dominion and True Humorist*.
33 The play was published serially in seven parts between 25 February – 8 April, 1871 in the *New Dominion and True Humorist*. For an analysis of the play, see Smith, *Measure by Measure*.
Legislative Assembly. The *Tuque Bleue* comedies, written in 1848, were two satirical plays that attacked Georges-Etienne Cartier and Doctor Wolfred Nelson. So outraged was Cartier that he fought a duel with Joseph Doutre, who, though not their author, took responsibility for printing them. The 1856 publication of the anonymously written *La Degringolade* over five issues in *L’Avenir* took aim at Sir Allan MacNab and E-P Tache. There were at least two plays about Confederation: Auguste Achintre’s *La Confederation* and Elzear Labelle’s *La Conversion d’un pecheur de la Nouvelle-Ecosse.* In 1871, Father Alphonse Villeneuve’s *La Comédie infernale ou Conjuration libérale aux enfers* appeared. Each of these plays were part of a tradition of exploring politics creatively through the stage.

Some plays, while not ostensibly political, nevertheless were. The literary critic Eric Lott notes that Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was an intensely political play. Much the same could be said about the 1885 play, *Louis Riel; or, The Northern Rebellion.* The work of Clay Greene, the play inserted itself into the political firestorm generated by the rebellion. The play took its name from the Metis leader who led two uprisings against the Canadian government as it encroached upon Metis land. It opened at the Grand Opera House in Toronto on 5 January, 1885 and was also staged in Montreal and London, Ontario. In a similar vein, Sarah Anne Curzon’s *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812*, while not overtly political, entered the debate.

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35 Doucette argues that there are two more plays than the three generally considered to make up *Les Comedies Du Statu Quo.* See L. E. Doucette, “Les Comedies Du Statu Quo Part –II,” Theatre History in Canada 3 no. 2 (Spring 1982).
37 Ibid, 134.
38 Ibid, 135-7.
41 Plant, “Chronology,” 332. As it was touring the region, it is likely that the play appeared in other Ontario towns as well.
surrounding Loyalist claims to special status and women’s rights by self-consciously dramatising Secord into the nation’s history. Only the narrowest definition of politics would exclude such works. Instead, I contend that they were a way for political playwrights and their audiences, to discuss—and even conceptualize—politics in a more participatory and collective manner.

Who made up the politically-minded audiences for these performances? Middle-class playgoers and the respectably literate with time and money for newspapers and magazines, to be sure, formed the great bulk. But so too did members of the working-class who regularly attended the city’s various public entertainments. It is important to remember that the theatre in Toronto was not only a regular feature of people’s lives, but that it was also in many ways a cross-class phenomenon. And there is no reason to assume that Grip and other publications were not read aloud in taverns across the city. Christina Burr, for instance, notes that Bengough’s cartoons reached a “diverse” audience and that he endeavoured to help less informed readers understand his cartoons through labels and explanations.

As scholarship on working-class culture demonstrates, interpreting literacy rates—or more significantly, the uses of literacy—is complicated and workers consumed published materials in ways that scholars, until relatively recently, have ignored.

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43 During the mid-1880s, Grip claimed circulation of between 7,000 and 10,000, with as many as 50,000 weekly readers. Grip, 12 May, 1883.
44 Burr, “Gender,” 515.
Political Playwright Bengough

Bengough is known for his satirical writings, his political cartoons and his reform leanings. His deep and abiding love of theatre, however, is rarely—if ever—mentioned. Under his watchful eye, *Grip* published numerous plays, satirical dialogues and allusive sketches for the benefit of its readers. Although not always strictly political, the majority of these plays were, as evidenced by this sampling of titles: “Scene at Ottawa,” “Scene-City Hall,” “The New Minister,” “The Fishery Commission at Halifax,” “The Commissioner and the Injun,” “The Sweets of Office,” “Scene in Ottawa,” “Scene at Ottawa,” “The Senator’s Sensitive Daughter,” the “political farce” “Before and Behind the Curtain,” “The Popish Plot,” and “Ambition; or, Be Sure You Are Off With the Old Hall Before You Are On With the New,” which satirized the decision to build a new city hall in Hamilton. These—just a handful of many similar endeavors which appeared in *Grip*—were penned for an audience accustomed to reading plays that would never be acted out.

Instead, they were political treatises in dramatic form intended exclusively for the pages of *Grip*. Not only did Bengough author political dramas for his magazine, he wrote a series of longer, more ambitious plays. These included a “farcical tragedy” call *The Edison Doll* as well as

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the popular *Bunthorne Abroad; or the Lass that Loved a Pirate.* His last play, *The Breach of Promise Trial Bardwell vs Pickwick*, was performed in Toronto in May 1907. In the waning days of his career, he even tried to write for Hollywood. Nevertheless, his most successful undertaking was *Grip* and, scattered throughout its pages, he offered theatrical reviews and advice to performers, admonished audiences for their poor behaviour, cautioned against a creeping looseness of morals on the stage and gently poked fun at those Presbyterians and Methodists too holy for the show. He accepted advertisements for theatres such as Mrs. Morrison’s Grand Opera House and regularly attended the city’s diverse array of public entertainments. And, like many of Toronto’s political playwrights, his politics were deeply intertwined with performance.

Many political histories make at least some reference to Bengough. He is perfect for a witty aside or to spice up an argument with one of his clever cartoons. Invariably, however, his preoccupation with public entertainment is overlooked. In this respect, he is emblematic of a larger process of abjection whereby historians and political scientists ignore the intersection of politics and public performance. The result is that scholars miss much of the force and meaning of Victorian political discourse. Library and Archives Canada, for instance, describes his depiction of Macdonald as “a figure of endless mischief.” But portraying Sir John as Richard III is strong condemnation. He is an evil tyrant from one of Shakespeare’s bloodiest plays.

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48 J. W. Bengough, “The Edison Doll,” *Grip*, 1 December, 1894. The remaining parts appeared in four subsequent issues. Bengough’s *Bunthorne Abroad; or, the Lass That Loved a Pirate* performed by Templeton Star Opera Company, 30 August, 1886.

49 The play was performed four times in Toronto on 9, 10, 15 and 28 May, 1907. See Richard Plant, “Chronology: Theatre in Ontario to 1914,” in Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario 1800-1914, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 342-344.

50 http://www.collectionscanada.ca/confederation/023001-4000-e.html#c
To illustrate this point, one need only look to recent scholarship on Bengough. Take, for example, an excellent article by Christina Burr. Although Burr provides her readers with a convincing analysis of Bengough’s use of gender and sexuality as it relates to his nationalism, the connection between his passion for public entertainment and his political criticism receives little attention. Her analysis of an elephant that Bengough uses to comment on the Conservative Party’s protectionist National Policy is revealing. [Figure 2-2 RIDING INTO POWER] Burr concludes that the Republican elephant of Thomas Nast was the inspiration for Bengough’s cartoons. Nast was a German-born, American political cartoonist whose work was familiar to Bengough. But the elephant motif, repeats itself in several of Bengough’s cartoons relating to the National Policy. [Figure 2-3 HERE HE COMES; Figure 2-4 CLOSE OF THE PLAY AT OTTAWA; and Figure 2-5 WAITING FOR THE ELEPHANT]

Although she is likely correct that Bengough took inspiration from Nast, the conclusion ignores the cultural context of Toronto’s love-affair with circuses and menageries—and especially elephants. Indeed, the cartoon succeeds because it relies on an image that audiences associated with the topsy-turvy excitement of the circus. As early as 1835, Torontonians were lining up to ride a visiting elephant “trimmed and decorated after the Eastern style . . .” [Figure 2-6 Eastern Style Elephant] The Canadian Illustrated News, for its part, regularly carried stories of elephants such as “The First white elephant—in the flesh,—ever landed in Europe.” It also printed a dramatic image of the famous Jumbo making the rounds of New York. The palpable excitement of the crowd gives one a sense of the significance of the animal as a source for

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51 Burr, “Gender,” 505-554.
52 Ibid, 525.
54 See Correspondent Advocate, 16 July, 1835.
55 Canadian Illustrated News, 8 October, 1881.
Figure 2-2 RIDING INTO POWER
Figure 2-3  HERE HE COMES
Figure 2-4 CLOSE OF THE PLAY AT OTTAWA
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Kingdom</th>
<th>Animal</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Animalia</td>
<td>Elephant</td>
<td>Eastern Style</td>
<td>A type of elephant characterized by its specific features.</td>
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**Figure 2-6 Eastern Style Elephant**
entertainment and spectacle.\textsuperscript{56} [Figure 2-7 Jumbo] These, and countless other circus elephants populated the Victorian imagination. If one looks at Bengough’s depiction of the elephant in “IN THE RING AT LAST,” the connection becomes clear.\textsuperscript{57} [Figure 2-8 IN THE RING AT LAST] In it, the political playwright presents Macdonald and his Tory cronies on the back of the NP elephant performing tricks like one would expect at a circus.

The circus device allows Bengough to comment on the helplessness of the average citizen in the face of the National Policy’s price increases.\textsuperscript{58} The sheer size of the beast, for instance, means that it easily tramples any opposition. This enriches our understanding of the playwright’s commentary. The new tariffs, written across the pachyderm like tattoos, represent the goods affected by the protectionist policy. Underneath the beast’s enormous feet lie a bruised Uncle Sam, and, even more disturbingly, the head of the Canadian “Consumer” crushed by the weight of the behemoth. But it is the title and setting of the cartoon that prove my point—this is fundamentally a political performance. The elephant is in a circus ring underneath the big top. An audience of Canadian voters watches the show. Macdonald, dressed like a circus performer, leads the “The Talented Elephant’s First Act.” Given the terrible consequences of the NP elephant on the average citizen-spectator—observe the blood squirting from his trampled skull—one would hate to see what he does for an encore. And indeed, this was Bengough’s point. In the political circus at Ottawa there were consequences to the various “Acts” of Parliament—this was only the first act in a longer performance that Bengough believed would leave the Canadian audience disappointed.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid, 29 April, 1882. \\
\textsuperscript{57} “IN THE RING AT LAST,” \textit{Grip}, 22 March, 1879. \\
\textsuperscript{58} Among other things, Macdonald’s National Policy called for higher tariffs on imported manufactured goods. Intended to promote Canadian manufacturing, it resulted in higher prices for Canadian consumers.
Figure 2-7  Jumbo
IN THE RING AT LAST!
THE TALENTED ELEPHANT’S FIRST ACT.

Figure 2-8 IN THE RING AT LAST
Acting Like Yankees: Reform Performances in Pre-Confederation Toronto

Although the majority of this chapter examines the last few decades of the nineteenth century, it is important to understand that political playwrights such as Bengough, Fuller and Davin were the inheritors of a rich tradition of political theatre. In the tumultuous pre-Confederation period, York and later Toronto experienced a pitched battle between members of the Tory elite and agitators for responsible government. Although the most obvious expression of this animosity was the 1837 Rebellion, the tensions surrounding loyalty and reform were frequently understood and articulated through a politics of performance. To demonstrate the ways in which politics and public entertainment intersected during the turbulent pre-Confederation period, I will look briefly at political acts performed in the transgressive space of the theatre itself before moving on to discuss political ephemera from the 1836 election. Then, I will examine the work of two political playwrights as well as two political cartoons that prefigure the work of Bengough.

In the pre-Confederation period, playhouses and other venues for public entertainment were transgressive sites that often blurred the boundaries between actors and audiences. The participatory nature of public entertainment meant that citizens could themselves become political performers. As tensions mounted in 1836, two symbolic events took place, revealing the

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59 For an excellent account of the politics of this period in Upper Canada, see Carol Wilton, Popular Politics. Average citizens were much more involved in politics than earlier believed. My sense is that political theatre, and public entertainment more broadly, facilitated greater participation in politics by ordinary citizens.

60 Led by William Lyon Mackenzie, the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837-38 pitted reformers against the entrenched Tory elite. Along with the larger Lower Canada Rebellion, the Upper Canada Rebellion are known collectively as the Rebellions of 1837. For a sense of the role that performative strategies such as effigy burning, rioting and monarchical display played in the politics of this time, see Ian Radforth, “Political Demonstrations and Spectacles during the Rebellion Losses Controversy in Upper Canada,” Canadian Historical Review 92, no. 1 (2011): 1-41. On the performative aspects of rebellion, see Bryan Palmer, “Popular Radicalism and the Theatrics of Rebellion: The Hybrid Discourse of Dissent in Upper Canada in the 1830s,” in Transatlantic Subjects: Ideas, Institutions, and Social Experience in Post-Revolutionary British North America, ed. Nancy Christie (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 403–38. For an account of the performance of regal grandeur by Governor General Lord Durham, see Bruce Curtis, “The ‘Most Splendid Pageant Ever Seen’: Grandeur, the Domestic, and Condescension in Lord Durham’s Political Theatre,” Canadian Historical Review 89, no. 1 (2008): 55-88.

connection between public entertainment and politics in Upper Canada. At a performance by the Toronto Theatrical Amateurs, the Union Jack was destroyed in protest against the government.\textsuperscript{62} The audience that night turned unruly as the simmering tension of colonial politics boiled over. In something of a repeat performance, the Union Jack was again attacked in August that same year. Some members of the audience intended to send a message to the Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada Sir Francis Bond Head.\textsuperscript{63} Interestingly, that very day, Sir Francis had become the official patron of the Theatre Royal where the public desecration of the flag occurred.\textsuperscript{64} In both instances, a violent assault on an emblem of government power was acted out in the transgressive space of a colonial theatre.

But even a decade before the Rebellion, the theatre was already an important site for political performances. One event in particular—linking issues of political reform and loyalty—demonstrates the riotous nature of the theatre in Upper Canada. It also hints at the extent to which this chaotic world was used by political actors and citizen-spectators as a venue for acting out alternative political performances. The Reform performance in question involved a retired British soldier, Captain John Matthews.\textsuperscript{65} On New Year’s Eve, 1825, a group of American actors from Rochester performed Shakespeare’s \textit{Richard II}. After leaving the military, Matthews had gone on to become an active reformer and politician. That night, he and between 16-18 other politicians from both camps had gathered to enjoy an evening’s entertainment.\textsuperscript{66} The show being

\textsuperscript{62} Plant, “Chronology,” 294.
\textsuperscript{64} Plant, “Chronology,” 294.
delayed, those gathered in the house called out for songs, as was the custom. Matthews, who was later recalled to Britain to defend his military pension, allegedly shouted out for “Yankee Doodle,” before demanding that his fellow audience members remove their hats for “Hail Columbia,” then America’s national anthem. According to Patrick O’Neil, “minor scuffles” broke out as some audience members tried to knock the hats off of those who refused. Not surprisingly, Matthew’s performance overshadowed all others that night. It became the subject of intense debate which sparked, besides his recall to London, a Select Committee to look into the events of the evening and to decide whether Matthews could be granted a leave of absence from the parliament.

According to the report of this committee, the commander of the forces in Lower Canada, Lord Dalhousie, had heard disturbing reports in the press that Matthews had “in a riotous and outrageous manner, called for the national airs and tunes of the United States . . . urging the audience there assembled to take off their hats as is usual in the British dominions in honour of ‘God Save the King.’” The performative act of displaying loyalty to the British Crown through the doffing of one’s hat could not, it seems, be performed for the anthem of the Republic. Dalhousie determined the retired Captain’s behaviour to be “utterly disloyal and disgraceful.” It should be noted that the committee found Matthews’ character unimpeachable and explained at lengths that witnesses at the performance saw him loyally singing several patriotic British tunes. They concluded that “there [was] no ground for the charge which had been preferred against Capt. Matthews; the malignity and falsity of which they believe, to have derived their origin and

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68 REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
support from political hostility towards him.” Indeed, the performance that night and the subsequent investigation reveal the extent to which party politics had already deteriorated dangerously. Performances which suggested disloyalty—especially by such a prominent political actor and in such a public and politically-charged space—had serious consequences in pre-Rebellion Upper Canada.

As the Rebellion of 1837 drew closer, politics in Toronto grew increasingly divisive. One need only look at the outpouring of political posters and handbills put out by both sides during the 1836 election to get a sense of the mutual hostility. Cartoons, songs, scenes and dialogues were part of the way in which citizens made sense of the turbulent period preceding the Rebellion. One particularly interesting poster illustrates not only the acrimony of the bitterly contested election, but also the transgressive intersection between politics and public entertainment during the early period. [Figure 2-9 Simon Ebenezer] A simple rendering of a large horse held by a dismounted rider sits atop the poster. Beneath the image, in large font, reads: “THE CELEBRATED HORSE/ Simon Ebenezer!/WILL STAND/For Six Days Only,/At the Court House, in this city./ . . .” At first glance, the poster might easily be mistaken for an advertisement promoting the display of some famous horse, similar to the various animals, circuses and menageries that found their way to the muddy streets of Toronto for the amusement of its inhabitants. [Figure 2-10 City of Toronto and York] Closer inspection reveals that it is in fact a political poster masquerading as an advertisement for a public performance. The text goes on to state that “The Ladies who have been observed exerting themselves canvassing for Parson

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72 Ibid.
73 An excellent selection of these posters and handbills may be found in the James Leslie Scrapbook of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. One of these, “DIALOGUE Between a Farmer from Darlington and a Freeholder of Cavan, in regard to the Election for the County of Durham,” is another example of the fusion of politics and performance in the pre-Confederation period. T-10 0064.
75 “CITY OF TORONTO AND YORK COUNTY RACE MEETING,” The British Colonist, 19 June, 1839.
Draper’s son, are particularly requested to come forward to tender their votes, and SIMON will pole them, gratuitously.”

No doubt the identity of Parson Draper’s son, and perhaps even the women canvassing on his behalf, would have been well-known to the city’s politically inclined. Member of the Family Compact, William Henry Draper was elected as the Conservative candidate beating out Reformer James Edward Small. Simon Ebenezer Washburn was, in fact, an associate of Draper and two-time rival of the reform leader and revolutionary William Lyon Mackenzie for a seat in the assembly for York County. All this is far less interesting than the insinuation of bestiality leveled in the public sphere. At the bottom of the poster, its creator decided to provide a definition of the word “Pole,” purportedly from Johnson’s Dictionary: “Pole---A long staff; a tall piece of timber erect; a measure of length containing five yards and a half.” Whether the author included this clarification to mask or enhance the phallic imagery is not immediately clear. Although simultaneously a misogynist threat to women performing a political role in the public sphere, the poster operates as a comic indictment of the Family Compact expressed through the medium of public entertainment. Its borrowing of the language of theatrical promotion, “THE CELEBRATED . . .,” and “WILL STAND/For Six Days only,” would have been interpreted through a well-established framework of public entertainment.

THE CELEBRATED HORSE

Simon Ebenezer!

WILL STAND

For Six Days only,

At the Court House, in this city,

Com'g MONDAY, June 20th.

The Ladies who have been observed exerting themselves canvassing for Parson Draper's son, are particularly requested to come forward to tender their votes, and Simon will pole* them, gratuitously.

*Pole--A long staff; a tall piece of timber erect; a measure of length containing five yards and a half.--Johnson's Dictionary.

Figure 2-9 Simon Ebenezer
CITY OF TORONTO AND YORK COUNTY RACE MEETING.

OVER SIMCOE RACE COURSE.

ON Wednesday the 19th, and Thursday the 20th, days of June, 1839.

To start each day at 1 o’clock precisely.

PRESENT.

Colonel MacKenzie-Fraser, Qr. Master General.

STEWARDS.

The Honorable Sir A. N. MacNab.
Colonel Cox, P. S.
Col. Bullock, A. G. M.
Capt. Markham, 32d.
The Sheriff, H. Dist’t.
Lt. Meade, 43d Lt. In.
Chas. C. Small, Esq.
John Barwick, Esq.
George Monroe, Esq.

FIRST DAY.

THE CITY PLATE OF FIFTY SOVEREIGNS.
Free for all Horses—2 year olds, a feather; 3 year olds to carry 6 stone 9 lbs.; four do. 7 stone 9 lbs.; five do. 8 stone 4 lbs.; six do. 8 stone 10 lbs.; and aged 9 stone.

Heats, 2 miles and a distance.

Entrance, £5.

Figure 2-10 City of Toronto and York
The transgressive imagery and underlying message of Reform politics fuse in an advertisement for an otherwise entertaining diversion.

Even after the Rebellion of 1837, political playwrights continued to explore issues of loyalty and reform. Even after the Rebellion of 1837, political playwrights continued to explore issues of loyalty and reform. Two political playwrights, contemporaries and sometime associates, help to illustrate the ways in which the stage was used to explore issues of loyalty and reform in the period following the rebellion. They also highlight the deep political divisions of the time. John Simpson and Hugh Scobie shared many things in common: they were journalists, playwrights and politicians. Despite this, the trajectory of their respective careers diverged as the tensions of politics in Upper Canada came to a head. Two of their plays provide useful insight into the political culture of early Toronto.

John Simpson, best known for his long career as a Tory politician, also crafted a brief play satirizing what he considered to be the self-interested and morally bankrupt Reform Party. Set in the bar of a Toronto hotel, “A Dramatic Sketch” introduces a pair of would-be Reform politicians. Filch and Logic are inveterate gamblers with an inordinate fondness for alcohol. Down on their luck, they contemplate a potential career change. Rejecting honesty and such professions as author, playwright and lawyer—the latter’s heads being “full of anything but brains,”—they decide on politics. Despite having “no patriotic feeling,” the two are endowed with “glib tongues for flattery, flexible knees to bend for patronage, and long hands accustomed

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79 There were also other early editorial cartoons that merged politics and public entertainment. Bengough included such an image in his A Caricature History of Canadian Politics. See J. W. Bengough, A Caricature History of Canadian Politics Events from the Union of 1841, As Illustrated by Cartoons From “Grip,” and Various Other Sources (Toronto: Peter Martin Associates Ltd., 1974), 21. See also, “1857? Cartoon up goes,” Baldwin Room Toronto Reference Library.

80 Also of note, is Lynch Lawdon Sharpe’s The Viceroy’s Dream; or, The Canadian Government Not “Wide Awake” a mono-dramatico-politica-poem, which appeared in 1838. And reformers were not the only political playwrights. Nor, for that matter, were they the only ones producing other texts fusing politics and public entertainment. See “1839 Durham,” Baldwin Room Toronto Reference Library. The political poster describes a performance complete with clowns, including a presumably black-faced “Clown of the Ring,” “In the Character of ‘Jump Jim Crow.”’ Equating Reformers with Republicans, the text concludes with “GOD SAVE THE PEOPLE!!!”


Logic fancies “. . . to set up as Physician extraordinary to the body politic, and advertise a nostrum for the infallible cure of all diseases, real and imaginary, extinct or existing, past, present, and future.” As a Reform politician, he imagines “. . . it would be both glorious and profitable, to convince rude health of disease, and administer medicine which would create sickness.” A more concise view of Tory opinions on Reform policies would be hard to find. Caught up in the excitement, Filch agrees with his companion to “. . . call Giants into existence, and armed in the vestments of Reform, enter the lists against them, and like the redoubtable seven champions, cut off their heads, and pocket their estates at my leisure . . .” To Simpson, Reformers agitated audience-voters with fictional tales of Tory corruption, only to abuse the spoils of power after gaining office. Fortunately for the body politic, the two aspiring political actors are met by their fellow gambler Snatchem who offers them a rich pigeon to pluck, thus sparing the province two more crooked Reformers.

Simpson’s play appeared in a collection of stories, plays and poetry that he edited and dedicated to Sir Francis Bond Head. In the dedication, the playwright alluded to the recent political troubles and dismissed “. . . that class of persons, who in every community, are found expressing their hostility to the institutions under which they live . . .” Like the two disreputable opportunists of his play, such people’s “. . . disappointed ambition often turns to revenge and love of change, [and] frequently instigate those who are miscalled Patriots . . .”

Toronto political playwright Hugh Scobie belonged, in many ways, to that class of people which Simpson lamented. Although the two men worked together on *The Canadian mercantile*

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83 Ibid, 25.
84 Ibid, 26.
85 Ibid.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid, 29.
88 Ibid, Dedication.
89 Ibid.
almanack [sic] from 1843-1848, their political views—at least when it came to writing plays—were worlds apart. Scobie’s effort was the 1839 Provincial Drama, called The Family Compact. A public attack on the greed and arrogance of the Tory elite who controlled Upper Canada, the drama is yet another excellent example of the way in which some citizens conceived of their politics through the stage. Appearing in the British Colonist over five issues, the play was written under the pseudonym Chrononhotonthologos, but attributed to Scobie, the paper’s editor.90 The play opens on a “secret conclave” with the leader of the Family Compact, Christopher (possibly a reference to the despotic Christopher Alexander Hagerman) bemoaning the plagues which face their “noble Church”: “Hard we’re beset; here Presbyterians sour,/There horrid Wesleyans rise, and Independents,/ with Baptists, and a motley scraggy crew/Of nondescripts, who worry, tear, and wound us!”91 Clinging desperately to power despite the will of the people, Christopher reveals the true motivation of his Tory brethren: “No; let us draw our term of office out/To its full length, and spin it to the last;/So shall we gain, still, one day’s salary; ...”92 His crony Samuel (possibly Samuel Peters Jarvis) attempts to cheer the gathering: “Who keeps up all the consequence of state?/Who, with good salaries, themselves have fixed,/Give routs, assemblies, balls and masquerades,/And dictate fashion to a wond’ring world?”93 And they would continue to do it so long as there was “... a governor that can be wheedled,/Or Downing-street remains as blind’s a mole.”94

92 Ibid.
93 Ibid, 26 June, 1839.
94 Ibid.
undemocratic power over the Governor were sources of frustration for Reformers throughout the province.

Scobie’s characters, no doubt, would describe such critics as “a thousand Yankee loafers.” The political playwright depicts the Tories as reactionaries, opposing progress and wanting nothing more than “the golden reins of power.” When faced with the possibility of being thrown out of office they lament:

Farewell, ye masquerades, ye sparkling routs!
Now routed out, no more shall routs be ours;
No gilded chariots now shall roll along;
No sleighs that sweep across our icy path,—
Sleighs! No; this news that slays our warmest hopes,
Ends pageantry, and pride, and masquerades!!

The Family Compact, in Scobie’s drama, are little more than pompous place-holders. The criticism was sharp and unambiguous.

**Political Shakespeare**

As we have seen, the political playwrights of the late Victorian period were heir to a vibrant—if understudied—tradition of political theatre. Of the many preoccupations that linked these two disparate groups, few were more potent or enduring than Shakespeare. An advertisement for Bruce the photographer—who kept a studio on King Street West—occupied a small corner of an 1884 cover of *Grip* magazine. It is an otherwise unassuming promotion of little interest to historians except that whoever wrote it decided to reference *The Merchant of Venice*. Entranced, two gentlemen gaze at a picture; one exclaims: “What find I here,/Fair Portia’s counterfeit! What

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98 *Grip*, 1 March, 1884.
Demi-God/Hath come so near creation?"  

99 It was, of course, the talented Bruce who, “alone can so beautifully counterfeit nature.”  

100 The evidence is everywhere, from the number of his plays performed to the most mundane advertisement: Torontonians loved their Shakespeare.

The noted cultural historian Lawrence W. Levine describes the close relationship between the Bard and the American people.  

101 Theatres and churches were amongst the first and most significant cultural institutions in frontier communities. And virtually everywhere there was a theatre, Shakespeare was a “paramount force.” Levine demonstrates that nineteenth-century Americans, whether in big cities or small Mississippi River towns, absorbed Shakespeare deeply into their culture.  

102 Shakespeare was not an accompaniment to lighter fare, contends Levine, he was a vital part of it: “Shakespeare was popular entertainment in nineteenth-century America.” Consequently, American audiences knew their Shakespeare.

99 Ibid. The photographer alludes to the coffin scene in the Merchant of Venice.

100 Ibid.


102 Ibid, 161.

103 Ibid, 157-163.

104 Ibid, 163. Emphasis in original.


106 For a sense of the role Shakespeare played in Canada in the nineteenth century see, Yashdip S. Bains, English Canadian Theatre, 1765-1826 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), 199; John Ripley, “Shakespeare on the Montreal Stage, 1805-1826,” Theatre Research in Canada 3 no. 1 (Spring 1982); and, Mary Elizabeth Smith, “Shakespeare in Atlantic Canada During the Nineteenth Century,” Theatre Research in Canada 3 no. 2 (Fall 1982).


109 For a sense of the role Shakespeare played in Canada in the nineteenth century see, Yashdip S. Bains, English Canadian Theatre, 1765-1826 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1998), 199; John Ripley, “Shakespeare on the Montreal Stage, 1805-1826,” Theatre Research in Canada 3 no. 1 (Spring 1982); and, Mary Elizabeth Smith, “Shakespeare in Atlantic Canada During the Nineteenth Century,” Theatre Research in Canada 3 no. 2 (Fall 1982).
the United States and up into what would become Canada using the same repertoire and creating, what some have called, “a shared urban theatrical heritage.”\textsuperscript{109} As early as 1835, The Toronto Shakspeare [sic] Club was formed as a literary and debating society for young men and Shakespeare associations appeared in several cities across the province.\textsuperscript{110} Other literary societies, including the Toronto Women’s Literary Club and the African-Canadian women of the Frederic [sic] Douglass Self-Improvement Club of Amherstburg, as well as various Mechanics’ Institutes, regularly featured the Bard.\textsuperscript{111} Not surprisingly, Shakespeare made up an important part of the province’s curriculum for both the regular school system and higher education.\textsuperscript{112} In documenting the production of poetic dramas in nineteenth-century Canada, Anton Wagner and Richard Plant observe: “The main source of inspiration . . . was the nineteenth century conception of Shakespeare.”\textsuperscript{113} These plays, written for stage or simply to be read, “. . . exhibit numerous ‘Shakespearean’ qualities, words, phrases, and lines from his plays, . . . and characters modelled [sic] on memorable Shakespearean figures.”\textsuperscript{114} Shakespeare’s plays, or excerpts from them, were amongst the most common performances in Victorian Toronto’s theatres.\textsuperscript{115} Concerts intended to raise money for charity, regularly included famous soliloquies. But so too did minstrel shows, which parodied Shakespeare in ways that were only funny if audiences understood the original.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid, 9.
\textsuperscript{110} Heather Murray, “Pioneer Shakespeare Culture: Reverend Henry Scadding and His Shakespeare Display at the 1892 Toronto Industrial Exhibition,” in Shakespeare in Canada: ‘a world elsewhere’? Diana Brydon and Irena R. Makaryk eds., (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 50.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid, 50-51.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid, 51.
\textsuperscript{113} Wagner and Plant, eds. Volume One, 10.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{115} Mary Shortt, “From Douglas to The Black Crook: A History of Toronto Theatre, 1809-1874” (MA Thesis, University of Toronto, 1977), 95.
Shakespeare shared the stage with both low and high in the Queen city. And no one thought it strange at all.

Given the centrality of Shakespeare to nineteenth century culture, it should come as no surprise that political playwrights regularly incorporated the Bard into their cartoons and plays. Indeed, several Canadian political cartoonists before Bengough employed Shakespearean tropes or scenes to further their political commentary. Charles Kendrick, a contemporary of Bengough who regularly drew covers for the Canadian Illustrated News, also liked to mix Shakespeare and politics. In one graphic satire, Kendrick depicted Sir John and Alexander Mackenzie, the somewhat dour Liberal leader, dressed in armour, each hiding behind two trees. The political playwright portrayed the two warriors bathed in footlights on a stage with the Parliament buildings as backdrop. He quoted Shakespeare’s Henry IV, “slightly altered,” to highlight Mackenzie’s victory over Macdonald in the wake of the Pacific Scandal.

Nowhere, however, is this fusion between Shakespeare and politics more obvious than in the work of Bengough. In some cases, the political playwright employed Shakespearean devices to emphasize the ways in which politics in the young nation was little more than an act performed by hacks. In “GRIP’S PERPETUAL COMEDY,” Bengough referenced Shakespeare’s As You Like It (II, vii, 139-143) to address the issue of the adjournment of the Ontario Legislature and the subsequent assembling of the parliament in Ottawa. [Figure 2-11

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116 See for instance, “Grand Concert and Hop,” performed by the “Mechanic Amateur” company concluded with a farce entitled Shakespearian Ball. See “Grand Concert and Hop, 1865, 71, 76, 82” in the E. A. McDowell Collection of the Toronto Reference Library.
117 Bengough, for instance, included three such cartoons in his collection, A Caricature History of Canadian Politics. See Bengough, A Caricature History, 21, 30, 56.
119 Although Bengough was voraciously omnivorous in his re-workings of public entertainment into politics—using circuses and parodies of Gilbert and Sullivan along with blackface minstrelsy and melodrama and elephants and acrobats—he used Shakespeare more than any other theatrical source to comment on the politics of his day.
120 GRIP’S PERPETUAL COMEDY,” Grip, 28 March, 1874.
GRIP’S PERPETUAL COMEDY] As the politicians spill out of the provincial house, the author explains, “THEY HAVE THEIR EXITS AND THEIR ENTRANCES.” By referencing this particular play, however, Bengough was also making an astute comment about the nature of Dominion politics as performance:

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages.122

As soon as the show was over in Toronto, the actors left for the [Play]House of Commons in Ottawa. A perpetual comedy, these particular actors did indeed play many parts. Their exit from one led directly to another—both were performed more for the benefit of themselves than their constituents.

Another of Bengough’s Shakespearean cartoons illustrates the nature of Canadian politics as performance. In “OTHELLO BROWN’S APOLOGY,” the political playwright depicts a black-faced George Brown in the role of Othello addressing the Senate in an effort to explain his inability to secure reciprocity with the United States. [Figure 2-12 OTHELLO BROWN’S APOLOGY] Here, however, Bengough accentuates the meta-dramatic nature of the noble moor’s performance by standing the Globe-editor and Liberal Party politician on a stage in front of several footlights.124 Once again, the political playwright encouraged his audience to consider

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121 Ibid.
123 “OTHELLOS BROWN’S APOLOGY,” Grip, 27 February, 1875.
124 Bengough regularly drew attention to the meta-dramatic nature of his graphic satires by intentionally depicting his subjects bathed in the footlights of a clearly visible stage. Sometimes the theatrical conventions were foregrounded even more. See, “BEFORE THE CURTAIN FOR PUBLIC APPROVAL,” Grip 27 September, 1890, which shows Grit politicians returning to the stage for their curtain call. Other political cartoonists also used the stage trope as analogy. See “His Favourite Part,” Telegram, August 1900. Here Owen Staples (alias Rostap) depicted Laurier
Figure 2-11 “GRIP’S” PERPETUAL COMEDY

Figure 2-12  OTHELLOW BROWN’S APOLOGY
the parallels between the stage and the House of Commons. After the Liberals swept to power in
the wake of the Pacific Scandal, Brown had hoped to secure a reciprocal trade agreement with the
Americans—along with considerable personal prestige. In that same issue, Grip approached the
failed treaty using Marc Anthony’s funeral oration from Julius Caesar. In “Marc Brown’s
Oration Over the Body of his Friend Treaty,” one of the most famous passages of Shakespeare is
parodied to satirize Brown’s efforts: “My reputation went when Treaty died,/And neither now is
coming back to me.”125 By drawing attention to ways in which politicians were like actors, and
by invoking Shakespearean characters such as Marc Anthony, Bengough alluded to their self-
interest and ambition. It rendered his criticism more complex while simultaneously linking it to
the carnivalesque world of public entertainment.

A similar piece of meta-drama occurs in “NOT A REAL LION—EXCEPT OUTSIDE
THE HOUSE,” which re-enacts the play-within-a play from A Midsummer Night’s Dream.126
[Figure 2-13 “NOT A REAL LION”] Macdonald, now biding his time in opposition after the
Pacific Scandal, appears before the assembled House in the garb of a lion. With Dr. Charles
Tupper, the former premier of Nova Scotia and National Policy-proponent, playing the tailor
Robin Starveling—who ‘acts’ the moon with a lantern reading “OPPOSITION MOONSHINE”—
Macdonald performs the role of Snug the Joiner.127 None-too bright, in Shakespeare’s version,
Snug goes out of character to explain his part to the assembled audience. So too does the former

125 “Marc Brown’s Oration Over the Body of his Treaty,” Grip, 27 February, 1875. The original lines read, “My
heart is in the coffin there with Caesar./And I must pause till it come back to me.” William Shakespeare, The
Tragedy of Julius Caesar. (III, ii, 139-143) The Riverside Shakespeare, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Princeton:
Shakespearean tragedy to explore Brown’s failure, see “Scene from the Tragedy of Brownibus; or, Dictatorial
Insanity,” Grip, 20 February, 1875. Punning on Brown’s newspaper and Shakespeare’s famous theatre, the author
noted that the tragedy was “now performed with small success at the Globe Theatre.”
prime minister, who clarifies that he is not a real lion “EXCEPT OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.”

Outside of Ottawa, Macdonald ‘raged and roared’ accusations of corruption at the new Grit government despite behaving like a lamb in parliament—as evidenced by his “SHEEP’S TAIL” sewn to his “LION’S HIDE WORN ONLY AT PICNICS. ETC.” By choosing to call attention to Macdonald’s duplicitous performances—acting one way in the House and another in front of citizen-spectators—Bengough reveals his cynicism about the nature of Canadian politics. His fear was that voters would be fooled by Macdonald’s performances.

Bengough enjoyed using A Midsummer Night’s Dream to comment on politics. Not surprisingly, the character of Bottom—who turns into an ass—gave him particular pleasure. In A POLITICAL MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM, a full-page graphic satire, Bengough gave the role to the Honourable George Brown.

[Figure 2-14 A POLITICAL MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM] With a donkey’s head and “GLOBE” written on his shirt, the politician brays, “I AM SUCH A TENDER ASS.” The piece coincided with the production of the play at Mrs. Morrison’s Grand Opera House. In a more elaborate reworking of this piece, which appeared less than a month later, Bengough offered his readers another full-page cartoon of Brown as the ass. [Figure 2-15 SHAKESPEARE IN THE CITY ELECTIONS] This time around, Bengough supplemented the image with a lengthy re-write of Act IV, scene I. In the cartoon, the Tory politician Matthew C. Cameron is the fairy Puck who dispels the dream of a “REFORM MAJORITY IN TORONTO,” from the head of George Brown. Criticizing “GRIT CONFIDENCE,” Bengough takes the party to task for running a poor campaign. In the text of

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128 *Grip*, 17 February, 1877.
129 Ibid.
130 See also, “A CANADIAN NIGHT’S ENTERTAINMENT,” *Grip*, 29 September, 1877.
131 *Grip*, 19 December, 1874.
132 *SHAKESPEARE IN THE CITY ELECTIONS,* *Grip*, 23 January, 1875.
NOT A REAL LION—EXCEPT OUTSIDE THE HOUSE.

JOHN A.—"You fellows, you, whose gentle hearts do fear
When lion rough in wildest rage do roar, etc.
Then know that I, too, I'm a little fright'ner, am.
A Real's fell me else no Sink's dam."
"Midsummer Night's Dream.

Figure 2-13 NOT A REAL LION
Figure 2-14  A POLITICAL MIDSUMMER NIGHT’S DREAM
the drama, however, he takes his criticism of Brown even further with accusations of greed and ambition. The politician awakes from his dream—“a most rare vision of place and power”—only to find his hopes of knighthoods and “amb-ass-ador[ships]” dashed by Tory success.

Bengough used Shakespeare to add depth and humour to his political criticism. In an interesting reversal of his usual depiction of Alexander Mackenzie, the talented satirist presented a scene from Henry V, called “EATING THE LEEK.”

Dealing with a Tory accusation linking Mackenzie’s brother to a steel contract for the Canadian Pacific Railway (C.P.R.), Bengough cast the Grit leader in the role of one of Shakespeare’s most successful leaders. Powerful and decisive, Henry V, played by Mackenzie, beats down his accusers in the House with the strength of his explanation. In sharp contrast to the armoured Mackenzie’s authoritative air are the comical Dr. Tupper, forced to the ground, and Macdonald, whose tiny sword and lack of armour speak volumes about his manliness. When Bengough included the Grit leader in his public entertainment cartoons, he tended to portray Mackenzie’s weaknesses. Perhaps the forcefulness of the politician’s explanation gave the artist pause for thought. In a culture steeped in Shakespeare, audiences would have appreciated the compliment Bengough paid Mackenzie by depicting him as one of Britain’s most successful rulers.

In an 1882 cartoon, Bengough gave vent to another characteristically harsh assessment of Macdonald. This time, in “MACBETH HATH MURDERED THE MANITOBA CHARTERS,” the prime minister is depicted as the murderous Scott, with a blood-stained ‘veto-dagger’ in his hand.

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133 “EATING THE LEEK,” Grip, 8 April, 1876.
SHAKESPEARE IN THE CITY ELECTIONS.
THE TORY PUDDING THE DREAM OF THE GROIT BOTTOM.
(Vide Midsummer Night's Dream.)

Figure 2-15 SHAKESPEARE IN THE CITY ELECTIONS
Figure 2-16  EATING THE LEEK
notes, the cartoon is meant to draw attention to Ottawa’s disallowance of subsidiary rail lines approved by the Manitoba legislature.\textsuperscript{136}

The veto Macdonald exercised killed the competing lines thus protecting the C.P.R. monopoly. A grim-faced and enormous ‘Lady Syndicate Macbeth,’ clutching her monopoly charter in her giant fist, glowers on approvingly. The murder, which took place in the “PROVINCIAL RIGHTS BED,” represented to Bengough the vicious ambition of the Macdonald government and its unparalleled greed. By using \textit{Macbeth} as a vehicle to explore the issue, the political playwright was able to employ the play’s gender dynamic to present Macdonald as a weak leader bullied by his designing wife. Towering over the prime minister, who appears as unsure of his murderous actions as Shakespeare’s protagonist, Lady Syndicate Macbeth clearly wears the pants in their relationship.

But Bengough was not only critical of the Tories. In an 1885 effort, he used the appropriately titled \textit{The Life and Death of King John} to launch an attack on Edward Blake.\textsuperscript{137} In “THE SALARY GRAB,” the Liberal leader is depicted as Lymoges, Duke of Austria. [Figure 2-18 THE SALARY GRAB] Chastised by Miss Canada, in the role of Constance, for voting in favour of a pay increase for members of the House, Bengough pointed out Blake’s hypocrisy. That the cartoon referred to a play treating a complicated period of succession to the English throne was appropriate to the satire. After succeeding Mackenzie as leader of the Liberal Party, Blake was never able to oust ‘King John,’ and there were many who wished to take the Grit’s place.\textsuperscript{138} Bengough thus used Shakespeare’s original to once again comment on the thorny issue

\textsuperscript{136} Cumming, \textit{Sketches}, 159-160.
\textsuperscript{137} “THE SALARY GRAB,” \textit{Grip}, 25 July, 1885. Generally, Bengough had a favourable opinion of Blake. See “MISERERE! (A scene form the political ‘Il Trovatore.’), \textit{Grip}, 30 April, 1887. Here the tragic love story of the opera was between Miss Canada and Blake. The evil Duke who wants to keep them apart is the “Revising Barrister.”
Figure 2-17 MACBETH HATH MURDERED
Figure 2-18

THE SALARY GRAB

Curfew

Hast thou not spoke like thunder on my side? Been sworn my soldier? Bidst thou upon thy stars, thy fortune, and thy strength? And dost thou now fall over to my foes? Thou wear a lion's hide! Doff it for shame, and hang a calf's skin on those recreant limbs.

-Shakespeare.
of ascension to the political throne. Although the cartoon was ostensibly about the Liberals, Bengough could not resist the opportunity to take a parting shot at Macdonald. The prime minister plays the role of Philip, the illegitimate child of Richard I. Throughout the play, Philip is identified by Shakespeare simply as “Bastard.” Bengough probably derived a certain amount of pleasure from the clever insult.

But it was not just Bengough who used Shakespeare. From the early period, Hugh Scobie’s 1839 Provincial Drama Called The Family Compact contains several references to Shakespeare. There are the three witches who greet the pompous Dr. John Scott—a thinly veiled version of the Church of England clergyman, educator and guiding light of the Family Compact, Bishop John Strachan. The allusion to Macbeth’s meeting with the hags suggests Scott’s/Strachan’s over-arching ambition—which in the play centres on his oft-expressed desire to become Bishop of Canada. Once he is accomplished that goal, the insatiable bishop immediately longs for even “higher honours.” Scobie also has Christopher, the head of the Family Compact, perform his decision to continue fighting the opposition through Hamlet’s famous “To be, or not to be” soliloquy. In it, Christopher questions the value of suffering the “slings and arrows of outrageous party;/Or take arms against a sea of troubles,/And, by resigning, end them?” As Hamlet, Christopher vacillates between fighting for his office and resigning. Unlike Hamlet, Scobie’s character is concerned primarily with the spoils of his position. The worry of being powerless is overwhelming to the Family Compact and “Thus love of lucre makes us cowards all…” Scobie uses one of the most familiar scenes from Shakespeare to satirize the

140 Ibid.
141 Ibid, 31 July, 1839.
142 Ibid.
143 Ibid.
shameless greed of the provincial elite, revealing the pettiness of their concerns through a contrast to Hamlet’s high-minded philosophizing.

The political playwright William Henry Fuller, writing some 35 years later, opened his satiric *The Unspecific Scandal* with the three witches from Macbeth—this time played by newspaper editors from the party press.¹⁴⁴ The scene is intended to elicit a laugh but also, as in Scobie’s dramatization, to call to mind the murderous ambition in Shakespeare’s original. A similar process is at work just two pages later when Alexander Mackenzie presides over a motley collection of Grits and “addresses them after the manner of Brutus over the body of Caesar.”¹⁴⁵ Connecting Mackenzie to the murderer of Julius Caesar, Fuller cast aspersions on the Liberal’s ambition to take over the country. “Grits, followers and office seekers, lend me your ears,” begins Alexander.¹⁴⁶ Fuller instantly sets the tone. In stark contrast to the complex Brutus, Mackenzie’s speech reveals a politician obsessed with power.

**The Political Circus**

Another type of public entertainment that inspired Bengough was the circus. With its sideshows, daredevils, acrobats and animals, it provided fertile ground for political satire. [Figure 2-19 GLORIOUS OLD KINGSTON, Figure 2-20 THE STAR OF THE ARENA, Figure 2-21 THE POLITICAL CIRCUS, Figure 2-22 TRIFLING NEW PROPOSITIONS] As we have seen with the National Policy elephant, Bengough could employ circus tropes to great effect. In “A RIEL UGLY POSITION,” he depicts a beleaguered-looking Macdonald as a daredevil equestrian.¹⁴⁷ [Figure 2-23 A RIEL UGLY POSITION] Standing astride two powerful horses, each facing the opposite direction and symbolizing English and French influence, the audience of anonymous

¹⁴² Ibid, 5.
¹⁴⁶ Ibid.
¹⁴⁷ “A RIEL UGLY POSITION,” *Grip*, 29 August, 1885.
citizen-spectators waits to see how the crafty Macdonald will handle the situation. An
intransigent Louis Riel sits atop the Prime Minister—the source of all his woes. Although
Carman Cumming makes a strong case that Bengough borrowed the idea from Punch’s Tenniel,
who portrayed Lord Northbrook in a similar situation, I would argue that the graphic satire only
succeeded because of its audiences’ familiarity with the myriad acrobatic riders who were a
staple of the circuses that visited the city.\(^{148}\) [Figures 1-35 and 1-36] Set in a big top with
Macdonald dressed as a performer, Bengough meant to comment upon not only the
precariousness of the Prime Minister’s situation, but the nature of politics as performance.
Audiences were expecting a show and perhaps anticipating a fall. This was the nature of politics
in the young dominion. The opposing forces of French and English could be perfectly expressed
by two horses racing off in opposite directions.\(^{149}\)

Indeed, for Bengough, circus entertainments proved to be a useful political metaphor for
exploring the French-English divide. Take for instance “THE DISCORDANT ORGANS,”
portraying an organ grinder caught between two party organs and their respective political
monkeys.\(^{150}\) [Figure 2-24 THE DISCORDANT ORGANS] Although such street grinders
frequently performed on their own, it was not uncommon to find them at circus parades and
sideshows.\(^{151}\) Either way, they were a common form of public entertainment. Here, however,

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\(^{148}\) Cumming, *Sketches*, 12-13. See also chapter one, 53-55.

\(^{149}\) Bengough could also use decidedly more high-brow public entertainments to discuss the tension between French and English-speaking Canada. See “SCENE FROM ‘LOUIS XI,” *Grip*, 1 March, 1884. In Bengough’s version, Sir John plays Louis XI on his knees beseeching Sir H. Langevin, representing Catholic Quebec, “Give me but twenty years more of (official) life, and I’ll give you everything you ask!”


\(^{151}\) A similar kind of public entertainment that graphic satirists used to discuss politics were peep shows and camera obscuras. Bengough, for instance used a peep show to discuss Laurier in “‘FAITH OR SIGHT?’” *Grip*, 12 March, 1892. Henri Julien, in “THE PEEP SHOW,” commented on Montreal’s tumultuous politics in a chaotic cover for the *Canadian Illustrated News*. *Canadian Illustrated News*, 16 January, 1875. Both illustrators regularly fused politics and public entertainment.
Figure 2-20  THE STAR OF THE ARENA

THE STAR OF THE ARENA.
Signor Farreri bringing up the Globe.
Figure 2-21  THE POLITICAL CIRCUS
Figure 2-22  TRIFLING NEW PROPOSITIONS
Figure 2-23  A RIEL UGLY POSITION
Figure 2-24 THE DISCORDANT ORGANS
Bengough imagines Macdonald as a dilapidated organ grinder tangled up in the long leashes of two quarrelling monkeys. The discordant music of the party newspapers—The Toronto Mail and the Montreal Gazette—demonstrates just how divisive the Northwest Rebellion was. The Ontario paper demands the disestablishment of the Roman Catholic Church, “NOT WITHSTANDING ANY & ALL TREATIES,” while its Quebec counterpart calls such Protestant-chauvinism “DANGEROUS NONSENSE.” Caught in the middle of the fracas, Macdonald looks stunned. In Bengough’s world of political performance, Macdonald’s attempts at balancing French and English rivalries invariably ended in failure.

Such was not the case with the political playwright’s depictions of Sir Wilfrid Laurier—who succeeded Blake as Liberal leader going on to become one of the country’s greatest prime ministers. In “THE GREAT VAUDEVILLE ARTIST ON TOUR,” Bengough barely hid his admiration. [Figure 2-25 THE GREAT VAUDEVILLE ARTIST ON TOUR] Three posters pasted to a fence advertise the “GRAND TOUR OF THE GREAT POLITICAL STAR,” Wilfrid Laurier. They reveal a talented and daring performer swallowing the sword of the separate schools issue and wrestling the fearsome free trade snake. In the centre of the image, the audience witnessed the courageous political performer walking a tightrope while balancing two balls representing French and English Canada. Unlike the depictions of Macdonald, where the Prime Minister seems unable to steady himself under the weight of the French-English divide,

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152 Cumming identifies the monkeys as Edward Farrer or Christopher Bunting of the Toronto Mail and Thomas or Richard White of the Montreal Gazette. Cumming, Sketches, 129.
153 Grip, 11 September, 1886.
155 “THE GREAT VAUDEVILLE ARTIST ON TOUR,” Grip, 18 July, 1898.
156 Ibid.
157 The motif of a politician swallowing a sword was used again, this time in 1908 by the Liberals to discredit Robert Borden. In this instance, Borden dressed as a circus performer and clearly at a circus, prepares to wow Jack Canuck by swallowing the sword of the “TORY RECORD.” Jack is less than impressed. “By Their Works Ye Shall No Them,” Canadian Pamphlets and Broadside Collection, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. CAP 00706
Laurier is billed as “THE GREATEST EQUILIBRIST ON EARTH.” Poised and purposeful, one senses that for Bengough at least, Laurier’s political performance in the circus of Ottawa politics was much more inspiring than Macdonald’s.158

In “THE CONTRACT SWALLOWED,” Bengough once again attacked Macdonald through the medium of the circus or menagerie.159 [Figure 2-26 THE CONTRACT SWALLOWED] Boa constrictors and other large snakes were incorporated into some of the earliest menageries to visit the city and their inclusion in touring circuses continued into the twentieth century.160 Here the snake is presented as Macdonald’s Parliamentary Majority, its gaping maw ready to swallow anything the politician feeds it. The Prime Minister, looking suspicious, holds a brush used to lubricate a controversial deal with “OFFICIAL INFLUENCE GREASE.” The belly of the serpent is near to bursting at the magnitude of the shameless doling out of government contracts. Even Macdonald seems unsure whether his latest act will go over: “YES, IT’S DOWN, SURE ENOUGH; BUT I’M AFRAID IT WON’T DIGEST.”

Bengough often set his political performers under the big top. In “THE LEAP FOR LIFE,” he depicts Alexander Mackenzie as a daring trapeze artist.161 [Figure 2-27 THE LEAP FOR LIFE] Hurtling from one flying trapeze to another—the first representing his riding in Lambton and the second a new seat in East York—the performer must first cross the interminable void of an election. Based on Bengough’s drawing, he must have doubted Mackenzie’s chances. A crowd, full of delighted Conservatives, looks forward to a fall.

158 Other political cartoonists were less impressed. Charles H. Kahrs depicted Laurier as a foolish daredevil about to go over Niagara Falls in a barrel. “DON’T MISS IT!/LAURIER’S/UNPARALLELED/(DE)FEAT . . . /PERFORMANCE/TO TAKE PLACE/ RAIN OR SHINE,” reads the sign that advertised the show. “Another Adventurous Inventor,” Daily Mail and Empire, 20 June, 1896. Kahrs drew Laurier as relying on gas, bluster, wind and ambiguity for his doomed performance.
159 “THE CONTRACT SWALLOWED,” Grip, 19 February, 1881.
Figure 2.25 THE GREAT VAUDEVILLE ARTIST ON TOUR
SIR JOHN.—"YES, IT’S DOWN, SURE ENOUGH; BUT I’M AFRAID IT WON'T DIGEST."

Figure 2-26  THE CONTRACT SWALLOWED
Figure 2-27  THE LEAP FOR LIFE
Political Melodrama

As scholarship on nineteenth-century culture demonstrates, melodrama was an important way in which Victorians conceived the world around them.\textsuperscript{162} For his part, Bengough revelled in political adaptations of the domestic melodrama.\textsuperscript{163} In “THE NEW DEPARTURE,” the satiric political playwright sets the stage for a teary-eyed leave-taking between Edward Blake and a cross-dressed Alexander Mackenzie.\textsuperscript{164} [Figure 2-28 THE NEW DEPARTURE] A gripping scene, the diminutive Mackenzie clings to the broad chest of ‘her’ lover, who says in parting, “FAREWELL FOR THE PRESENT, DEAR; YOU AND THE GIRLS MUST MANAGE THE HOUSE IN MY ABSENCE!” The House of Parliament is transfigured into a feminized, middle-class enclave. Addressing Blake’s decision to leave Mackenzie’s government soon after its triumph over the scandal-plagued Tories, Bengough presents a tableau that could have been lifted from any number of contemporary melodramas. It is also significant that Bengough casts Blake as the man of the house in contrast to the associations of frailty and dependence which accompanied Mackenzie’s cross-dressed performance. Would Mackenzie be able to make it on her own? The \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, in contrast, depicted Blake on one of its covers as a preening ballerina performing before a backdrop of Parliament.\textsuperscript{165} [Figure 2-29 Here We Are


\textsuperscript{163} According to Rosenman, “domestic melodrama . . . focuses on tensions within the Victorian middle-class home rather than conflicts between virtuous working-class women and their aristocratic tormentors . . . .” Rosenman, “‘Mimic Sorrows,’”22. Vicinus argues that “domestic melodrama was the working out in popular culture of the conflict between the family and its values and the economic and social assault of industrialization.” Vicinus, “‘Helpless and Unfriended,’” 128.

\textsuperscript{164} “THE NEW DEPARTURE,” \textit{Grip}, 21 February, 1874.

\textsuperscript{165} \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 29 November, 1879.
Again] Either way, the decision by a political playwright to depict politicians as female, was a not-so-subtle critique of their abilities as leaders.\textsuperscript{166} Melodramatic conventions also included variations on the subject of forced marriages and marriages of convenience. \textit{Grip} included a version of this in “THE PROPOSED MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE.”\textsuperscript{167} [Figure 2-30 THE PROPOSED MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE] Sir John plays the role of concerned father, attempting to marry off his daughter to the unappealing Sir Charles Tupper. Macdonald’s child is the Liberal-Conservative Party, and her teary protests call to mind the dutiful daughter’s dilemma at challenging paternal authority, “O PAPA! DEAR PAPA, I WOULD DO ANYTHING FOR YOU, BUT I CAN’T—CAN’T ACCEPT THIS ODIOUS MAN!” Cumming correctly identifies the scene as “an instantly recognizable dramatic situation.”\textsuperscript{168} He notes that Bengough had employed one of “the most stereotypical dramatic tableau of his day—the villain demanding to have his wicked way with the innocent daughter of an impoverished man . . .”\textsuperscript{169} The trope allowed political playwrights like Bengough to tap into deep-seated notions of gender and class.

Nicholas Flood Davin penned his own marriage of convenience blending domestic melodrama with a deeply cynical attack on the self-serving nature of politicians and the vitriolic party press. Published in 1876, \textit{The Fair Grit; or, The Advantages of Coalition} revolves around

\textsuperscript{166} I believe that the use of cross-dressing in Bengough’s cartoons and the work of several of his fellow citizen-playwrights comes from the long tradition of cross-dressing in public entertainment. The illustrator Charles Kendrick, for instance, produced a similar political-domestic melodrama on the cover of the \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}. Two politicians are depicted as a married couple arguing over money. The wife, it seems, has spent all the government revenue on “infernal nonsense.” See “‘TOODLES’ AS PERFORMED AT THE PROVINCIAL HALL, TORONTO,” \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 29 March, 1873. Kendrick took the well-known play, \textit{The Toodles}, which featured a wife with a penchant for frivolous spending, and used it to comment on wasteful government expenditures.\textsuperscript{167} “THE PROPOSED MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE,” \textit{Grip}, 5 February, 1887. This particular cartoon conforms to Peter Brooks’ explanation of melodramatic conventions involving innocent working-class girls exploited by upper-class men. Brooks, \textit{The Melodramatic}, 44.\textsuperscript{168} Cumming, \textit{Sketches}, 7.\textsuperscript{169} \textit{Ibid.}
Figure 2-29 HERE WE ARE AGAIN
THE PROPOSED MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE.

Daughter, O papa! Dear papa, I would do anything for you, but I can't—I CANT accept this odious man!

Figure 2-30 THE PROPOSED MARRIAGE OF CONVENIENCE
the love affair of a young couple from opposing political houses.\textsuperscript{170} Angelina, the fair Grit, is the daughter of Senator Alexander McPeterson—an allusion to Grit leader Alexander Mackenzie. Her would-be lover is George St. Clair, the son of a respected Tory. Although the couple initially meets with resistance, things change when their parents realize the advantages of coalition, namely personal gain.

Davin, like Bengough, was a journalist, having reported for the \textit{Globe} before going on to found the Regina \textit{Leader}. Like several political playwrights, Davin was also a politician, going on to serve in the House as a Conservative. Despite his allegiances, his play was deeply cynical of both parties. One of his characters explains politics in Canada as:

\begin{quote}
\ldots a rivalry in indecent hypocrisy in which practice and profession are more than usually apart. They out-vie each other first in professions of purity, and then out-do each other, as far as it is possible, in acts of corruption. It is a buncombe struggle—a battle of quacks. Each has his sham nostrum, his delusive specific, and the poor country is the patient whom the betraying drug of the blatant and brawling Pharmacopola leaves worse than he was. In Opposition all is virtue; in power all the reverse.\textsuperscript{171}
\end{quote}

The political performances of politicians, for Davin at least, are all sound and furry signifying nothing.

Davin also uses domestic melodrama to comment on the party press. Resolved to marry despite their political differences, the young couple concludes that the only way to win over their respective parents is through the press. When George goes to the office of the Grit \textit{Smasher}, however, he is confronted with a satanic scene presided over by a devilish editor.\textsuperscript{172} The latter is stumbled upon describing how a Tory should be roasted and then pontificating on the existence

\textsuperscript{170} Nicholas Flood Davin, \textit{The Fair Grit; or, The Advantages of Coalition} in Wagner and Plant, eds. \textit{Volume One}, 138-157. See also, Nicholas Flood Davin, \textit{The Fair Grit; or, The Advantages of Coalition} (Toronto: Belford Bros., 1876).

\textsuperscript{171} Ibid, 141. Emphasis in original.

\textsuperscript{172} Ibid, 151.
of hell. “The fact is . . .,” says the editor-in-chief, “if they could knock the bottom out of hell we would re-create it with an article. All Canada is at our feet, and we can do as we please, and we are determined to have a hell.”

The scene is not much different when George visits the Tory Dasher. There, the editor-in-chief takes the young man into the paper’s “inquisitorial chamber.”

“On all sides,” recounts the aspiring husband, “were implements of torture: boots, thumb-screws, Procrustean beds, ankle-chains, hand-cuffs, rapiers, daggers, and many other cruel instruments . . .”

At the end of the room, over a slow-burning fire, a victim is being brutally consumed at a leisurely pace. As the editor recounts to George the pleasures to be had from torturing a victim, “a radiant light of inspiration glowed on his face . . .”

Here the villains of the melodrama are the two warring newspapers, threatening the happiness of the young couple.

But, in keeping with Davin’s premise that politicians are more self-serving than ideologically pure, an arrangement between the two parents is nevertheless concluded.

George’s Tory father is offered a lucrative position with the Grits and the staff of the Smasher is suddenly on the happy couple’s side. The newspapermen sing cheerful songs of roasting those opposed to the marriage.

The play revels in its depiction of unscrupulous politicians and a fanatic party press. Angelina concludes the play with what might very well be taken for its moral: “The sad suspicion will force itself unbidden/That by both parties country’s overridden.”

Davin’s jaded view of the political life of his country came from his experiences as a journalist and continued during his tenure in the House of Commons from 1887 until 1900. By 1901, the political playwright was dead by his own hand.

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173 Ibid.
174 Ibid, 152.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid, 154-155.
178 Ibid, 156.
The Melodramatic Decline and Fall of Miss Canada

One of the most interesting expressions of these melodramatic performances in political satire took the form of Miss Canada and her relationship to Cousin Jonathan or Uncle Sam. In his *Caricature History of Canadian Politics*, Bengough included an 1869 cartoon from *Diogenes* that presents the figurative images of Canada, Great Britain and the United States engaging in a melodramatic convention surrounding love and unwanted marriage.\(^{180}\) His inclusion of the *Diogenes* image is important because it proves Bengough was familiar with the trope and believed it particularly effective for exploring the fraught issue of Canadian-American relations. [Figure 2-31 A PERTINENT QUESTION] In it, a visibly distressed Miss Canada—she is depicted with furrowed brow, contemptuous expression and angled body—energetically protests her mother’s “pertinent” question. Although Mrs. Britannia suspects that her daughter has encouraged the affections of the uncouth Cousin Jonathan, Miss Canada is emphatic in her response: “ENCOURAGEMENT! CERTAINLY NOT, MAMA. I HAVE TOLD HIM WE CAN NEVER BE UNITED.”\(^{181}\) This small piece of political melodrama unfolds while the coarse cousin picks his teeth with a pocket knife. Bengough interpreted the image as a discussion of the annexationist tendencies of the United States.\(^{182}\) That Canada is depicted as a young maiden in such situations, with its associations of purity and weakness, is suggestive.

The convention of the unwanted advances of an American suitor was revived by the political playwright William Henry Fuller. He ends his wildly popular *H.M.S. Parliament; or, The Lady Who Loved a Government Clerk* with a suitably melodramatic conclusion which could

\(^{180}\) Bengough, *A Caricature History*, 27.
\(^{181}\) Ibid.
\(^{182}\) Ibid, 26.
A PERTINENT QUESTION.

MRS. BRITANNIA.—"IS IT POSSIBLE, MY DEAR, THAT YOU HAVE EVER GIVEN YOUR COUSIN JONATHAN ANY ENCOURAGEMENT?"

MISS CANADA.—"ENCOURAGEMENT! CERTAINLY NOT, MAMMA. I HAVE TOLD HIM WE CAN NEVER BE UNITED."

Figure 2-31  A PERTINENT QUESTION
be a veritable stage-adaptation of the *Diogenes* cartoon.\(^{183}\) In the scene, Fuller has Miss Canada and Britannia, her mother, discussing some pressing issues regarding the spendthrift daughter’s political household. When her mother presses her too firmly on the issue of spending, Miss Canada engages in a bit of emotional blackmail: “I am sure, mamma, I haven’t spent nearly so much as sister ‘Zealand’ or sister ‘Australia has—and see what a lot of beef and things I sent you last year!—but there, I always thought you liked them better than me; and if you don’t want to give me any more money I can borrow it from ‘Cousin Jonathan.’ I know he’ll lend it to me.”

Given the context of expanding political, cultural and economic relations with the United States, Canadian audiences would have appreciated the significance of the dramatic exchange. Familial ties to Britain were important, but something in the naïve flippancy of Miss Canada’s potential betrayal bespeaks a childish impudence which many no doubt felt characterized those who wanted closer relations with America.

Britannia cautions her daughter:

> Now, my child, there is one thing I must really speak to you very seriously about. I don’t want to meddle with your domestic affairs, and, although I can’t say I approve of your going back on your mother’s free trade principles in the way you have done, still I don’t feel called upon to interfere, but I am told you are carrying on a flirtation with your “Cousin Jonathan,” and some people are even talking about an alliance between you. [Reproachfully.] Oh! Canada, *I would never have believed it of a well-conducted girl like you!*\(^{184}\)

Even though Fuller cannot resist one last dig at the National Policy, he ends his political drama on a note that resonated with audience members. Miss Canada assures her mother that the rumours of a union with her southern cousin are untrue. Indignantly she cries, “*It’s a horrid story mamma,* I like ‘Jonathan’ very much as a near neighbour and cousin, but I should never dream of


\(^{184}\) Ibid, 192. Emphasis in original.
a closer connection, and I don’t believe he desires it either.”

She is also sure who is responsible for the vicious rumours: “It is people like that horrid ‘Bystander’ who have been setting these stories about.”

Although Miss Canada admits she may “flirt” a bit, she insists to her mother she will “never be untrue . . ..”

For a much darker re-staging of the convention of Miss Canada’s relationship to ‘Cousin Jonathan,’ one need only examine a piece of propaganda put out by The Industrial League during the 1891 election. A pro-business special interest group, they were supporters of Macdonald’s protectionist National Policy. In an attempt to sway public opinion, they recast the melodrama in a more conventional manner. In this tradition, virtuous working-class heroines were terrorized by upper-class lechers. [Figure 2-32 THE WAY HE WOULD LIKE IT] “THE WAY HE WOULD LIKE IT,” presents a bound and impoverished Miss Canada being sold off to a demonic-looking Uncle Sam. The libidinous expression of lust on his face contrasts sharply with that of the Orientalized Sir Richard Cartwright. With his Arab dress, he performs the role of white-slaver with cool detachment. A former Tory who defected to the Liberals, Cartwright became the minister of finance and pushed for freer trade.

The intention of the piece was to create anxiety surrounding the Liberal’s economic policies with the United States. Here is the conclusion in the evolution of Miss Canada’s family drama. Her mother, Britannia is now absent, unwilling or unable to help her wayward child. Ominously, ‘Cousin Jonathan’ has changed from teeth-picking hayseed to satanic abuser.

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186 She is referring to Goldwin Smith’s *Bystander*.
188 “1891 Election (Cartoons) Item 1,” Toronto Reference Library.
Figure 2-32  THE WAY HE WOULD LIKE IT
The scene is reminiscent of another referred to in an 1893 speech by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union. In an effort to rally awareness and legislation around immoral advertisements for public entertainment, the speaker mentions a series of shocking images that appeared on playbills in the public sphere. One of these is called “Babylonish Slave-Market,” and depicted a “crowd of girls in semi-nude condition . . . grouped on the ground in various postures, while one is in the block for sale . . .”

Using conventions from melodrama—and pornography—the authors of “THE WAY HE WOULD LIKE IT” drew from familiar elements of public entertainment to cast aspersions on the intentions of their political rivals. Choosing such a compelling image, one that hinges on overt sexual desire, prostitution and interracial bondage, probably caught the attention of many citizen-spectators.

**The Pacific Scandal as Public Entertainment**

To help focus my analysis, I would like to discuss a particular political event—the Pacific Scandal—to demonstrate how several of Toronto’s political playwrights interpreted Macdonald’s disgrace through a matrix of Shakespeare and circuses. The national embarrassment involved a bribery scandal that saw the C.P.R., headed by Sir Hugh Allan, funneling several hundred thousand dollars into Tory coffers. Perhaps most personally damaging to Macdonald was the discovery of a telegram to Allan asking for another $10,000. Not surprisingly, Bengough had a lot to say about the Prime Minister’s impropriety. And, in typical fashion, he frequently expressed himself through themes and motifs borrowed from public entertainment. Indeed, *Grip*’s 1873 launch coincided with the eruption of the scandal. It was the young nation’s first real political embarrassment and set *Grip* on its initial path. That Bengough chose to interpret the

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Pacific Scandal using Shakespeare and circuses speaks to the creativity and political imagination of many Victorian Torontonians.

As we have seen, Shakespearian tropes were common for Bengough. During the election that followed in the wake of Macdonald’s misconduct, he presented the issue as a great battle between good and evil. In “REHEARSING FOR THE 23rd INSTANT,” the satirical critic once again reprised the Old Chieftain’s role as the tyrannical Richard III. [Figure 2-33 REHEARSING FOR THE 23rd INSTANT] Beside him, the dour Alexander Mackenzie is cast as a noble Hamlet, preparing to fight his adversary over the issue of the Pacific Scandal. Juxtaposed are not simply two opposing political ideologies, Tory vs. Reform, but two very different styles of leadership. As I have argued, Torontonians knew their Shakespeare. What was Hamlet? Like Mackenzie he was intelligent and moral. But he was also indecisive, unsure about the right course of action. At a time when the Liberals needed a strong leader, Bengough’s depiction of Mackenzie as a man almost too good for the world of politics, succinctly conveyed the Grit’s inadequacies and presaged his untimely fall from power. Conversely, Macdonald’s performance of the evil King Richard, with the dagger of the Toronto Mail’s vitriolic support and his mace inscribed with the word “Power,” would have resonated deeply with Bengough’s readers. Here was a man obsessed with power, deceptive and manipulating just like Shakespeare’s arch villain. Although Bengough hoped that Macdonald would meet Richard’s fate—the quote from Act V, Scene III that accompanies the image was spoken just before the usurper’s nightmarish premonition and defeat in battle—Macdonald proved more resilient than that. Of course, not even Macdonald’s famous good luck would stem the tide of anger that initially followed the breaking of the Pacific Scandal and the Conservatives were swept from power. (Although Macdonald managed to keep his seat in Parliament much to Mackenzie’s chagrin.)
REHEARSING FOR THE 23rd INSTANT.

M. "I WILL FIGHT HIM UPON THIS THEME UNTIL MY EYELIDS WILL NO LONGER WAG!"—HAREL, Act v., Scene 1.

JOHN A. "WHAT DO I FEAR?"—RICHARD III., Act v., Scene 10.

Figure 2-33  REHEARSING FOR THE 23rd INSTANT
In the following cartoon, Bengough satirizes the party’s shock and grief at their fall from grace after nearly twenty years in power. [Figure 2-34 OF COMFORT NO MAN SPEAK] The scene is clearly one of mourning: it is set in a graveyard, the willow tree symbolizing death and the black sash on the politician’s top hat suggesting grieving. But, characteristically, Bengough invoked a Shakespearian allusion to add depth to the meaning. The reference is to *Richard II* Act III Scene II. Here the ill-fated king learns of the defection of his supporters and recognizes that defeat is upon him. That the play treats the larger themes of the ill-effects of a bad leader and the necessity of removing him from power were a vital part of Bengough’s criticism.

But if Bengough felt the Pacific Scandal was grave enough for Shakespeare, he also could not help but interpret the event through the topsy-turvy world of the circus. He produced a series of cartoons during and after the scandal that explained the events surrounding Macdonald’s temporary un-doing through the matrix of circus performances. Through them, the political playwright explored issues surrounding the major political actors involved in the scandal while simultaneously raising concerns about the partisan press and the role of audience-voters watching the show.

In “WILL HE COME TO GRIEF?,” we see Macdonald “in the ring of the political circus.”[192] [Figure 2-35 WILL HE COME TO GRIEF?] The clown, gleefully waiting for the donkey of the Pacific Scandal to unseat its corrupt rider, is none other than George Brown of the *Globe*. Bengough probably derived a certain amount of pleasure from casting the Reform party worthy in the unbecoming garb of a clown. The pointed stick with which he prods the beast, all done for the entertainment of an amused audience, are the sharp editorials Brown used to fan the flames of the scandal.

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"OF COMFORT NO MAN SPEAK;
LET’S TALK OF GRAVES AND WORMS AND EPITAPHS!"—Shakespeare.

Figure 2-34   OF COMFORT NO MAN SPEAK
“THE IRREPRESSIBLE JACK; OR, THE CONSERVATIVE RESUSCITATION,” presented the audience with the former prime minister depicted as a circus barker.\textsuperscript{193} [Figure 2-36 THE IRREPRESSIBLE JACK] As I argue in the previous chapter, there was a significant discourse at the time surrounding the corruption of youth through public entertainment and it is significant that Mackenzie and Blake are presented as children. Bengough made a similar point in “THE COMING ATTRACTION.”\textsuperscript{194} [Figure 2-1 THE COMING ATTRACTION] Sir John’s performance as the liminal figure of a side showman provides a visual signifier of the anxiety felt by many toward the politician’s contaminating influence on the nation. Reformers thought that Macdonald’s fall would be the last they saw of him. Instead, the Tories chose him as leader of the opposition and feted him at various banquets. Given the prevailing feelings about the immorality of side show barkers, it is no surprise that Bengough chose to present the defunct leader as a shabby huckster.

Bengough, as we have seen, also enjoyed depicting Sir John as an acrobatic rider.\textsuperscript{195} [Figure 2-37 WILL HE GET THROUGH?] In “WILL HE GET THROUGH?,” Alexander Mackenzie plays a clown, holding a small hoop through which the disgraced politician must somehow jump. The hoop is the fixed day for the re-assembling of the House on the 23\textsuperscript{rd} of October. In an astute commentary on the role of newspapers in the shaping of the public sphere, George Brown is cast as ringmaster for this particular circus. Equestrian daredevils—including many female riders—were amongst the most popular parts of the various circuses that visited the

\textsuperscript{193} “THE IRREPRESSIBLE JACK; or, THE CONSERVATIVE RESSUCITATION,” \textit{Grip}, 22 November, 1873.
\textsuperscript{194} “THE COMING ATTRACTION,” \textit{Grip}, 11 January, 1879.
\textsuperscript{195} “WILL HE GET THROUGH?” \textit{Grip}, 18 October, 1873.
WILL HE COME TO GRIEF?
THE THRILLING ACT NOW IN THE RING OF THE POLITICAL CIRCUS.
THE IRREPRESSIBLE JACK; OR, THE CONSERVATIVE RESUSCITATION.

JOHN A. (SHOWMAN) — "DID YOU THINK THE LITTLE FELLER'S SPRING WAS BROKE, MY DEARS?"

Figure 2-36  THE IRREPRESSIBLE JACK
Their prowess was often demonstrated by jumping through fiery hoops and landing on their horses unscathed. Macdonald made it through; the same could not be said for many of his fellow Conservatives. Bengough liked this particular trope and used it again to slightly different effect. This time around, the tables are turned and it is the acrobatic Macdonald who holds the hoop and George Brown the one who must pass through it. The cartoon refers to an incident of alleged bribery by Reformers during Brown’s contest for office a few years earlier. What is interesting about this image, and indeed virtually all of Bengough’s public entertainment cartoons, are the questions it raises about the role of audience-citizens. What part do they play in the public sphere, passive observer or active participant? Here, little more than blurred faces and in previous examples eagerly awaiting tragedy, one wonders how Bengough conceived of voters in the political theatre of the day. The ambiguous connection to citizen-spectators—as well as the larger conceptualizing of politics as public entertainment—is captured in “THE IRREPRESSIBLE SHOWMAN.” In it, we see Miss Canada presenting the cast of the Pacific Scandal to one of the most famous showmen of the day, P. T. Barnum. A signifier of vulgarity, he is depicted by Bengough as a potential producer of a play about one of the most embarrassing instances of the rampant corruption of government in

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196 Puck carried a version of this circus act cum political commentary in James A. Wales’, “Shirking the Feat,” *Puck*, 29 September, 1880. In the American version, the rider is on a rocking horse.
198 “THE IRREPRESSIBLE SHOWMAN,” *Grip*, 13 September, 1873.
Figure 2-37  WILL HE GET THROUGH?
Figure 2-38  SIX AND HALF A DOZEN
the young Dominion’s history. Standing outside a large circus tent, with audience-citizens queuing to get in, Canada’s politicians are essentially for sale to American entertainers. The idea must surely have bothered Bengough deeply and there is something unseemly—given everything that Christina Burr concludes about Bengough’s use of Miss Canada as the embodiment of national innocence and purity—about her intimate connection with the balding theatre impresario. She is in fact touching Barnum on his shoulder and the gesture she makes, ostensibly to draw attention to Macdonald et al, could just as easily be interpreted as something far more erotic. The effect is funny to be sure—but an understanding of the broader discourses surrounding public entertainment suggests a much darker interpretation.

Bengough’s nightmare about an American staging the Pacific Scandal never came to pass. Instead, the task was taken up by a Canadian who created one of the most interesting examples of the way in which some Victorians imagined their politics as performance. William Henry Fuller’s *The Unspecific Scandal* was the deeply cynical product of another journalist who conceptualized politics performatively. Possibly performed in Ottawa in 1873, the short operetta satirizing the events of the Pacific Scandal appeared in the *Canadian Illustrated News* in 1874 and was published that same year by Woodburn Press in Ottawa. Billed as “An Original, Political, Critical and Critical Extravaganza,” Fuller jokingly claimed that it was “PERFORMED AT THE GREAT DOMINION THEATRE, OTTAWA.” The metaphor would have been immediately clear. Parliament was the greatest stage in Canada and it was here that Fuller decided to unfold his tale of power, corruption and greed.

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199 Burr, “Gender,” 516.
200 “THE UNSPECIFIC SCANDAL,” Canadian Illustrated News, 3 January, 1874, 10 January, 1874. See also, Fuller, *The Unspecific*. According to Richard Plant, the play was originally registered under the copyright act in 1868. See Plant, “Chronology,” 323. Robert G. Lawrence speculates that the operetta might have been performed in Ottawa in 1873. See, Robert G. Lawrence, “H.M.S. Parliament,” *Canadian Theatre Review* 19 (Summer 1978), 40. 38-45.
Figure 2-39  THE IRREPRESSIBLE SHOWMAN
Despite the gravity of the Pacific Scandal—and the uproar it caused amongst the public—Fuller spends the bulk of the play portraying the Grits as unscrupulous and thoroughly ambitious. He accuses them, for instance, of being closet Annexationists, biding their time until an American takeover.\(^\text{201}\) Although some scholars assert that the play was an attack on the Conservatives, the general thrust of criticism is directed against the Grits.\(^\text{202}\) The fact that Fuller refers to the play on its cover-page as a “Critical Extravaganza” suggests as much.

As we have seen, the curtain rises in a newspaper office and three “Editors as Wizards” re-enact the witches’ scene from Macbeth.\(^\text{203}\) Their efforts to distort the truth and stir up public outrage bring them praise from the “Chief Wizard,” Alexander Mackenzie: “Oh! well done. I commend your pains,/And every one shall share i’ the gains.”\(^\text{204}\) This is only the first of many insinuations regarding the Grits’ lust for office. Fuller goes so far as to equate the ‘crime’ of stealing Sir John’s private correspondence with the taking of Sir Hugh Allan’s money. When Sir John stumbles upon the conspiring wizards, they tell him they are performing “A deed without a name!” Macdonald offers them the following: “I fancy, too, I could suggest a better./‘Suppose you call your work ‘The Purloined Letter.’/’Twould be a taking title, and ‘tis known/You’re great at taking—what is not your own.”\(^\text{205}\)

At the opening of Act I, Scene II, Mackenzie refers to the stolen letter. He concedes, “’Tis true the means we’ve used are rather base/But that don’t matter when the end is place.”\(^\text{206}\)

\(^{201}\) Fuller, *The Unspecific*, 13. At one point the Grit member from Shefford sings a song extolling annexation to which Alexander Mackenzie is not entirely disinclined.


\(^{203}\) Fuller, *The Unspecific*, 3.

\(^{204}\) *Ibid*. Emphasis in original.

\(^{205}\) *Ibid*. Emphasis in original.

\(^{206}\) *Ibid*. Emphasis in original.
Later, the Liberal politicians Holton and Dorion break into song over their decision to publish the letter and the playwright once again revels in his depiction of Grit opportunism.\(^{207}\) Holton sings, “’Tis true it is not meant for us,/And to read private letters is wrong;/But perhaps Pope has sent it himself,/So we’ll publish your letter, Sir John.” The Chorus of power-hungry opposition members sing out: “Publish the letter of course,/Why should we hesitate long;/Such a chance we shall ne’er get again./So we’ll publish your letter, Sir John.” Here the Grits are more concerned with their party’s success than the good of the country. Fuller’s attempt to diminish the stain on Macdonald’s character manifests itself in an effort to paint the opposition with the same brush. Mackenzie’s motivation, at least in Fuller’s performance, has little to do with the public interest.

In contrast, Fuller’s treatment of Sir John is much more sympathetic. Despite the enormity of the sum he illicitly accepted from Sir Hugh Allan’s consortium, Macdonald comes across as charming and concerned about the common good. Nowhere is Fuller’s bias for the embattled Tory more apparent than at the conclusion of the play. Scene II opens with a dejected Sir John “in a very disconsolate attitude . . . ,” singing a melancholy song about his imminent defeat. A chorus of ministers soon cheer up their leader.\(^{208}\) In their upbeat tunes, the disheartened Macdonald is described as a “respected chief,” “[Who] shall turn out the Grits/And give them all fits/As [he] did once before with George Brown.”\(^{209}\) Consoled and inspired, Macdonald decides to resign to save “. . . my friends from much vexation.”\(^{210}\) Thus falling on his sword, Sir John nobly ends the acrimony in the House.

\(^{207}\) Ibid, 14-15.
\(^{208}\) Ibid, 15.
\(^{209}\) Ibid, 16-17.
\(^{210}\) Ibid, 18.
With this announcement, the Grits immediately surround Mackenzie, “... clamouring noisily for places.”

Cutting short this undignified display is the appearance of, “The Genius of Canada,” presumably an embodiment of national purity, before which “... all stand abashed and silent.”

“Peace, I command, and cease this rude turmoil,” she admonishes the Grits. “What! Quarrelling already o’er the spoil?/If this is how you mean to carry on/You’ll really force me to recall Sir John...” She chastises them further: “Assume a virtue if you have it not,/Nor let it to the country thus appear/That place and power your only objects are.”

The play concludes with her singing—presumably to the House but also to the nation’s citizen-spectators—“Let’s give fair play to Mackenzie/And not be too hard on Sir John.”

She continues: “True that Sir John has been guilty/Of acts which I cannot condone;/Still none of you are so spotless/That you should throw the first stone./Long has he worked in my service—/And many a good deed has he done—/And was ne’er swayed by personal motives./So don’t be too hard on Sir John.”

Perhaps the closest we can get to Fuller’s own views comes in a song by the Governor General, Lord Dufferin called “Cock a Doodle doo.” Dufferin—a successful diplomat who became Governor General of Canada in 1872—directs his cynical disdain first to Mackenzie, then to Macdonald:

A few remarks I’d like to make
Before I leave you now,
And just express my sentiments
About this precious row.
The house is in an uproar
And you make a great a do;
But after all it’s nothing more

\[211\] Ibid.
\[212\] Ibid. Emphasis in original.
\[213\] Ibid.
\[214\] Ibid.
\[215\] Ibid.
\[216\] Ibid, 19.

Than Cock a doodle doo! . . .

You say this prorogation is Of privilege a breach, And very kindly undertake My duties me to teach. Well, talk away, it don’t hurt me And doubtless pleases you; But I’m quite aware it’s nothing more Than Cock a doodle doo. . . .

My ministers have me assured The Charges are not true, That they’ve the country’s benefit At heart, in all they do. Sir John the matter has explained And very glibly too; But I fancy much of what he says Is Cock a doodle doo. . . .

For Dufferin, and presumably many citizen-spectators, much of what they heard from the political actors at the “Great Dominion Theatre” was little more than the self-interested histrionics of a bunch of hack performers.217

Macdonald’s National Policy as Political Entertainment

If political playwrights conceptualized political events such as the Pacific Scandal through their plays and dramatic cartoons, they were equally adept at exploring issues of public policy. After the Tories retook power in the 1878 election, Macdonald unveiled a series of high protective tariffs as part of his National Policy. Intended to stimulate Canadian manufacturing, the policy was hotly debated. Bengough, for one, believed it “. . . would ultimately prove to be a source of embarrassment to its authors.”218 Nowhere is his frustration with the N.P. more apparent than in

217 Fuller, The Unspecific, 3. Although Fuller’s play is one of the most compelling dramas dealing with the Pacific Scandal, it is not the only one that treated this national crisis. In 1873, when the scandal made headlines, there was a performance in Ottawa of the anonymously written Prince John John or Specific Scandal. See Plant, “Chronology,” 322. According to Plant, the play was unpublished. Even after Macdonald emerged from disgrace, political playwrights continued to dramatize his failings. See for instance, Canada A Satire By One of Her Sons, in the Theatre Collection of the Toronto Reference Library. CIHM # 06637.
218 Bengough, A Caricature History, 206.
the cartoon, “IN THE RING AT LAST!”219 [Figure 2-8 IN THE RING AT LAST!] In it, he betrays the vehemence of his opposition through the murder of the Canadian Consumer. Of all Bengough’s cartoons, this is one of the most violent.220 Although others illustrate murderous tyrants or imminent demise, this depicts an actual death as it takes place. As citizen-spectators look on, one of their own is done in by the crushing weight of the policy’s price increases: his body contorts and his fists clench as the blood from his trampled skull spurts out in all directions. The force of Bengough’s invective is made all the more biting by the look on the faces of the Tory politicians—especially Macdonald—which can only be described as smug. Their callous indifference to the fate of their victim was meant to highlight the relative power of those writing the Acts of Parliament and those who are acted upon. As we have seen, choosing to symbolize Tory power through a circus elephant served to illustrate the helplessness of the average citizen. Even the Grit leader Mackenzie is infantilized. His diminutive status a function of perspective—Bengough places him literally and figuratively in the background—he is powerless in opposition thanks to Macdonald’s strong majority.

But it is in William Henry Fuller’s wildly popular H. M. S. Parliament; or, The Lady Who Loved a Government Clerk, that the National Policy received its most elaborate theatrical adaptation.221 [Figure 2-40 Theatre Bill from the Toronto Run] The play, a political satire based on Gilbert and Sullivan’s H.M.S. Pinafore, premièred at Montreal’s Academy of Music on February 16, 1880.222 By the 23rd of that same month, it was on stage in Ottawa before setting off

219 “IN THE RING AT LAST!” Grip, 22 March, 1879.
220 The only one that approaches it in terms of violence is “OFF WITH HIS HEAD,” which depicted the beheading of a liquor seller at the hands of the Crooks Act. Grip, 6 May, 1876.
221 On top of The Unspecific Scandal and H. M. S. Parliament, he is also credited with Ye Ballad of Lyttel John A., published in 1873.
222 Bengough enjoyed using Gilbert and Sullivan’s work to his own effect. Often his efforts would coincide with the appearance of a Gilbert and Sullivan operetta in Toronto. Besides his full-length play, Bunthorne Abroad; or, The Lass that Loved a Pirate, he made several graphic parodies including “HMS PINAFORE,” and “Scene from a
on what would become the longest tour at the time in Canadian theatrical history. Including a successful run in Toronto, Fuller’s play visited as many as 27 cities and towns across the country. It was also published the same year. According to the theatre historians Anton Wagner and Richard Plant, the play was well received by Canadian audiences as more than just a parody of Gilbert and Sullivan, but a vibrant political commentary. Indeed, reviews were generally positive, something one would expect from such a widely toured show.

The political play was hugely successful. The theatre historian Robert G. Lawrence refers to its “meteoric popularity.” Fuller’s play was a hit because it resonated with Canadians as both citizens and audience members. Its cynicism toward politics, masked by a series of catchy tunes, reflected an ambivalence about the meaning of politics, democracy and the public sphere in late Victorian society. Lawrence observes that as the play moved across the nation, it evolved to encompass aspects of local politics. As with early blackface minstrels, who warmed up their audiences with thinly veiled attacks on the mayor and other town worthies, Fuller’s play acted out a long tradition of transgressive misrule at the expense of the elite. That so many Canadians saw it, is further evidence of the ways in which political playwrights tapped into a larger discourse when they imagined the political through public entertainment.

226 Lawrence, “H.M.S. Parliament,” 40.
227 Ibid, 44.
TORONTO, SATURDAY, MARCH 13th, 1883.

Engagement for six nights and madness of Mr. E. A. McDowell's Company in this great Canadian sensation,

THE CANADIAN PANTOIME

OR, THE LADY WHO LOVED A GOVERNMENT CLERK.

NOTE.—The author of this piece of extravagance begs to disclaim any political prejudices. He has attempted, he hopes, not unsuccessfully, to get a little harmless fun out of political peculiarities and weaknesses, irrespective of party. In fact, he has endeavored to set as much as possible after the pattern of the Irishman of Donnybrook Fair, and wherever he has had an available head has tried to give it a good hard-gauged tap, not out of any animosity, but simply for the fun of the thing. If any head should appear to come in for more than its fair share of taps, it must be attributed solely to the particular prominence of the said head and not to any other cause. If any expression of allusion to this extra-gauntlet should give reason for offense to any person, he will be sincerely sorry, and hereby apologizes for it in advance, but, as the operatic sheik of politicians in proverbial tough, he feels convinced, that no offense will be taken where none is meant.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE.

SIR SAMUEL SILLERY, K. M. G., Chief Financier H.M.S. Parliament
CAPT. M.C., Commander of H.M.S. Parliament
MR. SYDNEY SMITH
SAM NIFFER, Clerk of the Secret Wax Department
MR. E. A. McDowell
ALEXANDER MCCLARY, an Anarchistic Member
MR. J. H. STUART
TOM BLACK, a Statistician Member
MR. W. STURGEON
JACK HURL, a Poetical Member
MR. HENRY R.M.
KD BLACK, a Poetical Member
MR. FRED HIGHT
LIZA BLACK, a Poetical Member
MR. W. W. McDowell
LIEUT. BLACK, a Poetical Member
MR. W. W. McDowell
CHAS. BLACK, a Poetical Member
MR. W. H. DIYER
C. H. FRAZER
ANGELINA, the Captain's Daughter
MISS FLORENCE VICTORIAN
BRITANNIA, a Monopolist
MISS CLARA DOUGLAS
Chief Financier's little ring of Senators and Members. Members, Chorus, Pages, etc., by Full Chorus.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES AND INCIDENTS:

Act I.—Scene—Interior of Parliament Library. Members discovered a computer and characterless exquisites—Chorus. "We are the Ship of State." Enter Mrs. Butterburn, song.

A few minstrel transactions show the beneficial effect of the National Policy. Poetry and statistics fail to move the Monopolist. MacDowly explains the cause of his misapprehension. Mr. Smirr appears on the scene and he calls his unhappy fate in the lyrical fashion peculiar to him, Enter Capt. Mac.

"I am the Captain of the Parliament.

He explains his position in a recitative with Mrs. Butterburn. Enter Angeline,

Dialogue between the good parent and the daughter. Love gives way to political considerations.

"Up from St. John, N.B., comes Sir Samuel Sillery, K. M. G."

Sir Samuel describes his early career:

When I was a lad..."

Important advice to rising politicians and Government clerks. The whole duty of a Government official exemplified in a dialogue between Sir Samuel and Mr. Smirr. General admiration of Sir Samuel's urbanity and consideration. Mr. Smirr's ambitions views. The misanthropic MacDowly objects.

"The Government clerk is a scaling wall."

Angeline appears and sally declares herself. His rejection! His despair! He contemplates suicide—kentucky. Love triumphant. Tableau.

Act II.—Scene—Terrace outside the Parliament Buildings by moonlight. Capt. Mac explains the situation of affairs in a solo, accompanying himself on an appropriate instrument.

"Fair moon, I don't lament."


The Captain's alarm. His proposed compromise. He pirates a little bit from the "Pirates." Sir Samuel's diagnosis at the lady's want of appreciation. His consent to descend to her level. A terrible experiment. The result—"Trio..."

"Never mind the why and wherefore..."

The Captain's station is stamped by the appearance of MacDowly.

"Great Chickens! I've important information."

Preparations to foil the conspirator. An unnoticeable disguise.

"Shame be it, is it the Hidden?"


Figure 2-40 Theatre Bill from the Toronto Run
The historian Murray D. Edwards calls *H.M.S. Parliament* a “light form of political satire . . .”\(^{229}\) Although I am inclined to agree, throughout the operetta runs a troubling uncertainty about the state and its chief actors. Fuller’s portrayal of a government clerk, for instance, while amusing, leaves little doubt about his view of the civil service. Sam Snifter, whose very name implies a dissipated attitude, has a drinking problem.\(^{230}\) His average workday begins with a nap, followed by a session of reading newspapers and smoking his pipe. Then it is off to a long lunch from which he might or might not return.\(^{231}\)

The politicians come off no better. The play opens with them grinding their various axes before they break for refreshments of “ginger pop, flavoured with rye.”\(^{232}\) At a time of increased consciousness over temperance, Fuller populates his extravaganza with clerks and politicians with a pronounced appetite for drink. That his parliamentarians want an increase in their sessional allowances so that they can buy more booze, only adds insult to injury. Interestingly, however, Fuller does not allude to Sir John A. Macdonald’s legendary drinking. Indeed, much like in his *The Unspecific Scandal*, Sir John’s problems with alcohol are absent while his nemesis, Alexander Mackenzie, is depicted as overly fond of a dram.\(^{233}\) But the backbenchers in the house are more than just drinkers, they are corrupt sycophants. They may sing the praises of their captain but in return they demand sinecures and lucrative contracts.\(^{234}\)

Such was life aboard Fuller’s ship of state, and he makes no effort to hide the identity of those who steer it. Captain Mac. A., commander of the ship, is easily identified as Sir John A. Macdonald. At the time of the play’s performance, he was back in the House as Prime Minister.

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\(^{230}\) Fuller, *H.M.S. Parliament*, 162.

\(^{231}\) Ibid, 168-169.

\(^{232}\) Ibid, 159-160.

\(^{233}\) Ibid, 174.

\(^{234}\) Ibid, 163.
Sir Samuel Sillery, K.M.G. is the Chief Financier of H.M.S. Parliament and a thinly-veiled version of Sir Samuel Tilley. As Macdonald’s Minister of Finance he was instrumental in bringing about the National Policy.\textsuperscript{235} The sour Alexander MacDeadeye is none other than opposition leader Alexander Mackenzie. The performances of the three veteran politicians reveal a world of dishonesty, vanity and ambition that struck a cord with audiences throughout the Dominion.

The plot of the play centres on Captain Mac A.’s efforts to secure the support of the rich and powerful Sir Sam. To this end, and borrowing from domestic melodrama, the wily Captain hopes to marry off his daughter to the pompous inventor of the N.P. The Captain’s constant concern for votes and his doling out of positions for his various supporters, show him to be a shrewd manipulator of people and events. MacDeadeye sums it up succinctly when he chides, “. . . the Captains of such craft as ours don’t give anything [sic] away unless they get some votes for it.”\textsuperscript{236} The venality of politics is masked by a seemingly amusing series of songs:

\begin{verbatim}
CAPTAIN: The position which I fill
          Abuse I never will
          Whatever the emergencee.
          Corruption is a thing
          I detest like anything—
          And it never has been charged to me.

ALL: What! Never?
CAPTAIN: Confidently. No; Never.
ALL: What! NEVER?
CAPTAIN: Well, very seldom.\textsuperscript{237}
\end{verbatim}

Funny, to be sure, but like some pernicious little jingle, the message left in the minds of audience members was that politics was crooked.

\textsuperscript{236} Ibid, 162.
\textsuperscript{237} Ibid, 164. Emphasis in original.
This song is the first reference in the play to Macdonald’s troubles with the Pacific Scandal. It is one of very few, considering the prominence of the event and the fact that Fuller had written an entire play ostensibly about the subject just a few years earlier. Mac. A.’s associates are no better. Sir Sam, for instance, rose from humble beginnings, attributing his success to his less than scrupulous accounting practices:

As dispensing clerk I made such a name
    That a partner in the firm I soon became;
I prescribed for my customers’ little ills,
    And totted up the totals of their yearly bills.
I totted up the totals in a way so free,
    That now I am a Minister and K.M.G. . . .

At totting up totals I made such a pile,
    That I thought into politics I’d go for a while . . .

The unlikely rise of an errand boy in a druggist’s store to the heights of power could only be, at least for Fuller, the result of criminal immorality.

It is not surprising that Sir Samuel Sillery, K.M.G., is pilloried in such a way. As the inventor of the National Policy, Fuller held him in particularly low regard. H.M.S. Parliament is, after all, a sustained attack on the N.P.. The opening scene sees the great monopolist Mrs. Butterbun overcharging the Members for their various refreshments. When they question her prices, she retorts, “Ah! but . . . you forget the N.P.—everything has gone up.” Even after the economics of the situation are explained to her so that it is clear her increases are too much, she replies, “Can’t help that . . . . I’ve got a monopoly like some of the big manufacturers, so, if you don’t like to pay . . . . you’ll have to go without.” Besides, she concludes, “Why, what [is] it for if not to put up the price of everything.”

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238 Ibid, 167.
239 Ibid, 160.
240 Ibid.
241 Ibid, 161.
concludes, “I begin to think the N.P. is a sell, only I don’t like to say so.” Indeed, part of the humour of the play centres on the inability of politicians to speak critically of the dogmatic devotion to the protective tariff.

As Fuller’s play begins to wind down, a very interesting piece of political theatre unfolds. To the tune of “The Sea, the Sea, the Open Sea,” Sir Samuel and MacDeadeye debate the effects of the N.P.:

SIR SAMUEL: The P., the P., the Great N.P.
That lets nothing into the country free,
Nothing into the country free.
It sends up the price of everything,
And makes the producers merrily sing,
The producers merrily sing.
Oh! if ever we have prosperitee,
It will come on account of the Great N.P.,
On account of the Great N.P.

MacDEADEYE: I have sat in the Hoose for many a year,
But sic rubbish as this I ne’er did hear,
Sic rubbish I ne’er did hear.
For producers, nae doot, it’s all verra weel,
But how do the puir consumers feel?
The puir consumers feel.
Oh, we ne’er shall have real prosperitee
Till we knock on the head the horrid N.P.,
This horrible sham, the N.P. 242

Following this duet, Angelina, Captain Mac A’s daughter, introduces a strange bit of meta-drama that speaks to my larger point about the fusion of politics and performances such as Fuller’s:

ANGELINA: The P., the P., the Great N.P.,
Of opinion there seems much diversitee
Regarding this strange N.P.
But when Doctors like these do disagree—
Points to Mac.A and MacDeadeye.
So very decidedly disagree—
About the effect of this queer N.P.,
There is no other course, it seems to me—
No other course seems open to me

But to YOU to leave the *Decree*.243

The operetta suddenly addresses the audience directly on this most important political issue. Fuller has spent the entire evening satirizing the policy but recognizes that the final decision rests with the audience. It was a lonely note of optimism about the role of political performance in shaping the public sphere in a play that reveals an otherwise unrelenting cynicism about traditional politics.

Given the sustained attack on the harmful effects of the National Policy, and the repeated assertions of corruption and greed, the play is more than gentle satire. Yes, it is made more respectable through its association with Gilbert and Sullivan, and its darker conclusions are obscured behind a patina of catchy tunes, but the play’s underlying message is one of jaded cynicism. Like Bengough’s depiction of Macdonald as Richard III, historians who ignore the context of political performance, risk missing the bite of the satire behind its otherwise pleasing bark.

“For there are girls bold enough for that:” Sarah Anne Curzon as one of the “guise”

As I have shown, the tradition of fusing politics and public entertainment has a long history in Toronto. Political playwrights and their audiences were used to thinking of politics as performance. But not all members of the audience—nor occasionally the playwrights themselves—had the same legal rights. Non-voting citizens—women—were nevertheless able to participate in the process of shaping the public sphere. Voting, after all, was merely one form of political action. And—as an exclusively male rite at the time—it has been over-privileged by political scientists and historians to the exclusion of other less rational forms of influencing the public sphere. On that note, I would like to conclude with an example that not only demonstrates the extent to which Victorian politics was frequently understood as performance, but one that also

hints at the transgressive potentialities for inclusiveness that a politics fusing public entertainment offered to political playwrights and their audiences.

Sarah Anne Curzon is one of Canada’s most significant political playwrights. She is mostly remembered for her 1887 play, *Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812*, which sought to include the now famous Secord into the young nation’s historical consciousness.244 A journalist, historian, playwright and an activist for women’s rights, Curzon blended her politics into virtually every aspect of her work.245 She contributed to noted publications such as Goldwin Smith’s *Canadian Monthly*, the *Dominion Illustrated, Grip, Week, Evangelical Churchman, Canadian Magazine* as well as several newspapers in Canada, Britain and the United States.246 Curzon was also a principal member of the Toronto Women’s Literary Club, an organization devoted to bringing about the equal rights of women. It is her less well-known play, *The Sweet Girl Graduate*, however, that most successfully illustrates the ways in which Curzon understood politics and the myriad possibilities it offered for social change through its transgressive merging with public entertainment.247

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Interestingly, it was Bengough who—“in full sympathy with all the efforts to secure the rights of women”—encouraged Curzon to write the play.\textsuperscript{248} Perhaps Bengough had met something of a kindred spirit in Curzon, a fellow political playwright who also believed in the latent power of political performance to transform society. Consequently, Bengough published the play in \textit{Gripsack} for 1882. \textit{The Sweet Girl Graduate} is a brief comedy in four acts dramatizing the issue of access to higher education for women in late Victorian Toronto. Its protagonist, Kate Bloggs, whose name connotes Shakespeare’s heroine from \textit{The Taming of the Shrew}, confronts a system of male oppression that excludes women from academia. The play opens with her reading a letter of rejection from University College. Her mother, not a fan of higher education for women, likens those of her sex who pursue university degrees to “impudent minxes.”\textsuperscript{249} “What’ll men think of you,” Mrs. Bloggs asks her daughter, “if you go sittin’ down on the same benches at the colleges, and studyin’ off of the same desk, and like enough—for there are girls bold enough for that—out of the same books?”\textsuperscript{250} Enraged, Kate concocts a plan to prove the worthiness of her sex to the bigoted members of the university’s council.

To accomplish her goal, Kate decides to take on the role of a young man, Tom Christopher. The act is truly radical: “A deed I’ll blush for, yet I’ll do’t; and charge/Its ugliness on those who forced me to’t—/In short, I’ll wear the breeks.”\textsuperscript{251} Curzon has Kate admit the impropriety of the act, its “ugliness,” yet absolves her of guilt by forcing citizen-spectators to at least consider the possibility that the heroine was compelled into the transgressive performance. As literary critic Celeste Derksen notes, Kate’s adoption of Tom’s persona allows Curzon to

\textsuperscript{248} Curzon mentions this fact in “SOME NOTES BY SARAH ANNE CURZON,” which was included in the re-published version of the play in her \textit{Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812 and Other Poems}. Please see Wagner, ed. \textit{Women Pioneers}, 142.
\textsuperscript{249} Curzon, \textit{The Sweet}, 144.
\textsuperscript{250} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{251} \textit{Ibid}, 146.
explore the constructed nature of gender in late Victorian culture. The play’s heroine enjoys the gender reversal to the extent that her behaviour, as Derksen observes, has subtexts of lesbian desire. For Kate, and presumably for Curzon, the performance of gender lies at the root of women’s exclusion from higher education. As Kate begins her transformation into a man, she explains: “I’ll train my voice to mouth out short, thick words,/As Bosh! Trash! Fudge! Rot! And I’ll cultivate/An Abernethian, self-assertive style . . .” As Judith Butler contends, femininity is constructed through a series of gestures and movements that come to represent womanhood. The same holds true for masculinity, and it is Kate’s amusing depiction of Victorian man’s blustery style of speaking and her symbolic adoption of male dress that high-lights the constructed nature of the performance of manliness. Curzon cites precedent for her actions by having Kate invoke Joan of Arc and Shakespeare’s Rosalind and Portia—all of whom, as it were, wore the breeches. Kate’s performance of Tom is convincing. She fools her beloved cousin and successfully plays the role of student for two years. By becoming one of the “guise,” Curzon links her heroine to historical and literary women who, through their actions, have joined a unique ‘brotherhood of woman.’ But, as Derksen observes, Kate’s transgressive cross-dressing is intended not to win the love of a man, but to expose the hypocrisy of male domination through the exclusion of women from university.

253 Ibid, 6. Derksen strengthens her reading of same-sex desire through an analysis of not only Kate’s actions but the structure and style of Curzon’s depiction.
254 Curzon, The Sweet, 146.
256 Curzon, The Sweet, 146.
257 Ibid, 146, 150.
In many ways, Kate’s performance parallels that of Curzon’s own participation in another theatrical act of gendered and political role-reversing. In 1896, the political playwright took part in a “MOCK PARLIAMENT AND PROMENADE CONCERT,” held in Toronto.259 According to the theatre historian Kym Bird, similar Women’s Parliaments were held by suffragists in Manitoba, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.260 They were an interesting mix of musical entertainment and political drama. Prominent women involved in the suffrage movement, including Dr. Emily Stowe and Leticia Youmans, held public entertainments that included re-enactments of parliament where members debated such issues as votes for men. According to Bird, these were successful events that attracted the fashionable elite.261 The Toronto Women’s Parliament was held at Allan Gardens, filling the 1800-seat house to capacity. As in carnival, with its transgressive inversions of hierarchy, the female members acted out a scene both comic and highly charged. One of the highlights of the Toronto performance was a “Deputation from [the] Men’s Enfranchisement Association and [the] Men’s Christian Temperance Union.”262 The idea of a delegation of respectable men pleading their case for the right to vote must surely have elicited laughs from all quarters. But it did more than just amuse. Much like Kate’s performing the speech acts and fashion statements that signified manliness, the gender inversion of men begging to be taken seriously allowed those attending the Mock Parliament to explore the

259 “1896 Mock Parliament,” Baldwin Room Toronto Reference Library. The idea of a mock parliament fits perfectly with my thesis of a transgressive fusing of politics and public entertainment. This was Canada’s first Mock Parliament and not to be confused with the 1914 Mock Parliament held in Manitoba and in which Nellie McClung featured prominently.
261 Ibid. Bird concludes that these events succeeded not only in raising awareness about enfranchisement and other women’s issues, they helped to raise much needed money for political action.
262 “1896 Mock Parliament.”
constructed and capricious nature of gender. In the end, the motion for extending the franchise to men was rejected.  

As a comedy, Curzon’s play must end happily. Her sweet graduate goes on to earn not only a Master of Arts, “or more correctly Mistress of Arts,” but the respect of both her fellow students and instructors. Kate’s troubling of gender creates new and alternative ways of performing politics and femininity, both within the play and in the real world. Within the drama, Kate’s audience emphatically forgives her and begs the young lady’s pardon. Emboldened by their acceptance, Kate asks that “. . . every man and woman here to-night/Look out for those petitions that will soon/Be placed in many a store by those our friends/Who in this city form a ladies’ club,/And each one sign.” Here Curzon blurs the boundary between the performance of the play and political actions in the real world. The Toronto Women’s Literary Club engaged in such campaigns and the political playwright was essentially reminding her audience to sign the group’s petitions. In other words, Kate’s audience is not just the assembled group of well-wishers written into the play, but those spectators reading the play in Grip as well as its later incarnation. The play concludes with a rousing speech by Kate: “Let us go/In numbrous strength before the Parliament,/And ask our rights in such a stirring sort,/They shall be yielded.” It was a charge Curzon hoped her audience of citizen-spectators would follow.

**Conclusion: The Political Possibilities of Public Entertainment**

Curzon’s optimistic wish was that the power of Kate’s performance could win over an audience of citizen-spectators. It is also likely that she believed her play had the potential to persuade audience-voters and other citizens to agitate for political change. The ending of The

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265 Ibid, 153.
266 Ibid.
267 Ibid.
Sweet Girl Graduate reveals a hopefulness surrounding the power of public entertainment to bring about meaningful political reform. As such, Curzon’s political performances, whether in her plays or with her participation in the Women’s Parliament, fits into the long-standing tradition of using the transgressive forces of public entertainment to advance political agendas. It is reminiscent of William Henry Fuller’s brief moment of meta-drama in H.M.S. Parliament where Sir John’s daughter reminds citizen-spectators of their duty to decide for themselves on the National Policy. Curzon’s encouragement to sign the petitions of the Toronto Women’s Literary Club reveals one of the key aspects of the transgressive force of public entertainment as it intersects with politics. Political playwrights offered an alternative way of conducting and conceiving politics. Their criticism—of politicians, scandals, policies and even the party press—reveal a largely overlooked aspect of Toronto’s political culture. Their performances, on stage and in print, also hint at the ability of the transgressive forces of public entertainment to provide new political possibilities to an audience of citizen-spectators jaded by the tyrants and clowns of the Great Dominion Theatre in Ottawa.
As summer gradually engulfed Toronto in its sweltering heat, the theatrical season drew to a close. In the second week of June 1909, while the Grand Opera House was advertising its “Last Big Offering of the Season,” citizens looking for diversion had a number of choices. Of the six shows on offer at the big houses, however, three revealed an important preoccupation of Toronto audiences: race. Two of these three performances were variations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. The third was a minstrel show.

At the Royal Alexandra, the Toronto Press Club was holding its annual theatrical entertainment. In what the papers referred to as a departure from tradition, the journalists and editors of the club, “instead of presenting anything serious . . . presented a farcical travesty of ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ entitled ‘Uncle Tom’s Taxi-Cabin.’” Advertisements stressed the local and topical nature of the farce. Patrons were urged: “Spare yourself the life-long regret that will be yours if you miss the ‘Made-In-Toronto’ play . . .” E. R. Parkhurst, of *The Globe’s* Music and Drama section, echoed the theme of homemade satire, informing readers of the “many localisms being introduced” and reminding them that the entire cast was “composed exclusively of members of . . . Toronto newspapers, well-known to the public.” In his review of the show, he called it a “modern and *local* dramatic version of Mrs. Stowe’s work . . .” Although Parkhurst described the show as a “ridiculous perversion of the original drama[,]” he was nevertheless decidedly enthusiastic in its praise. “There is not only the travesty of the characters

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2 The Toronto Press Club began this tradition in June of 1905. See *The Globe*, 20 May, 1905.
in make-up and exaggeration of acting," raved the critic, “but there is also an interjection of local topics treated from a satirical point of view.”7 Like the burnt cork shows that regularly visited the city, the Toronto Press Club understood the importance of incorporating inside jokes for the hometown audience. In so doing, they took what began as a foreign entertainment dealing with racial issues largely alien to their society, and made out of it something of their own. They had, for lack of a better word, minstrelized one of the most important and beloved melodramas of the Victorian stage—substituting sombre homilies on the horrors of slavery for gender-bending, burnt cork routines. Writing about this particular performance, the historian Robin Winks avers that with the club’s burlesque, “the emotion and the meaning behind the original were forgotten.”8 Well attuned to the theatrical tastes of his fellow Torontonians, Parkhurst commented on two aspects of the performance which were of particular note: “. . . one may refer to the fact that the role of Topsy is impersonated as a Scotch ‘nigger’ in kilts, while the part of little Eva is taken by an athletic gentleman of more than average altitude.”9 That Parkhurst would enjoy the impersonation of Topsy as a blackface performance with a Gallic twist, or laugh himself to tears at an absurdly tall and very manly Eva, only reflected the racial and gendered complexity of Toronto’s theatrical scene. Indeed, the histrionic journalists who decided to spoof one of Toronto’s favourite shows were counting on their fellow citizens’ racial curiosity. Parkhurst predicted that the burlesque of one of the most successful melodramas of the nineteenth century would play to large audiences.10

7 Ibid.
9 The Globe, 19 June 1909. The man who cross-dressed to play Little Eva was “5 feet 11 inches in his stockings.”
The Globe, 18 June 1909.
10 Ibid.
If Torontonians were in the mood for something more spectacular than a bunch of journalists in blackface, there was Lew Dockstader and his “Seventy Real Minstrels.” Dockstader’s popularity came from the way he changed the minstrel show from a series of short, disjointed pieces into a more unified narrative. Critics appreciated these attempts to modernize the traditional genre. One noted that “Mr. Dockstader’s company has not been seen in Toronto for several years, during that time great changes have been made in minstrelsy.” He particularly liked that the show relied on “a cohesive story that runs all through the piece.” This new kind of blackface performance was, according to the journalist, a “big spectacular novelty[.]” Indeed, with impressive sets and elaborate costumes, the show satirized polar expeditions by the rich. The critic raved about the “representation of the North Pole zone, with its frigid surroundings well pictured.” This was minstrelsy at its most fantastic, replete with blackface parodies of ‘white’ Arctic explorers, exotic depictions of “Esquimaux,” a fifty-two person dance and an entirely new musical score that incorporated the “the national airs of Iceland.”

Spectacular racial performances were guaranteed to fill Toronto playhouses. And beneath the advertisements touting Uncle Tom’s Taxi-Cabin’ and Lew Dockstader and his Seventy Real Minstrels was offered a spectacle the likes of which would radically transform public entertainment across North America. For the week of June 14th, Shea’s Theatre offered its patrons something singular: a Kinetograph version of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. Like the Toronto Press Club’s updated burlesque and Dockstader’s innovative modernization of the traditional minstrel show, the Kinetograph Uncle Tom’s Cabin was simultaneously something old and

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14 *Ibid*.
15 *Ibid*.
16 Alexander, *Jazz Age Jews*, 150.
18 *Ibid*.
something new. An early pre-cursor of the modern cinema, which was already beginning to undermine ‘traditional’ theatre, the Kinetograph was cutting edge technology. By 1909, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had long since left the confines of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s printed page. Now, Torontonians could see the well-known Little Eva and the heroic Uncle Tom on screen. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was often spectacular as producers vied with one another to make their staging more thrilling than the last, but the Kinetograph was something else entirely.

Despite all the innovation and modernization behind these three shows, they are linked by a single, overriding preoccupation with race. It was an obsession that connects them to performances from as early as the days of Muddy York. ‘White’ Torontonians—of all classes and genders—were fascinated by race. And the main vehicle for satisfying this racial curiosity in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was public entertainment. Through circus acts and freak shows, melodrama and blackface minstrelsy, audiences consumed a multitude of racial performances that, while invariably reflecting racist stereotypes, could also open avenues for ambivalence and interracial longing. These performances of race—particularly blackface minstrelsy—spilled over from the stage and colonized the imaginations of the city’s inhabitants, colouring the way they saw the black Other.

In this chapter, I explore Toronto’s racial curiosity through its intersections with public entertainment. There were a variety of racial entertainments—ranging from spectacular recreations of British military campaigns from distant colonies to edge-of-your-seat Wild West shows—on offer at any given time.¹⁹ Any discussion of racial performances in the city, however,

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¹⁹ For an account of military recreations of British colonial might, see Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 93-94, 266-8. Other diversions included spectacular plays such as *Around the World in Eighty Days*; costumed ice-carnivals where Torontonians skated and flirted while dressed as exotic Others; so-called “Irish” plays featuring carnivalesque depictions of Lord of Misrule types from the Emerald Isle; moving dioramas containing stunning images of Jerusalem and the North Pole; and myriad entertainments featuring imagined “Indians” from Pocahontas to Buffalo Bill’s Wild West Show. These and other types of racial performances are the subject of my future work. My
must address the prolonged fixation with blackface minstrelsy. I establish that burnt cork shows were amongst the most common forms of public entertainment in Toronto and offer evidence suggesting that many residents were intimately familiar with the genre. As prominent scholars argue, blackface shows were characterized by an ambivalence or interracial longing. After briefly outlining minstrel theory, the chapter examines cross-racial sympathy through an analysis of the response to Uncle Tom’s Cabin and a series of melodramatic successors. From early anti-minstrel protests by prominent members of the black community to the appearance of minstrel tropes in unexpected places, it is evident that burnt cork acts spread from the stage into the wider culture. The chapter departs from traditional minstrelsy studies by arguing that although ambivalence characterized some aspects of the minstrel show, as the phenomenon spilled over the thresholds of theatres, circuses and saloons, to be used by a variety of cultural producers, its currency became more oriented toward ridicule than cross-racial empathy. As early instances of minstrelsy began to colour the ways in which ‘white’ citizens responded to the black people in their midst, prominent members of the black community attempted to prevent such performances through appeals to British tolerance and anti-American bias. For this small but highly visible minority, there was no doubt that blackface spread beyond the confines of the stage leading directly to humiliation and violence. But minstrelsy in Toronto was simply too popular to stop. Tropes from the burnt cork show began to appear in the media in ways that suggest a culture saturated with these racial performances. The chapter then explores how the spread of minstrelsy became particularly valuable to political actors anxious to blacken the reputation of their opponents. Finally, throughout these off-stage incarnations of minstrelsy, cultural producers such
decision to focus exclusively on blackface minstrelsy comes from its undisputed popularity for Torontonians and its surprising absence from Canadian historiography despite long being the subject of analysis for American, British and European historians.
as journalists, advertisers and political agents relied on the use of an imagined black vernacular to perform their own burnt cork shows.

Minstrelsy in Toronto

Blackface minstrelsy in Toronto had deep roots. The theatre historian Gerald Lenton-Young describes the city’s early relationship with burnt cork shows noting their immediate popularity.20 Records of minstrels coming to York exist from as early as 1836, when three such entertainers accompanied a menagerie featuring a rhinoceros that was billed as a unicorn.21 By 1840, audiences watched two children, both Albino African-Americans aged 6 and 8, sing a kind of white-face act “a la Jim Crow.”22 Advertisements from the Royal Lyceum, dating to 1849, reveal not only performances of “The Ethiopian Harmonists,” but also efforts by management to attract a more respectable clientele.23 Their efforts were rewarded with large crowds.24 By the 1850s, Toronto had hosted at least six significant minstrel troupes including the Nightingale Ethiopian Serenaders, the White Serenaders, the Wandering Minstrels and the renowned Christy’s Minstrels.25 The list also included such pioneering performers as T. “Daddy” Rice who played to enthusiastic audiences.26 During the 1860s, the city was visited by Cool Burgess’ Chicago Minstrels, Wood’s Minstrels, Duprey & Green’s Minstrels and again by Christy’s.27 One of the most famous minstrels of the day was Toronto’s own Colin “Cool” Burgess. With minstrel songs

21 Ibid, 172.
22 British Colonist, 10 June 1840.
26 Ibid. See also the Royal Lyceum playbill for Jumbo Jum, starring “The Original Jim Crow,” T. D. Rice in the Gardner Collection, Box 44, P63 A Minstrels, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library.
27 Harrington, “Toronto,” 611-12. See also “Fun for the Million, 1858” a playbill for Burgess & Redmond in the Baldwin Collection of the Toronto Reference Library.
making up a significant part of the parlour sheet music trade, three of Burgess’ songs were published in Toronto during the 1870s.28

Although Toronto was the chief theatrical centre for the province, blackface minstrelsy was a hit with audiences across Ontario and was well-established by the 1860s.29 By 1868, Ottawa and Hamilton hosted nine prominent minstrel troupes while Kingston was visited by dozens.30 In addition to touring professionals, Lenton-Young notes, that during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, virtually every town in Ontario had its own amateur minstrel troupe.31 As the author and theatre historian Robertson Davies observes, these amateurs raised money for charity and satisfied a need for pleasure and self-display.32 To say that minstrelsy was popular is something of an understatement. More germane, however, citizens were intimately familiar with the genre.

Minstrelsy evolved over time.33 Beginning as rough fare, it gradually became respectable.34 In the all male saloons of Toronto, including the more reputable Apollo Saloon and

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30 *Ibid.* Please see the playbills for the various shows of the Maple Leaf Minstrels appearing in Prescott, Ontario from 1864-1866 in the E. A. McDowell and Company Collection of the Toronto Reference Library. See also the poster for another of their Prescott performances in the Canadian Pamphlets collection of the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto. The E. A. McDowell and Company Collection also has advertisements and programs for minstrel shows from Perth, Ontario (1866) and for Wolfe Island (1877 and 1878). Ottawa’s *Daily Citizen* raved about the 1873 performance of Cool Burgess. *Daily Citizen*, 2 October, 1873. See also *Daily Citizen*, 30 September, 1873, and 3 October, 1873.
34 As late as 1890, a reporter reviewing Hamilton’s amateur minstrels noted with pride that the audience was in full evening dress but lamented that some of the jokes were too coarse for the ladies present. The reviewer cautioned performers not to play to the gallery at the expense of the orchestra. See, “Burnt Cork Artists,” *The Hamilton Spectator*, 10 February, 1890.
Concert Room, minstrelsy was a regular feature. By the mid 1850s, a standard three-part format was the norm. The performers entered forming a semi-circle that facilitated a series of comic exchanges between a ‘dignified’ interlocutor and two mischievous endmen, Brudder Tambo and Brudder Bones. These last two were named after their respective instruments, the tambourine and the bones—a kind of castanet. Tambo and Bones often caught the interlocutor out with their sly humour and transgressive wit, deflating his pomposity and laying bare his pretensions to superiority. The rest of the first part of the show featured songs and dances. The second part, or olio, also included songs and dances but expanded to encompass acrobats, comedians, female impersonators, amusing novelty acts and the stump speech. The stump speech was a comic monologue in which a performer would attempt to give a “serious” talk on a subject such as women’s rights or new discoveries in science but could also just revel in nonsensical word play. In an attempt to sound wise he came across as pompous. Invariably, however, his pretensions were pierced by his malapropisms and mispronunciations. Although the stump speech derived its comic energy from the perceived foolishness of its pseudo-black speaker, it often afforded opportunities for the performer to level biting social criticism. The afterpiece, at least in the early days of minstrelsy, was generally set on some idealized Southern plantation. After the early 1850s, the finale came to include humorous sketches satirizing current events. An interesting and controversial development in minstrelsy was the emergence of all female troupes in the 1870s. Beginning with Mme. Rentz’s Female Minstrels in 1870, there were eleven such companies touring within a year—most of these early troupes toured Ontario. Before

36 Toll, Blacking Up, 53.
37 Ibid, 161.
38 Ibid, 57.
long, dozens of all female minstrel shows—offering titillation to crowds of men—toured the province.40

**Ambivalence**

Although fear and loathing, often masked by humour, characterized many racial performances during the Victorian period, depictions of the black Other could also be inflected with a type of cross-racial longing. Thus, when confronting performances of blackness—be they melodramas or minstrel shows—it is best to approach them with caution. Audiences were negotiating one of the most important ideologies of their day. As British subjects, they operated within the context of a vast empire of their own.41 Inhabiting a borderland with an expanding American republic, however, they were exposed to the black Other in a particularly American manner.

The first to explore the interracial desire at the heart of minstrelsy was the literary critic Eric Lott.42 Earlier scholars such as Robert Toll saw only racial loathing in the burnt cork show.43 The historian David Roediger, for his part, found something like a psychological investment—the so-called wages of whiteness—which accrued to Irish workers in the northeastern United States as they developed a common whiteness through blackface performances.44

40 Ibid, 195.  
43 For decades, the historian Robert Toll set the tone for virtually all minstrelsy studies by approaching blackface minstrelsy as one of the most influential and evasive ways in which white Americans came to understand the legacy of slavery. Robert C. Toll, Blacking Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974).  
Although Roediger’s approach recognized a psychological element to minstrelsy, its focus remains largely on the genre’s aversion: the butt of the joke “remained a common, respectable and increasingly smug whiteness under the makeup.”

Lott, in contrast, argues that ‘white’ audiences simultaneously despised and longed for the black Other. So seminal is Lott’s thesis that minstrelsy studies have coalesced around the notion of cross-racial desire.

Blackface, according to Lott, was the single most popular form of public entertainment in the nineteenth century. As such, it offers scholars a unique insight into the way race worked, then and now.

The minstrel show was central to the lives of North Americans.

Employing Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of ambivalence, Lott contends that, blackface tried to repress through mockery a genuine fascination with black culture. Ridicule was therefore a psychological defence that hinted at the panic and anxiety caused by this attraction to the black Other.

As Bhabha argues:

Stereotyping is not the setting up of a false image which becomes the scapegoat of discriminatory practices. It is a much more ambivalent text of projection and introjection, metaphorical and metonymic strategies, displacement, overdetermination, guilt, aggressivity, the masking and splitting of ‘official’ and fantasmic knowledges to construct the positionalities and oppositionalities of racist discourse.

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47 Lott, Love and Theft, 4.
48 Ibid, 3.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid, 6. Roediger argues that Irish workers longed for a rural past that was often assuaged as minstrels sang about life in an idealized, plantation South. The identification with black Others could never be complete as, at the end of the day, it was “‘niggers’ who personified and longed for the past.” Roediger, Wages, 119.
52 Homi K. Bhabha, “The Other Question: Stereotype, discrimination and the discourse of colonialism,” The Location of Culture (New York: Routledge, 1994), 117.
Many racial performances in Toronto displayed the type of ambivalence that Bhabha posits. Indeed, some of the most compelling shows enjoyed by Toronto audiences offered performances of race that were contradictory and unstable. The ‘white’ self constantly required iteration and reiteration of itself in relation to the black Other in an effort to shore up racial hierarchy. Paradoxically, such entertainments threatened to tear down the very walls they helped to erect.

**Uncle Tom in Toronto**

Performances of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* had the potential to create meaningful cross-racial connections. With their pathos and clear-cut morality, staged versions of Stowe’s novel generated sympathy for several of its black characters. And yet, this immensely popular melodrama was deeply indebted to blackface minstrelsy. The literary critic Hazel Waters contends that dramatizations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* in England, for instance, marked the end of any meaningful efforts to portray nuanced black-skinned characters.\(^{53}\) So thoroughly colonized was the imagination of British theatre-goers by blackface conventions that it influenced the way Uncle Tom was performed.\(^{54}\) Although the novel endowed Tom with dignity, this rarely translated into the dramatized versions. Instead, according to Waters, Tom’s simplicity was staged as simple-mindedness, rendering him “lovably comical.”\(^{55}\) For a culture steeped in minstrelsy, the tumble into blackface caricature was too hard to resist.\(^{56}\) The same was true of other important characters from Stowe’s novel. The slaves Sam and Andy, for instance, regularly afforded the chance to interject a bit of levity into a performance.\(^{57}\)

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\(^{54}\) Ibid, 155.

\(^{55}\) Ibid, 158.

\(^{56}\) *Ibid.*

\(^{57}\) Ibid, 166. Lott, *Love and Theft*, 221.
character of Topsy, intended by Stowe to represent the degradation of family life under slavery.\textsuperscript{58} For Ontarians, whose own culture was widely infused with minstrel stereotypes, \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin} was intimately connected with blackface. In the 1890s, for instance, they regularly enjoyed entertainments featuring both a minstrel show and \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}.\textsuperscript{59}

As Lott demonstrates, dramatizations of \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin} in the 1850s were always a mixture of antislavery politics and entertainment.\textsuperscript{60} In the heated context of an increasingly divided United States, versions ran the gambit from abolitionist to proslavery and all, claims Lott, contained elements of blackface minstrelsy.\textsuperscript{61} These myriad adaptations do not include the many burlesque parodies of Stowe’s work by minstrel troupes which only reinforced the play’s connection with blackface traditions.\textsuperscript{62} Indeed, as Lott analyzes the evolution of Stowe’s original for the stage, it becomes clear that adaptations of Uncle Tom are deeply indebted to minstrelsy.\textsuperscript{63} Nevertheless, as blackface in the 1850s was so politically diverse, Lott argues that dramatizations of \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin} are “startlingly ambiguous.”\textsuperscript{64} Like the ambivalence he finds characteristic of minstrelsy, the literary critic refuses to dismiss staged versions of the work simply because of their interplay with blackface tropes. The play could represent the inconsistencies of contemporary racial ideology while simultaneously operating as a dangerous critique of slavery. Situated within the divisive context of antebellum New York, the two leading dramatizations of Stowe’s work are read by Lott as contested negotiations of sectional politics.\textsuperscript{65}

\textsuperscript{59} Lenton-Young, “Variety Theatre,” 183.
\textsuperscript{60} Lott, \textit{Love and Theft}, 212.
\textsuperscript{61} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid, 215.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, 217-220
\textsuperscript{64} Ibid, 218.
\textsuperscript{65} Ibid, 222, 226.
That versions of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* were still drawing crowds in 1909 suggests the popularity of Stowe’s original characters and concept. Little Eva and the story’s eponymous hero had been treading the boards of Toronto theatres since shortly after the release of Stowe’s novel in 1852. The play’s longevity also hints at Toronto’s fascination with racial performances throughout the nineteenth century. For its part, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* enjoyed virtually uninterrupted success on the page and stage from the early 1850s until the Great War. On the eve of the twentieth century, *The Globe* carried news of a survey of prominent thinkers who were asked to list the 10 greatest books of the nineteenth century.66 Stowe’s harrowing account of the degradation of slavery tied with the works of William Wordsworth and Sir Walter Scott for third place. Nearly three decades after the earliest stage adaptations, Uncle Tom was still drawing large and fashionable audiences in Toronto.67 As *Grip* noted in 1881, “The play of ‘Uncle Tom’s Cabin’ appears to retain its hold on the affections of the people more than any similar work in existence.”68

The play’s longevity highlights the ways in which public entertainment crossed international and cultural borders. Thanks to transnational networks of touring companies and theatrical circuits, a melodrama treating the effects of slavery in the United States became an international phenomenon. In England, Hazel Waters contends that *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* led to “Tom Mania,” the height of which was from September 1852 to around May 1853.69 But if the craze for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was intense in Britain, in the northern United States, it became, according to one literary critic, the basis for an imagined community of abolitionists whose sense

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67 *Grip*, 15 October, 1881.
68 *Grip*, 13 August, 1881.
of itself eventually defined modern American nationalism.70 The global popularity of Stowe’s work manifested itself in more than a series of plays and parodies of plays. Sheet music with songs from the entertainments was sold along with lithographs of favourite characters.71 And the phenomenon spread beyond entertainment to encompass fashion as well. Ellen J. Goldner observes that the St. Clare hat, so named after one of the main protagonists, was all the rage.72 So too were scarves that depicted important scenes from the work. Even in Paris, dressmakers were influenced by costumes worn by the character Eliza.73 Vases, fancy china plates, silver and gold spoons—all with images of famous characters—also graced the homes of middle-class people touched by the mania.74

Productions were rarely stagnant; instead, they constantly vied with past performances in an attempt to out-do earlier shows. Grip reviewed one such “elaborate representation” that included, a “pack of genuine bloodhounds” in a performance it touted as “realistic in the extreme.”75 Such spectacle helped Uncle Tom’s Cabin hold the attention of Torontonians into the twentieth century. Historian David Grimsted observes wryly that by the end of the century the success or failure of a production of Uncle Tom’s Cabin came to be measured “by the size and number of its bloodhounds . . . .”76 In other words, the more spectacular the better. By this point, however, the sectional issues that Eric Lott claims rendered the play an intensely political performance in pre-Civil War New York, were all but forgotten.77

70 Goldner, “Arguing With Pictures,” 72.
71 Ibid, 80.
72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid, 82.
75 Grip, 13 August, 1881. Two months later, Grip noted that another production of the play was being presented at the Royal. Similarly, the author commented that the play “has been extensively [sic] repaired and renovated for the season . . . .” Grip, 15 October, 1881.
77 Lott, Love and Theft, 226.
As the Kinetograph version suggests, technology was a significant part of spectacle in this particular racial performance. A case in point was the visit of the Lubin Cineograph. With “advertisement[s] posted everywhere,” the moving picture version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* promised to be a spectacle to behold. “Seldom, if ever before,” boasted one poster, “has there come to this neighbourhood a genuine/MOVING PICTURE MACHINE/of which you have often read.” Stowe’s characters had made yet another apotheosis, this time from stage to screen. As with so much of modernity, advertisements trumpeted its arrival: “But now this district is privileged to behold the wonders of real life motion pictures[.]” In the hype it attempted to generate over this new technology, no mention was made of slavery or Tom’s sacrifice. As far as the advertisement was concerned, Uncle Tom was more about the medium than the message.

Stowe’s original novel had the power to inspire. Dr. Alexander Ross of Belleville was so taken with the work that he made a lifelong commitment to abolition that included dangerous, clandestine operations as a worker on the Underground Railroad. In 1853, George Brown of the *Globe*, a fervent abolitionist, published excerpts of the book including the entire fifth chapter. Yet deciphering the effects of this text, including its countless dramatizations, is complicated by its particular connection to Ontario. The character of Uncle Tom was entwined with an equally compelling, and less fictive, persona: Josiah Henson. Henson, an escaped slave who settled in Upper Canada in 1830, went on to found Dawn, a settlement for other fugitive slaves before

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78 “HAVE YOU EVER SEEN ANIMATED PICTURES?” Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. University of Toronto. Canadian Pamphlets. Brc 0254. [191?] Siegmund Lubin was one of the earliest moving picture entrepreneurs.
demonstrating his loyalty to the crown by volunteering in the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837.\textsuperscript{84} Many people considered him to be the source for Stowe’s Uncle Tom.

The conflation of Uncle Tom with Josiah Henson had a more lasting effect than the literary legacy of Stowe. As Robin Winks observes, the myths of Henson’s escape to Canada along with a romanticized understanding of the country’s role in the Underground Railroad caused ‘white’ citizens to imagine their nation as morally superior to a racist United States.\textsuperscript{85} Winks implies that the myth of Uncle Tom in Canada has stifled meaningful discussions of racism above the 49\textsuperscript{th} parallel. “If Uncle Tom came to Canada,” he asks rhetorically, “could conditions need improving?”\textsuperscript{86} Thus the performance of the many versions of the play over such an extended time served to foster self-righteousness within the imagined community—yet another way in which performances of blackness spilled over from the playhouse into the wider culture. Still, Tom’s popularity operated within a cultural context that conceptualized these performances through the lens of minstrelsy. Besides active abolitionists such as Brown, did playgoers care about Josiah Henson and the Underground Railway as far as it related to their enjoyment of \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}? It is a difficult question for historians to answer. Perhaps as the play became more and more spectacular, audiences cared less about its morals and their country’s imagined connection with the demise of slavery in America. As I shall demonstrate, however, plays critical of the peculiar institution remained popular long after the Civil War.

By 1856, only four years after the novel’s publication, Toronto showgoers were already packing halls for “revivals” of \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}.\textsuperscript{87} Less than a week after one of these

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\item \textsuperscript{85} Winks, \textit{The Blacks in Canada}, 193.
\item \textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{87} \textit{The Leader}, 16 October, 1856. The critic for the paper was not fond of Stowe’s follow-up novel and his opinion of the play was not much better. His summation of the latter was that it was “rather weak, and not calculated to enlist the sympathies of an audience.”
\end{itemize}
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performances, audiences were offered an adaptation of Stowe’s latest work.\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp} was produced for the stage by John Brougham, among others, in an effort to capitalize on the tremendous success of its predecessor. Playing to large audiences, its success reveals the sympathy and ambivalence that ‘white’ Victorians could feel for the black Other. Torontonians were meant to empathize with Harry, the enslaved half-brother of the play’s heroine, Nina. They were also meant to despise Nina’s ‘white’ brother, Tom, who tries to seduce Harry’s loyal wife. A character called Uncle Tiff embodies aspects of loyalty and devotion reminiscent of Uncle Tom himself. Stowe, and Brougham, even went so far as to engender audience support for the work’s titular character, Dred. An escaped slave living in the Great Dismal Swamp, Dred inflicts considerable violence against slave owners and “acts the guide, avenger and friend of fugitive chattles [sic] in general.”\textsuperscript{89} Although not as popular as \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}, it was one of many entertainments that performed race in a more sympathetic manner than the straightforward loathing some might expect.

Plays like \textit{Dred} regularly appeared on Toronto stages throughout the nineteenth century. They presented a discourse of race that, while trading in stereotypes and paternalistic racism, nevertheless offered audiences performances of race that were more complex than simple aversion. Dion Boucicault’s \textit{The Octoroon; or, Life in Louisiana}, for instance, was also popular with Torontonians throughout the 1860s and well into the 1890s.\textsuperscript{90} Although not as overtly abolitionist as \textit{Uncle Tom’s Cabin}, the play was, nevertheless, sentimental and sympathetic to slaves. And, while employing stereotypes of various racial Others, \textit{The Octoroon} offered a counter-discourse to more direct racism. The plot centres on the love between George Peyton

\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Ibid.
and an “octoroon” woman named Zoe. After the death of her husband, George’s aunt is left in charge of a failing plantation. Zoe is the daughter of George’s uncle and one of his slaves. The villain of the piece is the ‘white’ slave-owner, Jacob M’Closky, who intentionally destroys the Peyton fortune and seeks to enslave Zoe as his mistress. A tale of star-crossed lovers, the melodramatic story is a series of heart-rending near misses culminating in the suicide of Zoe under the mistaken impression that she was now the property of the lascivious and murderous M’Closky. ⁹¹ The narrative structure of the work causes audiences to identify with various racial Others including Zoe and an American Indian named Wahnotee. And, as in Uncle Tom’s Cabin, the arch-villain is a ‘white’ slaveholder.

To be sure, such entertainments reinforced certain racist stereotypes. But, they also opened space, through the liminal realm of the playhouse, for Torontonians to approach race in new, more complex, ways. ⁹² Playwrights and producers attempted to capitalize on the success of Uncle Tom’s Cabin. The Staff or Diamonds; or, The Quadroon Girl, for example, billed as a companion piece to Uncle Tom’s Cabin, played at the Royal Opera House in February of 1881. ⁹³ Bartley Campbell’s The White Slave was also popular with Toronto audiences and played at the Grand Opera House in August of 1883. ⁹⁴ The playwright’s biggest hit, this show was performed well into the first two decades of the twentieth century. The plot revolves around the virtuous Liza, who believes, incorrectly, that she is a slave. The play served to complicate understandings.

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⁹¹ Interestingly, productions of the play for English audiences ended happily with the union of the interracial couple. Although some theatre historians contend that American show-goers would not tolerate the staged miscegenation, John A. Degen argues against this notion. I have not been able to determine which version Canadian audiences saw. See John A. Degen, “How to End ‘The Octoroon,’” Educational Theatre Journal 27, no. 2 (May, 1975): 170-178.

⁹² Grip, while trading in many traditional stereotypes, also advocated for more equitable treatment of black citizens. In “‘IT’S A POOR RULE, &c.’,” for example, an “ANTI-AFRICAN HOTEL KEEPER” is refused a family ticket to see the “Jubilee Singers, (Coloured)” because of his hypocrisy. Expressing the kind of limited and paradoxical equality so evident throughout Grip, the ticket agent exclaims, “. . . we don’t admit anyone in here who doesn’t ‘act like a white man.’” Grip, 8 October, 1881.

⁹³ The Globe, 16 February, 1881.

of ‘whiteness’ and blackness while hinting at the possibility of miscegenation.95 Although the structure of The White Slave attempts to minimize the tendencies of interracial erotic desire, the play nevertheless performs the transgressive potentialities of such cross-racial longing.96 Judging by the popularity of such plays, some Torontonians were open to new racial possibilities presented to them through performance.

“Ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of their audience”

Not all public entertainments dealing with race offered nuanced depictions of the black Other. A melodramatic production of Uncle Tom’s Cabin was not the same as a ribald minstrel show held at one of the city’s all-male saloons. Toronto’s performances of race were more complex and contradictory than that. For many of the city’s black citizens, however, the effects of blackface minstrelsy were made clear early on in a series of petitions to city council.97 Through these texts, one encounters a community frustrated by offensive depictions of its race and anxious to stop these “American” performances from spreading beyond the stage.

For four consecutive years, beginning in 1840, prominent members of the black community asked their city council to put an end to blackface in Toronto.98 The signatories had an unambiguous interpretation of the minstrel show and its effects off the stage. In the first petition, also signed by the committed abolitionist George Brown of the Globe, they “remarked with sorrow that the American Actors, who from time to time visit this City, invariably select for

96 Ibid.
97 The petitions were not the only instance of a collective response by Toronto’s black citizens to behaviour they found inappropriate. In 1857, Colonel John Prince, a member of the Legislative Council, referred to black residents as “the greatest CURSE ever inflicted upon the two magnificent counties which [he had] the honour to represent in the legislative council of this Province.” In response, Toronto’s black community held a significant protest. As quoted in Hill, The Freedom Seekers, 106. In 1864, members of the community protested a city councillor who regularly referred to them as “Niggers.” See Winks, The Blacks in Canada, 288. Hill offers a brief description of the anti-minstrelsy petitions. Hill, The Freedom Seekers, 109
98 City of Toronto Archives. The petitions were submitted on 20 July, 1840, 14 October 1841, 9 May 1842, and 21 April 1843.
performance plays and characters which, by turning into ridicule and holding up to contempt the coloured population, cause them much heart-burning and lead occasionally to violence.”\(^99\) Their goal was to “forbid . . . the performance of plays likely to produce a breach of the public peace.”\(^100\) The document argues that not only was the dignity of the black population threatened, but so too was their physical safety. The following year, a company of “‘Circus Actors’ from the United States,” were the ostensible reason for that year’s plea.\(^101\) As in all the petitions, the signatories emphasized their loyalty—juxtaposed against the republicanism of the American performers—and the humble nature of their request. The supplicants argued that they had “good reason to apprehend annoyances and insults, in the manner [the performers] endeavour to make the Coloured man appear ridiculous and contemptible in the eyes of their audience.”\(^102\) As we shall see, however, it was not merely the offensive nature of the content that irked the petitioners. It was that the jokes and gags went beyond the stage, colouring the way in which ‘white’ citizens viewed their black neighbours.

The city in the 1830s and 1840s witnessed a growing and increasingly visible black population. Although it is difficult to come by an accurate estimate of the number of black residents in the city, let alone the province as a whole, various attempts have been made. By the historian Michael Wayne’s accounting, the number of black residents of Canada West in 1861 was between 22,500 and 23,000.\(^103\) According to Winks, the black population in Toronto circa

\(^{99}\) Petition from People of Colour residing in the City of Toronto to His Worship the Mayor of Toronto. 20 July, 1840. City of Toronto Archives. For Brown’s role as an abolitionist, see Winks, The Blacks in Canada, 253.

\(^{100}\) Ibid.

\(^{101}\) Petition from People of Colour residing in the City of Toronto to His Worship the Mayor of Toronto. 14 October, 1841. City of Toronto Archives.

\(^{102}\) Ibid.

\(^{103}\) Michael Wayne, “The Black Population of Canada West on the Eve of the American Civil War: A Reassessment Based on the Manuscript Census of 1861,” Histoire Sociale/Social History 28, no. 56 (1995), 470. Wayne’s article turns on its head the consensus that the province was home to as many as 40 000 African-Canadians. Wayne’s argument is convincing and directly undermines the work of Robin Winks and Jason H. Silverman. The latter argues, for instance, that the number of black refugees in the Canadas was roughly 60,000 by the 1840s. See Jason
1854 ranged from 510 to as many as 1,000 out of a total population of 47,000.\textsuperscript{104} We can assume that the numbers during the period of the petitions were slightly smaller given the relatively slow rate of black immigration to the province. Indeed, the very insignificance of the black population in terms of sheer numbers renders the pronounced fixation with “blackness” all the more interesting for the historian of public entertainment. Why, with so few African-Canadian residents were there so many shows featuring black subjects and so many ‘white’ citizens willing to pay good money to enjoy them?

Although it is impossible to speak of a single response by the ‘white’ population to fugitive slaves, Winks suggests that these refugees were accepted without much fuss well into the 1830s. But, as numbers or at least the perception of them increased, concern amongst ‘white’ citizens did as well. By the 1840s and 1850s, however, black people were met with hostility in many parts of the province.\textsuperscript{105} Needed for their labour in the 1820s and 1830s, he asserts that with an influx of Irish immigrants in the 1840s, demand for black workers decreased.\textsuperscript{106} As cheap land dried up, black citizens migrated to the cities where, according to Winks, they were much more visible and their “presumed peculiarities more starkly revealed.”\textsuperscript{107}

Evidence suggests that racism in centres such as Hamilton and Toronto, however, was less than in the western part of the province. By way of explanation, Winks notes that these cities were relatively prosperous during the 1850s, even after the economic downturn. Consequently,

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H. Silverman, \textit{Unwelcome Guests: Canada West’s Response to American Fugitive Slaves, 1800-1865} (Millwood: Associated Faculty Press, 1985), 43. For his part, Winks claims that fully 75 per cent of African-Canadians in Canada West were fugitive slaves. Winks, \textit{The Blacks in Canada}, 240. Not only does Wayne demonstrate that these numbers are grossly exaggerated, he presents evidence suggesting that just fewer than 20 percent of all black residents of the province were fugitives. At most, Wayne concedes, 30 to 40 percent of the African-Canadian population were fugitives. Wayne, “The Black Population,” 474, 476.\textsuperscript{104} Winks, \textit{The Blacks in Canada}, 245-46. See also Hill, \textit{The Freedom Seekers}, 59.\textsuperscript{105} Winks, \textit{The Blacks in Canada}, 142. Silverman, \textit{Unwelcome Guests}, 34-36.\textsuperscript{106} Ibid, 144.\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.\textsuperscript{107} \textit{Ibid}.\textsuperscript{107}
the demand for semiskilled labour remained steady for both Irish and black workers.\textsuperscript{108} Toronto came to be something of a haven for escaped slaves as well as free blacks leaving behind an increasingly hostile environment south of the border.\textsuperscript{109} Many ended up in the infamous fourth ward. Hill asserts that, with notable exceptions, conditions in Toronto were relatively “favourable” for its black residents.\textsuperscript{110} Nevertheless, as the petitions attest, the black community certainly believed that minstrel shows led directly to insults and violence. In this sense, as early as the 1840s, blackface shows were spilling over from theatres, saloons and circuses and influencing ‘white’ citizens’ perception of the black Other. The 1843 appeal claims that such shows were “productive of many broils and suits between the White and Colored inhabitants of [the] City.”\textsuperscript{111} Indeed, in this the final petition, the supplicants implore the mayor to act to protect their “peace, welfare and safety.”\textsuperscript{112} Although Toronto might be comparatively tolerant, in 1855 William Davies lamented that he encountered “Free Niggers . . . at every step.”\textsuperscript{113} Winks notes that racist jokes became increasingly common in British North American newspapers during the 1850s.\textsuperscript{114} And well before mid-century ‘white’ citizens believed that blacks were disproportionately represented in prisons and asylums despite evidence to the contrary.\textsuperscript{115} Perhaps this mistaken belief was fostered by the inordinate amount of attention in the press paid to black offenses.\textsuperscript{116}

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid, 251.
\textsuperscript{109} Hill, \textit{The Freedom Seekers}, 49.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid, 107.
\textsuperscript{111} Petition from People of Colour residing in the City of Toronto to His Worship the Mayor of Toronto. 21 April, 1843. City of Toronto Archives.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{113} William S. Fox, ed., \textit{Letters of William Davies, Toronto, 1854-1861} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1945), 49.
\textsuperscript{114} Winks, \textit{The Blacks in Canada}, 248.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, 249. See also Hill, \textit{The Freedom Seekers}, 106.
\textsuperscript{116} Winks, \textit{The Blacks in Canada}, 249.
Racist ideology was challenged, however, by ‘white’ Torontonians’ imagined sense of self as British subjects. Accepting fugitive slaves demonstrated the superiority of British liberties and appealed to anti-American bias. It was to this prejudice that the petitioners played when they pointed out that these performances were often American. Juxtaposed with the rhetoric of loyalty that pervades each of the petitions, the intention was to convince council members that the demands of British subjects ought to come before those of republican rogues spreading dissent for commercial gain. And, to a certain extent, it was reasonable for black subjects to expect better treatment, at least legally, from the British. In 1793, Lieutenant Governor John Graves Simcoe introduced legislation that would bring a gradual end to slavery in Upper Canada—the first attempt to abolish the peculiar institution in the British Empire. When Jamaica officially ended its apprenticeship period on July 9, 1838, Toronto’s black population gathered to mark, in the words of Winks, “the final emancipation of their race within the British Empire.”

And black claims to loyalty were not empty boasts. Taken as a whole, black citizens were at this time, by and large, fairly conservative. Many harboured lingering animosity toward the American republic. Their loyalty was to Britain. And they defended their home in the War of 1812, including the twenty-seven members of the Black Corps. Later, as tension mounted between the Family Compact and Reform forces, contemporary observers believed, according to Hill, that the people of colour in Upper Canada supported the Tories. In the Upper Canada Rebellion of 1837, black loyalists, such as Josiah Henson, played an even larger role than in

118 An Act to Prevent the Further Introduction of Slaves, and to Limit the Term of Contracts for Servitude Within This Province, 33 George III, c. 7, July 9, 1793, in Provincial Statutes of Upper-Canada.
119 Winks, The Blacks in Canada, 111.
120 Ibid,149. The author notes that the black population voted Conservative until the 1850s.
121 For an account of African-Canadian soldiers serving during the War of 1812, see Ernest Green, “Upper Canada’s Black Defenders,” Ontario History 37 (1931), 365-91.
1812—almost 1000 volunteering within a month of the start of hostilities. Writing about the Coloured Corp, a group of black militiamen created during the Upper Canada Rebellion, Wayne Edward Kelly notes that several black communities raised independent companies to help defend their home from insurrection. Black citizens in Upper Canada also supported the Tories on the electoral front, casting votes for them in municipal and provincial elections. The radical William Lyon Mackenzie, for one, believed that blacks were “opposed to every species of reform,” and were “extravagantly loyal” supporters of the conservative government. In 1837 one commentator noted that the “radical party in politics . . . were opposed by the colored people generally who belong to the Government party.” Perhaps the petitioners felt that their demonstrable loyalty would encourage Toronto’s politicians to take seriously their claims about blackface minstrelsy’s spreading ridicule and violence.

City Council minutes pertaining to the 1840 petition mention that “A Communication from George Stewart and others praying the Council to prevent certain representations in the City was read.” Council’s response to the initial petition summed up their position for the subsequent efforts. The minutes show that Alderman Boulton, seconded by Alderman Young, moved that the mayor be authorized to tell “the coloured inhabitants of this City that under existing laws the grievances complained of in their communication cannot be put a Stop to and that this Council can hold out to them no hope of bringing in a Bill for such purpose without prohibiting such exhibitions altogether which at the present moment they are not prepared to do.” Although council ultimately voted to defer the consideration of Stewart and his fellow

125 As quoted in Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 149.
127 City Council Minutes, 13 July 1840. City of Toronto Archives.
citizens’ petition, Alderman Boulton’s reasoning revealed a tension surrounding public entertainment and its regulation. Although one scholar speculates that City Council was unlikely to help because the black population was too insignificant to matter, it is highly likely that Council felt constrained in taking action against such shows under existing law.\(^\text{129}\) It is also possible, as this same theatre historian concedes, that minstrelsy was too popular to consider banning it. Roughly a month after the initial petition, Council did revise its by-laws through “An Act to Regulate Theatrical Performances and Other Exhibitions.”\(^\text{130}\) No evidence exists, however, until several years later, that the Council acted to prevent the types of shows to which George Stewart and his fellow citizens objected.\(^\text{131}\)

In the final 1843 petition, the supplicants argued that council did in fact have the power to act:

> We Her Magest’y’s Colord [sic] Subjects . . . having found by reference to an act passed in 1834 that your honorable body, have the right to license or refuse request for the exhibition of Shows etc., in this City and we also find that your body have the power to make such laws, as will tend to the peace, welfare, and safety, of the inhabitants of this City. [sic] and as the Season for the exhibition of plays; Shows, etc. is now approaching, we anticipate that our City, will as usual be visited by such persons, and as certain acts, and Songs, Such as Jim Crow and what they call other Negro Characters, performed by them has heretofore been productive of many broils and suits between the White and Colored inhabitants of this City.\(^\text{132}\)

The petitioners desired that the Council would “act as have [sic] been done by the authorities of Kingston, to wit, refuse to license such exhibitions, unless the exhibition pledge themselves under


\(^{130}\) “An Act to Regulate Theatrical Performances and Other Exhibitions,” 17 August 1840. City Council Minutes. City of Toronto Archives.


\(^{132}\) Petition from People of Colour residing in the City of Toronto to His Worship the Mayor of Toronto. 21 April, 1843. City of Toronto Archives.
a penalty, not to exhibit such songs or plays.” Rebutting a criticism that must have been circulating at the time, the signatories conceded that they were aware that such shows also depicted other groups in a negative light. Nevertheless, they argued that these acts “go no further, which is not the case with us.” Instead, the blackface components of these shows spilled out of the playhouse and, it was asserted, “serve to degrade us as well as involve us in difficulties.”

Finally, in July of 1843, the mayor and Council did refuse to license a minstrel show out of concern for the city’s black population. Reformers at the time, convinced that black residents were mostly Tories, argued that the mayor’s gesture was more about re-election than a genuine concern for racial harmony. The victory, if it can be called such, was short-lived.

A few years after the last petition was received by city council, a group of performers calling themselves The Toronto Coloured Young Men’s Amateur Theatrical Society advertised their own show. For three nights toward the end of February 1849, these actors offered Toronto audiences the Restoration tragedy Venice Preserved accompanied by various scenes from Shakespeare. Theatre historian Ann Saddlemyer speculates that their endeavour was perhaps in response to the failure of the petitions. Although there is no evidence to support this tentatively offered conjecture, it is certainly conceivable. What is clear, however, is that the city’s black community actively worked to counter the negative images of minstrelsy—through both petition and performance. Although no reviews exist of their production of Venice

133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Winks, The Blacks in Canada, 150. See also, Hill, The Freedom Seekers, 109. They are citing a letter from Adam Wilson to Robert Baldwin, July 12, 1843. Baldwin Papers. Toronto Reference Library. In discussing the Tory mayor, Henry Sherwood, Wilson argued that the mayor took this action because the Black citizens were strong supporters of his.
136 Toronto Mirror, 9 February 1849.
Preserved, the offering was decidedly high-brow in comparison to the American circuses with their vulgar, if popular, antics.

As we have seen, however, burnt cork shows were immensely popular in the province as early as the 1840s. Early shows at the Royal Lyceum attempted to improve the genre’s seedy reputation by hiring “special constables” to “enforce the strictest order and propriety.” They banned smoking and assured patrons that an evening spent at one of their minstrel shows, as acknowledged elsewhere, would be “a source of instruction and rational entertainment.” It was in many ways because of minstrelsy’s popularity that by the 1860s and 70s, according to Winks, African Canadians were reduced to caricatures from Southern mythology. Blackface minstrelsy was all the rage with both respectable audiences and their disreputable counterparts. By 1880, Grip could report that, “The Prince of Wales, the Princess of Wales and several of the Royal Family went to hear the Haverly Minstrels in London, recently.” “They laughed so at Billy Emerson,” the piece continued, “as nearly to upset that comedian’s gravity.” The following year, Haverly’s Minstrels played the Grand Opera house in a tour so popular that a report claimed that the throngs outside one Boston theatre were reminiscent of the opening of a Sarah Bernhardt show. When Haverly’s returned to Toronto, many citizens were turned away for want of tickets. The crowd outside, however, was orderly as it was “composed of a different class than are usually met at a minstrel entertainment, fully one-half being ladies.” Like it or

139 “1849 Royal Lyceum,” E. A. McDowell Collection, Toronto Reference Library.
140 Ibid.
141 Winks, The Blacks in Canada, 290.
142 Grip, 16 October, 1880.
143 Ibid.
144 The Evening Telegram, 5 March, 1881. Haverly’s Minstrels were popular in Toronto. For reviews of their 1886 tour, see The Globe, 24 January, 1886; The Toronto Mail, 24 January, 1886; The Toronto Mail, 30 January, 1886.
145 The Evening Telegram, 5 March, 1881.
not, the black community in Toronto would have to accept their fellow citizens’ love-affair with minstrelsy.

**Spread**

Not only was blackface a common experience on Toronto’s stages, it was also performed regularly in periodicals, in playbills, advertisements, political propaganda and shop windows. In such cases, we see burnt cork acts leaving the liminal space of the playhouse and saloon, and spilling over into the wider culture.¹⁴⁶ These off-stage minstrel performances were common in Toronto. Political posters from as early as 1839 featured tongue-in-cheek references to prominent figures mockingly impugned with blackface characteristics.¹⁴⁷ *Grip* often carried jokes, sketches and illustrations that featured burnt cork humour, but so too did other prominent publications. A passing anecdote might make for a bit of fun: “A Frenchman saw a negro smoking a new meerschaum. ‘Thunder!’ he exclaimed, ‘why the pipe’s coloring him!’”¹⁴⁸ But equally as representative were longer pieces such as this one featured in the *Canadian Illustrated News*.¹⁴⁹ Titled, “Social Mysteries,” the author explored blackness and its humorous potentialities to launch a subtle social critique of mass consumption.¹⁵⁰ Curious about how the people around him were able to “. . . lib like lord’s [sic] on a salary of $600 a y’ar,” the black protagonist of this narrative concludes: “Dey are mysteries wid which we have no bizness, an’ de mo’ you ponder ober dem de less you will injoy what you have honestly airned by ha’d work an’ saved by good economy.” Like so many blackened performers pacing the boards of Toronto

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¹⁴⁶ The historian Cecilia Morgan found minstrelsy to be a popular diversion aboard ships amongst tourists on transatlantic crossings. See Cecilia Morgan, *‘A Happy Holiday’: English Canadians and Transatlantic Tourists, 1870-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 43-44.


¹⁴⁸ *Grip*, 29 January, 1881.

¹⁴⁹ The *Canadian Illustrated News* was widely read in Toronto. The Toronto Mechanics’ Institute, for instance, had a subscription now held at the Main Library and Archives of the Royal Ontario Museum.

playhouses, the ‘white’ man behind the mask adopts an imagined persona and voice to satirize the wider world.\textsuperscript{151} That such a tactic, so popular on the city’s stages, would come to hold such a prominent place on its pages is really no surprise. Here the imagined black protagonist acts as a source of ‘simple wisdom.’ Other entertainments depicted black people in a far less flattering light.

More pernicious examples of the spread of blackface minstrelsy into the wider culture may be seen in certain newspapers’ reporting on black citizens. In some cases, minstrelsy humour coloured journalists’ coverage and allowed for an opportunity to include elements of blackface—consciously or not—into their stories. As with minstrelsy, this could function as an avenue for racial and racist humour based on stereotypes. The \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, for instance, ran a piece called “Humours of the Census.”\textsuperscript{152} In what might have been a straightforward new story on a recent census, the author instead chose to present a kind of burnt cork routine comically ‘reporting’ on the efforts of a census enumerator and a journalist visiting a racially mixed area of the city. Unlike ‘white’ citizens, the black, mixed-race, and Irish inhabitants of the slum were unable to conceive of why these two privileged interlopers needed to ask them so many personal questions. The racial humour of the census, like so much of blackface comedy, relied upon the foolishness and misunderstanding of common social practices by the imagined Other it purported to depict. The report opened with a mob of slum dwellers surrounding the two men and threatening them, in true carnival disorder, with physical violence: “‘Dere’s a big cullud woman ‘round on St. Mary street huntin’ for you wid a club,’ said a burly mullato elbowing his way through the crowd.” The humorous disruption of traditional gender roles also extended to the perceived physical characteristics of racial Others: “‘Say, here’s Aunt

\textsuperscript{151} See Cockrell, \textit{Demons of Disorder}, 60; Lhamon Jr., \textit{Raising Cain}, 75-76 and 152; and, Mahar, \textit{Behind the Burnt Cork Mask}, 40-41.

\textsuperscript{152} \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 19 June, 1880.
Chloe,’ said a fellow, seizing an old coloured woman who was passing . . . ‘don’t you want to put something in your paper about her? Look yar, she’s got a beard . . ..’” Another black resident demanded that his six dogs, all mutts despite his insistence to the contrary, should be included in the census.

If it was common to see instances of burnt cork shows spreading into the wider culture at the height of minstrelsy’s popularity, early examples also exist in Toronto. In “De Unibersity of U. Canaday,” we find evidence of the spread of blackface minstrelsy as early as 1839.153 In a parodied version of the popular minstrel-show song “Jump Jim Crow,” a writer for the British Colonist uses the staple of minstrel shows to attack the influential Tory educator and Anglican Bishop, the Reverend John Strachan. The original song and dance were created in 1828 by Thomas Dartmouth, who became famous as T. D. “Daddy” Rice. The narrator of the song is a black man who speaks, or rather sings, in the imagined black vernacular, “Oh Doctor Strawn’s a nice man, him lub de/Niggar much . . ..” The performance begins with the black narrator coming to Toronto to get an education. There, he finds that Doctor Strawn is a pervasive presence at the university, “Him President, him lecturer, him hab de dollars/too, . . ..” With his influence, Strawn “make em all sich pretty rules, . . . [,.]” and wields a sort of dictatorial control of the university: “So like de Inquisitioners dat de Radical it funks,/For de Doctor him is President, de Doctor him is/Judge,/De Doctor him is ebery ting, and de Council dey/are fudge.” The doctor’s political influence, however, spreads well beyond the hallowed halls of the academy: “King John him was a great man, when Maitland/him was here,/But toder John him clipped his wings and made/him little queer;/But now by help of Hagerman, him fly again so/high/I ’spose at last him reach de region of de sky.” Strachan’s ambitious nature was laid bare in the final verse of this blackface show, a parody of the original chorus: “Him turn about and wheel about, to England now/to

153 The British Colonist, 17 July, 1839.
go/Him get to be a Bishop man, him jump Jim Crow.”\textsuperscript{154} This example illustrates the way, even in the early days, political performances could be tinged with racial overtones.\textsuperscript{155} A well-known blackface entertainment allowed its author/performer to apply the burnt cork, if only through an imagined black vernacular.

The \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, which regularly blurred the racial boundaries between stage and page, printed an image of a minstrel gag on its cover entitled, “A Case of Platonic Affection.”\textsuperscript{156} The scene is set in an opulent room, richly decorated with expensive furniture and ornate fabrics. Resting on a high column is a marble bust of a coquettish ‘white’ maiden demurely resisting the advances of a suitor. A young black man, outfitted in the breeches and vest of a house slave, stares enraptured at the beautiful image above him. Both his longing gaze and the placement of his hands over his heart, suggest the attitude of a love-sick fool. It is the fool of blackface caricature, too simple to understand the differences between art and reality. The subtext of interracial sexual desire is made even more overt by the black man’s feather duster and rag. Dropped to the floor in the throes of his passion, the handle of this tool has penetrated the vaginal folds of the white cloth. The humour of the situation rests on the inability of the black man to recognize the unattainable nature of the object of his desire. The ‘white’ audience’s discomfort, or perhaps titillation, at the transgressive interracial longing, is subsumed in a comedic device that, like so much of blackface humour, relies on the imagined stupidity of the black subject. The tension is thus defused through the use of well-known minstrel tropes.

\textsuperscript{154} The chorus of the original song is: “Wheel about, an’ turn about, an’ do jis so;/Eb’ry time I wheel about, I jump Jim Crow.”

\textsuperscript{155} For another instance of the spread of blackface beyond the stage in an early source referring to Jump Jim Crow, see “1839 Durham,” in the Baldwin Room collections of the Toronto Reference Library. In a political poster, Colonel Gowan was referred to as the “Clown of the Ring” who will perform, “In the Character of ‘Jump Jim Crow.’”

\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 11 October, 1873.
Advertising—whether through posters or window displays—also relied on minstrelsy to advance its aims. A storefront display for Sweet Caporal Cigarettes turned hundreds of cigarette packages into a mosaic of brightly coloured and contrasting patterns.\textsuperscript{157} [Figure 3-1 SMOKE SWEET CAPORAL] Repeated thousands of times over, the brand name is virtually a fetish in this shrine to nicotine. In the centre, two uniformed soldiers stand guard over a sign that reads “SMOKE SWEET CAPORAL CIGARETTES.”\textsuperscript{158} These heroes of empire evoke the exploits that Torontonians read about in their newspapers and witnessed on the stages of the city’s playhouses and other entertainment venues. But the martial discourse is not the only link between the intricate window display and the Victorian stage. Indeed, another personality familiar to the city’s audiences binds the worlds of commerce and public entertainment. To the side of the display, but twice as large as his armed colleagues, stands one of the most well-known characters of the period: the black dandy. Pointing to the centre of the intricate mosaic, he is emblematic of the stock character made famous by minstrels throughout North America. The dandy was a black man trying hard—but always failing—to emulate the dress and deportment of his racial “betters.” Recognizing the importance of the medium, Sweet Caps regularly advertised in theatre programmes including those for minstrel shows.\textsuperscript{159} In this storefront, he appears in fancy but foolish dress and sports a wide and ridiculous grin. This is blackface spilling over from the stage into the Victorian street via the medium of advertising.

\textsuperscript{157} Sweet Caporal Cigarettes, c1900-1920. City of Toronto Archives. Modern print from copy negative. Fonds 1497, Item 307.

\textsuperscript{158} The American Tobacco Company, which owned Sweet Caporal Cigarettes, issued a series of military cards in the late nineteenth century as a premium to customers.

Figure 3-1  Smoke Sweet Caporal
“Sweet Caps,” as they were more commonly known, were one of the most popular brands of tobacco produced by the American Tobacco Company. Located in the United States, it is not surprising that a humorous racial element was incorporated into the promotion of the brand. As the historian Kenneth W. Goings notes, the growth of consumerism facilitated such stereotypical depictions of black citizens by the so-called “New Advertising.” Comedy, according to Goings, relieved some of the racial tension of the post-Civil War era by depicting black subjects as happy. The cultural logic of these advertisements being that if they were happy “Sambos,” then conditions for black citizens could not really be all that bad. These whitewashed images became increasingly common in popular culture through advertisements, paintings and commercial items. The racial currency of the “New Advertising,” derived much of its humour from blackface minstrelsy.

Perhaps it was this conflation of levity with race that caused the journalist, playwright and member of the Toronto Women’s Literary Club, Sarah Anne Curzon to insert a bit of blackface into her otherwise high-minded 1887 play, *Laura Secord: The Heroine of 1812*. Curzon’s protagonist acts out her part as Loyalist saviour amidst a tense setting of violence and gender reversals. In a serious play treating issues of war, loyalty and women’s abilities, the author nevertheless finds time to include elements of the minstrel show at a moment of dramatic tension.

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161 Ibid, 10.
162 Ibid.
In the play, Secord owns two black slaves, Flos and Pete. As a gang of American soldiers intrudes upon the Secord homestead, Curzon juxtaposes the cowardly behaviour of Pete with Laura Secord’s calm and disciplined response. Pete is content to leave the two women alone to face the American invaders. His buffoonery befits minstrelsy more than historical drama. Excusing himself, he informs his mistress, “I done tell Flos/Ter put her bes’ leg fus’, fer I mus’ go/An’ ten’ dat poo’ sick hoss.” Mrs. Secord responds with authority displaying a proprietary concern for her female slave: “Nay, you’ll do nothing of the kind! You’ll stay/And wait upon these men. I’ll not have Flos/Left single-handed by your cowardice.” Before Pete goes on to make yet another attempt to flee, Secord warns him, “. . . see you play no tricks to-night.” In this brief exchange, Curzon employs a racial short-hand more common to burnt cork routines than high drama. Pete’s poor command of English, his spinelessness, his trickster nature, his repeated attempts to run off and his obviously feigned concern for “Dat poo, sick hoss,” reveal him to be little more than a stock character of the blackface show.

Whether Curzon’s performance of blackness was included consciously or not, it suggests the extent to which blackface pervaded dramatic conventions. A closet drama, her play was not intended for the stage—Curzon was a well-known journalist—and its subject was weighty and grave. Nevertheless, the inclusion of Pete illustrates the ubiquitous nature of this type of racial performance. It also implies the extent to which Curzon’s own views of race were coloured by minstrelsy’s comedic conventions.

Like Curzon’s Pete, blackface characters were often stereotypical, without much depth or roundness of personality. The genre did not require a consistently upheld suspension of disbelief so necessary to other forms of theatre. Instead, it relied upon a dynamic connection with the audience who were encouraged, depending on the specifics of the individual scene, to view the

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actors either as blacks or as ‘white’ actors consciously made up to look black. Toronto audiences recognized the meta-dramatic aspect of blackface, appreciating that the genre was essentially ‘white’ men playing dress-up. An example of this may be seen in an illustration entitled, “Washing Up,” which appeared in the *Canadian Illustrated News* in 1872.\(^{166}\) [Figure 3-2 Washing Up] The image took the reader behind the scenes of a minstrel show as the cast washed off their burnt cork and theatrical makeup. It is a jarring picture of half-‘white’-half-black men in various states of undress. The image depicts the performers in transition from comic black Other with hyperbolised lips and ragged clothes to shirtless semi-clean ‘white’ man and finally, to the apex of civilization, the fully dressed ‘white’ man replete with silk top hat. The ritualistic cleansing away of blackness, and all that it represents, culminated in a symbol of Victorian respectability.

A similar narrative of ritual ‘whitening’ appeared again in the pages of *The Canadian Illustrated News* some nine years later.\(^{167}\) It also reiterated the trope of cleansing away blackness to reveal a true ‘white’ self. In “An Irreparable Loss,” readers saw such a narrative unfold through 12 illustrated panels. The drama opens when Professor Softy hears a lovely tenor voice floating through his apartment. He discovers that the owner of the voice is a blackened chimney sweep. Convinced that “he has a fortune in his throat,” the professor prescribes a bath and begins a course of training to prepare the chimney sweep for the stage. What is of note, here, is that the future tenor is drawn as a coal blackened body complete with exaggerated lips and nose. It is only after the bathing scene in panel four that the singer’s ‘whiteness’ is revealed. Shortly after his cleansing, he takes the public by storm and is immediately engaged for $400 by a

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\(^{166}\) “Washing Up,” *Canadian Illustrated News*, 26 October, 1872.

\(^{167}\) *Canadian Illustrated News*, 27 August, 1881.
Figure 3-2   Washing Up
stereotypically Jewish-looking “impresario.” The entertainment entrepreneur’s hook nose, ears and pointed beard—as well as his profession—visually allude to his Semitic background and fit the continuing racial context. The chimney sweep cum tenor is such a success that a bidding war between various opera-house managers ensues; they literally tug at each of his limbs. In the final scene, however, the chimney sweep has signed a contract of a different sort, going with Miss Trampelston and the “offer of her heart and $100, 000 per annum . . ..” With his features now looking decidedly patrician, the once-black chimney sweep is shown at the reins of a smart-looking carriage with his rich wife at his side. To illustrate the racial cleansing, the author includes a sort of black doppelganger to remind the audience of the transformation. Behind the newly married couple, dressed in livery and top-hat, is their black servant. Depicted in profile with a pronounced nose and exaggerated lips, the image is meant to remind the viewer of the “black” chimney sweep, presented in a virtually identical profile, in panels two through four.

Thanks to scholars such as Anne McClintock, most students of Victorian culture are aware of the trope of racial cleansing in that era’s soap advertisements.\(^{168}\) One such instance, a promotion for Strachan’s Gilt Edge Soap suggests that Torontonians were no less familiar with the racial subtext of soap than their British and American contemporaries.\(^ {169}\) [Figure 3-3 Strachan’s Gilt Edge Soap] Here the image of a black man kneeling over a washing basin greets the reader. Depicted in stereotypical fashion, the man wears an expression of surprise as he gazes into a mirror. Thanks to the miracle of Strachan’s soap—which “Beats the World!”—the young man’s face and hands are ritually ‘whitened.’ Despite this, his exaggerated physiognomy remains the same. McClintock views soap and mirrors as two of the four ritualistically occurring fetishes

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\(^{168}\) Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 207-231.

\(^{169}\) *Canadian Illustrated News*, 26 November, 1881; *Canadian Illustrated News*, 3 December, 1881.
of soap advertising which promised to wash away the signs of racial and class degeneration.\textsuperscript{170} Like the chimney sweep-tenor or the minstrel actors “Washing Up” behind the scenes, the performance of racial ‘whitening’ relies on soap. The comedic currency behind all three images of racial ‘whitening,’ however, depends upon on popular conceptions of the black subject spread through minstrel performances.

\textbf{Blackening Reputations}

As blackface minstrelsy was spilling over the threshold of the theatres and saloons into other aspects of the culture, one of the most interesting manifestations of this disorderly spread was racially inflected political discourse. Indeed, the carnivalesque aspects of the burnt cork act also shaped the high political culture of the public sphere. So common were burnt cork performances, that they functioned as a sort of cultural matrix through which important political ideas and ideologies were negotiated. These racial texts thus shed light on the ways in which blackface minstrelsy influenced political thought. In the early nineteenth century, according to prominent revisionist scholars, minstrelsy allowed the dispossessed of the Atlantic diaspora to launch attacks against their political and social betters.\textsuperscript{171} By mid-century, however, some argue that the form had devolved into a more frivolous kind of entertainment, the basis of which was a mocking form of racism.\textsuperscript{172} Respectable audiences in Bengough’s day, for instance, were less interested in subversive politics than a pleasant evening out. Paradoxically, however, the transgressive political underpinnings of early blackface survived off-stage through the cultural productions of political actors anxious to impugn their opponents. Whether it was campaign literature depicting

\textsuperscript{170} McClintock, \textit{Imperial Leather}, 214.
\textsuperscript{171} See Cockrell, \textit{Demons of Disorder}, 60; Lhamon Jr., \textit{Raising Cain}, 75-76 and 152; and Mahar, \textit{Behind the Burnt Cork Mask}, 40-41.
\textsuperscript{172} Cockrell, \textit{Demons of Disorder}, 146-149.
Figure 3-3  Strachan’s Gilt Edge Soap
opponents "blackened up" like minstrels, or J. W. Bengough's racialized satires of politicians such as Macdonald and Blake, these burnt cork performances were a notable feature of contemporary political discourse. As I have argued in chapter two, certain Torontonians conceived their politics through performance. For present purposes, I would add that race played a special role in this process. Political actors, including journalists, satirists and campaign officials, incorporated racial signifiers taken from blackface minstrelsy into their own commentary and propaganda.

Early instances of the spread of blackface minstrelsy onto the political stage can be found in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Like the 1839 reference to the conservative Bishop of Toronto John Strachan Jumping Jim Crow, some early commentators used blackface minstrelsy as a way of attacking their political opponents. A large political broadside from the same year advertising a “GREAT DURHAM MEETING” gave Tory supporters the chance to ‘blacken’ the reputation of Toronto reformers. Made to appear as if it were one of the many posters tacked to the fences by those ardent for political change in the wake of Lord Durham’s report, it was, in fact, a satirical impersonation of the genre by supporters of the Family Compact. Symbolically, reformers are urged to muster at “THE GAOL, in the City of Toronto,” after which they will march up Yonge Street. With a band playing Hail Columbia, the Republican anthem, the procession was to include, among many others, such advocates for

173 The British Colonist, 17 July, 1839.
174 “1839 Durham.” Baldwin Room Toronto Reference Library.
176 Interestingly, although Wilton analyzes this broadside in great detail, she does not pursue the reference to Ethiopian Minstrels. Wilton, Popular Politics, 209-210.
responsible government as James Small, Robert Baldwin and Egerton Ryerson. What is of
note, however, is that O. R. Gowan, the sometime Reformer, was to be the “Clown of the Ring,”
and appear “In the Character of ‘Jump Jim Crow.’” Clearly, political performers on both sides of
the Reform-Tory divide felt that “blacking up” one’s opponents was an attack that carried
currency in Toronto’s early public sphere.

In another early satiric political poster, this time maligning the failed attempt to oust an
incumbent Reform politician, there is yet a further instance of blackface colouring the political
landscape. Announcing a mock political funeral, the poster describes a solemn procession in
honour of the “late THOMAS GRIMSHAWE.” Attended by local Tory worthies, with a hearse
“Drawn by 6 thorough-bred Mules from Toronto,” the sombre occasion also featured a dead
march performed by a troupe of “Ethiopian Minstrels.” The inclusion of the reference to
blackface performers, also known as Ethiopian Serenaders, was meant to insult the pretensions of
the would-be politician. It brought the disorderly world of public entertainment—and
particularly its racial transgressiveness—into the realm of political debate.

Grip, not surprisingly, used race to criticize politicians in several of its graphic satires and
political commentaries. “OTHELLO BROWN’S APOLOGY,” which was discussed in
Chapter Two, suggests that part of Bengough’s fascination with the intersection of politics and

\[177\] As Wilton notes, parades and processions were a regular component of reformers’ efforts to promote and

\[178\] “1858 Political Funeral,” Baldwin Room, Toronto Reference Library.

\[179\] Interestingly, as a further racial insult, one of the distinguished guests was to appear “dressed as a Mahommetan
[sic] in a Toga of ram-cat skins.”

\[180\] Bengough’s satiric combination of public entertainment, politics, and race was not limited solely to blackface
minstrelsy. In “THE NEW HEATHEN CHINEE,” he presents Alexander Mackenzie, then the prime minister after
the Pacific Scandal, as “Ah Sin,” a character from Bret Harte’s famous poem which was later adapted into a popular
play in collaboration with Mark Twain. *Grip*, 24 January, 1874. Mackenzie wears the stereotypical garb of a
Chinese man in a highly Orientalized Ottawa. The caricature relies on a series of comedic tropes not dissimilar to
those found in blackface.
public entertainment encompassed a racial component.\textsuperscript{181} [Figure 3-4 OTHELLO BROWN’S APOLOGY] In this case, the Honourable George Brown applies the burnt cork mask to play Shakespeare’s famous Moor. Although his features have not been distorted—no stereotypically oversized lips or nose—the Senator is nevertheless coloured by his failure to secure a trade agreement with the United States. To highlight Brown’s disappointment, a smirking Uncle Sam stands just off stage, carrying documents alluding to the U.S. Senate’s rejection of Brown’s overtures toward reciprocity.

An avid theatre-goer, Bengough often employed visual codes from the stage whose currency was colour. Take, for instance, a cartoon which appeared in an August issue of \textit{Grip} in 1878.\textsuperscript{182} Entitled “THE NATIONAL POLICY MINSTRELS,” the graphic satire depicts a scene familiar to Torontonians. [Figure 3-5 THE NATIONAL POLICY MINSTRELS] In it, a group of blackface performers, replete with banjos, tambourines and bones, acts out their shtick in front of an amused audience. Only in this case, the actors in question are better known for their political performances as prominent Tories. Here we see Bengough at his best: witty, allusive and slyly biting in his satire. Through the familiar language of the minstrel show, Bengough describes the Macdonald government as a farce. The racial implications of the decision to cast Prime Minister Macdonald as the master of ceremonies at a minstrel show, however, would not have been lost on his readers, steeped as they were in such black face performances. The humour of the wily politician performing in burnt cork barely masks Bengough’s contempt for Macdonald. Bathed in the glaring footlights of the political stage, he looks hot under the collar

\textsuperscript{181} “OTHELLOW BROWN’S APOLOGY,” \textit{Grip}, 27 February, 1875
\textsuperscript{182} \textit{Grip}, 31 August, 1878.
Figure 3-4  OTHHELLO BROWN'S APOLOGY
Figure 3-5  THE NATIONAL POLICY MINSTRELS
from behind his burnt cork mask. The insinuation is that Macdonald is too incompetent to handle his cabinet of buffoons. In effect, the artist and political critic is symbolically, and very publicly, blackening the reputation of the nation’s prime minister. *Grip*, as we shall see, enjoyed blacking up and otherwise colouring Canadian politicians.  

Bengough was intimately familiar with blackface. He regularly reviewed such entertainments and encouraged his readers to patronize them. In “Sketches at the Amateur Minstrel Show,” he treats his readers to a visual description of a performance he particularly enjoyed.  

The cartoon is rendered from an actual amateur minstrel show at the Grand Opera House in February of 1885. From it, one sees several features of the minstrel show that were essential to Bengough’s political burnt cork acts. At the top right, two figures are “Manufacturing Burnt Cork,” literally burning a cork and applying the blackness to their faces. Above them, the artist places a respectable looking audience. These two components were important to any minstrel show but, as we shall see, also appear in his minstrel satires as comments on the public sphere: the public persona of the politician and the constituent-audience members. In the centre of the image, however, Bengough gives pride of place to a ridiculous looking man in an oversized bow-tie, a ragged top hat and an umbrella that has seen better days. A would-be professor, the “Brilliant Oration” given by this stock character was a chance to poke fun at the pretensions of a black man unable to make it as an intellectual in the ‘white’ world. His inability to negotiate the codes of gentlemanly attire is a mute symbol of the malapropisms and mispronunciations that made his pompous

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183 Bengough also presented Macdonald as a Native-Canadian—although oddly with the oversized lips and nose of a minstrel character—in “LET THE BIG CHIEF BEWARE!” *Grip*, 18 November, 1882.

Figure 3-6  SKETCHES AT THE AMATEUR MINSTREL SHOW
speechifying so enjoyable. Although there are many other important elements in this image—such as the dizzying array of entertainments that made up a minstrel show—one of the most central facets may be seen in the sort of semi-circular group of performers dressed in black and holding various instruments. As we have seen, this group was led by a genteel interlocutor, a sort of straight-man juxtaposed with the inappropriate antics of his troupe—particularly the coarse and simple Tambo and Bones. These two men appear at opposite ends of the circle and exchange jokes and insults with the master of ceremonies. This disorderly back and forth, usually at the expense of the straight-man in the middle, offered Bengough a singularly effective satiric device.

The familiar routine helps us to better understand the critical thrust of “The National Policy Minstrels.” By taking this regular feature of the burnt cork show, Bengough wittily levels an attack on Macdonald’s National Policy. One of the end men, “Brudder Tambo,” played by the Honourable Mr. Tilley, brings up an important conundrum. With the protective tariff, how will the prime minister’s government raise any revenue without resorting to direct taxation? Bengough, an avid proponent of free trade, uses the traditional back and forth banter of the endmen with the interlocutor to catch Macdonald out on an important implication of his protectionist policy decision. Looking uncomfortable, Macdonald replies, “BRUDDER, DAT AINT TO DE P’INT!” All the other entertainers, blackened members of the Tory party, are at a loss to answer the “ASTOUNDING FINANCIAL CONUNDRUM.” Bengough portrays these political performers as simpletons. That they could so easily stump their leader was meant to highlight Macdonald’s own political shortcomings.

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185 “THE NATIONAL POLICY MINSTRELS,” *Grip*, 31 August, 1878.
Using another stock character from the minstrel show, the Toronto satirist depicted the prime minister as a chicken-stealing “coon.”\footnote{In British North America, blacks were widely thought to be prone to stealing chickens. See Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 248.} [Figure 3-7 A CRUEL, UNJUST SUSPICION] In “A CRUEL, UNJUST SUSPICION,” Macdonald is caricatured as a dishevelled “DARKEY” with a chicken stolen from “de Lib’rul coop.”\footnote{“A CRUEL, UNJUST SUSPICION,” *Grip*, 21 February, 1891.} With minstrel humour, Bengough offers up a popular stereotype from blackface performances. The chicken-stealing thief in this performance, however, is a politician taking the Liberal’s policy of Partial Reciprocity. When questioned by a police constable, Macdonald even speaks like a minstrel: “Stole dat pullet? No, sah! Dat ain’t never be’n in de Lib’rul coop, sah; day’s a bird wot I raised myself. De Lib’rul breed ob pullet ain’t got dar wings clipped laik dis here!” This is part of a series of cartoons unfolding a narrative involving Macdonald’s backtracking on free trade with a “Partial Reciprocity” stolen from the Grits. In “THE LAST SCENE OF THE FARCE,”—a title which alludes to the theatrical origin of this series—“The Political Coon,” Macdonald has eluded the constable, seen in the background, only to kill the “Limited Reciprocity” chicken at the bidding of his boss, representing central Canada’s manufacturing interests.\footnote{“THE LAST SCENE OF THE FARCE,” *Grip*, 28 February, 1891.} [Figure 3-8 THE LAST SCENE OF THE FARCE]

But, what was good for the Tory goose, was good for the Grit gander. In “THE BILL BOARD REDECORATED,” Bengough gives the same treatment to Liberals Alexander Mackenzie and Oliver Mowat.\footnote{“THE BILL BOARD REDECORATED,” *Grip*, 7 July, 1877. Mackenzie was Canada’s first Liberal Prime Minister from 1873-78. Sir Oliver Mowat, also a Liberal, was the third Premier of Ontario from 1872-96.} [Figure 3-9 THE BILL BOARD REDECORATED] This is an excellent example in so far as it reveals the artist’s fascination with political performance. Nineteenth-century public entertainments were often advertised on fences and giant bill boards.
Figure 3-7 A CRUEL UNJUST SUSPICION

A CRUEL, UNJUST SUSPICION.

THE DAKREY—"Stole dat pallet?  No, sah! Dat ain't never be'n in de Lib'ral coop, sah; dat's a bird wot I raised myself. De Lib'ral breed oh pallet ain't got dat wings clipped talk dis here!"
Figure 3-8    THE LAST SCENE OF THE FARCE
In this image, the bill board has been re-decorated with an ad for a new show. In the top right corner of this graphic satire, however, the previous bill board is seen peeking through. The hidden image references an earlier cartoon that Bengough had drawn where he likened the Tory government to a travelling circus: Macdonald’s “greatest show on earth.”190 [Figure 3-10 BILLED FOR THE SEASON] In “THE BILL BOARD REDECORATED,” the circus has been followed by a minstrel show, governing Canada and “organized regardless of expense or consistency to run out ‘John A’s Greatest Show on Earth.’” Although sympathetic to many Grit policies, this particular image demonstrates that Bengough was capable of levelling withering attacks at both parties. As in the earlier minstrel images, he includes the semi-circular grouping with interlocutor—played by George Brown—and fools played by Mackenzie and Mowat. Bengough thus comments upon the disproportionate influence of the Globe editor and the subservient position of Grit politicians to Brown’s power. At least Macdonald was in charge of his own show! In the top left, the stump speech is delivered by a character with pretensions to grandiosity, the farmer-politician Joseph Rymal. Balancing this, on the top right of the image, Mackenzie and Mowat stand in a pose typical of nineteenth century theatrical advertisements. The text around them cynically implies that the two Liberal politicians will be giving essentially the same performance as their conservative predecessor. The Grand Cabinet Walk-Around and the presence of Brown playing a banjo solo all add to the minstrelsy theme. But this was not the only time the Grits performed in burnt cork for Grip’s readers. “ONE MORE RIVER TO CROSS” takes its name from a popular minstrel song and depicts a blacked up Oliver Mowat.191 [Figure 3-11 ONE MORE RIVER TO CROSS] The tune was sentimental and spoke to the trials

190 “BILLED FOR THE SEASON,” Grip, 9 June, 1877.
191 Grip, 11 September, 1880.
Figure 3-9  THE BILLBOARD REDECORATED
Figure 3-10  BILLED FOR THE SEASON
Figure 3-11  One More River to Cross
and tribulations of slaves hoping to cross the river into freedom. Here Bengough presents the politician longing to cross the river of a general election to the freedom of the spoils of office.

Similarly, Bengough applied the burnt cork to the Conservative Sir Charles Tupper in a send-up of what *Grip* considered his “CHILD-LIKE CONFIDENCE” in the Canadian Pacific Railway Syndicate. In this graphic satire, Tupper is the simple black man of the minstrelsy stage. Clumsy and foolish, he stands upon a high ladder whitewashing the side of a building. Rooting dangerously close the ladder, however, is a greedy “C.P.R. SYNDICATE” pig chewing its “MONOPOLY.” As expected, the ladder of “CHILD-LIKE CONFIDENCE” gives way, leaving the burnt corked Sir Charles hanging from his breeches on a hook, his foot through a glass window and a bucket of white paint on his head. His dialect is also that of the minstrel, “GO ‘WAY FROM DAR, DON’T YOU BE BREEDIN’ NO MISCHIEF!” Bengough concludes this performance by having his minstrel-politician deliver the punch line of the joke with the blackface character’s stereotypical naïveté: “WHO’D HAVE THUNK DAT ANIMAL ‘D ACTED DAT WAY!”

In satirizing politicians as performers—and particularly blackface minstrels—Bengough was borrowing from an originally American tradition. Minstrelsy is known as the first truly American art-form. And, like so much of Victorian Toronto’s public entertainment, it originated from outside the dominion. After all, Toronto audiences had little actual experience with chicken-stealing African Americans. Nevertheless, cultural producers north of the border were able to turn this foreign art form to their own ends. Bengough was always on the lookout for material, always gazing south of the border or across the ocean for trends. He kept copious notes and scrapbooks, many filled with cartoons clipped from various American newspapers.

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192 “PUT NOT YOUR FAITH IN SYNDICATES!,” *Grip*, 20 August, 1881. Sir Charles Tupper was Premier of Nova Scotia from 1864-67 and, later, the sixth Prime Minister of Canada serving only 69 days in office.

One of these graphic satires kept by Bengough is from the *Kansas Evening Post* and provides an example of the ways in which American political cartoonists also used blackface in their art.\(^{194}\) [Figure 3-12 The National Cake-Walk] The author of “The National Cake-Walk,” like Bengough, derived a certain satiric punch from applying the burnt cork mask.

Bengough, however, was not the only Canadian graphic satirist to blacken his subjects. A contemporary of Bengough whose work appeared in the *Canadian Illustrated News* and the Montreal *Star*, was the Quebec-born Henri Julien (1852-1908). In one of his best works, the artist’s 1899 *Songs of the By-Town Coons*, he depicts the Laurier administration as a series of blackface minstrels.\(^{195}\) [Figure 3-13 Songs of The By-Town Coons Cover] A sly comment on politics as performance, the implication is that democracy—or at least the new Liberal regime—is a form of minstrel show. A certain tension exists with this document, appearing in two significantly different forms: serialized in the *Montreal Daily Star* and, later, on their own as an album. In their original incarnation, they were accompanied by verses that were both racist and anti-French. When they were reproduced as a commemorative album they were divorced from their vitriolic text. After all, as the preface suggests, Julien was a Liberal and “proud of Sir Wilfrid Laurier.”\(^{196}\) Thus, like many of Bengough’s graphic satires linking politics to public entertainment, Julien’s “Coons” were meant to amuse as well as condemn.\(^{197}\) With Sir Wilfrid serving in the role of interlocutor, the Liberal minstrel show was a tongue-in-cheek send-up of


\(^{195}\) The series was initially printed every Wednesday and Saturday in the conservative *The Montreal Daily Star*, between January and April 1899. It was later issued as a commemorative album. Please see, *Henri Julien Album*. Montreal: Librairie Beauchemin Limitee, 1916.

\(^{196}\) *Henri Julien Album*, 115.

\(^{197}\) Dominic Hardy suggests that Julien resisted pressure from *The Montreal Daily Star*’s conservative editor to present Laurier and his fellow Liberals in a negative light by retaining “codes of decorum in physiognomic representation that effectively argued a winking alliance rather than wholehearted satirical opprobrium,” See Dominic Hardy, “Historical ironies of Henri Julien (1852-1908): researching identity and graphic satire across
Figure 3-12  The National Cake-Walk

Figure 3-13  Songs of the By-Town Coons
Figure 3-14  Sir Wilfrid Laurier
Figure 3-15  Fielding with Big Feet
the Grits and their new French-Canadian leader.\footnote{198} \[Figure 3-14 Sir Wilfrid Laurier\] With only one exception, the out-size feet of the Honourable W. S. Fielding which burst through his tambourine in a trope of minstrels excess, the politicians are presented without the exaggerated physiology one might expect from such an performance.\footnote{199} \[Figure 3-15 Fielding with Big Feet\] Nevertheless, all the characters are blackened-up and depicted in minstrel poses. They wear the appropriate costumes and carry the usual props including a variety of musical instruments. \[Figure 3-16 Sir Richard Scott and Figure 3-17 Clown With Pipe\] Most of the politicians dance absurdly in the blackface tradition. As Dominic Hardy suggests in his analysis of this text, “The institution of parliament is seen, under the governance of a francophone-led Liberal government, as little more than the production of a minstrel troupe, as a parody of true (English-speaking, British-Canadian, Conservative) governance.”\footnote{200}

A similar piece of political theatre incorporating blackface performance emerged during Ontario’s bitterly contested election of 1902.\footnote{201} \textit{Build Up Ontario: Campaign Songs of the Ross Minstrels} is a campaign pamphlet reminiscent of Julien’s 1899 creation.\footnote{202} \[Figure 3-18 Build Up Ontario Cover\] Both were conservative efforts directed against the Liberal Party. In the later effort, however, the tone is much harsher than in the version of Julien’s satire of the Laurier regime divorced from its original racist and anti-French verses. Although humour is still the underlying force, here, George Ross and his fellow Liberals are depicted both graphically and textually as corrupt, as Yankee traitors and as liars. This is one of the best Canadian examples of

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\footnote{198}{Sir Wilfrid Laurier was Canada’s seventh prime minister and the first French-Canadian to hold that office serving from 1896-1911.}

\footnote{199}{See Lott, \textit{Love and Theft}, 138.}

\footnote{200}{Hardy, “Historical Ironies,” 12.}

\footnote{201}{Held on 29 May, 1902, it was Ontario’s tenth general election. Sir George William Ross’ Ontario Liberal Party barely won a ninth consecutive term beating Sir James P Whitney’s Ontario Conservative Party. One of the central issues revolved around a referendum on prohibition.}

\footnote{202}{\textit{Build Up Ontario: Campaign Songs of the Ross Minstrels}. Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library. University of Toronto.}
Figure 3-16  Sir Richard Scott
Figure 3-17  Clown with Pipe
Figure 3-18  Build Up Ontario Cover
politics as public entertainment and, tellingly, race is central to its political and performative currency. [Figure 3-19 The Grand Opening Chorus] Only as a result of the popularity of minstrel shows, and voters’ widespread familiarity with them, could this text have resonated with Ontarians.

The pamphlet consists of 25 pages of songs, dances, poems, jokes and blackened politicians. The entire text incorporates elements from public entertainment and its promotion into a compelling, if scurrilous, attack on Ross’ Liberal Party. The second page assumes the form of an advertisement, informing the public of the “FAREWELL TOUR/OF THE/ROSS MINSTRELS.” [Figure 3-20 Last Rehearsal] To reinforce the double meaning, and further the connection to the stage, the author writes: “Positively the Last Appearance in Ontario of the/Greatest Aggregation of Talent ever/Combined under One Management.” Farewell tours and posters advertising the last appearance of a star or troupe were common features of Toronto’s entertainment landscape. Here the trope is employed comically in the context of a heated election campaign in which the Tories hoped to close the curtains on the Grits’ eight-term run. The page also lists the prominent Liberal insider Alexander Smith as the advance agent for the show. And appropriately, on page three, it depicts Smith as a blackened clown, carrying paste, brush and Liberal posters to advertise the show. Page two sets the scene for the up-coming performance. Here the author creates a text that calls to mind the posters littering Toronto’s streets. “SEE THE ARRAY OF TALENT!!!,” it barks. “49 ARTISTS,” made up of, among others, “AXE GRINDERS,” “BALLOT BURNERS,” and “SURPLUS MELTERS.” “At each performance,” it proclaims, “Professor Ross will perform his in-/imitable self-swallowing act, to
Figure 3-19  The Grand Opening Chorus
LAST REHEARSAL
FOR THE FAREWELL TOUR
OF THE
ROSS MINSTRELS
Positively the Last Appearance in Ontario of the
Greatest Aggregation of Talent ever
Combined under One Management

ADVANCE AGENT
ALEXANDER SMITH

MASTER OF CEREMONIES
GEORGE WASHINGTON ROSS
Assisted by the Greatest Living
End Men Now on Earth

JOHNNIE DRYDEN   JIMMIE STRATTON

SEE THE ARRAY OF TALENT !!!

7  AXE GRINDERS  7
7  MACHINE HUGGERS  7
7  JUGGLERS  7
7  LOC ROLLERS  7
7  BALLOT BURNERS  7
7  SURPLUS Melters  7
7  THIMBLE RIGGERS  7
49  ARTISTS  49

At each performance Professor Ross will perform his inimitable self-swallowing act, to slow Referendum
Music by the Company

Figure 3-20  Last Rehearsal
Like any good minstrel show, the Ross Minstrels required a master of ceremonies (Premier Ross himself) and the unruly endmen, in this case John Dryden and James Stratton: “the Greatest Living/End Men Now on Earth.” Throughout the pamphlet, and in keeping with the blackface genre, Ross as interlocutor has great difficulty containing his endmen and the other blacked-up minstrel-ministers. This particular generic trope of the blackface show, as in the skilful hands of Bengough, functions as a double entendre, calling into question Ross’ strength as a leader.

Like many advertisements for shows attempting to reach a broader audience, Ross’ Minstrels include testimonies from local worthies.[Figure 3-21 Testimonials] Although a genuine minstrel show or a travelling circus might include a quotation from a religious leader or other moral authority, Ross’ Minstrels prefer such bastions of integrity as The Globe and John A. Macdonald. The latter assures audiences of “the high and edifying character of the entertainment . . .” The Globe’s assessment was similar: “Nothing better has been offered to those of our citizens who delight to combine amusement with instruction than the entertainments . . . which have had a cohesive run of thirty nights in the Queen’s Park Variety Theatre.” Each of these testimonials by “Eminent Men of All Classes,” alludes to specific issues or scandals, especially the debate over temperance. With palpable sarcasm, the Reverend D. SP-N-C-R contends that the show is “better than as many temperance lectures.” “The accursed traffic,” asserts the minister, “must tremble before this latest and greatest power for good.” Conversely, the secretary for the Office of Licensed Victuallers’ Association averred that the “. . . Ross Minstrels are as exhilarating as a bottle of ’83, I.X.L. or Club. The racy humor of the Referendum extravaganza

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203 The reference to the referendum on prohibition features prominently throughout the pamphlet. Although a majority of those who cast votes did so in favour of prohibition, so few citizens voted that the Ross government said it would not be bound by the results.

204 Build Up Ontario, 25.

205 This is yet another instance of a legislature intentionally conflated with a place of public entertainment.
READ THE FOLLOWING TESTIMONIALS GIVEN UNSOLICITED BY
EMINENT MEN OF ALL CLASSES.

Office of the W——zum——z-w——.
TORONTO, April 1st, 1902.

I can cheerfully bear testimony to the high and edifying character of the
entertainments of the Ross Minstrels. The self-swallowing act of Professor
Ross I regard as really educational in its character and entirely in accord with
the eternal fitness of things.

J. A. McD——N——L——D——.

TORONTO, April 1st, 1902.

To raise the moral tone of our saloons, to add to their attractiveness and
increase their patronage, I know nothing more effective than a performance by
the Ross Minstrels. Their rendition of the screaming Referendum farce is
unrivalled as a thirst provoker.

F. S. SP——N——GE.

Colborne Street,
TORONTO, April 1st, 1902.

I cordially commend the performance of the Ross Minstrels to the enter-
tainment committees of Temperance Societies. Even one rendering of the Re-
ferendum comedy will cause the rum floe to quake and flee. Yours in faith,
hope and charity.

J——S II——V——ER——S——N——.

Globe Office,
TORONTO, April 1st, 1902.

Nothing better has been offered to those of our citizens who delight to
combine amusement with instruction than the entertainments of the Ross
Minstrels, which have had a consecutive run of thirty nights in the Queen's
Park Variety Theatre. The pulp concession gift enterprise feature which the
management have added has added greatly to the popularity of the show.

THE G——RE.

Office of Licensed Victuallers' Association.
TORONTO, April 1st, 1902.

The entertainments of the Ross Minstrels are as exhilarating as a bottle of
783, L.X.L. or Club. The racy humor of the Referendum extravaganza was
heavily appreciated.

EDWIN D——K——IE, Secretary.

The pleasing, instructive and edifying entertainments given by the Ross
Minstrels are, to my mind, better than as many temperance lectures. As I
listened to the Referendum comedy I felt myself raised to a very high pinnacle
of temperance enthusiasm. The sacred traffic must tremble before this latest
and greatest power for good.

REV. D. SP——N——O——R.
End Man Stratton—Kin' ye tell me why 'le doctors of Soun' Ontario are like a box of red herrin'?
Prof. Ross—I give it up, Jimmie. Why?
End Man Stratton—Because they're Dryden cured. Lond applause from all the minstrels save one.
Prof. Ross—No'er mind their bit jokes, Jimmie. Give us a song, John.

Song by End Man Dryden—

The Farmer Man.

I once took a trip from Ont-to-ri-o,
And the people kicked like—well,
'Twas my love for the cattle that made me go
To a better land—than Ont-to-ri-o.
'Twas then that I slipped and fell.

I'm a farmer good, as you all do know,
And I think it little harm
To feather my nest while my herds do grow
In a better land than Ont-to-ri-o—
When winter drives the storm.

For the days will be cold at the end of May
And chilly for more than maw;
If Stratton now thinks to hold his cow,
Just because his water power will pay,
Let him stick to his dam and sea.

Figure 3-22  Dryden on Cow
was keenly appreciated.” The testimonials further linked the Conservative attack to the world of burnt cork.

As we have seen, minstrel shows also incorporated elements of local humour to bring audiences into the performance. The political nature of the genre’s early incarnation fits synergistically with the intentions of the pamphlet’s creator. In the burnt cork political performance of Ross’ Minstrels, issues pertaining directly to the 1902 election could be explored in a manner relevant to Toronto audiences. Damning allegations could be levelled under the guise of minstrelsy’s carnival excess. Themes such as the Grit’s disloyal Yankee-ism thus become songs and dances rendering the criticism more resonant than in traditional editorials. (Indeed, a subtext of the entire pamphlet is that just as blackface performers are not really black, Liberal politicians are not really Canadian).206 John Dryden’s connection to Dakota, for instance, features prominently.207 [Figure 3-22 Dryden on Cow] Premier Ross concedes that Liberal patriotism is shallow and self-serving.208 A scandal over textbooks for provincial schools is turned into a catchy song.209 Specific events incorporated in the performance, such as the setting up of the West Elgin Commission to look into Liberal improprieties, could connect with citizens in a way that stories in newspapers or political speeches might not.210 Mention is made throughout the pamphlet to kick-backs accepted by the party from lucrative timber and pulp and paper deals.211 These were important issues in the election. Liberal avarice in the resource-rich north was sent up in a parody of the famous minstrels classic “Way Down Upon the Swannee

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206 The blackening of the Liberal’s reputation with regards to loyalty see the pamphlet refer to George William Ross as George Washington Ross. Several songs are sung by the Ross Minstrels that insult Canadians and reveal a pro-American disposition.
207 Build Up Ontario, 6-7. A successful farmer, John Dryden was appointed Minister of Agriculture in 1890 under Sir Oliver Mowat’s Ontario government and continued in that capacity under Ross’ leadership of the province. Dogged by scandal, Dryden lost his seat in 1905.
208 Ibid, 7.
209 Ibid, 17.
210 Ibid, 8.
211 Ibid, 8, 11, 12,
River,” also known as “Old Folks at Home.” In the Conservative version, “Way Up Upon the Spanish River,” the entire company, or party, sings of their hunger for “More stuff to carry home” from the north-country.212 The song depicts the north as “well culled over,” denuded of trees and barren. Anything of value has been taken south by the Liberals: “’Way over all the whole north country./What is left to-day?/What for the coming settler’s comfort,/But brushwood, rocks and clay?” Sung to the widely known tune made famous by Christy’s Minstrels, here the performance melds blackface into trenchant political criticism. If the original song by Stephen Foster was meant to connote the longing of blacks for the plantation, the Tory parody twists this desire into a Liberal Party yearning for more resources to plunder: “All the country’s well culled over./Everywhere we roam./Oh! brothers don’t you wish ‘twas bigger—/More swag to carry home.”

**Imagined Black Vernacular**

An interesting part of the spread of blackface minstrelsy into the wider culture may be seen in the imagined black vernacular. Not surprisingly, Bengough and his colleagues at *Grip* were prolific in their use of this stereotyped performance. As one can conclude from the myriad examples above, the imagined black vernacular allowed authors a venue through which to explore their understanding of racial conventions and boundaries in a playful manner. A useful way of thinking about the imagined black vernacular is to view it in terms of performance and performativity. Indeed, it is a simple, albeit more literary, way of blacking up. For writers, the imagined black vernacular could act effectively as a signifier for race when an image could not be used. And its omnipresence suggests that appropriating black vernacular English was clearly a source of entertainment for Torontonians.

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212 Ibid, 22.
Although *Grip* relied on images for much of its success, there was not always time to create one. In introducing one such performance, the author explained to the reader that “The following fact reached our ears too late to be illustrated, but the reader can picture to himself ‘the scene,’ . . ..” In “The Counter of Our First Bank,” a black customer, identified simply as “Coloured Boy,” wishes to cash a cheque. The dismissive teller informs him that he will have to get identified, saying “I don’t know you!” In a classic minstrel reversal, the black customer turns to a ‘white’ man waiting in line and exclaims, “Golly, boss, he don’t know me. I reckon he don’t move in our just circles.”

Given the centrality of blackface performances to nineteenth century culture, *Grip*’s readers could certainly envision the action of the performance. But without the use of an image, a ‘white’ performer required a way to convey the racialized humour without the usual visual stereotypes. What better way for a ‘white’ writer to blacken up than to adopt a set of verbal signifiers that immediately call to mind the usual visual codes of blackness? It was the verbal and aural equivalent of applying burnt cork.

A minstrelsy trope which regularly appeared in the pages of *Grip* was the stump speech. Considered the high point of the minstrel show’s second act, known as the olio, the speech was a comic monologue that regularly featured politics, social issues, and science. As I have demonstrated, the minstrel’s grandiloquent talk would parody these weighty subjects, alternating between occasional insight and regular absurdity. Doing his best—but invariably failing—to conform to the niceties of academic discourse, the “Purfesser” addressed audiences with a series of humorous malapropisms that revealed the limitations of his—and perhaps his race’s—intellectualism. In the pages of *Grip*, the character underwent a series of minor changes over time, ranging from Professor Julius Caesar Hannibal Washington, to “Purfesser Jay Kayelle

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213 *Grip*, 15 October, 1881.
214 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
215 Such talks as well as sermons, were a common part of minstrel shows.
Washington White” to simply “our special colored reporter—Jay Kayelle Washington White.”

The pomposity of his name, underscored in several variations with Kayelle, set the tone for the professor’s speech. Verbose and self-important but invariably foolish, his talks offered ‘white’ audiences a chance to laugh at an uppity, if ultimately sympathetic, black man. Such characters provided Grip yet another opportunity to incorporate the drawing-power of blackface minstrelsy into its pages—and the fun of burnt cork performance for its author.

In an address on “The New Marriage Law” recently passed by Parliament, the professor opens:

Ladies an’ Gen’lemen.—“By pe’ticklah rekwest”—as de ‘wortisments says—I shall on dis occashun, ‘spress my sent’ments on de marridge law made by de Pa’liment men at Ottywah de uddah day. I feels myself most highly congratulated at habbin’ so many od de leet ob de bewty an’ de larnin’ ob dis community to lissen to me, and I hopes to be ables to depart to dem a little construcksun on dis werry impo’tunate and interestin’ kweschun.217

Given virtually two full columns, the professor’s talk is filled with such verbal infelicity. For the ‘white’ creator, and his ‘white’ audience, the orator’s voice was an exaggerated version of what they imagined authentic black speech to be. Mirroring Grip’s readers at home, the audience assembled to hear Professor Washington’s lecture have gathered to laugh at the lecturer. Both are there for the show, not to gain any new insights from the speaker’s interpretation of a parliamentary bill, but to guffaw knowingly at the expense of a silly and presumptuous black man. The “Prolonged and deafening applause” of the imaginary audience of “de leet of bewty an’ de larnin’” is a smugly sarcastic laugh by a crowd gathered to watch a blackface show.

216 Grip, 5 August, 1882; Grip, 26 August 1882; Grip, 2 September, 1882; and Grip 17 April 1875. In this last piece, “William Wantwork” writes to Grip in order to outline a lecture tour he would like the publication to sponsor throughout Ireland, Britain and the “isle ov man.”

217 Grip, 5 August, 1882. Emphasis in original.
“Purfesser” Jay Kayelle Washington White’s editorial on “De Greenhorn” offered the reader much the same.218 “Dis niggah am completely absawbed,” he begins, “in perfound quondamplation ob dat ar natural phenomenoman called by de denizens ob dis continent, a greenhawn.” As in any good essay, he defines his terms early on, “A greenhawn is an aborigine of de old world just arrove in de new.” Of course, as something of a native to the new world, Purfesser White feels eminently qualified to evaluate the prospects of these newcomers, ranking and categorizing his subjects like many a Victorian editorialist. In this case, however, a great deal of the humour of the piece emerges from the irony of a black man imagining himself in a position of power over English and Scottish immigrants. The assessment of certain types of British subjects as more suitable than others to the climate and culture of Canada was nothing new and White’s conclusions were generalizations held by many. That the same arguments were directed against black immigrants, however, was lost on Purfesser White.219

For whatever reason “Purfesser” White loses his title, becoming simply Grip’s “special colored reporter . . .”220 In this capacity, he provides a synopsis of a recent lecture by “the Rev. Astronomical Johnston,” called “De Secret Place ob de Thunder.” Describing “de vast audience ob over seventeen an’ mo’,” White reveals his pretensions, and his absurdity, by suggesting that the famous and “lately deceased” poet, Milton must have seen the reverend in a “prophetic vision.” Revealing his ignorance of the great poet, White plays the role of the pseudo-intellectual black man perfectly. Earnest and a bit vain, this comedic type gave audiences the ability to laugh away any discomfort ‘white’ audiences might feel in a post-Civil War society of emancipated

218 Grip, 26 August, 1882.
220 Grip, 2 September, 1882.
slaves or an outpost of empire with a sizeable black population of its own.\textsuperscript{221} Try as they might, black citizens could never rise high enough to be a real threat. In discussing whether or not lightning or thunder was the more dangerous, White reports that thunder is the more worrisome:

\begin{quote}
Fur instance, two niggahs am flying licktey-flip one down, de oder up, street. Course dey collide, and de two heads run smack-a-bunt together wid a werry loud report, and dere am consid’ble damage done under de wool. Dere eye’s flash as dey spring apart. Now which did de damage, de bunt [sic] wid de loud report, or de squint out de eye at each other?—de bunt, ob sourse, at de time ob de collision, was de secret place ob de thunder dar, and de lightning from de eyes was only a consequential succumstance.
\end{quote}

The author of the “editorial” uses a gag right out of a blackface performance as part of White’s account of the lecture.\textsuperscript{222} With the imagined black vernacular of White’s report, \textit{Grip}’s readers recognized the blackface show even without one of Bengough’s graphic satires to accompany it.

As we have seen, the imagined black vernacular was not limited to \textit{Grip}.\textsuperscript{223} \textit{The Evening Telegram} provided its readers with its own Professor.\textsuperscript{224} In doing so, however, it blurred the lines between truth and fiction, suggesting a troubling distortion of the boundaries between blackface minstrelsy and the news. Arrested and convicted for stealing iron from the Grand Trunk Railway Company, “Doc. Sheppard” appeared fresh from his sixty-day stay at the Don Prison in front of the Police Court. There he was greeted by the spectators “who rose as one man” in tribute to the “celebrated character.” The description and language—the standing ovation for a celebrated character—furthers the connection to public entertainment. Even the subject’s name, Doctor

\textsuperscript{221} For a discussion of the size of the black population in Toronto, see Hill, \textit{The Freedom Seekers}, 2-59; and Winks, \textit{The Blacks in Canada}, 484-496.
\textsuperscript{222} The joke could also appear in other racial performances such as Ali Baba; Or, The Forty Thieves. Prescott. 23 February, 1875. In the R. B. Butland Collection of the Toronto Reference Library.
\textsuperscript{223} A playbill from the Grand Opera House, for instance carries an exchange between a white gentleman and Uncle Rastus—a name familiar to audiences from blackface minstrelsy. When asked to build a chicken coop, Uncle Rastus—who is known to be rather fond of poultry—replies: “Yes, sah, I kin build yo’ as fine a hen coop as ebber war built, but I’se too busy white washin’ jus’ now to undertake the job. I tell yo’ what I kin do, though, Mr. Smith, I kin work on it nights.” The humour lies in the minstrelsy trope of the chicken-stealing black man, sneaking into hen houses in the evening. See, “Bill of the Play,” 5 March, 1887. Grand Opera House, E. A. MacDowell Collection. Toronto Reference Library.
\textsuperscript{224} \textit{The Evening Telegram}, 16 February, 1881
Washington Pompey Sheppard, is reminiscent of Grip’s racial protagonists and their stump-speech delivering blackface cousins. Without an image to accompany the story, the imagined black vernacular allowed The Telegram to perform its own burnt cork routine complete with the humorous tropes of a burnt cork show. The newly-freed doctor intended to bring an affidavit of perjury against two witnesses in his recent case: “Yoah wershup, afore de Court stan’s ajourneyed I hab de affidavit to ask. . . . I wants de affidavit ob perjury, agen two ob de witnesses in the copper case.” What plays out in the pages of The Telegram, is a blackface show complete with the imagined black vernacular, minstrel humour and cross-racial eroticism surrounding the claimant’s interracial marriage. Advised to consult the Crown Attorney, a man named Fenton, Doc Sheppard accuses the lawyer of harbouring prejudices against him for having a ‘white’ wife: “Dat man had de wrong opinions. Dat man know dat I am married to de Anglo-Saxon wife and he jealous an tink dat too much honour foah me to hab a white woman . . . .” Referring to Fenton, Sheppard accuses him of setting “de bloodhound on my track.” The reference to tracking dogs, so familiar to Toronto audiences from productions of Uncle Tom’s Cabin and other performances, calls to mind immediately images of escaped slaves and vicious overseers. The author of the piece concludes his blackface performance with a joke that might be equally at home in a stump speech. “He is going to quit the iron business,” writes the reporter, “and proposes to gain a livelihood by peddling pig’s feet in a bag. Virtually, ‘a pig in a poke.’” The allusion to Sheppard’s incarceration (the poke) is a witty end-piece to the author’s own burnt cork show, a mixture of black criminality, interracial eroticism and comic performance.

**Conclusion: Minstrelized**

That the Evening Telegram would—consciously or not—conflate the case of “Doc Sheppard” with a minstrel show tells us something about the way blackface shaped contemporary
perceptions of the black Other. Like the journalists of the Toronto Press Club who performed their burlesque of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* some 28 years later, they were not only significant producers of culture, but actors operating within it. Minstrelsy’s tremendous popularity, as we have seen, created powerful discourses that influenced understandings of race for ‘white’ Torontonians of all classes. Although the black population of Toronto was always small for the period in question, ‘white’ citizens, as evidenced by their entertainment choices, were nevertheless preoccupied with issues of race. Public entertainment, through shows as diverse as Dion Boucicault’s *The Octoroon* or Christy’s Minstrels, provided one of the most significant avenues for ‘white’ citizens to explore race.

Such performances might rely heavily on an ambivalence that reveals not only cross-racial anxieties but also currents of interracial desire. That was the case for *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* and its successors. But minstrelsy’s popularity meant that burnt cork acts easily spilled over from the fashionable theatre and disreputable saloon into the wider culture. When they did, of what significance is it that so many of these shows were American in origin? For the vast majority of Toronto audiences, enjoyment and pleasure were the primary motivators. If these performances were American, then Canadian audiences were obviously similar enough to their southern counterparts to get the jokes. For certain cultural producers, however, American popular culture became an avenue through which to explore new racial performances. It is significant that Bengough took minstrelsy and used it in his own way, just as it is when Sarah Curzon or some anonymous campaign official co-opted blackface’s carnivalesque misrule for their own ends. Often, when they did, journalists, playwrights, advertisers and political actors reproduced these performances of blackness with more ridicule than sympathy.
In its original context, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* was an abolitionist’s attack on the South’s peculiar institution. In Victorian Toronto, it was also a way for Canadians to smugly assert a view of their own British superiority—further entrenching a myth of racial tolerance that would hinder for generations meaningful engagement with Canadian racism. In the self-conscious performance of the city’s press, a minstrelized version of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* became a vehicle to trumpet its own cultural capital. Indeed, it is significant that when it came time for them to publicly celebrate their profession—to offer up to their audiences a performance of their professionalization and increasing respectability—they took to the stage. It is even more significant that in 1909, when they entertained audiences with their Uncle Tom’s Taxi Cabin’, they naturally chose to minstrelize a work that had once been at the heart of the fervent anti-slavery campaign. Through such performances, historians can see the extent to which minstrelsy influenced the wider society. Toronto’s newspapermen were intimately familiar with blackface. They used it both consciously and unconsciously as cultural producers. To the broader culture, minstrel shows gave some a chance to suppress through laughter deep anxieties about black citizens. For others, the genre provided novel opportunities to expand political discourse in original and creative directions. Either way, as the black citizens behind the early petitions against American minstrel shows believed, blackface had a troubling way of escaping the theatre and colouring the world outside.
Chapter Four
Toronto the Good, Sarah the Great: Sarah Bernhardt in Toronto and the Performative Boundaries of Gender

It was an overcast evening in Toronto. Ladies and gentlemen, dressed in their finest clothing, waited expectantly in the rain. Observers maintained that it was the largest gathering of people the city had seen for some time. Ostensibly, the crowd was assembled to watch a French play about an adulteress, a voluptuary whose hedonistic pursuit of pleasure destroys a bourgeois family. The real reason so many of the city’s fashionable elite braved the inclement weather that night was to witness the singular genius of the actress performing the lead. Sarah Bernhardt was a celebrity of the highest order—talented, scandalous and immensely powerful.¹ This was her first appearance in Toronto the Good. In total, she would visit the city six times between 1881 and 1911.² Like her subsequent tours, Bernhardt’s first trip exposed certain cleavages within the community. And, as the best of Toronto society—or, from another perspective the worst—stood outside the Grand Opera House on Saturday March 19, 1881, they were unwittingly helping to define the boundaries of gender in this relatively provincial outpost of the British Empire.³

Sarah Bernhardt, in many ways, embodied the New Woman. Her shocking personal life, ambiguous Jewishness, vast wealth and tremendous influence posed provocative questions about the significance of art, the place of women and the future of relations between the sexes. Born in Paris in 1844, her mother was a courtesan and her father unknown. From this beginning,

³ A reviewer in the Toronto Mail claimed that it was “one of the best audiences, socially speaking, Toronto has ever turned out.” Toronto Mail, 19 March, 1881.
Bernhardt went on to become the most famous stage actress of her time. She was equally known for her singularly outrageous behaviour—sleeping in coffins, having multiple affairs, traveling with a veritable menagerie, sculpting and running her own theatre.\(^4\) To many, she signified a dangerous form of misrule characteristic of public entertainment. To her vociferous detractors, Bernhardt was a bad example. To her many admirers, however, she was a talent beyond compare.\(^5\) One journalist summed it up thusly: “Toronto has seen Mdlle. Bernhardt and Toronto is happy—at least a portion of Toronto is happy; for the probabilities are that another portion is unhappy; and, perhaps, spent yesterday lamenting that people could be found in this fair city so horribly wicked as to go and see a woman who has sinned.”\(^6\) Either way, with Bernhardt, one is faced with the spectacular and the exotic.\(^7\) A visit from such a star was hardly run of the mill. “Nihilism, Sara [sic], and the mud formed the principal topics of conversation on the streets yesterday,” noted the *Globe* wryly after her first appearance.\(^8\) Listening in on their conversations tells us much about their particular understandings of the confluences of gender and race. The debate surrounding Sarah Bernhardt provides an opportunity to explore the relationship between public entertainment and the construction of gender in late Victorian Toronto. Of primary concern are the ways in which her gendered acts were re-iterated again and again through

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\(^4\) Biographical information about Bernhardt is drawn from the work of Brandon and Gottlieb.  
\(^5\) She was widely understood as an artistic genius. As Cecilia Morgan observes, the Canadian-born actress Margaret Anglin was dubbed Canada’s Sarah Bernhardt. Despite the scandalous life of Bernhardt, it was high praise for the Canadian actress. Cecilia Morgan, “‘That will allow me to be my own woman’: Margaret Anglin, Modernity and Transnational Stages, 1890s-1940s” in *Transnational Lives: Biographies of Global Modernity, 1700-Present*, eds., Desley Deacon, Penny Russell and Angela Woollacot (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 144.  
\(^6\) Mail, 21 March, 1881.  
\(^7\) One scholar has observed that for American audiences, “going to see this notorious French actress may have seemed slightly transgressive and adventurous, so they might have had the unusual experience of going slumming and attending a glittering social event at the same time.” Please see, Michael Moon, “Tragedy and Trash: Yiddish Theater and Queer Theater, Henry James, Charles Ludlum, Ethyl Eichelberger,” *Queer Theory and the Jewish Question*. Eds. Daniel Boyarin, Daniel Itzkovitz and Ann Pellegrini. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 276.  
\(^8\) Globe, 22 March, 1881.
discourses of public entertainment and how those discourses proliferated, leaving the theatre and influencing the world around them.

The chapter begins by discussing the performative nature of Bernhardt’s celebrity using a theoretical approach gleaned from Judith Butler, as well as insights from recent literature on the theatre and its connection with the New Woman. Toronto was experiencing its own gender trouble as the role of women shifted in the rapidly modernizing city. Public figures such as the Reverend W. S. Rainsford and historian and journalist Goldwin Smith, the latter anxious about her racial Otherness, attacked the Sarah craze while some anonymous readers launched spirited defences of the actress. Not all women felt like writing letters to the editor. Some kept theatrical scrapbooks filled with ephemera about their favourite actresses and the chapter ends with an analysis of what these artefacts tell us about the way certain elite women understood the gendered performances of famous actresses like Bernhardt.

**Performance Anxiety**

Understanding the anxiety caused by the Divine Sarah’s performances of gender is at the heart of this chapter. Ruth Brandon, one of Bernhardt’s biographers, suggests that the actress suffered from what is popularly known as multiple personality disorder. The border between self and character was porous for the great artist. As I will argue later, audiences and critics could not help but conflate her with the wild women she frequently portrayed. For my immediate purposes, however, Bernhardt’s inability—as well as that of those around her—to distinguish

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between real life and performance, helps to set the stage for a discussion about the role she played in defining the boundaries of gender for Torontonians. With her complex psychology blurring the space between self and actor, Bernhardt exemplifies Judith Butler’s understanding of gender as performative. Bernhardt’s gendered performances acted out on stage and off, in the newspapers, sermons and gossip that swirled around her, helped Torontonians give expression to their shifting understandings of gender.

Butler’s theory helps to explain the significance of Sarah Bernhardt’s appearances in Toronto and of the larger effects of public entertainment on gender’s discursive operations. According to Butler, gender is based on the repetition of acts performed within culture that, over time, come to be seen as natural. Each gendered act, be it an on-stage performance of Bernhardt’s, a re-enactment of it in a local newspaper, a repetition of it in gossip or a re-iteration of it in a sermon, served to either limit or expand the number of performative options available for Torontonians. If gender is built upon repeated acts, then it is more a process than a stable identity. As such, the process can be radically destabilized through performances that disrupt conventional gender roles. Bernhardt’s acting, or debates about it in the press, had the potential to reveal the constructed and arbitrary nature of certain cherished beliefs. It is my contention that Bernhardt, and the world of public entertainment in which she operated, offered a site for acting and re-enacting that had the potential to significantly undermine hegemonic discourses of gender and race in Toronto.

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12 Following Foucault, Butler argues that a political genealogy of gender will reveal the constructed nature of gender identity. Judith Butler, Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity (New York: Routledge, 1990), 33.
13 Ibid, 25.
In the American context, several scholars have argued convincingly for the liberating potentiality for women working in public entertainment. Indeed, recent scholarship suggests that women were central, both as producers and consumers, of public entertainment in nineteenth century United States. Susan A. Glenn, in her *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism*, argues that female celebrities—in particular Bernhardt, the biggest star of her day—were instrumental in shaping the New Woman and early twentieth-century feminism. For Glenn, the theatre between the late 1880s and 1920s was a powerful agent of cultural change, helping to shape modern notions of sexuality and gender. The American stage, and the celebrated actresses who performed on it, provided new models of feminine behaviour. Not surprisingly, theatres south of the border also became a focal point for anxieties surrounding the New Woman.

The term New Woman did not come into wide use until the waning decades of the nineteenth century. As the literary critic Martha H. Patterson notes, the phrase New Woman signified both “a character type and a cultural phenomenon.” The label was more inclusive than suffragist or settlement worker and simultaneously conveyed a distinctively modern sense of

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18 Ibid, 3.
19 Ibid, 10.
20 Ibid, 3.
“self-refashioning.” It could also encompass identities and positions both wide-ranging and contradictory: socialist and capitalist, mannish woman or vamp, as well as prohibitionist and flapper. In its darker incarnations, the New Woman was also connected, according to the literary critic Angelique Richardson, to the late Victorian eugenics movement.

Several scholars suggest that the New Woman owed her existence to an increasingly modern world of mass-consumption and communication. As the historian Christine Stansell demonstrates, the rise of the New Woman was inextricably linked to a rapidly expanding mass culture of magazines, novels and newspapers. From her vantage point in bohemian New York, argues Stansell, the New Woman experienced a dizzying array of fresh images of respectable feminine behaviour. Similarly, the historian Mary Louise Roberts’ work on the connection between the New Woman and the performative worlds of late nineteenth century French journalism and the theatre is instructive. Both the page and the stage facilitated a transgressive kind of performance: “an acting that was also an acting up.” Female journalists and actresses could perform novel roles, including that of men, with a success that destabilized normative definitions of true womanhood. New Women could, in print, pass as men. And, actresses performing male roles were similarly disruptive. Bernhardt’s Hamlet was so compelling as to call into question the very notion of a true gendered self. Likewise, her renditions of pure

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22 Ibid.
23 Ibid, 1.
27 Ibid, 177.
women were so convincing that the jarring juxtaposition of her outrageous personal life called into question understandings of female virtue.28

Canadian historians have not pursued the relationship between public entertainment, the New Woman and late Victorian understandings of gender norms.29 Although the term New Woman emerged late in the nineteenth century, Toronto’s respectable classes believed that fundamental changes had been altering relations between the sexes for decades. As the historian Carolyn Strange demonstrates, Toronto’s social surveyors and reformers were preoccupied with the increasing number of young female workers and what they did in their leisure time.30 Working girls’ independence became caught up in discourses of danger while their pleasures became entangled in concerns over immorality.31 Thus, for upright observers of the rapidly changing city, urban danger was something of a paradox: young working girls “signified the perils of the city, both as its chief victim and as its source.”32 Commercial amusements increasingly catered to the young, and single, working woman. But, as Strange concludes, the challenging of established gender boundaries through female consumption of commercial amusements resulted in working girls being increasingly interpreted through discourses of “vagrancy, prostitution, delinquency, or even sexual psychopathy.”33 Thus, regulatory mechanisms began to control these women’s leisure time, disciplining their pleasure.

|In|Famous Women in Toronto

28 Ibid, 55.
29 The Canadian historian Lynne Marks explores the connection between leisure and identity in small-town Ontario during the period under study but does not include theatre and related public entertainments in her analysis. See Lynne Marks, Religion, Leisure and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century, Small-Town Ontario (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996).
30 Carolyn Strange, Toronto’s Girl: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 116-125. Commercial amusements play a significant role for Strange yet public entertainments such as vaudeville, burlesque and melodrama form a relatively small part of her discussion.
31 Ibid, 10.
32 Ibid, 11.
33 Ibid, 15.
Sarah Bernhardt was not the only controversial female performer to visit Toronto. And like the Divine Sarah, these women were also intimately involved in the process of shaping the boundaries of gender through public entertainment.\(^1\) One of the earliest female celebrities to tread the boards of the city was the Spanish Dancer and courtesan, Lola Montez. Born in Ireland, Eliza Rosanna Gilbert took the stage name of Lola Montez, before becoming the mistress of King Ludwig I of Bavaria. The monarch became so enamoured with her that he made her the Countess of Landsfeld. Infamous for her outrageous personal life, which included charges of bigamy, Montez performed at the Royal Lyceum in 1857 to packed houses. Playing “Lady Teazle” in Sherridan’s *School for Scandal*, a reviewer for the *Toronto Leader* noted that she was “received with great applause, and that she threw much archness and vivacity into the character.”\(^2\) After her performance, she was called to the stage “where she received the most flattering and hearty applause.”\(^3\) After graciously thanking the manager and performers of the Royal Lyceum, she then chastised the city’s newspapermen: “To the Toronto press, I have only to say a few words; but it is not to thank its members—except one person.” During her brief visit, a minor controversy emerged with some in the media questioning whether the performer was the real Lola Montez and not just some unscrupulous impostor. As silence gripped the theatre, she launched an attack on those who doubted her identity. To loud applause, she assured those gathered to see her that she was the genuine article.\(^4\) She concluded with no apparent irony: “Let me say to the press of Toronto, a word of advice. The stage may be made an instrument of much good, and it is the province of the press to watch over it and encourage it. And I hope the press will take down

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\(^1\) A host of other female celebrities perceived to be of more respectable character also visited the city. The listed included such luminaries as: Jenny Lind, Julia Arthur, Margaret Anglin, Ellen Terry, Mary Forbes-Robertson, Madge Kendal, Minnie Maddern, Emma Albani, and Della Fox. Keith Walden notes that Toronto’s elite attempted to maintain its social dominance by inviting respectable celebrities into their social circles. Keith Walden, “Toronto Society’s Response to Celebrity Performers, 1887-1914,” *Canadian Historical Review* 89 no. 3 (2008): 381, 83.

\(^2\) *Toronto Leader*, 27 July, 1857.

\(^3\) Ibid.

\(^4\) Ibid.
my words and act upon them!”

For such an outrageous woman to so dramatically challenge the fourth estate on the basis of morality must have left many scratching their heads.

Montez was not the only royal mistress to win over crowds of Toronto’s play-goers. The beautiful Lillie Langtry, the widely acknowledged lover of the Prince of Wales and future King Edward VII, played at the Grand Opera House in 1883. Despite modest talent, and frequently harsh reviews from critics, the “Jersey Lily,” as she was known, drew large audiences on all of her North American visits. In no small part because of her controversial personal life, according to the theatre historian Robert Lawrence, her Canadian and American tours made her wealthy.

One reviewer in the *Globe* observed somewhat wryly, “She does not act, she is.” As a female celebrity, she profited not only from scandal but from the greater liberty afforded to actresses. The historian Keith Walden notes that when her 1888 visit coincided with an elite society ball, a minor tempest erupted with some ladies even threatening to stay home if Langtry were invited. He notes, however, that such objections soon gave way and that the Jersey Lily was feted in the best homes of Toronto. Like Bernhardt, Montez and Langtry provided audiences, both through their plays and personal lives, with new definitions of what it meant to be a modern woman.

But public entertainment could also provide a venue for less celebrated women. As early as 1855, one woman was using the relative freedom of the stage to challenge prevailing definitions of gender-appropriate behaviour. Assessing her conduct from his vantage point in 1882, George M. Harrington could not hide his scorn for a “certain strong-minded female” who

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38 The controversy began as a response by Montez to those in the press who doubted that she was the real Lola Montez and not merely some impostor.


40 *The Globe*, 10 April, 1895.

41 Walden, “Toronto Society’s,” 383-84.

42 Ibid, 384. Walden observes that celebrities with less colourful reputations than Lillie Langtry were more likely to be included into elite circles.
took to the stage of St. Lawrence Hall. In a series of lectures on “Woman,” Lucy Stone “disclaimed marriage as a necessary rite between the two sexes,” creating “no little excitement in the city.” Mounting such a public assault on the institution of marriage represented a challenge to patriarchal attitudes that Harrington, among others, could not abide. This erstwhile female rebel, however, was finally subdued. And Harrington concludes smugly: “However, despite her energetic advocacy of women’s right to an impartial distribution of her affections, the fair lecturer herself was subsequently led to the hymeneal altar, but under protest (?) so it was stated.” Some women were able to use the relative freedom of the stage to perform gender in ways that pushed at the boundaries of acceptability. In so doing, they sparked debates while simultaneously offering citizens new ways to imagine gender identity in a rapidly modernizing city.

**Mistresses and Murderesses**

For those who viewed the theatre with suspicion and lamented Sarah Bernhardt’s presence in Toronto, much of the blame lay squarely at the feet of the plays she chose to perform. They were an affront, a slap in the face, to which good Christians could hardly turn the other cheek. Her most famous roles were invariably ones involving women who transgressed the boundaries of what many contemporaries believed was appropriate behaviour for women. The plays may have been acceptable in Paris, but detractors felt that they were best left on the continent. Interestingly, though, as Ruth Brandon points out, these same plays were also thoroughly misogynistic. For all the wantonness of its heroine, a typical Bernhardt play often found the actress dead in the final act, a comforting return to normalcy, as it were, from the carnivalesque

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45 Ibid.
46 Ibid.
47 Although in *L’Aiglon*, one of her most famous plays, she depicts the imprisoned son of Napoleon.
48 Brandon, *Being Divine*, 412. Unlike contemporary critics who frequently conflated the life of Bernhardt with the characters she played, Brandon illustrates the important differences between the challenge the actress’ life made to gender and class norms and the “deeply misogynist” plays in which she appeared.
inversion of women gone mad. Nevertheless, the performance of these women acting up, offered audiences imaginative possibilities that could challenge gender norms.\textsuperscript{49}

For Toronto audiences, Bernhardt usually chose plays that were well received: \textit{Camille}, \textit{Frou-Frou}, \textit{Fedora}, \textit{La Tosca}, \textit{Gismonda}, \textit{Izeyl}, \textit{L’Aiglon}, \textit{Jeanne d’Arc} and \textit{Jean-Marie}. Most of these were guaranteed crowd pleasers, depending, of course, on which crowd one was in. Many of the plays were familiar to middle-class audiences. As one reviewer noted, \textit{Camille} and \textit{Frou Frou} were “plays pretty well known to Toronto theatre-goers.”\textsuperscript{50} Audiences had seen them performed “frequently,” including renditions by another world-renowned actress, Helena Modjeska.\textsuperscript{51}

For her first visit to the city, the great tragedienne chose two of her favourite plays. \textit{Camille}, Bernhardt’s signature piece, is the sad story of Marguerite Gautier, an attractive courtesan and one of the glittering inhabitants of the Paris \textit{demimonde}. It recounts her fall after scorning the wealthy and suitably immoral Count de Varville for the poor and gratifyingly upright Armand Duval.\textsuperscript{52} The respectable family of Duval disapproves of their liaison and its patriarch convinces Marguerite, despite her love, to leave his son and return to her life as a courtesan. Thinking she is doing what is best for her lover, Marguerite convinces Duval she is no longer in love with him. The ruse eventually fails and Duval races to find his true love. Their happy reunion is prevented, however, when Marguerite dies of consumption, something Bernhardt did better than anyone else. And if the story of a high-class prostitute dying nobly was

\textsuperscript{49} Despite the fact that Bernhardt performed in French, English-speaking audiences throughout North America were enthralled by the great tragedienne. Glenn suggests that Bernhardt’s acting style incorporated powerful emotional displays that were particularly appealing to women longing to see actresses unleashing their passion. Glenn, \textit{Female Spectacle}, 21.

\textsuperscript{50} \textit{The Globe}, 21 March, 1881.

\textsuperscript{51} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{52} The play is based on the work of Alexandre Dumas \textit{fils} \textit{La Dame aux Camelias}. Controversial from the start, the name of the play was changed to \textit{Camille} for English-speaking audiences in a thinly veiled attempt to stave off censorship. For a contemporary assessment of the play’s scandalous history, see “Camille” in \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 13 November, 1875.
not enough, theatre-goers could also attend the evening’s performance of *Frou-Frou*. The latter featured a heroine who abandons her husband and children to lead a life of debauchery. After seeing the error of her ways, she tearfully begs absolution from her family. The prodigal wife is forgiven but only moments before her heart-rending death—also from consumption.

So shameful was *Frou-Frou* that it was reputed to have resulted in the destruction of at least one marriage. According to the *Canadian Illustrated News*, Count George de Meyerac’s happy union was brought to a tragic end after the nobleman, who had seen the play several times, attended a party for the actress who played the lead. His unhappy Countess, suspicious of her husband’s enjoyment, waited outside their home in a rainstorm for his return. At five in the morning, the Count “stumbled over an inanimate body, lying prostrate on the rain-soaked ground.” Although his wife was not yet dead, she spent the next five days in something like a coma. “In her delirium,” so the story goes, “she incessantly murmured ‘Frou-Frou! Frou-Frou!’”

The denouement of this particular narrative reads like the melodramatic original it re-enacts. The dramatic events turn on gendered understandings of loyalty and infidelity that are the centre of the play’s dramatic force. Is it a true account? Does that even matter if it is offered up to Torontonians as news?

Bernhardt was famous not only for dying, but also for killing. And her plays often presented female leads unable to reconcile themselves to patriarchal authority without resorting to violence. One commentator wryly observed, “A Bernhardt play in which Sarah does not murder someone is an incomplete affair.”

So common was it that the satiric periodical *Grip* carried an amusing dialogue between an actor and a stage manager:

Actor- “What do you think of this new play of Bernhardt’s?”

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53 *Canadian Illustrated News*, 27 March, 1875.
54 *Grip*, 11 April, 1896.
Manager- “Slow, me dear boy. Altogether behind the times. Won’t draw in this country. Not realistic enough.”
Actor- “Not realistic! Why, I should have thought that murder scene—”
Manager- “That’s just it, dear boy. Too old-fashioned. Sickles are out of date. Whole thing ought to be re-written, introducing a real reaping machine as the instrument of murder. Then it would go.”

The humour of the manager’s off-handed remarks revealed an ambivalent attitude toward the contemporary theatre’s darker desire for violently gendered spectacle.

Another exchange in Grip featured a Frenchman and a Canadian: “Have you seen Bernhardt in that new play of hers, ‘Pauline Blanchard,’ where the heroine cuts her husband’s throat with a sickle?“
“Ah oui!,” replied the Frenchman, “Mais it was brutale! – horrible. Zat sickle do remind me of – vat you call him? – Jack ze Reaper.”

An amusing play on words, the exchange hints at a connection between narratives of sexual danger on stage and off. It is also indicative of Torontonians exposure to transatlantic news. Not everyone was as blasé about the great actress’ penchant for murder. One reviewer of Bernhardt’s performance of La Tosca, in which she stabs to death Scarpia, the corrupt chief of police, described it as “a daring treatment of an extremely repulsive subject.”

Nevertheless, the structure, writing and acting of the plays were intended to make audiences feel empathy for these wild women. Just what did it mean when one felt pity for a woman killing a man? The presentation of disreputable women on the stages of Toronto, especially when the plot and the acting were designed to elicit

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55 Ibid, 21 November, 1891.
56 Grip, 21 November, 1891.
57 Ibid.
58 The Daily Mail, 30 October, 1891.
59 The infamous cases of Angelina Napolitano and Annie Robinson come to mind. Napolitano killed her husband as a result of years of domestic violence. Robinson killed two of her grandchildren who were the result of an incestuous relationship between her daughter and her husband. Both women were convicted and sentenced to hang. They were spared the gallows after a public outcry led by the women’s movement. See Karen Dubinsky, Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 86-112.
sympathy from the audience, was transgressive.60 In the case of Bernhardt’s first visit to the city, both plays were controversial. One audience member, otherwise impressed by Bernhardt’s acting, nevertheless felt obliged to describe Marguerite as “simply an unholy woman, who inspires an unholy passion—a woman who lives in the lap of luxury, and scarcely knows the meaning of an unrequited desire.”61 “Such a picture of successful wickedness,” the critic further opined, “is not a wholesome one to present to our rising generation.”62 In comparing the heroines of the two plays performed that day, the same reviewer scathingly observed that the eponymous Frou-Frou “is a little better at first, but she, too, finally becomes an adulteress.”63 If the plays could provoke supporters of Bernhardt to such harsh judgement, their effect on her detractors was much worse.

The Conflation of Sarah Bernhardt

To the minds of many contemporary observers the connection between the characters Bernhardt played and the character she was in real life was caught up in an amalgam of nationality, race and gender. Bernhardt was frequently the victim of attempts to conflate her with the characters she played on stage. The most notorious instance of this is Marie Colombier’s spitefully salacious Les Memoires de Sarah Barnum.64 Written after a falling out between the author and the famous actress, the thinly veiled attack on Bernhardt emphasized amongst other alleged defects, her hollow and insatiable sexuality, her greed and lust for power and her ambiguous Jewishness—perhaps the source of all the other defects. Yet most instances were less sensational than

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60 In outlining the plot of Phedre, another of Bernhardt’s specialties, one critic describes shuddering at the “frenzied confession of crime” but “cannot withhold commiseration from the unhappy creature whom merciless fate has condemned to cherish an unholy passion.” Canadian Illustrated News, 18 December, 1880.
61 The Toronto Mail, 21 March, 1881.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 Marie Colombier, Les Memoires de Sarah Barnum Avec une pref. par Paul Bennetain (Paris: Tous les Libraires. 1883).
Colombier’s attack. When the average reviewer described characters such as Marguerite and Froufrou, it was often difficult to tell if he was not really describing Bernhardt herself.

For some critics, the great tragedienne was simply too cosmopolitan and corrupt to successfully portray an innocent woman.⁶⁵ “Her *Gilberte*, before the fall,” asserted one would-be connoisseur, “is not the innocent, reckless, whirlwind girl of the dramatists.”⁶⁶ In sharp contrast, he continued, “that feverish, flaring poor flower of vice, so madly and wildly gay—the Dame aux Camellias . . . [is] absolutely personified by the Marguerite Gautier of Bernhardt.”⁶⁷ For this critic, Bernhardt’s personal life rendered her incapable of playing a girl not yet polluted by vice. On the other hand, there was no one better for roles like Marguerite than Bernhardt, whose disgraceful past allowed her to reach the depths, in both the artistic and depraved sense of the word, of these wild women. A similar explanation appeared in a later review by an anonymous critic for the *Globe*. “In the interpretation of the higher more spiritual love she does not succeed,” he opined, “so well as she does in the more human and fleshly kind.”⁶⁸ Her characters’ moral failings were, to the minds of many reviewers, the very same traits that defined the famous actress herself. Not only was her sexuality emphasized, but so too were other equally important flaws such as selfishness and vanity. The same journalist pointed out that Bernhardt dropped entire scenes from the play that would have allowed her fellow performers more stage time.⁶⁹ It is particularly intriguing that these same character flaws overlapped with negative perceptions of the New Woman.

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⁶⁷ Ibid.
⁶⁸ *The Globe*, 7 April, 1896.
Not all the press was bad. Some sympathetic journalists portrayed the actress in a positive light. One such writer commented that “[d]uring the siege of Paris, [in the Franco-Prussian War] Sarah Bernhardt . . . w[as] foremost among the heroic women, who devoted their means and energies in organizing relief for the sick and wounded.” Still another went into even greater biographical detail in coming to Bernhardt’s defence in the face of clerical condemnation. When asked about the “wickedness” of Bernhardt’s past, the author related a story that reads as if it were the plot for a Victorian melodrama:

Even when commentators were sympathetic to Bernhardt, they still conflated the life of the actress with the characters she played. They interpreted her through the lens of the theatre with all of its melodramatic tropes. Indeed the narrative of this piece, factually untrue in virtually

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70 *Canadian Illustrated News*, 7 August, 1880. Bernhardt received permission to turn the Odeon theatre into a temporary hospital. Brandon speculates that the actress derived immense satisfaction from the experience despite the hardship and chaos that accompanied it. Brandon, *Being Divine*, 135-38.


every respect, runs strikingly like that of some popular play. The noble but sinning woman, the painful abandonment by the hypocritical Christian and the protagonist’s overcoming of adversity formed the way in which the reporter understood the celebrity.

That even her defenders interpreted Bernhardt as something like Mary Magdalene is revealing, suggesting promiscuity and prostitution. One up-start American reporter assumed that Bernhardt would be as amorous in real life as she was on stage. While interviewing her about her experiences in America, Bernhardt “grew enthusiastic” and “expressed the wish that the nation had but one mouth that she might kiss it.” The clever questioner quipped “that he represented the nation to a certain extent, and he had ‘but one mouth.’” The short piece concluded by telling the reader that he did not receive his kiss. What is significant about this anecdote is that both the reporter and the reader found the story amusing but not out of place. Actresses were fair game, as it were, and none more so than Sarah Bernhardt. So common was this conflation of roles, that it reached the level of trite comedy. In one cartoon, for instance, a well-dressed actress appeals to the manager of a theatre to put her on stage. [Figure 4-1 THE STAGE OF TO-DAY] He replies: “What’s that you say—only been divorced once? Miss de Balle, your rendition is excellent, but I could never think of engaging you unless you had a presentable list of divorces.”

Thus, it was common for audiences to associate Bernhardt, both because of her artistic genius and perceived immorality, with the tragic heroines she depicted. One critic wrote that she puts “the mark of her peculiar methods upon them.” He went on to say: “There is the same

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73 For a discussion of the perception of actresses as prostitutes, see Tracy C. Davis *Actresses As Working Women: Their social identity in Victorian culture* (New York: Routledge, 1991).
74 *Grip*, 9 April, 1881.
76 *Grip*, 4 August, 1888.
77 *The Globe*, 11 April, 1896.
THE STAGE OF TO-DAY.

Theatrical Manager—"What's that you say—only been divorced once? Miss de Ballé your rendition is excellent, but I could never think of engaging you unless you had a presentable list of divorces."
tempestuous, rebellious woman who thrilled us as La Tosca several years ago. In each play fate is too strong for her, strong and mutinous though she be.”78 It is not exactly clear whether he is describing Bernhardt or the characters of her plays. In Izeyl, one of the plays to which this reviewer referred, he asserted that she reached a form of artistic perfection that “is undiluted Bernhardt, the tiger woman, whose stake is herself, who knows neither fear nor compunction.”79 He rhapsodized: “Izeyl, the courtesan, and Gismonda, the Duchess of Athens, who . . . yields herself to a lover on condition he releases her from her promise to marry him, are altogether and completely Bernhardt in the role which she, and she alone, can play successfully.”80 The emphasis placed on the word “role” is the original author’s and suggests the extent to which he conflated the performer and the parts she played.

Was Bernhardt playing a role here or was she unleashing something in herself under the guise of performance? The answer might explain the importance the writer placed on the ultimate subjugation of the conflated female embodied in both Bernhardt and these wild women. He described as “something quite impressive and interesting” the threats used by one of the male characters “which alternately roused and subdued the reckless Gismonda.”81 In the final scene, Bernhardt was “completely conquered” and “meekly kneels . . . before the church full of worshippers.”82 The public shaming of the wild woman was not only the denouement of the play but the climax of the author’s appreciation for Bernhardt’s talents. He gushed that “there is nothing more gently feminine and irresistible than the erstwhile rebel.” That she was now “demurely and penitently meek, . . . [and] timid . . .” did not matter. “Bernhardt is still Bernhardt, call her Gismonda, or Izeyl, or La Tosca, . . . she defies law and the

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
conventionalities.” He continued: “The church is her tyrant until she discovers an escape from its power; passion and self-will are her gods; fear is unknown to her; an untamed, insincere, tigerish being touched with the fire of genius, to whom her compatriots are not afraid to accord the adjective, Divine.” At this point in his aesthetic and ecstatic rhapsody, it is impossible to make any distinction between the actress and her “role”.

Bernhardt’s tigerish being hinted at the extent to which her passions, both on stage and off, led some people to invest in her an animal nature at odds with dominant notions of Victorian femininity. As a New Woman, she was already suspect for her appropriation of behaviours previously reserved for men. Bernhardt exacerbated the anxiety felt by some contemporaries through such peccadilloes as her adoption of masculine attire while painting, by frequently playing male roles such as Hamlet and Napoleon’s ill-fated son in L’Aiglon, and by opening her own theatre in Paris. But it was the wildness of the female characters she depicted—so seamlessly conjoined in the mind of the public with her own personality—that drew the most comment from both critics and supporters alike. Her violent disruption of nineteenth-century codes of female behaviour, which she enacted with what audiences felt was a horrifying realism, could put her beyond the pale of not just femininity but humanity itself. Thus, in a work like Frou-Frou, Bernhardt's wrath is described in reptilian terms. “When she is roused to anger,” similised one confessed admirer, “she is for a moment terrible as a pythoness on her tripod . . .” So completely unwomanly was Frou-Frou's behaviour, so thoroughly entwined was it with Bernhardt's public self, that for one critic, she degenerated into a snake.

When Bernhardt killed, as she frequently did, her anger was frenetically palpable and her animalistic nature exploded on stage. In La Tosca, she transforms herself into an “infuriated

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83 Ibid.
84 Canadian Illustrated News, 18 December, 1880.
tigress mood” that allowed her to unleash against her tormentor “an irresistible outburst of passion, too long pent up, and which must necessarily touch upon incoherency.” The incoherent irrationality of the animal attacking its persecutor resulted in a frightening mauling of “frenzied reproaches and execrations [which] she heaps upon him, as he lies helpless and dying at her feet . . .” Another observer for that evening's performance likened her to “a savage” and a “caged panther who ceaselessly walks back and forth before his iron bars.” Bernhardt's animal savagery, threatening to break through its barriers and devour the male gaze that was simultaneously captivated and repelled by its seductive celebrity, must be contained. Thus, she transforms from her "tigress mood" to "the hushed, awestruck utterances and movements of the woman as she realizes the presence of death . . .” When she regained her human form, she more closely resembled the quiet and passive ideal of Victorian womanhood. The moment of her snakelike terror passed, "the fury soon subsides, and the affectionate, single-minded, docile creature—the very woman—once more predominates.” Her gendered acts of defiance, her acting up as it were, were roles that many felt removed her from definitions of womanliness.

**The Reverend Rainsford vs. Gunhilda**

Indeed, definitions of womanliness were at the heart of the debate between those who approved of Sarah and those who felt her wicked. During her first visit in 1881, the actress was at the centre of a protracted and very public dispute about the morality of the theatre and appropriate roles for women—both onstage and off. It was sparked by a letter to the editor from the Reverend Mr. W. S. Rainsford, well-known pastor of the prestigious St. James Anglican Cathedral. For his part, the good reverend claimed that Bernhardt “openly flaunts her immorality

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85 *Toronto Daily Mail*, 30 October, 1891.
86 *Ibid*.
87 *Saturday Night*, 7 November, 1891.
88 *Toronto Daily Mail*, 30 October, 1891.
89 *Canadian Illustrated News*, 18 December, 1880.
in the face of Europe.” Rainsford’s letter encouraged others to write—many echoing his central theme. “Bernhardt is a special offender,” wrote one concerned citizen, “and . . . she wantonly flaunts her immorality in the face of society and defies all social laws and obligations.” And it was the public defiance of these gendered norms, threatening to split apart society, that caused critics so much anxiety. The author concluded that those who go to see Bernhardt will do so “to see her as an actress, and not as the maiden mother of several ‘little accidents.’” The latter remark reveals the gendered thinking behind a great deal of both the public outrage and support surrounding Bernhardt’s performances.

Several people claiming to be women wrote letters to the editor directly in response to Rainsford. Editors typically headlined their views under “A Woman’s Reply to Rev. Mr. Rainsford,” or “Another Woman’s Opinion.” Perhaps the most vociferous defender of Bernhardt, at least in terms of her position in society as a woman, was “Gunhilda.” Her rebuttal to Rainsford was a far-ranging critique of clerical hypocrisy especially as it related to women. She began ‘her’ assault by suggesting that Rainsford was out for self-aggrandizement and, lacking any real ability, “[h]is only hope seems to be in securing the destruction of some talented woman.” “In this day,” Gunhilda harangued, “when almost every avenue to her daily bread is closed by men—the chief places and professions, even the public offices in the gift of the Crown—woman’s character is her chief reliance to gain pre-eminence or rise above want.”

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90 The Toronto Mail, 17 March, 1881.
91 Ibid.
92 The Evening Telegram, 18 March, 1881.
93 Ibid.
94 The Toronto Mail, 23 March, 1881; The Toronto Mail. 24 March, 1881.
95 The Toronto Mail, 23 March, 1881.
96 Ibid.
assail the character of a woman, therefore, especially if she be gifted and brilliant.” she continued, “is a breach of honour and a crime which even the most hardened ruffian will not commit when not shielded by the robe which alone makes him respectable.”

Gunhilda’s response reveals the extent of the debate taking place around Bernhardt’s appearances. It also illustrates the way some women understood the celebrity’s challenge to the social norms that others were so anxious to defend. Her spirited justification of Bernhardt, with its attack on the clergy and patriarchy, is worth quoting at length:

In her girlhood, as would appear from the dark hints of this clerical puritan, Mlle. Bernhardt was guilty of an indiscretion; but her great talents and brilliancy, which have excited the wonder and admiration of mankind, and which would be sufficient to excuse the weakness of a man . . . are no shield for her. A clergyman may commit crimes that are a scandal to society, even in the Queen City of the West—crimes that are daily reported throughout the year and throughout the world; a bishop may hobnob with Senators to prevent legislation in favour of women, and may appear in his pulpit in a state of intoxication, and—he may be pardoned! The public is merciful, it was a man. It will forgive him. But did anyone ever hear of a community, especially one schooled by a priest, that ever forgave a woman. Mr. Rainsford preaches charity and pardon, but only for men. He has none for women. Even the press, the centre of all our earthly hope, is not free from this clerical influence, for while the names of women who keep immoral houses are exposed, the names of the men who support them—among whom ecclesiastical hypocrites sometimes stray—are carefully concealed from the public. Mr. Rainsford’s church, like every other in Toronto, is mainly supported by women, who all come willing—though the first ladies in the city—to assume the mission of strolling beggars to obtain the necessary means to support his household. Let them be careful as to a past indiscretion. Twenty years will not conceal it. The scandal-hunter is on your track. Mr. Rainsford will tell it! But it is not misconduct that has courted this attack upon Mlle. Bernhardt by the priesthood, and the evidence lies in the fact that the first Christians—and Mr. Rainsford is strong on apostolic succession—who brought dishonour upon womanhood were the clergy, and that such immorality is not treated as a crime
from the pulpit. . . . The clergy have never been known to interfere in woman’s behalf when imposed upon by men, though ever ready to destroy them by a too well-known weapon, wielded only by the clerical assassin, when she bids fair to rise to power or fame. During the wars of the great Napoleon a historian informs us that “When the French army left Egypt shameful transactions were witnessed upon the quay of Rosetta. The French were busily engaged in selling to British troops the women who had lived with them during their stay in the country. Several British soldiers bought very pretty girls for a dollar each.” (Child. Vol. 1, p. 229.)

Hundreds of such circumstances have occurred which affected not merely the dignity, but the decency of the whole British nation, but without eliciting a word of reproof from priest or bishop of the national Church. The selling of women to British soldiers did not interfere with the funds of the clergy. Mlle. Bernhardt’s crime is that she attracts the talented and wealthy of society, who are thereby induced to give their money to the stage and not to Mr. Rainsford.97

The wide-ranging rebuttal of Rainsford gives some sense of the passion behind certain of Bernhardt’s supporters. It also demonstrates one of the ways in which the performer’s appearances in Toronto opened debates about gender.

For some, Gunhilda’s remarks went too far. Her public attack on the clergy and patriarchy sparked several hostile responses. Conceding that it “contains many true things,” one allegedly female critic nevertheless felt obliged to address Gunhilda’s letter because of its “unwomanly remarks.”98 Several citizens made similar reference to ‘her’ as “unladylike,”99 or suggested that Rainsford’s opinions were more “fully with the interests of womankind.”100

Presumably Gunhilda had strayed, as did Bernhardt and the New Woman, too far from the niceties of acceptable behaviour. For many, the epistolary cross-dressing was enough to discount the author’s point entirely. Several of the responses reveal a deep anxiety over Gunhilda’s gender

97 Ibid.
98 The Toronto Mail, 24 March, 1881.
99 The Toronto Mail, 25 March, 1881.
100 Ibid.
status that was no doubt exacerbated by their authors’ inability to know for certain whether they were dealing with a man or a woman. Although it was true, conceded one female critic, that “society, and in society women themselves, nearly as much as men, are altogether too unjust to women who sin in a certain way, [and] not sufficiently condemning the men who make them sin,” Gunhilda’s masculine rhetorical attire nevertheless “lays herself open to the suspicion that she has both an illogical and narrow way of looking at the subject in question.” The author chided Gunhilda for a “want of logic” and claimed amazement “causing wonder that a rational woman could write it.” The irony of a woman employing a rhetorical strategy that relied on a discourse of female irrationality to delegitimize her opponent’s argument was lost on this citizen. Gunhilda had struck a nerve. But blame for her gendered impertinence lay elsewhere. One defender of the status quo concluded that “[t]he sad lack of womanly modesty, [and] the fallacious doctrine,” is an example of “the evil effects of Bernhardt’s presence among us.”

The more conservative elements of Toronto could sense the spreading disorder caused by Bernhardt’s gendered performances, their evil effects contaminating the more susceptible amongst them. The appropriately named PATER wholeheartedly endorsed Rainsford’s warning “to the heads of families throughout the city against the attendance of any of those under their control at the performances referred to.” The pronounced paternalism of PATER’s letter suggests the problem was one of gender disorder: men were losing control. To his mind, it could be solved simply by men fulfilling their responsibilities as heads of households and religious leaders. Just as it was right for the reverend to speak out as a (male) leader of society, it was right for any husband or father to keep his female charges safely away from the spectacle of such a

101 The Toronto Mail, 24 March, 1881.
102 Ibid.
103 The Toronto Mail, 25 March, 1881.
104 The Toronto Mail, 18 March, 1881.
woman. Bernhardt’s performances were, in PATER’s “humble opinion, no place for virtuous husbands and wives, much less for parents, still less for young people of either sex . . . []”\(^{105}\)

PATER’s anxiety over Bernhardt’s gendered acts, like most who wrote in to voice their condemnation, probably extended beyond the actress herself to encompass most public entertainment. For many, the theatre was a source of gender trouble. Even as committed a playgoer as J. W. Bengough understood its connection with female sexuality. In a Grip cartoon entitled “From An Unproduced Drama By Dumas,” the reader sees a diva much like Bernhardt resisting, although not that energetically, the advances of a male suitor:

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Armand—“Come! Fly with me, I implore you!”
Camille—“Never! Sir, you insult me.”
Armand—“What! You will not go?”
Camille—“I will resist you with all the strength of my woman’s nature. If you would tear me from this place, you must first drug me and render me unconscious. You will find a bottle of chloroform on the bureau over there.”\(^{106}\)
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Grip also included this little dialogue: “Fenderson was at the theatre the other night. ‘It was a burlesque, a take-off, wasn’t it?’” asked Smith. “‘Yes,’” said Fenderson, “‘that’s what it was. I guess. They had taken off about everything they dared to.’”\(^{107}\)

There were also those who recognized that clerical condemnation was a form of free publicity. Many citizens felt that Rainsford’s letter, and attacks from other religious elite, only helped Bernhardt’s cause. Indeed, these comments reveal a relatively sophisticated understanding of celebrity and advertising toward the end of the nineteenth century. Several responses echoed the view that it is “unwise to call public attention to the woman and so increase public curiosity to go and see her.”\(^{108}\) “The better she is advertised by the clergymen,” continued

\(^{105}\) Ibid.

\(^{106}\) Grip, 9 August, 1890.

\(^{107}\) Grip, 19 July, 1881.

\(^{108}\) The Evening Telegram, 18 March, 1881.
the response, “the better she will like it, for it means increased receipts.”∗∗∗109 Another reply, signed simply “DRAMA,” observed that “[i]f the Bernhardt were in want of any more advertising, the letter of Rev. Mr. Rainsford, . . . would certainly be the thing to ensue [sic] her a full house.”∗∗110 Abraham wrote that “[t]here is a certain class of people for whom the only necessary incentive to evil-doing is to be told that it is wicked . . . [.]”∗∗∗111 “Perhaps, after all,” concluded a columnist for the Evening Telegram, “the best the clergy can do is to let the divine Sara [sic] severely alone.”∗∗∗112

Many middle-class Torontonians were increasingly aware of the tensions caused by the new commercial forces behind public entertainments. The creation and manipulation of desires that ran contrary to the values of more traditional elements of the society was very much a part of the discourses that emerged from public entertainment. One frustrated citizen complained to the Globe: “[Sarah Bernhardt and George Eliot], and other eminent persons who defy the customs of society, are competent to judge of right and wrong, and are free to act. I do not judge them.”∗∗113 “But what I wish to point out,” the letter continued, “is the social phenomenon presented when the leaders of a society which crushes thousands of poor girls in the mire for illegitimate sexual relations should at the same time lavish admiration upon women of the same character who happen to have talent.” Bernhardt’s performative challenges to Torontonians brought the issue into stark relief, forcing many to acknowledge a conflict they might otherwise have wished to ignore. High society’s response to Bernhardt’s illegitimate children, proved the letter writer’s point: “It was amply demonstrated that fashionable English society does not really respect the customs which it professes to hold essential.” “But what I have observed of her career among the

∗∗∗109 Ibid.
∗∗110 The Toronto Mail, 19 March, 1881.
∗∗111 Ibid.
∗∗112 The Evening Telegram, 8 March, 1881. The author notes that “pulpit denunciations are usually good advertisements, and draw crowds.”
∗∗113 The Globe, 2 August, 1879.
aristocrats of London,” continued the accusation, “leads me to feel that it is not through
overlooking her sins or forgetting about them, but to some extent because of them that she had
enjoyed a brilliant apotheosis.” To some, it must have appeared as if a revolution in society’s
values was under way: “The constant gossip has lent a piquancy to her presence, and the
enthusiasm has been quite as great among those who could not understand or appreciate her
performances.”

The tremendous influence of Bernhardt, and of the theatre more broadly, lay behind much
of the attack on public entertainment. Rainsford lamented that Bernhardt had “attained a position
from which her influence is immense . . .” One allegedly female letter-writer, referred to
Bernhardt’s “great influence and magnetism over the youth.” Another citizen wrote in to
complain that “the stage should be an educator of public morals.” “No person,” the letter
chided, “can shut his eyes to the fact that it does possess a great influence, and all must admit that
it is not at present exercising that influence as it should.” “Plays like ‘Camille’ . . .,” noted a
critic “have, in my opinion, an unhealthy tendency, especially on young minds, while they leave a
nasty taste behind them even to tolerably blasé men of the world.” Performing acts of
immorality on the stage, he believed, “will lead to a deterioration in public morals.”

Bernhardt’s gendered acts worried these concerned citizens precisely because her popularity
couraged the spread of female misrule well beyond the threshold of the playhouse.

The pioneering female journalist Kit Coleman, writer of the “Woman’s Kingdom” section
of the Toronto Mail, was a fan of Bernhardt’s. And her awe for Bernhardt was palpable. After

114 Ibid.
115 The Toronto Mail, 17 March, 1881.
116 The Toronto Mail, 24 March, 1881.
117 The Toronto Mail, 25 March, 1881.
118 Ibid.
119 The Toronto Mail, 5 January, 1895. Press Clippings (Canadian 1890-1908) Theatre and Morality, Toronto
Reference Library.
120 Ibid.
witnessing one performance the journalist wrote: “One shrank into one’s corner, a small, ignorant, insignificant creature. Why did God give such gifts to the one woman, denying the other, one murmured feebly.”\textsuperscript{121} Still, Coleman was less pleased with the effects of the theatre on certain young women:

> When are the adolescent girls attending vaudeville and theatre matinees going to gather their senses? They are all but mobbing stalwart Jack Webster, while the other day a crowd of girls hissed the villain in The Silver King as that innocent man was making his way to a restaurant. O female reserve whither has thou flown! Imagine asking a strange man for his photograph, his autograph, a lock of his hair, a pairing from his toenail. And this is virtuous Toronto! What queer, half-women, half-children, frequent the matinees. Have you observed these miniature women with their enormous pompadours, their high-heeled shoes, their saucy bird- ridden hats? There they go, holding up their skirts in one hand in imitation of the women in long clothes. Opera glass, fan, gloves all resemble the grown-ups, and judging from what my own ears have heard, the conversation of these perky midgets was much more grown-up than that of my granddame when she was eighty. Conversation, artificial, superficial, at times indecent, and almost touched with vulgarity is what one hears. Little girls are not what they used to be.\textsuperscript{122}

The world’s first female war correspondent, Coleman was no stranger to gender trouble herself. That she would voice such concerns suggests the extent to which anxiety surrounding the theatre’s influence over young women had spread. As Marlis Erica Schweitzer illustrates, matinee girls in turn-of-the-century New York closely followed the fashion of prominent actresses copying not only their clothes but their progressive representations of modern womanhood as well.\textsuperscript{123}

> What if young people, young women in particular, started acting like the infamous Bernhardt? In conservative quarters, a fear of spreading pollution pervades the discussion around the celebrity’s power and public entertainment more broadly. Rainsford, for example, described

\textsuperscript{121} Qtd. in, Ted Ferguson, \textit{Kit Coleman Queen of Hearts} (Toronto: Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1978), 119.
\textsuperscript{122} Ibid, 42.
the “tainted atmosphere that unfortunately already surrounds the profession of the stage.”¹²⁴ A colleague, writing in the Canada Presbyterian, argued that:

To patronize or engage in the plays of the theatres of the day, cannot be right. The immoral and often blasphemous plays enacted, the vulgar and uncouth attitude which actors and actresses often assume, the immoral and indecent costumes often worn are all repulsive to the sense of Christian refinement, and the whole tone of the theatre is most demoralizing, and stimulates and excites evil passions.¹²⁵

Theatre-going, he vituperated, “brings in its train, undue excitement, late hours, extravagant and perhaps immodest apparel, envy and jealousy and vanity.”¹²⁶ Only “the most vile and morally filthy are to be found within those walls of revelry.”¹²⁷ The good Christian must avoid “contact with the moral filth of the world.”¹²⁸

Another letter to the editor refers to the “danger of pollution” that accompanies the wrong sort of theatre.¹²⁹ If the theatre has fallen into a “slough of despond,” questioned the writer, “we have to ask ourselves the question whether we would not rather sink it still deeper in the mire, by attending the performance, by such an actress [as Sarah Bernhardt].”¹³⁰ The fear of contamination is evident throughout and the author grew increasingly agitated, “[t]he stage, then, must be pure. If a wicked actress is feted and lauded to the skies, other actresses, who mean well, will be encouraged to follow her example.”¹³¹ The anthropologist Mary Douglas argues that our behaviour surrounding pollution, “is the reaction which condemns any object or idea likely to confuse or contradict cherished classifications.”¹³² The obsession with filth that fills these

¹²⁴ The Toronto Mail, 17 March, 1881.
¹²⁵ The Canada Presbyterian, 25 March, 1881.
¹²⁶ Ibid.
¹²⁷ Ibid.
¹²⁸ Ibid.
¹²⁹ The Toronto Mail, 25 March, 1881.
¹³⁰ Ibid.
¹³¹ Ibid. My emphasis.
responses to Bernhardt’s gendered acts suggests profound apprehension about the effects of those performances on society. As has been shown, Gunhilda’s letter, costumed in its unwomanly rhetorical attire, was, to the mind of one critic, an example of the evil effects of Bernhardt’s presence. The result of Bernhardt’s contamination, presumably, was what the author referred to as Gunhilda’s “distorted moral vision.”

The pages of the popular press were filled with instances of the distorted moral vision performed in Bernhardt’s plays and private life. The spreading disease of feminine transgression could be evidenced by any number of events. As if to highlight the connection, these narratives of disorder occasionally appeared in periodicals next to stories about Sarah Bernhardt herself. Although they were lamented by many, these gendered acts, whether they were performed on stage by Bernhardt herself, or re-enacted in newspapers and in the lives of those who acted them out, were repetitions of gender identity that either reinforced or challenged normative behaviour. To those such as the good Reverend Mr. Rainsford, these instances of transgression were indicative of the moral decay that was everyday seeping from the seductively powerful world of the theatre and into society as a whole. In some cases, such as the article exclaiming that “red headed girls are all the rage,” examples of the spread of theatrical influence appear relatively benign. That Bernhardt’s red tresses, so often commented upon by supporters and detractors alike, could spark a fashion for a certain style or colour of hair was, to some no doubt, emblematic of society’s decline.

133 Mariana Valverde reminds us of the importance of discourses surrounding soap and cleanliness to the social purity movement. See Mariana Valverde, The Age of Light, Soap, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925 (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1993), 40-1.
134 The Toronto Mail, 25 March, 1881.
135 Ibid.
136 The Globe, 22 March, 1881. Bernhardt was a red-head.
Other societal trends were far more worrisome, and like Bernhardt’s public flouting of gender norms, filled the pages of the press. Not even established Toronto papers with solid reputations were free from such indecency. “Patent medicine advertisements,” argued the W.C.T.U., “that defile the pages of many country and city newspapers, including even the Toronto ‘Globe’ and ‘Mail-Empire,’ ought also be precluded, and such advertisements—pictorial or otherwise—as pander to man’s lower nature.” Pandering to man’s lower nature was something the slumming journalist Christopher St. George Clark knew all about. The author of the infamous 1898 expose of Toronto’s seedy underbelly, Of Toronto the Good, was much more graphic in his description of the problem than the W.C.T.U.. He chastised those who “run away with the idea that no abortion is committed in Canada[.]” “What does an advertisement like this mean?”, he asks rhetorically: “TANSY AND PENNYROYAL PILLS./Never fails. Any stage. Thousands of happy ladies. Safe, sure and absolutely harmless./ . . .” Such advertisements were common in newspapers. Indeed, just such an advertisement was published in the conservative Toronto World right next to a large photograph of Bernhardt languishing seductively on an ornate throne. [Figure 4-2 Dr. Martel’s Female Pills] “Dr. Martel’s Female Pills,” so the claim went, had “Seventeen Years the Standard.” “Prescribed and recommended for women’s ailments, a scientifically prepared remedy of proven worth. The result from their use is

138 C. S. Clark, Of Toronto the Good A Social Study: The Queen City of Canada As It Is (Montreal: The Toronto Publishing Company, 1898).
139 Ibid, 124.
140 Ibid, 125. Clark goes on to describe an advertisement in a Toronto paper for “Rubber Goods of ALL KINDS For Sale.” “There is not a boy in Toronto, I dare say,” asserts Clark, “who does not know what that means.” That condoms were widely available and publicly advertised despite their being illegal was a point the author wanted to impress upon his readers. “[T]hose ladies who talk of passing laws restricting this thing and that,”—exactly what the W.C.T.U. was calling for with regards to patent medicine advertisements—needed to face up to a reality beyond their bourgeois morality. Clark, 127.
quick and permanent.”¹⁴² The legal historian Constance Backhouse, in writing on women and abortion in nineteenth-century Canada, notes that such female pills were used as evidence in court for trials of abortion.¹⁴³ Many of Toronto’s druggists supplied such pills and other abortifacients, some even going so far as to perform abortions themselves.¹⁴⁴ Such an advertisement placed beside the picture of a woman notorious as “the maiden mother of several ‘little accidents,’” is precisely the kind of thing the W.C.T.U. was clamouring against.¹⁴⁵ That it re-enacts one aspect of the gendered identity of Bernhardt and several of the characters she played only reinforced the notion of her contaminating influence for those who felt threatened by her performances.

That Bernhardt, and public entertainment more broadly defined, was spilling out into the rest of the world could have disastrous effects. Each gendered act that was repeated in the wrong way, at least from the perspective of those anxious to maintain the status quo, had the potential to be picked up and re-enacted by others. To the mind obsessed with purity and gender appropriate behaviour, instances of women acting up were everywhere.

To reformers reading these appalling gendered acts in the news, regeneration might very well have seemed impossible. Right next to a story about Sarah Bernhardt appeared the bold, uppercase headline: “WOMAN ATTEMPTS SUICIDE.”¹⁴⁶ [Figure 4-3 Woman

¹⁴⁵ *The Evening Telegram*, 18 March, 1881.
Figure 4-2  Dr Martel’s Female Pills
Attempts Suicide] “Mrs. George Slade Gashes Throat with Husband’s Razor,” shouted the subhead.\textsuperscript{147} Calling to mind the kind of melodramatic events of a Bernhardt play, the article reports that the 30 year-old woman slashed her throat in full view of her husband. Here was a woman performing her gender in a way that people would have expected from Bernhardt herself.

Not only did Bernhardt’s characters occasionally kill themselves, but the actress herself either attempted or at least considered suicide.\textsuperscript{148} The short piece concludes with an ending worthy of Dumas fils himself: “On the way to the hospital Mrs. Slade moaned continually: ‘Be good to the baby.'”\textsuperscript{149} Physically touching the article on the controversial celebrity, it is as if the contaminated world of the theatre had temporarily overflowed its borders and into the real world beside it. If one cared to look at the headlines around Bernhardt’s visits, and if one’s mind were prone to seeing vice everywhere, the world was filled with women behaving just as poorly as Bernhardt.

My point here is that the dominant discourses of these public entertainments refused to remain in the playhouses, spilling over, instead, into society at large. More importantly, however, these discourses and tropes became congruent with the way some people interpreted the world around them. The newspaper description of Mrs. Slade’s suicide attempt was spatially situated next to a story about Sarah Bernhardt. The story read as if it were a melodrama. The dénouement seems strikingly like that of \textit{Frou-Frou} to cite but one example. The readers, and the writer, familiar with the format of such plays, made sense of the event in terms of drama or, in this case, melodramatic tragedy:

\textsuperscript{147} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{148} \textit{Toronto Mail}, 11 June, 1887. Brandon mentions Bernhardt’s “death-wish,” which she attributes to the actress having been sexually abused, and argues Bernhardt made at least one suicide attempt. Brandon, \textit{Being Divine}, 121.
\textsuperscript{149} \textit{Ibid.}
JOHN REDMOND, Irish member of parliament, who is credited with having the upper hand of the house of commons. During his recent tour of America, Redmond is said to have collected $200,000 to be used to further a scheme to obtain home rule for Ireland.

WOMAN ATTEMPTS SUICIDE

Mrs. George Slade Gashes Throat With Husband’s Razor.

Because of despondency induced by a long illness, Mrs. Ada Slade, aged 30, wife of George Slade, 305 West Queen-street, cut her throat with her husband’s razor early Saturday morning. She is in a very serious condition, Mrs. Slade may recover. She is in Grace Hospital.

The deed was committed in the presence of her husband. The instrument was lying on the dressing table in the room. While they were getting dressed she picked it up, looked at it for a short time, then suddenly opened it and slashed her throat. Her husband was unable to prevent her. He became nearly frantic and rushed for a doctor, after putting on a temporary bandage. Mrs. Slade fainted while the razor was at her throat. The gash was nearly six inches in length. On the way to the hospital Mrs. Slade moaned continually: “Be good to the baby.”

DR. SHEARER’S ILLNESS.

The following is a telegram sent to the city solicitor of Winnipeg, Mr.

THE TORONTO WORLD

Madame Sarah Bernhardt

The figure on the divan might have been some beautiful statue of marble; the pallid face, the black, carefully moulded eyebrows, the sensitive mouth, the round, full chin. A long lace robe fell in graceful folds from her shoulders, edged at the neck by a collar of ermine. It might have been the figure of some resting goddess until the glance became riveted on some definite object, and the eyes looked for a moment from the scrutiny of space. Then there flashed into the marble face that something which robbed it of the inscrutable calm, the morose stillness. The figure became imbued with life. And soon not only the eyes, but fingers, hands, as well, the mouth, the face, the whole being. The bunch of white chiffon rose rose and fell, against the crema luxuri of her satin waist. The long arms gestured gracefully, the head leant forward, to add greater attention to the speaker. Madame Bernhardt was, even more the “Femme Charmante” off the stage than on it. She spoke in French, except now and then, when someone seemed not to understand her. Then her brow became wrinkled, and it was with difficulty she found the appropriate word, to express herself.

She made a laughing illusion to the musling of dogs in Toronto. "What is the matter with all the dogs here? Why is it that they have those ugly things around their necks? Ah, I would not have my dog tortured so. My beautiful cocker, Peter Pan. They would not let me bring him to Toronto in my car. And he remains in New York pining his life away till his mistress returns. I had a telegram from him the other day. He said he was very lonesome without his mother, that he wished I would soon be back again, and hoped I would have a pleasant trip around the country."

She leaned back and smiled. And then I understood how it was she had had such a remarkable influence over her audiences, all over the world. There is one thing to which all nations are alike susceptible. Madame Bernhardt’s long tuition on the stage has perfected her in the art of graciously, no other tuition could. Here is the charm of years, the greatest triumph, the triumph of time against youth. When time accentuates graciously and charm, then time is indeed rising to its true worth, its best mission.

Someone mentioned something about Chandeleer and asked about its reception in Paris. At the mention of

Figure 4-3  Woman Attempts Suicide
The deed was committed in the presence of her husband. The instrument was lying on the dressing table in the room. While they were getting dressed she picked it up, looked at it for a short time, then suddenly opened it and slashed her throat. Her husband was unable to prevent her. He became nearly frantic and rushed for a doctor, after putting on a temporary bandage. Mrs. Slade fainted while the razor was at her throat.\textsuperscript{150}

The scene might very well have provided yet another vehicle to promote Bernhardt’s world-renowned ability to simulate death. The dramatic tension is heightened by Slade’s use of her husband’s razor and by the brief moment that she spent studying the instrument of her doom. Her fainting, something actresses like Bernhardt spent years practicing, was perfectly timed for maximum effect. That she should regain consciousness long enough to express her sole desire—that her husband care for their baby—were poignant last words that any diva would be proud to utter. Readers, or more correctly, audience members, for this particular performance understood the event because of their familiarity with melodramatic conventions. One might also speculate about the extent to which Mrs. Slade acted out her own private drama within the well-known framework of its public cousin.

\textbf{Toronto’s Women Rebel}

The prominent intellectual and social commentator Goldwin Smith held strong views on Sarah Bernhardt and her role in society.\textsuperscript{151} As a journalist, he spilt a lot of ink discussing the actress and the controversies that dogged her. Characteristically, Smith left no doubt as to where he stood on the issue. Implying that her life was “filthy and vile,” and suggesting that those who supported her were “paying homage to evil,” Smith’s excitement over the topic reveals a deeply-

\textsuperscript{150} Toronto World, 27 November, 1910.
rooted apprehension of female ascendency. That the elite of society should shower Bernhardt with praise was too much. The Evening Telegram reported that she was all the rage in England and that the Prince of Wales paid Sarah no end of attention. To Smith, the actress’ behaviour revealed “a character of depravity” and he labelled the trend toward glorifying her as nothing short of “social rebellion.” If Bernhardt symbolized the New Woman, in all her cosmopolitan ascendancy, then society was in the midst of a revolution. The anxiety surrounding women’s changing roles, the general concern over women behaving badly, derived much of its currency from the expanding culture of public entertainment. Although Smith and his contemporaries would not have phrased it thus, it was clear to him that public entertainment was a contested site where battles over gender were waged.

If New Women were ruling the roost, it had something to do with the gendered performances of women acted out by the likes of Bernhardt. Saturday Night magazine included an amusing dialogue of domestic bliss interrupted by the controversial actress’ visit which might have been familiar to its elite readers. In this domestic drama, Henry, the hen-pecked husband, is variously connived, cajoled and, finally, convinced into taking, not only his wife, but his mother-
in-law as well, to see Bernhardt’s show.\textsuperscript{155} The considerable expense, including the purchase of new clothes, represented a significant outlay. Like a slightly less seductive embodiment of the great actress, the wife in this comedy wields her feminine power mercilessly against her hapless husband. What if Bernhardt were rubbing off on Toronto’s women?

What if she were rubbing off on Toronto’s men? Maybe it would account for the “theatrical phenomenon” of a “young man of respectable family, who intends to make his appearance in a number of feminine characters . . . for which his exterior, as well as his voice—a natural soprano—perfectly qualify him.”\textsuperscript{156} That he was to play roles such as Adrienne Lecouvreur and Phedre, characters that Bernhardt personified, only made matters worse. If this young ‘man’ were physically qualified to be a woman, what exactly was it that made him a man?

Judith Butler argues that drag performances cannot help but high-light the “imitative” nature of gender and its potential for alternative performances.\textsuperscript{157} These inversions of normative gender relations, from Butler’s perspective, could radically disrupt notions of gender’s naturalness and necessity.\textsuperscript{158}

Popular understandings amongst the Victorians of heredity and evolution were widespread. The \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, for instance, carried a story reporting that “Mr. Darwin believes that the general beauty of the English upper classes, and especially of the titled aristocracy, is due to their constant selection of the most beautiful women of all classes (peeresses, actresses, or wealthy bourgeois) as wives through an immense number of generations.”\textsuperscript{159} If society could be made better by such processes, then the reverse was certainly just as true. Society could be weakened if some habits or behaviours were condoned and passed

\textsuperscript{155} \textit{Saturday Night}, 17 December, 1910.
\textsuperscript{156} \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 29 April, 1882.
\textsuperscript{157} Butler, \textit{Gender Trouble}, 137. Emphasis in original.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid, 138.
\textsuperscript{159} \textit{The Canadian Illustrated News}, 24 July, 1880.
on to subsequent generations. If the "social rebellion" that Goldwin Smith lamented were successful, if women were becoming too much like men and men too much like women, then the period of mis[s]rule would result in the feminization of the race.

**The Tubercular Body of a Jewess**

And race was vitally important to the likes of Smith. Indeed, his understanding of Sarah Bernhardt—along with many contemporaries—was inextricably linked to her ambiguous Jewishness. Indeed, racial thinking underlies much of the gender anxiety caused by Bernhardt’s presence. Interpreted within the context of widespread antisemitism, her celebrity provoked even more anxiety. Mary Louise Roberts contends that in the image of Bernhardt, "fears about race and gender, the Jew and the New Woman, are perhaps most fully realized." Much of this concern came from, or was projected onto, Bernhardt’s distinctive body. The actress was tall and thin. To Victorian audiences, used to more voluptuous celebrities, however, Bernhardt's long, slender figure was a topic of much conversation. Her body, including textual and visual depictions of it, became a site for negotiating anxieties not just about the New Woman, but its confluences with a particularly gendered antisemitism.

Bernhardt's thinness, so at odds with contemporary notions of female beauty, drew the attention of commentators around the world. True to form, Bernhardt flaunted her unconventional looks despite detractors who called her too skinny and admonished her to put on weight. "Bernhardt is not a 'girl of the period,'" joked one observer, "but her resemblance to an inverted exclamation point is striking!" Another journalist, commenting on her latest dress,

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162 *Grip*, 29 January, 1881.
described her body as looking "like a sword in a beaded silk sheath." Bernhardt's slender frame fit well, however, with many of the tragic characters whom she depicted on stage. After their fiery and even animalistic passions had passed, Bernhardt's heroines frequently turned, as we have seen, into docile women reconciled to audiences only through their death. Bernhardt playing Adrienne Lecouvreur may be a "pythoness" one minute, but is described by the same man as delicate and fragile the next. He likened her to an ill-fated lighthouse battered by a storm: "The fabric is as frail as the first Eddystone; it goes down at last with a crash, and disappears in the deep forever . . ." Bernhardt’s return to a more submissive, womanly role, was especially linked to her wasting away on stage from tuberculosis. Another reviewer described her performance in Camille using a vocabulary of consumption. He referred to her “wasted life,” and its “hollow pleasures” that are shown in stark relief against “the light of the consuming present.” So compelling was Bernhardt’s performance, so ingrained was the notion of her tubercular celebrity, that “. . . one almost believed the wasted form about to float in air . . .” Her tubercular identity was entangled with the public identity of the thin celebrity.

Bernhardt’s body carried with it cultural associations that were unique to fin-de-siecle society. Fans and detractors alike noted the great artist’s ability to depict the consumptive. Part of the humour of a Toronto Mail story about a young gallery god seeing Bernhardt play in Camille was his inability to appreciate her sensitive rendering of the tubercular heroine. The boy describes her as looking “kind a sick,” and argues that “[i]t must hev been purty cold on th e stage for she commenced to cough . . .” According to Ruth Brandon, Bernhardt cultivated the notion

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163 Canadian Illustrated News, 2 July, 1881.
164 Canadian Illustrated News, 18 December, 1880.
165 Ibid.
166 The Globe, 21 March, 1881.
167 Ibid.
168 Toronto Mail, 21 March, 1881.
that she suffered from advanced pulmonary disease by going so far as to carry bladders of fake blood, a common stage prop, so that she could cough up blood at certain advantageous points during rehearsals and performances.\footnote{Brandon, \textit{Being Divine}, 298-299. It is unclear if Bernhardt suffered from the disease. Brandon suggests that her low weight was due to anorexia.} Although many interpreted these frightening fits of coughing to her commitment to art, other less charitable observers felt that she embodied a form of disease and degeneracy intimately associated with Jewish women toward the end of the nineteenth century.

As the historian Sander Gilman argues, Sarah Bernhardt was “understood as the exemplary tubercular Jew.”\footnote{Sander Gilman, “Salome, Syphilis, Sarah Bernhardt, and the Modern Jewess,” \textit{The Jew in the Text Modernity and the Construction of Identity} (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1995), 111.} Quoting a contemporary of the actress, the historian Anatole Leroy-Beaulieu, Gilman illustrates the widely understood connection between the Jewess and consumption: “‘those lean actresses, the Rachels and Sarahs, who spit blood, and seem to have but the spark of life left, and yet who, when they have stepped upon the stage, put forth indomitable strength and energy. Life, with them, has hidden springs.’”\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}} The connection to the famous actress Elisa-Rachel Felix (1820-58) is no coincidence. Rachel, as she was known to audiences, was also Jewish and made a name for herself performing many of the same roles that Bernhardt would later make her own. Although Bernhardt’s Jewishness was more ambiguous than Rachel’s, contemporaries understood her to have, as the \textit{Mail and Empire} put it, “Jewish blood in her veins.”\footnote{\textit{Mail and Empire}, 5 June, 1911.} As the art historian Carol Ockman notes, comparisons between Bernhardt and Rachel are an indication of contemporary understandings of Bernhardt’s Jewishness.\footnote{Ockman, “When is a Jewish Star,” 122.}

The diseased Bernhardt’s body became a site for exploring contemporary notions of modernity, womanliness and racial ideology. Her thin, consumptive body was often caricatured
Seats for the Bernhardt performances at the Grand on Saturday are at a premium, and that portion of society which has neglected to buy its place in advance will be on the tip-toe of expectation all round the back of the family circle.

The great and meagre Sara will give us—that is, those of us who speak Parisian French—her impression of Gilbert and Camille, exhibiting in each piece a distinct and characteristic stage die. Her performances will no doubt sustain her world-wide reputation, but whatever we may think of her acting her dress will certainly be Worth a good deal. It is consoling to know that although the swells of our first families will not be able to catch the meaning of her words, they will all understand her millinery effects.

Mr. Davin's article on "Great Speeches" has been reprinted from the March Canadian Monthly, and is now on sale in pamphlet form. It is well worth reading.

The amusing burlesque novel, "Rodriguez," which was given in the last two issues of Garr, was written for the Yankees, N. Y., Gazette, by Mr. Wade Whipple.

Through a want of explicitness in our mention of the date of Miss Genevieve Ward's appearance here, a good many patrons of the Royal Opera House expected to find her on the boards this week. They were disappointed, but she is coming sure enough, and that before long.

Rev. Dr. Wild, of Bond Street Church, was one of the pioneer shorthand writers of Canada. He contributes an article to the Shorthand Writer of this month, which will prove interesting to all disciples of the stenographic art. A portrait of the rev. gentleman is also given in the magazine.

Melodrama holds sway at the Royal this week, the piece being an exciting dramatisation of incidents in connection with the Molly Maguire episode of a few years ago in Pennsylvania. Those whose dramatic tastes have a tendency for sensational action cannot do better than go and see the piece.

Scribner for April will contain a paper on "Wood-Engraving and the Scribner Prizes," illustrated with the three blocks which were successful in the competition of 1899, and with three others which received honorable mention. The writer gives a rapid review of the rise of the so-called "new school" in this country, noting as the chief of its results the development of personality in the engraver, and as its characteristics: 1. Originality of style; 2. Individuality, and (as a corollary) variety of style; and 3. Faithfulness in the representation of a wide range of subjects by diverse methods.

Figure 4-4  The Great and Meagre Sara
in ways that drew attention to her Jewishness. *Grip* provided its readers with a cartoon of the “great and meagre Sara [sic]” that ran the length and side of an entire page but appeared as no more than marginalia given that at its widest point it was only a couple of centimetres long. [Figure 4-4 The great and meagre Sara] Her paradoxical status as both “great” and “meagre,” calling to mind the comments of Leroy-Beaulieu, emphasizes the contradictory notion of her position as simultaneously weak yet powerful—a common image of Jews at the time.

Later that same year, as Bernhardt concluded her North American tour, *Grip* ran another cartoon of Sara [sic] “[w]aving adieus to L’Amerique from the deck of . . . [a] steamer.” [Figure 4-5 Adieus] This time, the image is significantly more abstract, composed almost entirely of dollar signs. Both images high-light the actress’ slender physique. They also employ a rhetoric of symbols that accentuate, or at least engage in, a discourse of antisemitism. The latter image, perhaps more obviously, links Bernhardt to the thin consumptive body but also to the rapacity and greediness that many attributed to Jews. The former, however, is less straightforward in its antisemitism. Unsurprisingly, Bernhardt’s meagre size is accentuated, linking her to the sickly, blood-spitting image put forth by Leroy-Beaulieu. But there is something more. As Ockman notes, when she first started analyzing images of Bernhardt in relation to questions of antisemitism, she originally searched for the tell-tale six-pointed Star of David. What she quickly realized, however, was the significance and ubiquity of depictions of enlarged noses and frizzy hair. Not surprisingly, *Grip*’s caricature of Bernhardt, running down the entire left side of the page, gives her a prominent nose and a mess of unruly hair.

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174 *Grip*, 19 March, 1881. For an interesting account of Bengough’s views on Jews and the ways in which *Grip* made antisemitism respectable, see Mendelson, “*Grip* Magazine,” 1-44.
175 *Grip*, 28 May, 1881.
176 Ockman, “When is a Jewish Star,” 130.
177 Ibid.
The Joker Club.

"The Man is mightier than the Sword."

SIRI ERMHARDT

Waving her adieux to L'Amérique from the
deck of the steamer. — QUINCEY MODERN ARMS.

The Ritualist's Rector.

Let me introduce a sol-fah, lady-dah! lady-dah!
Quite a Ritualistic word, eh, lady-dah?
Oh, a holy Ceremonialism, is it not?

Adieu, my dear!—adieu, lady-dah! lady-dah!
Yes, his name is quite ceremonious, lady-dah!

He adores a musically clashing, lady-dah! lady-dah!
And a quivering organ's fire, lady-dah!
The church is thus to be heard.

But the priest above the people,
And a cross above it's steeply, lady-dah! lady-dah!
Not a Protestant plain steeple, lady-dah!

He immures both prayer and prayer, lady-dah! lady-dah!
And his Anglican high altar, lady-dah!

If we take an oath with the rector,
Said by Evangelical vestry.

Taxes with flowers, feasts, and goats, lady-dah! lady-dah!
All of which in truth he handles, lady-dah!

Of all churches that are common, lady-dah! lady-dah!
He believes the English oldest—dear the Roman, lady-dah!

All other crowns his show in
With a holy Jane personage;

Hell's very tax, he says it is
Yes, he'd gladly see their ruin, lady-dah!

Of his age's many errors, lady-dah! lady-dah!
That which are seen murder, lady-dah!

He says he comes in from a foreign section.
And church military motion, lady-dah! lady-dah!

Which was surely feeling or shame, lady-dah! — Farewell.

It is dangerous to walk in the country at this time of the year, when the hedgerows are shooting
and the bull rushes out. — Walthers Observer.

This is the time that Venner predicted frost for May. He must use an ice cream freezer for

A fortune awaits the man who will invent a

Adieu
The contradictory understanding of Bernhardt, her apparent frailty contrasting sharply with her immense power, fed into gendered stereotypes about Jews prominent in the nineteenth century. Although virulent antisemitic diatribes against Bernhardt did not appear in Toronto, as they did in Quebec and Europe, it is clear that Torontonians read the actress through her ambiguous status as a Jewess.\textsuperscript{178} As scholars such as Gilman and Ockman argue, Bernhardt was perceived as the quintessential \textit{belle juive}. Janis Bergman-Carton contends that nineteenth-century ethnographic literature often linked a sensual yet sterile Orient with a femme fatale.\textsuperscript{179} Bernhardt’s perceived promiscuity and her passion for gender-bending, both on stage and off, made her a highly charged symbol of Jewish disorder that was inextricably linked to anxieties about the New Woman. Gilman asserts that she became “the embodiment of the sexuality of the Jew and, therefore, of the modernity which this sexuality comes to represent.”\textsuperscript{180} Bernhardt stood for the modern woman—that her sexuality was tinged with Jewishness was deeply troubling to some because of its destructive yet seductive portents.\textsuperscript{181}

The siren-song of such women was the attractive façade of the threat to purity represented by the mixing of races. Bergman-Carton notes that the seductive Jewess signified the danger of contamination—a “slick exterior belying a corrupt Semitic core.”\textsuperscript{182} Seemingly benign and certainly attractive, once assimilated into society, the Jewess contaminated all that surrounded her. It was felt that Jews dominated the theatre because acting suited what many believed to be

\textsuperscript{178} Hathorn, \textit{Our Lady of the Snows}, 59, 112-117. Hathorn cites the antisemitic remarks of \textit{La Verite}’s Jules-Paul Tardivel, as well reports that one protester allegedly shouted, “A bas la Juive!” Antisemitic discourse is not the focus of Hathorn’s book and he does not engage in a sustained analysis of it. In her 1905 visit to Montreal, her carriage was attacked by a crowd on her way to the station amid cries of “Kill the Jewess.” See Gottlieb, \textit{Sarah}, 138.
\textsuperscript{180} Gilman, “Salome,” 115.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{182} Bergman-Carton, “Negotiating,” 58.
their disingenuous nature, especially the modern Jewess.\textsuperscript{183} Already engaged in a profession long associated with prostitution, Bernhardt’s sexual freedom, according to Ockman, was interpreted as “unwomanliness or mannishness.”\textsuperscript{184} Both Bernhardt and Rachel made fortunes from their acting and extended their financial and artistic endeavours beyond the theatre. Ockman believes this was central to a discourse of greed more commonly attributed to Jewish men.\textsuperscript{185}

Indeed, Bernhardt’s greed was often alluded to in the Toronto press. The caricature of her made up of dollar signs is one of the more obvious examples. Reduced to little more than a stick-figure, the only detail hinting at her gender is the dress that protrudes from an otherwise unsexed body. Her perceived lust for money was a common aspect of articles about her. Reviewing \textit{Camille}, one observer noted that “[t]he world that has gold has given as much as fifty louis for a box and fifteen for a stall.” “Sarah,” he asserted dryly, “goes halves.”\textsuperscript{186} Another mention of her, in the same periodical, noted wryly: “Mlle. Bernhardt is going to make a tour in Spain, Italy and Switzerland. After the financial collapse of Paris, she may doubt if coin for her is sufficiently plentiful.”\textsuperscript{187} This despite Bernhardt’s fervent nationalism, which saw her stay in Paris to run a hospital for wounded soldiers during the German siege. To many contemporaries, her perceived cupidity prevented her from forming any meaningful national attachments. Indeed, the disloyalty of Jews was a common antisemitic stereotype in the nineteenth century.

A \textit{Grip} cartoon, depicting Bernhardt with a prominent hooked nose and the requisite frizzy hair, takes as its subject the receipts from her Australian tour.\textsuperscript{188} [Figure 4-6 IMAGINARY CONVERSATION] In an imaginary conversation with the boxer John L. Sullivan, who also

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{183} \textit{Ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{184} Ockman, “When is a Jewish Star,” 124.
\item \textsuperscript{185} \textit{Ibid}.
\item \textsuperscript{186} \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 17 June, 1882.
\item \textsuperscript{187} \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 4 March, 1882.
\item \textsuperscript{188} \textit{Grip}, 19 December, 1891.
\end{itemize}
toured the colony but with much less financial success, Bernhardt chided the “sloggaire” for his naïveté in financial matters:

John L. – “Look here, Sairey, I hear you got away from Australian with 60,000 quid; while I got away from there a blooming frost with only my unblemished character to my back.”

Sarah B. – “Ah! Monsieur Soolivong, eef I had gone to zee Antipodee in zee role of one sloggaire, it shall be zat I too have been zee bloomanf fr-r-roszt. Eef you had gone in your true role, you have acquire zee big money, too!”189

The assumption is that her true role, that of a consumptive and sexually rebellious woman, earned the shrewd Jewess the big money. That, so went the argument, was more important to Bernhardt than the boxer’s quaint concern for his “unblemished character.” That such money-grubbing behaviour was usually associated with Jewish men, made Bernhardt’s greed all the more masculinizing.190 A similar conclusion may be drawn from the caricatures of the actress that appeared in the Toronto press. For Ockman, these depictions suggest that “stereotypes of Jewishness were inseparable from the terror of woman’s power.”191

The terror of a woman’s power, as I have shown, is behind much of the anxiety caused by Bernhardt’s visits to Toronto. Goldwin Smith, notoriously antisemitic, could not help but interpret Bernhardt as a Jewess, one that threatened to contaminate the city.192 Admonishing those who offer the theatre as a panacea for all society’s ailments, he wrote: “There is a limit, though some rhapsodists seem not to think so, to the spiritual benefits of seeing Rachel or Sarah

189 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
190 Ockman observes that Bernhardt was frequently depicted as either promiscuous or mannish. Ockman, “When is a Jewish Star,” 138.
191 Ibid, 139.
192 For a contemporary account of Smith’s antisemitism, see Isaac Besht Bendavid, “Goldwin Smith and the Jews,” North American Review 153, no. 418 (1891): 257-271. Bendavid counters Smith’s assertion that the Jews are a parasitic race with no national loyalty.
IMAGINARY CONVERSATION

BETWEEN SARA BERNHARDT AND JOHN L. SULLIVAN—WHEN THEY MEET AGAIN.

JOHN L.—“Look here, Sairey, I hear you got away from Australia with 60,000 quid; while I got away from there a blooming frost with only my unblemished character to my back.”

SARA B.—“Ah! Monsieur Soolivong, eef I had gone to zee Antipodee in zee role of one soggare, it shall be zat I too have been zee bloomang fr-r-r-oszt. Eef you had gone in your true role, you have acquire zee big money, too!”—Sydney Bulletin.
Smith’s tone was derisive but turned even more vitriolic as time went on. In a later essay, Smith launched an attack on Matthew Arnold for claiming that Bernhardt picked up where Rachel left off. Comparing Rachel to the great actress Adelaide Ristori, who was not Jewish, Smith wrote: “It would be misleading to say that Rachel left off where Ristori began, because they were in different lines; but we should say that Ristori, at her best, reached a higher point than Rachel, and that she reached it in virtue of a superiority of character which made her capable of nobler emotions.” Ristori, a Christian and Italian by birth, was in a different “line,” than Rachel. The ambiguous wording reminds the reader that Ristori made her name in comedy while Rachel came to success in tragedy. It puns, however, on the different blood lines of these two famous women. The subtext is that the diseased Rachel, like Bernhardt, came from inferior Jewish blood that prevented her from attaining the superior character necessary for nobler emotions.

Mixing was of particular concern for Smith. Immediately following his comparison, he conceded that “. . . it must be owned that the Seine is mingling its waters with the Thames.” This mingling with the cosmopolitan and immoral French was part of the social revolution that threatened the “cleanly minded English people” with all that is “filthy and vile.” If Bernhardt embodied a simultaneously seductive and destructive femininity, it was predicated—at least for Goldwin Smith and the like—upon her status as a Jew. Smith wrote at length about his views on Jews. These writings fall prey to many of the usual antisemitic stereotypes prominent in the English-speaking world of the nineteenth century. One theme, however, emerges more clearly

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193 The Bystander, March 1880. As Ockman reminds us, when contemporaries connected the two actresses, it indicated an awareness of Bernhardt’s status as a Jew. Ockman, “When is a Jewish Star,” 122.
194 The Bystander, April 1881.
195 Ibid.
197 Ibid, 224.
than most, the fear of contamination by a diseased people. Several essays from *The Bystander* refer to the notion of Anglo-Israel. The idea that the “Saxon race” was one of the Lost Tribes of Israel had gained acceptance in certain circles. The very idea repulsed Smith as did the prominence it had reached in society: “It is impossible to speak of ‘Anglo-Israel’ with disrespect, since it is the creed of the most popular preacher in Toronto, and in England has arrived at the political dignity of being a ‘vote,’ and of putting test questions to Parliamentary candidates.”

All the evidence marshalled by the various proponents of the Anglo-Israel connection could not explain, at least in Smith’s mind, the “transformation of a set of dark, long-nosed and crafty Orientals, into a people of fair-haired, blue-eyed and frank-faced rovers on the Northern Sea.”

Although the idea of such a close connection to a wretched people caused Smith and his ilk no end of suffering, one of his main criticisms of Jews was their racial exclusivity. Rebutting the claims of an opponent who accused Christians for their religious persecution of the Jews, Smith countered: “Perhaps he will in the meantime consider whether if Christians have been too often intolerant, Jews who will not eat, drink or intermarry with their fellow-citizens are models of toleration.” The contradiction of blaming Jews for not mingling with Christians and his simultaneous revulsion at the notion of having any connection with them was lost on Smith as it was on many of his contemporaries.

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198 *The Bystander*, January 1890.
199 Ibid.
200 Ibid. His writings on Jews are filled with palpable contempt at the notion of the Jews as a “chosen people,” and he refers, almost obsessively, to their cleverness and their ability to ensnare simple-minded farmers. “The Jews,” he vituperates, “are beginning to assume, and are encouraged by Judaeomaniacs in assuming the airs of ‘a superior race.’” *The Bystander*, February, 1881. For further examples that roughly coincided with the first appearance of Bernhardt in Toronto, see: *The Bystander*, March 1880; *The Bystander*, August 1880; *The Bystander*, December 1880; *The Bystander*, January 1881.
201 When the Canadian Commissioner in England “sent out a consignment of Jews” to Canada, Smith argued that he “had better hold his hand, unless he wishes to import the worst of moral and commercial plagues into the country. *The Bystander*, January 1883. Smith believed that Jews were incapable of forming strong national attachments.
Smith describes “the Jew” as being “. . . little more attached to the particular country in which it happens to sojourn than is the caterpillar to the particular leaf on which it feeds.” “A community so thoroughly sound as Scotland seems to repel Jewish settlement, while Jews swarm in diseased communities such as Poland.” *The Bystander*, August 1880.
Grip ran a satirical cartoon called, “INJEWDICIOUS GOLDWIN.” [Figure 4-7]

INJEWDICIOUS GOLDWIN] In it, Smith approaches a Jewish pawnbroker, played by Benjamin Disraeli, who asks if he has any goods to pawn. As if only now realizing his situation, Smith looks a little taken aback. His sole possession is a large tract entitled “19th Century VIOLENT ATTACK ON THE JEWS BY GOLDWIN SMITH.”

**Bedazzled by Bernhardt**

Despite all the rancour surrounding Sarah Bernhardt, many Torontonians quietly admired her. She was, as Kit Coleman suggested, an awe-inspiring woman. And many in her audience paid attention to her and other celebrities in a private manner. Some middle and upper-class women kept theatrical scrapbooks with images of, and articles about, the female celebrities who fascinated them. The authors of *The Scrapbook in American Life* note that theatrical scrapbooks are amongst the most consulted of such texts in archives and libraries. One example, from Elizabeth Strathearn Hay, (nee Hendrie)—which reveals that its creator had been to see both Adelaide Neilson and Sarah Bernhardt—suggests one of the ways in which elite women responded to female celebrity. Hendrie came from one of the most prominent Hamilton families. In 1891, she married into Toronto’s wealthy Hay clan. Her opportunities for leisure were far more than the average Victorian woman. Indeed, in 1888 she traveled around the world alone, circumnavigating the globe and attending theatres as far away as

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202 *Grip*, 29 October, 1881.
203 *Ibid*.
206 Archive File Elizabeth Strathearn (Hendrie) Hay, Scrapbook 1 1881-1888, Special Collections of the Hamilton Public Library. There is one clipping pertaining to Sarah Bernhardt, a playbill from Victorien Sardou’s *La Tosca*. It appears in Scrapbook 3.
207 Her father, William Hendrie was the second richest man in Hamilton and her brother, Sir John Strathearn Hendrie was Mayor of Hamilton for several terms before becoming the Lieutenant Governor of Ontario.
208 *Weekly Times*, 8 October, 1891. She married Major John Dunlop Hay in Hamilton in what the article described as one of the premiere social events of the season.
Japan, China and India. Although her class would have circumscribed the kinds of entertainment considered appropriate, Hay’s scrapbook tells of a woman taken with the pleasures of the theatre. Tickets, playbills, reviews, images of playhouses and the beautiful actresses who performed in them vie for prominence with articles about the many plays she attended and performers she saw in her various travels.\(^\text{209}\)

One section of Hay’s scrapbook prominently features the English actress Lilian Adelaide Neilson. An article carefully included in the book discussed an appearance by the actress at the Grand Opera House in Toronto where Neilson was met with ecstatic praise. Such was the audiences’ enthusiasm after her final performance in the city that the horses from her carriage were unhitched and a group of young men pulled the conveyance to her hotel where an “immense” crowd gathered to cheer her. Hay, who pasted the article in her book, must have marvelled at the hold this woman had over society. Her own exploits as a solo world traveler, as well as the public lectures she gave on her adventures, were closely followed in the press. Hay’s wedding, as well as other society events which she attended, were covered in a way reminiscent of the expanding culture of celebrity. Perhaps she herself experienced the excitement of the evening from one of the theatre’s boxes. Hay’s enchantment with the actress caused her to include even minor one and two-line mentions of Neilson clipped from various newspapers that regularly offered trivial updates about the celebrity’s personal life.

Hay was particularly affected by the actress’ untimely death at the age of 32. This elite woman clipped several articles eulogising Neilson. Underneath one melancholy piece written by

\(^{209}\) Hay, Scrapbook 1. The effect is similar to the bulletin boards described by the art historian John Berger on which people pin “letters, snapshots, reproductions of paintings, newspaper cuttings, original drawings, [and] postcards.” The images or texts “have been chosen in a highly personal way to match and express the experience of the room’s inhabitant.” See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972), 30. There is a carnivalesque quality of mixing in the way that Hay has combined and assembled the various artifacts she collected. Referring to a similar quality in scrapbooks, Tucker notes that “Compilers personalized their clippings and infused them with individual meaning outside the arena of market exchange.” Tucker et al., *The Scrapbook*, 18.
a woman on pilgrimage to Neilson’s burial site, Hay wrote, “I saw this grave 29, May 1882.”

That the scrapbook’s compiler would make a point of going on this theatrical pilgrimage suggests the extent to which she was affected by the actress and her premature death. Hay continued to collect articles about Neilson long after the performers’ passing—several about the subject of visiting her tomb. One account from The Mail by the drama critic Touchstone was written 21 years after Neilson’s death and carefully placed into the scrapbook among the earlier articles by a much older Hay. Touchstone’s tone was less elegiac and more thoughtful in its assessment of the talented artist, “As a woman, and as an artist she was difficult to account for.” “I do not pretend to know the truth about those portions of her life which have a dubious aspect,” he writes. “After she came to the fullness of her power the voice of disparaging gossip grew faint,” noted the critic, “as if there could be but one verdict, and that of approval.” Whatever lessons Hay took from Neilson’s life, she would not have assembled this collection—amending it over two decades—unless she were deeply moved by the actress.

Another such text—the McAlpine Scrapbooks donated to the Toronto Public Library by a Mrs. McAlpine of Toronto—reveal a similar fascination with public entertainment and celebrity. The books contain playbills and programs from the United States and Britain, as well as Montreal. The majority, however, are from Toronto theatres. The collector included clippings of Adelaide Neilson, the well-known tragedienne Genevieve Ward, Helena Modjeska and, prominently, Sarah Bernhardt. Although it is impossible to determine whether the McAlpine scrapbooks were compiled by a woman, perhaps the Mrs. McAlpine who donated them,
scrapbooking was generally considered a feminine activity. Not all theatrical scrapbooks were compiled by women. The amateur actor and music store owner R. B. Butland compiled such a book, filling it with playbills for shows with which he was affiliated and others that he attended. There are bills for shows that he toured with to Whitby, Newmarket and Hamilton, as well as for more professional shows by the likes of Cool Burgess and Den Thompson. Tellingly, perhaps, Butland did not include clippings or images about female celebrities.

Although the McAlpine scrapbooks contain theatrical ephemera from a variety of sources covering a range of theatrical topics, it appears that Sarah Bernhardt held a particular allure for the collector. From the articles discussing her appearances in Toronto and the playbills with her name in large print, one senses the work of a person captivated by the actress’ celebrity. Images of her posing seductively or taken from one of her many plays also catch the eye. Prominently featured are newspaper accounts blending material about her personal life—regularly sleeping in a coffin, being Jewish, being Catholic—with accounts of her professional success. One article, penned when Bernhardt was “an old woman,” observed that journalists could not help discussing her: “They write about her as one of the prime women of all history.” Little surprise then, that women of a certain class would feel compelled to collect and assemble images and other texts pertaining to her. The article rhapsodized Bernhardt’s talents, forgiving her eccentricities and controversies on account of her unrivalled genius. In discussing the ridiculous gossip surrounding the celebrity, the writer mentioned an absurd rumour that the actress was really a “Canadian girl, raised among Baptists, moved to Rochester, where she learned vast chunks of

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215 “Env. # 5: Scrapbook,” R. B. Butland Collection, Toronto Public Library.
216 Ibid.
Shakespeare,” before fleeing to Paris after a love-affair gone bad.\textsuperscript{217} The author concluded with a passage appropriate for a woman’s scrapbook:

\begin{quote}
The Bernhardt career is a wonderful example to quiet wives and self-sacrificing mothers—a negative example of the blessedness of duty well done, without bedazzlement. Bernhardtian genius, like poverty, is not a sin, but like poverty, it’s mighty inconvenient to itself and to everything it contacts—except the person with a seat in the balcony.\textsuperscript{218}
\end{quote}

Bedazzled with Bernhardt, the compiler of this scrapbook made her own use of the articles and images, playbills and programs. For her, Bernhardt’s escapades on and off the stage, opened up new avenues of thought—some would no doubt be dismissed as idle fantasy, others might linger, their very strangeness creating a compelling cognitive dissonance.

As a highly personal text, the scrapbook reveals its creator’s character and concerns in a particularly distinctive way.\textsuperscript{219} The historian faced with such a text, can use it as an entry point to assess the compiler’s tastes and perspectives on a variety of contemporary issues. The scrapbooks of theatre and female celebrities suggest that some middle and upper-class women found the antics and attributes of actresses compelling enough to collect. What their creators made of them must remain a matter of speculation. Nevertheless, the act of assembling such texts is revealing in and of itself. As Neilson and Bernhardt blazed their own trails through modernity, they performed for audiences in ways that went far beyond the stage.

**Conclusion: The Subversive Possibilities of Sarah Bernhardt**

To listen to the likes of the Reverend Rainsford or Goldwin Smith, one might be tempted to think that Bernhardt was part of a deeply subversive movement that threatened to destabilize the status quo. Indeed, Bernhardt and the subjects I have included in this chapter were increasingly caught up in discourses of gender and race that were refracted through the lens of

\textsuperscript{217} McAlpine Scrapbooks.
\textsuperscript{218} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{219} Tucker et al, *The Scrapbook*, 12.
public entertainment. They were part of a process of defining normative behaviour that equally encompassed the gendered performances of the Reverend Rainsford and Goldwin Smith, but also Elizabeth Strathearn Hay and the unfortunate Mrs. Slade. Bernhardt’s celebrity meant that her audience was much larger and the debate surrounding her more heated than the average woman. Her influence, and that of the stage more broadly, was cause for anxiety amongst the more conservative elements of the city. Others, however, simply enjoyed the show.

The Reverend Rainsford’s letter, and many of the responses to it, lamented the pervasive influence of Bernhardt and the theatre in general. Bernhardt’s celebrity played itself out within an expanding world of public entertainment. There was an increasing appetite for such diversions. Newspapers and magazines reported on her latest misadventures. Priests sermonized against her. And people talked. Those who were opposed to her performances were well aware of how powerful they were. By performing gender differently, Bernhardt allowed others to follow suit—be they fiery letter-writers such as Gunhilda or more genteel scrapbookers such as Hay. Coupled with the substantial social changes hastened on by new modes of consumption and entertainment, it was increasingly difficult to uphold more traditional gender identities as if they were the only options available. In the face of the actress’ overpowering success—as an artist, businesswoman and self-promoter—ideas about the proper role for women were seriously challenged.

Perhaps it is to Bernhardt’s off-stage gendered performances that one must turn in order to see more completely her destabilizing effects. Her sheer success, despite or because of her status as an infamously woman, was also subversive. How very much unlike the comforting ending of a Victorian melodrama that the outrageous heroine goes unpunished. Bernhardt’s unapologetic insistence on behaving unconventionally, was met, at least on the surface, with tremendous public
success. This acceptance by the people, including high society and the arbiters of taste, was what truly worried the likes of Rainsford and Smith. Thus, each public victory, every accolade showered upon her by an admirer, destabilized the naturalizing efforts of hegemonic patriarchy.

Nevertheless, for all of Bernhardt’s subversive power, her gendered performances took place within a culture shifting toward new modes of mass consumption. Increasingly, public entertainment co-opted her gendered acts into other discourses that helped create consumers out of audiences. As we shall see in the following chapter, one of the most powerful was the Aesthetic Movement. A discourse of aestheticism allowed Bernhardt and those Torontonians who appreciated her artistic achievements an avenue to amass a kind of cultural capital based on their good taste. The aesthetic, however, also proved to be a powerful force for asserting bourgeois codes within the increasingly highbrow space of the theatre.
“Among the many symptoms of Ecclesiastical disintegration,” bemoaned Goldwin Smith sardonically, “we note that the Canada Presbyterian has fallen out with the Globe over the reception of Sara [sic] Bernhardt.”

The Globe compiles column after column of gushing panegyrics. The Canada Presbyterian calls this sort of thing “an agony of baseness,” characteristic of “simpering imbecility which would fain be thought cultured,” and, striking an attitude of martyr resignation to the endurance of calumny, defies the epithets “fanatic” and “maw worm.” The Globe might reply by reminding its offended sister that Sara [sic] has received the public homage of the Prince and Princess of Wales. As expression of its own sentiments, the Canada Presbyterian gives an extract from the letter of a reverend gentleman, who calls this adorable woman not only “dirty, impudent and offensive,” but a name which a lay journalist cannot venture to repeat. A lay journalist, however, will hardly go beyond the mark in saying, that the enthusiasm which greets Sara [sic] Bernhardt, not only on the stage but off it, is a phenomenon characteristic of the age, and one which affords matter for reflection. . . . [T]he homage paid her in England by the cynosures of society, no doubt, denotes a change of sentiment. The science of ethics is in a state of transition.

In many ways a perceptive social critic, Smith summed up the transitional state succinctly. On the one side were the Puritans, those maw worms of fanaticism, who railed against the theatre and Bernhardt’s outrageous behaviour. On the other, were the aesthetes, simpering imbeciles to some, but actively taking on the mantle of cultured cosmopolitans by lauding Bernhardt’s artistic genius. The ascendancy of the cultured authorities, with their challenge to traditional morality, represented a dramatic change in Victorian culture.

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1 The Bystander, December, 1880.
2 Ibid. pp. 660-661.
3 The term Puritan was used by Smith, as well as certain aesthetes as a derogatory name for those conservatives who took moral issue with the theatre and Sarah Bernhardt.
In the waning decades of the nineteenth century, traditionalists who attacked the theatre based on its immorality were losing ground. With Sarah Bernhardt’s 1881 visit to Toronto, as Smith observed, we see something of a tipping point. Theatre in the city was more socially acceptable than ever before and those who defended it using arguments about its cultural significance were increasingly emboldened. The emergence of aesthetic appreciation was part of the social rebellion that Goldwin Smith reviled. Anxious to accumulate cultural capital, some of his contemporaries sought to legitimize their authority by establishing sound credentials as connoisseurs. Sarah Bernhardt’s visits allowed these would-be sophisticates—middle-class playgoers, theatre critics and urbane journalists—an ideal opportunity to perform the role of aesthetic experts. In a Foucauldian sense, they exercised power through the accumulation of a body of knowledge that justified its own authority. As with discourses such as science, medicine, psychiatry, economics and politics, aesthetic expertise operated in much the same fashion. Increasingly, Toronto’s “regime of truth” accorded aesthetic discourse, along with those who wielded it, greater power.

Toronto’s aesthetes attempted to monopolize aesthetic discourses and thereby position themselves as the arbiters of taste for society. Inevitably, the process was a negotiation. The clash over Sarah Bernhardt was just that, a single skirmish in an ongoing struggle for power and prestige. It was, however, an important fight and part of a larger battle involving public entertainment, morality and a discourse of aesthetic appreciation. Just as in other areas of the culture, citizens were learning deference to a range of experts exerting their newfound authority

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4 *The Bystander*, April, 1881. See also chapter four of this dissertation.
5 Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). Here, and elsewhere, I employ the term cultural capital in the sense of a dominant group (i.e. those possessing economic and cultural capital) defining and legitimizing what is thought to be good taste, good art et cetera.
and professionalism in the public sphere. And dramatic art underwent a similar change. And audiences, to borrow the American historian Lawrence Levine’s apt wording, were tamed.

This chapter builds upon the previous discussion of Bernhardt’s first appearance in Toronto. Its focus, however, is more directly upon class relations. I argue that Bernhardt’s 1881 visit allows historians to chart the shifting nature of aesthetic discourse in the city. The chapter begins with an exploration of the rise of the Aesthetic Movement and the role played by theatrical critics, amongst the earliest adopters of aesthetic discourse. Although some scholars argue for the liberating power of the aesthetic, my examination of the role aesthetic discourse played in disciplining playgoers—particularly the working-class gallery gods—suggests a darker import. I also demonstrate how the theatre was used by aesthetes to perform the role of experts, arbiters of good taste with a privileged kind of knowledge. In the section entitled The Puritans’ Lament, Goldwin Smith returns in a cameo appearance alongside such anti-aesthetes as the Reverend Rainsford and the W.C.T.U.. Their belief that society was undergoing a significant change in values meant that Toronto’s aesthetes were not assured an easy hegemony. The negotiation between residual values and emergent aestheticism meant that the city’s would-be connoisseurs relied on the rhetorical strategy of high talk. Although this approach was effective, there were limits to the success of aesthetic discourse. The chapter concludes by exploring two of the most significant challenges to aestheticism: an ambivalent connection to the increasing commercialization of theatre and the gender trouble caused by the Aesthetic Movement’s most famous promoter, Oscar Wilde.

8 In the American context, the late nineteenth century experienced a dramatic change in the nature of public entertainment. See, Lawrence Levine, Highbrow/Lowbrow: The emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1986), 195.
9 Ibid.
The Rise of the Aesthetic

An amorphous group that included journalists, theatrical critics and playgoers, the city’s aesthetes were part of a larger Aesthetic Movement that began in Europe and quickly migrated to North America. Relatively short-lived, from around 1868-1901, its central creed was the much maligned, “art for art’s sake.” Thanks in part to Oscar Wilde and his 1882 tour of North America, the movement became well-known throughout the United States and Canada. Praising beauty as an end in and of itself, aesthetes railed against mass-production and commercialism. In addition, the movement’s proponents shocked many of their contemporaries by asserting that artistic consciousness had little to do with morality and could be applied to arenas as diverse as poetry and personal dress.

In her exploration of the Aesthetic Movement in America, Mary Warner Blanchard argues for the liberating power of aestheticism. In it, American women found a seductive and potentially dangerous way to transform themselves. American aestheticism was more popular and widely dispersed throughout the country than its British counterpart. More importantly, Blanchard contends, its primary advocates were women who used the movement as a force for self-expression. Evidence suggests the Aesthetic Movement pervaded American society including what were previously such non-consciously artistic areas as interior decoration,

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11 Mary Warner Blanchard, Oscar Wilde’s America: Counterculture in the Gilded Age (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), xiii.
12 Ibid.
13 Ibid. Arguing on a similar tack, Jennifer Curtis revises current understanding of the fight for female dress reform in the United States by illustrating the importance of the aesthetic dress movement. Whereas so-called radicals met with outright hostility when they advocated for changes of women’s dress based on principles of equality, those proposing fashions based on aesthetic principles had a much warmer response. Jennifer Curtis, “‘We’ll fight for nature-light, truth-light and sunlight, against a world in swaddling clothes.’ Reconsidering the Aesthetic Dress Movement and Dress Reform in Nineteenth Century America,” Past Imperfect 13, (2007): 110, 129. 108-133.
women’s fashion, advertising and magazine publishing.¹⁴ In Blanchard’s telling, the parlour becomes a “comfortable theatre” for the performance of a newly transformed female self.¹⁵ Despite its role in shaping a subversive form of feminism, scholars in Canada have not pursued the Aesthetic Movement.

For Blanchard, the aesthetic was a liberating force that could be used to formulate a novel and invigorating expressions of self. Aesthetic discourse in Toronto, however, was to remain a relatively fluid phenomenon. Although it offered those who used it many opportunities for self-expression, the liberating qualities of the aesthetic came at the expense of others—particularly the city’s working class. For those who wielded it successfully, however, it provided cover, allowing Toronto’s aesthetes to bypass the traditional moral arguments levelled by anti-theatrical forces. It also lent prestige. Cloaked in high talk about beauty and form, a theatrical reviewer appeared authoritative and cultured. Likewise, for the middle-class theatre-goer in the pit, taking on an air of aesthetic appreciation allowed her to demonstrate a kind of cultural capital: particularly through new codes of behaviour that privileged the actors and the play. Art was serious business. And in order to experience it fully, to evaluate and rank it, audiences must comport themselves appropriately.

Behaviours that interfered with the critical enjoyment of the theatre, long the province of the working-class gallery gods and the high society big-wigs in their boxes, came under increasing criticism.¹⁶ Although both groups eventually succumbed to the new codes, such changes in behaviour did not happen over night. Before the gallery gods were to abandon the

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¹⁴ Blanchard, Oscar Wilde’s America, 3.
¹⁵ Ibid.
¹⁶ Keith Walden notes that elite attempts to dominate the playhouse such as arriving late and talking during performances “may have signalled the perpetrators’ sense of self-importance, but it also marked them as uncouth, undermining their claims to social leadership.” See Keith Walden, “Toronto Society’s Response to Celebrity Performers,” Canadian Historical Review 89, no. 3 (2008): 383. 373-397.
theatres during its cultural bifurcation into high art, they continued to assert their place in the playhouse through their rowdy conduct—drinking, whistling, cheering and hissing.\textsuperscript{17} And they had no problem articulating their frustration with the would-be aesthetes in the pit through a well-aimed peanut or crumpled playbill. Nevertheless, as Levine demonstrates, disciplinary processes were implemented by figures as diverse as orchestral conductors and vaudeville managers to curtail the excesses of American audiences.\textsuperscript{18} Shaming and public pressure played a role, so too did ushers and police officers. By the turn of the nineteenth century, audiences were more fragmented and disciplined.\textsuperscript{19} Less likely to act as a collective, audiences became more like the outwardly passive recipients of art we recognize today than the spirited participants of earlier times.\textsuperscript{20} Such disciplining revealed the darker side of the aesthetes’ desire for beauty and quest for self-expression.

Aesthetes existed on a spectrum from middle-class audiences hoping to experience an evening’s transcendence to its extreme proponents such as Wilde. The Aesthetic Movement’s apparent lack of moral focus earned it the contempt of society’s more conservative elements. In many respects, the movement revelled in its frequent undermining of established forms. As we shall see, great aesthetes such as Bernhardt and Oscar Wilde aroused a variety of contradictory emotions for Torontonians. In that respect, they revealed the limitations of aesthetic discourse in the city. Although theatrical critics might wax poetic on the importance of the sublime, other citizens showed more interest in prestige than poetry. Warner claims that the power the movement gave to American women provoked deep anxiety in their contemporaries.\textsuperscript{21} For many Americans, claims Blanchard, the aesthetic allowed a war-weary public the opportunity to

\textsuperscript{17} Levine, \textit{Highbrow/Lowbrow}, 177-84.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 185-88, 195-7.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 195.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Blanchard, \textit{Oscar Wilde’s America}, xiii-xiv.
explore notions of androgyny and the homoerotic.\textsuperscript{22} As the reaction against this gendered experimentation set in, the brief flourishing of the Aesthetic Movement was replaced by a more virile vision of manliness embodied by the likes of Theodore Roosevelt.\textsuperscript{23}

The Emergence of Theatrical Criticism

Of all Toronto’s would-be sophisticated, theatre critics were amongst the earliest and most public adopters of aesthetic discourse. Writers and journalists, they were more likely to encounter and spread ideas about art and literature. The theatre historian Anton Wagner refers to them as cultural gatekeepers helping to shape the tastes of their communities.\textsuperscript{24} At their aesthetic height, these critics introduced audiences to the finer points of art and its meaning.

Nevertheless, it would take some time before the profession of theatre critic came into its own. As the theatre historian Leslie O’Dell demonstrates, some of Ontario’s earliest theatricals were performed by the military in the garrison-towns of Kingston, Toronto and London.\textsuperscript{25} Although these efforts regularly received comments in the local press, patriotic journalists were rarely critical of these respected amateurs.\textsuperscript{26} By the 1860s, however, these cities had developed professional theatrical scenes that pushed military entertainments to the fringes. As theatrical offerings expanded, so too did criticism and it was not impossible, as Ann Saddlemeyer observes, to find newspaper accounts that contained insightful comments on standards.\textsuperscript{27} Perhaps the most committed theatrical critic of the early period was the editor Daniel Morrison of Toronto’s \textit{Daily

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\textsuperscript{22} Ibid, 10.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid, 71-75.
\textsuperscript{27} Saddlemeyer, “Introduction,” 14.
Leader, who provided his readers with reviews of local entertainments as early as 1854. Calling him a “midwife to the birth of regular theatrical criticism in British North America,” Patrick B. O’Neill argues that Morrison was the first to take criticism seriously, significantly changing the attitude of other editors toward the genre. The majority of newspapers at the time, however, printed puffs—accounts created by theatre managers to lure citizens into seats. Colonial newspapers were unlikely to alienate an important source of revenue with something so damaging as an honest review.

In the 1870s, E. R. Parkhurst emerged as one of the city’s leading dramatic critics, writing for the Mail from 1876 to 1898 before moving to the Globe. By this time, both newspapers printed regular columns devoted to musical and dramatic arts, as did Grip. Indeed, during this time, critics began offering serious reviews, a trend which reinforced the legitimacy of actors and the stage. Some critics remained anonymous, such as “The Man in the Front row” who wrote for the Evening Telegram and “Mack” who contributed to Saturday Night. Like Parkhurst, these critics traded in the aesthetic. Parkhust could criticize an actor for pandering to the

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28 Ibid.
31 Ibid. At stake were contracts for printing playbills, handbills as well as season passes for the editor and his family.
33 Wagner, “Critics and Criticism,” 123.
audience “at the expense of art,” while chiding him for a “lack of study and want of reading.”

He might also suggest that some subpar performers “join amateur theatrical associations to satisfy their histrionic inclinations.” Parkhurst could also turn his aesthetic judgement against the entire city. “Had it been a clog and dance party which was to appear at the Grand Opera House last night,” he bemoaned, “the theatre would have been crowded to the doors, but as it was only one of the best pieces of artistic acting on the English stage to be presented for the edification of the public so divinely appreciative as that of Toronto, there was a beggarly array of empty benches.”

Gradations of plays, players, and even audiences were part of Parkhurst’s aesthetic world view. The day after the Divine Sarah made her first appearance, he enthused: “In the evening the wealth, beauty and intellect of the city braved the rain and showed themselves superior to that narrow view which would refuse a recognition to art because its exponent may not be the exact embodiment of all that is good and righteous.” There were plays, such as Bernhardt’s, that only a highly cultivated audience could appreciate. And then there were those better suited to “please an average audience.”

The zenith of aesthetic criticism, however, was reached by Hector Charlesworth’s reviews during the 1890s, which appeared in Saturday Night and the Toronto World. Writing under the pseudonym Touchstone, and filling his reviews with high talk and sacralised digressions on art, Charlesworth made beauty his stock and trade. Theatre historian Denis Salter paints a portrait of the critic committed to the highest aesthetic standard. And it should come as no surprise that

36 Mail, 1 March 1882.
37 Mail, 21 September, 1881.
38 Mail, 12 May, 1881.
39 Mail, 21 March, 1881.
40 Mail, 24 March, 1885.
41 Mail, 26 March 1878; 7 May 1878.
42 Denis Salter, “H.W. Charlesworth and the Nationalization of Cultural Authority,” Establishing Our Boundaries: English - Canadian Theatre Criticism (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). 137-176 Salter’s focus is on
within the rarefied pages of *Saturday Night*, a magazine dedicated to high society, aesthetic discourse should find a comfortable home.\(^{43}\) Charlesworth cultivated a Wildean-inspired notion of art and beauty that bore all the trademarks of the Aesthetic Movement.\(^{44}\) As Salter observes, art mattered to the critic for its sensuousness and its liberating qualities in an age of mass-consumption, vulgarity and ugliness.\(^{45}\) Charlesworth adopted the aesthetic pose early, during the heady days of the late 1880s, “For when a boy of sixteen I had made beauty my mistress, and whatever my pursuits I have never lost sight of her.”\(^{46}\) Railing against the Philistines of Toronto and their stifling Puritanism, he cultivated the airs of a bohemian radical.\(^{47}\)

**The Theatre as Disciplinar[il]y Complex**

For Toronto’s aesthetes, there was an expanding network of theatres and lecture halls. By 1875, boasted three state-of-the-art playhouses with a capacity of over four thousand.\(^{48}\) This number was supplemented by St. Lawrence Hall, with a capacity of 1,000, and the 2,500 more that could fit in the Horticultural Gardens and Pavilion which opened in 1879: all this in a city of roughly 56,000 people. In these venues, the would-be sophisticates of Toronto performed their roles for all to see.

Efforts by the aesthetes were not only an attempt at identity formation but a play for greater social control as well. In his discussion of the *Birth of the Museum*, Tony Bennett argues

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Charlesworth’s role as an Arnolidan-inspired cultural nationalist. His argument is convincing and I am indebted to his erudition. My reading of Charlesworth, like Parkhurst, is as a critic adopting the pose of an aesthete.

\(^{43}\) Walden, “Toronto Society’s,” 374.

\(^{44}\) Salter, “H.W. Charlesworth,” 139.

\(^{45}\) *Ibid*.


\(^{47}\) Salter, “H.W. Charlesworth,” 140. Salter notes that Charlesworth was more radically experimental in his early days as a critic. Ibid, 139.

\(^{48}\) Robert Fairfield, “Theatres and Performance Halls,” *Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario, 1800-1914*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 218-32. The figures do not include less highbrow establishments nor saloons where entertainments were a regular feature. Nor do they include other respectable theatres, such as the Princess Theatre, Royal Alexandra Theatre, built in the late, 1880s, 1890s and early twentieth century.
for the role accorded to high culture in transforming the population—especially its behaviour.\textsuperscript{49} Nineteenth century reformers believed high culture could cure such social ills as drunkenness and riot while significantly improving the morals and manners of citizens.\textsuperscript{50} For Bennett, one of the chief effects of the museum was its “performative context.”\textsuperscript{51} The museum was “emulative” in the sense that it was as a space where the working class would become more refined by aping the manners of the elite.\textsuperscript{52} The key was to instil self-control so that the subject regulated his or her own behaviour through internalized mechanisms of surveillance. In Foucault’s famous deployment of the panopticon, the subject, always visible to an unseen observer, never knows when he or she is being watched and thus internalizes the disciplining gaze.\textsuperscript{53} With the “swarming of disciplinary mechanisms,” their de-institutionalization from the prison and spread into the wider culture, the playhouse operated as an extension of this subtle yet coercive practice.\textsuperscript{54} Panoptically speaking, theatres in Victorian Toronto offered audiences regular opportunities to see and be seen. Robertson Davies reminds us that well into the 1870s, theatres remained fully lit throughout the performance.\textsuperscript{55} Even after theatres darkened—forcing attention away from the audience and onto the stage—playgoers had plenty of opportunities to show off. And one of the chief ways they did so was by performing the new codes of urban refinement. In this way, Toronto’s respectable theatres bear some striking resemblances to other disciplinary institutions including the museum, department store and exhibitionary complex.

An image from the \textit{Canadian Illustrated News} shows Montreal’s Academy of Music during a military drama which involved the suitably martial spectacle of live horses pulling heavy

\textsuperscript{49} Tony Bennett, \textit{The Birth of the Museum History, Theory, Politics} (New York: Routledge, 1995), 20.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid, 22.
\textsuperscript{51} Bennett, \textit{The Birth}, 47.
\textsuperscript{52} \textit{Ibid}.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 211.
Figure 5-1  Academy of Music
equipment onto a steamer whose smokestack billowed black clouds.\textsuperscript{56} [Figure 5-1 Academy of Music] Although the subject matter is compelling as spectacle, what is more intriguing is the setup of the audience and stage. Playgoers were seated hierarchically, demonstrating for all to see, the subtle and not-so-subtle gradations of society. In much the same way that Victorians enjoyed seeing miniature reproductions of their cities, it would appear that an evening at the theatre was also a performative overview of existing class relations.\textsuperscript{57} In this particular case, four boxes appear almost as part of the stage itself. Following the curve of the playhouse, these expensive boxes face toward the rest of the audience. Although that must have made it somewhat difficult to appreciate the action on stage, allowing the aesthetic elite such opportunities for acting out their perceived superiority was very much a part of their appropriation of highbrow status.\textsuperscript{58}

Another image of the interior of a nineteenth-century theatre which appeared in the \textit{Canadian Illustrated News} gives one the sense of just how on display audiences were when they enjoyed a night at the theatre.\textsuperscript{59} [Figure 5-2 Missionary] At first one’s eye is led to the stage where a menacing group of Natives ominously encircle a praying missionary. A small orchestra accompanies the action as it reaches its violent crescendo and many respectably dressed playgoers watch the unfolding martyrdom intently. The image is a bit disquieting, not merely because of the subject matter on stage, but because the viewer is left with the distinct feeling of being watched. A closer look at the large audience reveals that many members are staring

\textsuperscript{56} \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 23 February, 1878.
\textsuperscript{57} For an interesting discussion of miniaturization, please see Keith Walden, \textit{Becoming Modern in Toronto The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture} (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 36. Walden speculates that these miniature representations of cities or industrial processes “. . . based on elaborate systems of clockwork, offered an attractive contrast to the human realm that too often seemed incomprehensible and uncontrollable.” The depiction of society in miniature, as it were, at the theatre, might also have helped assuage fears over shifting positions in the wider culture. At the very least, it was a performative effort to represent society as the aesthetic elite felt it ought to be.
\textsuperscript{58} Walden, “Toronto Society’s,” 382.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 28 May, 1870.
directly at the viewer. Their curious, or condemning, gazes make one a bit uneasy. Looking further into the background, the faces blur and lose definition. It becomes impossible to tell if they are scrutinizing the viewer or the stage. The missionary’s sacrifice was not the only one being performed that night. The onlooker too, under the constant surveillance of the smartly-dressed and black-eyed audience must surely have felt some pressure to surrender to the circling forces of conformity.

And yet the efforts of the city’s aesthetes were not uncontested. Interestingly, the theatre in its Victorian form at least, gave the balcony—in many ways the chief panoptical position—to the gallery gods. Done, of course, for reasons of sound and sight-lines, it nevertheless ceded the high ground to the opposition. In another important respect, the theatre was unlike the museum or exhibitionary complex in that it was a privately owned for-profit business. Whereas a museum or industrial exhibition was relatively free to create narratives of progress and civilization, overflowing with edifying messages, the playhouse was subjected more directly to market forces.60 The many caricatures and columns attesting to Bernhardt’s perceived greed, the accompanying obsession with the financial side of the theatre, and the salacious stories of her personal life, suggests that any efforts at creating morally uplifting entertainment would have to share the stage with less high-minded fare.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, titillation, spectacle and sensationalism were critical to Bernhardt’s success. Frequently, the theatre offered outrageous performances that ran contrary to established codes of decorum. Although the aesthetes worked hard to make the

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60 Interestingly, as Walden notes, whereas the Toronto Industrial Exhibition’s civic promoters would rather the viewing public appreciate the technological significance of various manufacturing processes, the paying public was often more interested in the “freaks, frauds and floozies” of the midway. See Walden, *Becoming Modern*, 158, 287-288, 291.
Figure 5-2 Missionary
theatre more respectable, artists such as Bernhardt were forever pushing the boundaries of acceptability in the name of both art and profit. With the theatre, the public was drawn to salacious and spectacular performances in a way that people such as Smith and Rainsford found troubling. Scantily clad female snake charmers or international celebrities with a knack for challenging the status quo meant that moralizers and reformers had to come to terms with new forms of desire that upset traditional views on everything from mass consumption to masculinity.61

**Disciplining Playgoers**

One of the things that differentiated a true devotee of the aesthetic from those with more plebeian leanings was the right kind of behaviour. From the 1870s on, aesthetes were increasingly able to define what was considered appropriate conduct inside the playhouse. The same pages that offered reviews by would-be sophisticates of the latest performance by Bernhardt were also brimming with humorous anecdotes, polite admonishments and clever satire all intended to whip Toronto theatre-goers into shape. Although many of these texts were directed at ‘respectable’ members of the audience, the most forceful condemnations were aimed squarely at the working class. The laughter at the expense of others, however, was part of the process of self-definition. As Keith Walden observes, Torontonians used rural people as touchstones to assess their own status as urban sophisticates.62 The self-definition that Walden finds at the Toronto Industrial Exhibition was much the same as that surrounding Bernhardt’s visit. The process

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61 Indeed, some did. As John W. Frick illustrates, temperance activists in the United Stats actively engaged with the theatre to help draw attention to their crusade against the evils of alcohol. See, John W. Frick, *Theatre, Culture and Temperance Reform in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
unfolded inside the Grand Opera House and in the various periodicals that those with pretensions to artistic authority read.

By the late nineteenth century, public entertainment in Toronto was becoming increasingly bifurcated between high and low. Although Canadian historians have not pursued this phenomenon, south of the border, several scholars have documented the split in American culture. Lawrence Levine, for instance, characterizes American theatre in the first half of the century as a “kaleidoscopic, democratic institution” that loved its Shakespeare along with its farces. Toward the end of the century, however, a more rigid line began to demarcate popular from elite tastes. Before this, Shakespeare in America was for all and “the various classes saw the same plays in the same theatres—though not necessarily from the same vantage point.” In the dwindling decades of the nineteenth century, however, the Bard became the fare of so-called legitimate theatre, leaving behind the heterogeneous audiences of earlier times. Even such traditionally popular entertainments as blackface minstrelsy succumbed to a form of gentrification. As the music historian Dale Cockrell demonstrates in his comprehensive study of blackface in America, theatre managers in the late nineteenth century began to crack down on the unruly behaviour—and particularly the noise—of working-class audience members. Theatres were no longer the settings for raucous audience participation but increasingly places of edification and elevation, the result of a “surprisingly rapid containment of the social noise of

65 Ibid.
66 Ibid, 165.
67 Ibid, 171.
68 Dale Cockrell, Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 146-49.
minstrelsy.” The “music” of blackface came to exclude this “social noise” as managers enforced new codes of behaviour that emphasized quiet appreciation.

Indeed, noise was at the centre of Toronto’s aesthetes’ efforts to remake the theatre. An article entitled “Misbehaviour at Public Entertainments,” chastised those who “mar every sense of decency and decorum by their loud tramping, loud talking, and most rude unceremonious ignorance [sic] of the purpose of the meeting . . . [.]” Going to the theatre was an event that required a certain dignity. *Grip* related a dialogue about the drama between a husband and wife. When asked which theatre she preferred attending, the wife replied, “I’ve not much choice, the play is what I look to. Of course, in the Horticultural Gardens, it is different, for we could go early, you could enjoy a cigar before the entertainment, and the dear children could play around the grounds and see the pretty flowers . . .” This is the Victorian ideal, bordering on the precious, of an evening at the playhouse. Loud stomping and talking would not meet with the good wife’s approval. And aesthetes laboured to wean audiences of this type of bad behaviour. *Grip* offered up, if only in cartoon, a “Theatrical Invention” “[d]esigned for people who WILL talk during the acts.” [Figure 5-3 THEATRICAL INVENTION] A well-dressed couple sit side by side in a theatre. A hose is connected from one party’s mouth to the other’s ear and vice versa allowing for conversation without disturbing the fashionable people sitting next to them.

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69 Ibid, 146.
70 Ibid, 149. Appreciation bordering on reverence was the driving force behind many of the efforts to elevate the tastes of American society. Sociologist Paul DiMaggio’s study of Boston’s cultural scene in the late nineteenth century argues that the increasing cultural bifurcation was the result of urban elites who constructed institutions that singled out, and then differentiated, high from popular culture. See Paul DiMaggio, “Cultural Entrepreneurship,” 374.
71 *Canadian Illustrated News*, 29 July, 1876.
72 *Grip*, 9 April, 1881.
73 DiMaggio argues that the middle class, anxious to distinguish itself from the working class, emerged as enthusiastic consumers of high culture. DiMaggio, “Cultural Entrepreneurship,” 383.
74 *Grip*, 10 May, 1890.
Figure 5-3  THEATRICAL INVENTION
Figure 5-4  HINTS TO PLAY-GOERS
The *Canadian Illustrated News* ran its own “Hints to Play-goers and Stage Managers,” which consisted of eight panels illustrating a corresponding number of theatrical vices.\(^{75}\) [Figure 5-4 HINTS TO PLAY-GOERS] Audiences were encouraged to “wait till the play is over” before leaving while actors are told to “spare us those repeated encores.”\(^{76}\) Two of the lessons, however, dealt with noise. Once again, a couple is shown chatting loudly with a caption reading, “Others wish to listen, if you don’t.” Another panel illustrates “How whistling rowdies should be dealt with.” It shows a large, uniformed man beating a bunch of poorly-dressed gallery gods with a truncheon while several of their co-conspirators cheer and whistle.\(^{77}\) Loud noises were increasingly singled out for rebuke. The sounds of people misbehaving drowned out the words of great artists such as Bernhardt. As the aesthetic experience became more highly prized, whether out of belief in its intrinsic value or its significance as a signifier of elite status, the audience was expected to listen appreciatively. If art was the new religion, presumably it required a certain amount of quiet reverence from the congregation.

Those who were not in the know, that is, those who did not understand the new aesthetic codes were the subject of endless humour for the aesthetes. *Grip*, in a regular section called “From Our Box,” often had a laugh at what it saw as bad taste. Commenting on the lamentable predilection of uncouth audiences for violent spectacle, it opined that “[n]othing short of actual carnage will satisfy play-goers soon and the re-establishment of gladiatorial fights may be confidently expected.”\(^{78}\) In another text dramatizing the struggle between the aesthetic and the Puritan, *Grip* poked fun at Aunt Polly, an ordinary woman not much troubled by issues of art and

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\(^{75}\) *Canadian Illustrated News*, 10 September, 1870.

\(^{76}\) Ibid.

\(^{77}\) Ibid.

\(^{78}\) *Grip*, 17 April, 1875.
beauty. Her nephew Billy, on the other hand, was depicted as an urbane wit, cleverly making fun of tiresome guests and flirting clandestinely with a young woman. When the topic of conversation turned to Sarah Bernhardt’s visit, one of the guests asked a minister if he intended to go. “Well, no” replied the reverend, “a Latin or a Greek play would be more in my line, and then they have refused me a pass in.” His pretension was undercut by his embarrassing admission that he was not given the free pass that ministers often received to public entertainments. Meanwhile, Aunt Polly has not cottoned on to the scene unfolding around her. As if to underline the humour of a moral paragon seeing the infamous actress, Aunt Polly asked, “‘Where does he preach, this Mr. Burnhard?’” Naturally, the guests “raised a laugh,” at Aunt Polly’s backwardness and she confessed: “but they didn’t tell me it was that French actress (which I make bold to say if she isn’t a hussy there never was one),—I found out after.” Aunt Polly’s comments allied her with the Puritans and her inability to follow the conversation was emblematic of her position in society. If her nephew Billy, whom she also cannot keep up with, is read as part of the clever aesthetic elite, then one can see Aunt Polly as a signifier of those who failed to stay with the times.

In attempting to set the standards for appropriate behaviour inside the playhouse, the aesthetic elite struggled to control the unruly conduct of the working classes who filled the less expensive seats of the gallery. These gallery gods, as they were known, had their own long

79 Grip, 16 April, 1881.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Middle-class youths occasionally went slumming in the galleries. C. S. Clark included an anecdote of students from the university running amuck at the Grand Opera House. Referring to an “uproar” they made in the gallery, the Telegraph opined that the manager ought not to let the students’ “boorishness” interfere with the enjoyment of other patrons. “The students behaved like a lot of blackguards among the gods at the Grand Opera House. They blew horns incessantly . . . , their uproarious behaviour causing many to leave before the opera was half finished.” The students then formed a parade some 600 strong and continued their carnivalesque antics which included serenading the women of the Moulton Ladies college. The young women therein “acted most indiscreetly in encouraging the
history with public entertainments in Toronto and their own views on how to behave—in short, their own culture. In the bifurcation of theatre into high and low, the working class’ long-standing relationship to public entertainment—beginning with its early days in the tavern and regularly reinforced by workers immigrating from across the Atlantic—came under serious attack.\(^8^3\) The cartoon illustrating “[h]ow whistling rowdies should be dealt with,” featuring a large police officer pummelling a working-class man with a truncheon, expressed the darker side of the aesthete’s desire for hegemony within this particular public sphere.\(^8^4\) The victim’s poorly dressed companions treat the beating as if it were part of the evening’s entertainment. They whistle and cheer and stand and, in almost every respect, behave exactly the way an aesthete would not.

*Grip* often had harsh words for the gallery gods:

> *Grip* would suggest that the unmannerly idiots who continue the practice of letting fragments of playbills, paper darts and the like, descend from the gallery be looked after a little. Their noise is sufficient without allowing their childish folly to take a practical form. There are many of the male sex that are preiously [sic] athirst at all times and especially at the close of each act. And on these occasions they will clamber out over whole rows of people and return redolent of cloves and things, just after the curtain has risen again, when they repeat the scrambling performance and by reason of their noise can naught be heard for about ten minutes. *Grip* hereby ordains that all persons afflicted in this wise shall sit close to doors, unless they bring in flasks of the beloved poison with them.\(^8^5\)

The reference to the “childish behaviour” infantilised the gallery gods, reducing the psychological and physical threat they posed to the ego of the aesthete. The practice of assailing their social

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\(^8^4\) *Canadian Illustrated News*, 10 September, 1870.

\(^8^5\) *Grip*, 27 March, 1875.
betters in the more expensive seats below was a long-held tradition amongst the gods. It was one of the ways they made space for themselves within the public sphere of the theatre.

Long used to physically and verbally expressing their pleasure, or lack there of, during a performance, the gallery gods chaffed under the imposition of aesthetic codes. Whereas the connoisseur’s ideal would have an audience sit passively while evaluating the performance,

Figure 5-5   A STAGE FARE
workers actively engaged with the performers and their fellow audience members. A Grip cartoon entitled “A Stage Fare,” puns on the gods’ disapproval of a poorly acted Hamlet by having the prince buffeted by an assault of “Ham and Eggs.” In another issue, Grip observed: “[t]his has been a good winter for lecturers and amateur actors. With eggs at seventy-five cents a dozen none but the wealthy can afford to throw even rotten ones.” In many ways the behaviour of the workers was the manifestation of an oppositional culture. Each peanut or piece of paper that landed squarely on the head of some fashionable theatre-goer was a critique of the pretensions to superiority that threatened to exile the gods from their long-held place in the public sphere. Aesthetes took art seriously. To their minds, the gods did not. The working class was notorious for its love of less decorous performances and its want of patience: “O ye gods! be not so ready to appreciate and encourage vulgarity. Also make less noise, and once and for all give up those fearful strains wherewith you are wont to mark your impatience when kept waiting.” The gods’ lack of taste was often commented upon. E. R. Parkhurst, for one, attacked those in the gallery who had already made up their minds to enjoy a show long before they even set foot in the playhouse.

86 It is worth noting that aesthetic appreciation was not entirely passive. Certain types of physicality were encouraged such as applauding, endless curtain calls and, especially, weeping. Spontaneous expressions of delight or sentiment were not considered out of place. Indeed, aesthetic audiences were supposed to be working hard to experience the sublime, or at least, evaluating the performance. Thus, mental activity was to replace stomping, cheering and other types inappropriate behaviour.

87 Grip, 9 August, 1890.
88 Grip, 9 April, 1881.
90 Grip, 20 February, 1875.
91 Mail, 5 December, 1882.
conflict with the working class’ understanding of an enjoyable night out. To the aesthetes, being hit in the head with a paper dart was embarrassing. Perhaps it made them question their own pretensions more than they would otherwise have liked. How reassuring then, was the steady stream of humorous stories and cartoons portraying the gods as buffoons incapable of understanding the nuances of the aesthetic.

One such story appeared in the Mail during the fervour created by Bernhardt’s first appearance in the city. Although “Seeing Sarah What a Gallery Boy Thought of the Play ‘Camille’” was intended as comedy, a closer look reveals a darker anxiety surrounding working-class behaviour.\(^\text{92}\) Ostensibly, the reader was meant to laugh at the stark differences between a sophisticated Toronto audience and the uncouth, and often violent, gallery gods. The article derived its comic energy from its protagonist, Johnny, and his lowbrow friends, who prove incapable of appreciating the great Bernhardt. The exchange was purportedly captured by a Mail employee who was waiting for the crowd to thin before leaving the Grand. His attention was caught by the rough talk of some “gallery boys,” one of whom had just seen “Burny, as they styled her.” Their leader Johnny joins the gang with the triumphant shout, “I seen her,” before proceeding to tell his story of witnessing the world-renowned performer. He bragged: “You see, boys, I laid myself out long ago to take in this show, and when the bill and programme feller struck the town I caught on to him and helped him bill the city. I stung him for a pass[.]”\(^\text{93}\) The gallery boy sounds like one of Fagin’s gang of thieves in Dickens’ *Oliver Twist*. It was only a matter of time before he became a full-fledged gallery god. And if he was stinging people now, what would he be doing in 10 or 15 years?

\(^{92}\) *Toronto Mail*, 21 March, 1881.

\(^{93}\) *Ibid.*
The writer and dedicated slummer C. S. Clark knew. As we have seen in chapter one, his social study, *Of Toronto the Good*, noted that the city’s newspaper boys were avid theatre goers capable of offering sensitive criticism. Few aesthetes shared Clark’s high opinion of gallery boys’ theatrical musings. Instead, they were concerned with the degraded and nomadic apprenticeship they served learning to be gallery gods. Clark regaled his readers with the shiftless life of these boys who quickly grew into men with few options. After a peripatetic existence wandering America’s vice-ridden cities, the boys had received the vilest education. According to Clark, the lodging houses in which they stayed were dens of iniquity where same-sex encounters were common. After this rough-and-tumble education, the young men were ready to take on the role of gallery god.

Inside the Grand Opera House, Johnny saw “lots of toney people down stairs, and they was all readin’ books, wot I never seen before in a the-atre.” Making himself at home in the gallery, Johnny looked down on the fashionable aesthetes reading programs that contained outlines of the scenes for those who could not speak French. Johnny, in an attempt to make sense of it all, asked a gallery god various questions throughout the performance. The older man’s answers revealed the perceived character of an average god and demonstrated that class’ inability to comprehend the experience of seeing the Divine Sarah. Johnny noted that she “had gloves on with legs up to her shoulders, but they was all wrinkled, because they were a misfit, and the man

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95 Clark, *Of Toronto*, 83.
96 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
98 Susan E. Houston argues that children who worked the streets created their own culture that revolved around pool halls and theatres and was characterized by petty theft and mutual treachery. Susan E. Houston, “The ‘Waifs and Strays’ of a Late Victorian City: Juvenile Delinquents in Toronto,” in *Childhood and Family in Canadian History* in Ed. Joy Parr (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc., 1982), 139-40. Timothy J. Gilfoyle contends that street-youth in the second half of the nineteenth century fashioned a “confrontational and oppositional subculture relative to adult authority. Timothy J. Gilfoyle, “Street-Rats and Gutter-Snipes: Child Pickpockets and Street Culture in New York City, 1850-1900,” *Journal of Social History* 37, no. 4 (2004): 870.
99 Ibid.
said that the feller wot made them gloves ought to be clubbed, and he laughed again.”\textsuperscript{100} The inability of either of these two to understand the latest French fashion, coupled with the casual violence, singled them out for ridicule by the artistic sophisticates reading the story. So too did Johnny’s inability to distinguish fact from fiction. The would-be-god concluded that “[i]t must have been purty cold on the stage for she commenced to cough, and the gal with the banged hair put a white cloak like a sheepskin around her.”\textsuperscript{101} Bernhardt was renowned for her ability to portray the consumptive heroine with startling realism. That Johnny did not get it was, to the mind of an aesthete at least, indicative of his class.

One of the most important traits of the gods, as defined by bourgeois aesthetes, was their penchant for violence. When Bernhardt’s male lead is discussed, one of Johnny’s gang cannot help but interpret his part through the lens of more lowbrow entertainment. Thus, Maloney—his Irish name signifying much—asked, “hed he pistols on . . .?”\textsuperscript{102} As before, the obsession with violence resonated with the aesthetes as something characteristic of the gallery gods. Again he asked, “Yes, he had his pistols, hedn’t he, and his hoss was tied up outside?” A particularly moving point in Bernhardt’s performance of \textit{Camille} comes when she is struck symbolically with a large sum of money. Confronted with this denouement, Johnny was disappointed. In keeping with his class, he expected a more direct form of violence: “He shoved his hand into his pocket, and I thought the shootin’ was goin’ to begin. But he pulled out a wad of bills . . . and hit her on the head with them so hard that she fell down.”\textsuperscript{103} Steeped as they were in lowbrow forms of popular culture, the gallery boys and their older cousins, at least from the perspective of the \textit{Mail} observer, were incapable of experiencing one of the most moving scenes in contemporary drama.

\textsuperscript{100} \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{101} \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Ibid.}  
\textsuperscript{103} \textit{Ibid.}
To Toronto’s would-be aesthetes, there could be no better justification for disqualifying these low others from the public sphere of the playhouse.

**The Puritans’ Lament**

But attempts to reform the middle class and suppress the gallery gods were not the only efforts undertaken by the city’s theatrical aesthetes. The so-called Puritans, with their residual traditionalism, also faced the withering contempt of the would-be sophisticates. Surveying “The Drama in Toronto,” Goldwin Smith averred that “Ultra-culturists, such as Mr. Matthew Arnold, are never tired of defiling the graves of the Puritans, for having shut up the playhouse.”

Although he recognized that Toronto’s Puritans were fighting a losing battle, Smith, nevertheless, believed the aesthetes were too radical in their rejection of the old values—especially when it came to Bernhardt:

> If the Puritan feeling lingers in some minds, it deserves respect; but it has outlived the state of things which made it reasonable, as may be said also of the feeling, similar in origin, against dancing. On the other hand, the culturists expect too much: actors and actresses are not priests and priestesses: when they have given us an evening’s innocent pleasure, and at the same time awakened right sympathies, they have done their part. There is a limit, though some rhapsodists seem not to think so, to the spiritual benefits of seeing Rachel or Sarah Bernhardt.

Although Smith was hardly a Puritan, he could not help but conceive of the division in religious terms. The aesthetes worshiped at the false idol of art. In another essay, he chided those “who wish to erect Art into a religion.” Once again, Smith took issue with the class of people who “revile the Puritans for closing the playhouse, and the Methodists for shunning it[.]” And at times he could easily be mistaken for some enraged preacher, “[t]here are playhouses now which

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104 *The Bystander*, March, 1880.
105 Ibid.
106 *The Bystander*, June, 1880.
ought to be shut up, and which not only Methodism but decency will shun."

"[T]here are exhibitions," he continued, "sometimes in respectable theaters under the name of Opera Bouffe, every performer in which deserves to be dragged through a horse pond, where he would meet nothing so filthy as himself." Smith left no doubt as to his allegiance.

Indeed, despite his assertions to the contrary, Smith often made not only the same arguments as the Puritans but in the same religious tone and tenor. Like many of the Puritans, he was particularly irritated by those who argued that the theatre was a place of moral education while simultaneously implying that Bernhardt’s talents outweighed her personal indiscretions. "[T]he Stage," he insisted, "cannot be proclaimed out of the pale of morality and at the same time recommended to general support as an organ of moral improvement." Although not normally keen on prying into the private lives of celebrities, Smith made an exception for Bernhardt: “in this case the social question has been pressed on the public conscience both by the conduct of the lady herself, and by that of her worshippers.” It was particularly galling that some of these aesthetic congregants were “recognized leaders of opinion and . . . have insisted on her receiving not only professional but social homage.” Smith, like the Puritans, was preoccupied with the shift in attitudes amongst the elite.

As for the Puritans proper, they argued their case vehemently. In response to the Reverend Rainsford’s letter, one citizen admonished, “we must not allow our admiration for genius to blot out our regard for womanly virtue.” Another, giving the name Hildegarde,
explained why an immoral actress such as Bernhardt must not be forgiven simply on account of her talent:

Because no moral principle can be inculcated by a person known to be devoid of that principle. Suppose Sara [sic] Bernhardt was portraying [sic] the character of a young woman striving against temptation and successfully resisting it, even when all the world seemed against her. Would it be possible for a person fully aware of the fact that the actress lived a life the very opposite of that which the writer of the play wished to praise, to reconcile the inconsistencies of the real and assumed character of the actress, and to receive any benefit from her rendition of the conception of the writer? It seems to me that her acting would encourage hypocrisy, and would afford an example of the way in which a clever woman can, by concealing her feelings, create a false impression in the minds of her acquaintances.  

Hildegarde’s moral certainty bristled at the thought of Bernhardt’s passing for something she was not. The Reverend Rainsford, for his part, was pretty clear on the issue of genius as excuse.

“Shall those who take the name of Christ on their lips, kneel at His holy table, and call themselves His followers, turn aside to worship a genius that persistently, defiantly, notoriously, disobeys the laws He made beautiful,” he asked rhetorically, “—a genius that has made the path of obedience to that law more difficult to be followed.” The whiff of sulphur that Rainsford invoked—the seductive power of the false idol to which the aesthetes prayed—was intentional.

**Fighting Over the Aesthetic**

Increasingly, however, in the heady days of late Victorian Toronto, aesthetes were emboldened to challenge the likes of Rainsford. The anonymous Gunhilda, from the previous chapter, referred to Bernhardt’s “talents and brilliancy, which have excited the wonder and admiration of mankind[.]” Calling Rainsford a “clerical puritan,” Gunhilda argued that he was incapable of fully appreciating the actress’ genius. Those who went to see the great tragedienne,

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113 *The Toronto Mail*, 25 March, 1881.
114 *The Toronto Mail*, 17 March, 1881.
115 *The Toronto Mail*, 23 March, 1881.
“treated her appearance on the stage just as they would have treated the appearance of one of the pictures on the walls of a public gallery,” claimed another would-be connoisseur. By invoking an additional medium of aesthetic appreciation, the art gallery, the writer cultivated an air of worldly sophistication. Adopting an amoral attitude of art for arts sake, the aesthete argued: “they regard either as a matter of public interest in a purely artistic sense, and deriv[e] a moral significance only from the moral character of the play or picture.”

The sensitive aficionado declared, “we deplore the coarseness and ill-manners displayed by many of the representatives and leaders of our public opinion towards this woman and stranger[.]” Taking churchmen to task for their limited artistic appreciation and coarse vulgarity was a sign that aesthetes were growing ever more comfortable in their roles as defenders of art against narrow-minded Puritanism.

In an era of expanding public entertainment, the Puritans began to look decidedly behind the times. “People are laughing at the Rev. Dr. Hunter, of Yorkville,” said The Evening Telegram, “because he disapproves of dancing, base-ball, cricket and indoor and outdoor amusements . . . [.]” “It’s beginning to look as if the only amusement that our esteemed Yorkville friend intends to leave the young folks,” teased The Telegram, “is the manufacture of bedquilts, with your name inserted at ten cents a square, for presentation to the pastor.” Given the wide variety of spectacles available to Toronto audiences, including Bernhardt’s celebrated performances, the humour of the story takes on a more derisive tone. There was a considerable gulf between Dr. Hunter’s world and the reality of late nineteenth-century Toronto. If people

116 Canadian Illustrated News, 29 January, 1881.
117 Ibid.
118 Ibid.
119 The Evening Telegram, 15 February, 1881.
120 Ibid.
were laughing at the minister, it was because he could not see how far behind the times he really was.

But just as the gallery gods clung to their traditional rights, Toronto’s Puritans zealously fought against the cultural change ushered in by the aesthetes. In their responses to the public pretensions of the city’s sophisticates, one can make out the boundaries of the aesthetic discourse. One of the things that the Puritan side had going for it, rhetorically speaking, was the prejudice linking actresses and prostitutes. To a wide segment of the population the actress was suspect. Hence the shock felt by Goldwin Smith—and his concern over social rebellion—when society elevated these infamous women. Sarah Bernhardt, the quintessential Dame aux Camellias, was received everywhere by the leaders of society. “It is coming to be deemed very morose and narrow,” said Smith sourly, “to say anything against the Dame aux Camellias.” “We are told,” he persisted, “that in London, as well as in Parisian society, she has made her way through the old social barriers . . . and secured recognition as an object of legitimate interest.” Camille is the story of a courtesan who dies nobly and Smith contended perceptively that “there is something fascinating in the idea of a vein of good lurking beneath a surface of evil and people take pleasure in backing up warmhearted [sic] and spirited vice against cold pharisism [sic] or seraphic insipidity.” Finding a substantial change in society’s values, a preference for Camille to the old Puritanical views, Smith could not help but remind his audience that the honourable courtesan was nothing more than the sparkling “. . . apex of a pyramid the base of which does not glitter.”

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122 *The Bystander*, February 1881.
123 *Ibid*.
124 *Ibid*.
125 *Ibid*.
The base to which Smith referred, were the many prostitutes who walked the streets and frequented the theatres of the nation’s larger cities:

In Montreal we are told there are one hundred and eleven houses of ill fame; and the lives and ends of the wretched creatures who fill these houses are of all the depths of human misery and shame the very lowest. A true history of the career of a low prostitute ought to be bound up with the *Dame aux Camellias*.\(^{126}\)

The stage, to the mind of Smith, had not transcended its seedy past. Rainsford, felt similarly, and remarked upon “. . . the tainted atmosphere that unfortunately already surrounds the profession of the stage[.].”\(^{127}\) The stain on the reputation of the theatre had a great deal to do with the perception that performers were immoral. Bernhardt was, to some at least, only one of many suspect actresses. One citizen joked that “the clergy will have a nice time of it if they undertake to enquire into the moral character of all the actors and actresses who strut their brief hour upon the stage in Toronto . . . “\(^{128}\)

For the aesthetes, the moral attack on the actress as prostitute required a careful response. Reminding people of the high social standing of those who celebrated actresses such as Bernhardt, be it the Prince of Wales or the King of Greece, was one way to rescue the morality of these liminal women. Another was to point out the hypocrisy of the puritans. Thus, an occasional trope in the discourse surrounding Bernhardt was to mention the New Testament story of Mary Magdalene. One of Jesus’ most devout followers, Mary Magdalene earned Christ’s forgiveness. Thus, one of Bernhardt’s defenders wrote satirically: “‘Didn’t Christ spurn Mary Magdalen?’ Our saviour didn’t say, ‘Let him among you who is without sin cast the first stone.’ Oh, no; he kicked poor Mary Magdalen down and sat on her.”\(^{129}\) Another defender claimed that

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\(^{126}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{127}\) *The Toronto Mail*, 17 March, 1881.  
\(^{128}\) *The Evening Telegram*, 18 March, 1881.  
\(^{129}\) *The Toronto Mail*, 25 March, 1881.
whatever went on in Bernhardt’s private life was irrelevant to the stage because, “[i]n her dramatic performance she does certainly not display any immorality.” Although Puritans would no doubt disagree, the supporter went on to ask “if this artist should wish to hear the Rev. Mr. Rainsford preach, would he order the whole congregation out of the church and himself vacate the pulpit?” In a similar tone, a newspaper carried the story of a minister publicly shamed after zealously denouncing Bernhardt from his pulpit. The minister threatened that “if any of the congregation of the Church attempted to receive the Sacrament after having been present at any one of her performances, he the preacher would repel them from his Communion table.” The newspaper reported that “[a] voice was heard to cry out ‘I thought it was the Lord’s table, not Mr. ----,’ The clergyman said no more.” Increasingly, aesthetes were comfortable launching attacks on the clergy. What is more, they did so from the moral high ground, criticizing the church from a position that should have been its own.

**High Talk and the Defence of Bernhardt**

Paying a lot of money to see a woman renowned for flaunting the morality of her day presented certain challenges to the aesthetes. The transgressive tendencies of public entertainment, its radical challenging of established meanings and its opening up of hitherto closed avenues of desire, meant that there was a constant effort to police the boundaries of the acceptable. Toronto’s cultural authorities were in the midst of rescuing the theatre from the low tastes of the gallery gods and the fire and brimstone of the Puritans. One of their chief rhetorical strategies was high talk. The art historian and cultural critic David Freedberg argues that high

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130 *The Toronto Mail*, 19 March, 1881.
131 Ibid.
132 Ibid. Emphasis in original.
133 Ibid.
talk was designed to impart status upon the critic. High talk, among other things, can include the use of technical jargon and bogus professionalism. For Toronto’s would-be arbiters of taste, references to art, the sublime and the aesthetic was part of the process of establishing codes of taste and appropriating the power of the expert.

Thus, reviews of Bernhardt’s performances were filled with the discriminating comments and tasteful observations that make up high talk. It was this discourse around the Divine Sarah that so irked Goldwin Smith: “[a]ll the high language which we have been hearing on this subject is a mockery if in the drama there is no distinction between right and wrong, between a true wife and an adulteress, or a concubine.” Although scholars such as Freedberg maintain that high talk is an effective way of sanitizing art, Toronto’s sophisticates were more concerned with appropriating the status that accompanies expert knowledge. Whereas Freedberg argues for something akin to a return to innocence, an effort to loose the shackles of bourgeois education, the aesthetes were in the process of creating and disseminating those very standards that Freedberg laments.

One of the easiest ways to take on the aura of expert was to foster a judgemental critical persona. Thus, one aesthete described the quality of the city’s theatre reviews in both the *Globe* and the *Mail* as “wretched.” Another wrote: “A common remark by people who know what criticism is, on reading a ‘notice’ in the morning papers is ‘that man should write one more and die.’” A death notice was a pretty harsh penalty for bad writing but the stakes were high. If

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135 Ibid, 431.
136 *The Bystander*, February, 1881.
137 Freedberg, *The Power*, 431. Expanding on an idea from Roland Barthes, Freedberg writes, “We have, in a sense, to try to lose our education (at the same time acknowledging that we never can) and become ‘primitive’ and crazy . . .”
138 *The Evening Telegram*, 7 February, 1881.
139 Ibid.
death was a little too extreme, there was always exile: “An actor who pronounces ‘been seen’ as if it were ‘benzine’ had better go to Manitoba and farm than be a Jonah in a stock company.”

Another way to appear like a cultural authority was to cultivate the impression of being particularly learned. When critics wrote about Bernhardt, they could give free rein to their aesthetic pretensions. Theatrical aficionados compared artists, Bernhardt to Rachel for instance, and debated the merits of past productions with current undertakings. And they were always anxious to show the breadth of their knowledge. It never hurt, for instance, to include a particularly moving passage from Tennyson in one’s review. Nor was it ever a bad idea to invoke the sublime. E. R. Parkhurst rhapsodizing about one of her death scenes raved, “Mddle. Bernhardt’s magnificent picture of approaching death alone redeems all this from condemnation, and lifts the stalest tricks of the melo-dramatist into the realms of sublime art.”

As patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel, so too was the sublime for the would-be aesthete.

Not surprisingly, one of the favourite strategies for Toronto critics was to drop liberal amounts of technical jargon or French and Latin into their reviews. Thus, the authority who recommended a career in agriculture for those with poor pronunciation referred to Jonahs. Stage types were thought to be pretty superstitious and Jonahs were performers cursed to doom entire productions with their bad acting. Another expert compared Bernhardt’s performance with that of another great artist, Salvini, and concluded his review with the observation: “’Ars est celare artem,’ and it is in this subtle concealment of the art that we recognize the artist’s powers to the

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140 The Evening Telegram, 18 February, 1881.
141 See, for example, Canadian Illustrated News, 18 December, 1881; Globe 21 March, 1881.
142 Globe, 21 March, 1881.
143 Toronto Mail, 21 March, 1881.
144 Sailors also used the term for seamen who brought bad luck to the ship. The connections to sailing, given the details of the book of the Old Testament that bears his name, are perhaps more straightforward than the connection to acting.
In case it were not enough that the reviewer preferred Salvini’s talents to those of the great Bernhardt, the casual dropping of Latin delivered the *coup de grace* to any doubters. Here was a true arbiter of taste.

Someone who could critically compare the performances of great artists, who could weigh the value of their different repertoires or, in the case of the following, distinguish between the dramatic tastes of French and English audiences, had reached the pinnacle of good taste:

If one would attempt to give an estimate of Sara [sic] Bernhardt’s power as an actress, it is necessary that one fundamental consideration be entertained, which has been overlooked by all critics, both English and American, whose deliverances the writer has perused. It has been tacitly assumed by one and all that qualities of character are absolute, that is to say, that nobility, jealousy, love and hate take one outward form and expression, and are not “conditioned” by national character, no matter whether these qualities be manifested in an individual of the serious and morose English people, or the light and vivacious French people.

The rhetorical strategy of high talk lent the author an air of unrivalled sophistication. The writer goes on at length about such things as “The French Conception of Art” and “Unity, Completeness and Satisfaction.” To have a mastery of two different national tastes was something any aesthete would envy.

Perhaps the most useful rhetorical strategy for Toronto’s aesthetes was the appeal to international authority. “Americans can never help flinging themselves at the feet of celebrity,” wrote Smith, “especially when it comes to them accredited by European opinion, which, and English opinion above all, they regard with excessive deference.” Smith might as well have been talking about Toronto’s would-be taste makers. The local press was filled with international examples of the kind of dramatic criticism that Toronto’s aesthetes adored. They could, for

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145 *Canadian Illustrated News*, 29 January, 1881. The Latin translates as, “True art is to conceal art.”
146 *The Evening Telegram*, 21 March, 1881. See also *Canadian Illustrated News*, 21 May, 1881.
148 *The Bystander*, December, 1880.
example, read reviews by prominent English critics such as George Augustus Sala. Sala’s views on Sarah Bernhardt featured prominently in the Canadian Illustrated News in a prelude to the great actress’ first Canadian tour.\textsuperscript{149} His reviews were for the “general art-loving public . . .” that went to the theatre “night after night, season after season.”\textsuperscript{150} As an authority on the theatre, Sala could remember a time when he “used to see a play almost every night. . . .”\textsuperscript{151} Of course, one would expect that from the sort of person who could compare Bernhardt’s performances to those of Rachel, or quote long passages of French as if he actually understood what they meant.

Indeed, Sala’s columns might have been a model for the never-ending cavalcade of connoisseurs who claimed the status of authority in the city’s press. Many Torontonians looked to international experts before making their minds up about an artist. If the great arbiters of taste had feted her, then it was probably safe for Toronto’s aesthetes to do the same. Indeed, mentioning the reception she received in London or Paris was another way of silencing critics. One commentator observed that “[w]hen she was in England she was all the rage, and the Prince of Wales paid her no end of attention.”\textsuperscript{152}

But the international appeal—particularly when it involved France—only went so far. To reference France was not a neutral, or uncommon, act. For the city’s sophisticates, France was the centre of intellectual and artistic enlightenment. It would, for example, be difficult for Toronto audiences to reach the level of sophistication attained by their counterparts in the city of Rouen, who were reported in the Toronto press to be “the most critical and realistic in the world.”\textsuperscript{153} Appearing during the debate surrounding Bernhardt, the newspaper story noted that audiences there had not permitted an actress to perform until she had removed a breastpin that

\textsuperscript{149} Canadian Illustrated News, 18 December, 1880.
\textsuperscript{150} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid, 387.
\textsuperscript{152} The Evening Telegram, 19 March, 1881.
\textsuperscript{153} The Evening Telegram, 7 February, 1881.
contained a photograph. Photography had not been invented at the time of the play’s first production and the offended audience would brook no such anachronism. The actress, noted the Toronto journalist, received an ovation when the offending item was removed.154

To the city’s Puritans, however, France was a land of widespread decadence. The W.C.T.U., for instance, lamented “that freeborn Canadian Women . . . are so willing to enter a state of slavery, that they will bend their heads at the nod of a Frenchman and put a yoke so heavy that it tears the clothing from neck and arms, and leaves it trailing behind them[.]”155 These same slaves, no doubt, wore these indecent French clothes to Bernhardt’s performances. And that Bernhardt was French made it all the more difficult for Puritans to accept her. Goldwin Smith, echoing the anti-French sentiment of the Puritans, argued that the trouble came from the “circle, principally in Paris, of which the sentiment is that embodied in a number of well-known works of fiction.”156 Smith was attacking the novels of Émile Zola and his contemporaries which Bernhardt regularly performed in staged adaptations. “In the Old World it is possible that the enthusiasm for culture or dramatic art may, in the case of a magnificent actress, overpower all other thoughts . . .” continued Smith, “[but] . . .[i]n communities like ours, this can hardly be the case[.]”157 To him, the types of plays performed by actresses such as Bernhardt, belonged to “that Parisian class which cleanly minded English people cannot thoroughly appreciate[.]”158 That so many did enjoy Bernhardt’s work distressed Smith to no end. Good morals were essential to Anglo-Saxon superiority, he concluded, “and that everything said to the contrary in French novels or other depositories of elegant pruriency [sic] is nonsense.”159

154 Ibid.
155 Report of the Sixth Convention of the Dominion W.C.T.U. Held at Winnipeg from June 16th to 20th. 1893, 82.
156 The Bystander, December 1880.
157 Ibid.
158 The Bystander, April 1881.
159 Ibid.
W.C.T.U., were somewhat more optimistic: “Of France, that country where the moral standard has been so low one could hardly detect it, Rev. J. C. Braq writes: ‘A more practical conception of morality has become current. The idea of Art, for Art’s sake, is losing ground.’”\(^{160}\) Perhaps there was hope still.

Even aesthetes could be troubled by France. E. R. Parkhurst, for one, agreed that Bernhardt was liable for a host of “unwholesome French plays, which are responsible for a good deal of the tone of the modern English drama.”\(^{161}\) Although, as an aesthete, he was forced to concede that in comparison with their French colleagues “Americans and English lack original talent,” he longed for the day when Anglo-Saxon authors would “give the English-speaking world plays [of] noble and elevating sentiment without being mawkish.”\(^{162}\) France offered a critique of North American materialism but in bristling against it so vehemently, the New World betrayed its insecurity. “The Paris papers, in discussing Sarah Bernhardt’s American engagement,” noted one defensive Canadian, “allude to the United States in a tone of amusing misconception. A dread seems prevalent that the talented actress will, in some vague manner, be shorn of all her gifts by that dark ordeal, a season in America.”\(^{163}\) Protesting perhaps a bit too much, he continued: “That the good Parisians have a rooted idea of America still being a broad, barren, semi-barbarous country is made amusingly apparent, and Sarah Bernhardt’s French admirers firmly believe she will not return from our distant shores the same.”\(^{164}\)

For Toronto’s sophisticates, their inability to master the French language was also a source of tension and amusement. As we have seen, casually dropping a bit of French into one’s theatre review added to the perceived sophistication of the author. Not very many Torontonians

\(^{160}\) Report of the Sixth Convention of the Dominion W.C.T.U. Held at Winnipeg from June 16\(^{th}\) to 20\(^{th}\). 1893, 82.

\(^{161}\) Mail, 21 March, 1881.

\(^{162}\) Ibid.

\(^{163}\) Mail, 17 July, 1880.

\(^{164}\) Ibid.
could count French amongst their linguistic accomplishments. That Bernhardt’s performances were all in French made for some interesting reviews. “To those who understood French sufficiently to follow the dialogue,” remarked one clever aesthete, “both plays were of surprising power and interest, while even those ignorant of the meaning of the torrent of words . . . gathered from her expressions and gestures the gist of the plot.”\footnote{Grip, 11 April, 1896.} Others were even less charitable, “Perhaps two hundred people understood the language of La Tosca at the Academy last week; the balance of the audience could only watch the actions and expressions of the actors.”\footnote{Saturday Night, 7 November, 1891.} But even if the audience could not understand what was happening on stage, it probably understood a great deal of what was going on off stage, as it were. If one came away with some cultural capital from the evening’s performance, then it was not a complete waste; after all, that was what many in the audience were paying for.

\textbf{The Challenge to Aesthetic Discourse}

An increasing focus on consumption—including the cost of productions and the salaries of performers—had a paradoxical relationship with the discourse of aestheticism.\footnote{See for example, Canadian Illustrated News, 7 August, 1875; Canadian Illustrated News, 22 March, 1879.} From one perspective, the taint of filthy lucre could undermine the almost religious nature cultivated by certain proponents of the Aesthetic Movement.\footnote{DiMaggio, “Cultural Entrepreneurship,” 376. The author notes that in late nineteenth-century Boston, true art was managed by not-for-profit corporations while lowbrow institutions were produced by entrepreneurs for the market. The profit motive thus undermined claims to artistic legitimacy.} What to make of the “rich Englishman,” who “insisted upon purchasing the looking-glass Mdme. Bernhardt . . . uses in playing in the Dameaus Cameli\text{a}s [sic]. We are told that the enamoured gentleman gave 2,000 francs for it.”\footnote{Canadian Illustrated News, 24 June, 1882.} Hardly surprising in a world where performers such as the Divine Sarah earned sums unimaginable to the average citizen. In an account of her first North American tour, the \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}
commented that the “prevailing idea among the actors and actresses was that they should receive from three to five times their real worth in salaries.”

In his work *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger treats the fraught interconnection between art and money. In reference to an original painting in the era of mechanical reproduction, he observes that the price it fetches at market is an indication of its spiritual value. Consequently, the work is surrounded by an air of “bogus religiosity.” The bogus religiosity that encircled Bernhardt’s performances, as Smith and others pointed out, was, in Berger’s terms, a form of “mystification.” The high talk surrounding the great actress was both undercut and reinforced by the ‘market talk’ that accompanied it. Although it qualified the notion of art for art’s sake, in a time of increasing commodification of art, the obsessive references to money also lent Bernhardt an air of legitimacy as well. But just as the price of art in the age of mechanical reproduction is supposedly a reflection of its spiritual value, so too could the high cost of a show legitimize its aesthetic *bona fides*. In something of a tautology, that she was so well paid was proof that Bernhardt’s performances were transcendentally aesthetic.

Nevertheless, the high talk of the aesthetes was undermined by an obsession with cost, fashion and celebrity that gripped some of their fellow audience members. The fixation on how much Bernhardt made, or how much she spent, did not really fall within the purview of beauty as defined by the great arbiters of taste. Likewise, concern about her cutting edge fashion or latest intrigue, while frivolous gossip to some, was essential news to others. The newspapers of the day were filled with stories about just how much the celebrity took in from her various performances.

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170 *Canadian Illustrated News*, 18 September, 1880.
172 Ibid.
173 Ibid, 11.
175 For examples of press accounts referring to Bernhardt’s remuneration, see, *Canadian Illustrated News*, 4 June, 1881; *Canadian Illustrated News*, 17 June, 1882; *Canadian Illustrated News*, 4 March, 1882; and *Grip*, 19 December, 1891; *Globe*, 16 March, 1881.
“During her stay in the States,” claimed one report, “she performed 152 times, and has earned since her departure from France the enormous sum of thirty-six thousand pounds sterling.”176 The numbers were mind-boggling to Torontonians. “After performing in London . . . ,” continued the story, “she proposes to make a starring tour through the other capitals of Europe.”177 The litany of articles written about the vast amounts of money involved in her tours suggests a growing obsession with the commercial side of public entertainment. The numbers for the 1881 performances in Toronto were reported to curious readers: “About $2,600 was taken yesterday for tickets for the Bernhardt performance on Saturday. . . . Mlle. Bernhardt was guaranteed $2,000 for the evening performance before she accepted the engagement to come here.”178 All the talk of money affected the perception of the actress and diminished the air of religiosity around the theatre created by the aesthetic elite.

Reports from New York emerged that speculators had purchased all the best seats in the house and hoped to turn a healthy profit.179 The same piece noted that only three hours after opening, the box office had sold some $25,000 worth of tickets.180 As we have seen in the previous chapter, Grip depicted Bernhardt waving good bye to America from the deck of the ship that was to take her back to Europe; the stick-figure image is made up almost entirely of dollar signs.181 In an atmosphere that increasingly associated value of a thing with its market price, one cannot help but wonder whether Grip’s tongue-in-cheek adieu is a subtle attack or grudging endorsement.

176 Canadian Illustrated News, 4 June, 1881.
177 Ibid.
178 The Globe, 16 March, 1881.
179 Grip, 16 October, 1880.
180 Ibid.
181 Grip, 28 May, 1881.
The cartoon, alas, does no justice to her costly wardrobe which was the focus of a great deal of public attention:

Mlle. Bernhardt intends to take the ladies of the new continent by storm, not only in her acting, but in the manner of her dresses. A famous house in the Rue de la Paix is now making for her twelve costumes at a cost of 60,000 francs. She has already bought 300 pairs of gloves, and her stockings and slippers are said to be marvels of richness and beauty.\footnote{Canadian Illustrated News, 18 September, 1880.}

The rest of the lengthy article was devoted to how much money was spent on the production, the salaries of the supporting company, the arrangements for Bernhardt’s personal servants and other issues relating to cost. Her talent as an actress was entirely eclipsed by material concerns. Another reviewer, hoping to please “the feminine portion of the community,” devoted considerable space to a “description of the toilets of the great actress[.]”\footnote{The Toronto Mail, 6 June, 1887.} In the long accounting of her wardrobe, not a single mention was made of Bernhardt’s abilities as a performer. The always perceptive \textit{Grip} quipped wryly: “Her performances will no doubt sustain her world-wide reputation, but whatever we may think of her acting her dresses will certainly be Worth a good deal.”\footnote{\textit{Grip}, 19 March, 1881.} “It is consoling to know,” he punned, “that although the swells of our first families will not be able to catch the meaning of her words, they will understand her millinery effects.”\footnote{\textit{Ibid}.}

That many in the audience, particularly women, purchased tickets to Bernhardt’s shows for the sole purpose of seeing the latest French fashions was not lost on the aesthetes.

As the century waned, the connection between theatre and consumption grew ever more entwined. Nowhere was this more the case than in fashion.\footnote{See Joel Kaplan and Sheila Stowell, \textit{Theatre and Fashion: Oscar Wilde to the Suffragettes} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For a broader account of consumption see Susan Matt, \textit{Keeping Up with the Joneses: Envy in American Consumer Society, 1890-1930} (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003) and Gary Cross, \textit{An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America} (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000). It is hardly surprising that the}
performative aspects of fashion would have a symbiotic relationship to the stage. Patterns of mass consumption emerged alongside the expansion of the cult of celebrity. Women such as Bernhardt or Lillie Langtry were looked to not only for their talent as performers, but also for their fashion sense and good looks. Newspapers were filled with stories about the cost and elaborate detail of their gowns, secrets of their beauty and, indeed, the products they used.

“Madame Sarah Bernhardt’s latest toilette,” extolled the Canadian Illustrated News, “is a dress dotted with white and black dots, with a silk scarf tied below the waist in the Turkish fashion; a coat-bodice in black velvet, with splendid white lace, and a bolero hat veiled in black and white blonde.” Newspapers reported that Washington was considering charging a duty on her costly and extensive wardrobe.

Increasingly, theatrical programs played host to advertisements touting a dizzying array of beauty products, dress makers, milliners and corset manufacturers. And Toronto audiences responded. Keith Walden notes that society elites, both as audience members and as amateur performers seeking to preserve their social status, paid considerable attention to their costumes. Theatre historian Marlis Erica Schweitzer notes that an on-stage “revolution in modern gowns” took place around the turn of the twentieth century. Combining a desire for realism in theatre with expanding notions of celebrity, actresses began wearing dresses as expensive and well-made as the society women they were portraying on stage. As we have seen, evidence suggests, however, that celebrity actresses such as Bernhardt were already famous for their pricey gowns.

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187 Canadian Illustrated News, 2 July, 1881. For further examples, see Evening Telegram 23 March, 1881; Evening Telegram, 24 March, 1881; Canadian Illustrated News, 24 July, 1880; Toronto Mail, 23 March, 1881; Toronto Mail, 6 June, 1887; Canadian Illustrated News, 18 September, 1880. Not surprisingly, a similar, if more astonished coverage, followed Oscar Wilde. See, for instance, Canadian Illustrated News, 24 June, 1882.
188 Canadian Illustrated News, 15 January 1881.
191 Ibid.
decades before the turn of the century. Nevertheless, as Schweitzer notes, recent scholarship has elaborated the ways in which fashion has been a productive venue for women—from department store workers and milliners to factory girls—to create a space for themselves in the public sphere and to mitigate the harsher effects of industrial capitalism.\textsuperscript{192}

*Grip* was less sympathetic to the proto feminist intentions of those who, literally, let style get in the way of substance: “This time it is those in the audience, against whom he has received about a bushel of letters . . . complaining that the height of modern female headgear prevents anyone behind them from viewing the stage[.].”\textsuperscript{193} “He fears nothing will be of any use against the demon of Fashion . . .” and noted that the same trend occurred at churches “where however it does not appear to incommode his friends so much.”\textsuperscript{194} *Grip* was not the only publication seeking to discipline audience members about fashion. *Saturday Night Magazine* also satirized the growing—and gendered—commercialization of the theatre. In a humorous domestic drama between a hen-pecked husband and his somewhat manipulative wife, the man is slyly coerced into taking his wife and mother-in-law to the Bernhardt show. He will have to borrow the money to do so. The woman, after so much success, goes a bridge too far in her campaign to make the evening memorable:

Wife: “I knew you would—and Henry, of course if we’re going to sit in the $3 seats I’ll have—”
Husband: “Nothing more,—nine beans is all I can afford to blow in now.”
Wife: “But I haven’t anything fit to wear.”


\textsuperscript{193} *Grip*, 27 March 27, 1875. See Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, 191.

\textsuperscript{194} *Grip*, 27 March, 1875.
Husband: “Say,” he retorted angrily, “are you going to see Sarah, or is Sarah coming to see you?”  

But Sarah was watching and the wife understood the importance of her role in the performance. *Grip* reported Bernhardt’s assessment: “The audiences at American theatres are brilliant—such rich toilets—the ladies know how to dress[.]”  

The marital exchange highlights not only the personal cost of seeing Bernhardt, which could be a burden to some, but the psychological expense that comes from a culture increasingly fixated on outward displays of affluence and fashion. The relationship between the aesthetic and its fixation with consumption was ambivalent and complex. There was cultural capital to be accumulated by seeing Bernhardt, and being seen doing so. Nevertheless, the obsession with money undermined all the high talk, profaning the air of religiosity surrounding the theatre that it helped create.

So too did the celebrity gossip that filled the pages of many contemporary periodicals. Newspapers, for one, were anxious to turn a profit and salacious stories about celebrities sold more papers. Countless stories appeared about Bernhardt and other performers, as well as religious, artistic and political leaders. “The ship on which Mlle. Sarah Bernhardt returned from America has become an object of worship . . . .,” ran one such piece, claiming people “visit the state-room where she lived, where she slept, where she ate, where she was sea-sick.”  

Goldwin Smith opined that “[i]f anything can be more revolting than the details of the vice which haunts great and luxurious cities it is surely the appetite which causes those details to be telegraphed all over the world and eagerly devoured.”  

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195 *Saturday Night*, 17 December, 1910.  
196 *Grip*, 2 July, 1881.  
197 See for example, *Grip* 30 January, 1875; *Canadian Illustrated News*, 24 July, 1880; *Canadian Illustrated News*, 23 October, 1880; *Canadian Illustrated News*, 7 August, 1880; *Canadian Illustrated News*, 4 June, 1881.  
198 *Canadian Illustrated News*, 26 June, 1881.  
199 *The Bystander*. January, 1890.
to be debauched enough to licence anything so long as excitement is provided.” Elsewhere, he bemoaned that “[t]he lust of scandal is becoming madness.” With technology such as the telegraph, and the expansion of public entertainment, information about celebrities such as Bernhardt became a newsworthy commodity. All this materialism called into question the legitimacy of the aesthetes’ more sublime assertions.

**Quite too Ass-thetic**

Perhaps the most serious challenge to the sophisticates’ use of aesthetic discourses came, ironically, from one of the greatest champions of their cause. Oscar Wilde was the *de facto* leader of the aesthetic craze that swept Britain and North America from around 1869 until the turn of the twentieth century. Supporter of the kind of art for art’s sake that the W.C.T.U. hoped was on the wane in France, Wilde, with all of his many eccentricities, came to embody the Aesthetic Movement.

When Wilde first came to North America, he was not yet known as a playwright. Instead, he was famous for winning the prestigious Newdigate Prize for English Verse and for his association with the Aesthetic Movement. Although his fame for plays such as *The Importance of Being Earnest* lay in the future, Wilde’s tour to Canada and the United States was nevertheless intimately connected to the world of public entertainment. Wilde was commissioned by the skilful theatrical promoter Richard D’Olyly Carte to undertake a lecture tour on such topics as “The House Beautiful” and “The Decorative Arts.” Instead of advancing the appreciation of art for art’s sake, Carte used Wilde to drum up interest in the North American tour of Gilbert and}

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200 Ibid.
201 *The Bystander*, December, 1889.
Sullivan’s *Patience, or Bunthorne’s Bride*.\(^{203}\) The comic opera was a send-up of the excesses of aesthetic discourse and many believed at the time that in the central character of Bunthorne one could find a tongue-in-cheek portrait of Wilde.\(^{204}\) Fearing that the Aesthetic Movement was not well-known enough for a satire of it to fill American playhouses, Carte used the flamboyant Wilde to cause a stir in the New World. The effort was a success and *Patience* played to packed houses. But Wilde got what he wanted as well. Despite being ridiculed in the press, he was treated like a celebrity everywhere he went. Thus, feted and fawned over, he advanced the Aesthetic Movement as well as his own fame.

Manifested in the outrageous behaviour of Oscar Wilde, the aesthetic made its way from the stage into politics. As we have seen in chapter two, public entertainment was central to Bengough’s political satire. The Aesthetic Movement and its chief proponent were quickly adapted to the Canadian political stage. In “THE POLITICAL AESTHETE,” Edward Blake appears as an “Oscar Wilde type” admiring the beauty of his policy lily.\(^{205}\) “As is well-known, Mr. B. is a long-haired, white-faced, morbid and intense-looking person . . .,” observed the author, “who loves to stand in uncomfortable attitudes and pay deep-souled attention to a water lily.”\(^{206}\) In a similar send-up of Blake, Bengough presents him in aesthetic dress carrying a lily, but now in the role of Reginald Bunthorne from *Patience*.\(^{207}\) [Figure 5-6 OUT OF “PATIENCE”] Here, Blake’s unhappiness with the Grits is expressed through Gilbert and


\(^{204}\) It is unlikely that Bunthorne was meant to be Wilde. Nevertheless, because of the timing of the play’s North American tour with Wilde acting as a kind of aesthetic advance agent, contemporary observers could not help conflate the two Aesthetes. See, *Canadian Illustrated News*, 28 January, 1882.


\(^{206}\) Ibid.

\(^{207}\) “OUT OF ‘PATIENCE,’” *Grip*, 28 January, 1882. Interestingly, the graphic satire appears next to a poem about Oscar Wilde.
Figure 5-6  OUT OF “PATIENCE”
Figure 5-7  A DUET FROM “PATIENCE”
Sullivan’s opera. The “GRIT PARTY,” depicted as an unattractively large woman, cannot compete with the much prettier “YOUNG CANADA.”

Bengough also used *Patience* to poke fun at the tension between Edward Blake and Sir John A. Macdonald. [Figure 5-7 A DUET FROM “PATIENCE”] With Sir John cast as Bunthorne, and Blake playing Grosvenor the other male lead, Bengough poses the two politicians in a variety of aesthetic stances as they sing about the political rivalry between them. In so doing, Bengough reveals what he thought of each man. Macdonald chirps: “I’m a C.P.R. young man,/A great N.P. young man,/A practical-policy (just like St. Paul, ye see)/Dish-all-the-Grits young man.” Blake replies: “I’m a logical, calm young man,/Sarcastic and cool young man,/An amply statistical, mazy and twistical,/Wind-you-all-up young man./Oh! follow me if you can.”

*Grip* used the same device on a variety of Canadian politicians. He liked it so much, in fact, that he employed it on two covers satirizing Joseph-Adolphe Chapleau, the fifth premier of Quebec and Member of Parliament. In the first, Chapleau, in aesthetic dress as “THE POLITICAL ‘BUNTHORNE,’” worships the lily of a majority in the Quebec legislature. [Figure 5-8 THE POLITICAL “BUNTHORNE”] Tacked to a wall behind him is a picture of his opponent, Sir Henri-Gustave Joly de Lotbinière, labelled “A PHILISTINE.” The following year, Bengough illustrated the rivalry between Chapleau and Hector-Louis Langevin. [Figure 5-9 HOW LANGEVIN MIGHT SETTLE CHAPELAU] Both politicians pose aesthetically, with Langevin carrying a large sun flower. As in *Patience*, the competition

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208 Ibid.
210 Ibid.
211 Ibid.
212 See also “FANCY PORTRAIT OF OSCAR WILDE,” *Grip*, 18 February, 1882.
213 *Grip*, 10 December, 1881 and *Grip*, 26 August, 1882.
215 Ibid.
Figure 5-8   THE POLITICAL “BUNTHORNE”
Figure 5-9  HOW LANGEVIN MIGHT SETTLE CHAPLEAU
revolves around a pretty young woman, in this case the “FRENCH PARTY,” in the House of Commons.

But it was not only in the imagination of Bengough that Wilde made his presence felt in Canadian politics. The Canadian Illustrated News noted that the nation’s capital bore the marks of its infatuation with the aesthetic craze. The big sunflower has at last visited us,” remarked the paper in its “DOINGS AT THE CAPITAL” section, “and milliners and shopkeepers will no doubt do their best to cultivate it[.].” Entrepreneurs capitalized on the excitement generated by the celebrity and “Wilde himself [was] posing en photographie in a certain shop window.”

That Sparks street was covered in the “hideous and ungainly flower” was bad enough. It crossed the line, however, when it “actually made its appearance in the Senate yesterday.”

Oscar Wilde helped popularize notions of beauty and art. That his message made it all the way to the Red Chamber suggests the extent of his influence.

For many Torontonians, Gilbert and Sullivan’s Patience preceded their introduction to Wilde. The comic opera premiered in 1881, the same year as Bernhardt’s first visit to the city. The play’s most famous song, “If You’re Anxious for to Shine in the High Aesthetic Line,” is a confession by Bunthorne that his aestheticism is merely a sham. His unbosoming is also a critique of the aesthete’s pretensions:

If you’re anxious for to shine in the high aesthetic line as a man of culture rare,
You must get up all the germs of the transcendental terms, and plant them everywhere.
You must lie upon the daisies and discourse in novel phrases of your complicated state of mind,

217 Canadian Illustrated News, 18 February, 1882.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
220 Ibid.
The meaning doesn’t matter if it’s only idle chatter of a transcendental kind.

And everyone will say,
As you walk your mystic way,
“If this young man expresses himself in terms too deep for me,
Why, what a very singularly deep young man this deep young man must be!”

Toronto’s connoisseurs, as we have seen, made a point of employing high talk as a way of expressing both individual sophistication and group superiority. Gilbert and Sullivan were having none of it.

“Though the Philistines may jostle, you will rank as an apostle in the high aesthetic band,” continues Bunthorne. Toronto’s sophisticates took shelter in their aesthetic airs from the jibes of both the Puritans and the gallery gods. Wilde, reported *Grip*, “when street gamins followed him, . . . sublimely observed, ‘I am glad I form amusement to the lower classes.’” Toronto’s aesthetes, however, were not as secure. Many of the stories about Wilde that appeared in the press contained a note of unease surrounding the young artist and the movement he embodied. An article entitled simply “Aestheticism,” attempted to describe his devotees to the city’s less informed: “The young men affect long hair through which they carelessly run their fingers, low collars, neckties of strange hues, and very ill-made clothes.” The commentator pointed out one of the chief rhetorical strategies of the aesthetes: “Any ordinary mortal who does not understand this kind of thing, and who ventures to say so, is at once spoken of as a ‘Philistine.’” That people began to see through this strategy was only one small manifestation of the counter-discourses that sought to rein in the excesses of the aesthetic.

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222 Ibid, 1568.
223 Ibid, 1569.
224 *Grip*, 9 July, 1881.
225 *Toronto Mail*, 19 March, 1881.
226 Ibid.
At issue was the flamboyant performance of aestheticism that challenged contemporary gender norms. In an attempt at whimsical verse, Grip wrote:

This soulful young poet named Wilde,
As simple and pure as a child;
He’s quite too ass-thetic,
Intensely poetic,
And not at all naughty or spiled.

He’s meek, lowly, good undefiled,
And by syrens will ne’er be beguiled;
Boston’s sweet culcha’d belles
And aesthetic young swells
Will enthuse o’er divine Oscar Wilde.227

The Canadian Illustrated News described him sarcastically as “Clothed with a white lily, and a few other less utterly divine garments, he is Beauty and Soul and Horticulture and Silent Music mingled together.”228 Wilde’s obsession with flowers and beauty meant that he was immune to the siren calls of Boston’s women. The subtext was clear.

Torontonians who lauded the aesthetic ran into difficulty with Wilde’s more unconventional behaviour. The public humiliation emerging from his trial and conviction for homosexual acts would not occur until 1895, well after his 1882 tour of North America and his fame as a leading playwright. Nevertheless, he represented a challenge to contemporary understandings of manhood. His clothes, his long hair and clean-shaven face and his tendency to carry a lily or sunflower around with him all aroused anxiety about public and private codes of conduct. One sanctimonious commentator could not help but conflate Wilde’s behaviour with that of women:

And talking of lilies of the field, and of the nutriment which they are supposed to afford to some sensitive natures, it may be said that there is no new thing under the sun. If our young men can lunch on lilies, there was a girl in the time of the author of the “Religio Medici” –“that maid

227 Grip, 28 January, 1882.
228 Canadian Illustrated News, 28 January, 1882.
of Germany” he calls her – who professed that she supported existence on the smell of a rose. But she was proved to be an imposter, a horticultural variety of the modern “fasting girl.”

The author implicitly connected the lily-sporting Wilde with the “maid of Germany” and the modern “fasting girl.” His language betrays an anxiety over gender. He was worried that all “our young men,” were lunching on lilies. The Telegram was even more explicit. Recounting a visit by Wilde to their offices, the editor was described as being bashful during their meeting: “Being an orphan he always does feel that way when females enter his sanctum.”

Much the same sentiment lies behind a series of images that appeared in the papers around the time of the great aesthete’s North American tour. Grip, for instance, carried a small cartoon representing Uncle Sam carrying a large sun-flower, in the centre of which was a dollar sign.

[Figure 5-10 OSCAR WILDE IN NEW YORK] He is posed effeminately a la Wilde, right down to the limp-wristed gesture which became a trope in visual portrayals of the young artist. But whereas the sublime Oscar Wilde was famous for never becoming distressed, the expression on Uncle Sam, as he looks over his shoulder at the departing poet, is decidedly unhappy: “’Dod gast the feller, what did he want to come here for, and stir up our aesthetic natur’! I s’pose it’s all right; it’s Yurruean style, and I’ve got to keep up with the procession if I bust – but there ain’t no money into it as I kin see!” Immediately under the dialogue but separated by a line, and therefore presumably not part of the cartoon, appeared the following observation: “Young men should be careful about dropping remarks. They may be picked up by a bigger man.”

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229 Canadian Illustrated News, 24 June, 1882.
230 Telegram, 27 May, 1882.
231 Grip, 14 January, 1882. Emphasis in original.
232 Ibid.
OSCAR WILDE IN NEW YORK.

UNCLE SAM. — “Dod gast the feller, what did he want to come here for, and stir up our æsthetic natur’? I s’pose it’s all right; it’s Yurrupan style, and I’ve got to keep up with the procession if I bust—but there ain’t no money into it as I kin see!”

Young men should be careful about dropping remarks. They may be picked up by a bigger man.—N. O. Picayune.
wonders if the placement is not intentional, a way for the editor to subtly impugn Wilde’s witty effeminacy with a resort to a more virile form of manhood embodied in the physical violence that was becoming more associated with manly behaviour toward the end of the century.\textsuperscript{233} At the very least, Uncle Sam has certainly felt the effects of his tangle with the remark-dropping Oscar Wilde. Although his traditional focus on money remains safely intact, this American icon has now adopted the physical, if not attitudinal, posture of the true aesthete.

Less ambiguous, however, was the appearance of Uncle Sam and Oscar Wilde on the front page of the \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}.\textsuperscript{234} [Figure 5-11 \textsc{The Last Straw}] Entitled \textquotedblleft THE LAST STRAW,\textquotedblright; the only thing the two Uncle Sams have in common is their expressions of sceptical disdain. This Uncle Sam, however, is even less taken with the young poet than the last. He stands uncouthly with his hands jammed in his pant’s pocket in a position that contrasts sharply from the effeminate posture struck by the young poet. A slight turn of his shoulders and head gives the impression of Uncle Sam trying to widen the gulf between himself and Wilde. This visual effect is accentuated by a large up-turned cigar that creates a barrier between the two men and draws attention to Uncle Sam’s scornful look. Wilde gestures delicately. In his long-fingered left hand, the poet holds an enormous sunflower, the head of which is angled provocatively toward the larger man. Wilde attempts to give Uncle Sam the flower of aesthetic appreciation but the American has his hands safely in his pockets: “Uncle Sam:—‘No sir! You

\textsuperscript{233} Gail Bederman observes a decline in the Victorian notion of ‘manhood’ based on “sexual self-restraint, a powerful will, a strong character . . . ,” and its transformation into a ‘masculinity’ based on “aggressiveness, physical force, and male sexuality.” Bederman, \textit{Manliness}, 18-19.

\textsuperscript{234} \textit{Canadian Illustrated News}, 28 January, 1882.
Figure 5-11   THE LAST STRAW
kin rig my wimmen folks any way you please, but when it comes to fixing me up with your
vegetable kew-riosities, you’re left, young man.**235** The phallic implications of the giant
sunflower spring instantly to mind. Indeed, if one looks closely, the visual path of Uncle Sam’s
eyes leads directly to the flower’s large head, and then past it to the smaller head of the poet. The
personification of America prefers his cigar to the “vegetable kew-riosities” offered by the
sensitive young man. These curiosities, after all, are only for “wimmen.”

The fear of contamination, of an erosion of manhood, pervades reports of Oscar Wilde. If
Toronto’s aesthetes were keen on employing the aesthetic to generate support for their authority,
they met a serious challenge from those anxious about the destabilizing effects of Wilde’s
gendered performances both on stage and off. High talk generated a great deal of currency for
the aesthetic elite but it could only go so far. A society obsessed with gender, one that was
struggling to assign appropriate roles for men and women, could not easily come to terms with
the gender-bending Oscar Wilde. As the world of public entertainment expanded through-out the
nineteenth century, many social critics worried about the deleterious effects of theatre-going on
men. One particularly apt image of this anxiety over the feminizing tendencies of the theatre
depicts three gentleman, “AT THE PERFORMANCE OF THE MODERN SENSATIONAL
DRAMA”**236** [Figure 5-12 AT THE PERFORMANCE] On stage, a young girl runs to embrace
an older woman, possibly her mother, whose arms are thrown open as she leans down toward the
child. This reunion scene could be taken from one of countless melodramas performed in
Toronto. It is the action off stage, however, that is the subject of this particular commentary. In
the foreground, three respectable looking gentlemen are in the audience. As the play reaches its
melodramatic peak, one of the men has broken down. In his hands, he holds a well-used

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**235** Ibid. Emphasis in original.
**236** Canadian Illustrated News, 15 May, 1875.
Figure 5-12  At the Performance
handkerchief to blot up his tears. The caption reads: “Sympathetic gentleman to friend who has brought him to the theatre for an evening’s enjoyment:—‘D’you ca-call this p-p-pleasure?’”\textsuperscript{237} Overcome by the performance, he can only snivel out his meek query. Mary Warner Blanchard notes that a reactionary sentiment took hold of America in response to a widespread perception that aestheticism’s success came at the expense of the “feminization of American men.”\textsuperscript{238} This “sympathetic” gentle “man” represents the harmful potentialities of the theatre on the manhood of those men who attended such performances.

\textbf{Conclusion: The Silent Playhouse}

Although Toronto’s would-be aesthetes used aesthetic discourse to accumulate a form of cultural capital, there were limitations as to just how far they could get with their artistic airs. Public entertainment, including Bernhardt’s appearances in the city, offered aesthetes a venue through which to perform their identity as experts—both to themselves and others. Through the discourse of the aesthetic, Toronto’s sophisticates sought to create a regime of truth. In their attempts to discipline the city’s audiences, they exerted power over the public sphere of the playhouse. Through high talk, aesthetes also confronted those who questioned the morality of the stage by lauding the genius of talents such as Bernhardt. Nevertheless, the culture’s obsession with cost and the accompanying celebrity gossip undermined the aesthetic elite’s position. The continuous efforts to purge the theatre of its rougher elements, including talkers and gallery gods, were not entirely successful. There would be no uncontested hegemony and that the aspirations of the aesthetes were inevitably curtailed by a process of negotiation. At least until moving pictures created a more compelling, if less democratic, venue for lower class entertainment.

\textsuperscript{237} \textit{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{238} Blanchard, \textit{Oscar Wilde’s}, xiv.
Sarah Bernhardt’s visits provided Toronto’s aesthetes with a unique opportunity to cast themselves in the role of arbiters of taste, experts with a specialized kind of knowledge. By emphasizing the aesthetic, a mysterious and almost religious experience, they were able to launch assaults on both the Puritans and the working-class gallery gods. The aesthetic discourse, however, met its most serious challenge when it conflicted with other, possibly more powerful discourses, involving patterns of consumption and notions of manhood. Oscar Wilde, who preached the aesthetic even more zealously than Bernhardt, caused many to question the value of the aesthetic claims. The transgressions of accepted codes of manly behaviour, be it his long hair and clean-shaven face, the opposite of contemporary male grooming habits, or his various languid poses which became visual signifiers of a kind of effeminate posturing, reduced the effectiveness of the aesthete’s claims.

Despite the challenges to aesthetic hegemony, audiences and their entertainments of choice eventually split along class lines, bifurcating into high and low. As bourgeois codes of aestheticism entrenched themselves in playhouses across the city—the elite forced to share attention with the celebrities on stage and the gallery gods silenced, neutered and excluded—something meaningful in public entertainment was lost. As it became more aesthetic, theatre in Toronto stopped being a cross-class phenomenon, ceasing to function as an arena for cultural exchange between diverse groups in the fledgling democracy. Instead, it emerged as the preserve of a particular class and world view. No longer forced to share its space with rougher elements, theatre was refined but simultaneously reduced. With the advent and eventual triumph of movies, the more subversive, cross-class potentialities of public entertainment were finally removed. In their place, a group of aesthetes and bourgeoisie were left in reverent and passive silence.
The Final Act

Public entertainment was a powerful cultural force. The *Canada Presbyterian* acknowledged this fact when it bemoaned: “The home life of our people has undergone a total change, and coincident with this change, and one of its causes, is the rapid development of popular amusements.”\(^1\) The theatre, with all of its temptations was “disastrous to social life and its old and most delightful forms.”\(^2\) The author concluded that “the playhouse has absorbed much of the life of our society, and grown very largely at the expense of our homes.”\(^3\) The reverend W. S. Rainsford, for his part, understood the influence of the stage. “I wish I saw any prospect of a reformation in the theatre” he began his letter that opened the very public debate over Sarah Bernhardt’s first visit. The theatre held such sway in his city that he longed for it to be a force for good: “I wish I could indulge a hope that first-rate comic or tragic representations might at no distant date be acted by actors of good moral tone and pure life.”\(^4\) But Bernhardt was not morally pure, and that fact was made all the worse by her status as a celebrity: “She, a queen of the stage, having attained a position from which her influence is immense, casts aside restraints, the most vitally important that bind moral, not to say, religious, Society together.”\(^5\) Hildegarde, one of the many anonymous Torontonians who wrote in to support Rainsford’s attack, was similarly angered by the power of public entertainment: “The stage should be an educator of public morals. No person can shut his eyes to the fact that it does possess a great influence, and all must admit that it is not at present exercising that influence as it should.”\(^6\)

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2. *Ibid*.
3. *Ibid*.
5. *Ibid*.
These detractors certainly believed in the power of public entertainment over their society. The W.C.T.U., the Ontario Horticultural Association, and Lieutenant-Colonel George T. Denison felt it in the dizzying and disconcerting images of vice and flesh that colonised the streetscape. J. W. Bengough and Sarah Anne Curzon, anxious to reform society with their political plays, understood what a potent force public entertainment could be. So too did Toronto’s black population when they petitioned their city council to protect them from the humiliation and violence caused by blackface minstrelsy. If many contemporaries understood the importance of public entertainment to Victorian culture, most historians have not. In this present study, I argue that it was one of the most significant mediums through which Victorian Torontonians ordered and understood the world around them. It satisfied deep human needs for entertainment and diversion. But it also provided a conduit through which Torontonians explored and expressed a variety of identities. Public entertainment reflected the culture in which it existed, but it shaped it as well. Bernhardt performed gender in new ways, and her audience—those in the playhouse and those that refused to go—were either amazed or appalled. They might have written impassioned letters, or quietly pasted articles into scrapbooks, either way, they were affected.

Public entertainment was also a significant force linking Torontonians to the broader world. The hottest plays from London and New York quickly made their way to the city, bringing with them a new ideas, trends and values. Audiences eagerly anticipated the latest fashion worn by celebrities such as Bernhardt and Lillie Langtry. They adopted the most recent slang, picking up expressions that had been heard just months before in West End theatres or Bowery music halls. And because of public entertainment, Torontonians were also exposed to influential intellectual currents such as the Aesthetic Movement. They followed these and other developments through celebrity gossip wired from around the world and printed in their daily
newspapers. Consequently, debates about imperialism, Americanization, modernization and secularization would do well to include discussions of what Torontonians were watching when they went to the show. Although the present study only hints at these larger questions, it is hoped that others will pursue them in greater depth. Historians imagining the city as a backwater must come to terms with the myriad ways in which public entertainment connected Torontonians to a wider transatlantic culture.

For its part, the present study examines the role of public entertainment in five important aspects. It argues that the transgressive forces of theatres and circuses, saloons and opera houses radically altered the streetscape, influenced political life, provided a means for exploring racial curiosity, helped to define the boundaries of gender and facilitated the disciplining of working-class audiences through an aesthetic discourse.

Advertisements touting public entertainment were a regular feature in the urban landscape. To many in the city, they were an exciting reminder of the fun to be had within the boundaries of the playhouse, circus tent or saloon. To others, however, they were objects of dread. Menaced by their depictions of violence and sexuality, it was as if the transgressive world of public entertainment was escaping the stage and running riot in the streets. To these Victorian iconoclasts, posters and billboards peddling public entertainment exercised a frightening power. In their view, images of heroes tied to railway tracks or women in revealing outfits excited the imagination and aroused the passions of the city’s most vulnerable and susceptible. Despite their efforts to shield children from the theatre, they were helpless to defend against giant billboards erected across from churches or posters tacked to hoardings. The fearful images captured the gaze of the passersby, infecting them with images of criminality and wantonness.
Efforts to control these images met with limited success. Groups such as the W.C.T.U. and the Ontario Horticultural Association, as well as influential individuals such as Lieutenant-Colonel George T. Denison launched a spirited crusade to control the power of these advertisements. They believed that theatrical posters and billboards led to increased crime and worried aloud about the long-term effects of exposure. Members of Toronto’s city council and the Ontario Legislature took up the issue only to have their efforts thwarted by concerns over private property and commerce.

Public entertainment also provided a significant medium for political discussion. Attentive to this connection, I offer an alternative way to approach politics and the public sphere. Through closet dramas and political cartoons, campaign literature and elaborately staged operettas, many Victorian Torontonians imagined politics through performance. For the likes of J. W. Bengough, William Henry Fuller, Nicholas Flood Davin, Henri Julien and Sarah Anne Curzon, the political stage offered a vehicle for biting satire. These and other political playwrights drew on traditions as diverse as blackface minstrelsy, the circus, Shakespeare and melodrama. Although most scholars have not pursued the relationship between public entertainment and politics, evidence suggests it was an important way for certain Victorians to conceptualize the politics of their day.

Historians concerned with high-politics often miss the ways in which public entertainment interconnected with initiatives such as the National Policy or embarrassments like the Pacific Scandal. But so too do social and cultural historians when they overlook the performances of political actors such as Curzon. Her optimistic drag-show was, from her perspective, a political act—one that was linked to her efforts as a historian and a suffragist. Understanding why a
Senator would wear a sunflower into the Red Chamber or why a special interest group would depict Sir Richard Cartwright as an Arab white-slaver, enriches our understanding of politics.

Perhaps one of the most significant contributions of this dissertation is its exploration of the stage as one of the chief matrices for the spread of racial ideology. Torontonians were obsessed with race and public entertainment reflected and refracted that fixation in a variety of ways. Melodramas such as *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*—and a host of successor-plays hoping to capitalize on the phenomenon of the original—suggest the ways in which public entertainment could create interracial empathy. But the most compelling racial performances were the blackface minstrel shows which regularly visited the city. Indeed, this quintessentially American form of popular culture became so accepted in Toronto that it began to colour the way in which ‘white’ citizens viewed their black neighbours. The black petitioners, who pleaded with city council to ban early minstrel shows, understood this. On the street, the punch line of a burnt-cork joke could be literally that.

But if public entertainment was essential to satisfying racial curiosity, it was also vital to establishing the borders of gender in Victorian culture. When the infamous Sarah Bernhardt came to town, a heated debate gripped the city. At its center were questions about the role of women not only on stage but in the wider society. An exciting example of the New Woman to some, to others she represented a dangerous form of misrule that characterized public entertainment. Prominent figures such as the reverend Rainsford and Goldwin Smith were disconcerted by the accolades showered upon the scandalous actress. They argued that Bernhardt was a bad example for others—particularly young women. Despite, or perhaps because of, the controversy aroused by clerical condemnation many Torontonians flocked to see her. Some, such as the fiery “Gunhilda” were roused by the gendered attacks on Bernhardt. They countered with
allegations of clerical hypocrisy that amounted to indictments of patriarchy. The debate that raged in the pulpits and press reveals the ways in which public entertainment provided a stage for competing definitions of femininity at a time when understandings of gender norms were in a state of transition.

Many of those who rushed to Bernhardt’s defence relied on arguments about her sublime genius. In so doing, they hastened the spread of a new discourse about art and beauty: the Aesthetic Movement. In some ways a liberating phenomenon, the aesthetic allowed Bernhardt’s supporters to assert themselves in the public sphere with increasing confidence. Through the rhetorical strategy of high talk, aesthetes went on the offensive against the puritans who still lamented the influence of the theatre. Aesthetic hegemony was not uncontested, however. Claims about transcendence and art for art’s sake were undermined by a culture ever more caught up in discourses of consumption—particularly those involving the financial side of public entertainment and the related culture of celebrity. Even more problematic was the challenge presented by Oscar Wilde’s gender-bending behaviour. His performance of the aesthetic, with its unmanly postures and dress, limited the appeal of the Aesthetic Movement.

But if the aesthetic freed certain middle-class theatre-goers to defend public entertainment from its detractors, it had a darker side as well. Adopting the role of arbiters of taste, aesthetes used their status as experts to crack down on behaviour they considered unruly and inappropriate. Thus, aesthetic discourse facilitated an attack on the working-class gallery gods. Their cultural practices of loudly interacting with performers and fellow audience members, as well as drinking and smoking were central to their participation in the public sphere of the playhouse. As these rougher elements were excluded, however, the power of theatre as one of the most significant mediums for understanding and shaping the broader culture was eroded. The sterilization of
public entertainment’s transgressive tendencies represented a loss to the culture. The
carnivalesque that I have traced throughout this study was being eclipsed. From its over-the-top
advertising, its blurring of high and low in politics, its flirting with cross-racial desire and anxiety
to its gender-bending performances, public entertainment spilled from Toronto’s theatres and
influenced the world around it. Although it is naïve to suggest that the city’s playhouses were
revolutionary and egalitarian, they were, as we have seen, significant engines of social change.
As new technologies such as moving pictures combined with stultifying bourgeois codes, theatre
lost its transgressive excitement.

It was the final act—the end of public entertainment as a meaningful force in the fledgling
democracy. Movie palaces would retain vestiges of the playhouse, but they were simulacra,
empty signifiers devoid of meaning. Highbrow theatres and lowbrow movie houses were now a
place to passively watch the show. Plunged into darkness and silenced by manners and
technology, citizens were increasingly cut off from one another. The raucous playhouses were
torn down. The public in public entertainment was gone.
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