Arrant Beggars: Staging the Atlantic Lumpenproletariat, 1777 to 1852

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To my parents, Robert and Linda, and to Rip, who believed in me from the beginning.
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ABSTRACT

Atlantic popular theatre culture in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries circulated stagings of outcast yet admired underclasses. Karl Marx’s naming of these characters lent increased visibility to the lumpenproletariat, the object of both audiences’ applause and authorities’ censure. Theatrical archives reveal numerous performances that helped imagine and define an emerging Atlantic lumpenproletariat. I examine a broad spectrum of interconnected popular performances. The cycle I follow begins with the charismatic piracy of John Gay’s Polly (first performed in 1777) and moves to the interracial affiliations and struggles in plays such as John Fawcett’s 1800 Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack. From there, nautical circulations produce melodramas such as Douglas Jerrold’s 1830 Black-Ey’d Susan and urban voyeurism pictures the lumpen in plays like W. T. Moncrieff’s 1822 Tom and Jerry; or, Life in London; finally I discuss the re-emergence of Jack Sheppard, the historical model for Macheath, in a spate of plays after 1839. Popular stagings of the lumpenproletariat provided a means of imagining class; urges to protect boundaries competed with cultural transgressions and complications of class. These theatricals also reveal connections to other modes of cultural expression, influencing the work of nineteenth-century artists and authors such as George Cruikshank, James Fenimore Cooper, Charles Dickens, and Herman Melville. Such circum-Atlantic and inter-generic cultural productions reveal the importance of cultural continuities and transmissions, the relationships between class and culture, and the unexplored influences of theatre on American and transatlantic literature.
CHAPTER 1

ARRANT BEGGARS: EMERGENCE OF THE ATLANTIC LUMPENPROLETERIAT

In 1777, at London’s Haymarket Theatre, George Colman the Elder staged the first production of John Gay’s *Polly*. A half-century after Gay wrote it in 1729, actors first performed the continued story of Macheath and Polly, the protagonists of *The Beggar’s Opera*. With Macheath masked as the black pirate captain Morano, the play stages an underclass, transracial rebellion against colonial society in the Caribbean. The rebellion fails. Despite Morano’s charismatic leadership and Polly’s lovelorn protests, the bandit-pirate goes to the gallows, and *Polly* finishes the punishment that Gay’s first ballad opera does not execute. The play’s end seems to mark the defeat of underclass breakouts. The containment, however, is only temporary, and the curtain’s fall does not mark the end of these characters’ cultural presence.

*Polly*’s introduction provides terms that compactly figure some of the tensions permeating stagings of the Atlantic underclasses, presenting the “arrant beggar” as a key figure. “Arrant,” indicating wandering, itinerant, vagrant, as well as notorious and rascally, appears repeatedly in eighteenth and nineteenth century accounts of lumpen types, used to label the mobile and criminally suspect underclasses. The adjective however, does not invoke an exclusively negative sense of the underclasses. The term’s connotations, as Gay recognized, combine scorn for vagrant criminality with admiration and emulation of notoriety and fame. On the stage and in popular accounts, an arrant character like Gay’s Macheath could be at once worthy of fear and admiration, simultaneously inspiring moralizing warnings and enthusiastic applause.

Emphasizing this double meaning, “arrant” indicates the complex, charged ways that Atlantic theatricals imagined the underclasses. By extension, too, it also implies the importance of theatrical stagings of Atlantic underclasses in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, representations that gave real substance, a physical presence, to the popularity—the notoriety—of these figures even as they displayed their rascally criminality. The arrant beggars and thieves, as Gay styles them, appear repeatedly in Atlantic popular culture, exercising pervasive influences on popular culture. These performances, as Gay seems to understand, produced spectacular performances of the fame and popularity of often-despised lower classes.

*Polly*’s use of the term “arrant” accentuates three principles that inform my approach to this material. First, I argue the theatricality of the lumpenproletariat—performances generated by *The Beggar’s Opera* and *Polly* helped imagine the underclasses as a performing, acting, dissembling lot, and this theatricality permeated the plays I examine, often self-consciously. Second, since *The Beggar’s Opera* was one of the most popular plays of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the popularity and infamy of arrant types become governing tropes.
Thinking of these entertainments as popular explains much more than viewing them as products of deviancy or immorality. Capitalizing on such popularity, Atlantic theatre repeatedly revived versions of Polly’s scenes and situations; popularity thus impels the survival and transmission of cultural elements. Third, the circulations of plays throughout the Atlantic world, as mobile and active as Macheath himself, require that I attend to the mobility of culture. These stagings permeated the culture of the Atlantic world, influencing and feeding on other literary, visual, musical, and gestural forms. Attention to the interdisciplinary and multiple productions and transmissions of culture centrally informs how I approach these materials.

If Polly’s revival in 1777 marks a beginning for this theatrical history of Atlantic underclasses, Karl Marx’s 1852 analysis of the leftover elements of society in The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte provides an ending point—the class had found a name. Marx’s description of this class, the group he labels the “lumpenproletariat,” resonates with the stagings of Atlantic underclasses appearing into the nineteenth century:

> Alongside decayed roués with dubious means of subsistence and of dubious origin, alongside ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie, were vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, mountebanks, lazzaroni, pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, maquereaux, brothel keepers, porters, literati, organ grinders, ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars—in short, the whole indefinite, disintegrated mass, thrown hither and thither, which the French term la bohème.

Marx’s disdain for the “indefinite, disintegrated mass” is palpable. They were members of the class who had betrayed a revolution; these types, Marx believed, constituted a group who “cannot represent themselves”; they must, instead, be represented.

They found popular representation and misrepresentation on the stage. Marx, publishing transatlantically, finally named groups and social relationships that Atlantic theatre culture had spent nearly a century acting out. The characteristics that seem most troubling to him permeate the stagings of Atlantic underclasses. Marx’s remark, then, indicates some of the various strategies used to imagine underclass characters at the margins of society. Within the urge to stratify along class lines, to lump all these outcast types into one group, Marx’s remark also imagines the lumpenproletariat as a mixed, heterogeneous group. The theatre staged popular counterparts to Marx’s theorizing, revealing on stage the ways that a culture at large understood its class relations and acted them out. The lumpen, then, when I find it, demonstrates the traits Marx saw; “dubious” means of subsistence, the downward mobility of “ruined” fortunes, the unstable, the rootless, the criminally suspect, the deceptive, the theatrical—all these characteristics added up to the politically unstable lumpenproletariat. Frequently the stage applies imagined lumpen qualities to characters with otherwise stable class locations. Thus, servants, sailors, urban workers, and upper-class voyeurs all align from time to time with the stage lumpenproletariat. Theatre culture found ways to imagine the ragged diversity of the lumpenproletariat and the connections among these disparate groups.
Hit-and-Run Histories

In examining the staging of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat, I begin from a set of convictions that have important implications for my work and its engagement with the critical discourses of literary, theatrical, and historical studies. The first of these is that culture is mobile and active, transitive, rather than static or unchanging. Cultural productions generate multiple meanings through multiple connections. The arrant beggars whose acts I examine provide me with a model for discussing culture, whether defined as high or low. I also begin from the suspicion that cultural historians have neglected certain areas of our past and their significant interconnections. Finally, I proceed from the belief that the way to recover the significances of these under-studied, under-noticed histories is by tracking them along their routes, through their fugitive associations, their generative and derivative acts. Thus, I pursue the cultural studies of performances of fugitive but connected mobility.

My history of Atlantic theatre’s fascination with its outcast underclasses builds momentum, proceeding on principles of contiguity and accumulation. Representations of the lumpenproletariat move forward from Gay’s ballad opera in the form of a “lore cycle,” a continually circulating and shifting body of imaginative performances. Joseph Roach signals wider cultural dynamics at work when he describes the parade as “an additive form, passing by a point of review in succession, its ending always an anticlimax, a provocation, an opening.” As the procession produces its performance through its moving accrual of theatrical moments, the cultural transmissions—the mechanisms that produce lore cycles—operate on a cumulative logic, building up meaning as performances circulate, cast off, and incorporate bits and pieces of culture. Arrant Beggars, tracking the extended parading of the lumpenproletariat through Atlantic theatre, deliberately gathers momentum and density as it advances by the layering of allusions and references.

Processions of accumulation manifest the constant interplay of past and present, and lore cycles demand that we not force teleological sequences and synthetic historical narratives onto historical evidence. Understanding culture in terms of transmission and cycles makes the project of writing history a recursive, layered exercise. The form of Arrant Beggars thus follows the cues of its material; the structure of accumulation and accretion becomes central to its historical project, not merely contingent, in a way broadly analogous to Benjamin’s methodology in the Arcades Project.

Focusing on popular theatricals’ motion requires re-centering historiography on concepts such as repetition and return, rather than novelty or innovation, as Benjamin’s histories recognize. The movement of popular theatricals flouts chronological sequence, and any discussion must find itself ranging ahead and reaching backward for historical contexts.

Stagings in a lore cycle, with their layering and repetition of cultural moments, operate like Benjamin’s dialectical image, a model for the condensation of past and present. In the Arcades Project, Benjamin describes the dialectical image as a schema “in which that which has been comes together with the Now and falls flashlike into a constellation. In other words: Image is dialectics at a standstill . . .” The model of the dialectical image foregrounds the “both/and” (rather than the “either/or”) aspects of popular performances—both the formal implications of theatre and audiences’ desire to have it both ways. The dialectical image models cultural productions left unresolved, remaining in motion, embodying the overlay of past and present performances. The cultural transmission of theatrical performance, moreover, extends Benjamin’s model of the dialectical image into the realm of lore cycles, situating individual words, gestures, or images amidst constellations of cultural production and consumption.
Focusing on the movement of transmission, however, avoids privileging production or consumption, the moment of genesis or the end of a cultural trajectory. The presentness of the dialectical image also requires acknowledgment that my historical work (rather than neutrally citing and simply tracking the layering of such theatrical moments) also superimposes the present moment onto the image, layering commentary onto citation. In its simplest sense, that means that *Arrant Beggars* does not pretend to unbiased objectivity, but instead represents one strand through archival sources.

Any examination of such a cycle always begins *in medias res*; the boundaries and starting points are always contingent, defined in retrospect and in relation to its various contexts—in terms of what Joel Pfister calls “conjunctures.”

The process of discussing individual parts of the cycle constantly reviews and re-performs the preceding ones, performing the cycle anew each step of the way. Nineteenth-century Atlantic theatre culture operated in this manner, as well; century-old dramatic standards like *The Beggar’s Opera* appeared in close proximity to the latest theatricals, repeatedly re-performing and re-inventing Atlantic culture. With their dense and persistent cross-referencing, the plays of the Atlantic lore cycles embody performance as Richard Schechner’s “restored” or “twice-behaved behavior.” Both old and new acts bear the traces of overlaid and re-performed words, deeds, and images. W. T. Lhamon, Jr., discusses this overlaying of culture, pointing to blackface and its vernacular legacy as performances of cultural “overlaps of difference.” The acts Joseph Roach identifies as cultural “surrogation” and “substitution,” likewise, do not efface memory, but rather perform overlaid gestures, behaviors that reveal complex antecedents and proliferated offspring. Thus, I begin my study with a roughly chronological ordering in mind, but repeatedly, the routes of these performances track backward through parallel universes of performance and forward to multiple possibilities.

The Lore Cycle and Discourses of Performance, History, and Literature

*Arrant Beggars* pushes its way into a new spot in literary and cultural studies, one that moves in the no-man’s land, or perhaps the crossfire, of various other disciplinary traditions and arguments, with which I perform sets of hit-and-run engagements. While visual culture, music, and dance play important roles in this study, representations of the lumpenproletariat principally intervene in the critical discourses of performance studies, cultural history, and literary studies. I will introduce the engagements here and discuss them in detail as I proceed through further discussions of lore cycles and their implications.

Historicizing popular theatre re-situates the study of nineteenth-century theatre and performance in the spaces and contexts in which it originally appeared. Historicizing also performs the reverse operation, returning theatre’s contexts to the playhouse; theatre and culture merge as mutually articulating, continually negotiating new relationships. I locate this merging in a disciplinary space between literary analysis and performance studies. The study of performance has followed the productive lead of psychologists or ethnographers such as Victor Turner, Erving Goffman, and Clifford Geertz, claiming everyday lived experience for the realm of performance. Literary critics, of course, have traditionally carried on the formal analysis of those dramatic texts regarded as more sophisticated or complex. The analysis of popular (“illegitimate” or “minor”) theatre, however, demands the formulation of a theoretical middle ground, where the performance of everyday life meets the verbal and conventional codification of traditional drama.
Theatricality provides the defining feature of the texts and performances of the lumpenlore cycle. I attend to acts that assert themselves specifically as performances. Critics have used the concept of theatricality in so many ways that it has become, as Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait note, “comprehensive of all meanings yet empty of specific sense.”12 To counter this broadening definition, I attend to acts that perform their own status as staged, costumed, masked, scripted, or constructed. Although the term “theatricality” did not come in use until near the end of the period I examine, the stage frequently acted out deliberate, ironic, or at least self-conscious references to its own status as theatre, and these self-conscious moments justify the retrospective application of the term theatricality. I also intend to recover what theatricality meant to an eighteenth- or nineteenth-century audience before critics expanded the term to cover a wide range of characteristics.

Returning theatricality to the contexts of its eighteenth and nineteenth-century stages aims at two results: the first is limiting theatricality in this discussion to the pertinent aspects of the term as rooted in historical evidence. The second goal is recovering its positive connotations for critical analysis. The concept of theatricality has an established history of disdain; since Thomas Carlyle first used the word in 1837, it has repeatedly functioned as a negative term opposing truth, sincerity, and understated expression. The foundational work of scholars outside theatre studies, such as Michael Fried and Peter Brooks, reveals this bias as well. Working with visual culture, Fried identifies theatricality as a negative term representing the artificial, attention-drawing and spectatorial qualities of modern visual culture; as Davis observes, Fried indicts such representation as “theatrical, dislocating, and estranging in contrast to reality’s absorption, sympathy, and self-transcendence.”13 Similarly, theatricality provides a set of negative concepts for Peter Brooks when he argues that the “melodramatic imagination” produced a mode of excess, characterized by a surplus of extravagant emotional energy, which realist literary and dramatic works emerge from but must subvert or resist. *Arrant Beggars* works to recover these disdained terms for positive critical use—the spectacle of excess and the focus on reception and spectatorship define the theatrical history of the lumpenproletariat. The excess, the extravagance, the spectacle that Brooks devalues operate productively in popular theatre; these acts construct new communities and relationships among stages and spectators in nineteenth-century culture, I argue. Such new relationships, moreover, appear both absorbing and theatrical; against Fried, I do not imagine these qualities to be mutually exclusive. Nineteenth-century theatre, through its often ironic and self-aware theatricality, produced a community of spectatorship which, though resisting mimetic modes, still found the staged events compelling and fully absorbing.14 As a cultural history, *Arrant Beggars* insists upon the elaboration of recovered material and the production of alternate histories; it aims at new understandings of the relationships among codified texts, archived ephemeral material evidence, and ethereal performances. In the process, I produce histories of connections and contiguities, such as those marked by the inter-racial, cross-class imaginative affiliations of popular theatre. The history of the popular and the low insists upon disdained and ignored positions as the important ones in cultural history. I pursue histories from the bottom up; at the same time, I seek performances, images and narratives that have seeped into the collective imagination. *Arrant Beggars* contributes to ongoing efforts to recover for culture the outcast, the useless, the disruptive, the unproductive. I seek not to cleanse it, redeem it, disarm it, or to vindicate it, but to understand its charismatic appeal for various publics. I explore, accordingly, not a social history of people we might label lumpenproletarian, but rather a history of the category’s drawing power for wider arenas of
culture. I examine the widely circulating popular theatre and the literature and visual culture that exercised a continual fascination with the low, an enthrallment that later histories generally discard. My history of the cultural production of the lumpenproletariat, argues, for example, that if “hidden histories” like Linebaugh and Rediker’s *The Many-Headed Hydra* present a wishful, romanticized view of lumpen defeats, the cultural re-performances of such historical resistance tells us that, in fact, it did have a firm grip on the public imagination of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.  

The history of the cultural imaginary of such resistance urges that murkily delineated acts are important; that we ought not to dismiss unpredictable and multiple loyalties and affiliations. The performances I examine enact Bakhtinian dialogics, presenting in a physically immediate way competing and complementing discourses; in performance, too, “centrifugal as well as centripetal forces are brought to bear.” Audiences can, and indeed did, have it both ways, and theatre reception reveals that acts produced complex and often conflicted results. The product of these accumulations asserts that there are retorts to the narratives of triumphal cultural progress, whether they appear in national, class, or gendered terms. Losses and draws become partial victories and survivals; incomplete victories still matter, survival is significant, and no loss is complete or final. The Atlantic history of the lumpen reveals a penchant for jailbreaks, for resistance, for “excarceration,” as Peter Linebaugh labels it. It also insists that increasingly visible interracial affiliations matter. The lumpen mutualities that form up under the authoritative radar matter and their traces appear and reappear in widespread sites of cultural production.

This theatre history reacts to and contributes to the prevailing narratives of literary studies as well. It begins by asserting the importance of theatre to literature. The reverse logic, of course, has long held sway in literary criticism that argues for the progress of the drama to a more literary point. In conventional histories of drama, nineteenth-century theatre strove mightily and unsuccessfully to achieve formal, thematic, and verbal sophistication. In place of such a history of insufficiency and anxiety, this study recognizes parallel cultural histories that alter the prevailing narratives of literary history. Although these include visual and musical histories, I concentrate upon the underappreciated realm of theatre history and argue its influence upon wider arenas of culture. This proposed scheme does not intend to reproduce hierarchies of disdain. I do not position theatre as the low-culture support for literature—as, for example, one might read David S. Reynolds’s quest for popular culture underpinnings in *Beneath the American Renaissance*. Theatre culture, I argue, forms part of broader sets of practices that infuse literary production and which literary culture in turn permeates. The interpenetration of spheres of cultural production ought to provoke a reconsideration of the idea of the separate developments of theatre and literature. The histories of the two are inextricable. Accordingly, my work argues the useful interconnections among the analytical categories of the two disciplinary fields. While literary analysis has long been applied to theatre (often to its detriment), theatrical analysis is only beginning to articulate literary studies. Studies such as Alan Ackerman’s *The Portable Theatre* and Joseph Litvak’s *Caught in the Act* have begun the work of examining the theatricality of nineteenth-century literary culture, but more remains to be done, and the sites of performance themselves must be engaged more thoroughly.

This study, examining transnational, intercultural, interdisciplinary performance cultures, modifies the prevailing narratives and histories that have dominated literary and cultural studies until recently. Popular theatre, for example, contradicts the story of the bifurcation of western culture into high and low, with the attendant biases that see elite culture as generative and the
low or the popular as derivative. My study resists the historical narrative of the “rise” of Anglo-
American Drama, from a low and imitative position to one of realism and originality. My work
also opposes the American and English literary histories that view literature as isolated flashes of
brilliance before a distant backdrop of history. It opposes narratives of the solidifying of
independent national identities and the march of literary sophistication. In addition, and perhaps
more subtly, my examination of the contiguities of Atlantic culture offers an alternative to the
history of the nineteenth century as a time of radical change and innovation. The theatre of the
lumpen suggests that forms of emancipation arrived slowly and that, despite the rise of
nationalism and industrialization, cultural retentions remained influential. Histories that assume
racial isolation, too, only inadequately explain the inter-racial affiliations, the borrowings, thefts,
and bestowals that took place in the Atlantic theatre.

In place of these narratives, I offer a hit-and-run history of the popular, a narrative of
active and intermingled levels of cultural production, of interconnected critical and imaginative
projects, of transnational movements of culture that used the reserves of past performances to
produce culture characterized by attractions, however hesitant or qualified, across lines of race
and class.

The history of the theatrical lumpenproletariat is part of an Atlantic paradigm. As such, it
draws on the concerns of British Cultural Studies as well as American Studies. The mixing and
circulating of culture has a direct relevance to the current scholarship seeking to remodel
American Studies on transnational or postnational models. The new schools of American
Studies have themselves emerged from the interplay of politics and culture, products of
transatlantic (and circum-Atlantic, and later still, circum-Pacific) flows of cultural exchanges.
The idea of the field itself resists any concept of a geographically bounded “America” or its
equally bounded culture. Paul Giles, for example, emphasizes seeking “various points of
intersection, whether actual border territories or other kinds of disputed domain, where cultural
conflict is lived out experientially”; the end result of his approach is to recognize nations as
territories “that can no longer be regarded as organically complete or self-contained.” Arrant
Beggars presumes the same impossibility of organic, static national completeness and the vital
mobility of mixing and circulating cultural performances.

This approach has a direct impact on conceptualizing the relationship between English
and American culture. In his Transatlantic Insurrections, Giles understands American and
British literature from the Revolution to the middle of the nineteenth century as “secret sharers,”
“twisting and intertwining with each other in mutually disorienting ways.” While this concept
certainly affords a new perspective on Atlantic literary studies, the sharing was hardly a secret in
the theatre. Scripts, actors, managers and other production personnel circulated around the
Atlantic; troupes traveled, adapting local material to their acts and their standard repertoires to
local conditions. Versions of theatricals proliferated, and the “official” versions of plays, the
printed and collected editions as well as the “definitive” performances, coexisted (and still do,
although hidden behind reference desks and archival catalogues) with numerous less codified
artifacts of theatre culture.

The inherent biases of theatre history run deep. English archives tend to hold more and
more varied material, and American archives represent London theatres more thoroughly. When
attempting to recover a more balanced sense of cultural production in the Atlantic world, we still
contend with multiple biases in the record. American theatre troupes, for example, never won
the fame or the professional reputation that their English counterparts achieved. This imbalance
produced, from the beginning, disparities in the archives. The publicity generated by the
season’s centerpiece in Baltimore, for example, paled in comparison with the star power (and consequent documentary richness) surrounding even the most humdrum performance at London’s Haymarket Theatre. Nevertheless, the theatrical histories remain, and as scholars recover and interpret them, they affirm my suspicion that the production and reception of culture always involved more complicated interactions than the projects of national cultural history tend to assume.

Investigating theatre through an Atlantic lens modifies the valuable work begun by the classic accounts of American literature and culture, including such explorations of popular culture, mythology, and symbolism as Henry Nash Smith’s *Virgin Land* (1950), Leo Marx’s *Machine in the Garden* (1964), and R. W. B. Lewis’s *American Adam* (1955). Promoting a sense of American exceptionalism, these versions of American culture rely upon narratives of initial cultural dependence on England and, later, forceful self-emancipation from the mother country—the same narrative still often applied to American theatre. Corroborating this scheme, high culture became the property of English originators while low culture became the American accomplishment. What high culture Americans did develop this model sees as merely derivative. In fact, as theatre history shows, the impetus of cultural production in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries continually wavered, whatever the social status of the production. Certainly, cultural independence did not occur as cleanly as many historians conclude, nor according to the ideals of a relatively few authors and public figures. The arena of the popular, additionally, complicates any diagrammatic force lines of cultural production and exportation, with high and low forms combining and recombining as they circle along routes of trade, tourism, politics, and migration.

**Transcribing the Lore Cycle’s Stages**

Although the outlaw pirate captain Morano meets his death at *Polly*’s conclusion, his influence remains detectable in later Atlantic culture. I trace the lore cycle through the movements that defined the Atlantic underclasses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Geographically, these circulations carried people and performances from London, to the Caribbean, into contact with maritime classes, and back to the metropolitan centers, where the cycle often re-engaged with earlier elements, dynamically transforming and moving on.

Popular theatre’s cycles performed the experiences of the actual people who lived the lives of the Atlantic underclasses. Peter Linebaugh has unearthed an account of John Meffs, one of the “London hanged,” whose trajectory through the Atlantic world anticipates the movement of the lore cycle. The shifting themes of theatre culture in my chapters look a lot like Meffs’s historical experiences. Meffs, Linebaugh writes, “took to thieving” in London, facing execution, but escaping thanks to mob violence. As the account continues,

Meffs was transported to America instead. The transport ship carrying him to the plantations was taken by pirates. While most of the felons signed articles aboard the pirate ship... Meffs did not and was marooned on a desert island. He stole an “Indian canoe” and made his way to the mainland, where he entered ship again, sailing between Virginia and South Carolina, and Barbados and Jamaica. He then returned to England, fell into his “former wicked practices” and was imprisoned in Newgate. With the assistance of a bricklayer, he escaped and fled to Hatfield,
where he was betrayed into the hands of Jonathan Wild, who turned him in to the
authorities for “a very handsome sum.”

Meffs finally met the end he had initially escaped on Tyburn’s gallows. His circulations, far
from anomalous, seem almost representative for someone of his class. Certainly, they remain
within the bounds of cultural imagination. His movements and affiliations forecast the
movements and stages of the lore cycle through the one hundred thirty years following his death.
His transportation to America echoes the journeys of Macheath and his cohort in Polly, and his
marronage evokes echoes of Inkle and Yarico and Obi. Along the way, he interacted with the
sailors and pirates who later dominated nautical melodramas; and his return to London prefigures
the later rise of depictions of urban underclasses. His end at Tyburn, of course, provided fodder
for the vast living archive of popular memory that made Jack Sheppard a resurgent hit in the
middle of the nineteenth century. My chapters address the overlapping segments of the lumpen
lore cycles, following recurrent characters and situations and their persistent songs, words, and
deeds. They reveal genealogies of lumpen performance, sometimes hidden, sometimes obvious,
but always connected by the words, songs, gestures, and images of Atlantic theatre culture.

In chapter two, I begin my examination of the lore cycle with the plays of the
lumpenproletariat as it began to push outward from London. Continuing The Beggar’s Opera,
Polly stages the expulsion of England’s unruly underclasses into the currents of the circum-
Atlantic. By enacting both Macheath’s transportation and Polly’s journey westward, Polly also
stages different versions of underclass mobility, performing the tension between versions of
forced and voluntary movement. Since Polly enjoyed only limited performances in the
eighteenth century, however, I look to the continuing adaptations of The Beggar’s Opera to
understand the circum-Atlantic afterlife of Macheath and his crew. The opera, I argue, plays a
central role in the imagination of a truly circum-Atlantic economy of culture and performance,
one in which it self-consciously participates. The circulation of Macheath and his gang
throughout the New World makes The Beggar’s Opera a foundational text for later performances
of lumpen insouciance.

I argue in chapter three that Atlantic theatricals embody an increasingly visible interracial
cohort based upon the experiences of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat. Following the example of
Polly (which transforms Macheath into a blackface pirate and leaves Polly presumably to marry
a West Indian prince), theatre increasingly circulated representations of racial difference and
affiliation. Performances had long engaged issues of race and class together. Thomas
Southerne’s adaptation of Aphra Behn’s Oroonoko (1694) had appeared earlier on Atlantic
stages, and plays such as James Nelson Barker’s The Indian Princess (1808) gained popularity in
America. T. D. Rice and others enacted increasingly popular blackface performances in English
and American theatres a few decades later. George Colman the Younger’s Inkle and Yarico
(1787) and John Fawcett’s Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack (1800) stage underclasses imagined in
interracial terms, continuing the lore cycle begun by Gay’s ballad operas. These performances
recycle Polly’s depiction of Macheath in blackface and act out early versions of blackface. The
lumpenproletariat became an interracial class in performance as slaves and Caribbean indigenous
characters mingled with and fought against European characters.

The performances of nautical underclasses—groups in tension with Peter Linebaugh and
Marcus Rediker’s “hydrarchy,” played a central role in imagining class identity in the Atlantic
world. In chapter four, I argue that representations of sailors, pirates and their cohorts
performed the constant presence of unruly elements, a potential lumpenproletariat in their midst.
Plays such as Douglas Jerrold’s famous Black-Ey’d Susan (1829), which drew upon a 1720
ballad by John Gay, explore the relationship between the lawful, proletarian sailor and the
dangerous lumpenproletariat. Theatre complemented a transatlantic tradition of prose works
such as James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Red Rover* (1827, stage adaptation 1829), which
foregrounds transatlantic piracy, becoming a theatrical hit as well. The sailor hero and the pirate
both represent exotic products of the circum-Atlantic currents returning home. The unruly
nautical underclasses, often figuratively blackened, return to harass English middle-class
domesticity. This is perhaps most evident in an unpublished, nearly lost play by Isaac Pocock.
His 1828 melodrama *Tuckitomba; or, the Obi Sorceress*—produced by John Fawcett, also the
author of *Three-Finger’d Jack*—recycles Caribbean themes and settings to stage a multiethnic,
seaborne lumpen class. As it does so, piratical figures merge on stage with practitioners of
syncretized slave magic, and even slave drivers. Pocock’s production of the lumpenproletariat
recalls the racial masking of Gay’s *Polly* as it reveals the unruly and charismatic presence of the
outcasts and workers of the Atlantic hydrarchy.

The fifth chapter follows the implications of the nautical hero’s homecoming as it
underscores the importance of plays depicting the urban underclasses. As stagings of the
lumpenproletariat thematically moved ever closer to domestic spaces, those locations came to
structure representations of the lumpenproletariat. The stage, I argue, produced its underclasses
through the lens of upper-class observers. In the process, however, the acts collapsed the
 distinctions between the visually and theatrically defined lumpenproletariat and the slumming
dandies. I argue that W. T. Moncrieff’s 1822 *Tom and Jerry; or, Life in London* and its imitators
render explicitly the theatrical voyeurism that produced the lumpen in urban scenes. George
Cruikshank’s illustrations of the play’s heroes literally visualize the lumpen, framing depictions
of urban underclasses through the voyeurism of white dandies. Theatrical and visual
representations like those created by Moncrieff and Cruikshank generate new, overtly theatrical
productions of Atlantic outcasts. These sorts of performances emerged on American stages too,
re-staging the urban underclasses. Productions such as Benjamin Baker’s *A Glance at New York
in 1848* implicate different modes of watching and performing urban class identities, replacing
Tom and Jerry with Mose, the working-class hero. Baker’s play represents a shifting and
potentially empowered lumpenproletariat, one who possesses the insider status formerly reserved
for the gentleman flâneurs of London.

The *Jack Sheppard* plays that emerged in 1839 represent the revival and further
adaptations of gestures that *The Beggar’s Opera* had originally mobilized. Jack’s escapes
provide a fitting bookend to a cultural history of Atlantic excarceration, even if he is defeated at
the play’s end. My final chapter argues that Jack’s escapes and the mob violence that
accompanies his execution in most plays stage the continued radical force of lumpenproletariat
excarceration. J. B. Buckstone’s lower-class mob, for example, draws the audience into
celebration of Jack’s ambiguous victory over the thief-taker Jonathan Wild. In Jonas B.
Phillips’s rewriting of *Jack Sheppard* for American audiences, too, mob violence saves Jack
from hanging. Although he still dies at the end, he gets a chance to make a dying speech to the
rabble, giving a voice to the apparently defeated lumpenproletariat. The burgeoning star system
in Atlantic theatre influenced lumpen performances as well. Robert Montgomery Bird’s *The
Gladiator* (1831), for example, reveals the effects of Edwin Forrest’s celebrity on stagings of
mob violence and underclass emancipation. *The Gladiator* displays the uprising
lumpenproletariat within the context of the volatile Bowery audiences, contributing to a culture of
collective violence that cumulated in New York City’s Astor Place riots of 1849. Once
again, although Jack dies at the end of his performance, the staging of lumpen rebelliousness carries on, moving beyond the footlights and into the streets.

Moving Forms of the Lore Cycle

When representations of the lumpenproletariat circulate in and through popular entertainments, they do so by virtue of the superimposition of performances. Almost inevitably, middle-class stagings qualify and modify any possible act of self-representation. The theatre attempted to stage and define the emerging Atlantic economy, imagining connections and articulations between various members of the lumpen cohorts. The lumpen classes would not simply disappear. However, upper or middle class interests tried to claim them, to control or defuse the social critique embedded in their actions. I take the onstage presence of unthreatening characters—patriotic sailors, humbly abolitionist slaves, and demure Indian women—as a sign of popular culture’s need to claim the charisma of the lumpenproletariat while at the same time erasing the more dangerous unruliness. Thus, these plays just as often expose the inability of cultural authorities to contain fully these unruly energies as the appeal of the lumpenproletariat lurks behind the representation.

The complexity of these performances, I believe, defies reductive analysis of their social function. The currents of circum-Atlantic exchange had piled performance upon performance, and the plays I examine reveal these overlays. Because of these layers, one can jump to no easy conclusion; the plays clearly do not represent authentic lumpenproletariat performances, but neither do they simply falsify class relationships. The lore cycle I examine depends upon acknowledging that the mobile lumpenproletariat, even if present only by middle-class proxy, still has a formative effect upon these performances and their production. A crafty mobility, integral to the Atlantic lumpenproletariat and distinctive to their world, characterizes these superimposed stagings. Performance, already ephemeral and varying, does not stand still, and neither do the subject matters of Atlantic lore cycles. They stage multiple meanings and reference numerous antecedents with each performance. The plays I examine enact mobility; they perform versions of the historical reality of circulating peoples and goods, of the triangular trade and numerous local movements. The surviving artifacts—the playbills, scripts, prints, novels, and almanacs—record these exchanges, providing physical evidence of the movements of cultural gestures.

James Clifford, scrutinizing the mobility of culture, bases his study Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century on an “assumption of movement” that underlies the production and performance of culture. “Cultural action,” he asserts, “the making and remaking of identities, takes place in the contact zones, along the policed and transgressive intercultural frontiers of nations, peoples, locales. Stasis and purity are asserted—creatively and violently—against historical forces of movement and contamination.” The lore cycle of the lumpenproletariat, I argue, figures the mobility and conflict of Clifford’s vision of culture. Similarly, Paul Gilroy’s The Black Atlantic focuses attention away from borders and boundaries and towards the circulation of “ideas and activists as well as . . . of key cultural and political artifacts.” Circulation is crucial; lumpen acts hardly respected lines on maps. The term “transatlantic,” with its connotations of linear, bilateral movements, does not adequately comprehend the complex circulations of Atlantic culture. Joseph Roach’s investigations of the more aptly termed “circum-Atlantic” in Cities of the Dead assert that the multiple vectors of
Atlantic popular culture’s mobility disrupts any assessment of Atlantic culture that depends on binary models of movement and exchange. As this viewpoint implies, the popular culture of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat exhibited more than just geographical mobility. Performances circulated, reappearing in new forms, media and genres. The lore cycle overruns boundaries between theatre and print culture, between visual art and ephemeral materials, between music and history. The formal mobility of representations of lumpen classes echoes the physical mobility of Atlantic popular culture. The geographic mobility of performances circulating through the Atlantic, the class mobility as gestures move from slave quarters to metropolitan playhouse—all seem intimately related to the ways that Atlantic popular cultures never settle permanently in one form. The material conditions of Atlantic lore cycles—physical mobility—shape the forms and themes of popular theatre, pushing representations from vernacular performance, to theatre, to print, and back again in varying directions.

As the overlapping and layering of Atlantic theatre provides _Arrant Beggars_ with a method of accumulation and overlaid allusions and references, it also advocates a set of formal concerns. These forms provide a set of common denominators for the plays and performances I examine. Disguise, for example, play a foundational role in my analysis. I examine blackface, cross-dressing, and masking as strategies of disguise that provide forms for staging the lumpenproletariat as it eluded easy representation by established theatrical forms. As Macheath turns up in the Caribbean as the blackface Morano, and Polly disguises herself as a young man, and as pirates such as the Red Rover hide their identity, disguise formally embodies the problems of identity location permeating an increasingly mobile Atlantic world. Certainly the problems of disguise did not emerge newly on the stage in the late eighteenth century (Shakespeare’s comedies relied upon the trope), but with the production of _Polly_, the plot device took on new momentum and resonance in the world of Atlantic commerce and colonialism. Later melodramas, including the wildly popular nautical melodramas like _Black-Ey’d Susan_, rely significantly on the unmasking and revelation plot to re-establish the proper social order.

Acts of masking, of course, do not always conceal; costuming frequently disguises and reveals simultaneously. The sumptuous display of clothing and accessories frequently marks class difference and lumpen identity, for example. When the slave dancer Jonkonnu appears in _Three-Finger’d Jack_, or when Macbeth steals extravagant outfits from the tailor, or when Colman’s Trudge and Wowski aspire to the fashionable performances of London, costuming reveals the lumpen. The plays’ self-conscious use of costuming negotiates the implications of class and display as characters appropriate the attire marked for member of another group. The trope of costuming operates complexly, simultaneously inverting and reinforcing the dynamic of disguise; costuming frequently reveals and conceals identity at the same time. Importantly, like masking, it calls attention to the costumed construction of the play itself.

Masking and costuming emerge with a set of performed spectacles, acts that dance out their own theatricality. Musical numbers, dances, and celebrations represent a recurring site of lumpen performance. If the Bakhtinian carnivalesque operates in nineteenth-century theatre, it operates in the celebrations of the onstage lumpenproletariat, acts that amalgamate the high and low, creating a performance world that fractures and disorients hierarchies. The form links the prison-cell celebrations of Macheath’s gang in _The Beggar’s Opera_, the wedding dances of _Inkle and Yarico_, the sinister cavorting of _Three-Finger’d Jack_’s bandits, sailor’s revels, and lowlife blackface performance in _Tom and Jerry_. Such theatricals consistently associate lively dancing such as the hornpipe with lower-class characters, and frequently with criminality. These acts,
however, exist in a performance continuum that disregards categories such as lawful and lawless, permeating theatre culture with outcast stagings.

The celebratory numbers, acts within acts, also highlight another formal property of lumpen stagings, the self-conscious spectatorship which emerges later in the lore cycle. Growing especially visible in *Tom and Jerry*, lumpen theatricals become something to watch for other characters onstage. The title characters, for example, act out a voyeurism and spectatorship that implicates the audience in the same politics of watching. At the same time, the dual function of watching and participating means that the audience, rather than passively watching, also contributes to the construction of the performance. These forms produce an extended meta-theatrical mode that plays a central role in staging the underclasses. The theatre of the lumpenproletariat imagines its own position and function in culture in the formal strategies of staging the Atlantic’s despised yet admired classes.

**Staging High and Low**

As I follow the lore cycle, stagings of the lumpenproletariat exhibit changing relationships with the culture in which they appear. Themes and strategies of representation emerge, gain prominence, and recede into the background, leaving their traces behind in later stagings. This analysis tells the story, in large part, of the uptake and re-performance of the low by the high of outcast by conventional culture. The gradual assimilation and conventionalizing of the new or startling always marks these performances. At the same time, it never remains as simple as the taming of the rebellious, the containing of the criminal, or the elevating of the lowly. The complex dynamic of adaptation and adoption complicates the dualism implied by Linebaugh’s incarceration and excarceration (as useful as these terms are). The high and the low, the permitted and the mutinous, continually produce and reproduce themselves and various shades of their opposite numbers. The category of “the popular” confounds ideas of high and low just as a character such as Morano troubles the boundaries of what are genteel and lowly with his performance of lumpenness.

Not limited to thematic influence, Gay’s two operas influenced the institution of nineteenth-century theatre. Their insouciant acts directly stimulated the theatre licensing regulations that shaped English theatre culture into an enduring—but also problematic—opposition of high and low.33 By the late eighteenth century, stagings of the lumpenproletariat had become full participants in popular theatre—although the combination was not always an easy one. Performances of the lumpenproletariat opened up space between the high and the low, where audiences imaginatively engaged the outcasts of their society, admiring and fearing their deeds. The negotiation of high and low also, notably, emerged in the stagings themselves as they characterized the lumpenproletariat. Plays representing the lumpenproletariat often formally enact the institutional tensions that shaped them, reproducing the slighted-yet-admired status of low and popular performance.

However distant from the street lumpenproletariat its acts might seem, the lore cycle’s representations formed part of a historical fabric. Atlantic theatre’s lumpen characters butted up against the “multiethnic class” of proletarians that Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker see as “essential to the rise of capitalism and the modern, global economy.” The characters in popular theatre were sometimes working class (as in nautical melodrama’s heroes), although more often they represent figures on the margins, quasi-proletarian characters who do not neatly assimilate
to hierarchical class schemes. The pirates, thieves, slumming gentlemen and escaped slaves of popular theatre represent characters unaccounted for by traditional Marxist approaches, a “‘scandal’ within Marxism,” as Stallybrass observes.  

Linebaugh and Rediker’s Atlantic working underclasses provided the physical labor in a global economy that circulated performances of culture; they also supplied the manpower that circulated out of control at times, ducking out of the organized proletariat and returning as the lumpenproletariat. The performances I examine, in turn, represent these castaway and ship-jumping elements of a society conditioned by that circum-Atlantic economy. The circulations of the lumpenproletariat outlined possibilities, then, for theatre, visual art, and literature defined as transatlantic. They enacted a creative, mobile culture where numerous sources could intermingle and cross-pollinate. These crossings and interactions, in turn, fed into the lore cycle I investigate. As Marx’s commentary and the theatricals of the nineteenth century demonstrate, the lumpenproletariat functioned in the Atlantic cultural imagination as a heterogeneous interclass; it was a slippery non-group whose words and deeds filtered into other strata of Atlantic culture. I understand the lumpenproletariat, following Peter Stallybrass, “more as a political process than as a specific social group,” as lively as the performances that purported to represent it.

Moreover, as Stallybrass is careful to emphasize, the lumpenproletariat is as much a matter of representation—and misrepresentation—as concrete reality. Repeatedly, what seems to carry weight in Atlantic popular culture are not the historical numbers and conditions so much as the charismatic acts of imagining these classes, whether on the stage, in visual art, in narrative, or in song. The representations of the lumpenproletariat allowed, encouraged, even forced Atlantic culture to work through its shifting understandings of its selves and their relationships to others. Tracking the cycle of lumpenproletariat performances focuses on the acts generated by the interplay between dominant and subaltern classes. This focus on interplay shifts emphasis away from attempts to identify supposedly “authentic” lumpen culture in words, gestures, dance, or music—even if a historically identifiable lumpenproletariat did indeed affect the cultural representations. As James Clifford emphasizes in The Predicament of Culture, culture and its transmission is not about the loss or survival of “pure products”; the “unprecedented overlay of traditions” that he locates in the twentieth century characterizes the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as well, and articulates the performances and scripts of popular theatre.

This overlay and interplay results in cultural experiences in which we cannot separate the effects of representation from those of material experience, where each influences the other. As Marxist cultural theory has come to recognize, economic base and cultural superstructure do not stand in simple causal relationships. I am thus interested in class, in the words of Gareth Stedman Jones, “as a discursive rather than an ontological reality,” a concept produced by the multiple overlay of words, gestures, songs, and images in culture. Moreover, the theatricals I encounter focus attention not simply on the self-imaginings of classes, but on the imagined and performed relationship between the various class positions. The plays I examine present the traces of disdained groups—of culture marked as “lumpen,” as ragged, by ongoing negotiations among class positions. Popular theatre performances embody class, acting out in concrete terms what it meant to be lumpen, to be genteel, or to move amongst these locations.
Culture as Performance

The popularity and widespread currency of the plays I examine indicate that theatricality played a central part in Atlantic popular culture. For audiences who did not entertain themselves exclusively or even predominantly through reading, the theatrical (in its various guises, from the stage to music to the visual arts) effectively produced nineteenth century popular culture. It shaped the ideology of an era. Michael Denning addresses this trait of culture when he characterizes ideology “not as a system of false ideas or a false consciousness, but as a sort of narrative.” I suspect, however, that overemphasis on the importance of narrative might mislead. While people may (and certainly do) create stories to explain the “imaginary relationship[s] for the individual to the collective world,” narrative stands as a product of this process. Culture travels not as a smooth, directed—authored—narrative flow, but rather recursively, haphazardly, with multiply referential associations. It is acted, theatrical. Culture takes the form of echoed performances and pictured moments, uneven sequences of events. If it is narrative, it might be much more like a story that coalesces only after the fact, after the songs, dances, words and deeds have percolated and digested. Even then, of course, it invariably competes with other versions of the resulting story.

One of the stakes of this theatre history, then, is a recovery of culture as performance, a pursuit of the theatricality and performative aspects of Raymond Williams’ “lived experiences.” Rather than assuming that culture is a passive product possessed by certain groups, I treat it as the active performance of cultural gestures. Rosemarie Bank relies on this concept when she explains the concept of “theatre culture” as “the notion that peoples in a culture stage themselves and perform multiple roles.” Performance, especially when it explicitly emerges on theatre stages, represents moments where culture solidifies in gesture and performance, where it codifies briefly before moving on. In my study, I am interested in the stagings as waypoints, both as condensations of earlier performances and generators of later ones. The theatre itself, the site of these cultural valves and filters, represents the location where people indeed do act back, where they are not simply passive receptors of culture. This was the case in nineteenth-century theatre cultures; Bruce McConachie’s *Melodramatic Formations*, for example, details the ways in which antebellum audiences acted back in riots and re-enactments of stage spectacle, using the performances constructed in a theatre culture both on and off the stage.

Theatre, one of the most important means of acting out those non-narrative representations, served an especially generative role in nineteenth century Atlantic culture. It cross-pollinated with diverse forms of cultural expressions and spawned widespread progeny. The theatre served as a direct articulation point for public culture, a mode of creating publics and performing the relationships between them. J. Ellen Gainor, introducing a collection of essays on American theatre culture, cites the “impact, prevalence, and centrality of theater as an indomitable cultural force” in American culture, despite a longstanding “anti-theatrical prejudice.” The premise that the theatre indeed constituted a pervasive influence in Atlantic culture, articulating and influencing cultural expressions, governs much important work on theatre culture from both American and English perspectives.

Theatricality also provides a rationale for examining works of cultural production as part of the public sphere, as it participates in the realms of politics and popular communication. Although Jürgen Habermas’s bourgeois public sphere only peripherally addressed the possibilities of the theatre, it seems that the concept could extend to performance. Habermas himself briefly acknowledges the role theatre can play in producing “not merely a change in the
composition of the public but...the very generation of the public as such.” Although it is debatable whether Habermas’s liberal public sphere, based on the print culture of coffeehouses and newspapers, disintegrated as quickly as he implies, it almost certainly shifted; some of the shifts, I argue, positioned theatre as an institution of the nineteenth-century public sphere. The theatre itself was nearly always a public place, a space for various audiences to receive and produce culture. The theatre’s public was, however, not exclusively the liberal bourgeois that Habermas identifies. Habermas’ encounter with theatre is limited to the top-down parade of culture that involved lower class audiences only as passive spectators. The theatre culture of the public sphere I examine is closer to the participatory culture examined by recent scholarship on Atlantic theatre culture. Popular representations of the lumpenproletariat—the persistence and eventual preponderance of illegitimate theatre styles, for example—reveal the active persistence of a plebeian public sphere separate from the bourgeois public sphere.

The importance of some alternate version of the liberal public sphere becomes evident as nineteenth-century melodramas continually resituated private acts in terms of the public sphere. In Polly, for example, the private amours of Macheath counterpoint a pirate’s public war against the world, and his hidden, un-public execution gives way (like that of Three-Finger’d Jack) to a scene of public festivities. Repeatedly, the finale of nineteenth century melodramas stage a final celebration scene, the various characters of the play mixing promiscuously, slaves with masters, sailors and landlubbers, the urban poor and their upper class spectators. The plebeian and the lumpenproletarian continually make their presence known in the public arena. With these song and dance numbers, theatre acknowledges what practitioners of cultural studies have come to take as axiomatic: that culture, even ostensibly private experiences, belongs to the community; the sum of personal interactions adds up to public culture. That public sphere, danced out on stage, represents more than a monolithic liberal bourgeois world. The theatre makes explicit the relationships between the public and a literary culture that had established itself, in the nineteenth century, as a purveyor of private material. Theatre acted out, in public venues, the community relationships erased from all but the prefaces of other literary traditions.

There always seems to have been something dangerous about this exposure of the private sphere into the public sphere. Historically (beginning with contemporaneous theatre reviews and picked up subtly by current scholarship), there seems to be an implicit association of the terms “theatre,” “entertainment,” “violence,” “lumpenproletariat,” and “danger.” Atlantic culture appears to have created and performed repeatedly throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the contiguity of these concepts. In London, authorities forced popular theatre to set up shop on the south side of the Thames, outside the city; the case was similar in the Americas, with theatres like Philadelphia’s Southwark popping up in the “liberties,” the less-strictly-controlled margins of the city. Disorder in and associated with the theatres was widespread, and various plays—especially those representing the lumpenproletariat—acted out the relationship between theatricality, rebellious danger, and the lower classes.

In all these performances, Atlantic cultural history reveals the complexity of both the unruly, radical appeal of lumpenproletariat theatricality and the admiring and disciplining urges of middle class stagings. The underclasses’ position as a disdained yet charismatic party in a larger Atlantic culture foregrounds issues of cultural politics and power, of the relationships between people in power and those denied power and the culture both groups produce. In the cycle of Atlantic culture that I outline, dominant cultures repeatedly encounter and incorporate vernacular cultures. Just as often, the vernacular creates space for performances of resistance, in turn adapting forms from elite culture. The creation of culture, thus, is a shifty, performed affair
of changing ratios and proportions, moving both ways and taking various shapes. At times it looks like loving adaptation, sometimes jealous appropriation (as Eric Lott’s *Love and Theft* argues of blackface acts), and usually, more than one party exercises agency in the exchange. Sometimes established cultural authorities appear to push disdained images on stage and into print; at other times, the subtle presence of excluded characters and their gestures reveals cultural influence working against the grain of power. In the interaction, however, middle class Atlantic popular culture reveals itself as fully engaged with excluded classes, and those lumpen elements repeatedly act out against dominant cultures.

However, the lumpenproletariat, in the cases I examine, plays its part most often as an absent presence: the performances are about, but (frequently) not for, and only occasionally by, the excluded underclasses of the circum-Atlantic. Most of the time, upper or middle class theatre cultures, not the underclasses themselves, produce lumpen stage acts. Despite the lack of focus on underclass self-representation, however, I do not mean to replicate Marx’s disdain for various lower classes when he concludes in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* that “they cannot represent themselves, they must be represented.” I do not particularly address the historical veracity or the representative status of the characters that surface, the robber captain and rebellious slave, the nautical hero and maroon pirate, the urban ruffian and the rebellious hero—based on historical realities though they may be. Instead, I am interested in the acts of representation that both create and respond to an imagined Atlantic underclass. The cycle reveals a popular fascination with advancing and receding attempts to define and perform different concepts of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat.

The thematics and dynamics of the performances I analyze re-surface repeatedly in literature and visual art that has since become more canonized—culture that scholars have since treated as representative of the nineteenth century. This account of the history of Atlantic theatre culture, then, aims at a broadly interdisciplinary target, emphasizing the principle of cultural mobility over fixed categorization. It aims to identify the hidden continuities, links between themes, forms, and genres, which trouble any simple schematization of the development of American or English culture. This account also aspires to write history, perhaps not “from the bottom up” (as E. P. Thompson famously did in establishing the early aims of cultural studies), but from the middle outward, in all directions from a vantage point like the “popular.” In the process, the stagings of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat proclaim the theatrical investments of the nineteenth century in a broader sense. Without erasing the important distinctions between form and genre, my approach and subject matter hopes to question easy oppositions, between the ephemeral transience of a gesture and the concrete materiality of a painting, for example, or between the assumed domination and subordination of groups. At the same time, the formal changes between modes of expression and the different ways of producing meaning affect any understanding of Atlantic culture as well.

Macheath’s peregrinations, which I follow from London as it moves outward to cultural margins and back again, point to central cultural events in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The plays of this lore cycle do not just reflect thematic linkages; they act out structurally and formally linked events in cultural history. The traits that lumpen acts make visible reveal the broader dynamics of culture—details usually hidden behind smooth façades overwriting the traces of culture’s roots and routes. As popular theatre performed ongoing attempts to explain, to act out the lower classes and their relationships to other social locations, it performed its own place in culture. These stagings of the lumpenproletariat, with their focus on the low, certainly did not corrupt or disrupt culture. Instead, they created and passed on culture
in ever-changing forms. The lumpenproletariat on the stage carried embedded forms, words, deeds, and gestures central to the experiences of the Atlantic world and its theatrical culture.
CHAPTER 2

MACHEATH’S CIRCULATIONS: STAGING THE THEATRICAL CIRCUM-ATLANTIC

In 1777, George Colman the Elder launched his management of the Haymarket Little Theatre with the first production of John Gay’s 1729 ballad opera Polly. As the second part of The Beggar’s Opera, Polly stages the continuing story of Macheath’s London gang, now transported to the West Indies and turned pirate. The play highlights the problems of mobility and theatricality embodied in the Atlantic lumpenproletariat. The final scene clears up the confusions of identity which Macheath’s rebellion generated. Even as the performance attempts to cut through the play-acting, it presents the theatricality at the heart of lumpenproletariat stagings. “Have done then,” the Indian king Pohetohee exclaims, “Morano is now under the stroke of justice.” The announcement sparks an exchange central to the play:

Jenny: Let me implore your majesty to respite his sentence. If Macheath’s misfortunes were known, the whole sex would be in tears.

Polly: Macheath!

Jenny: He is no black, Sir; but under that disguise, for my sake, skreen’d himself from the claims and importunities of other women. May love intercede for him?

Polly: Spare him, save him! I ask no other reward.” (58)

Polly has just revealed that she is actually female, her male attire hiding her identity. The scene also discloses that Morano, as well, has been disguised, the white Macheath in blackface. The masking helps define Macheath and Polly as lumpen heroes, characters who ironically turn disdained lowness on its head, generating popularity from outcast status. Despite Macheath’s popularity (with theatergoers as well as his two lovers), he cannot be saved in time, and the play’s final lines leave Polly in mourning and an amorous Cawwawkee planning their nuptials.

As the scene suggests, disguise plays a central role in the plot; none of the characters realizes Morano’s identity until after Polly, also in disguise, heroically helps win the day. Audiences were in on the act, so the masked protagonists act a self-consciously theatrical performance. The ending lines of Polly also indicate that, within the economy of the play, disguise represents a contested term. In the end, the play works to eliminate such theatricality. Staging Macheath’s execution too quickly for Polly to intervene, the play shifts quickly to a celebratory ending featuring preparations for the heroine’s wedding to the Indian prince Cawwawkee. The final song, close on the heels of Cawwawkee’s announced intention to marry Polly, celebrates the triumph of “[j]ustice long forbearing” with “sports and dances” (59-60).
This is hardly an unequivocal triumph over the rebellious lumpenproletariat, however. Having celebrated outcast theatricality throughout, the play ends on a conflicted note; it forces audiences to watch Macheath’s defeat with mixed feelings.

The conflict of attractive yet threatening qualities defines stagings of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat in its late-eighteenth-century resurgence. The tensions of staging the low or the outcast produce an underclass celebrated and feared, admired and disdained at the same time. As an example of these tensions, Polly seems only an isolated moment, a short theatrical run in late-eighteenth-century London. Its production, however, hints at the bulk of a submerged iceberg, a longer dialectic, a theatrical lore cycle that circulated through the Atlantic world in performances of the underclasses.

As the central characters of extended cultural cycles, the beggars, pirates, and thieves of popular theatre performed three important qualities. Most importantly, they embodied the outcast, the ragged, the low—in short, the lumpenproletariat. Second, they acted out the implications of theatricality; and third, they performed the circulation of culture through the circum-Atlantic world. These three recurring traits of lumpen stagings mutually reinforce and modify one another. The underclasses become theatrical, for example, when Macheath masks up as Morano, or when Polly cross-dresses to go in search of Macheath. Mobility is always a matter of class, since movements cut across and slide along force lines of power. The theatre itself acts out the mobility of the despised classes it represents, circulating about the New World and performing from an always-suspect position on the margins of society.

With the success of The Beggar’s Opera, Polly, and the similar performances that I analyze, popular theatre continually negotiates the shifting relationships among performance, class, and mobility. This triangulation works simultaneously from above and below, often in conflicting ways. Plays depicting the mobile, theatrical underclasses attempt to act out the lumpenproletariat and its motivations. At the same time, lumpen characters often actively represent themselves onstage in unruly theatrical acts—if only in the play’s imaginary world, of course. The danger Macheath acts out in masking as Morano, the threat the play must expel in its finale, is this uncontrollable menace of lumpen self-representation. Macheath claims the privilege of theatrical self-representation, of creating and acting his own part. For this, he represents a threat, and as the play implies, he must die in the end.

For their audiences, however, gallant outlaws like Macheath provoked glee more often than dread, and their responses reveal the complex relationships between popular performances and socially radical gestures. Responses to the Haymarket’s performances under Colman seem conspicuously free from anxiety. The “Theatrical Intelligence” column in the Gazetteer observes the “judicious” alterations and “happily chosen” music in Polly, predicting the play was “likely to become a favourite piece.”47 The Duchess of Queensberry, who had sponsored Gay’s work in the face of official resistance and suppression fifty years before, reacted “with delight” to Polly’s performances, according to her theatre companion Anna Margareta Porter. Porter recorded with satisfaction the final justice of Macheath, noting with a moralizing sense of irony how the play “vindicated” Gay’s decency, justifying the Duchess’s support, which had deprived her of her place at court fifty years before. Along with most other viewers of the play, Porter remarks that the play’s “moral is nothing remarkably pointed.”48 In place of The Beggar’s Opera’s legacy of satire and scandal, only a mild delight remains. The Duchess’s cheerful enjoyment and Porter’s faint praise seem to have typified critical responses to Polly since its first production run of the eighteenth century.
Such sugary reviews always masked an undercurrent of alarm. Responses to *Polly* and *The Beggar’s Opera*, voicing both pleasure and anxiety, reveal an ongoing negotiation between the popular and the threatening. Since the 1728 debut of *The Beggar’s Opera*, Gay’s underclass heroes had relentlessly presented serious social criticism behind an entertaining mask. Fifty years later, Colman’s productions reveal that underclass pickpockets, fences, and thieves-turned-pirate persisted on London’s stages, theatricalizing the Atlantic world’s lawless underclasses. The popularity alone of the lumpenproletariat became threatening at times; the illegal ways of Macheath and his gang drew censure repeatedly. To some extent, this popularity grew in opposition to political and cultural authorities. In 1773, Sir John Fielding, in a prominent case of hostility to *The Beggar’s Opera*, attempted to prohibit performances of the play at Drury Lane and Covent Garden on the grounds that the opera “never was presented on the stage without creating an additional number of real thieves.”

Colman, then manager of Covent Garden, refused to comply, giving Macheath and his gang yet another appearance on stage. Under these types of pressures, late-eighteenth-century productions of *Polly* and *The Beggar’s Opera* took turns containing, strengthening, and re-routing the class critiques performed by the onstage Atlantic lumpenproletariat.

*Polly* demonstrates these shifts especially clearly. The sequel never proved as controversial and popular as *The Beggar’s Opera*, and subsequent criticism has consistently underestimated the second part’s importance. This devaluing fails to take into account the contexts of its performance history. *Polly* represents a significant performance in its own right, and it certainly forms part of a wider, newly energized pattern of representing underclass characters in English and American theatre. It is significant that Colman chose to rewrite and present *Polly* in his first season at the Haymarket; it was a daring choice, but one also calculated to succeed at a smaller theatre competing with the dominant houses. The play’s eight performances in 1777 made it the most frequently performed new play during Colman’s first season at the Haymarket Little Theatre and a short revival in 1782 ensured its continued prominence. Audiences saw *Polly* only one time less often than the most popular Haymarket production of 1777, Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. While the sequel’s numbers certainly do not approach *The Beggar’s Opera*’s sixty-two performances in its first season, *Polly*’s run actually represents a more significant popular event than most accounts acknowledge.

The first stagings of *Polly* signal the emergence of new styles and themes, newly powerful performances of the lumpenproletariat in Atlantic theatre.

**Staging the Lumpenproletariat at the Haymarket Theatre**

When *Polly* appeared on the stage in 1777, George Colman the Elder had significantly revised Gay’s portrayal of the dangerous Atlantic underclasses. While Gay’s pirates act out a complex world of social interactions, Colman’s production excises much of Gay’s focus on the underclasses. *Polly* does, of course, maintain the centrality of “Gay’s choice of thieves and highwaymen” as vehicles for social commentary. Gay’s characters had always voiced from below their critiques of class and identity created in the Atlantic world of capitalist and imperial expansion. In *Polly*, as in *The Beggar’s Opera*, the lumpenproletariat still serves, in Michael Denning’s words, as a “condensation, a figuration, of contradictions” within English society. Similarly, Dianne Dugaw argues that “people of the middle and lower sort voice the tensions of this historical moment of social shuffling.” Even in revised form, *Polly* performed such
problems of class and social positioning for its audiences, figuring them in terms of mobility and theatricality. In this respect, Colman’s production derives much of its cultural currency from the same traits that made Gay’s script compelling.

In simplifying the play, Colman’s cuts push Morano and Polly to the fore, emphasizing their theatrical, mobile critique of Atlantic culture. Mobility in its various forms defines the staging of Polly’s lumpenproletarian characters, and physical movement becomes alternately the results, the means, and the goals of various acts. Macheath’s initial mobility, for example, is forced; once transported to the West Indies, however, he soon exercises mobility of his own choosing. The procurress Diana Trapes reports rumors that Macheath “robb’d his master, ran away from the plantation, and turned pirate” (8). Although she does not know the extent of Macheath’s theatrical transformation into the blackface pirate Morano, the gossip proves basically correct, of course. Macheath-turned-Morano acts out the theatrical relationship between physical mobility and mobility of identity, movement and masking.

Polly’s mobility, in contrast, takes a more complicated form. Although Polly follows her transported lover Macheath to the West Indies voluntarily, she quickly finds herself sold into sexual slavery to the planter Ducat. She resorts to the strategies of the disempowered, relying on other female characters’ solidarity with what Damaris refers to as the “common cause of the whole sex” (16). Polly attains mobility through the theatrical strategy of cross-dressing, and maintains her freedom (despite her temporary imprisonment) with cagey performances. In the end, however, the play implies a restriction of her mobility, rendering her a more passive character as Pohetohee and his son Cawwawkee apparently decide her matrimonial future for her. Critics have since remarked that this ending represents a dissatisfying and perhaps overly simplistic resolution to the issues and conflicts raised by the script. An easy resolution, however, cannot erase Polly’s deep ambivalence about the nature of ethnic and racial identities, class positions, and gender roles in the colonial enterprise. The ending, read in concert with these other complications, might actually emphasize the freedom produced by lumpen mobility. If Polly is weakened and trapped, her containment contrasts all the more powerfully with her dangerous mobility; like Macheath, she must be tamed.

The play links the mobility of Polly and Morano to theatricality, creating a lumpen mobility of identity. Polly’s cross-dressing and Morano’s blackface masking work ambivalently, enabling and forcing their circulations. Colman’s script presents the other lumpenproletarian characters as thoroughly theatrical as well. They perform, acting out tenuously claimed identity positions within a theatrically-defined world. Morano’s predatory pirates, for example, eclipse all other action in the play with their theatricality. The pirate Culverin suggests this creative theatricality as he proudly announces their status as men “of invention” (27). As they perform roles (even in acts as simple as lying), they mimic the theatrical, and threatening, behavior of Macheath. Colman’s script excludes a telling rebuke Morano addressed to his crew; in Gay’s script, he instructs his men to “be Indians among ourselves, and shew our breeding and parts to every body else.” Even though this line fell to Colman’s cuts, the principle remains in the 1777 performance. Critic Robert Dryden, sensing these compound and theatrical subject positions, observes that the play “conflates identities,” constructing a variety of “culturally marginal positions.” Planters act like pirates, pirates act as gentlemen and as escaped slaves, and Native Americans act as both idealized nobility and scheming politicians. The play certainly negotiates among multiple marginalized positions; but perhaps more than conflating or fusing these identities, Polly stages performances of masking, of identity layering. It features identities simultaneously hidden and revealed, a self-consciously theatrical world of masking.
Polly stages her most visible performance of such identity layering, of course, as she dresses in men’s clothing. Even so, the script figures her as theatrical before she ever cross-dresses. Mrs. Ducat, for example, assesses Polly’s “over-honest look” as evidence of deceit, an innocent mask that does not fool the matron (22). When the play’s heroine does act, her theatrically emerges not as the deceitfulness that Mrs. Ducat sees, but rather as an enabling strategy. In cross-dressing, Polly remarks to herself, “With the habit, I must put on the courage and resolution of a man; for I am everywhere surrounded by dangers” (26).

Polly, however, has thoroughly proved her courage before cross-dressing—she achieves her independence from London, completes a transatlantic voyage, survives the loss of her money, bargains her way out of servitude, and identifies the most likely places to find Macheath. Breeches aside, she demonstrates a resourceful and creative theatricality. She talks her way ably in and out of situations, acting bold or reticent as it serves her purpose. When the pirates find her, for example, she speaks the lines of a young male adventurer, flattering them as “those Alexanders, that shall soon, by conquest, be in possession of the Indies.” They respond predictably, deciding she is a “mettled young fellow!” (29). Lumpen theatricality, she finds, becomes an empowering tool when power is unavailable to a woman on her own terms.

Once in the confidences of the pirates, her performance manifests in actions as well as words. Morano signals the change, informing all those present, “The youth pleases me; and if he answers in action—d’ye hear me, my lad?—your fortune is made” (36-7). Morano, of course, refers to her effectiveness in battle, but he may as well be probing the efficacy of her cross-dressing act. Sure enough, the play puts Polly’s theatricality to the test soon enough, but Morano is not the judge of her performance. Instead, Jenny Diver provides the excuse to both test and display Polly’s theatricality. As soon as Morano leaves the two alone, Jenny attempts to entice Polly. With the come-on, “How many women have you ever ruin’d, young gentleman?” Morano’s wife forces Polly to evade answering the suggestive questions.

Backed into a corner by Jenny’s fondling advances, Polly finally kisses her, though the performance partially fails to convince: “What, my cheek!,” Jenny exclaims, “let me die, if by your kiss, I should not take you for my brother or my father”; Polly, of course, knows she “must put on more assurance, or I shall be discovered” (38). She kisses Jenny again, performing her role more convincingly this time. Polly balks at taking “a turn in yonder grove,” but as Morano returns, Jenny abandons the project and instead accuses Polly of attempting to seduce her (39). Contemporary newspaper accounts conspicuously ignore the act, but it seems fair to assume that it provided an emblematic moment for lumpen theatricality in the play. Charged with sexual tension, the scene hinges upon Polly’s cross-dressing—the play’s self-conscious theatricality becomes a key player in the performances of gender identity and fidelity. Polly dons men’s clothing in order to secure her from sexual advances, dissembling in order to remain faithful. At the same time, as the threat comes unexpectedly from Jenny Diver, the scene simultaneously inspires titillation and suspense. Theatricality, for Polly as well as the audience, provides risk and reward at the same time.

Morano in disguise performs a similarly oscillating theatricality, although one focused upon a masculine performance of race and class. The pirate occupies a shifty position, simultaneously playing the roles of mock-aristocrat and theatrically blackfaced character. Morano enacts a lumpen strategy dangerous because it slides craftily between class locations, deflecting disdain for lowness onto ironic nobility. He masquerades as upper-class, of course, with ironic self-awareness. Self-consciously toying with class hierarchies, his crewmembers delight perversely in calling him a “genius too above service” and addressing him as “Noble
Captain” (28, 34). Like the “great” men he compares himself to, he stands above the plebeian values of industry, honor, and virtue. Pohetohee, questioning the captured Morano, reveals the threat of his mobile theatricality. “Would not your honest industry have been sufficient to have supported you?” the Indian king asks; “Have you no respect for virtue?” (55). Had Morano only stayed in his place and worked industriously, Pohetohee’s questions imply, he would have posed no threat at all.

Even as he mockingly plays at the role of gentleman, Morano’s theatricality exhibits a shrewd downward mobility. In masking himself in blackface, Macheath became Morano, claiming the despised role at the bottom of the Atlantic food chain. In assuming and acting blackness, Morano converts the apparent powerlessness of Atlantic African identity into an enabling role, making his upward mobility even more dangerous. Morano’s blackface, of course, is as overtly theatrical as his class acting; in an aside designed to clue those audience members who might not have realized, he tells Jenny Diver, “I disguis’d myself as a black,” rendering Macheath “dead to all the world but you” (31). His masking, like Polly’s cross-dressing, preserves him from the claims of the opposite sex and also enables his piratical command. Macheath as Morano, then, acts out a lumpen position characterized by an ironic, doubled role-playing; he acts the roles of nobleman and the disdained black simultaneously, while becoming neither. Morano thus represents one of Polly’s accomplishments—the lumpenproletariat characters are those that slide cunningly and mockingly from one position to another, never sitting still or exclusively inhabiting any one role.

In Morano’s masking, performances of race and class converge. Morano embodies in one theatrical character the multiracial lumpenproletariat circulating throughout the Atlantic. Morano’s name, as Calhoun Winton notes, “echoes both Marrano, the christianized—and persecuted—Jews and Moors of Spain, and Maroon, fugitive slaves in the West Indies, some of whom were Marranos.” The name itself reveals links among the variously unsettling contingents of mobile and resistant Atlantic underclasses. The play script, of course, confirms the linguistic hints. Polly suspects that she might find Macheath in the pirate crew or “among the slaves of the next plantation” (26). Though Colman cuts the line, in Gay’s script Ducat does indeed find runaway slaves among the crew. Macheath’s London gang, moving to the Caribbean in Polly, has become an interracial lumpenproletariat. Morano forms a link in this interracial cohort, his masked identity associating him with the island’s rebellious slaves as well as with the pirate marauders. At the same time, he acts as a theatrically self-conscious connection—he indicates the performative and cultural connections between lumpen groups. As the white Macheath in black disguise, Morano might be the first self-consciously blackface performer in Atlantic culture. Various plays (Othello, Thomas Southerne’s 1696 Oroonoko, Isaac Bickerstaff’s 1768 The Padlock), had presented blackface earlier, but it had always used blackface makeup to represent authentic blackness. In Polly, of course, blackface signifies blackface itself.

Morano’s performance thus represents a troubling presence onstage. Gay, scholars such as Robert Dryden have claimed, “designs Morano cosmetically and occupationally as a subversive figure.” Morano’s subversion of racial codes extends the lumpen rebelliousness of The Beggar’s Opera. Class tensions of the Atlantic mercantile system come to the fore in Polly, acted out in racially coded conflicts. Unlike in The Beggar’s Opera, there is no pardon or reprieve for Macheath once he dons the blackface. The work of empire in Polly allows no place for an agent who voluntarily assumes a mask of blackness and uses that identity to prey upon “legitimate” mercantile activities. Morano’s presence, uniquely in Polly, combines underclass
identity positions, deriving from them a charismatic power—the authority to command a pirate crew and to aspire to New World empires. Morano embodies rebellious potential, defying the limitations of Atlantic social structures.

If Macheath’s slippery status represents a problem, it also offers a solution for Atlantic theatre. It provides a way of imagining and containing the lumpenproletariat. The rabble needs leaders. In the Eighteenth Brumaire, the outcast elements that Marx labels the lumpenproletariat include not only the working classes but also downcast elements of more affluent classes—“decayed roués,” “literati,” and “ruined and adventurous offshoots of the bourgeoisie,” as Marx identified them. The most dangerous elements of society, he insinuates, include not only the disenfranchised underclasses but disaffected members of various elites. Marx, like theatricals of the lumpenproletariat, can hardly imagine a lumpenproletariat without some sort of leaders to guide the rabble. Many-headed as the hydra may be, the heads provide a comfortable way of understanding class and a convenient way of dismissing the troubling underclasses of the Atlantic world. The rabble simply responds to inciting troublemakers, whom authorities can isolate and dispatch relatively easily; the strategy repeatedly surfaces in lumpen stagings. Accordingly, Polly does indeed take care of Morano in the end. Combining his wily mock-nobility with his assumption of the blackened identity of “Morano,” he has become too transgressive for any staging, and Colman’s performance happily races to his hanging at the end. The play has cut off one of the lumpen hydra’s heads; however, as the metaphor implies, many more will appear through the course of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

### Cross-Dressing the Lumpenproletariat

Lumpenproletariat characters retained their status as emblems of Atlantic culture in the late eighteenth century. At the same time, however, stagings of the dangerous lower class often avert, at least partially, the radical disorderliness of Macheath and his cohort. Because of these deflections, new sets of vectors drive the lumpen it into the public eye.

The 1777 and 1782 revivals of Polly represent significant choices for the moderately adventurous Haymarket. Colman had continued Samuel Foote’s practice of providing a theatrical alternative to the patent houses. Colman, like his successor, did not constrain himself to “legitimate” theatre, and certainly not to the dignified serious drama. At the same time, he competed with the larger houses for actors, season dates, and even for repertoire, satirizing the larger houses when he could not copy their performances. Colman’s productions frequently mocked the foreign affectations and conceited stagings of “legitimate” drama. The Haymarket drew popular audiences with conventional performances, but also differentiated itself by frequently going one spectacular step further than its competition. Summer theatre’s management, fighting official disapproval over the years, had made the Haymarket the most profitable theatre in London by the mid-1770s. This profitability itself generated further tensions, evidenced in efforts to control the smaller upstarts. Between official censorship and the suppression efforts of the major theatre owners, the Haymarket occupied a position of qualified or controlled radicalism in the late-eighteenth-century London theatrical scene.

While Polly represents a decidedly new development in the story of Macheath and his lumpen cohort, it also reveals their continued presence on the stage. Gay’s characters had never disappeared; in fact, The Beggar’s Opera had retained a place of high popularity in London theatricals. W. E. Schultz notes that the play saw performance “in every year of the eighteenth
Polly, then, must be understood in the context of the frequent productions of *The Beggar’s Opera*. Multiple institutional connections expand the textual relationship between the two plays. Hesther Boyd Colles (fl. 1776–1780), a relative unknown, continued the tradition established by John Gay’s operas of launching fresh actresses, innocent *ingénues*, into the frenzied controversies of popular stage careers and public scrutiny. The bass singer and popular actor Charles Bannister (1741–1804) had played Macheath in *The Beggar’s Opera* and later blacked up as Morano. The crossover demonstrated by Bannister’s roles seems to be common; most of the cast of *Polly* had already played (or would soon after play) parts in productions of *The Beggar’s Opera*. The shared frame of theatrical reference with such a perennial favorite, of course, presumably did not hurt *Polly*’s ticket sales. At the same time, the connections produced a shared vocabulary of performances, and the two plays thus combined to work through problems of class repeatedly in the late eighteenth century. The relationship between *The Beggar’s Opera* and *Polly* reveals the continuities in Atlantic lore cycles, what Walter Benjamin characterized as the passing of the cultural baton, unheralded and relatively undetected, under the noses of elite culture.

*The Beggar’s Opera* had gone underground with its social critique by the 1780s. As *Polly* had shifted focus from Morano’s masking to Polly’s cross-dressing, the *Opera* also underwent a gender-crossing transformation in the 1780s. An announcement in the *London Advertiser* of August 8, 1781 (four years after *Polly*’s premiere and a year before its revival) reveals the new presentation of *The Beggar’s Opera*, announced it as a “Favourite Pasticcio.” This production of the *Opera*, mounted by Colman’s summer crew at the Haymarket, featured an entirely cross-dressed cast. Though not the first such travestied production of the *Opera*, it might have been the most popular of its time and the most widely remarked. Although cross-dressed versions of *The Beggar’s Opera* had become increasingly fashionable in the 1770s, Colman’s unusual production went a step further, casting male actors in all the female parts, and female in all the male roles. The act proved popular, and reappeared at the Drury Lane and Covent Garden theatres in 1782 and 83, thus surrounding performances of *Polly* in 1782. The proximity, I argue, is not accidental.

Audiences and critics alike have generally received these productions as little more than amusing diversions, but they reveal an important trend in the way that the late eighteenth century stage rewrote and re-routed the cultural work of John Gay’s lumpenproletariat. Performances of *The Beggar’s Opera* presented relevant social critique behind a mask of frivolous humor. The plays’ social commentary operated on a perhaps subliminal level—never openly engaging controversial issues, they made the lumpenproletariat entertaining. The increased amusement value of the performances, however, does not mean that significant social critiques disappeared. This dynamic emerges in accounts of the play’s humorously couched threat. An obituary for one playgoer, a Mrs. Fitzherbert of Northamptonshire, relates that:

On the Wednesday evening before her death this lady went to Drury Lane theatre, in company with some friends, to see the Beggar’s Opera. On Mr. Bannister’s making his appearance in the character of Polly, the whole audience were thrown into an uproar of laughter; unfortunately the actor’s whimsical appearance had a fatal effect on Mrs. Fitzherbert; she could not suppress the laugh that seized her on the first view of this enormous representation; and before the second act was over she was obliged to leave the theatre. Mrs. F not being able to banish the figure from her memory, was thrown into hysterics, which continued without intermission until Friday morning, when she expired.
Mrs. Fitzherbert, laughing along with the other fans of the reversed *Beggar’s Opera*, never saw it coming. Despite the displacement into the realm of the ridiculous, this account codes a submerged warning about the play’s dangerous social work.

This potential danger had to be tamed somehow. In the newspaper reviews of the reversed *Beggar’s Opera*, class critiques and cross-dressing subtly disappear from view; instead, the reviewer concentrates on the theatrically redeeming values of the performance. The “astonishingly correct manner” in which Colman’s stars handled the difficult material bespeaks not the rowdy satire of burlesque, but an attempt to mimic the propriety of the patent theatres’ self-styled elitism. Bannister, in particular, garnered high praise for playing “chastely,” with a “serious performance” of Polly, not “attempting to render the character ridiculous by making it more outré, than it was rendered by his voice and figure.” Clearly, terms like “outré” and “ridiculous” pose a threat to the reviewer’s concept of decorous and genteel theatre. Quickly suppressing these possibilities, the commentary shifts the discussion into the realm of thespian skill. Cargill performed the role of Macheath “with singular and wonderful success,” it continues; she “occasionally exhibited some masterly touches that surprised us greatly.” Nevertheless, the writer’s insistence on the production’s chasteness and propriety imply an anxiety about the transgressive qualities of a cross-dressed performance. Excellence of performance and drag seem mutually exclusive qualities, or at least improbable bedfellows.

Figures like Bannister as Polly persisted in the popular imagination. Mrs. Fitzherbert was “unable to banish the figure from her memory.” Lumpenproletariat characters, always in sight, were hard to keep out of mind. Bannister’s cross-dressing acted a significant moment in Atlantic theatre, and engravings of the role spread lumpen travesty. A depiction of Bannister in the Harvard Theatre Collection, like the play’s reviews, downplays the outrageousness of travesty (Figure 1). At the same time, of course, Bannister’s understated demeanor comically underscores the significance of the casting choice. Bannister’s shockingly funny performance played in the grey area between the amusing and the deadly, shiftily negotiating between the two.

The “reversed” *Beggar’s Opera*, with its heroine in breeches, resonated in numerous ways with *Polly*. Audiences knew about and witnessed both plays, and members of the cast played minor parts in both productions. Kenny, for example, a minor actor who also played the pirate crewman Laguerre in *Polly*, performed the female part of Moll Brazen in *The Beggar’s Opera*. Mr. Massey, the playbills reveal, played both Vanderbluff in *Polly* and Mrs. Vixen in *The Beggar’s Opera*. A Miss Hale appears in both productions playing minor parts, Damaris in *Polly* and a “Waiter” in the cross-dressed production. In addition, the two leads of *The Beggar’s Opera* travesty had both established their careers playing John Gay’s underclass characters. Charles Bannister, Polly in the cross-drag *Beggar’s Opera*, also appeared as Macheath/Morano in *Polly*. Ann Brown Cargill, who played Macheath in this production, was also associated with, and possibly considered for, the title role in *Polly*. Travesty productions of *The Beggar’s Opera* easily evoked their counterpart acts of cross-dressing in *Polly*.

Cross-dressing, in both *Polly* and *The Beggar’s Opera*, performs a radically theatrical lumpenproletariat. As Laurence Senelick observes, “[m]ixing and matching, let alone switching, the signs a culture uses to distinguish gender spells danger.” Much of this radical energy resided in travesty. The last two decades of the eighteenth century were a time of transition regarding the boundaries of gender identities. The middle of the eighteenth century, as Dror Wahrman claims, saw “a resigned—if not humouring—willingness to accept that gender boundaries could
ultimately prove porous and inadequate.” Mid-eighteenth-century cross-dressing, while pushing the boundaries of gender performances, had become a commonplace on and off the stage. As

Figure 1. J. Sayer, "Mr. Bannister in the Character of Miss Polly Peachum," 1781; courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection.
Terry Castle asserts, the early and middle of the eighteenth century produced what might be called, without exaggeration, a “culture of travesty.” The later part of the century, on the other hand, witnessed a profound shift toward what Wahrman labels “gender panic.” Cross-dressing on stage became a more socially volatile event. The cross-dressed productions of *The Beggar’s Opera* in the 1770s and 1780s thus show that popular theatre consistently imagined the lumpenproletariat as a location for radical performances, even if audience responses worked to contain those unruly impulses.

Lumpen cross-dressing may not simply perform anxieties about gender identities; Senelick also makes an important qualification. “Traditional cross-dressing,” he writes, “rarely intends fusion, the *sine qua non* of androgyny, but rather gender division through choice of one polarity or other.” Polly’s dressing up in men’s clothing (especially contained as it is within the boundaries of the playhouse and the imaginative world of Gay’s West Indies) may reinforce more than trouble conventional gender roles. At the same time, Bannister as Polly layers gender in complex ways, holding the “polarities” of gender in dialectical tension.

Instead of charging headlong at the gates of conventional gender roles, the drag in *Polly* works radically sideways. It performs a substitution in Roach’s sense of the term, a transmitted and adapted performance. Travesty or drag present corollaries, perhaps, or augmentations, of the various other modes of theatrical crossing that Gay’s lumpen characters enact. As Senelick argues, “[c]ross-dressing in the theatre thus engages with more than concerns about gendered personal identity: it invokes aspects of divinity, power, class, glamour, stardom, concepts of beauty and spectacle, the visible contrasted with the unseen or concealed.” Colman’s travesties acted out more than gender transgression. The cross-dressing acts in both *Polly* and the travestied *Beggar’s Opera* represent the masked lumpenproletariat and interracial cohorts along with the radical sexual politics that had always accompanied outcast characters.

The travestied lumpenproletariat performs complex, ambivalent moves—their acts are neither openly rebellious nor completely dismissible. Such slipperiness defines the onstage lumpen. The performances work ambiguously; they become the object of dismissive laughter, and a laughable underclass might be a defused one. At the same time, the lumpen also emerges recharged, once again spectacular and titillating, the object of popular applause. Macheath, Polly, and their cohort gained new energy to perform their radical acts. Polly’s cross-dressing is radical because it presents an alternate version of Morano’s masking. As Polly shifted to top billing (becoming the title character and the center of most of the play’s scenes in Colman’s 1777 *Polly*), the focus of Colman’s staging has almost certainly moved from Morano’s dangerous blackface to Polly’s drag performance. Colman’s text, of course, still capitalizes on Macheath’s sensational disguise as a Maroon pirate. His masquerade, fifty years after Gay authored the play, still acts out the dangerous mobility of underclass identity. As travesty becomes the newly dominant formal element, lumpenproletariat acts extend to cross the boundaries of gender as well as race and class.

*Polly and The Beggar’s Opera Move Offstage*

The theatricality of Gay’s enduring situations bled into real life on stages large and small. Since its first appearance, *The Beggar’s Opera* had blurred the boundaries between onstage and offstage theatricality. The play inspired some of the first theatrical biographies, documents in which offstage biographies merged with onstage personae. As Cheryl Wanko argues, Lavinia
Fenton and her fellow performers occupied a position in which the public and the private spheres overlapped and interpenetrated. Audiences conflated onstage character with offstage celebrity, and popular culture consistently understood *The Beggar’s Opera* and its characters in this manner by the 1770s. William Blake, copying Hogarth’s famous depiction of a performance of *The Beggar’s Opera*, reveals the consistent interpenetration of actors and audiences (Figure 2). The image emphasizes the eighteenth-century practice of allowing elite audience members to exercise “freedom of the scenes,” viewing the performance while seated onstage, albeit from the margins. Blake’s engraving, rendering Hogarth’s original oil colors into black and white, creates a line of light linking the spectators on the margins with the actors on the stage. Hogarth’s painting, unlike Blake’s engraving, sets the actors apart from the audience visually, emphasizing the brilliance of Macheath’s red coat, Lucy Lockit’s blue dress, and Polly’s eye-catching garb. Blake’s later engraving, however, relies upon the contrast of light and dark, and the audience appears almost as visually prominent as the actors. With prints appearing from the 1790s well into the next century, Blake’s interpretation of Hogarth emphasizes the offstage theatricality of *The Beggar’s Opera* as much as the events occurring within the play.

Blake’s engraving, based on a later version of Hogarth’s painting, also registers the interplay of audience and actors by presenting two dramas at once. The scene, based on a later version of Hogarth’s painting, depends on the public awareness of Lavinia Fenton’s involvement with the married Duke of Bolton, pictured seated on the right with a book in his hand. By picturing Fenton’s connection to Bolton, the image depicts her onstage and offstage identity simultaneously, ironically playing off the dual perceptions of Polly’s faithfulness and Fenton’s relationship with a married man. The image formally reproduces this dialectic. Although Polly pleads with her father for Macheath’s life, the actress’s eyes meet the Duke’s, their reciprocated gaze crossing the bounds of the performance. Fenton-as-Polly kneels at the juncture of two performances, linking an imagined theatrical lumpenproletariat and theatrical reality. The dual depiction of the roles of Fenton and Polly underscores theatricality’s pervasiveness; it slides past the boundaries of the stage into the boxes as spectators become actors and historical actors conflate with their characters.

The lumpenproletariat revealed in other ways the same tendency to jump the confines of the stage, playing out theatrical performances in the street. A series of incidents involving Ann Brown (later Cargill), the actress who built a reputation playing Polly at Covent Garden in the late 1770s and Macheath in Colman’s travesty version of *The Beggar’s Opera*, reveal the dramas of Atlantic mobility playing out in a complex staging of gender and class. Brown, as her biographers note, had become an “amazing favorite” with her publics. In winning such celebrity, she follows the tradition of earlier actresses who had played Polly in accruing a scandalous reputation in the theatrical world. Like Lavinia Fenton (the first Polly, who debuted fifty years earlier), she had eloped despite the watchful eyes of male authority figures and the constant attentions of the theatre-going public.

Brown’s elopement is significant, revealing the forms of theatre culture spilling beyond the confines of the stage. Her story plays out the drama of female mobility staged in Polly Peachum’s marriage to and search for Macheath. As Polly later does onstage, Brown acted out the complications of feminine agency, asserting her independence and contesting the attempted restraints on her behavior. Also like Polly’s story, her strategies and tactics reveal the limitations imposed upon feminine mobility in circum-Atlantic culture of the late eighteenth century. Effectively, Brown’s story echoes and modulates the dilemmas and solutions staged by Polly’s travels, her performances a version of her onstage character’s acts.
In December 1775, around the age of sixteen, she engaged in a series of struggles with parental authority. At one point, her father forcibly removed her from London and carried her away in a coach. Thinking quickly, she alerted the inhabitants of the village she was passing through, “declaring that the man (her father) was carrying her away by force, in order to ship her for America.” For the time being, she escaped from her father’s grasp, and returned to act at Covent Garden for the 1776-77 season. In the autumn of 1776, the confrontation made the news again:

Friday night Mr. Brown, the coal-merchant, whose daughter eloped from him some months since, attempted to seize her, as she stopped in a coach at the end of the play-house passage in Bow-street. The little Syren was accompanied by her aunt, who made a great outcry, and told the populace Mr. Brown was mad; the alarm presently reached the play-house, and the theatrical garrison sallied out in great numbers. . . to relieve the distressed damsel. The thieves in the Beggar’s
Opera, armed with pistols, &c. made a most formidable appearance, and the crowd was so numerous, that for a considerable time the street was impassable. At length, however, the lady was handed into the play-house in triumph, and, notwithstanding her great agitation of spirits, performed the part of Polly greatly to the satisfaction of a very numerous and brilliant audience, who received her with repeated shouts of applause.

Lumpen thieves, a street mob, and actors combined to stymie parental authority, acting out the excarcelary urges of the lumpenproletariat. In the process, they give the public ever more sensational theatrical material. The account’s rapid shifts between the languages of theatre and of news reporting reveal the theatricalization of everyday life. In the account’s terms, actual thieves (not actors dressed as Macheath’s gang) arrive, but they do so in a distinctly theatrical way, making their appearance as if on stage already. Brown, playing Polly on the street, smoothly transitions into her onstage performance.

The episode provides an important gloss on the relationship between theatricality, the performance of underclass identity, and gendered mobility. Like Polly’s travesty appearances (both in Polly and The Beggar’s Opera), the incident holds the gravely dangerous and the ludicrously fantastic in wavering tension. The theatrical stakes seem as high as in stagings of Polly’s encounters with the lumpenproletariat, and it is harder, perhaps, to sort the real from the fantastic. The episode articulates an imaginatively compelling theatricalization of everyday life. The event’s publicity emphasizes the social roles the players acted out; stage actor becomes lumpenproletariat outcast, and actress plays the part of endangered heroine in a real-life circum-Atlantic drama. With the episode’s presence in the historical record, the lumpen theatricality and circum-Atlantic mobility of Ann Brown’s onstage roles became part of her professional persona and defined the celebrity she achieved as a performer.

The historical incident differs significantly from staged versions of the lumpenproletariat’s actions. Within the playhouse, Polly’s cross-dressing enables her mobility and protects her from the gang of unruly pirates and villains. Her temporary assumption of male attire re-affirms gender division: it allows her a certain degree of masculine success, but only as a masculinized figure. Eventually, the preparations of the wedding reclaim her firmly for conventional femininity. In Brown’s attempted abductions and rescue, though, the heroine acts out a different relationship to mobility. Her movement is forced, if imagined; her father, in all likelihood, was not trying to send her to America, but rather attempting to restrict the dangerous mobility of her theatrical career. Brown, also, acts within the bounds of conventional, if theatrical, femininity. Like Polly, she enacts a drama of female captivity and mobility. In contrast, though, she transposes the terms, cleverly figuring her father’s attempt to immobilize her career as the forced mobility of transportation to America.

Like Polly, Brown assumes theatrical strategies to achieve her release. She implements her escape first with her theatrical talents—her ability to produce, take on, and act out convincingly the role of kidnapped damsel. In the second release, of course, the theatrically costumed gang of actors frees her. Her resistance, in addition, negotiates an ambivalent boundary between female agency and helplessness. Her companion, an aunt, actively engineers Brown’s freedom by accusing her father of madness, effectively turning back the charge of hysteria on the male authority figure. Brown herself uses more complex strategies, acting helpless in order to help herself. In the end, the theatrical triumph of the lumpenproletariat over Brown’s father might present a more compelling version of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat, granting the underclasses more agency than onstage versions of The Beggar’s Opera and Polly.
In Brown’s case, the lumpenproletariat wins, breaking out once again: Macheath’s gang, in a spectacularly theatrical appearance on the street, reclaims one of their own from the hands of an authority figure.

This extended incident highlights the overt theatricality of the culture in which The Beggar’s Opera and Polly played such an important part. A year after Brown’s abduction and rescue, audiences saw the threat of transportation carried out onstage in Polly. The Beggar’s Opera, certainly familiar to the bystanders, had staged such forced mobility for years. The incident confirms that gendered acts of mobility seeped into the fabric of late-eighteenth-century culture, providing models for real behavior and theatrical templates for other acts. The performances, after all, represent actions credible enough to be believed; it does not seem too farfetched to see the actress who plays Polly about to suffer the same treatment that Polly did onstage. The blurred boundaries between staging and reality formed a persistent feature of Atlantic culture. Both everyday and onstage performances of identity, as Brown’s story attests, constituted mutually articulating, revising, and reinforcing aspects of a theatricalized Atlantic culture.

Colman’s underclass performances, as Brown’s act demonstrates, did not remain passively in London. The onstage mobility of Polly and Morano corresponded to the mobility of the theatrical world, and lumpen character types circulated around the Atlantic staging their popular acts. Although Polly never achieved the widespread success of its first part, The Beggar’s Opera presented “surrogate” performances of Polly both in England and in the Americas. In Cities of the Dead, Joseph Roach discusses “surrogation” as a key characteristic of the “three-sided relationship of memory, performance, and substitution” in the circum-Atlantic world. In processes of constant and varying substitutions and retentions, circum-Atlantic performances staged the boundaries and the self-definitions of cultures, substituting and altering elements with time and change. This surrogation, never an exact process, takes place when, for example, lumpenproletariat characters take the stage once again to act out the class relationships creating the fabric and texture of Atlantic culture. Looking for traces of Polly in the New World, then, is a search for analogues (not exact duplicates), for ways in which the acts that reached London audiences disseminate through the Atlantic world. It is a search for onstage performances that become offstage acts and for the reverse processes as well.

Gay’s lumpenproletariat characters appeared in surrogate stagings as the plays appeared in various other locales. The repeated appearances of The Beggar’s Opera in the New World act out the same mobility the ballad opera and its sequel stage. Surrogation occurred all along the networks and nodes of the circum-Atlantic world. Performances of The Beggar’s Opera in the Americas, for example, stage the same underclass mobility and theatricality that Polly presented to its more limited audiences. Even if Polly did not appear in the Americas onstage, other versions of the criminal cohort appeared again and again on the stages of the Americas. The performance arcs of Gay’s lumpenproletariat thus shift in and out of theatre, on and off the stage. Acting and reality bleed together; actors of various sorts stage performances that reveal the theatricality and mobility of Atlantic culture.

The Lumpenproletariat in the Americas

The publicity surrounding Ann Brown also exposes the central role of the New World in the theatricalized culture surrounding and including The Beggar’s Opera. The Americas
maintained a constant presence in the theatre of Atlantic mobility. If the stars and villains of the London theatrical world—whether actresses or their characters—undergo forced movement, their routes inevitably seem to carry them to and through the western hemisphere, along the Atlantic routes of culture. Observers had already sensed the connections, using The Beggar’s Opera to articulate the issues involved in English England’s involvement in the American colonies. Certainly, the re-emergence of Polly at the start of the American Revolution suggests that acts of insouciant lumpen rebellion commented, however subtly, on current events.

The St. James’s Chronicle on October 18, 1781, for example, placed an all-female performance of The Beggar’s Opera in American contexts. After accusing Colman of having “turned the whole thing into Ridicule,” the reviewer returns to his imaginative scheme for prosecuting the war in America. “No female Polly will ever be so popular as Bannister; and if he is to be sent against Washington, Invalids may be employed with tolerable success.” The reviewer places the satirical suggestion within the context of a more serious debate about gender, nationality, and professional occupations. “It has been some Time in Contemplation,” the review continues, “to assign the Conquest of America, and the plunder of East-India Nabobs, to those Heroes of the Buskin, who have been trained in our Theatre, at least in the Affectation of Valour, and in the prompt Execution of Orders of their Masters.”78 The Chronicle’s review associates theatrical cross-dressing with the political measures which might be undertaken in order to produce more military manpower, even imagining Bannister as a fantastic transatlantic expeditionary. In this disparaging review, the domestic acts of cross-dressing, (whether in onstage performances or in occupational choices), bear directly on England’s ability to maintain its presence in America. The star actors of The Beggar’s Opera, in this case, have become poster children for what some thought wrong with English culture and its struggle to retain its American empire. Perhaps more importantly, the review understands the rebellious unrest in the American colonies in terms of the breakaway urges of Macheath’s gang.

The Beggar’s Opera and America maintained a persistent connection in the English cultural imagination. But Gay’s underclass protagonists did not simply perform American scenes from afar; they also traveled those very routes, staging their presence in theatres in nearly every major port of call in the circum-Atlantic world. They began traveling these circum-Atlantic routes of culture early. Frank Kidson, for example, locates the first Jamaican performance, and perhaps the first New World staging, of The Beggar’s Opera, in 1733. William Rufus Chetwood’s 1749 History of the Stage, retelling the story from a “gentleman” from the island, reveals the dangers of acting the part of the underclass in the Caribbean:

[A] company in the year 1733 came there and cleared a large sum of money. . . . They received three hundred and seventy pistoles the first night, to The Beggar’s Opera; but within the space of two months they buried their third Polly and two of their men. The gentlemen of the island for some time took their turns upon the stage, to keep up the diversion; but this did not hold long, for in two months more there were but one old man, a boy, and a woman of the company left. The rest died either with the country distemper or the common beverage of the place, the noble spirit of rum punch which is generally fatal to new-comers. The shattered remains, with upwards of two thousand pistoles in bank, embarked for Carolina to join another company in Charlestown, but were cast away in the voyage.79

The report cannot resist moralizing, concluding that, “[h]ad the company been more blessed with the virtue of sobriety they might perhaps have lived to carry home the liberality of those
generous islanders.” Chetwood’s history, of course, tells little about what made the play popular in Jamaica, but it does indicate the centrality of Gay’s lumpenproletariat characters to Atlantic theatre culture. *The Beggar’s Opera* provided material for an auspicious opening night performance, and Chetwood, using the generic “Polly” to identify the actresses, implies the defining nature of the role.

The account also serves as a central emblem of the theatrical lumpenproletariat in the Americas. The elements trace a series of significant and recurring associations in Atlantic theatre. The theatre troupe, fighting hardships, battles the typical hardships of the island. The “diversions” they offer, even when assisted by gentlemen of leisure, are no match for the disease and alcoholism, and eventually the troupe withdraws to another part of the Americas, ending their retreat in shipwreck. The account rehearses the associated dangers of morally suspect activities, Caribbean climates, and circum-Atlantic mobility. Victims of their own lumpen condition, the troupe acts out the defeats of *Polly* and *The Beggar’s Opera*.

Macheath’s gang, perhaps because of these associations, continued to define American theatre. Accounts of the growing American theatre establishment in the late eighteenth century agree that American companies invariably tried the opera. The first New York City performance of *The Beggar’s Opera* occurred on December 3, 1750, at the Nassau Street Theatre operated by Thomas Kean and Walter Murray’s theatrical company, one of the first to present regular dramatic seasons in the American colonies. The historian of American theatre George Overcash Seilhamer notes that “for almost half that period [between 1728 and 1769] there was no American company so ‘mean and contemptible’ as not to sing or attempt to sing” Gay’s *Opera*. Intermingling circum-Atlantic currents also helped maintain the conspicuous presence of *The Beggar’s Opera* in American theatre culture. Celebrated English performers like Charles Dubellamy, who had received top billing as Cawwawkee in Colman’s *Polly*, married an American and traveled to New York City around 1784. He subsequently worked with William Dunlap and the Hallam-Henry theatrical management, perhaps in the capacity of literary agent. Dubellamy’s presence, like Ann Brown’s adventure, shows that the historical experience of Atlantic actors mimicked the imaginative experiences they performed onstage.

Historical accounts confirm the mixed peril and appeal of underclass stagings like *The Beggar’s Opera* in America. These performances, like their counterparts in London, habitually skirted the bounds of propriety. In Williamsburg, Virginia, a 1768 performance by the Virginia Company of Comedians (a troupe which may have shared some performers and its repertoire with the Lewis Hallam’s American Company in New York), appeared in partial cross-dress. A Mrs. Parker played Polly for her benefit, while a Mrs. Osborne, who had also played Sir Harry Wildair in *The Constant Couple*, played Macheath. Similarly, at least one of two 1769 Annapolis performances by the New American Company featured some cross-dressing antics; a cast list printed in the *Maryland Gazette* indicates that while Mrs. Parker played Polly to Mr. Verling’s Macheath, a Mr. Walker doubled up in the roles of Crook-Finger’d Jack and Moll Brazen. These particular performances do not seem to have excited much opposition, but American theatres did not exhibit the widespread cross-dressing of English playhouses, and a travestied *Beggar’s Opera* thus represents something of an unusual event.

While Colman’s *Polly* and the travestied *Beggar’s Opera* energized London stages, American audiences enjoyed performances of Macheath and his gang. In Annapolis, for example, the ballad opera played three times in the course of the 1783 and 1784 seasons. All was not smooth sailing, however, for *The Beggar’s Opera*. In what W. E. Schultz calls a “countercurrent to the general popularity of *The Beggar’s Opera* in America,” the historical
record reveals a number of altered or censored performances of the play. Schultz lists performances in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1793, 1794, and 1795 with ‘the exceptionable passages obliterated’.” In 1799, the ballad opera appeared in a “deodorized version” in Philadelphia. Unfortunately, none of these scripts appear to be in existence, nor do any newspaper accounts or playbills detail the changes. Whatever the details of the censorship, though, we might theorize that the underclass depictions of the play, coupled with the always-precarious social position of theatricals and actors, combined to produce uncomfortable stagings of mobility, of shifty disorder, of dangerously lionized criminality. These performances were, from time to time, inevitably watered down.

*The Beggar’s Opera* seems to have retained some of its socially disruptive force over time. Much later, the tendency resurfaces; the *American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review* reported in 1817 the hissing of *The Beggar’s Opera* at New York City’s Park Theatre. According to the account, rioting or near-rioting occurred, and watchmen “armed with their magic wands” arrived to keep the peace. Arrests and legal action followed for some of the participants. The account blames the play itself; the “disgust produced by the representation of this vulgar and licentious burletta,” it claims, inspired the disturbance. The reviews of performances preceding the one in question, however, indicate that there may have been other factors. Charles Incledon’s performances had been inconsistent at best, and his offering of an “American patriotic song of British manufacture” hardly made up for the absence of “those powers which the company had assembled to admire.” *The Beggar’s Opera*, then, even if it may not have directly inspired the rioting, provided a venue and a context. For elitist critics, the *Opera* supplied an easy mark for moralizing condemnation. Audiences were not displeased with the play itself, but critics of a more conservative inclination perceived it as a threat and shifted blame to its immoral tendencies. *The Beggar’s Opera*, even when its onstage performances were not particularly dangerous or radical, provoked disorder and outraged responses.

During the years of *The Beggar’s Opera*’s renewed success at the Haymarket Theatre, Caribbean playhouses presented the play a number of times. Documents reveal only six performances in St. Croix, for example, in the early 1770s. Jamaica, too, witnessed a revival of the musical. In Montego Bay in 1777 and 1784, and in Spanish Town in 1788, troupes produced the ballad opera. These performances occurred when members of David Douglass’s American Company of Comedians withdrew to Jamaica during the turmoil in the North American colonies. Jamaican theatregoers since 1733 had served as a second home audience for troupes traveling the Americas. They were as likely to land in Kingston or Montego Bay as in Charleston, South Carolina, or Annapolis, Maryland. As Seilhamer observes, “Jamaica had always been the retreat of the Colonial players.”

The 1777 production of *The Beggar’s Opera* at Montego Bay presented Macheath and crew in, as Richardson Wright observes, “abbreviated form,” since the cast includes only 13 parts, half the number that usually appeared in London. Amateurs occasionally filled in for professionals missing from the cast, but the Jamaican theatre still tried mightily to offer the popular metropolitan entertainments to colonial residents. As Seilhamer recounts, the troupe offered nearly three years’ worth of entertainments, although they cannot cleanly be separated into seasons. The offerings included the standard theatrical fare of the late eighteenth century, including the requisite Shakespeare, Sheridan, and Cumberland, in addition to some Jamaican exclusives such as *The Kingston Privateer* and *The West India Lady’s Arrival in London*.

The American Company traced its lineage rather directly through Jamaica; the elder Lewis Hallam ended his career in Jamaica, dying there in 1754. David Douglass, his successor,
married his widow and recruited from the remains of the old company, playing in theatres from Annapolis to Newport for the next four years. After recruiting another company in Jamaica, Douglass once again journeyed northward, establishing the American Company by name and supplying theatrical entertainments until the outbreak of hostilities. So when the American Company sailed southward to Jamaica, its players’ motivation stemmed directly from the circum-Atlantic conflict developing between England and its colonies. Their move, of course, was logical; as Seilhamer notes, American theatre had long maintained roots in the Caribbean.

The record has left very little evidence of these plays’ reception in Jamaica, but we can reconstruct something of their theatrical contexts. Performance on the island ranged from aristocratic masquerades to slave performances. Even within the theatre, the dominant forms of performances on the island appear informal—accounts, for example, repeatedly tell of amateurs substituting for professional performers. Jamaica’s theatre culture intrinsically mixed high and low, performer and public, and the institution’s professional underdevelopment inevitably undercut any claim to the status of elite culture. This ambivalence of status and class position produced new forms in which survivals from different traditions intermixed. In complex versions of Macheath’s masking as Morano, the various types of theatricals and paratheatricals had blended and overlaid each other by the late eighteenth century. Even though Gay’s Polly never (as far as we know) saw the inside of a playhouse in the Caribbean, Morano’s blackface act provides a model for the theatricality of the island’s culture.

Theatricals in Jamaica, even the more proper English theatre of Hallam and Douglass, never drifted very far from the influences of their less formal counterparts. The theatre and actors occupied a position closely associated with the underclass elements of the island, and physical association permeated the Jamaican stage. Richardson Wright’s account of Jamaican “revels” reveals that the actors of Hallam’s troupe existed in close proximity to various problem-causing underclasses. During a period of martial law in 1779, for example, the island’s Assembly closed the theatre and used it to house Maroon soldiers, free blacks who historically alternated between violent rebellion and helping to suppress slave rebellions. “Evidently,” Wright remarks, “the Maroons made pretty havoc of the place.” According to a petition submitted by Lewis Hallam to the Assembly, they destroyed parts of the playhouse and its machinery; Hallam claimed nearly two hundred pounds in damages. Such an anecdote, of course, could just as well emphasize the differences between Jamaican Maroons and the white actors; but it also reveals that the social spaces available to the theatre troupe could easily transform into barracks for hired Maroon soldiers.

The conceptual proximity of high and low, black and white, theatrical and real, recurs in Jamaican theatre. A prologue to Otway’s Venice Preserved, performed in 1780 by “gentlemen of the army” for the American Company’s benefit, compares the theatre itself to the island of Jamaica. The upper boxes become the “fine Mountain,” the side boxes “Enclosures” filled with “sweet strait canes,” the pit a “Savannah”; the punch line, no doubt humorously intended, entreats the audience, “one word, as we’re New Negroes here, / Kind overseers, be not too severe.” Certainly, the comparison operates ironically to some degree, emphasizing not the actors’ common lot with the island’s other underclasses, but instead their differences. At the same time, the tendency to imagine actors and theatricals in the terms of slaves and their implied performances indicates ambivalence in the troupe’s social positioning and self-representation. The prologue represents a verbal equivalent of blackface performance, a moment in which the speaker ironically claims and inhabits blackness, the site of dialectical tension revealing a broader pattern in Atlantic theatricality.
This cross-class and interracial self-identification, even if sardonic, defines the contexts in which circum-Atlantic theatricals, including *The Beggar’s Opera*, came to Jamaica. It also suggests connections between institutionalized theatre and the paratheatricals of slave performances on the island. Morano’s lumpen theatricality appears again in Caribbean paratheatricals such as “Jonkonnu,” which centrally informs my discussion of John Fawcett’s 1800 *Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack* in the next chapter. In Jonkonnu, a carnivalesque slave performance, slaves enacted “comical ‘plays’ dealing with a potpourri of historical, fictional, or newsworthy items such as scenes from Shakespeare, the death of Tipu Sahib, the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo.” The act centered on a character decorated in an outlandish assortment of animal features (notably horns and tusks on an animal-head mask), often brandishing a wooden sword and leading a procession through the streets. Richard D. E. Burton, locating the first recounted performances in 1687-88, locates the rituals at “the core of the oppositional culture of Jamaican slaves.”

Like *The Beggar’s Opera* and *Polly*, the act represents the overlaying of high and low, comic and threatening, black and white. Jonkonnu was also an aggressive performance that, as it pilfered from colonizer culture, brought black theatricals directly to the thresholds of the white spectators. The performances, despite the toleration and even participation of the colonial authorities, maintained subtly threatening undertones. Jonkonnu is evidence of shared lumpen theatrical strategies; apparently lighthearted comedy masks serious social critique. Even if these strategies traveled and exchanged only subliminally, the act represents the same sort of social disruption that *The Beggar’s Opera* had long performed around the Atlantic. In Jonkonnu, black performance adopted white English cultural forms into its performances, staging whiteness to a culture in which whiteness routinely performed in blackface.

The affiliations acted out in Jamaica—the association of actors with slaves and underclass bandits—conditioned circum-Atlantic theatre. The culture imaginatively constructed in *The Beggar’s Opera* and *Polly* reappeared in Atlantic theatrical institutions. In the Caribbean, lumpen characters performed the mobility of the Atlantic underclasses in a setting defined by theatrical mobility; English theatricals, underclass paratheatricals, and the everyday performances of social roles intermingled constantly. Jamaica’s environment of eclectically intermixed theatre cultures directly influenced theatricals on the western rim of the Atlantic Ocean, making *The Beggar’s Opera* a compelling vision of circum-Atlantic life. *The Beggar’s Opera*’s move to the New World thus reveals the contact points and continuities of culture between the northern and southern colonies. In later performances set in the Caribbean, the connections grew more visible; Jonkonnu appeared on English stages and in English novels, and Macheath-like characters returned in blackface. For the time being, though, the connections remained mostly submerged, playing out in subtle structural analogues that would only later resurface in the cultural cycle.
CHAPTER 3

MAROONS AND INDIAN PRINCESSES: STAGING THE INTERRACIAL LUMPENPROLETARIAT

Dancing and singing celebrations at the end of Polly stage a theatrical victory over the lumpenproletariat pirates of Macheath/Morano’s gang; they also signal the growing importance of plays about the Atlantic world’s racial complexities. Atlantic theatre, following the appearance of Polly at the Haymarket Theatre, began to imagine alternative ways of representing racial relations at its colonial margins. While Polly and The Beggar’s Opera staged the triumph of innocent and feminized, if ironically depicted, English goodness over the once-slippery mobility of Morano’s defeated lumpenproletariat cohort, there still remained a complex and shifting world of Atlantic cultural currents to contend with onstage.

Morano’s performance signals coming entertainments, and the racial affiliations of the lumpenproletariat form an increasingly important current in Atlantic theatricals. After nearly two centuries of intensifying intercultural contact between Europeans, Africans, and indigenous American peoples, non-European characters such as Cawwawkee remained a problematic presence in Atlantic culture, one that increasingly found representation on stage. Though Polly temporarily disposed of the problem, Morano’s blackface specter remained, continuously reminding audiences of the racial realities behind the masking. As English colonial practices shifted and antislavery views gained ground, Anglo-Atlantic culture continually staged connections with these ethnic outsiders, to portray and to compare, constructing ever-evolving performances of race, ethnicity, and nationality.

George Colman the Younger’s popular Inkle and Yarico (1787) and John Fawcett’s pantomime Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack (1800) provide two of the late eighteenth century’s most prominent examples of this trend. Non-white characters provide opportunities for staging the problems and solutions of increasingly threatening Atlantic underclasses. Together, these two plays represent variations on the cultural work that Polly performed, both in the London theatres in which they premiered and in a broader Atlantic culture. The two productions stage alternate versions of Polly’s Caribbean encounter, emphasizing the interactions between members of interracial underclasses. In addition, they both embody insouciant versions of blackface lumpen performance, resurrecting the revolts against society staged by the gangs of Macheath and, later, Macheath-as-Morano.

These plays demonstrate formal continuities with the Colmans’ earlier productions at the Haymarket. Emulating the popular success of Polly, they both featured music by Samuel Arnold. Inkle and Yarico is George Colman the Younger’s first play, written as he gradually assumed leadership of the Haymarket Theatre from his father, who had first brought Polly to the
stage. *Inkle and Yarico* and *Obi* also continued the ballad opera style, interspersing popular songs with the action and dialogue. Like the elder Colman’s travestied *Beggar’s Opera*, they positioned themselves against high opera, opposing the elite theatrical institutions of the time. Because of this, they relied openly on popular approval for success, disdaining critical opinion in favor of box office receipts.

The performances demonstrate other connections to the Colmans’ earlier stagings as well. Since *Inkle and Yarico* also drew from the Haymarket Theatre’s company, many of the parts fell to the same actors. Before the end of the century, the Haymarket’s actors achieved fame in parts such as Wowski and Trudge while they performed the roles of Macheath and Polly. Also initially appearing at the Haymarket, *Obi* appeared later at other London theatres and then American venues, dispersing throughout the Atlantic world. Fueling the lore cycle, the popularity of these two plays propelled them abroad; they adapted and circulated as much as earlier representations of the underclasses. Like *The Beggar’s Opera*, *Inkle and Yarico* and *Obi* both lived out the circum-Atlantic themes they staged night after night. They represented versions of the colonial realities for London theatres, but they also, eventually, traveled those shipping routes, ending up in playhouses in far distant corners of the Atlantic. Following *Polly* and *The Beggar’s Opera*, these later plays represent momentary flashes of high visibility of a lore cycle that (like the earlier plays) continually staged the lumpenproletariat and its place in Anglo-Atlantic culture. The plays glean material from a burgeoning mass of lower-class stage presences, including the earlier stagings of Gay’s work.

The productions pushed to the cultural foreground in 1787 and 1800 performed some of the most direct attempts at imagining the words, songs, gestures, and responses that emerge from racially defined Caribbean colonial situations. Plays such as *Inkle and Yarico* and *Obi*; or, *Three-Finger’d Jack* explicitly reveal the charisma of a lumpenproletariat defined by its relationship with Atlantic blackness. Following, perhaps, the lead of *Polly* in blacking up Macheath, these later plays displace the threat of the restive English lower classes onto characters with darker skin tones. The literal masking of *Polly*, however, takes back seat to more subtle, complex, and submerged acts of cultural masking. Characters like Inkle’s servant Trudge and his lover Wowski, as well as Jack and his enslaved nemesis Quashee in *Obi*, enact layered identities in versions of Macheath’s masking. Their stage acts hold blackness and whiteness in tension, conventional European performances meeting representations of exotic difference. They register the increasing presence of Africans moved by the triangular slave trade: Africa is always present, even if as an absent presence, in these plays. These representations move beyond the stage, representing the dark bodies circulating from metropolitan centers to colonial peripheries, from the north Atlantic littorals to Caribbean and South American ports of call.

The routes of Atlantic theatre culture do not represent easily traceable trajectories, with defined beginnings and ends; instead, the moving material coalesces at certain points, attaining a higher visibility and a new cultural energy for a time. These sites provide starting points for analysis, even as they invariably represent transitional points, sites of cultural transference, rather than cultural genesis. *Inkle and Yarico*’s 1787 emergence at the Haymarket Theatre represents such a point. The Haymarket, transitioning management from George Colman the Elder to his son in the last two decades of the eighteenth century, served as a cultural distiller, gleaning and extracting gestures circulating in Atlantic culture. The cultural position of the Haymarket Theatre—popular, middle-class, sometimes even edgy—provided a venue for continually resurrecting and re-staging the lumpenproletariat, giving it new faces season by season and
continually staging new ways of understanding and containing the cast-out elements always present in Atlantic culture.

“To Hug and Kiss a Dingy Miss”

George Colman the Younger’s 1787 Inkle and Yarico emerged from a well-established, persistent web of tales about English merchants encountering indigenous Caribbean women. In most versions of the story, Inkle, a young English merchant, encounters Yarico, a Caribbean princess, when his ship maroons him inadvertently. Left alone on the island, the two develop a relationship; when Inkle finds help, however, he abandons Yarico, in some versions selling her into slavery even as she bears his child. Early versions, like the one written by Joseph Steele and published in The Spectator in 1711, used the story to critique gender roles. In the late eighteenth century, however, the story shifted, staging a new emphasis on racial issues. Interracial attraction, which had receded into the background of the earlier stories, moved to the fore. In its post-1787 form, the performance imagined interracial attractions as the province of an underclass cohort, staging the complex intersections of race and class in circum-Atlantic encounters.

In its finale, Colman’s version encapsulates Inkle and Yarico’s new preoccupation with race. The comic chambermaid Patty steps forward to appeal to the audience:

Sure men are grown absurd,
Thus taking black for white!
To hug and kiss a dingy miss,
Will hardly suit an age like this--
Unless, here, some friends appear,
Who like this wedding night.  

The lines of course betray anxious responses to the blurring of racial boundaries, the inadvertent taking of black for white. Patty also, however, reveals the possibility that popular sanction might relieve the tension; if an audience approves, all is well. Importantly, the maid refers to a new interracial relationship that Colman created, the liaison between Inkle’s white servant Trudge and Yarico’s chambermaid Wowski. Depictions of the play’s scenes reveal the interloping presence of the underclass Trudge and Wowski. Decades of performance inform this depiction, which dates from the 1820s. By the time it appeared, the interracial encounter had become an iconic moment in the play.

Depicting the scene in which the Englishmen stumble upon Yarico’s cave, the scene visualizes the intersection of race and class in the encounter. The more sumptuously decorated Yarico pairs up with the gentlemanly Inkle as the servants tryst to the side. The contrasting light and dark skin tones of Trudge and Wowski, though pushed to the margins of the scene, remind viewers that the play displays specifically underclass blackness and interracial relationships together. Although the illustration does not reproduce the details, in performance the cave appeared exotically dressed; the stage directions to the third scene describe it as “decorated with skins of wild beasts, feathers, &c.” Other lumpen acts frequently occur in cave-like spaces, often decorated in similar manner. The revelry of Macheath and his gang, too, occurred in the same sort of subterranean enclosed space. Later, a similarly exotic cave provides a home for the slave rebellion of Three-Finger’d Jack. The cave provides a location for interracial desire as well, a
desire that extends to the audience. The depiction reveals the levels of confinement that enclose and sanction the interracial encounter, as did the nested compartments of the seraglio imagining the interracial encounter in other contexts. Inkle and Yarico gesture toward the curtain-covered inner apartment, the cave within the cave, hinting at the consummation of their relationship. Looking out the cave opening into the background, we can see the pursuing natives outside. The cave shelters the viewer along with the characters, and audience and actor intermingle in a dynamic similar to that displayed by illustrations of The Beggar’s Opera’s scenes.

Although the tale’s folk presence extends back two centuries, the contexts of London’s popular theatre and the circulations of the late-eighteenth-century lumpen world shaped the 1787 version immediately and decisively. It appeared as a comic opera at the Haymarket; by all accounts, the play represents a resounding success in that form for the younger Colman’s playwriting career as well as for its cast. A writer for the Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser for August 6, 1787, reviewed the opera after its opening night, exemplifying the generally positive reviews the play drew. Despite finding some faults with the writing, audiences found the “comic scenes [...] light and laughable; the serious ones more than ordinarily affecting.” The play grew more comedic with time, as Colman altered it, cutting lines, changing costuming, even adding a “Pastoral Dance.” Through the 1787 summer season at the Haymarket, the comic opera appeared twenty times. The opera also provided the theatre’s season finale to the public’s approval; the Morning Chronicle for September 17, 1787, announced the play, “with the Romp.—The Opera went off with éclat, which it highly merited.”

Critics paid a great deal of attention to Yarico, the emotional focus of the play’s sentimental antislavery message. Observers such as Robert Burns, William Hazlitt, and Charles Lamb attested to the acute emotional effect of her performances. Popular audiences, too, sensed the overwhelming sentimentality that these literary witnesses noticed. The Morning Chronicle’s account approved of Elizabeth Kemble (1762?–1841) acting the part of Yarico “with great simplicity, which was as it ever will be, productive of great effect.” As the review implies, Yarico’s sentimentalized plight provided the play with much of the force behind its antislavery applications. She brought other associations to the role too; Kemble had made her debut at Covent Garden as Polly in The Beggar’s Opera on September 21, 1780.

Despite Elizabeth Kemble’s star performance as the affecting Yarico, comic songs and dances—performances of lumpen culture—dominated the play’s staging. John Bannister (1760–1836), who played Inkle, made a specialty of raucous lower-class comedy. He was the son of the Charles Bannister, who had played Morano in Polly and the cross-dressed Polly Peachum in the travestied Beggar’s Opera. The younger Bannister had also played Jenny Diver opposite his father’s Polly in the travestied Beggar’s Opera. Both father and son had also attempted Macheath in straight versions of play. By 1787, the Bannisters, renowned for their imitative and vocal powers, had established themselves playing comic underclass characters in Colman’s musical comedies. Inkle, therefore, represents a change of pace for Bannister, and a reviewer in The World (which generally took a less adulatory tone than some of the other papers) half-grudgingly admitted that the “Inkle of Bannister was his best performance hitherto in a serious line.”

The supporting cast of low characters, more comic than touching, also received the audience’s approval. The first night review considered “Wowski, Trudge, and all the et cetera of the Dramatis Personae... fictitious characters, but neither ill drawn nor ill placed.” The World also had unqualified praise for John Edwin (1749-1790) as Trudge, reporting that his “acting,
and still more his singing, were in his best manner.” Georgina George (d. 1835) received praise as Wowski, the review noticing her specifically as an outlandishly costumed and made-up character. The lesser figures received passing comments from the reviewer, but the play’s staging clearly hinged on the two lead couples, Inkle and Yarico contrasting with Trudge and Wowski. Colman took advantage of the Haymarket’s gifted comedic actors and propelled *Inkle and Yarico* to great popular successes. The 1787 staging set the standard for imagining of circum-Atlantic race, gender, and class in the next fifty years’ worth of performances of *Inkle and Yarico*.

Colman’s addition of the characters of Trudge and Wowski allows the play to deflecting the seriousness of race relations with class-based comedy. Blackness becomes a matter of class on and off Atlantic stages. Colman’s work relentlessly figures Caribbean characters as African or black; Native Americans become indistinguishable from Africans. When Inkle, his uncle Medium, and his servant Trudge find themselves marooned and pursued by the native inhabitants, they describe the natives as “black as a pepper-corn,” a “pack of black bloodhounds,” and, cutting right to the racial chase, as “old hairy negroes” (8, 14, 11). The natives become, in the words of the Europeans, a collection of “dingy dukes,” “black baronets,” and “Inky commoners” (11). Trudge, running for his life, fears that “all my red ink will be spilt by an old black pin of a negro” (16). The discursive blurring of the racial imaginary does not represent an isolated mental or verbal blunder—the trope pervades the play. The consolidating of different nonwhite groups under the heading of “black” has become a central technique of the play. It represents a unified, if not deliberately calculated, mode of representation—not simply a recurring mistake made by one character or the other.

Even with the rhetorically established blackness of Caribbean natives, acting out a Native American woman’s betrayal into slavery, however, still presented challenges. The text reveals a delicate balancing act—or a fierce conflict of interest—between emphasizing Yarico’s racial difference, justifying her slavery, and eliding it, making her relationship with a white Englishman more acceptable. The play’s tension between competing racial classifications of Yarico emerges in Trudge’s description of Yarico:

- Patty: Well; and tell me, Trudge;—she’s pretty, you say—is she fair or brown? Or—
- Trudge: Um! She’s of a good comely copper.
- Patty: How! a Tawny?
- Trudge: Yes; quite dark; but very elegant; like a Wedgwood tea-pot.
- Patty: Oh! the monster! the filthy fellow! Live with a black-a-moor!

A bemused reviewer’s remark in the *World* proves that “copper” reflects the actual color of the makeup used at the Haymarket to create Yarico’s look; “A Sailor in the Gallery,” the account relates, “observed, ‘that as to Mrs. Kemble, she was only copper bottomed; but as to Miss George, she was the devil himself.’” Wowski’s blackness represents the ever-present allure of racial mixing in the play. Patty’s list of Yarico’s possible skin tones (“fair, brown, or—” black, as one supposes the elided term must be) reveals the tantalizing, unspoken possibility of miscegenation. Yarico’s association with Inkle hints at the enthralling relationship between black and white despite Trudge’s protest that she is “a good comely copper” color.

Despite its complex figuring of race, the play never, of course, fully relegates Yarico to the same racial category as the Africans for sale in the slave market. Instead, Colman’s play insists (like other sympathetic English stagings of darker-skinned unfortunates) on imagining her as of noble or aristocratic birth. In her first onstage appearance, she appears exotic, but framed in terms that could apply just as well to a white woman. Inkle, upon encountering her, calls her...
beautiful “as an angel” (21). In nearly the same breath, he commends her as a “brave maid”; in the same vein, Trudge refers to her as a “fine Lady” (21, 54). Yarico’s darkness disappears as she slides ever nearer the status of gentility. Class and gender together trump blackness in *Inkle and Yarico*, and Yarico’s status as a sort of prelapsarian version of an English aristocrat spares her from slavery at the end. This characterization, however, also reveals the class positions that Colman exploits in his duplication of the love plot.

**Dancing Out Underclass Blackness**

Negotiating Yarico’s tricky relationship to blackness and slavery, Colman introduces Trudge and Wowski, two servile characters who provide a model of lower-class interracial attraction. As the two highlight the racial injustice of Inkle’s betrayal, they also perform the interracial affiliations of the Atlantic underclasses. Although they occupy more stable roles in society than Marx’s volatile version of the lumpen, they act out interracial associations; they emerge as members of the variegated cohorts Melville names the “piebald parliament” in his 1857 *The Confidence-Man*. Colman’s creation of Trudge and Wowski also anticipates Marx’s class formulation by expelling downward the otherwise inexplicable behavior of Atlantic cultures. Blackness and proximity to blackness defines the lumpen, distancing the underclasses from the rest of the play’s characters.

Although outcast, Trudge and Wowski’s charisma takes center stage as the play’s celebrated cross-racial affiliation. The shift hinges on textual changes, since Colman wrote them into the script, but the ascendance of the low most noticeably happens extra-textually, in performance. Theatricality, as performance theorists such as Richard Schechner have noted, tends to overleap the bounds of the script quite readily. As the play staged the betrayal of Yarico and the redemption of Inkle, Trudge and his companion seem to have stolen the spotlight in numerous ways, both during the performances and outside the playhouse. In *Inkle and Yarico*’s performances and in the popular responses to the play, the two underclass characters overshadow almost everyone else on stage. The Haymarket’s playbills for the play’s premiere night placed John Edwin, as Trudge, at the top of the cast list. According to biographers, Edwin, a comic actor capable of a versatile range of comic parts, served as a “chief attraction at Covent Garden in the winters and at the Haymarket in the summers until his death in 1790.” His wide range of roles included Lucy Lockit in the travestied *Beggar’s Opera*, and he enjoyed the publicity provided by volumes of humor and anecdotes that often featured his songs from *Inkle and Yarico*.

Clearly, despite the focus on Yarico’s sentimental performance, Edwin’s character had come to dominate the play’s reception. Edwin and his comic parts overshadowed even Bannister in the play’s publicity. In the issue of the London Chronicle that recorded the play’s Haymarket premiere, August 4, 1787, three of the “most approved Songs in the above opera” appear—two of Edwin’s, and only one attributed to Bannister. The same newspaper clearly approved of Edwin’s performance, noting that “last, though not least, Edwin acted as he ever does, with that incomparable merit, which either by look, art, or word, can excite risibility, or command applause.” The role of Trudge clearly supplied the opportunity for the crowd-pleasing, charismatic performances desirable to comic actors. John Bannister, perhaps never fully satisfied with the less charismatic role of Inkle, confirmed this, when on May 28, 1789, he assumed the role of Trudge at the end of Drury Lane’s season. Edwin, then at the end of his
career, had clearly vacated a desirable position in the cast. Trudge’s high profile onstage embodies the simultaneously disdained and admired position of underclass characters in Atlantic theatricals. The part, inviting disdain with its self-deprecating humor, was nevertheless desirable enough for Bannister to trade the “lead” role of Inkle for it.

_Inkle and Yarico_ also defines its lumpenproletariat as a group aspiring to the performance of class status. By continually juxtaposing Trudge’s servile status with his almost ridiculous class aspirations, the performance stages his class position as an act, a theatrical performance. Similar to Macheath and his gang (though with implications much less threatening) the underclass attempts to act upper class in an ironic, slippery way. As scripted, Trudge and Wowski are decidedly low. Even as they act out lowness, however, Trudge and Wowski reveal aspirations to upper-class status. Trudge imagines the luxury and prestige, the performance of class, which he might enact upon his return to London:

> Zounds! leopard’s skin for winter wear, and feathers for a summer’s suit! Ha, ha! I shall look like a walking hammer-cloth, at Christmas, and an upright shuttlecock, in the dog-days; and for all this, if my master and I find our way to England, you shall be part of our traveling equipage; and when I get there, I’ll give you a couple of snug rooms on a first floor, and visit you every evening as soon as I come from the counting-house. (24)

Trudge and Wowski perform a class identity always ready to jump the boundaries, always eager for upward mobility. Trudge’s dandyism (“Damme, what a flashy fellow I shall seem in the city!” [24]) and his flashiness are an ironic version of wealthy display, but that is what is important about Colman’s lumpen characters. Together, Trudge and Wowski act out class positions in flux, new identities generated in the rush to colonize the New World.

Trudge and Wowski represent the moving parts in an Atlantic colonialism defined by its mobility, by its instabilities of identity, social position, and location. They function, then, importantly as representatives of a subordinated class of persons expelled from the sphere of normative Englishness by the workings of colonialism. Trudge is expelled from the colonizing metropolitan center by the act of voluntarily leaving Threadneedle Street to, as he punningly complains, “thread an American forest, where a man’s as soon lost as a needle in a bottle of hay” (8). The play already profoundly separates Wowski, by virtue of her darker skin, from potential Englishness—unlike Yarico, who appears feminine, genteel, and potentially domesticated.

Colman’s _Inkle and Yarico_ thus continues constructing lumpenproletarian identities inextricable from the racial identities of the Caribbean. Trudge and Wowski represent an increasingly interracial underclass. As Colman’s script emphasizes Trudge’s underclass qualities, Wowski grows ever blacker. When Trudge first spies her, he identifies her as an “angel of a rather darker sort” (19). Later, in their duet “One day, I heard Mary say,” Trudge becomes the “White man,” in implied contrast to her even blackness. Wowski is the natural object of affection for “Black men”; of whom “—plenty—twenty—fight for me,” as she sings (25). The performance overlays her Indian identity with an African one.

Wowski appeared black in performance as well; at least some of the time she appeared on stage in blackface. The vocal sailor identifies Wowski as appearing like “the devil himself”—black, presumably—compared to Yarico’s copper hue. The same review proclaims that “we never saw upon any stage a figure so dreadful as Miss George—and we do not except the Furies, or Dancing Devils of the Opera.” The _Morning Chronicle_’s account of Colman’s changes for the second performance strongly suggests that she walked onstage—at least in the opening
performance—in burnt cork makeup. Newspaper reviewers reported that Colman “has also caused Miss George to look less like a chimney-sweeper in petticoats, and to wash her face.”

These remarks reveal that Miss George’s performance skirted the boundaries of what some reviewers found acceptable, and that her performance’s edginess was racial. The reviewer remarks “Miss George’s Wowski was lively, though we could spare her jumping at the end of the third act.” Her movement represents an early version of T. D. Rice’s Jim Crow acts, the jumping, wheeling, and turning that take Atlantic stages by storm in the late 1830s.

Wowski’s performances, like Trudge’s, spread beyond the script and the stage, and graphic renderings confirm that her racial identity quickly solidified in the public imagination as black African. A lithograph illustrating Inkle and Yarico in an 1827 edition of Cumberland’s British Theatre depicts Trudge and Wowski dancing in the play’s finale. Captioned “Come Let Us Dance and Sing,” Robert Cruikshank’s illustration pictures Wowski and her lover executing a dance step together (Figure 3). Trudge’s white features and conventionally English dress contrast with the Native American woman’s darkened skin and Caribbean head wrap. The image, positioning her face at an angle, renders her facial features stereotyped, racially exaggerated, and clearly visible.

As the illustration visualizes Wowski’s blackness, it also imagines her as part of the Atlantic systems of cultural exchange. The image acknowledges the performance’s position in what Joseph Roach calls an “interculture,” a zone of actively exchanging words, gestures, and performances. The drawing, which Cruikshank purportedly drew in the theatre, transforms the stage into the world of the play’s Caribbean setting. Instead of stage boards, Trudge and Wowski dance on a dock; ships serve as the backdrop. Rather than an enclosing proscenium arch, the lines of the equipment and ship’s rigging loosely frame the pair—the image trades the confinement of the playhouse for the mobility of the circum-Atlantic. In the visual transformation, the properties of a mobile culture of Atlantic exchange (already present in the casks and bales in the foreground) stand in for the props of theatrical and cultural exchange that made Inkle and Yarico a compelling popular performance.

Cruikshank’s illustration, as its caption indicates, depicts the play’s ending, a celebratory finale whose choruses and dancing numbers cement the displacement of Inkle and Yarico from center stage. The chorus of “Come then dance and sing, / While all Barbadoes bells shall ring,” answers Patty’s plea for “some friends” who “like this wedding night” (76). Audiences relished the opportunity to imagine characters that potentially transgressed those boundaries of race and class. Much as The Beggar’s Opera, for most of the century, had thrown Macheath and the entire performance on the mercy of the “taste of the town,” Inkle and Yarico openly depends on the applauding sanction of its audiences. The hugging and kissing of dingy misses, Colman’s performance shows, enjoys audiences’ approval. The play is a cooperative event, communally performed by audience and actors from a script whose range of reference extends well beyond the stage and the playhouse containing it.
Inkle and Yarico is not all light entertainment, of course; it expends a significant amount of its creative energy ejecting and projecting relationships with dingy misses onto the lumpenproletariat, trying to ward off the race-mixing implications of Inkle’s union with Yarico. The strategy attempts to imagine a stratified Atlantic culture in which race and class safely remain within their categorical boundaries. The social realities, of course, provide for a significantly messier staging. We can measure the success of this way of imagining the classes and races of the circum-Atlantic, as Patty’s song indicates, by gauging the audiences’ reactions. The great ironic truth of Inkle and Yarico might be that it did find the popular approval it sought, but instead of applauding the mercantile Inkle and his genteel Caribbean bride, theatregoers applauded the comedic Trudge and Wowski, his “dingy” lover.
Marronage and the Lumpenproletariat

For the remainder of the eighteenth century, and well into the next, *Inkle and Yarico* displaced the threat of cross-racial affiliation onto a newly shaping lumpenproletariat. Performances of the play spread well beyond London’s Haymarket Theatre, and stagings appeared in American cities from Boston down to Edenton, North Carolina. Inkle’s island marooning, of course, is the imaginative event that sets the various performances in motion. Marronage, a central theme of the circum-Atlantic world, appears repeatedly in colonial travel narratives and literary works. Shipwrecks in *The Tempest* and in *Robinson Crusoe* foreshadow Colman’s play, leaving their unlucky passengers stranded on unknown islands. A more aggressive and threatening kind of marronage, however, precedes the sense of stranding which Inkle’s experience evokes. Polly’s Morano acts out this type of marronage, a rebelliousness that is submerged in *Inkle and Yarico* but which re-emerges in *Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack*. The concept of “marronage” provides a key location for understanding the underclass and racial rebelliousness of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat.

The concept of marronage, in both Inkle’s stranding and Morano’s rebellion, owes its significance to the Maroon communities of the colonized New World. The Maroons were populations of free blacks with a long history of precarious relations with both the white slaveholders and the enslaved population. Orlando Patterson, speaking of the Jamaican Maroons, observes that the first “eighty-five years of the English occupation of the island (1655-1740) were marked by one long series of revolts.” Two agreements, the Leeward and Windward Treaties of 1738 and 1739, ended the open rebellion and calmed relations between Maroons and whites. These treaties, though they could never ally the Maroons wholeheartedly with whites, tried to reinforce the delicately balanced position of the Maroons, placing the former rebels in an ambivalent relationship to other blacks. While the treaties promised peace to the Maroons, for example, they also stipulated that they “use their best Endeavors to take, kill, suppress or destroy, either by themselves or jointly, [...] all Rebels wheresoever they be throughout this Island, unless they submit to the same Terms of Accommodation” of that treaty.

Similarly, the ninth and tenth terms of the Leeward treaty specify that the Maroons must return all runaway slaves, including the ones they had set free during their struggle. Noting the difficulty in imagining black rebels who would assist in capturing runaway slaves, Campbell writes that the treaty may have been fraudulently presented, but she finally concludes that the “promptness with which [the Maroons] assisted in dealing with runaways” indicates their willing cooperation. Indeed, the leeward Maroons “had shown more than ordinary zeal in hunting down runaway slaves; R. C. Dallas’s 1803 History of the Maroons related that the Maroon slave-hunters were often so vicious that monetary encouragements had to be offered to bring slaves in alive.” Maroons, among other things, stood as an exemplar of racial and social in-between-ness: as neither fully black, nor fully indigenous, as populations descended from slaves but not enslaved, sometimes aggressively rebellious and at other times eagerly collaborative.

Marronage thus provided a compelling theatrical trope for imagining Atlantic underclasses. Morano, for example, finds himself cast away from both the metropolitan center of English society and the culturally privileged forms of whiteness. Like the Jamaican Maroons, he stages an underclass rebellion. Morano condenses into one theatrical character the confluence of concepts reserved for castaways (punished rejects from either ships or London streets), underclass rebels, and fugitive slaves in the Caribbean. In *Inkle and Yarico*, the cultural equation of castaway status with rebelliousness and with historical Maroon status begins to lose the force...
it had in *Polly*. Colman’s plot invokes fugitive slave marronage only distantly, metaphorically—
evoking, perhaps subconsciously, fears of being made into Maroons. Inkle’s relationship to
society takes a rather different form from Macheath’s deliberately rebellious blackface
marronage. In deciding whether to abandon Yarico to slavery, the white merchant certainly
exercises a more violent and degrading power than Morano ever does.

**Performing and Expelling Slave Rebellion**

*Inkle and Yarico*, however, does not represent the only popular attempt to imagine the
Atlantic lumpenproletariat and its relationship to the race and class mixing in American colonies.
In John Fawcett’s 1800 pantomime *Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack*, the threat of miscegenation
is not so easily danced away. Instead, *Obi* represents the potential dangers of the lumpenproletariat
even as it imagines strategies for containing such threats. Three-Finger’d Jack, the villainous
star of the play, takes a heroic stand against Jamaica’s planter aristocracy. Like Macheath, he
becomes a charismatic representative of the lumpenproletariat, one of the dominant characters of
the early nineteenth-century stage. Also like Macheath/Morano, Jack, an escaped slave, ends up
defeated by the island’s forces of law and order. His defeated struggle represents the appeal—or
perhaps even the societal necessity—of imagining Caribbean racial revolt along with the almost
inconceivable possibility of staging that revolt’s success.

Fawcett’s *Obi* represents marronage as a shifty, changing position with unsteady
allegiances; the concept provides theatre with both the embodiment of a threat and, at times, the
solution to those unruly problems. First produced at the Haymarket Theatre on July 2, 1800,
John Fawcett’s *Obi; or Three-Finger’d Jack* stages the story of Jack, a black Maroon bandit in
Jamaica who terrorizes whites and slaves alike with “obi,” or obeah, a magic ritual practice of
the African circum-Atlantic. The turning point of the play occurs when some willing slaves
volunteer to track him down after requesting baptism to counteract Jack’s obeah magic. The
slaves’ action parallels that of white characters; Rosa, the plantation owner’s daughter and the
love interest of the brave but unfortunate Captain Orford, also plays a pivotal breeches role in
securing the drama’s happy ending. With Jack’s demise, Rosa and Orford can marry, and the
island’s happy residents (both slave and planter) can relax and celebrate colonial prosperity.

The *Morning Post*, with the usual zeal of theatrical announcements, announced a “new
grand Pantomimical Drama in two acts” for the play’s premiere. The *Morning Herald*, divining
the play’s promise, trumpets the “Black Hecate, of Jamaica,” (presumably Jack) who provides
the “subject of the announced piece, which is likely, from the force of its magic, to throw [its]
spells over all the town.” The “Pantomimical Drama,” with music by Samuel Arnold, indeed
found immediate success; a review in *The Dramatic Censor* observed that *Obi* “appears to have
gained a fast hold on the favor and partiality of the town” upon its debut. Its success appears due
to a combination of timely subject matter, star performances, and novelty. Identifying the play
as a “Pantomimical Novelty,” the *Whitehall Evening Post* reviewer wrote that *Obi* “resembles
several representations of a similar kind, yet it is well put together, and excites a strong interest
throughout.” Miss DeCamp, the same review notes, “displayed great powers of gesture in
Rosa,” and Charles Kemble “invested Jack with terrific importance.”

As *Obi* stages Jack’s marronage, it both evokes and revokes Morano’s earlier rebellion.
The pantomime pictures the underclasses of the Atlantic, the lumpenproletariat, in exclusively
racial terms. The play does not exhibit *Inkle and Yarico*’s ambivalence about miscegenation; nor
does it trouble itself with London bandits in blackface. Marronage takes on additional slipperiness in the play, however. Jack, a rebellious slave, performs a version of historical Maroon rebellions. He stages the repeated unrest instigated by free slaves in the Jamaican mountains, still persistent into the last decades of the eighteenth century. The play also, however, introduces submissive slaves (adapted from historical Maroons) to dispose of the troublesome marauder. *Obi* thus resurrects grassroots resistance to white colonization, altering it to slave rebellion; it attempts to inoculate against the threat of slave revolt with the reassuring presence of obedient slaves.

The historical version of *Three-Finger’d Jack* achieved notoriety in popular lore even before it reached the stage. Like *The Beggar’s Opera, Polly, and Inkle and Yarico*, Fawcett’s play drew upon historical incidents from the social and geographical fringes of English society. Jack’s story first reached English audiences in the form of authoritative historical “facts.” *Three-Finger’d Jack* borrowed its material from a study of Jamaican magic and slave rebellion by Dr. Benjamin Moseley, an expert in the nascent field of tropical medicine and colonial culture. In 1787, Colman had consulted with Moseley on *Inkle and Yarico*, on (among other things) the effectiveness of “Come Let Us Dance and Sing” as a finale. Rather than stabilizing Jack’s story as historical fact within ethnographical and scientific discourses, Moseley’s narrative popularized the play in London theatre culture.  

For nearly two years, from 1779 into the beginning of 1781, the historical Three-Finger’d Jack engaged in a guerrilla war in the hills of Jamaica. The two early London runs of John Gay’s *Polly*, 1777 and 1782, neatly bracket the historical Three-Finger’d Jack’s Jamaican run. London performances of Macheath’s marronage thus re-enact current events in a sideways fashion; Jack’s story had not emerged in popular form, but reports of the Maroon unrest circulated. Atlantic currents circulate themes and scenes, sometimes building force and taking form beneath the surface for years before emerging onstage. The details of his rebellion are sketchy, appearing in Dr. Benjamin Moseley’s eyewitness account and corroborated by a few government proclamations and newspaper announcements. Jack was clearly no ordinary, if felonious, runaway; accounts describe him as physically imposing, terrifying even without his mysterious obi charms. Thus aided, Jack and a “desperate gang of Negro Slaves,” as one official proclamation identified the outlaws, waylaid travelers in the Jamaican backcountry. As he robbed travelers, resisted the law, and attempted to instigate an uprising, his actions caught the imagination of popular culture and inflected performances of underclass and slave rebellion for decades.

Jack died spectacularly on January 27, 1781, providing the climactic event of *Three-Finger’d Jack*. In Moseley’s account, a party of free blacks known as Maroons, led by Sam and Quashee, took up the legislature’s offer of a three-hundred-pound reward for Jack’s capture or killing. After tracking the outlaw down, his pursuers engaged him in hand-to-hand combat. The advantage finally turned to the Maroons’ side, and the three combatants tumbled down a steep bluff, where Sam and Quashee shot and bludgeoned Jack to death. Moseley’s account ends with an enduring image of the island’s slaves and Maroons alike celebrating over the severed head and hand of the fallen outlaw. They carried the trophies in a pail of rum to Morant Bay; a “vast concourse of negroes,” Moseley recounts, “now no longer afraid of Jack’s Obi, blowing their shells and horns, and firing guns in their rude method” paraded on to Kingston and Spanish Town.
Three-Finger’d Jack as the Return of Morano

The celebration of Jack’s death indicates the high stakes of his life and death; part of what made his performance so compelling and visible is that he re-stages Morano’s lumpen rebellion in *Polly*. Jack, played in blackface, performs a version of Morano’s earlier racial layering. Significantly, of course, he is not in blackface within the play’s diegesis, instead representing a stage version of authentic blackness. Nevertheless, the play and its contexts create Jack as yet another performer of the theatrical intersection between the lumpenproletariat and Atlantic blackness.

The prospectus of the play, sold at the theatre and published along with *Obi’s* songs, offers some tantalizing examples of Jack’s complex, racially layered performance. The description, taking poetic license, compares Three-Finger’d Jack to Robinson Crusoe—not Friday—and praises him as having “ascended above Spartacus.” Representing Jack this way wards off the realities of Caribbean racial rebellion, re-positioning Jack in the world of narrative fiction and mythical history. The prospectus’s rhetoric also, perhaps inadvertently, indicates that Jack’s rebellion was always a class matter. Spartacus’ revolt against Greek oppression resisted slavery, like the Caribbean revolt of *Obi*’s Jack. At the same time, Spartacus endured a version of slavery less fraught with the racial associations of Caribbean servitude, and perhaps more evocative of class warfare. Jack becomes rhetorically equivalent to Spartacus, who, not coincidentally, enjoyed his own Atlantic fame beginning with the 1831 premiere of Robert Montgomery Bird’s *The Gladiator*. Jack’s rebellion edges ever closer to the masked interracial rebellion of *Polly*; like Macheath, Jack’s role craftily slides between whiteness and blackness. The descriptions, if only unconsciously, reveal the multiracial potential for revolt which Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker describe as the “hidden history of the revolutionary Atlantic.”

The submerged suspicion of multiracial affiliation pervades the contexts of *Three-Finger’d Jack*. Besides describing the action onstage, the pantomime’s prospectus greeted theatregoers with a description of the effects of obeah and the appearance of certain “Obi-Men.” Quoting Moseley’s pseudo-scientific account, the prospectus describes certain “abandoned Exiles” who “survive a general Mutation of their Muscles, Ligaments, and Osteology; becoming also hideously white in their wooly Hair and Skin.” These deformed, bleached figures, banished to the hills, often sheltered “robbers and fugitive Negroes” (Songs 4). As the description figures slave magic and rebellion in terms of deformity (as with Jack’s mutilated hand), it also creates quasi-white characters to assist black rebellion. These Obi-men represent theatrical whiteness, perhaps, the deformed counterpart to Morano’s blackface performance.

In reprinting this part of Moseley’s writings, the prospectus supplements the play, connecting it to the medical-cultural discourse of race. This contextual interplay does not simply become clear in hindsight; audiences bought and read the prospectus of the play before, during, and after the performance. Audiences absorbed the discourses Moseley used to analyze Caribbean magic and rebellion. The prospectus actively encouraged audiences to construct narratives of circum-Atlantic rebellion, class, and race. It also hints at the inadequacy of such discourses to fully picture or comprehend black rebellion. The descriptions construct tropes of trans-racially understood—and misunderstood—rebellion. Metaphorically, they suggest the problems of sorting out the threats of culturally mobile underclasses of the circum-Atlantic.

*Three-Finger’d Jack* figures its hero, like Macheath, as the head of a gang. The play transports the London lair to an exotic Caribbean setting. In the third scene, the pantomime introduces its audience to the “Inside of an Obi Woman’s Cave, cut in the heart of a large rock.”
The cave furnishes the setting for Jack’s abduction of Rosa, the planter’s daughter, in the second act. Rosa’s capture occurs when Sam, Quashee, Tuckey, and Rosa (dressed as a sailor) find themselves caught in a storm while searching for Jack. Rosa, finding herself fatigued and “unstable,” must rest, enters a sheltering cave while Tuckey runs for assistance. While she is alone, Rosa encounters Three-Finger’d Jack in the darkness of the cave, narrowly avoiding death as his gun misfires. Rosa’s situation recapitulates Polly’s cross-dressed encounter with Morano’s crew. Performing a less assertive rendition of Polly’s disguise, Rosa assumes male garments to help hunt for the outlaw Jack.

In what must have become a clichéd convention, she finds herself unequal to the task of wearing the breeches; she falls prey to the villainous lumpenproletariat. With the less-comic tone of the “serio-pantomime,” though, the threat of Rosa’s rape is not a matter for travestied humor. Jack, the directions reveal, “goes to her and feels her chin—is persuaded she is but a boy—asks her to serve him—she consents through fear” (Obi 2:2-3). Despite her dismay at finding herself in the outlaw’s cave, Rosa serves Jack, bringing him food and drink. The scene, of course, exploits the tension as she performs in pantomime the domestic duties, her disguise helping her to avoid the implied threat of Jack’s amorous attentions. Rosa’s entrance into the cave re-stages similar scenes from both Inkle and Yarico and Polly. With her capture by Jack, the cave becomes the exotically blackened version of a newlywed abode, an infinitely more threatening version of Inkle and Yarico’s love nest. The grotto becomes the location of potential miscegenation, although the play narrowly averts this possibility.

Rosa’s captivity provides another opportunity for potentially threatening performances to emerge, reprising the lumpenproletariat’s tendency to sing and dance on stage. “Jack drinks plentifully of rum and water,” the directions read; he then “gets a little merry—takes his banjo, plays, and desires her to do the same. Rosa, terrified, sings, which lulls him to sleep” (Obi 2:4). As Jack makes merry, his musical performance, invokes the earlier dangerous carousal of his gang. The audience cannot be sure, until Rosa sings Jack to sleep, that she will escape danger. The episode’s end temporarily neutralizes the threat posed by Jack’s performance, opposing Jack’s dangerous music with Rosa’s pacifying singing.

In 1800, Sylvester Harrison and Edward Orme represented the cave in an aquatint that sustained the popular spread of Three-Finger’d Jack (Figure 4). The cave appears, as per the stage directions, in outlandish décor, with dark nooks and corners abounding. Relieving the darkness of the scene, Rosa appears, stage right, in her sailor clothes. The crowd-pleasing breeches and low-cut blouse, of course, leave little doubt as to Rosa’s gender or to the visual appeal of the scene. She stands in a hesitant pose, playing a lyre (not the banjo indicated in the stage directions) as Jack listens. The bandit, echoing Moseley’s description, appears in a white thigh-length tunic reminiscent of Roman drapery. Furthering the classical imagery, he reclines in a languid pose, his left arm draped over his head, his right bent at the elbow and resting on the table behind him. His hair, the inevitably “wooly” coiffeur of stage blacks, has been transformed into the curly ringlets of a classical youth. In depicting Jack the image layers the various discourses used to represent his lumpen rebellion; in the process, the scene only indirectly pictures the receding danger of Jack’s lumpen lawlessness.
The background of the scene, however, forces the receding threat back into viewers’ consciousness. Along with Rosa’s singing, the disorderly revels of Jack’s gang also occur in the cave. Exotically decorated, it appears an even more menacing version of Yarico’s grotto. “The whole of the walls,” the stage directions read, “are entirely covered with feathers, rags, bones, teeth, catskins, broken glass, parrots’ beaks, &c. &c.” (Obi 1:3). Covering Jack’s lair with the exotic decorations of the lumpen, Three-Finger’d Jack constructs a recurrent iconic space in Atlantic theatre. It re-stages the spaces of confinement in The Beggar’s Opera’s cell scenes, and later variations recall its dark, enclosed spaces—the holds implied in nautical theatricals, the low dives visited by urban ramblers, the cells from which Jack Sheppard repeatedly escapes. Making the headquarters of Jack’s rebellion one remove from Macheath’s gaming house is no accident; the cave’s imaginative proximity to a cell ironically highlights the lumpen’s obstinate resistance to confinement. The ladder in the background, leading upward and conveying both Rosa’s eventual escape and Jack’s revolt, visually signals subversion of the enclosing space’s intended discipline.
The performances in the cave, both Jack’s inebriation and Rosa’s song, point to the dangerous theatricality of the underclasses throughout the play. In the third scene of the drama, for example, Jack appears suddenly from a trap door in the stage and joins his band of robbers who have been paying “Homage to the Obi-Woman, who presents them with Obi.” After the conjure woman fills Jack’s Obi-horn, the black robbers hold a “Dance, and Carousel” (Songs 8). The dancing of underclass and black characters has taken on an ominous tone, becoming a fearsome but captivating version of Wowski’s energetic, comic jumping. In staging this number, Three-Finger’d Jack interlocks the related performances of black singing and dancing, rebellion, and obeah magic. Fawcett’s pantomime binds obeah inextricably to the performances of black characters, both slave and outlaw. Throughout the play, slave magic associates with and enables reveling disorder, contributing to black rebelliousness. The carousel, physically enacting the exotic threat of the black bandits, echoes the constant dancing and singing performed on Atlantic stages by other underclass characters. Certainly, despite its Caribbean exoticism, Obi’s performance would have reminded audiences quickly of the charismatic staged acts of Macheath and his gang.

The island’s obedient slaves also perform, but instead of providing an antidote to the bandits’ performances, their dancing draws them conceptually closer to the rebellious lumpenproletariat. Uncontrollable elements of black performance in ostensibly harmless acts emerge at the end of the play’s first act. A character identified as “Jonkanoo,” or the “Master of Ceremonies,” makes a single but climactic appearance at the “Negro Ball” celebrating Quashee’s christening. The Jonkanoo character manifests a condensation of the ambivalence involved in imagining black performance—audiences’ simultaneous desire and fear. The figure subtly signals slave performances’ potential eruption of violence. Caribbean slave celebrations of Jonkonnu associated with obeah—whether the links were real or imagined may be immaterial. Eighteenth-century observers of the festivals sensed the connections. Among them, Janet J. Schaw, a “lady of quality” who traveled along Atlantic routes in the 1770s, recounted the implicit threat (which “every Negro in fact can tell you”) that “Master will die a bad death” from an obeah curse if he interferes with the festivities. With Jonkonnu’s appearance in Three-Finger’d Jack’s (ostensibly harmless) slave rituals, docile slave performances reveal a kinship to the singing and dancing in the “Obi-Woman’s” cave. Black performances, even if only inadvertently, smack of mysterious and subversive slave practices.

Fawcett’s “Jonkanoo” also registers the pantomime’s incorporation of rituals, displays, and performances of the black Atlantic. Reviewing the pantomime’s staging from his English vantage point, Dutton’s Dramatic Censor describes Jonkanoo as a “grotesque character, equipped with a ludicrous and enormously large false head,” who “presides at the negro [sic] balls in Jamaica, in the capacity of master of the ceremonies.” English readers in the nineteenth century knew Jonkonnu as a Christmas festival, authorized by the planters and taken to ritually imaginative extremes by the black participants. By the second or third decade of the century, numerous travel accounts, as well as narratives by novelist Michael Scott and playwright Matthew G. Lewis, had thoroughly publicized the ritual. Lady Maria Nugent, the wife of a Jamaican governor, also commented upon the Jonkonnu festivities, although her observations did not circulate in published form until much later. Cultural transmission of Jonkonnu was a more complex affair than performing passively for the tourism of upper-class English observers. Jonkonnu enacts an aggressive ritual that appropriates white culture and brings black
performance directly to the thresholds of the white spectators, threatening retribution if the audience does not follow the ritual’s codes. Whites participated in these slave performances, either by their authorization or by actual involvement. Richard D. E. Burton, for example, characterizes Jonkonnu and Carnival as “ritualized combat,” an insouciant interracial competition staged for admiring onlookers. The competition, of course, emerged through Jonkonnu’s compelling acts. As Matthew G. Lewis wrote with striking (but perhaps unintended) double meaning, “there was no resisting John-Canoe.”

On the London stage, Jonkonnu sported a “ludicrous and enormously large false head”; in Jamaica, an outlandish assortment of animal features (notably horns and tusks on an animal-head mask), decorated the mask. Decked in tokens of savagery, Jonkonnu brandished a wooden sword and vied for the attention of the residents as he leads a procession through the streets. The festival, Michael Craton writes, featured “comical ‘plays’ dealing with a potpourri of historical, fictional, or newsworthy items such as scenes from Shakespeare, the death of Tipu Sahib, the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo.” Frequently Jonkonnu’s headgear supplemented the performance material. Matthew Lewis wrote in his journal of a Jonkonnu “dressed in a striped doublet, and bearing upon his head a kind of pasteboard house-boat filled with puppets, representing, some sailors, others soldiers, others again slaves at work on a plantation.” The scene represents in effigy the multiple ways the Atlantic world organized labor. The ship’s crew, the plantation slaves, and the military unit on Jonkonnu’s head all point to forms of proletarian social organization. The slave performer, however, enacted a complex, coded rebellion that had more in common with a theatrical, uncontrollable lumpenproletariat than a docile idealization of the slave.

Jonkonnu’s acts of masking and display spread to other Atlantic locales. Jonkonnu’s “pasteboard house-boat” and his nautical re-enactments resonated in London, revealing the transmission of lumpen culture. The black ex-seaman Joseph Johnson, for example, entertained London pedestrians with his sea-chanties and unusual visual display during the early nineteenth century. A model of the ship Nelson nodded on his head as he begged on the street, recalling Jonkonnu’s nautical headgear. A print by John Thomas Smith preserves his fame in an 1817 collection entitled Vagabondiana, which catalogued the various lumpen street types in London (Figure 5). Johnson, boat on head, registers culture’s metonymic connections—he quite literally performs contiguity with the currents of black Atlantic. While Jonkonnu’s headgear masks coded slave rebellion in Jamaica, the black former seaman Johnson, who might easily have seen such Caribbean performances on his travels, adapts the extravagant costume for his own needs and for the viewing pleasure of an almsgiving public. Johnson serves notice that Jonkonnu does not enact isolated, elusive authentic African culture. Instead, the Jamaican ritual participates in the interconnected movements of increasingly globalized performance cultures. Cultural transmissions slither along the routes of commerce and conquest, condensing in unlikely spots in new forms.

Three-Finger’d Jack’s stage celebrations thus reveal the manifold transmissions of cultures through the Atlantic. Jonkonnu does not provide evidence of “essentially African” culture. Understanding the performance as the germ of African culture behind Obi (as if it starts as authentic cultural expression and subsequently becomes a bastardized theatrical display), represents a severely limiting perspective. The ritual’s integral inclusion of European culture very early in its existence and the untraceably hybridized origins of acts such as Jonkonnu reveal that such cultural intermingling had transmitted clear back to the metropolis. The creolization or hybridization that defines these rituals’ development as a whole continues to define the
Figure 5. John Thomas Smith, Joseph Johnson from *Vagabondiana* (1817); The Rev. C. H. Townshend Bequest; courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.
circulations of Atlantic theatre. These displays evidence the “stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within [.. .] the black Atlantic world” that Paul Gilroy discusses in his _Black Atlantic_.

Jonkanoo’s appearance in _Obi_ shows that lumpen performances traveled energetically, slotting into unlikely niches, creating meaning through new associations and renewing the meanings of old ones. In _Obi_, of course, the domestic and sanctioned celebrations contrast with the outlaw festivities; audiences clearly understood which acts represented acceptable versions of black performance and which were threatening. Fawcett is not alone in using the merrymaking of submissive slaves as an antidote of sorts to the more ominous obeah dancing of the outlaws. Approved scenes of festivities, like the procession of merry-makers after Jack’s death, punctuate the tensest moments of the play’s romantic adventure plot, providing seemingly innocent jubilation over theatrical good fortune. Those performances might counterpoint, but they never, of course, erase the threats in the uncontrolled renegade carousing. The supposedly docile slaves sing and dance just as the villains do; even though they may voice more reassuring sentiments, their performances inevitably invoke their contrasting numbers. Jonkonnu presides figuratively, and charismatically, over all the dances in the pantomime.

_Three-Finger’d Jack_’s performances simultaneously draw in and repel white viewers; the slaves’ festive rituals, even authorized acts, excluded the master. They represent oppositional culture. They performed resistance to the slave-holding aristocracy, despite their nominal status as permitted performances, and white audiences found this fascinating. Paul Gilroy calls these sorts of events “processes of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity that exceed racial discourse and avoid capture by its agents.” Appropriated and re-presented by whites, black performances merge with and emerge from white theatre in ways that their English stagers cannot entirely manage. The mutation and discontinuity, as Joseph Johnson’s display shows, emerge from subtle links and transmissions. Black rebelliousness re-emerges in white performances, egged on by the popular demand of clamoring audiences. _Obi_’s interplay of obeah, rebellion, and performance confirms the ability of these performances to exceed and trouble the boundaries of the racial discourses that produced them.

**The Caribbean Lumpenproletariat Travels Onward**

The organizing concept of maritime circulation in Gilroy’s Black Atlantic naturally invites us to follow the trail of plays like _Obi_ and _Inkle and Yarico_ as they circle the Atlantic. Both plays, with their successors and their predecessors, stage dynamic sets of moving relationships that are not limited by geopolitical boundaries. Gilroy, theorizing beyond traditional concepts of culture and nationhood, describes his controlling metaphor of nautical transit:

I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise and as my starting point. [. . .] Ships immediately focus attention on the middle passage, on the various projects for redemptive return to an African homeland, on the circulation of ideas and activities as well as the movement of key cultural and political artifacts. (4)
Importantly, these plays do not confine themselves to Anglo-European culture as they circulate the Atlantic. *Inkle and Yarico*, for example, appeared in French and German versions, and printed or performed versions found their way around the Atlantic in ways divergent from the usual Anglo-American axis of transportation, London to New York City. Circum-Atlantic theatre culture is more complex than the publisher’s imprints on printed texts indicate; those texts represent only a (briefly) frozen moment in time along dynamic continua of performances and artifacts.

The initial presentation of *Obi* in London in 1800 only hints at the dispersal that followed. Within a year, the play appeared in New York City, Boston, and Philadelphia, whereupon it became, in Errol Hill’s words, a “staple on both sides of the Atlantic.” An epistolary novel by William Earle entitled *Obi; or, The History of Threefingered Jack* appeared in England in 1800 and in Massachusetts in 1804, leading a fifty-year long onslaught of prose versions. The story had clearly entered American folk knowledge soon after its initial debut in theatres. John Nathan Hutchins’ 1802 Almanack, printed in New York, demonstrates *Obi*’s popular diaspora, reprinting the first edition of the theatrical word-book. Within a very short time after the debut of Fawcett’s pantomime, versions of *Obi* and its themes appeared to have spread from Jamaica, through England, and to the eastern seaboard of the United States. Significantly, however, the play did not appear in Jamaica until 1862. Although well after its initial period of popularity, that moment too marks a significant moment in the history of the black Atlantic.128

Performances of Three-Finger’d Jack’s rebellion did not stop there; they continued circulating, transforming on the way. William Henry Murray wrote a version of the play “not later than 1830,” according to Charles Rzepka, which the black actor Ira Aldridge performed in England. Aldridge, born in New York in 1807 (where he attended the African Free School), became widely known in Europe as the “African Roscius,” playing many traditionally darker-skinned roles in addition to some well-known white characters. After the 1830 debut of Murray’s *Obi*, Aldridge continued to perform the Caribbean bandit and other similar characters throughout his English career.129 Aldridge, of course, imparts new resonances to the role of Three-Finger’d Jack. Aldridge helped re-write the part and performed it in England during the years immediately preceding the 1833 abolition of English slavery. To Jack’s newly vigorous abolitionist force, Aldridge also added his reputation as a rising Shakespearian actor of considerable talent. The black actor, playing a part historically reserved for a white actor in blackface, reclaim a forceful performance of black and underclass culture. Aldridge’s act capitalizes upon residual lumpen charisma and converts it into abolitionist sentiment.

A militant antislavery version of *Three-Finger’d Jack* seems very different from the gleefully underclass characters of Colman’s *Inkle and Yarico*. Both, however, depend on the charismatic appeal of lumpen black performance. The two plays, with their different imaginings of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat, present competing and supplementing versions of race and class. As their Caribbean settings make especially evident, they both imagine the racially defined underclasses that circulate along Atlantic routes. In so doing, they both acknowledge certain persistent features of Atlantic life; neither performance could ignore the potentially threatening but attractive reality of interracial desire, for example. It might, of course, be contained, deflected, or suppressed, but the inviting festivities of Atlantic blackness remain.

Audience demand brought these performances to their publics. The charisma and appeal of Atlantic blackness and of lumpen performances pulls along the circulations of theatre culture. Each of these performances contains within itself the surrogation that Joseph Roach discusses in
Cities of the Dead. The displacements stage what Roach calls “restored behaviors,” re-performing “variations on a persistent Atlantic occasion particularly subject to forgetting: encounters between and among white, red, and black peoples.” Of course, as Roach recognizes, the acts of restoration hardly ever occur without some slippage or substitution. In these performances, the inevitable acts of surrogation produce a sub-class which can help explain, fabricate, or rationalize the realities of the Atlantic world—cultural realities which audiences found fascinating and absorbing. Emerging from London playhouses in the guise of comic opera and pantomime, the plays continue the work of cultural transmission along Atlantic routes. They mark way stations for loric elements, imparting new spins to acts as they continue on their way. As they traveled, the plays staged the darkened lower classes and ultimately their relationships to other mobile groups of the Atlantic.

_Inkle and Yarico_ and _Three-Finger’d Jack_ reveal the “movement of key cultural and political artefacts” of which Gilroy writes, the attraction for blackness creating motive forces in circum-Atlantic culture. Constantly flirting with charismatic blackness, the plays sustain the interconnections of Atlantic performance culture. They construct a material, theatrical circum-Atlantic culture very aware of its own cultural imbrications. Representations of marronage promote characters from the margins, bringing Wowski and Trudge to audiences in response to popular demand. As elements of the past disappear and reappear, these processes performed the Atlantic scene—a scene which performances of race and culture traveled extensively and popularly. The circulating performances of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat, of course, do not stop with _Inkle and Yarico_ and _Three-Finger’d Jack._
Although the lumpenproletariat emerged from remote corners of the Atlantic world, it did not remain long on the edges. The sailors and pirates lining the edges of the stage in Polly, Inkle and Yarico, and Three-Finger’d Jack began starring in their own productions. Nautical types began appearing onstage, bringing the lumpenproletariat ever closer to home for their English and American audiences. If earlier plays imagined movement outward from the colonial center, by the third decade of the nineteenth century, that traffic had begun to flow along different routes. Nautical theatricals stage these multiple circulations of culture, troubling binary oppositions of center and periphery in Atlantic culture.

Atlantic culture energetically represented the nautical lumpenproletariat; a half-century of popular fascination with seafaring culture led up to Herman Melville’s 1851 Moby-Dick, for example. Going to sea as a “simple sailor,” Ishmael joins a world of underclass laborers who pass the “universal thump” around in their shipboard work. Significantly, Ishmael also narrates the presence of a more disconnected group, a nautical lumpenproletariat, “Isolatoes,” as he calls them,

Not acknowledging the common continent of men, but each Isolato living on a separate continent of his own. Yet now, federated along one keel, what a set these Isolatoes were! An Anacharsis Clootz deputation from all the isles of the sea, and all the ends of the earth, accompanying old Ahab in the Pequod to lay the world’s grievances before the bar from which not very many of them ever came back.

(131-32)

Nautical culture, Melville recognized, drew together disparate characters in relationships that did not always add up to an organized proletariat. Though unified by their “grievances,” like the “ambassadors of the human race to the National Assembly” led by the radical Clootz in 1790, the nautical cohort remains ragged and isolated, a group more often on the receiving end of Melville’s universal thumping.

The early decades of the nineteenth century saw varied attempts to represent nautical underclasses, the lumpen characters often skirmishing with the forces of law and order. Such struggles, like those of Morano and Three-Finger’d Jack, reveal Atlantic culture acting out the possibilities and limitations of class on stage. Increasingly, nautical theatre’s characters also assert national identities and gender positions. The seafaring lumpenproletariat often appears
outlandish, requiring discipline or expulsion. At other times, playwrights and producers attempt to reclaim the loyal “Jack Tar” for domestic society, having him kiss the flag and sing a national anthem at the end of a play. All along, however, such characters reveal genealogical connections to other lumpen types, maintaining the stage presence of underclass troublemakers.

Nautical melodramas negotiated among various categories used to define early nineteenth century culture; an always-mobile form, it anchored an emerging performance culture that confounded clear distinctions between legitimate and illegitimate, between elite and popular culture, and between American and English cultural production. Following in the footsteps of the earlier performances, nautical theatre repeatedly staged dangerously unstable distinctions. Attempting to distinguish between included and excluded members of society, between conventionally acceptable and dangerously unconventional, stage sailors and pirates act out a palpable anxiety over the validity of these distinctions.

The Stage Lumpenproletariat Goes to Sea

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, nautical melodrama had begun to represent the return and re-imagining of the radical underclass figures that earlier plays had figuratively expelled to the margins of the Atlantic or held at arm’s length. The transported felons of *The Beggar’s Opera*, Morano’s pirate cohort in *Polly*, and the unpredictable and darkened Caribbean lumpenproletariat of *Inkle and Yarico* and *Three-Finger’d Jack* make curtain calls in surrogate forms in the nautical melodramas of the 1820s and 30s. The character types, plots, and gestures of the most popular theatricals often recycle earlier acts, referencing the long series of plays staging the underclasses of the Atlantic world. With often veiled references, the wildly popular nautical productions at theatres south of the Thames and in American playhouses from Maine to South Carolina reveal a radical genealogy of earlier lumpenproletariat stagings.

The influence of maritime culture can perhaps be persuasively argued for any theatrical production in a period in which English, American, and French navies were contesting control of the north Atlantic and as merchants from both nations were circulating goods and people around the globe. If seafaring endeavors did not openly influence a given play’s content, then the nautical, one could always credibly argue, helped create the economic conditions of its production and circulation. Peter Linebaugh convincingly identifies the ship as one of the dominant modes of production beginning in the eighteenth century. As mobile locations of concentrated numbers of laborers, sea vessels created and transported culture, helping shape a “deep-sea proletariat.”

This was true in the western hemisphere too. American theatrical companies, for example, relied heavily upon sea travel, deep-water as well as coastal. When touring companies were not traveling from New York to Jamaica, as Henry and Hallam’s troupe did during the American Revolutionary War, they often sailed from port to port along the Atlantic seaboard. Transatlantic manager and actor Joe Cowell’s memoirs include anecdotes of traveling the eastern seaboard circuit in the 1820s, once nearly wrecking in a violent storm en route to Charleston. Cowell articulated his experience in theatrical terms; the “clouds began to separate,” he recounted, “producing a supernatural kind of light, which would be considered awful even in the last scene of a melodrama.” Their near-disaster and providential delivery became theatre even as it shaped the material processes of producing theatre. Seafaring culture played a decisive role
in the production and dissemination of theatrical performances, moving the people, scripts, and theatrical equipment long distances quickly and (with occasional exceptions) relatively safely. Elements of nautical culture circulated quickly and subtly, gesturally permeating theatricals of all types long before playwright J. C. Cross and actor T. P. Cooke helped popularize nautical melodramas in London. Nautical themes and dances, for example, had appeared on stage for decades, perhaps even a full century, before the rush on nautical theatre at the end of the 1700s. Performances such as *The Beggar’s Opera*, with only hints of maritime culture in their actual scripts, became vehicles for sailor’s hornpipes and nautical songs. The prisoners’ celebration in the third act became an elaborate hornpipe by the 1750s. A drawing in Harvard’s Theatre Collection, for example, depicts the London staging of one such “popular dance in fetters” in *The Beggar’s Opera* as late as 1836 (Figure 6). The drawing reproduces the theatrical spectatorship that plays such a prominent role in stagings of the underclass, nautical or otherwise. Its bystanders watch a disgruntled-looking lumpen dancer, the image reveals the fascination that capturing nautical dances—literally, with the ankle irons—held for Atlantic audiences. The fetters, rather than containing the nautical underclasses, emblematize the urge to discipline that the lumpenproletariat continually escaped.

![Figure 6. "Popular Dance in Fetters, from The Beggar's Opera," 1836, courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection.](image-url)
The nautical cohort became lumpen not only in London, but throughout the Atlantic world. In 1754 at New York City’s Nassau Street Theatre, Mr. Hullet, danced hornpipes while playing the part of Filch in *The Beggar’s Opera*. Audiences most likely associated the lumpenproletariat with nautical dances; Hullet may even have won the part with his ability to dance the hornpipe. In similar fashion, nautical songs and dances, given an even remotely plausible excuse, had peppered other stagings of the lumpenproletariat. At its debut in 1777, *Polly* advertised a “Dance of Pirates” as one of the play’s noteworthy attractions. Likewise, the “full chorus to the good Merchant ship the Achilles, that’s wrote by our Captain” in *Inkle and Yarico* underscored the singing and dancing skills of its sailor characters. Inflecting the theme with local overtones, New England performances of *Inkle and Yarico* preceded the “favorite farce... *Preparation for a Cruise; or, The Portland Sailor.*” In this afterpiece, Mr. Kedey played Tom Grog, the “Portland Sailor with a Song.”

Nautical elements, responsive to popular demand and easy enough to insert into or between existing performances, increasingly permeated Atlantic stages during the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth centuries. The gestures often slid in sideways, inserting themselves into plots which otherwise did not necessarily demand them. Other lumpen acts, thus, had whetted the public appetite for the nautical plays that emerged as a distinct genre at Sadler’s Wells in the 1790s. In addition, the earlier manifestations of nautical themes and gestures had firmly associated nautical characters and gestures with more dangerous elements on the margins of Atlantic culture, from the thieving London gang types, to piratical Caribbean crews, to rebellious slave cohorts.

Nautically themed entertainments, reacting to and interpreting current events, became popular in both American and English theatres at the end of the eighteenth century. Theatres supplied—like newsreels of the early twentieth century—accounts of naval victories and spectacular patriotic celebrations. Current events often became celebrations of underclass culture. These revels led to the Haymarket Theatre’s 1794 production of *The Purse; or, the Benevolent Tar*, generally considered the first nautical drama. Its author, J. C. Cross, later called a “key unheralded innovator” of his time, wrote for both the Surrey Theatre and the patent theatres north of the Thames, his work following popular demand from one side of the Thames to the other. On American stages, nautical melodramas sprang from a similar foundation of naval current-events performances. Susannah Haswell Rowson wrote *Slaves in Algiers; or, A Struggle for Freedom* for Thomas Wignell’s new theatre on Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. Rowson, best known for *Charlotte Temple*, an immensely popular tale of transatlantic seduction and betrayal first published in 1791, had supplemented her writing of fiction by acting and writing for the stage in Scotland as well as eastern American cities such as Boston, Baltimore, and Philadelphia. *Slaves in Algiers*, a close contemporary of Cross’s *The Purse*, also expanded upon current naval events; the capture of American sailors and officers by Algerian pirates catapulted the stage tar to heroic status.

The nautical themes remained prominent in American theatre culture, dominating theatres on the eastern seaboard well past the War of 1812. The well-established Jack Tar character had begun to take on distinctly American characteristics onstage. A song from William Craft’s nautical afterpiece *The Sea-Serpent* (1819) celebrates the fact that “One cannot go / To a bleak rock, or barren waste of snow / A burning mountain or an arid sand / But sees a yankee soon as he sees land.” The tar has become a potent symbol of American nationalism, a figure found wherever American ships travel—preceding even the more serious traveler. The song—although it certainly exaggerates the reach of American sea power—celebrates a
neglected side of American culture. The nautical characters of early America (on and off stage) occupied a much more important position than, in hindsight, we tend to recognize. As Constance Rourke’s *American Humor* suggests by its almost complete omission of the American sailor as a folk type, the Jack Tar character gradually lost its central position in American culture. By the middle of the nineteenth century, as Craft’s *Sea-Serpent* forecasts and Rourke’s survey confirms, the Yankee appears to have completely subsumed the Jack Tar character. The two became inseparable, and commentators could speak, as Rourke later does, of a “Yankee sailor aboard a clipper.” Histories have gradually erased their presence on American stages to make way for narratives of national identity and manifest destiny. Nevertheless, despite this later turn, maritime themes dominated antebellum American theatricals and were still popular when Melville penned *Moby-Dick*.

Nautical plays reveal theatrical continuities in the ways that Anglo-American culture understood the mobile masses of laboring bodies circulating among their ports. Certain segments of society, as nautical plays demonstrate, transmitted a cultural cachet to the theatre. The familiarity of Atlantic culture with maritime endeavors, coupled with the exotic perceptions of seafaring, condensed possibilities for highly charged, compelling theatre. Seagoing culture placed mundane, everyday objects and the most outlandish of products in the same hold—obi incantations and popular songs moved along the same channels. New York and Boston connected Kingston, London, and the African coast, potentially troubling distinctions between the exotic and the familiar, the centers and the peripheries of cultures. On stage, sailors and their ilk acted out such links between the strange and the everyday, complex negotiations between insides and outsides of landlocked societies.

My analysis of nautical melodramas attends to three plays in chronological order. Such order, however, does not imply a master narrative of nautical melodrama. The three plays I discuss, John Fawcett’s *Tuckitomba*, Edward Fitzball’s *The Red Rover*, and Douglas Jerrold’s *Black-Ey’d Susan*, all premiered within the span of a year or so, from the spring of 1828 to the summer of 1829. They of course do not exemplify the full chronological development or range of nautical melodrama. They do illustrate, however, the multiplicity of the lumpen lore cycle in a given cultural moment. Radically circum-Atlantic acts such as *Tuckitomba* accompany more conservative plays such as *Black-Ey’d Susan*, both kinds appearing in nearly the same cultural moment. These three plays represent attempts of varying success to take advantage of an already-popular but still growing area of Atlantic theatre. With varying degrees of success, they mined residual and dominant gestures. As the lumpen characters moved homeward, they also began to produce the performances that emerge as the dominant modes in mid-century theatre. Perhaps most importantly, my ordering follows the movement of this stage of the lore cycle from the circum-Atlantic world’s peripheries back to its centers. Those centers are multiple, not limited to London, since American nautical acts re-centered maritime circulations on ports like Newport, as *The Red Rover* demonstrates. The themes of nautical theatre make apparent the forms and structures of Atlantic cultural transmissions. Rectilinear cultural movement becomes multiple, with new centers appearing constantly, generating complex circulations of culture.

**Tuckitomba and the Persistent Mobility of the Lore Cycle**

The threatening confusions generated by the mobile Atlantic underclasses, reached the stage repeatedly in nautical melodramas, becoming conventional, even hackneyed. They were,
however, no less popular for it. A minor play by Isaac Pocock, *Tuckitomba; or, the Obi Sorceress*, reveals the persistent presence of the Atlantic nautical underclasses. The play presented its audiences with the aristocratic Jamaican planter Edwards, whom the mysterious escaped slave, Tuckitomba, victimizes. Tuckitomba, significantly, reappears after having supposedly died years ago in a slave revolt. Assisted by an obi-sorceress, the villain kidnaps Edwards’s child, Johnny, and attempts to claim his quadroon nurse, Clara, for himself. The other characters—the master, an overseer, slaves, and even helpful seamen—join in the hot pursuit of Tuckitomba. In the process, however, the plot complicates, and an equally mysterious pirate captain (the Black Rover) and his crew play an increasingly prominent role in the plot. The play winds its way to a conclusion by killing off the obi-woman and revealing Tuckitomba as the Black Rover, and—in an additional plot twist—as Durant, the cruel overseer whom Clara had spurned yeas before. The true Tuckitomba, we find, had indeed died years before. The play’s grand finale, following the longstanding tradition of popular melodramas on Atlantic stages, celebrates the defeat of the evildoers with dancing, singing, and slave antics.

The play was not a success; it stayed about a week at the Theatre-Royal at Covent Garden under the management of John Fawcett. It never saw publication in one of the numerous acting editions of the mid-nineteenth century, nor has it left much of a mark on the printed records of London stages. The only trace of it I have yet found is a handwritten manuscript in the Lord Chamberlain’s records, now in the British Library. Part of the reason for this might reside in the fact that the play seems a clumsy, strange bird. The staging is somewhat convoluted, relying on multiple and unwieldy revelations of identity to establish, clarify, and resolve the conflict. The crises of identities in the plot, though, are also formally significant, corresponding to a generic identity crisis of sorts. *Tuckitomba* stages elements of nautical melodrama, but it also draws on other previously successful motifs such as the Caribbean magic of “Obi” that had been appearing on Atlantic stages for three decades. *Tuckitomba*, staging a mix of nautical melodrama and exotic Caribbean themes, represents a previously missing link in the lore cycle. At the same time, it does not represent a hybrid transitional form between two pure products. Instead, *Tuckitomba* asserts popular culture’s tendency to revive past elements at any given historical moment, inflecting current trends with older gestures and themes. *Tuckitomba* is important as a performance that has embedded flashes and gestures of cultural cycles, words and actions layered into one compact and multiply dialectical moment on stage.

*Tuckitomba*’s production also represents an important link in the institutional routing of the lore cycles of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat. On February 21, 1828, Fawcett submitted the manuscript to George Colman the Younger, the Examiner of Plays, who approved it a week and a half later. The cooperation represents a telling linkage in the lore cycle’s wanderings. Fawcett, of course, had written the pantomime version of *Obi* some three decades before. He now found himself promoting not precisely a sequel, but a production that played off the earlier play’s persistent popularity and perhaps created an opportunity for the revival of the original *Obi*. The man who approved the play for performance, of course, had written the hugely successful *Inkle and Yarico* some four decades earlier. The play itself gathers and stages elements from earlier parts of the lore cycle, epitomizing the connections that Fawcett and Colman imply.

Unlike many of its nautical relatives, *Tuckitomba* features no upstanding sailor hero. However, in the person of the villainous Tuckitomba, the play elaborately stages the anxiety over identity and mobility upon which other nautical melodramas capitalized so successfully. In addition, the play capitalizes upon earlier stagings of race (including Fawcett’s perennially popular *Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack*) to complicate the picture of Caribbean mobility. These
complications present an ambiguous staging of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat, adding—in a move that contrasts somewhat daringly with other plays—a significant element of racial ambiguity to the staging. At the same time, the complications deflect the single-mindedness and self-sufficiency of a rebellion like that of Tuckitomba or Three-Finger’d Jack.

The racial machinations of the performance start with the opening scene in Jamaica in 1760. The setting prepares the audience to enjoy a setting in the past—during a time, the play proposes, when racial relations took a somewhat less complicated form than they did in the 1820s. This simplified view of the relations of slavery becomes evident from the opening curtain. In the first scene, the overseer Fletcher and his slave “helpers” Cudjoe and Quaco watch for a sail on the horizon and sing a “Glee” anticipating the benevolent master’s return to his plantation. As in the opening scene of *Three-Finger’d Jack*, slaves celebrate the kindness of the master, who “do to ebery white and black / All de good he can” (536). The planter also serves as a sort of paternalistic authorization for the slave festivities to come; as Mary, the planter’s wife, asserts, the slaves “will not enjoy their accustomed Festival without my husband’s presence” (537).

Despite the seemingly uncomplicated relationship between black and white characters, the play quickly introduces racial tension. *Tuckitomba* introduces the “whisper abroad” that the “Koromantyn Negro who headed the late conspiracy has been seen on the neighboring plantation” (540). Mrs. Edwards describes the villain, whom she presumes dead, and his “Obi charms” (541). As if invoked by Mrs. Edwards’ hushed exclamation, “Tuckitomba,” and an ominous “chord of Musick,” the villain appears briefly in the background (540-41). The play dramatically (if somewhat predictably) allows the audience its first glimpse of the mysterious menace, Tuckitomba.

Tuckitomba’s early and elusive presence in the melodrama highlights his dangerous character. As Mrs. Edwards reveals, the whites believed the escaped slave killed in a Maroon revolt “in the woods, when his merciless companions were taken and executed, with all their trumpery and Obi charms about them” (541). As in *Three-Finger’d Jack*, the slaves fear Tuckitomba’s omnipresent and multiple threat; Quaco, for example (exclaiming “Tuckitomba here, dere, ebberywhere”), echoes the once-comical mobility of Bickerstaff’s Mungo in a distinctly more ominous tone (548). The overwhelming danger, as is apt to happen in melodrama, causes the characters to break out in song:

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Tuckitomba! Tuckitomba!
Wid Obi charms he bind us
Tuckitomba! Tuckitomba!
He ebberywhere can find us. (549)
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Part of the threat might reside in the fact that Tuckitomba is, indeed, effectively multiple, only one member of an outlaw gang that includes Esther (an Obi-woman) and “renegade Negroes” who gather in a cave in the hills (561-62). Like Macheath, Three-Fingered Jack, or Morano, theatrical villains like Tuckitomba cannot execute their dastardly plans alone; the gang once again plays a significant role in the representation of lumpenproletariat rebelliousness.

Tuckitomba poses a multiple threat to planter society. He represents an exotic threat to the domestic, as the play emphasizes in having him kidnap young Johnny, the planter’s son. He also represents a mobile threat to the rooted: his presence “here, dere, ebberywhere” renders him unpredictable, mysterious, and dangerous. In his mobility, he also represents an uncontrollable black threat to the happy harmony between benevolent master and grateful slave. The Edwards
inhabit a world in which black characters (except of course, for Tuckitomba), can be as happy “as if Sugars were up 50 per cent” (544). With no trace of irony, the play figures the master’s happiness as equivalent to the happiness of everyone on the plantation. Out of place in this idyllic scene, Tuckitomba represents an inexplicable, unpredictable, and utterly alien element. Pocock’s play thus searches for motivations and strategies that might explain reasonably (if imaginatively) Tuckitomba’s actions without indicting the entire slave system and by extension the Atlantic mercantile system that created and sustained the Edwards’ plantation. In order to accomplish these ends, Tuckitomba initially isolates the villain in his rebellion, rendering him a unique phenomenon (of personal grudges, we later find) rather than the product of an oppressive slave system. Although he operates with a cohort of threatening characters, the play insists on understanding his evil deeds in terms of an eccentric private vendetta.

In addition, the magic of obi has taken on a newly useful role for the slaveholding establishment. Magic takes the place of any real motivating grievances on the part of slaves or Maroons. The overseer Abraham Fletcher explains the island’s troubles by invoking “The witch plague. . . The dreadful practice of Obi, which spreads in secret like a pestilence” and oppresses the slaves (541). This principle governs the play’s plot; Chickateki, a mute slave, only helps Esther out of fear. As the stage directions indicate, “he gives expressions of pleasure—when she turns, of fear and hatred” (557). The obi-woman Esther, for her part, operates on the same principle of personal vendetta that impels Tuckitomba. Although she blames the slave system, she holds the strongest grudge against Mr. Edwards, the plantation owner who, she says, “destroyed” her own child (563). As in Three-Finger’d Jack, the harmonious slave system contrasts starkly with the personal hostility of Esther and Tuckitomba towards the planter.

So far, the play mimics the action of Fawcett’s Obi. At the beginning of the second act, however, the play begins to oscillate between scenes ashore and afloat. Pocock’s melodrama becomes more nautical and eventually stages its climax (in nautical theatre’s tradition of spectacular ending disasters) with the burning and sinking of the pirate ship. Besides anchoring the play firmly in the context of nautical melodrama, the move also serves to dissipate the black rebellion even further. The play echoes the whites’ belief that only an external influence could inspire rebellion like Tuckitomba’s, and the play’s rebelliousness shifts from the escaped slave to the pirate. The play accomplishes this by revealing first the collusion of pirates and renegade blacks and, more spectacularly, by unmasking Tuckitomba as the pirate captain. In the process, the play (repeating earlier staging and foreshadowing later ones) imagines a dangerous component of the Atlantic lower classes, a cohort whose threat to established society becomes evident and therefore must be punished.

While loyal tars help with the hunt for Tuckitomba, a more dangerous nautical cohort lurks offshore in the ship Sturdy Beggar. Like their more upstanding and legal Jack Tar counterparts, the pirates provide the stage with musical entertainment. Their performances (though more dangerously mobile than those of the average seaman) exhibit the same charisma with which T. P. Cooke sang and danced more socially acceptable versions of the tar. One pirate’s solo, for example, emphasizes the dangerous mobility of his kind:

Pull away, pull away, ’tis the bold black Rover
At anchor she rides, like a sea bird a sleep
Five fathom below, and the red flag above her
She’ll wake like a tempest, and traverse the deep. (568)

The pirate’s song presents, of course, a romanticized, rosy-colored rendition of piracy, but at the same time it cannot erase the labor producing the number. In a move characteristic of nautical
melodrama, seafaring characters often slide across distinctions such as pirate and loyal sailor. Pirates “pull away” just as sailors do, and the nautical cohort is tinged lumpen throughout.

The singing and dancing entertainments of nautical characters become potentially threatening, in part by mere theatrical proximity. The pirates’ songs, rebellious enough on their own, associate with songs and dances of a more disorderly kind. A scene placed in the obi-woman Esther’s cave, features Tuckitomba’s rebel slaves in disorderly celebration. During this sequence, the mute Chickateki (a loyal house slave) helps Edwards to escape “over the bodies of the sleeping negroes,” Tuckitomba’s renegade companions (579). Once he has accomplished this, Chickateki encourages the awakened cohort to engage in some festivities:

Chickateki...rises, when Tucka [sic] disappears, and claps his hands, as possessed of sudden thought, it attracts the attention of the Negroes. Chicka [sic] beckons them, and assumes gaiety—makes the motion of drinking, and points to the bottle on the table, they assent with appropriate action. Chicka takes the bottle, and shews the word “rum” marked upon it; drinks, and tosses his arms joyfully—they simultaneously snatch at the bottle, and drink in turn—Chicka then recovers it as greedy of his portion appears to drink and dances grotesquely—they beginning to join him in his antics. (580)

The spectacle of the black characters reeling in grotesque antics, of course, contrasts strongly with the tamer, more controlled performances of the white pirates. Wordless and menacing, it certainly displays none of the good-natured humor that the pirates’ singing reveals. At the same time, the rapid succession of performances, black following white, encourages their association. Nick Dragon, the Black Rover’s mate, reinforces the affiliation of the two groups in earlier reporting that “Tucki has promised to get him a few hands among the runaway Caribs” (573). The play stages the alliance between renegade seafarers and rebellious West Indian natives as a theatrical business, evident by their related performances of singing and dancing.

The finale of the play concretizes the underclass affiliations that have developed in the sequence of scenes on board the Sturdy Beggar and in the obi-woman’s cave. With a dramatic multiple unmasking sequence, Tuckitomba reveals himself as the pirate captain Black Rover. Up until this point, he has performed his costume changes backstage; now, however, the stage directions have him “instantly [throw] on his Boarding cap &c., and [resume] in great degree his former appearance as the Pirate” (590). The obi-woman Esther has already identified Tuckitomba as the cruel overseer Durant, who had been dismissed in favor of the more benevolent Fletcher (589). A surprised onlooker sums it up, exclaiming “My shoes!  What don’t you know, that Durant’s the sham Tuckitommy, and that the sham Tuckitommy is the Black Pirate” (597). Thus, with the layers of sham penetrated, the play positively identifies the perpetrators of social unrest. Despite the convoluted process of establishing culpability, Tuckitomba safely places the blame and contains the play’s multiple threats.

At the same time, the play’s celebratory ending is the festive air “Come Let Us Dance and Sing,” recycled from Inkle and Yarico. The ending song and dance recalls the interracial cavorting of Trudge and Wowski, undercutting the re-establishment of racial boundaries with theatrical interracial affiliations. Although Tuckitomba stages the restoration of order, in the end the performance slips briefly out of control. The finale, with “all the Negroes assembled, and some Seamen,” features the lively frolicking of sailors, slaves, and slaveholders together. Tuckitomba represents simultaneously a radical staging of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat and one of the most vigorous efforts to contain the dangers that inevitably arise. The play works
diligently to discriminate between acceptable members of the lower classes, like the helpful seamen, and the intolerable elements, like the pirates, who must either reform or perish. In the process, however, Tuckitomba embodies vividly the connections among various members of the underclasses and their potential to escape the demands of discipline and decorum.

“The Behold and Know Me!”

The connections performed for the limited audiences of Tuckitomba found much greater success in other nautical melodramas. Appearing soon after Pocock’s play, Fitzball’s The Red Rover and Jerrold’s Black-Ey’d Susan both stage the same basic conflicts and affiliations of the Atlantic world’s nautical classes, though in always shifting guises. The performed expulsion of undesirable characters occurs just as overtly in Edward Fitzball’s The Red Rover, first performed in 1829. One of a trilogy of nautical plays Fitzball adapted from James Fenimore Cooper’s early sea novels, the melodramatic version of The Red Rover emphasizes the discovery, display, and discipline of unruly nautical characters in transatlantic culture. The main character, the Rover, preys upon Newport, Rhode Island, disguising himself in a kidnapping and extortion plot. In his introduction to the play, George Daniel observes that, “like most rogues, the Rover has many disguises.”

The rover eventually meets his match in the combined efforts of Lieutenant Wilder of the Royal Navy, the humble sailor Fid, Guinea (his black sailor companion), and Hector Homespun, the comedic Yankee tailor.

Significantly, The Red Rover embodies the lumpen threat directly, rather than leaving it as the absent shadow or the mistaken identity of more cautious plays. A climactic moment in the play reveals the lumpenproletariat in the flesh, to the astonishment of the loyal lieutenant Wilder:

Rover: Behold and know me!
Wilder: The Red Rover?
Rover: Aye, the Red Rover. (25)

Stepping forth on stage, the nautical lumpen once again presents appealing and popular acts, and the tension between charismatic popularity and social threats permeates the play. Like other nautical melodramas, The Red Rover attempts to contain the spectacular and the outlandish, but not before it allows those elements to capture the stage and entertain audiences on both sides of the Atlantic.

With its American authorship and English adaptation, The Red Rover also reveals negotiations between the different regional stagings of Atlantic culture and the Atlantic underclasses. Once again, popular theatre makes America the stage on which problems of class and race play out. Just as Polly enacted lumpen war on society and Inkle and Yarico engaged the complexities of race at a safe, Caribbean distance, The Red Rover uses American themes to explore the implications of class. The play also reveals direct links between English nautical melodrama and American literary and theatrical production—Cooper wrote the book in America and, almost instantly, both English and American playwrights adapted it to the stage.

The active American participation in cultural production is not new; American plays and literary works appeared long before this, contributing to an active dialogue with English work. Its success in the popular realm, however, marks the increasing velocity and interplay of circulation of Atlantic culture as well as the growing public recognition of these exchanges.
The Red Rover appeared in Paris on November 27, 1827; in London on November 30; and in Philadelphia on January 9, 1828. The novel’s transatlantic circulation occurred about as fast as it could move along shipping routes. The results of this spread, most visibly in the theatrical versions, negotiate the authority to represent class and nationality within circulating Atlantic culture. The play (even more than the novel a compound product of writing for both American and English audiences) represents the cooperative transatlantic production of culture. Theatrical crossing and cross-pollination, of course, had long taken place. American themes permeated popular theatricals in London, for example, and acts such as *Three-Finger’d Jack* quickly recrossed the Atlantic to give American themes back to American audiences. John Gay’s work had consistently provided American playhouses with standard productions, and plays such as *Inkle and Yarico* adapted almost unchanged for American stages. Beginning in the late 1820s, however, the cultural production becomes even more multi-phased, and Cooper demonstrates this circulation. The product of professional authorship, written in Europe for American audiences but published first in Europe, sparked off multiple adaptations in both England and America.

Cooper’s sea novels respond to English novels, situating them in a transatlantic web of intertextuality. As John Peck notes, Cooper’s dissatisfaction with the unrealistic portrayal of nautical matters in Walter Scott’s 1821 *The Pirate* inspired his 1823 novel *The Pilot*, which *The Red Rover* quickly followed. Romantic heroes such as Conrad in Byron’s 1814 *The Corsair* also contributed to Cooper’s choice of making his hero a visionary, an adventurer, an idealistic gentleman pirate. At the same time, the transmission of Cooper’s story reveals a struggle over class and nationality acted out on the lumpenproletariat. The novel, which is set in the late colonial period, narrates the Rover as an English sailor who had escaped justice after killing an officer. In effect, he acts a fugitive version of William in Jerrold’s *Black-Ey’d Susan*. Instead of exonerating and neatly enfolding him back into the landlocked social order, Cooper’s novel creates the Rover as an independent antihero, the rebellious predecessor to later romantic American heroes. The pirate sets fire to his own ship and disappears, presumably dead. Witnesses who “ascended to the upper masts of the cruiser, and were aided by glasses, believed, indeed, that they could discern a solitary speck upon the sea; but whether it was a boat,” Cooper writes, “or some fragment of the wreck, was never known.” For a brief moment, he appears unforgiven, irredeemably lumpen, a self-immolating, outcast antihero who may indeed have escaped.

The novel’s ending, however, tempers this image with the possibilities of a newly articulated cultural nationalism. Cooper redeems the outcast status of the Rover, quite simply, by recruiting him to the patriotic cause. After the Rover’s apparent death, the novel skips forward, briefly glossing the turbulent events of the 1770s and 80s, finally bringing the Rover back to his long-estranged American family. The reconciliation scene reveals the “tenderness and sorrow” in the dying Rover’s expression; “this war,” he relates, “drew me from my concealment. Our country needed us both, and both she has had” (495). Cooper’s quick and perhaps facile redemption of the antihero provides an opportunity to celebrate American values, transforming the lumpenness of an American national identity forged in rebellion into patriotic dedication.

Theatrical versions of the novel never redeem the Rover in quite the same way, however, and *The Red Rover*’s conversion to melodrama reveals further transnational negotiations over the representation of class. Although the novel appeared first in Paris and London, its first theatrical adaptation appeared at Philadelphia’s Chestnut Street Theatre, under the direction of Francis
Courtney Wemyss. Both grandparents and the father of Joseph Jefferson III (most famous for his enduring role as the title character of Dion Bouicault’s Rip van Winkle from 1864 to 1904), played headlining roles in Wemyss’s production. Wemyss’s playwright, Joseph Chapman, had recently joined the American theatre from Covent Garden.147 The interplay of transatlantic cultures is clear; the actors who cemented the enduring popularity of the American stage Yankee perform a play that began as an American-authored novel written in Europe and finally adapted by a London playwright for American and English audiences. This mix of English and American cultural production appealed to American audiences, and The Red Rover represents one of the most frequently performed plays of the antebellum period.

In England, the play enjoyed at least as much popularity as it did on American stages. Allardyce Nicoll dates the premiere of Fitzball’s version of the “Nautical Burletta” at the Adelphi Theatre on February 9, 1829.148 It appeared 41 times that spring, making it one of the season’s most successful productions. Frederick Yates, a manager of the theatre, played the Rover and T. P. Cooke took the part of Fid. Both actors had already achieved fame for their nautical impersonations. Significantly, the play seems to have cashed in on the sensationalism of the mutiny by listing the mutineer Sam Cutreef and his henchman above the always-popular Cooke. Fitzball’s version, despite competition from American and other English versions, represents the most popular staging of the play. Its significant alterations of Cooper’s plot also make it a noteworthy example of transatlantic cultural in dialogue.

Later evaluations of the performances recall its success; George Daniel’s preface to the Cumberland acting edition recalls that “Mr. Yates, who is particularly well adapted for these parts, made the most of this Terror of the Sea. His performance was exceedingly characteristic and bold” (8). In addition, Daniel relates, “Mr. T. P. Cooke had his hornpipe, which as usual he, to the great delight of the audience, danced with all his wonted energy and spirit” (8). The focus on these two indicates the way the play’s audiences understood its underclass characters; the lumpen provided “bold” and “characteristic” performances, full of energy and spirit. Daniel does not dwell on the obvious differences between Fid and the Rover (one is “good,” the other “bad” in the melodrama’s universe), instead treating them both as members of the nautical classes. Fitzball’s Rover thus stages a complex, oscillating version of the nautical lumpenproletariat. The charisma of performance holds the moral dichotomies of melodrama in tension.

While Cooper’s novel focuses on the individual heroism enabled by class status, Fitzball’s play emphasizes the activities of the common sailor instead. At the same time, the Rover, opposing the faithful tar, reveals a debt to previous conceptions of lumpen antiheroes. The Rover, demonstrating more in common with Morano than with Jerrold’s William, performs the slippery mobility of the lumpen classes. This becomes evident from the first scene, when Fid and his black companion Guinea argue over the status of the pirate’s ship the Dolphin, suspiciously ready to flee the outer harbor of Newport, Rhode Island. “He keeps everything in readiness for a sudden move,” Fid observes, “In ten minutes he would carry his ship beyond the range of the battery, provided he had a capful [sic] of wind” (12). Physical mobility, a defining characteristic of the lumpenproletariat, provides the material basis for the Rover’s lumpen war on civilization. If he moves fast enough, he can continue to prey on merchant ships while keeping his identity hidden. Physical movement enables and signals other types of mobility in the play.

The Rover, while physically slippery, also reveals the theatrical mobility of identity that defines the lumpenproletariat increasingly into the nineteenth century. Perhaps more heavy-handedly than Black-Ey’d Susan, Fitzball’s Red Rover stages the revelation of the
lumpenproletariat’s hidden identity. This emphasis is clear from the title page onward; two of the published acting editions (Cumberland’s and the virtually identical Davidson’s) boast a “fine engraving, by Mr. Bonner, from a Drawing taken in the Theatre, by Mr. R. Cruikshank.” The engraving, representing one of the play’s iconic moments, depicts the villainous Red Rover, waving a scarlet flag, surrounded by startled-looking sailors. The lines of dialogue below the engraving (illustrating the fourth scene of the play) reveal the pirate captain identifying himself: “Behold and know me!” This moment, the confirmation of Wilder’s suspicions, serves as a turning point in the performance. With the Rover’s confirmation of his status, the lumpen characters also emerge in full view; the stage directions call for music and indicate that “the deck is filled with the whole Crew, armed, from various entrances R. and L” (25). All of the characters onstage, including the heroic officer Wilder and Fid, the loyal tar, share the knowledge that had earlier been restricted to the audience alone.

The discovery scene emphasizes the danger the Red Rover represents. The threat resides not in violent acts of piracy; the Rover acts a relatively tame piracy. Instead, his threat comes from his performance of a sequence of hidden identity and ostentatious display. The Rover emulates Morano’s revelation scene in Polly, which exposes the social threat of his masking. Like Trudge and Wowski imagining the figures they would cut in London, the pirate’s flagrant appropriation of upper-class identity poses more of a threat than any actual brutality he might perform. Like the Jack Sheppard plays that appear almost a decade later, the pilfering of upper-class identity, the defiant flaunting of lavish garments, pose a distinctly theatrical threat to established order.

As the Rover sidles up and eavesdrops on the group of heroic tars discussing his ship, he demonstrates the dangerous mobility of identity that nautical melodramas unleash onstage. Feigning lack of knowledge (“I confess my ignorance of all maritime affairs”), the Rover assumes the role of a civil servant (12). The Rover plays one type of authority against another. He shields his illegitimate competence behind a mask of ignorance, strategically trading nautical knowledge for civic authority in order to remain undetected. The importance of his multiple impersonations become evident in the costume descriptions provided by Cumberland’s acting edition. The Rover, listed first, has three costumes, while no one else has more than one: the pirate captain’s dress varies from the elaborate “Green coat—yellow kerseymere breeches—high boots, and spurs—white coat, with double lapels—broad brim hat, and long flaxen wig” of his first costume to the plainer “Old man’s coat and waistcoat—sailor’s striped trowsers—striped stockings—shoes—gray wig, and old hat” of his disguise as an old sailor (9).

The Rover’s costuming also points to the class implications of his mobility. While a character like the black sailor Guinea dresses simply in plain sailor attire (“Guernsey shirt—canvas trowsers—hat and shoes”), the Rover alternates among more sumptuous outfits. In presumably his normal costume, the pirate captain wears “Blue jacket trimmed with gold lace—red stocking tights—red waistcoat—white petticoat—trowsers—blue cloth cap hanging down at the side—black belt—mantle shoes and buckles” (9). The outfit serves to differentiate him from the other nautical characters as it highlights the threat of his class aspirations. The Rover also evokes the consistently sumptuous dress of lumpen stage heroes such as Macheath. In performance, the Rover’s costume subtly suggests that he maintains much the same goals as Morano and his crew in Polly, waging a war against elites that threatens to usurp markers of upper-class style. The lumpenproletariat, The Red Rover asserts, always threatens to jump class boundaries in their war on society, converting from outcast to aristocrat; their dress is the proof.
The Rover stands opposite Fid, the loyal tar. In Fitzball’s version, the Rover’s slippery class identity, highlighted by his multiple and sumptuous costumes, contrasts with Fid’s uncomplicated and unquestioned class location. Fid establishes his authoritative nautical knowledge immediately in the first scene, assessing the Rover’s suspicious intentions. Fid performs his place in a world of commercial enterprises that needs men of his experience and competence. He also enacts the Foucauldian urge to detect, to discipline, to assess and control, although his visual skills are not particularly effective in stopping the pirate. “I see now,” he says of the Rover, “he keeps everything in readiness for a sudden move” (12). Fid, much like Black-Ey’d Susan’s William, is a useful member of the underclasses, neither replaceable nor expendable. His status (closer to proletarian than lumpen) contrasts with other nautical characters, including his companion Guinea and the Rover himself, both of whom die to enable the play’s happy ending.

Even so, Fid plays a role as mobile as that of the Rover, never more than one foot ashore. Like Black-Ey’d Susan’s William, Fid’s domestic life propels him into nautical circulations. At the play’s ending, in fact, Fid relates the history of his association with Guinea and Captain Wilder; his dramatic story of shipwreck and recovery creates familial bonds for himself in the absence of traditional domestic ties (37-39). Fid ends up a father-brother figure to Wilder after rescuing him. The discovery that Wilder’s mother is actually Madame de Lacy, one of the Rover’s hostages, enmeshes Fid in familial relationships, despite his nautical mobility. In the final scene, however, Fid remains literally marginal, held at the periphery of the domestic resolution. Lieutenant Wilder, Madame de Lacy, and her daughter Gertrude board the rescuing boat, leaving “Fid clinging outside the vessel, as the curtain descends” (46). Although the play rescues him in its happy conclusion, Fid still occupies a problematic location between nautical mobility and middle-class rootedness.

The mysterious Rover is, perhaps, even less easily understood. Despite melodrama’s propensity to unmask and fix identity, the Rover’s rebellious, piratical wanderings remain unexplained in the melodrama. The play presents no pleasing narrations of criminal pasts, no rogue’s progress. The play (despite Robert Cruikshank’s engraved revelation scene) never fully unmasks the Rover, never actually reveals his true identity. Throughout the play, he plays roles, often in disguise. Neither the characters within the script nor the audience can ever be completely sure of the Rover’s character. The Rover even undergoes a change of heart at the end, allowing his hostages to go free and refusing to resist the English ship Dart. Fitzball’s script resists establishing his true character, and he must endure the inexorable justice of melodrama. The final scene, with the Rover laughing “hysterically” at the inevitable poetic justice of his death, only further confuses his position (46).

In The Red Rover, the theatricality of other lumpenproletarian characters becomes threatening as well. Fitzball’s play, much like Black-Ey’d Susan, reveals the theatrical contiguousness of music and mischief, lumpenproletariat entertainments and social danger. As in Jerrold’s play, the nautical plot provides a chance for sailors’ revels, but in contrast, The Red Rover stages these festivities as part of the pirate’s fun. Instead of jolly tars, cutthroat rogues provide the music and dancing. Fid, played in London by the popular Cooke, of course gets his turn dancing a hornpipe. This is the act that George Daniel admired, the performance Cooke “danced with all his wonted energy and spirit” (8). Even with Cooke’s dancing showcase, the “ball” is a piratical affair. The Red Rover calls for the event, and the call goes out, “All hands ahoy for mischief”—certainly with more ominous tones than when the convivial tars of Black-Ey’d Susan stage the event (30).
Fulfilling the implied threat of the nautical revels, events turn ugly after Hector Homespun sings a song aboard the pirate ship.\textsuperscript{150} The episode is minor in the constellations of dramatic events, but it reveals the sliding associations between theatricality and lumpen unruliness. Emphasizing the American associations of Cooper’s work, Hector sings “\textit{in the Yankee singing tone},” according to the stage directions (33). In echoes of Joseph Jefferson’s role as Hector in Philadelphia, Yankee character types feed into nautical comedy. Hector’s impromptu song, sung from a precarious perch on a three-legged stool lifted in the air, communicates the inversion of nautical power structures. With his ballad of a “gallant tailor” taking command of a Rover’s ship, Hector draws laughs until he rhetorically claims the crew as his own (31). The line “Oh then, said the tailor, to his merry men all—” provokes a violent reaction; a “burst of fury from the crew,” the stage directions read, cuts the song short (32). The impulsive crew moves to throw Hector overboard while the gallant Fid dissuades them.

The comic character has upstaged the pirates at their own rebellious game, and only Fid’s timely intervention saves the Yankee tailor. In \textit{The Red Rover}, nautical entertainment oscillates precariously between the laudable and laughable moves of Fid and Guinea and the violence and disorder occasioned by Hector’s song. Farce slides to furor, light mockery to mutiny, with perhaps frightening speed. Of course, the entire episode moderates the danger with comic overtones. Nevertheless, this very evasion of consequential disorder, the displacement of social threats into the realm of the comic, insinuates their seriousness. The scene represents the dialectical performance of attraction and containment; it encapsulates Atlantic culture’s recurrent need to admire and fear the underclass characters it represents onstage.

The near-riot inspired by Hector’s song encapsulates Fitzball’s production of the lumpenproletariat. The play stages the approach of theatrical, underclass, and nautical threats, only to defuse them. The sinister threat of the Rover competes for attention with the performances of the admirable Fid, whose very name evokes his obedience. More overtly, perhaps, than does \textit{Black-Ey’d Susan}, Fitzball’s play counterparts celebrations of the lumpen with the urge to unmask and separate the good from the evil. At the same time, nautical characters stage so many different acts, running the gamut from comic entertainment to threatening disguise, that their theatricality emerges as irrepressible. Attempting to divide and conquer members of the threatening nautical classes, the play never succeeds in fixing the Rover’s identity, nor does it effectively differentiate among the various performances. The crowd-pleasing theatricality of these characters becomes the fiber that resists the urge to separate, to fix identity, and to control the lumpenproletariat.

The Nautical Returns Home

Douglas Jerrold’s smash hit \textit{Black-Ey’d Susan; or, All in the Downs} demonstrates these traits as well as any other nautical melodrama while achieving greater popularity than most. \textit{Black-Ey’d Susan} premiered at London’s Surrey Theatre on June 8, 1829. The sailor-turned-actor Thomas Potter Cooke (1786-1864), parlaying his own nautical experiences into theatrical personification, played the part of William, a tar returning from the Napoleonic wars to defend his domestic interests. Cooke played William in \textit{Black-Ey’d Susan} more than 800 times during his career, and cemented his lasting fame in the role of the “Jack Tar,” extending his successes in similar roles.\textsuperscript{151} The play, with Cooke’s memorable performances, represents a point of high visibility for what had become a generation of increasingly popular representations of nautical
themes on English stages. William’s return home represents the lumpenproletariat come full circle, figures from the Atlantic peripheries returned to claim their place in domestic society. *Black-Ey’d Susan* also acts out the transnationalism characteristic of popular theatre. Jerrold’s play made its way with dispatch to New York City’s Park Theatre, where Mr. Mercer acted the part of William. The cultural transmission took place speedily; the play crossed the Atlantic within the year, reaching the stage and then publication in New York in 1830. In America, as in England, the play marked a high point of forty years of nautical theatre.

*Black-Ey’d Susan*, to a greater degree than *The Red Rover*, hinges on the complicating entanglements of the domestic and nautical. As Jeffrey Cox argues, the play provided a “model for the return of the wanderer or the prodigal to the fold,” subjecting the alien, lumpenproletariat sailor to the process of domestication. William’s return, however, is not easy. Outside forces (most often nautical in nature) intrude repeatedly on the domestic bliss of William and Susan’s marriage. The gallant tar William returns just in time to rescue his wife Susan from the plots of Doggrass, her despicable uncle and landlord, the scheming smugglers Raker and Hatchet, and Captain Crosstree, William’s superior officer. William, the gallant tar, thus faces various nautical threats; he disposes of Raker and Hatchet easily enough, but Crosstree represents a different problem. William, returning to find Crosstree making advances upon his wife, stabs his officer. Since naval law dictates the death sentence for mutinous acts, a righteously unrepentant William must stand trial. The play thus stages the volatile interaction of the nautical and the domestic—innocent country lasses and aggressive, unprincipled naval officers. In staging the conflict of culturally external and internal, it also stages conflicts between classes, and, by pitting William against intruders from above and below, constructs him as a potential member of the middle classes.

*Black-Ey’d Susan* bears the traces of other popular entertainments, influenced by formulaic melodramatic conventions. More importantly, the title itself reveals a longer theatrical genealogy that stretches back over a century. Evoking the title of a ballad by John Gay, Jerrold’s play takes advantage of the continuing nineteenth-century popularity of the “Sweet William’s Farewell to Black-Ey’d Susan.” Although the song reveals little of William’s life as a sailor, it did help to keep the words and tunes of the Atlantic nautical classes in circulation for more than a century. The persistence of “Sweet William’s Farewell” in various forms also suggests that plays like Gay’s *The Beggar’s Opera* and *Polly* did not endure by accident. Gay produced versions of society’s marginalized and celebrated outcasts, a lumpenproletariat that remained compelling for modern Atlantic culture.

Gay’s ballad reached its audiences in multiple ways: through performance, via broadsheet publications, and as printed collections of Gay’s poetry (Figure 7). As the illustrated title page renders visually explicit, William had been from the beginning caught between Susan and the sea. His feet planted on dry land, as the print shows, he nevertheless gestures toward the mobility and circulation represented by the ship at anchor in the background. The nautical melodramas of William and Susan, however, shift the sailor’s position, placing him not on shore, but aboard the ship, swapping the background and foreground of the 1750 scene. Melodramas also changed the ratio of words to images that the printed ballad displays; words become supplementary to the spectacle, the image, the scene in nautical melodrama. Once Jerrold’s play staged his version of the ballad’s subject matter in the 1830s, the subject matter picked up even more cultural momentum, careening in directions shaped by emerging melodrama. The history of *Black-Ey’d Susan* thus reveals the same generic mobility and thematic tenacity that characterize other representations of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat.
Jerrold, introducing the first acting edition of *Black-Ey'd Susan* in 1829, claimed that he was not too particular in the way that he had used Gay's ballad. Despite his admission that he had pressed the song into service only in the title, Jerrold's script in fact amplifies themes Gay's ballad originally popularized. Gay's ballad, as Jerrold's melodrama later does, schematizes the collision of nautical and domestic cultures. Formally, the ballad also anticipates melodrama's combinations of words and music, and even—in the illustrated and broadside versions of the
ballad—the amalgamation of words, images, and implied gestures. Jerrold’s *Black-Ey’d Susan*, then, emerged from a long train of entertainments defined as “illegitimate,” from beyond the pale of privileged spoken drama. Gay’s ballad, of course, had long enjoyed a popular place on illegitimate stages south of the Thames, where legal strictures had preserved Shakespeare from a polluting association with equestrian antics. William G. Knight, for example, notes that a performer at the Surrey Theatre sang “Black-Eyed Susan” on October 19, 1808. The ballad held equal prominence as quasi-theatrical entertainment on the western edges of the Atlantic; in 1817, when an American audience could not be satisfied with English acting, they called for the song, but “no regard was paid to this expression of the public wish,” according to an anonymous dramatic reviewer in *The American Monthly Magazine and Critical Review*. 156

The story’s circulations in and out of legitimate theatre continued throughout the nineteenth century, and derivations of *Black-Ey’d Susan* had appeared in varied theatrical forms. David Mayer, reports playbills for two pantomimes predating Jerrold’s melodrama: *Davy Jones’s Locker; or, Black-Ey’d Susan*, (Sans Pareil, 1813) and *Davy Jones’s Locker; or, Harlequin and Black-Ey’d Susan* (Coburg, 1825). The evidence reveals that these two were based on the characters from Gay’s ballad but otherwise hardly resembled Jerrold’s product. An 1830 pantomime at Drury Lane, *Davy Jones; or, Harlequin and Mother Carey’s Chickens*, mined the nautical material of Jerrold’s play, though conspicuously not his title, for theatrical material. A burlesque send-up of Jerrold’s play also appeared at the Olympic Theatre around 1830 with Frederick Fox Cooper’s *Black-Eyed Sukey; or, All in the Dumps*. Nearly three decades after T. P. Cooke’s successful run with the play, the Surrey again resurrected it as *William and Susan; or, All in the Downs*, with more music than Jerrold’s version. 157 Jerrold’s play thus emerged from and contributed to a variegated generic theatre culture, influenced as much by musical and pantomimic performances as by “legitimate” theatre. Jerrold’s exploitation of varied formal elements simultaneously highlights the thematic of mixing, mobility, and uncertainty that his script—perhaps ironically, in light of its origins—attempts to tame.

Jerrold’s 1829 production provoked a competitor’s version, revealing the extremes to which relatively tame nautical theatre could slide. The imitation inspired heated accusations of theatrical plagiarism and piracy. The production itself reveals nautical melodrama’s proximity to various forms of illegitimate performance. On May 28, 1829, Robert Elliston announced the Surrey’s version for June 8, setting off a minor skirmish between theatres. The Coburg’s George Davidge (who had until the previous season employed Jerrold as the house writer) raced to beat Elliston to the punch, producing *Black-Eyed Susan; or, the Lover’s Perils* the week before the Surrey’s version. William Knight observes that the Coburg’s version featured a more varied and sensational nautical plot: “it had pressgang, mutiny, storm, shipwreck, pirate’s cavern, battle and rescue, finishing with ‘A Nautical Triumph’ and ‘View of the victorious British fleet lying at anchor’.” 158 It seems considerably racier than Jerrold’s more mainstream version. The Coburg, in contrast to Jerrold’s more domestically oriented dramatization, exploited the outlandish, the dangerous, and the spectacular side of nautical theatre.

Jerrold’s version, aided by T. P. Cooke’s acting, won the popularity contest, and Davidge’s production closed after a brief run—but not before the two managers had exchanged barbs in print. Elliston’s protestations against Davidge’s attempted upstaging seem ironic in the light of the fact that the situation could easily have been reversed, had Jerrold still been employed by Davidge. The accusations ignore Davidge’s substantial textual innovations, but in a popular, thoroughly illegitimate style of theatrical performance and self-promotion, the text did not necessarily represent the most important element of a performance. The real distinction
between the two plays was not the plot, the characters, or the effects—it was the popular prestige and name-recognition value Gay’s ballad could lend to a play. Romantic notions of authorial creativity and independence were already in play, even in popular theatre, as Jerrold attempted to claim credit for the play’s popularity (as well as disavow responsibility for any part in the piracy of the play) by disclaiming in the introduction that it “might, with equal justice, have been called ‘Blue-Ey’d Kate’.”

Jerrold, of course, did not call it that, and the play did indeed capitalize on the sustained popularity of Gay’s ballad. The episode, though brief, demonstrates important facets of illegitimate theatre in general, and *Black-Ey’d Susan* in particular. It reveals that literary plotting and dramatic structuring may have been the least important factors in a play’s popularity, even as producers and authors tried to shift weight to these terms. The play also participated in a fiercely competitive economic system in which minor theatres stole or borrowed each others’ ideas, thematic treatments, not to mention each other’s star employees. Piracy and smuggling (though the parties involved reacted more often with advertising bluster than with legal objection) defined the economics of *Black-Ey’d Susan*’s theatrical production as much as its actual performances onstage.

Although Davidge’s more spectacular version had a lock on battles, mutineers, and pirate caves, *Black-Ey’d Susan* fights off exotic nautical dangers in surrogate form. Pirates make no physical appearance in Jerrold’s play, but they maintain a central place in the play’s cultural imagination. Repeatedly, characters (mis)identify various threats as nautical miscreants, as pirates or buccaneers. Raker and Hatchet, who stage the first plot to gain Susan’s hand in marriage, lead a band of coastal smugglers—as close to pirates as *Black-Ey’d Susan* will get. In a contrived bit of stage dialogue, Hatchet remarks to Raker, “now I’ll tell you what you are—Bill Raker, first mate of the Redbreast, as great a rogue as ever died at the fore-yard” (7). The two pose as shipmates of William’s, trying to convince Susan that her husband has died. William returns just in time to foil their plot, but not before they demonstrate the play’s recurring insecurity about identity—uncertainties aggravated by the unpredictable mobility of maritime culture.

William enacts this uncertainty when he defends Susan against Captain Crosstree’s advances in the play’s climactic scene. William, significantly, does not realize the Captain’s identity, and he attacks his officer thinking he is one of the play’s dangerous lumpen characters. With a cry of “Susan, and attacked by Bucaneers! die!,” William rushes onstage and slashes at the Captain from behind (30). As soon as he has committed the deed, William (“horror-struck”) and his comrades realize the crime (30). First the audience and then the characters onstage have realized the true identity of the victim—not a pirate at all, but “The Captain!” as all onstage gasp in unison (30).

Nautical rogues do imaginary duty as the play’s miscreants. The play’s real dilemma comes from the misperception of pirates—the fixing of identity poses the problem now. Within *Black-Ey’d Susan*’s maritime world, pirates represent a logical choice for embodying the play’s conflict, the seafaring equivalent of Macheath and his gang of rogues. However, the characters called pirates are notably not. Piracy thus becomes a problem of performance. The physical mobility of the buccaneer becomes a theatrical mobility of identity as Jerrold peoples his Atlantic world with characters as slippery as any pirate. This displacement represents meta-theatrical performance, and *Black-Ey’d Susan* stages itself, focusing attention on the masking and acting occurring onstage. The melodrama also, of course, enacts the Atlantic world’s longstanding
wariness of theatricality, but its attempts to solve these theatrical conditions cannot erase their presence, of course.

The perceived presence of ocean-going rogues, then, reveals the melodrama’s central focus on problems of identity and mobility. Jerrold’s play toils to achieve its successful conclusion by undoing confusions, doing away with ambiguous characters like the smugglers and positively establishing various characters’ identities. The melodrama repeatedly insists on visually identifying moral character. After averting the near-foreclosure of Susan’s home, the chivalrous Gnatbrain remarks to Jacob, a villainous accessory, that he “puts me in the mind of a pocket edition of the Newgate Calendar—a neat Old Bailey duodecimo; you are the most villainous-looking rascal—an epitome of noted highwaymen” (12). Physical appearance exposes villainy, and Gnatbrain goes on to compare Jacob to a veritable catalogue of infamous rogues, including Dick Turpin, Jack Sheppard, and Sixteen-String Jack (12). Gnatbrain’s remark anticipates the “histories of Lazarillo de Formes, Meriton Latroon, or any of my favorite rogues,” that the fictional John Gay later mentions in J. B. Buckstone’s 1839 *Jack Sheppard.*

The theatrical genealogies become more lumpen, more roguish, as they circulate. *Black-Ey’d Susan*’s urge for positively identifying character appears also as a legal strategy in William’s court martial. The tribunal, despite the improbability of clemency for William’s act of mutiny, hears witnesses who vouch for William’s character. One by one, they describe him as a good sailor, obedient except when asked to support inhumane practices. As they do so, the problem of recognition and distinction becomes more and more apparent—the quandary of recognizing and distinguishing between good and evil characters whom the audience, in most cases, can already differentiate.

As the play makes clear, the dangers allegedly posed by uncontrolled nautical characters masks the real conflict in the play, a class conflict. As Marvin Carlson argues, “tensions about rank and social class experienced within the society” begin to inflect nautical melodrama at this time, emerging in *Black-Ey’d Susan* as well. Susan’s uncle Doggrass (the landlord) and her admirer Crosstree (William’s commanding officer) both exercise power from positions of class dominance. *Black-Ey’d Susan,* like Jerrold’s successful play *The Rent Day* (1832), renders the conflict between upper and lower classes in melodramatic terms. The unsympathetic characters occupy the upper-class positions; even William’s naval tribunal represents a legal system too flawed to recognize true moral goodness and the contingencies of self-defense. Jerrold’s play attempts to redeem William from the lower-class nautical contingent. In so doing, the play imagines something like a lumpenproletariat rendered domestic, sentimental, and almost middle-class.

In contrast, the unassimilated remains of that underclass—the smugglers, the buccaneers, the nameless sailors—become elements in a continuously re-performing and reconstituting Atlantic lumpenproletariat. The redemption of William represents a less interesting move than the play’s need to imaginatively create a lumpen class; downward expulsion enables upward movement, as Marx’s later naming and blaming of the lumpenproletariat also reveals. For Marx, the unstable and disloyal outcast class undermined the revolutions of 1848; the lumpenproletariat, although unable to support collective action, can rhetorically buttress the proletariat as a productive, revolutionary group. Likewise, an imagined underclass of pirates and smugglers, the nautical lumpen, propels William to middle-class respectability by the play’s end. Importantly, these class formations exist as much to mobilize as to situate their members, for William begins a member of the underclasses, and Crosstree undergoes an imaginative
William. The discharged William, of course, moves instantly from the nautical underclasses to the landlocked domestic classes. In *Black-Ey’d Susan*, the “taste of the town” operates so smoothly and thoroughly that there need be no announcement of William’s redemption, as *The Beggar’s Opera* does for Macheath. It seems a given that William will escape hanging. William has so completely demonstrated his worthiness of redemption that the rigged ending comes as a relief to the audiences, who have come to identify thoroughly with the sailor hero.

William’s deliverance and *Black-Ey’d Susan*’s celebratory ending do not represent a unique or particularly radical occurrence in Atlantic theatre. However, we should not prematurely dismiss such melodramatic resolutions as empty-headed, facile responses to the staged conflicts. Jerrold’s play and the others it evokes by sheer weight of generic popularity performed the mobility of the lore cycle, bringing forth on stage the cultural elements circulating actively in Atlantic culture. The plays’ subject matter, the dangerous, mobile, and theatrical nautical lumpen, becomes their form, producing equally mobile and self-consciously theatrical performances of Atlantic underclasses. What is important and perhaps radical about *Black-Ey’d Susan*, then, is the way that it performs the instabilities of lumpen identity, bringing such performances back to the home port. Even though it attempts to contain such uncertainties, the easy reassurance of the ending seems not to defuse the performance, but rather to lobby strategically for the continued performance of such complicated visions of Atlantic class.

As examples of a lore cycle in action, *Tuckitomba*, *The Red Rover*, and *Black-Ey’d Susan* importantly remind us that cultural transmission does not operate in sequential and teleological ways. Instead, they produce concurrent and recurrent performances, recycling and reproducing earlier themes and forms. They produce, of course, alternate versions of the stories in response to the rising and falling popularity of various theatrical gestures. The stagings coexisted, though with various degrees of popularity and in various locales, and their wave patterns sometimes reinforced, sometimes interfered, producing the immensely popular *Black-Ey’d Susan* and the almost completely lost *Tuckitomba* from the same body of cultural lore. They hold in common a continued negotiation with the elements of the lore cycle, combining them in ever-changing ratios to create popular performances of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat returning from various corners of the seafaring world.
transformation from officer to pirate. The lumpenproletariat thus appears as the lubricating ingredient in emerging mythologies of upward class mobility.

The boundaries between those class definitions remain blurry, and the play reveals significant ambivalence about its hierarchical setup. In *Black-Ey’d Susan*, good and evil depend on theatricality, proven or refuted by performance. This becomes evident at William’s court-martial, as witnesses attempt to establish the goodness of his character and (potentially) his exemption from the death sentence. When asked about the tar’s reputation, Quid, the boatswain, responds, “His moral character, your honour? Why he plays upon the fiddle like an angel” (35). In the performance at New York City’s Park Theatre, the witness adds that William has been known also “to spin the biggest galley yarn, of any man in the fleet” (25). In the court-martial, the Jack Tar’s entertainment value has become indistinguishable from his moral quality, even an indispensable part of it. The shipboard persona and the stage persona have amalgamated, rendering William the tar as entertaining to his comrades as T. P. Cooke the actor-sailor was to his audiences.

William’s legal defense, however, carries with it certain self-contradictions that trouble his redemption into the play’s acceptable classes. The inconsistencies become evident when, for example, telling a lie (a “galley yarn”) becomes a moral virtue. The judges accept Quid’s testimony without remark, but William’s talents, either of the nautical or musical varieties, clearly cannot save him. When popular virtuosity meets the imperatives of legal discipline, the latter prevails. And for good reason, in the logic of the melodrama; the play had earlier figured the revels of sailors as “mischief,” akin to the criminal mischief of the smugglers. In *Black-Ey’d Susan*, amusing acts of unruliness (singing, fiddling, dancing, and yarn spinning) seem harmless, giving witness to William’s good character. The call to “Pipe all hands to mischief,” however, still communicates a rebellious charge, evoking the nautical self-organization of late-eighteenth century mutinies and the unruliness that inevitably accompanied sailors’ shore-leave festivities (24). In addition, the play’s “mischief” explicitly generates class-based rebellious sentiment. As Blue Peter (for whom the revels provide an excuse to sing the play’s eponymous ballad) remarks, “them lords of the Admiralty know no more about the pleasures of liberty, plenty of grog, and dancing with the lasses, than I knows about ‘stronomy” (27).

Such grumbling places the sailor’s revels as distinctly underclass, if not yet lumpen; everyone can sense the gap between the tars and the lords of the Admiralty, the judges who preside over William’s trial. Hornpipes, fiddling, and storytelling stage insider performances to non-participant audiences, which is a large part of the allure of lumpen acts. As subculture gestures, the acts display traces of class resentment, rebelliousness that ironically inflects the statements of William’s character witnesses. The sailors’ onstage testimonies judge William, like Macheath, by the taste of the town—his performative talents, though smacking of rebellion, become his only hope for pardon.

Caught between the demands of his two onstage audiences, William finds himself at the mercy of a larger theatrical audience, and Jerrold must have sensed this. The only way out for William was to recuperate him from the lower classes. The play’s ending, therefore, figures him as the paragon of domestic and nationalistic values, the patriotic husband. Ever the gallant tar, William goes to meet his fate with equanimity and patriotism; in the London stagings, the stage directions indicate that he “embraces the union jack,” invoking the obligatory repetitions of “Rule Britannia” that ended most nautical plays (42). The *deus ex machina* of a drowned Doggrass found bearing William’s discharge saves him from hanging, twisting the plot to affirm both the justice of English law and reward the simple righteousness of a domesticated tar such as
CHAPTER 5

LIFE IN LONDON AND NEW YORK: GLANCING AT THE URBAN UNDERCLASSES

After its premiere on November 26, 1821, W. T. Moncrieff’s Tom and Jerry, or, Life in London, appeared at the Adelphi Theatre a total of ninety-four times that season. Tom and Jerry rejoin the lumpen characters that had already begun to return home from voyages around the Atlantic. The play stands among the most popular productions in the first half of the nineteenth century in America and England. The Adelphi, like the Haymarket some forty years before, produced a varied selection of illegitimate theatricals, pantomimic spectacle, and conservative high drama. Introducing an acting edition of the play published a few years later, one commentator assessed its place in the cycling culture of the Atlantic underclasses:

*Tom and Jerry* must undoubtedly be regarded as the *Beggar’s Opera* of the present century; its scenes certainly do not possess any of the brilliant wit and pungent satire which sparkle so plentifully throughout the pages of Gay; but, on the other hand, they are more generally true to nature, and have none of the disgusting depravity and undisguised profligacy, that so greatly alloy the gratification we receive in the company of Macheath and his associates.

“Both *Tom and Jerry* and *The Beggar’s Opera*,” the introduction continues, “are Dramas of nearly the same genre” (n.p.). As observers quickly understood, *Tom and Jerry* links other Atlantic lumpen stagings. Moncrieff’s play and its numerous relatives, however, performed the lumpenproletariat often at a remove, through the perambulations and observations of upper-class gentlemen.

These performances of urban underclasses achieved their popular zenith in the 1820s, but they also responded to earlier parts of the lore cycle and extended their influence forward to mid-century. *Tom and Jerry*’s acts trace the continued motion of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat through new locations. As they stage encounters with the underbellies of Atlantic cities, these theatricals also push and pull at the class implications of mobility, the shifting theatricality of the underclass, and what these performances amount to when watched self-consciously. Performances of the urban lumpen produce a privileged insider perspective, a local knowledge; they deliver the same pleasures promised by scenes set inside the dens of criminal gangs, caves of Maroon rebels, and into the cabins of merchant ships. In the 1820s and later, that insider knowledge shifted to city streets and slums, growing increasingly self-conscious and deliberately
theatrical. As urban lumpenproletariat characters gained prominence on stage, such acts increasingly performed self-conscious displays of their own theatricality.

Playbills appearing in November of 1821 had promised to show both “the Ups and Downs of Life” in Moncrieff’s new musical burletta, and the Adelphi’s production delivered beginning on November 26, 1821. Moncrieff’s play, based on Pierce Egan’s *Life in London*, performed the adventures of Corinthian Tom, his country cousin Jerry Hawthorne, and Bob Logic, an expert on living the fast life. Jerry, persuaded to leave his country estate to enjoy the dangerous delights of the city, travels a route from greenhorn to initiate through the course of various “rambles” and “sprees.” Armed with their superior understanding of urban ways, Logic and Tom combine to drag Jerry in and out of scrapes. All the while, unbeknownst to the bachelors, three young female friends follow and monitor them, often in disguise. Each incident brings the genteel characters perilously—but fashionably—close to the lumpenproletariat of London.

The formula proved immensely popular and generated numerous spin-off plays, some competing with Moncrieff’s, others cashing in on its success as sequels. The longevity and recurring iterations of the play attest to the charisma and popularity of its formula. Repetition, in the case of popular culture, is a virtue. The play’s persistence also points to its central role in the imagination of class and race in Atlantic culture.

The exploits of Tom and Jerry captivated audiences and quickly became a transatlantic phenomenon. Observers instinctively placed *Tom and Jerry* in the context of a longer cultural cycle; Mrs. Arbuthnot, the wife of a member of parliament, attended an Adelphi production in 1822 and described the play as “a sort of very low Beggar’s Opera.” The cycle moved onward, as well. The cultural work of plays based on and influenced by Egan’s novel persisted, presenting various versions of urban underclasses until well after mid-century. Within a few decades, the cycle subsided in its most directly traceable form; its echoes, though, persist in popular culture to this day, transmitting the legacy of *Tom and Jerry* through such indirect routes as the naming of mixed drinks and animated television animals.

For their part of the cycle, however, stagings of *Tom and Jerry* focused on the job of urban representation. The plays first rendered “life in London” in a form recognizable to urban audiences, then consolidated and packaged that local knowledge for audiences outside the city. In a multilateral process of re-presentation and performance, the genre expanded, representing still other locales to its increasingly varied audiences. The play’s flâneur heroes saw Paris, Dublin, and New York, to name just a few of their destinations, before they stopped circulating. By 1848, American characters like Mose in *A Glance at New York in 1848*, the joint creation of Benjamin A. Baker and his New York star, Frank S. Chanfrau, took over the task of representing the lower sorts of Atlantic cities to their audiences. In the process, Mose acts out the lower classes’ theatrical flirtations with lumpen status.

These performances of local knowledge fueled *Tom and Jerry*’s popularity. A preface to the Cumberland edition of Moncrieff’s script observes,

> we ought to express our grateful acknowledgments to Mr. Moncrieff for having introduced us to characters and scenes, of which we might never have known the existence but for his helping hand. Taking into account the vast popularity of Tom and Jerry, who shall now say, “One half of the world don’t know how t’other lives?” (6)
Audiences prized this knowledge of how the “other half” lives; it conferred insider status and privilege, as Tom and Jerry’s manic pursuits of experience indicate. The insight they sought was location-specific—the plays performed, as their name implies, a version of life in a particular place. Thus these stagings produced insider knowledge of the peculiarities of London, and audiences jumped at the chance to revel in the same kind of savvy, unflappable urban competence that Corinthian Tom or Bob Logic demonstrated onstage.

As Daniel’s preface makes clear, Tom and Jerry produced knowledge of the lower parts of society to be consumed by segments of society defined by their watching as “not low.” For such audiences, the performances packaged the actions and signs of an urban Atlantic lumpenproletariat. Although Tom and Jerry advertised the contrast of high and low life (the “ups and downs” promised by the playbill), they traded more in energetic, rowdy, and barely controllable scenes acted out by underclass characters in low settings. Moncrieff’s play, like most of its imitators, set its popular centerpieces in low dives, rooms where beggars drank, prostitutes plied their trade, and mixed-race couples danced together indiscriminately. Clearly, audience fascination went up a notch when Tom, Jerry, and Logic crashed seedy coffeehouses and gambled illegally. The plays relied on the same appeal that made Macheath a continual resident of Atlantic theatres, the same popular demand that repeatedly resurrected Three-Finger’d Jack, Trudge and Wowski, the Jack Tar and the pirate.

The shady underclass scenes made up the most popular aspects of the play, appealing to audiences visually. The plays traded upon the popularity of illustrations in Egan’s novel. Produced by Robert and George Cruikshank, prints of the drawings became so popular that demand outstripped the brothers’ ability to produce them. The scenes picture the most popular episodes from Egan’s Life in London, depicting the upper-class heroes visiting famous sporting figures and infamous taverns. “Lowest ‘Life in London’,” for example, features an underclass counterpart to the elite Almack’s assembly hall, complete with the dancing of African Sal and the fiddling of Dusty Bob. Most of the stage versions of Tom and Jerry featured these same scenes, often with only minor changes. These images and scenes produced a tangible, visual representation of lumpenproletariat culture. Jane Moody, recognizing the innovative visual appeal, claims that “the wave of Tom and Jerry plays in 1821-2 . . . really defined London as a hedonistic, panoramic stage of pleasure.”

The play’s production of these characters and settings has the quality of an open secret. The prized knowledge performed onstage was clearly difficult to acquire. It thus conferred a prestigious insider status, but at the same time (certainly after a few weeks of successful performances, and even before), the play offered few, if any, previously unknown scenes. Audiences turned out not to see spectacular revelation, but rather the embodiment of Pierce Egan’s Life in London, which had enjoyed two years of popularity by the time the play appeared. Moncrieff’s play was not even the first Tom and Jerry production; that honor goes to the version by William Barrymore, which appeared at the Royal Amphitheatre on September 17, 1821. It was not, therefore, the secrets of the other half that were at stake in staging the play.

The scenes often took advantage of the popularity public characters and scenes audiences already knew, at least by reputation. One such personage was Billy Waters, a black beggar known for busking outside the Adelphi Theatre in the late eighteenth century, the same theatre where his staged facsimile later appeared in Tom and Jerry. The historical facts of Waters’s life have disappeared, but he transitioned rapidly into popular memory. An obituary in clipping form in the Victoria and Albert Museum (undated, but clearly post-1821 by its references to Moncrieff’s play) reposes him to have been a sailor (his wooden leg having saved him from the
“penalties of the Tread Mill). He supposedly fought in the American Revolution and ended up on the Strand in the 1780s, retracing once again the circum-Atlantic routes traveled by Macheath and his gang. By the 1820s, when Moncrieff’s play reached the stage, the historical street musician has become an iconic cultural trace; both the play and the image represent performances of memory. In a scene set in the slums of St. Giles, Billy Waters dances and sings his way across stage, bumptiously demanding “sassinger” with his turkey. Representing the lumpenproletariat come home, Waters stages the admired theatricality of the underclasses.

Daniel’s preface to the Cumberland edition of the play delights in the claim that audiences confused actors playing such parts with the real thing. Waters may have played himself in some of the productions, but it is only a remote possibility. Instead, Daniel’s claim sounds like the assertions that later accompanied blackface minstrelsy, stories that claimed an authenticity often compelling to naïve audiences who looked for the roots of blackface in unadulterated blackness. When the play stages characters such as Billy Waters, it invokes claims of authenticity, but it deliberately reproduces layered gestures. The layering becomes visible in popular prints, where his costuming shows off his nautical background and enables his busking performance (Figure 8). The play transfers the black performer’s street theatricality—already patronized by white audiences going to and from the theatre—onto the stage. If Tom and Jerry claims anything authentic about the lumpenproletariat, it is the dynamic of solicitation and performance, audience and actor, which occurs both inside and outside the theatre. Thus, rather than taking Waters’s performance as evidence of mimetic realism or theatrical authenticity, I

Figure 8. "Billy Waters," by Thomas Busby, hand-colored etching on paper. Courtesy of the Victoria & Albert Museum; given by H. Graves.
read his appearance as an indication of the play’s links to a larger dynamic of Atlantic performance, theatrical acts that produced the lumpenproletariat both inside and outside of the playhouses.

If the plays enacted the disciplinary control of social surveillance, they also reveal the positive, productive force of popular culture. George Daniel’s introduction urges audiences to concentrate on “a more popular topic” than the morality of the lower-class scenes—the play’s “powers of entertainment” (6). Moncrieff’s play follows the dominant trend in representations of the lumpenproletariat since Macheath, using popularity to qualify or deflect the onstage appearance of potentially thorny social problems. The “dangers” to which Tom, Jerry, and Logic subject themselves become, instead, crowd-pleasing scenes. “High and low,” as Daniels remembers, “flocked in crowds to see an extravaganza which reflected the eccentricities of modern Babylon” (7). The play transforms eccentricities—even scandalous ones—into laughable incidents in a larger extravaganza available to admirers of both high and low station in life.

### Lumpenproletarian Panoramas

The celebration of the underclasses in Egan’s book and its stage versions injected a newly invigorated and self-conscious performance of observation into stagings of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat. Visual qualities seem integral to urban representations, whether in novels, plays, or engravings themselves. Egan had based the book not only on his own observations, but also on the drawings of brothers Robert and George Cruikshank.172

The novel itself frequently veers from narrative into ekphrasis, interrupting the adventures when they describe the plates. Accompanying the illustration of “Tom and Jerry at a Coffee Shop near the Olympic,” for example, Egan’s text points out that

This group (which the plate so correctly delineates, and, in point of character, equal to any of Hogarth’s celebrated productions) displays a complete picture of what is termed “Low Life” in the Metropolis; drunkenness, beggary, lewdness, and carelessness, being its prominent features. (181)

The novel, with these intrusions, insists on the primary status of the visual (their quality, moreover, equal to Hogarth, an earlier illustrator of lumpen lore). The Cruikshanks’ visual representations, taking their cues from the likes of caricaturists including James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson, guide Egan’s text and Moncrieff’s script, replacing narrative sequence with visual flow.173 Tom and Jerry’s rambles take them from image to image, and narration becomes merely the means to interpret their disorderly progress through the city. The novel and the play, then, formally embody the observation that drives their plots. Interlinked modes of representation (visual, narrative, theatrical) also reiterate the behavior of cultural cycles: they do not restrain themselves to one genre or type of production.

The visual qualities of Tom and Jerry’s adventures form a crucial link between narrative and performance, between textuality and theatricality. The link, as Martin Meisel explains, was not necessarily always that of illustration, but often of “realization.” Realization, the dominant mode in theatrical productions, carries a “sense of materialization, even reification,” as opposed to illustration’s connotation of “enrichment and embellishment beyond mere specification.”
Both effects often worked together; we can understand Egan’s Life in London as a text illustrating pictures. The play version, embodying those pictures into scenes, realized the Cruikshanks’ drawings. Realization, as Meisel argues, represents a key technique in the period’s “persistent pressure toward uniting a concrete particular with inward signification, the materiality of things with moral and emotional force, historical fact with figural truth, the mimetic with the ideal.” This pressure toward realization influenced theatre’s turn toward melodramatic forms, toward performances that foreground performance and insist upon observing, unmasking, and identifying the theatrical underclasses.

Onstage, Tom and Jerry owed much to other forms of visual perception as well. Adelphi playbills, for example, advertised Tom and Jerry as an “entirely new Classic, Comic, Operatic, Didactic, Moralistic, Aristophanic, Localic, Analytic, Terpsichoric, Panoramic, Camera Obscura-ic Extravaganza.” The ironic mixture of genres and modes itself suggests the investment of minor theatres in mocking the conventions of high culture. At the same time, the last terms expose the play’s debt to forms of visual spectacle such as the panoramic display, which Robert Barker popularized in London at the end of the eighteenth century. As Angela Miller explains, the “moving panorama resembled a dramatic theatrical performance during which an audience was seated in a darkened space facing a proscenium stage”; the simulation of reality in the physical space of the panorama makes the form already theatrical. Plays such as Tom and Jerry deliberately constructed themselves as a series of scenes that evoked the simulated movement of panoramic displays, even going so far as to list out the attractions scene by scene in playbills.

Panoramic movement has political and social implications. Miller argues that the panorama served the purposes of empire, temporalizing space and ordering it within narratives of historical progress; simulated journeys along the Mississippi River, for example, produced a spectacle of empire for disempowered viewers “passively consuming the images that moved before their eyes.” Plays that operated on Tom and Jerry’s scheme of voyeuristic ramblings, however, differ in two important ways from such panoramic spectacles. First, if they reproduce a narrative of empire, it is indirectly, since the ramblings take place in London, at least initially. Second, it is not at all clear that viewers of Tom and Jerry’s panoramic sequences remained completely passive, for theatrical audiences frequently talked back, threw food, rioted, and otherwise played an active role in theatrical performances. Moreover, they vicariously enjoyed the progress of Tom and Jerry through the city, and this seems a rather different experience than gliding disembodied along the Mississippi or the Thames.

Observation plays a complicated role in stagings of the urban underclasses. Dana Arnold points out that Tom and Jerry’s streetwalking observations enact an emerging urban surveillance and discipline popularized by Jeremy Bentham’s proposed panopticon, the all-seeing disciplinary observing mechanism. Describing Tom, Jerry, and Logic’s visit to the top of Newgate Prison, Arnold argues that “their disengaged viewing practices represent how the distanced urban panorama gave the bourgeoisie a feeling of empowerment and security and distracted them from their own position in relation to the ‘discipline’ of the metropolis.” To the extent that they were disengaged in this scene, this Foucauldian reading rings true. However, more frequently, the trio of flâneurs engaged the underclasses much more closely; their observations were more complex and caught up with the underclasses than their wishfully detached ascent of Newgate prison acknowledges.

The Adelphi staging of the play conspicuously omits the Newgate scene, indicating an important shift in the story’s emphasis. Theatre audiences watched underclass characters not so
much to control them as to revel in their exploits. Of course, the “laughable” acts still trace the lines of power exercised in particular class interactions. Entertainment is hardly politically neutral. As cultural tourism or voyeurism, observing “life in London” was a recreation for the well off. As Tom and Jerry used their privileged urban expertise to navigate London scenes, they repeatedly employ a mobile, theatrical observation of the underclasses. Their mobility and their ability to watch, of course, come from their privileged position in society; Corinthian Tom and Bob Logic, men of leisure in the city, guide their country cousin Jerry, less sophisticated but no less a man of leisure.

The play simultaneously troubles the proprieties marking class boundaries, however. Even a moralistic reviewer like Daniel (“The moral intended is to show the necessity of a young gentleman being carefully initiated into the trickeries of the town” [5]) implies with his italics that Tom, Jerry, and Logic’s acts of observing and participating might function as other than a simple moral inoculation. The metropolitan adventurers became too enthusiastic, perhaps, coming too close to the urban bottom-feeders of whom they were supposedly learning to be wary. Tom and Jerry’s proximity to the underclasses, their cultural intermixing, represents the longstanding threat of lumpen lore cycles, an ominous possibility as often deflected with jokes than disciplined with authority, but a danger nevertheless.

Troubling the Boundaries of Underclass Theatricality

As stagings of the lumpenproletariat had during the eighteenth century, Moncrieff’s Tom and Jerry often represents performance as intrinsic to the underclass. Appearing without (at least within the terms of the diegesis) any upper-class solicitation, characters like Billy Waters acted out an ostensibly innate lumpen-ness onstage. These lumpen performances, when independent, represent some sort of threat to middle-class mores. More often than not, they stage theatricality as a suspicious activity—they equate lower-class status with theatrical tendencies, and both with the urge to deceive or cheat. Take, for example, the “cadgers” of the “Holy Land” in St. Giles, who talk before the arrival of Tom, Jerry, and Logic. In Moncrieff’s script, they proudly perform acts like “gammoning a maim,” or faking disability, in order to obtain charity (48). One beggar expresses his readiness, “if any lady or gemman is inclined for a dance,” to drop his “arm-props in a minute” (48). Billy Waters, even as he was celebrated for his performances, also played the role of a scam artist, playing at poverty while enjoying—even demanding—luxuries such as sausages with his turkey. In Egan’s more verbally detailed scenes, underclass characters also fake pregnancy and blindness in order to excite charitable sympathy.

Theatricality, in these scenes, represents a strategy of the underclass, much as it had enabled survival for characters like Polly or Morano. Performance sits in a precarious position between deceptive artifice and admired skill, a conscious technique appropriated by the underclass. As in earlier stagings of the lumpenproletariat’s self-conscious theatricality, disempowered characters use performance for survival, evasion, and sometimes even resistance. Their constant theatricality enables clever, if not disorderly and often illegal, actions. Importantly, such deceptive acts occur outside of the viewing of the three heroes, and thus without any staged patronage from upper-class viewers. Acts like “gammoning a maim” represent the play’s concept of unregulated lumpen theatricality. Although no scene in Tom and Jerry ever escapes the conditions of upper-class patronage, the play at least complicates the
performances as the audience precedes its three heroes in penetrating to the locations of underclass knowledge.

These acts attempt to render upper-class patronage invisible, and the responsibility of soliciting the performances shifts to the audience, although the play does not acknowledge this dynamic. The conditions of performance remain invisible in these particular scenes. In some scenes, however, the masking slips and grows momentarily discernible. Lumpen performance emerges as the result of class interactions, a complex mix of solicitation and offering, of pre-existing and newly created acts. The third act of Moncrieff’s play demonstrates such a dynamic. Played in blackface, the characters Dusty Bob and African Sal dance a “Comic Pas Deux” to a popular jig tune (62).

Moncrieff derived the scene from a Cruikshank illustration featured prominently in the novel, using it as an opportunity for entertaining lumpen performance (Figure 9). The scene was theatrical even in visual form. Cruikshank’s image, preceding Moncrieff’s play, imagines the scene in a stage-like space open to the spectator, who watches from beyond an imaginary proscenium arch. Extras crowd around the main performers, who stand front and center. The colored engraving visualizes an unruly, disorderly scene of low life. The image, with all its activity, implies the embedded theatricality of nineteenth-century culture—the narrative, based on Cruikshank’s drawings, already contains the seeds of the staging to come. In the theatrical scene, Cruikshank represents the interracial affiliations of the lumpenproletariat; Tom, Jerry and Logic cavort with underclass characters of various skin tones. The lumpen themselves, as the dancing couple demonstrates, act out the interracial gestures of the Atlantic world.

Figure 9. George Cruikshank, "Lowest 'Life in London'," from Pierce Egan's Life in London, 1820.
It would certainly be naïve to read the scene as an innocent depiction of interracial harmony, however. As it moved from print form to performance, the scene begins revealing the coded and superimposed relationships between black and white, upper and lower classes. The play transforms the scene as Egan and Cruikshank imagined it into a blackface act. In the play Dusty Bob becomes black, while Cruikshank imagines him as just dirty; Cruikshank’s fiddler, appears unmistakably white-skinned, transforming into the ironically named “Snowball” in *Tom and Jerry*. Where the image depicts interracial affiliation, Moncrieff’s play constructs blackface performance.

The staging of blackface is at first masked, however, as Tom labels the occupants of All-Max “unsophisticated sons and daughters of nature” (61). The performance, however, acts out a much more complex interplay of class, race, and theatricality. As Bob and Sal’s dance performs theatricality as an inherent or natural part of black and underclass, it simultaneously plays into and complicates stereotypes. The stage directions reveal the multiple meanings embedded in their dance:

Sal, by way of a variation, and in the fullness of her spirits, keeps twirling about; at the same time going round the Stage—Bob runs after her, with his hat in his hand, crying, “Sarah! vy, Sarah, ’ant you well!” &c. –the black Child seeing this, and thinking something is the matter with its mother, also squalls violently: stretching its arms towards her; at length, Sal, becoming tired of her vagaries, sets to Bob, who exclaims, “Oh! it’s all right!” and the dance concludes. (62)

Blackface, and by extension black theatricality, appears the product of emotional overflow in these stage directions, always liable to suffer the uncontrollable excess of the underclass. Sal’s dancing gestures to improvised performance, her random movements gyrating out of control. Sal, the unsophisticated daughter of nature, becomes ironically unnatural as her theatricality becomes frightening. Dusty Bob’s concerned cry and the child’s violent “squalls” alert audiences to the submerged and deflected threat of lumpen theatricality. In addition, the play augments the dance’s “unnatural” quality by casting a male actor in the part of the maternal Sal, at least in some performances. White actors in blackface inevitably played both dancers.

Once again, underclass performance occupies a conflicted location in Atlantic theatre culture. The dance itself steps out the tension between “natural” and socially constructed performances. Sal’s undirected, instinctive overflow of emotion contrasts with the dance’s frightening inexplicability to her child; cross-dress complicates maternal qualities, and burnt cork belies ethnic theatricality. Sal and Bob’s dance, however, stages its own construction. This metatheatrical quality further complicates the “naturalness” of Bob and Sal’s act, echoing the conflicts embedded within the blackface dance. Logic, addressing the blackface musician as “Snow-Ball,” urges him to play a danceable tune. As he does so, he gives the inebriated musician “gin and snuff, and begrimes his face” (62). Bob re-enacts the blacking of the fiddler, a white actor already in blackface. Logic creates blackface on stage, self-consciously pointing to the conventions of blackface as a constructed performance rather than a natural act. Alcohol, Logic’s snuff, and the urgings of the upper-class observers conjure the performance into existence, and everyone watching can see it.

The scene (despite Tom’s delight in its natural naïveté) represents a complex theatricality, one hidden behind smokescreens of race and class. Dusty Bob and Sal perform their dance at the urging of the white, upper-class gatecrashers, who ply their hosts with alcohol until they acquiesce to the entertainment. Far from revealing an unsophisticated product of
nature (as Tom and perhaps the audience would like to believe), Moncrieff’s script actually acts out the performance’s construction before its multiple audiences. As a theatrical production, the scene’s creation highlights the tensions in patronage and patronization—Logic’s scornful mode of address cannot erase the attraction of the charismatic performance. The scene plays upon this awareness—it celebrates, rather than covers up, the conditions of its own production and acts out the conflicted processes of patronage, creative impetus, costuming, and finally performance in broadly comedic strokes.

These conflicted performances of race and class pervade popular representations of the lumpenproletariat. In these scenes, theatricality jumps the boundaries of class and ceases to be the production simply of underclass entertainers and upper-class patrons. Moncrieff’s *Life in London*, read against the grain and perhaps despite itself, thus punctures the staged artlessness of underclass theatricality. Stagings of their theatricality continually appropriate lumpen acts, creating them as natural, innocent, and worthy of celebration—but at the same time, theatrical, staged, artificial, and somewhat disturbing. Theatrical productions foreground these tensions, rather than erase them, and that contributed to their popularity.

Scenes such as the dance of Dusty Bob and Sal display the theatrical qualities of the lumpenproletariat, but beggars are not the only deliberate actors in *Tom and Jerry*. The three upper-class protagonists themselves repeatedly play the part of underclass characters, veering dangerously close to class boundaries as they act out cross-class affiliations. Perhaps the most immediate and commented-upon way they do so is by appropriating the words—the “flash” and slang—of the underclass characters. The rambling gentlemen also act the parts of the lumpen, performing the disorderly mayhem usually attributed to underclass characters. The city-rambling project as a whole presents its audiences with more than an opportunity to watch the underclass. It actually offers a chance to play the part of the lumpenproletariat. Tom, Jerry, and Logic do not merely (as their audiences do) admire the urban underclasses from a distance; they opt instead to become them. Theatrical conventions and the privilege of their class status, however, always hold this transformation at bay.

In one of the play’s metatheatrical moments, the three heroes actually disguise as beggars in order to penetrate a haunt of London’s unemployed. The distance between the observers and the observed is not so great, as Tom and Logic remind their audiences. The script counterpoints Logic’s insistence that “We must masquerade it” with Tom’s demonstration of their ability to do so as he turns out his pockets—their rambles have rendered them penniless, closer to lumpen than they would like (46). Their financial straits, however, do not keep them from slumming further, and at the end of the second Act, they enter, “disguised as beggars, with Placards on their backs—Tom’s “Burnt Out—lost my little all.”—Jerry’s “Deaf and Dumb.”—Logic’s “Thirteen Children” (50). Once inside, they attempt to seduce a trio of underclass women, unaware that they are actually their female pursuers, slumming in disguise along with the men. Such a scene reverses the early theatricality of characters like Morano and his pirates, who had acted like gentlemen despite their precipitous downward slide into piracy. Characters such as Black-Ey’d Susan’s William straddle the line between upper and lower class, but Tom and Jerry’s downward play-acting stands as a distinctive expression of adopting underclass theatricality.

Their performance, complete with Tom’s moralizing (“it almost staggers belief that hypocrisy is so successful” [50]), ironically replicates the deceptive theatricality of the beggar’s pretended disability. The scene, though, ends with the men doubly outsmarted, the objects of their affections substituted for the less desirable (and most likely cross-dressed and blackfaced) characters “Dingy Bet” and “Soldier Suke.” Their unsuccessful attempt at performing lumpen
theatricality marks them as still a little green; there may be, in the theatrical economy of the play, an unbridgeable gap between the classes. The irony of their act, of course, hovers outside the world of the play; the three ramblers notice nothing significant about the reversals in the scene.

Their attempts to act the parts of low characters affirm that the critical problem of the play is not one of becoming underclass, but one of exercising the desired theatrical skills. In the end, the three adventurers’ attempts to act underclass surely reinforce the class difference they represent. Their economic and social privilege allows them to dabble in the lumpen stage without permanent scarring, and they eventually leave the scene none the worse for wear. While slumming, though, Moncrieff’s characters embody a version of the problematic dynamic the theatrical lumpenproletariat has performed since Gay’s characters reached the stage. Macheath first played out lumpen dangerousness by ironically acting the gentleman while masking as black; nearly a century later, privileged dandies dressed up as beggars and caused the kind of mayhem normally inexcusable in decorous upper-class circles.181

Tom and Jerry Ramble On

With the popularity of their moving panorama of street scenes, Tom, Jerry, and Logic added new ingredients to the mix that had previously represented Atlantic underclasses to popular audiences. Moncrieff’s play acts out a shifting relationship between class and mobility, a relationship that had posed a continued problem in Atlantic culture. Mobility, the play cycle reveals, had its voyeuristic advantages, even if it took its toll on upper-class characters. As the sequence continued, the relationship between movement and class shifted; local knowledge became an even more mobile commodity, and the class relationships that produced it played a central role in later stagings.

Tom and Jerry, as seems usually the case with popular theatricals, represents a freeze-framed moment (itself only nominally immobile) in a longer, continuous succession of linked cultural productions. Characters and scenes popularized by the play are continuations in form and spirit of those in earlier plays. In a verbal clue absent from Moncrieff’s staging, Egan relates Logic “chaunting like a second Macheath,” his song dissolveing into drunken hiccups (289). Popular writers frequently resurrected the ghost of Macheath in close proximity to Tom and Jerry. Egan himself published a biography of a Samuel Denmore Hayward, the “modern Macheath,” in 1822. Moncrieff also wrote a play entitled Jack Sheppard, the Housebreaker; or, London in 1724, which resolves the exploits of Jack Sheppard, the historical basis for Macheath’s character, into a series of scenes reminiscent of Tom and Jerry’s adventures.182

Performances of Tom and Jerry held in focus, for at least a moment, the urban lumpenproletariat. At the same time, that focus was hardly static. Connections to earlier parts of the lore cycle surface sometimes in random associations, sometimes in thematic resonances, sometimes formally, in analogous structures that reappear time and again. The fiddling Billy Waters, for example, gives a name and a face to the lore cycle’s movement of circulating cultural elements. A black man, he was reputedly a former sailor, the street embodiment of the entertaining seamen of nautical melodramas like Black-Ey’d Susan and The Red Rover. Similarly, the whirling gyrations of African Sal, of course, re-stage Wowski and Trudge’s Caribbean dances, which were still popular enough to illustrate an acting edition of Inkle and Yarico in the late 1820s. Life in London and its derivatives show the layering of performance, the persistence of marks left by every revolution along the cycle.
Among the survivals, however, come new features; the observation foregrounded by Moncrieff’s play becomes perhaps the dominant mode of staging the underclass by the second decade of the 1800s. The scaffold display, so prominent in Gay’s Beggar’s Opera, has receded in Tom and Jerry’s staging of London as it had begun to vacate the wider stage of crime and punishment in London—public hangings were moved from Tyburn in 1783, but continued until 1868 outside Newgate Prison. Instead of watching onstage hangings and prison celebrations, audiences begin to view the lumpenproletariat’s songs and dances in smoky back rooms. The stage still bears symbolic traces of the scaffold, but the intensity and focus has changed. By the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the continued close-up presence of circum-Atlantic performances, brought home by sailors, enacted by black residents of London, and admired by popular audiences of all types, made the stage of lumpen theatricality increasingly intimate, and occasionally self-reflexive.

As the cycle of plays and narratives continues, Tom, Jerry, and Logic eventually pay for their class-disrupting sprees and rambles. Egan’s The Death of Life in London (which T. L. Greenwood turned into a play as well) has the rakes pay for their sins, leaving their acquaintances to mourn them in a conclusion that teases with both self-parodic and moralizing moments. Moncrieff’s sequel forecasts the direction Tom and Jerry takes as the lore cycle spins along—the moral clampdown becomes a dominant theme for some playwrights, providing an acceptable resolution to the adventures of the ramblers.

Notable among the plays in this trend is Edward Fitzball’s The Tread Mill; or, Tom and Jerry at Brixton, which appeared in November 1822. This take-off on Tom and Jerry’s adventures (by an author who later made a name in nautical melodrama with plays such as The Red Rover) demonstrates the lore cycle’s carceral urges. Most of the play concentrates humorously on the danger faced by a family of rural newcomers to the city. Tom and Jerry, despite their popularity and their title billing, do not appear until the eighth of ten scenes, four pages from the end of the script. Their effect precedes their onstage presence, however, as the yokel Pringles (Jerry’s country neighbors) use Egan’s Life in London as a guide to the city. The inclusion of Egan’s novel in the play emphasizes the increasing self-consciousness of the lore cycle—Fitzball and his audiences knew well the uses of Egan’s insider knowledge. Using Egan’s text also mocks the defense of Moncrieff’s play that claims it actually provides flats with important insider knowledge. Minor theatres, with their satirical tendencies, indiscriminately mock established culture, whether “low” or “high.” The lore cycle thus feeds on itself, creating out of popular culture performances which, when seen in context, confound any hierarchical distinctions of culture.

When the rakes finally do appear, they cause more problems than they solve. Fitzball’s play reprises the scene in Moncrieff’s Tom and Jerry in which guards of the watch storm an illegal gambling house. This time, however, instead of escaping the authorities as in the earlier play, the unfortunate dabblers in lumpen culture end up in prison. As Jerry observes in the commotion, “Now for a new adventure—to pay for being in a gambling house” (24). Fitzball’s version of events thus exhibits a distinctly moralizing tenor, and the illustrations in the published script exemplify this focus compactly (Figure 10). The upper drawing on the page depicts a melee, with Tom, Jerry and Logic swinging umbrellas and fists amidst broken dishes. The disorderly drawing formally reproduces the social mayhem the flâneurs encourage onstage: bodies flail, furniture teeters precariously, and crockery in mid-flight heads for the floor. This image presents the “before” moment in the staging. Situated directly below that drawing, in a remarkably linear contrast to the above scene, is the “after” image, depicting an orderly line of

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prisoners walking the treadmill. Foregrounded by two observers, a male and a female, the horizontal lines of the mill discipline and contain the still-organic (but now tamed) limbs of the prisoners.

Figure 10. Frontispiece, *The Tread Mill, or Tom and Jerry at Brixton* (London: J. Lowndes, [182-?]).
In Fitzball’s play, without apology, the disorderliness of Tom and Jerry’s class acting directly precedes the inevitable taming by penal authorities. The enthusiastic observations of Tom and Jerry give way to the stern supervision of authorities at Brixton’s famous new treadmill. At the same time, the play’s punning self-positioning as a “milldramatic” and “farcical” burletta tempers the serious and didactic urges. The pleasures of observation, undoubtedly still present, appear in a different mix. The touristic gratification of seeing a fascinating new technological advancement mixes with the vicarious satisfaction of discipline and punishment.

For its finale, the play recycles “Come Then Let Us Dance and Sing,” the musical number that also celebrates the underclass union of black and white in *Inkle and Yarico* and finds its way into *Tuckitomba*’s rebellion too. It marks the restoration of order, admonishing audiences to “Learn this lesson from our play, / Do not turn displeased away — Hear the moral fixt-on” (28). At the same time, it also represents the iconic final moment of several dramas of Atlantic underclass social unrest. The gestures and songs of the unruly characters remain in the audiences’ minds, charismatically and perhaps uncomfortably present. Reading the song in its theatrical context, one can hardly conclude that the treadmill and one musical number can erase all the popular mayhem generated onstage. The performances’ popular appeal impelled and lubricated these transmissions. “Come Let Us Dance and Sing,” then, musically signals the charismatic presence of unruly, interracial, and underclass elements onstage. The song points to the popularity of the “low” elements in the Atlantic world. In the process of transmissions, hidden charges pass along, and a play featuring prison discipline celebrates underclass unruliness at the same time. Although Jerry observes pithily that “it’s one thing to be notorious, and another to be popular,” Fitzball’s sequel asserts that, in fact, the two were more closely linked than some critics insist (24).

Despite the insistent urge to discipline incursions into underclass territories, popularity impels theatricals, and *Tom and Jerry*’s act still had legs. The Caledonian Theatre in Edinburgh featured *Tom and Jerry in Edinburgh* in 1823. Pierce Egan apparently wrote and staged a *Life in Dublin* by 1842. Tom, Jerry, and Logic had a “Hop” at Brighton in 1834 attributed to George Colman the Younger. Soon after the original *Tom and Jerry* theatrical productions, David Carey wrote a prose *Life in Paris*, which, like Egan’s work, featured illustrations by George Cruikshank. That adventure, too, saw quick adaptation to the stage; a playbill for the Adelphi Theatre in January 1823 promises “this and every evening, January, 1822” *Green in France, or, Tom and Jerry’s Tour!* It did not take long for *Tom and Jerry* to circulate further afield. The duo came unmoored further in C. A. Somerset’s 1843 *The Nautical Tom and Jerry*. Shipboard life, it appears, provided a rich supply of the underclass antics in these types of plays, and representations of the urban lumpenproletariat remain linked to other parts of the lore cycle.

*Tom and Jerry* in America

The movement (both figurative and literal) of these plays indicates that mobility provides lumpen acts with more than a theme; it forms an integral part of their cultural presence. It makes sense that more overtly mobile cohorts—like sailors—feature in Tom and Jerry’s adventures. It also makes sense that Tom and Jerry turn tourist in other, more far-flung, destinations. Their act, the easy and privileged upper-class counterpart to lumpen circulations, became itself mobile, and versions of their adventures cropped up in various other locations. As they spread to
Philadelphia, New York, and other American locales, *Tom and Jerry*’s theatricals rendered visible connections among widely spread parts of the Atlantic world. The plays stage an Atlantic tourism of the lumpenproletariat that verges on the cosmopolitan even as they represent local culture.

Moncrieff’s play and its imitators saturated American theatres in the two decades following its London premiere. The basic premise of the play was no more unique or startlingly new to American theatre than it was to English audiences. Popular theatre tends to reuse and recycle, always shifting in the process. Royall Tyler’s 1787 *The Contrast* provides a good, if distant, example of the refurbishment of old themes. One of the first American plays to reach the professional boards, *The Contrast* prefigured Jerry’s introduction to urban mysteries. Tyler’s Yankee Jonathan, a less sophisticated version of the country squire Jerry, embarks on a naïve tour of New York City that satirizes anti-theatrical sentiments both in and outside of the metropolis. Tyler’s play also forecasts the overt theatricality of Moncrieff’s look at London life as, in one scene Jonathan innocently confuses the theatre for a curtained view into a private dwelling. Three and a half decades before Tom and Jerry rambled through the concealed histories and public secrets of London’s underclasses, Jonathan enacted a similar onstage observation. *The Contrast*, however, is significantly less inclined to show off underclass performance, and more likely to mock humble outsiders’ ineptitude in interpreting elite culture. While Moncrieff’s *Tom and Jerry* certainly exhibited some residue of these urges, it more enthusiastically performs underclass subcultures and their connections to other social contexts.

Linking such performances of upper- and lower-class theatricality made Moncrieff’s play a winner in the New World. The Richardson acting edition’s introduction, for example, compares the transatlantic popularity of *Tom and Jerry* and *The Beggar’s Opera*. The writer concludes that “the point of precedence must be give to *Tom and Jerry*, as its favor. . . extended to every Theatre throughout the United Kingdom; nor was it less forcible in America, where it is, to this day, what is termed, a stock piece.” *Tom and Jerry* first appeared at New York’s Park Theatre in 1823, displaying the lumpen dives and blackface performances for a city increasingly saturated with black and blackface performance.

*Tom and Jerry* was not long in reaching other American cities; Charles Durang, for example, dates the play’s Philadelphia debut as April 25, 1823. Leading Philadelphia theatrical figures, including Francis Wemyss and Henry Wallack, appeared in the lead roles, and competing performances soon appeared—one at the Chesnut Street Theatre and another performed by Joe Cowell’s “circus corps.” The play remained popular for the next few years on the eastern seaboard. A clipping at the Harvard Theatre Collection indicates that in 1824 at the “Philadelphia Theatre,” the play appeared along with its sequel, *The Death of Life in London*, appeared as an afterpiece, and most likely in abbreviated form. In 1826, *Tom and Jerry* made a run in Boston as well.

In its travels, the play inevitably altered. Predictably, *Tom and Jerry* did not present only London underclasses to its American audiences. The play adapted its materials to the locales in which they appeared, American cities providing new raw material for its traveling scenes. William Brown’s African Grove Theatre performed the play soon after its opening in 1821; its *Tom and Jerry* added a scene of “Life in Fulton Market,” one of the city’s spaces of cultural and economic exchange. Significantly, the African Theatre presented Tom and Jerry’s ramblings alongside the iconic rebellion of *Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack* and a now-lost production entitled *Shotaway; or, the Insurrection of the Caribs, of St. Domingo*. Billy Waters, African Sal, and Dusty Bob, though not busking or begging right outside American theatres, dominate an Atlantic
culture shot through with everyday street performances, and audiences recognized this. Various currents of Atlantic lumpenproletariat performance converge at the African Theatre on that night in 1823.

Jonas B. Phillips penned a version entitled *Life in New York*, which appeared in that city in 1834. W. W. Clapp, Jr., notes that *Tom and Jerry* played with a local twist at Boston’s Adelphi Theatre in 1847, subtitled *Life in Boston*. Well after the play’s American premiere, John Brougham’s *Life in New York* appeared in acting editions in 1856, continuing the circulations of *Tom and Jerry*. In these productions, the lore of American cities gradually supplanted that of London, fed by a growing sense of national identity that copied and competed with English theatre even as it sporadically tried to claim its own independence. The knowledge of the lumpenproletariat’s local haunts, made attractive by Tom and Jerry’s acts, disseminated throughout the Atlantic. Privileged glimpses of the distant metropole’s underworld give way to popular representations of urban culture everywhere in the Atlantic world.

One sign of *Tom and Jerry*’s American popularity was that not everyone appreciated the play. Durang, remembering the season in his theatrical memoirs, judged the sequel a “most lamentable failure” and a “lame and stupid production.” Durang’s critique reveals a divided reception—dismissive by some, enthusiastically approving by others. The play, he argues, was a “chaos of dramatic inconsistencies and improbable incidents clothed with vulgarity” (6: 10). His censure, of course, judges the play by standards of dramatic evaluation that it was never meant to fulfill, revealing the moral proprieties bolstering his assessment. The popularity of the play directly inspired Durang’s anxiety. He saw the effects of the play as alarmingly pervasive:

> We had a racy group of Toms, Logics, and Jerrys, which sprang from its vicious froth instanter, in every city where it was represented. Tavern haunts and mixed drinks were created, and christened ‘Tom and Jerry,’ to suit the vitiated new-born taste. Boxing schools, and the elegant auxiliaries of genteel rowdy education, arose and became prevalent. After the inauguration of this dramatic monstrosity (which for the time being drew good houses) at the Park theatre and at the Chesnut street house, we thought that we saw a visible decline from the original positions of those dramatic temples. The reflective and respectable heads of families gradually dropped away from their once hearty support, and other intellectual amusements and changes intervening, radically altered the character of our theatrical audiences. (6:10)

Durang’s condemnation, despite his claim that the play hurt the city’s theatrical establishment, reveals the moralizing anxiety that the play engendered on both sides of the Atlantic. In American cities, as much as in London, the play consolidated the collective identity of those who admired Tom and Jerry’s chameleonic mobility and access to lumpen performances. The play articulated the affiliations of “genteel rowdies,” the young and not-so-respectable, giving them a cultural kernel around which to base their own social performances.

Circulations of urban underclass performances erupted in unique local performances. *Life in New Orleans*, performed at St. Charles Theatre in New Orleans on May 13, 1837, featured Old Corn Meal, a locally famous black peddler and performer. “Signor Cornmealiola,” as newspaper commentators labeled him, performed as himself, just as later lore reputed Billy Waters to have done in London. Driving his cart on stage and singing his well-known street tunes, Old Corn Meal served much the same function as did characters like Moncrieff’s Billy
On the northern terminus of the Caribbean basin, Old Corn Meal performs a local culture specific to New Orleans but still linked to other strands of Atlantic culture. As one might expect, Old Corn Meal’s appearance echoed other Atlantic lumpen performances, revealing the connections between apparently far-flung acts. A commentator in the New Orleans Picayune wrote, “[w]e never heard a vocalist who could make his voice ‘wheel about and turn about’ so quick from tenor to bass and from bass to falsetto.” The New Orleans journalist quotes the catch-phrase from T. D. Rice’s well-known song “Jump Jim Crow,” which had proven wildly successful on both sides of the Atlantic. Rice, literally turning and wheeling since the 1830s, finds his vocal equivalent in Corn Meal’s singing. It is tempting, perhaps, to see Rice as an imitation of authentic performances like Corn Meal’s, or to judge the New Orleans songster as an overwrought instance of “authentic” black performance rushed to the stage to compete with Rice’s derivative blackface. Neither one of these conclusions seems adequate, especially since the frames of reference for these performances long precede American blackface.

Such local curiosities, of course, were not hermetically sealed off from the rest of the Atlantic world, and observers noticed the connections. Francis C. Sheridan, an English diplomat observing Old Corn Meal in 1840, judged the effect of his singing as “precisely the same effect as one of our street duets where the Man & Boy alternately sing a line.” The contexts of Signor Cornmeal’s act extend further back in time, too. The New Orleans entertainer’s vocal talents also demonstrate the same qualities that Charles Bannister had showcased with his erratically alternating bass and falsetto as he performed Polly in the cross-dressed Beggar’s Opera. American vocalists use techniques transmitted from London street singers, moments of performance on both sides of the Atlantic tapping a common characteristic element of culture, the wheeling and turning. Even if there traceable links no longer exist, extended chains of influence and connotative meaning connect the two.

These cultural resonances illuminate the meanderings of Atlantic culture. Distinct techniques and gestures found their way through hidden channels of cultural transmission, and observers noticed the similarities. Wheeling and turning about unpredictably, whether articulating lumpen cross-dressing or African-American culture, whether at the end of the eighteenth century or the middle of the nineteenth, had become an embedded feature of performing the urban lumpenproletariat.

Mose Extends the Cultural Cycle

American theatricals clearly demonstrate a well-established history of underclass performances drawing upon the structure and thematics of Moncrieff’s Tom and Jerry. When American theatres did not stage Moncrieff’s play itself, they often presented imitations inspired by the themes, situations, and characters of Moncrieff’s play. Even as Tom and Jerry’s cultural life persisted, American theatres developed and staged their own versions of the urban lumpenproletariat. As Old Corn Meal demonstrates, even when they draw upon common sources of Atlantic performance, local variations still lace the mix with their own gestures in varying proportions and ratios.

Such new ratios appear in Benjamin A. Baker’s hit A Glance at New York in 1848. Premiering at Mitchell’s Olympic Theatre in New York City, the play featured, like Tom and Jerry, contemporary scenes of underclass local culture. Frank S. Chanfrau starred as the
“Bowery B’hoy” Mose, a man-about-town who casually engages in firefighting and butchering, revealing the transitions and continuities between street and theatre culture. Chanfrau’s B’hoy acted the onstage counterpart of the real, if constructed, characters on the street and in the Bowery’s audience. The figure of the B’hoy brought theatricality to New York streets; popular prints as well as fictionalizations by popular authors such as E. Z. C. Judson (known to his readers as Ned Buntline) reiterate the staginess of the Bowery B’hoy. The memoirs of Charles Haswell famously describe the theatricality of the B’hoy, describing him as appearing “in propria persona, a very different character”; he describes the B’hoy in detail:

his dress, a high beaver hat, with the nap divided and brushed in opposite directions, the hair on the back of the head clipped close, while in front the temple locks were curled and greased (hence, the well-known term of “soap-locks” to the wearer of them), a smooth face, a gaudy silk neck cloth, black frock coat, full pantaloons, turned up at the bottom over heavy boots designed for service in laughter houses and at fires); and when thus equipped, with his girl hanging on his arm, it would have been very injudicious to offer him any obstruction or to utter an offensive remark.

The B’hoy’s theatrical visibility, accentuated by distinctive costuming, travesties the styles of New York’s elite culture. The care put into his distinctive appearance mock the flaunted luxuries of New York’s elites, marking his distinctive territory in the process. Although he was of the laboring classes, he acts a more complex performance than simply one of working-class provenance. He is, as Haswell observes, a “character,” more than simply a social type. Mose and his real-life counterparts stage hints of their lumpen predecessors like Morano and Polly, who rely upon theatrical disguise to position themselves in relation to dominant culture. The B’hoy and his theatrical idol Edwin Forrest later play leading roles in the 1849 Astor Place Riots, the most visible instance of theatrical, lumpen disorder bleeding off the stage and into the streets.

In a distant echo of Jerry’s visit to his London cousin Tom, Baker’s play stages George Gordon’s arrival in New York City from an upstate village. His urban cousin Harry introduces George to New York scenes, the tourist sites of the city giving way to scenes of swindling, scam artistry, and low dives. Billed as a “local drama” and originally conceived as a series of scenes in the style of Tom and Jerry, the play grew into a vehicle for Chanfrau’s character Mose when the “New York Fire Boy” proved much more popular than anyone anticipated. He acts as a guide and interpreter for the other two, explaining the meaning of local slang as Tom and Logic had done in Moncrieff’s play. Mose, rather than Harry or George, serves as the focal point of the play’s urban adventures.

The real source of urban knowledge in Glance, then, is not a dandified Tom, nor an encyclopedic Logic, but instead Mose, the character who moves in working-class and lumpenproletariat circles. Mose’s popularity soon extended beyond his immediate environs, but his initial launch was due in part to the Olympic and the Chatham’s audiences. These audiences participated wholeheartedly in antebellum American theatre’s cultural skirmishes over the rights to define the provinces of “high” and “low” culture. The Chatham Theatre, for example, provided a home for lower-class entertainments in the 1820s, but suffered conversion to a chapel in 1832. The theatrical establishment had only just reclaimed the Chatham in 1839. The net, and probably unintended, effect of these battles was perhaps to intensify the affiliations of working-class audiences with their own culture. In 1848, Chanfrau, flush with his success from riding this effect at the Olympic Theatre, bought the Chatham and made it the new home of
From there, his working-class audiences transmitted their enthusiasms for Bowery B’hoys like Mose to the rest of the nation.

The urban scenes through which Mose guided audiences reveal the residue of earlier performances even as the play stages new relationships among local knowledge, power, class, and theatricality. Traces of *Tom and Jerry* appear, as cultural survivals usually do, in flashes and glimpses, independent of narrative continuity. We find one such trace in the song opening *A Glance at New York in 1848*; in a scene set on the waterfront, the script indicates that a “number of Newsboys, Porters, Apple-Women, &c.” sing the air “The Jolly Young Waterman.”

Charles Dibdin composed the song for the early nautical melodrama *The Waterman*, also called *My Poll and My Partner Joe* and staged at the Haymarket Theatre in 1774. “The Jolly Young Waterman” saw a revival in J. T. Haines’s 1835 version of *My Poll and My Partner Joe*, by which time it had come to be a staple of nautical performances, almost as popular as *Black-Ey’d Susan*. Famously sung by Charles Bannister (the father of John), the song celebrates a ferry operator whose skill and popularity left him “never in want of a fare.” The song’s popularizing of the underclasses made it persistent and adaptable.

When Baker and Chanfrau produced their *Glance at New York* in 1848, the song already served as an all-purpose signal of nautical and waterfront culture, but it also carried more recent and closely adjoining cultural cargo. In Moncrieff’s *Tom and Jerry*, the song accompanies the flâneurs’ entrance into the “Parlour” of Tom Cribb, a black sailor and English boxing champion of the early nineteenth century (32). In Moncrieff’s act, the song celebrates the popularity of the “gallant black diamond”; “who has not heard of a jolly young waterman?” it asks (32). The tune indicates the persistent relationships among various Atlantic subcultures. In Moncrieff’s play, the song celebrates a black man as sporting idol, figures him as the waterman he once was, and marks his appearance in the play as an icon of the urban underworld, all in a few short verses. In *Tom and Jerry*, the moment charts the interrelatedness of these various subcultures—the black Atlantic, nautical culture, the sporting classes. In performance, then, the “waterman” of the title slides from Dibdin’s ferryman, to deep-sea sailor in *My Poll and My Partner Joe*, to Moncrieff’s boxer; extending the cycle in American plays, it passes back by Baker’s anonymous dockworkers to celebrate Mose the landlocked Bowery B’hoys.

Baker’s 1848 *Glance*—appearing after *Tom and Jerry*’s heyday, but while the English heroes continued their rambles and spree before various audiences—continues to act out these relationships from New World perspectives. The “Jolly Young Waterman,” placed among Baker’s travelers, sailors, and dockworkers, explicitly voices the linkages between nautical life and urban lumpenproletariat, much as Somerset’s *Nautical Tom and Jerry* does. Baker’s script makes other references to *Tom and Jerry*; the shifty scam artist Jake, for example, addresses loafers in a low dive collectively as “you Johnny Stokes and Billy Waters, time’s up—move yourselves, come!” (15). The name “Johnny Stokes” means little to us now (or yet), but the name of Billy Waters invokes clear images of Tom, Jerry, and Logic rambles in London slums. Clearly, calling on the name of Waters, through far-removed from his busking corner outside London’s Adelphi Theatre, still has the power to label underclass character types. In this case, the reference, applying Waters’ name to the denizens of a “Loafer’s Paradise,” focuses on the deceitful theatricality of the lumpenproletariat more than its staged charisma.

The lumpenproletariat, as the disdainful reference to Billy Waters suggests, had become in some ways less the object of appreciation than of suspicions. The play represents the lumpenproletariat in the persons of Jake and Mike, two street tricksters who repeatedly bilk the greenhorn George out of his money. Like earlier stage-lumpen characters, they are theatrical,
continually reprising the acting trickery of Moncrieff’s shamming beggar. Misrepresenting themselves as types such as a fellow greenhorn, an auctioneer, a tour guide, Jake and Mike victimize George in his touristic attempts. Staged New York City scenes emphasized the threatening, theatrical trickery of the underclasses; at the same time, these scenes must have represented charismatic lumpen performances to their audiences. Despite Mose’s popularity, or perhaps because of it, the play’s real lumpenproletariat becomes the shifty, scamming types such as Mike and Jake. Initiation into the insider knowledge of urban underclasses is in the hands of the sometimes merciless lumpenproletariat—certainly not a character like the genteel Corinthian Tom.

It is important that the play’s underclass characters, the savvy operators along with the rough but kind Mose, possess the prized and admired local knowledge. The power to deceive outsiders openly and theatrically shifts from gentlemen like Tom and Jerry to the lower-class characters. Baker’s play turns the tables on the upper-class tourist, replacing Tom and Jerry with a helpless George; while audiences see the scam coming, George never does. If Mose sometimes marks the urge to render the lower classes respectable, other lumpen types continue preying on middle-class, rural and inexperienced victims.

The value of lumpen insider status becomes evident when certain characters fail to achieve it. Mose contrasts sharply with characters such as Baker’s Major Gates, whom the script labels a “literary loafer” (15). Gates, using his poetic invocations to score change for a drink, enacts comic pretensions to gentility with his ornate language and laughable inability to fit in to either lumpen or upper class culture. A down-and-outer, he tries to act like Tom or Jerry on a rakish ramble. He fools neither audiences nor Mose, however, and we see his true lack of gentility despite (or because of) his frequent erudite declarations. With Gates, Baker scores a hit on his theatrical predecessors, making fun of the likes of Tom and Logic. The literary loafer, like Moncrieff’s heroes, attempts to slum among the lumpen, but only pretensions remain of his past gentility. Major Gates embodies the anxieties of class position enacted repeatedly by characters performing in the area between the elite classes and the lumpenproletariat.

Theatricality in various forms saturates the play’s other underclass characters. Mose’s “G’hal” Lize, for example, admires George Christy’s minstrel show, asking rhetorically, “Ain’t he one of ‘em?” (22). She even goes so far as to sing one of Christy’s songs onstage, “Lovely Mae” lending a bit of the minstrel show’s popularity to Baker’s play. Evoking Christy and his minstrel show’s theatricality becomes another way of signaling belonging in a unique urban subculture, even as it signals the interconnection of various groups. Blackface performance, from Dusty Bob and African Sal through Old Corn Meal, remains a persistent and compelling theatrical element in stagings of the urban underclasses. Blackface performance only grew more popular toward mid-century; Mose, for example, acts as a patron to blackface performance in New York As It Is, an 1848 sequel to Glance.

The few surviving archival remains of New York as It Is indicate that Mose solicits a black dance, reviving echoes of Tom and Jerry’s patronage of Dusty Bob and African Sal. The scene was popular enough to headline advertisements of the play, appearing on playbills and in a popular print. In James Brown’s print, “Dancing for Eels,” Mose observes a black character performing at Catherine Market (Figure 11). The performance, watched by a mixed crowd of onlookers (beggars, gentlemen, black, white) re-stages publicly performances like those of Billy Waters, Old Corn Meal, African Sal and Dusty Bob. Mose, however, does more than simply observe—he becomes an active part of the depicted performance. The scene renders him larger than the black dancer, and he overshadows everyone else in the print. It is his scene, perhaps to
share with the dancer; the other bystanders only watch, forming the scene’s border. Lounging against a barrel in the foreground, Brown’s drawing visually marks the Bowery B’hoys connections to the performance. Mose’s limbs—though resting—faintly mimic the dancer’s moves; both exhibit the hand on the hip, the bent knee, the turned head that had become emblematic of blackface and other lumpen performances by the middle of the nineteenth century.

Figure 11. James Brown, "Dancing for Eels: A scene from the new play of New-York As It Is, as played at the Chatham Theatre, N.Y.," 1848; courtesy the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.

As his casual, authoritative pose reveals in Brown’s print, Mose is firmly in the know, a participant-observer in the lumpen culture that dances at the edges of working-class New York. Like its sequel, A Glance at New York prizes insider status, candidly demonstrating its fascination with belonging. Announcing the presence of Mose and his pals, a voice without identifies them as “Three insiders” (15). The announcement, despite its assertiveness, has the flavor of bluster and perhaps some suppressed anxiety about it. “Insiders” might well be
concerned about their standing, given the intangible requirements for achieving it. Mose, for example, disdainfully explains how it works, remarking “Why, foo-foos is outsiders, and outsiders is foo-foos” (16). He makes the lines between accepted and excluded seem deceptively permeable, implying that in order to belong, one needs just “three cents for a glass of grog and a nights’ lodging” (16). One suspects, however, that it is not as simple as purchasing membership; the experience George pays for dearly, falling repeatedly for the scams of Jake and Mike, hardly buys him insider status. Tagging along behind Mose, for Harry and George as well as for the audiences, might be the only possible way to achieve insider status.

Mose on the Move

Mose’s brand of cultural tourism proved a popular and mobile one, not limited to New York City. His movements bear importantly on the lumpenproletariat, for although Mose is working class in New York City, his journeys render him significantly unmoored. He already plays a precarious, in-between position in Glance, negotiating between tourists and crafty street punks, locals and visitors, the well-to-do and the beggarly. He even negotiates among various occupations, always on the verge of quitting the fire engine and pursuing, perhaps, butchering full time. Mose’s travels thus literalize the mobility that theatrically aligns him with the lumpenproletariat.

Richard Dorson’s list of plays indicates that Mose appeared in numerous spin-offs. His exploits brought him to other east coast cities, to France, California, and even China. In these stagings, Mose consistently exercises the coveted powers of the cultural insider, even when far from home—Mose’s visit to China, for example, reveals “Life Among the Foo-Foos.” His travels re-enact those of Tom and Jerry, although the class position of the traveling observer has changed. The interpretation of other subcultures now filters through the B’hoy’s underclass viewpoint. Mose and his cohort, these plays reveal, reclaim mobility from English gentlemen. Mose’s movement also indicates, perhaps more than Tom and Jerry’s ever did, the interplay of the local and trans-local. Moncrieff’s heroes, for all their popularity, represented the detached cosmopolitan observer of local custom, constructing the knowledge of others for their audiences. In London itself, in France, in American cities, Tom and Jerry attempted to render their own subject position less visible (despite slips such as African Sal’s dance) as they rambled and watched. Their theatricals represent something like a vacuum effect, inhaling local underclass customs and re-performing them as outsiders.

In comparison, Mose made his own position hyper-visible. He represents centrifugal motion as he flung his version of local culture outward, both on and off stage. Audiences did not simply watch Californian, Chinese, or French customs as Mose traveled; they observed as he performed his New York-ness in relation to those other cultural positions. When Mose journeyed to California, for example, his performance adapted to the new setting. One popular print pictures him in the course of yet another “muss,” this time a “set-to with a bear” (Figure 12). He address the bear in the same terms he uses with New York City street challengers: “Old feller!” he says to the bear, “I know you: yer been mussen’ round me long enough. Now I’m a goin’ to lam yer.” Mose has become, even in California, a dominant character, defending his gold.
These kinds of performances continued as Mose mobilized local culture in his journeys. Soon after his American debut, a *Life in New York* probably featuring Mose played in England.
A manuscript in the British Library, submitted for approval by the Lord Chamberlain, indicates that it capitalized upon a variety of Mose’s acts; it identifies itself indiscriminately as “A glance at New York, or, New York as it is 1848, Life in New York - 1848.” Mose’s exhibition of New York City’s lumpen subcultures for English audiences represents a cultural nexus, a location where class mobility was acted and transacted. In addition, taking Mose’s act to England reversed the cultural flow that had continued to bring Tom and Jerry to American shores. As late as 1856 John Brougham’s Life in New York featured the two flâneurs in America, but with Mose the tide seemed to be turning. Rituals of cultural tourism crossed paths in mid-stream, performing a very transatlantic, very mobile culture.

In 1850, Mose Among the Britishers, or, the B’hoy in London appeared in Philadelphia. The transatlantic dynamics of class and performance are evident from the illustrated title page onward, where Mose stands center stage, in front of his supporting cast and a scenic backdrop featuring St. Paul’s Dome (Figure 13). This short pamphlet, which now exists in only a few archived copies, reveals Mose’s continued adventures and his spread through various strata of culture. Its popularity, ephemerality, and now scarceness go hand-in-hand—it never had a chance as curated culture, falling somewhere below dime novels in complexity and durability of construction. Mose Among the Britishers hints at strains of culture, now mostly lost, that valued the simple, concrete narrative, the iconic image, and the caricaturing of character over the verbal complexity and abstraction that pervades later evaluations of culture. Illustrations govern the narrative; drawings dominate each page, accompanied by a line or two of text.

Figure 13. Title page, Thomas B. Gunn, Mose among the Britishers; or, the B'hoj in London, 1850; courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection.
Taking its cues from Mose’s onstage acts, Gunn’s storyline presents a series of images, theatrically staged moments in his continuing adventures. Mose, deciding to look for excitement in other places, embarks on a transatlantic voyage to London. Once there, he plays the dual role of tourist and tourist attraction, simultaneously the observer and the object of fascinated observation. Acting the part of naïve newcomer, he attempts to call upon English noblemen. Finding his audience, Mose ends up in a “set-to” with Lord Brougham, evoking at once Tom and Jerry’s fascination with the sporting life and the New York cohort’s willingness to find a “muss” (8). Despite the apparent simplicity of the pamphlet, the narrated scenes encapsulate Mose’s complex and unpredictable oscillation between watched and watching. As he assists in re-enacting the still-popular scenes from *Tom and Jerry*, he stands in for the noble voyeurs even as he becomes the exhibit of outlandish American style.

On his transatlantic search for excitement, Mose unwittingly becomes the exhibit more than once. After seeing the standard tourist sights of London, he attends “Jullien’s Bal Masque”; dressed in his typical costume of flannel shirt, stovepipe hat and fire boots, he “is admitted en costume, under the impression that he is a transatlantic debardeur” (15). He dances a polka to the admiration of the crowd, but the entente lasts only a short time, as he takes offence at the perceived advances of another partygoer. Resorting to the aggressive unruliness his audiences were accustomed to seeing, Mose ends up before a magistrate, and eventually in jail with other lumpen malcontents (18). The distance between Mose’s theatrical entrance onto the stage of the masque and his confinement in prison is remarkably short. Theatricality once again slides quickly into unruliness and Mose quickly associates with England’s other lumpen malcontents—incarcerated, as the text reads, “with a chartist patriot, a lady imprisoned for beating her husband, a gentleman of anti-Father Mathew principles, and a pick-pocket” (18); (Figure 14). The cell scene, of course recalls the recently popular scenes in *Jack Sheppard* and *The Beggar’s Opera*, and more remotely the caves of Yarico and Three-Finger’d Jack.

Finally “denounc[ing] the British lion” and concluding that there is “no place like home,” he returns to New York, where he shares his adventures with Lize, Mose, Jr., and his pals from New York City and Philadelphia (19, 20). As Mose moves back and forth across the Atlantic, he acts out more complex reprisals of *Tom and Jerry*’s performances. Performing the lumpen underclass to the sophisticated English elites, Mose persists in asserting his New York City subculture’s traits. He addresses nobility in casual terms and causes musses at inopportune moments. In the end, Mose claims the street for the “low” types. The mobility and theatricality that Tom and Jerry begin to appropriate in their London rambles become (once again) lumpen qualities. The trip to London serves as a send-up of *Tom and Jerry*’s tourist acts even as it explores the layering theatricality that makes of Mose both tourist and curiosity. As urban-lumpen plays had been doing for nearly three decades, the pamphlet also makes explicit the nationalist terms at play in the stagings of class and local knowledge. Gunn’s pamphlet, concluding Mose’s trip with a declaration of satisfaction with home, makes Mose a national type. Mose’s adventure declares class and nationality as concepts together discovered and consolidated in performances of cultural tourism.

*Mose among the Britishers* provides an appropriate moment through which to follow the cultural cycle. Though printed, it ended up less substantial than Mose’s onstage actions; it exemplifies the ephemerality of such popular cultural products. It is one of the multiple, disjointed traces left behind by plays staging the likes of Mose, Tom and Jerry, Billy Waters and Old Corn Meal. Such artifacts trace the outlines of cultural cycles that circulated beneath the
As stagings of the urban lumpenproletariat grew increasingly popular in the mid-nineteenth century, they performed simultaneous an unguarded attraction and a defensive suspicion of underclass acts. Tom and Jerry and their successors, from Egan onward, perform this ambivalence as upper-class characters gravitate irresistibly toward the likes of Tom Cribb and Dusty Bob, claiming underclass energies and the prestige that came from mastering covert codes. At the same time, the theatricality of the characters they associated with cast them under suspicion, and their own theatrical mobility—their voyeurism and flâneurie—drew them precipitously close to the deceptive and theatrical underclasses. Plays like *Tom and Jerry*, thus, accomplish the important work of rendering explicit the relationships between watcher and watched, performer and patron, lumpen and cultural elite. Mose, drawing upon these performances, rendered even more overt the social implications of performing the underclasses.
The transition from upper-class tour guide to underclass insider, of course, strained the class relationships all over again, and gave audiences a chance to re-evaluate their own relationship with the staged lumpenproletariat. Most importantly, perhaps, the New York firefighter reveals the persistent connections among popular stagings of urban underclasses. Performing the mobility and theatricality of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat, Mose stands at one end of a long line of linked songs and dances, words and poses that reveal the slippery cross-pollination constantly at work in popular culture.
CHAPTER 6

JACK SHEPPARD’S RE-EMERGENCE: LUMPEN HEROES AND RIOTING MOBS

On October 28, 1839, London’s Adelphi Theatre proudly announced the premiere of John Baldwin Buckstone’s *Jack Sheppard*, an adaptation of William Harrison Ainsworth’s popular novel. The play presents the fictional jailbreaks of the historical model for Macheath, a rakish, defiant lumpenproletariat hero. Though rooted deep in cultural history, the act was by no means tired in 1839, as the public response testifies. Buckstone’s version appeared amidst a flood of other adaptations, the most prominent other London productions by T. L. Greenwood and J. T. Haines. There were at least eight versions in London at the height of its popularity, according to one historian’s “conservative estimate”; Buckstone’s play represents perhaps the most influential of these renditions of Jack Sheppard’s story.211

The Adelphi version had perhaps the longest shelf life of all the London productions, and traveled the most extensively. By the late 1830s, the Adelphi Theatre was one of the physical links between high and low culture in London, between the illegitimate theatre that dominated venues south of the Thames and the patent theatres on the north side. Just two years before Jack Sheppard took the stage, for example, the Adelphi had shared T. D. Rice with the Surrey. Insouciant blackface performances, a rising strain in Atlantic theatre, closed the circuits that circulated Jack’s acts widely in the years following 1839.212 The Harvard Theatre Collection, for example, holds promptbooks of Buckstone’s *Jack Sheppard* marked for performances in Boston, and the Samuel French series of acting editions, edited by Philadelphia manager F. C. Wemyss, published Buckstone’s play as acted at the Bowery Theatre in November, 1853. The Buckstone staging clearly exercised a durable appeal.213

In performance, the play found unique ways to stage the lumpenproletariat in 1839. In the Adelphi’s *Sheppard*, cross-dressing deliberately codes the position of the lumpenproletariat. Mary Ann Keeley lent her small, seemingly powerless physical presence to the performance of Jack, and the Adelphi consciously promoted its jailbreaking hero in this fashion. The act became popular to the point of conventionality; other versions of the play in London and New York also cast women in the part of Jack. Playbills highlight Keeley’s iconic embodiment of the lumpen. The bills include lines of dialogue from the third scene of the fourth act, in which a fictionalized John Gay (labeled as “afterward Author of the Beggar’s Opera”) and the artist William Hogarth observe Jack in prison. Gay observes that he expects “a six-foot ruffian, not a stripling”; Hogarth’s reply, “Don’t you see, he’s all muscle and activity, without an ounce of superfluous flesh on him,” emphasizes Jack’s diminutive stature and streamlined figure.214 The cross-dressed performance that Keeley made popular simultaneously capitalized on multiple appeals: the comedic attraction of travesty, enduring since the Haymarket’s popular productions of the 1780s;
the risqué popularity of breeches parts in which female actors showed off their figures for mostly male audiences; the aesthetic appeal of a small, supple, sinewy Jack; and the apparent powerlessness but strategic slipperiness of the lumpenproletariat.

The re-appearance of Jack Sheppard in various forms marks a new chapter in the struggle for representation of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat. The popular obsession with Jack and his performances reveals three main characteristics. First, Jack and his lumpen cohort act out the continuing underclass resistance to authority—a struggle which grew in intensity offstage as well. Censorship and the controversies over Jack Sheppard plays reveal the still-contested position of the lumpen in Atlantic culture—the more popular Jack Sheppard’s acts became with street-level audiences, the more critics and authorities worried about the effects of lumpen performances. The various performances of Jack, highlighting his celebrated escapes, unabashedly promote the cultural resistance of excarceration. Jack’s escapes are marked by a theatrical display that includes his ostentatious mode of dress (his dandyish clothing always stolen) and even the role’s performance by the cross-dressed Keeley. Excarceration becomes not merely the act of survival but the flaunting of resistance, the performance of lumpenproletariat disdain for authority.

Second, popular representations tinted the lumpen with a romanticized historical perspective, which enabled the acting out of current tensions and live cultural issues on stage while simultaneously displacing them into the distant past. On both sides of the Atlantic, however, stagings of the lumpenproletariat transform contentious issues into the material of historical fiction. Jack Sheppard, therefore, emerges not simply as a timeless hero of the underclasses, but as the historical thief of the 1720s, reproduced on nineteenth-century stages. Like earlier plays in the lumpen lore cycle, Jack traveled transatlantically. The play’s appearance in a new form in New York City demonstrates that the same contest played out on a slightly different terrain in the New World. In America, the lore cycle explored its options in different ways with its own repertoires and celebrities. Plays such as Robert Montgomery Bird’s immensely popular 1831 The Gladiator, for example, worked through issues of race, class and nationality, displacing currently contested issues onto the distant past.

Third, and perhaps most importantly, the stage lumpenproletariat acted increasingly self-aware versions of itself. The Atlantic lore cycle achieves a new self-consciousness in the 1830s and 40s, and lumpen performances highlight a changing perception of their own place in cultural history. Such reflexivity had existed before, but with Jack Sheppard, the lore cycle’s work of cultural transmission moved to the forefront of concerns over lumpen performances. The most urgent debates over the cycle’s work centered upon the production of class affiliations (including the production of a criminal class) and the consolidation of national identity. Cultural transmission, while always a submerged theme in underclass acts, had become an increasingly troubling concept. Critics worried about the effects Jack Sheppard’s exploits would have on “masterless” men, and various stagings of the story represented the same crowd violence that punctuated disgruntled audiences’ relationships with theatrical management. Lumpenproletariat acts converged with concerns that certain parts of society had become simply lawless, prone to riot and mob violence.

Earlier theatrical performances forecast these changes. On the heels of the popularity of W. T. Moncrieff’s 1821 Tom and Jerry at the Adelphi Theatre, the Coburg Theatre produced another of Moncrieff’s plays, Jack Sheppard the Housebreaker, or London in 1724. Beginning on April 18, 1825, the playbills advertised the “life of this remarkable Robber, replete with the romance of real Life.” Moncrieff, not surprisingly, took advantage of the current popularity of
Tom and Jerry in his title and the play’s structure. “An animated Picture of Life in London 100 Years ago,” the bill asserts, “will be found scarcely less amusing or less interesting than the Adventures of Tom and Jerry.”

T. L. Greenwood, author of the Sadler’s Wells version of Jack Sheppard, had also penned the popular parodic sequel The Death of Life in London, or, Tom and Jerry’s Funeral, which appeared on stage in 1823. It seems no accident that Jack Sheppard resurfaces in lumpenproletariat stagings. He had remained close to the cultural surface all along, and narratives of Sheppard’s exploits frequently reached popular audiences during the eighteenth century. The thief’s story had always traded upon the allure of representing life among the underclasses. Moncrieff’s play, then, even as it re-stages peeping into Jack Sheppard’s London underworld, also reveals a continued historical fascination with the infamous thief and jailbreak.

Realizing Jack Sheppard

The Adelphi production rendered Jack’s jailbreaks, to great acclaim, with a remarkable combination of cross-dressed performance and visual staging and advertising. The Adelphi’s playbill, a spectacular graphic production in its own right, reveals the emerging visuality of Atlantic lumpenproletariat theatricals. Jack’s new visibility, as Moncreiff’s Sheppard play shows, develops the panoramic representation of the lumpenproletariat in plays such as Tom and Jerry. The rage for pictorial realization linked theatrical and textual representations in a culture of interconnected media forms. Ainsworth’s novel, like other parts of the lumpen lore cycles, reveals significant inter-generic characteristics, and these contribute to the lore cycle’s multiple manifestations. Most visibly, the novel appeared with illustrations by George Cruikshank. Cruikshank, of course, plays a recurrent and important role in picturing the Atlantic underclasses, influentially depicting low types on and off the stage. The novel’s popularity, critics have argued, indeed relied heavily on the dissemination of visual material in a culture of increasingly available print images.

Cruikshank’s illustrations contributed crucially to the novel, helping to redraw the relationships between visual and textual representation. Matthew Buckley reads the visual powers of the young thief against the novel’s illustrations, arguing that the lumpen gaze asserts its power in the narrative. Buckley argues that Jack’s gaze “controls the scene,” as he confronts his virtuous counterpart Thames Darrell, “registering the power of Sheppard’s visual capabilities.” A significant part of Jack’s appeal—the theatrical exercise of visual power—had long structured performances of the lumpenproletariat. Most evidently, the lumpen has been a looked-at presence on the stage; but in Ainsworth’s novel, Jack significantly becomes an actively gazing party. Jack Sheppard’s gaze recalls the first time Trudge sets eyes on Wowski in Yarico’s cave; it also evokes the tense moment in which Three-Finger’d Jack eyes Rosa in men’s clothing and the scene in which Polly evades detection by Morano’s crew. The power of looking, as Ainsworth’s novel makes clear, has a distinctly lumpen quality in some cases. Audiences of lumpen acts constantly exercised the power of the gaze; repeated appeals to the “taste of the town” and the approval of the audience demonstrates that the well-established power of watching by the time Jack exercised his visual self-assertion in 1839.

Ainsworth’s novel, as Buckley notices, appears already theatrical; the narrative builds the dynamics of observer and observed, actor and audience, already layered into its scenes. The play, when it appeared, operated in a similar fashion. Cruikshank’s images, for example, structure the action occurring on stage. Promoting the play, the Adelphi Theatre produced
playbills with twelve images arranged in a grid (Figure 15). The Adelphi’s bill, trumpeting the “Grand Spectacle!” of Buckstone’s play, advertises the more memorable moments of the play, using approximations of Cruikshank’s illustrations from the novel. The images themselves demonstrate a theatrical quality, mimicking the divided sets that some theatres had begun to use in the 1830s to stage simultaneous action. The playbill provides a graphic counterpart to the scenes staged sequentially in the play, forecasting the theatrical realizations that audiences could anticipate. As the playbill implies, the performance depends upon the audience recognizing a sequence of images to punctuate the narrative flow.

![Figure 15. Playbill, Adelphi Theatre, 1839; courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection.](image)

Illustrated playbills such as this appeared more frequently toward the middle of the nineteenth century (the Surrey Theatre’s production of Oliver Twist used a similar illustrated bill), but the Adelphi’s presents a more elaborate scene than most. Certainly it presents a more detailed set of images than earlier advertisements for lumpen stagings. Playbills for the still-popular Tom and Jerry, relying upon the sequential spectacle of its scenes, only described them verbally. Martin Meisel sorts the relationships among texts, images, and performances, writing that the “dramatic versions of Jack Sheppard that survive are faithful to the pictures, and rather free with the text. They rely on the pictures for effect, but even more for authenticity, as a
realization of the novel.” At the same, the relationship between the pictures and the staging short-circuits textuality and narrative, producing a symbiotic relationship between the drawings, which were already theatrical, and the stage adaptation, which realized the images.

This dynamic appears in the third scene of Buckstone’s fourth act, in which we discover Jack, “sitting for his picture by SIR JAMES THORNHILL” while “HOGARTH is taking a sketch on the L.—FIGG, a prize-fighter; GAY, the poet; and AUSTIN, a turnkey, standing by. JACK is fastened to the ground and handcuffed.” The scene renders onstage Cruikshank’s “The Portrait,” in Ainsworth’s Jack Sheppard (Figure 16). Cruikshank’s drawing represents an already theatricalized scene. Jack performs for his audience, who process his performance into various other modes and media. Once again blurring the boundaries between on- and offstage, Cruikshank’s actors and audience occupy the same space.

![Figure 16. George Cruikshank, "The Portrait," from Bentley's Miscellany, 1839.](image)

The viewer, too, watches from within the cell, participating in the collective task of cultural transmission performed by each observer in turn. The image inserts the viewer into a chain of over-the-shoulder views, each one receiving and retransmitting the scene. Thornhill’s portrait, Hogarth’s sketching, and Gay’s planned script begin reproducing Jack in fictionalized
versions of earlier moments in the lumpen cultural cycle. The image thus signals more than simply the play’s investment in visual culture; it also asserts its self-aware position in the lore cycle. In this self-aware moment, Buckstone’s play and Cruikshank’s image stage their own history, acting out an earlier part of the lore cycle of the lumpenproletariat. Jack, the image shows, stares back; he had even gone to the theatre, taking his own place within the lore cycle. The chain of cultural transmission swallows its own tail when Jack comments, “And so you’re Mr. Gay, the play-writer, eh? I saw your ‘Captives’ at Drury Lane one night. Poll, Bess, and I went into the gallery; we were highly entertained. The Princess of Wales was there too.” Immediately afterward, Jack gets to work filing his chains and soon escapes. The scene, I argue, represents a condensed parable of cultural transmission; the lore cycle’s processes incarcerate and contain the lumpen, but also produce its getaway. The pressure of containment springs Jack loose. Culture stages its own jailbreaks, as Jack demonstrates, and the processes of reproducing and transmitting, though it might appear to imprison the low, also participates in its excarceration.

Costuming the Lumpenproletariat

Cruikshank’s visual representation of the lumpen finds its counterpart in a newly self-reflexive theatricality of appearance and dress. This becomes evident in two related ways. The first of these is Mary Anne Keeley’s cross-dressing for the role of Jack; the second is a thematic concern with the problems of costume and clothing throughout the play. The 1839 Adelphi staging of Buckstone’s Jack Sheppard (with Mary Ann Keeley cross-dressed in the title role) re-stages earlier travestied performances of the lumpenproletariat. Cross-dressing, the favored tool of Colman’s “reversed” productions of The Beggar’s Opera in the 1770s and 80s, once again defines the stage lumpen. During the Adelphi’s winter pantomime season of 1840-41, Keeley starred in “Burlesque” productions of The Beggar’s Opera as Macheath. Keeley’s act produces another parallel link beside the already-existing historical connections between Macheath and Sheppard. The performances also concluded with “Nix My Polly,” a musical send-up of the popular song “Nix My Dolly” in Buckstone’s Sheppard. Keeley’s cross-dress, far from the distracting “lark” that Meisel labels it, formed a central part of lumpen theatricals in the years following 1839.

Even with such apparent continuities between the Haymarket’s landmark cross-dressing and Keeley’s later act, lumpen travesty operates in new ways in the 1830s and 40s. Charles Bannister, acting Polly in The Beggar’s Opera as an outrageously comic part, made the lumpen outré, even ridiculous. He even induced a sometimes-fatal hilarity, as Mrs. Fitzherbert’s obituary reminds us. Those stagings, of course, featured the cross-dressed male lumpen. Layers of feminine clothing at once contained the threat of the thieving, pirating underclasses and provided a crowd-pleasing, comedic version of Macheath in the 1780s. Acts like Bannister’s also created an ironic distance between the staged lumpenproletariat and its audience—the travesty almost forced reviewers to focus primarily on the casting and costuming choices.

Keeley’s act, in comparison, revives the cross-dressed mobility that the female lead acts out in Polly. Although the second part of Macheath and Polly’s adventures ends in a restoration of gender identities and proper costuming, Polly asserts her agency while dressed as a man throughout much of the play. Keeley, a woman playing the young Jack, re-poses the problems of gender, power, and costuming in the 1830s and 40s. Buckstone’s script provides no excuse for
cross-dressed theatricals—the gender reversal represents a theatrical supplement to the story, an element present only in the staging. Keeley’s act, like the theatrical embellishments of the elder Colman’s Haymarket, had no overwhelming diegetic reason to exist. Jack’s youth and small size only represent a partial reason to cross-dress the role. Like the earlier travesties of Beggar’s Opera, Keeley’s cross-dressed Jack Sheppard taps into persistent aspects of acting outcast; she embodies the slippery strength, the suppleness, the resilience of the lumpenproletariat.

The engraved portrait of Keeley as Jack visualizes the gendered implications of her role as lumpen hero (Figure 17).223 With hair short, Keeley’s Jack appears more like a young man than a cross-dressed woman. As Laurence Senelick notes, not all acts of travesty imply gender transgression, or the same types of gendering, and the cross-dressed renditions of Jack or Macheath reveal important differences. Keeley’s appearance implies androgyny much more strongly than, for example, Bannister’s Polly does. Keeley played Jack seriously, as her pose and expression suggests; cross-dressing the role seems much more than a “lark.” And although the image of Keeley shows hints of conventionally-presented female travesty (echoing, for example, the typical appreciation of the legs and hips in breeches-roles), at the same time, her costuming refrains from the attention-attracting excesses and grotesqueries of earlier travesty parts. Audiences, accordingly, received her in a much different way—the nervous laughter seems notably absent.

Figure 17. Mary Anne Keeley as Jack Sheppard at the Adelphi Theatre, 1839; courtesy the Harvard Theatre Collection.
If Ainsworth’s novel had emphasized the male power of Jack’s gaze in contrast to the vulnerable Thames’s “innocent virtue,” as Buckley argues, then Keeley’s performance layers the power and vulnerability, the feminine and masculine. Her gaze, in the print, does not meet the viewer’s, but she still directs it assertively outside the boundaries of her own space. Her act produces a powerless-and-powerful figure on stage, compressing the disadvantages of petite size and inexperience and the advantages of youth and strength into one role. This, too, echoes one of the longstanding appeals of the lumpenproletariat—the strength of weakness, of slippery resistance, of Macheath dodging the gallows, of Three-Finger’d Jack lurking in the Jamaican hills, of beggars gammoning a maim to fleece bystanders. The stage lumpen thrived on this dialectical pose, and Keeley’s act continued the tradition.

Keeley inherited a long history of sexually transgressive roles. Her most recent predecessor was the famous Eliza Vestris, perhaps the best-known English performer of breeches parts. Vestris was also an aggressive theatrical businesswoman and manager, famous for leasing and managing the Olympic Theatre in 1831, beginning a long and successful career. Vestris had also performed Macheath in The Beggar’s Opera, although, as Elliott Vanskike notes, Vestris’s act depended upon the simultaneous foregrounding of exaggerated gendered characteristics. Keeley, in contrast, plays a subtler, more androgynous version of the lumpen hero. The script, however, still allows her to perform situations as dangerous and as titillating as any in Colman’s productions of Polly. In Buckstone’s scene in the “flash ken,” Keeley as Jack appears with “Poll Maggot on one arm, and Edgeworth Bess on the other”; he kisses each in turn and takes a seat to begin the celebration (37-38). Jack continues such gallantry, “kissing his hand to the ladies” (41). Jack’s sexual misadventures, especially when performed by Keeley, acted out the sort of morally objectionable performance that led authorities specifically to censor references to the two wives.

Lumpen acts, which had long worked through the implications of masking and disguise, took a newly self-reflexive interest in costuming in Jack Sheppard. Polly had explored acts of cross-dressing and racial masking which continued to permeate plays such as Three-Finger’d Jack and Inkle and Yarico. Disguise and deception remained live issues in Atlantic theatre as pirates, slumming gentlemen, and beggars alternately concealed and exposed their identities. Jack, however, rarely relies on disguise and Keeley’s heavily advertised cross-dressing hardly represents a deception. Buckstone’s Jack Sheppard instead exhibits a marked fascination with clothing and sumptuary display, a preoccupation that we might read as a thematic counterpart to Keeley’s cross-dressing. The theme is an old one; eighteenth-century narratives of Jack’s life consistently comment upon his tendency to pilfer cloth and other decorative fashion accessories between stays in Newgate. Ainsworth, as well, writes the tendency into his narrative. Moreover, London thieves targeted those sorts of items quite commonly in the early eighteenth century, revealing another side of what Linebaugh evocatively calls the “shadow economy of clothing.” The trope appears in earlier stagings of the lumpenproletariat; Tom and Jerry must guard against having their “wipes prigged” and Trudge and Wowski anticipate the underclass copping of luxury display items upon their return to London.

The script’s description of Jack’s costuming reveals multiple outfit changes culminating in the “Scarlet hunting coat, trimmed with gold lace, high boots, and feathered hat” made famous by early stagings of Macheath. The outfits provide both cause and visible effect of Jack’s lumpen criminality. His escapes lead him inevitably to a cloth dealer or to a tailor’s shop for a new costume. Having acquired his new clothing, he uses the appearance of upper-class status to ease his way through London’s fashionably decadent nightlife. Jack enacts this sequence in the
first scene of the third act; having finished his escape offstage, Sheppard rejoins his crew in the
“Flash Ken.” The Flash Ken, a den for thieves and other criminally low types, once again
reprises the space of the lair or den that recurs in lumpen stagings. The cadger’s hideouts, the
caves of Tuckitomba and Three-Finger’d Jack, the holds of ships where sailors made mischief all
precede Buckstone’s scene. Repeatedly, such locations provide the lumpenproletariat with a
place to act out their underclass status.

In Buckstone’s Jack Sheppard, the Ken is where thieves speak their slang and present
their most attractive performances. Jack appears in his second dress, an elaborate getup that he
has just stolen. The stage directions reveal his spectacular appearance:

Jack . . . advances with Poll Maggot on one arm, and Edgeworth Bess on the other.
They all shout, jump up, and surround him. Jack stands laughing in the centre—
his coat is of brown flowered velvet, laced with silver—a waistcoat of white satin,
richly embroidered—smart boots with red heels—a muslin cravat, or steenkirk,
edged with point lace—a hat smartly cocked and edged with feathers. (37)

Jack’s triumphant entrance (following a “call at our tailor’s and milliner’s”) spurs a performance
of the famous “Nix My Dolly Pals, Fake Away.”

Singing and dancing to their flash song, the
lumpen crew celebrates the theatrical contiguity of escape, theft, sumptuous display, and lumpen
celebration. With a girl on each arm, Jack also acts out the dangerous immorality that titillated
audiences and frustrated authorities ever since Macheath’s multiple wives first surrounded him at
the end of The Beggar’s Opera. In this scene, Buckstone’s play enacts the associations that have
structured performances of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat for over a century. It is also a
repetitive cycle; although Jack’s jailbreak enables the celebration, he eventually returns to
Newgate Prison.

Cultural Transmission “Unkennelled”

Discipline and punishment provides a central trope for Jack’s 1839 adventures. Jack’s
punishment, on or off the stage, constitues a significant development in stagings of the
lumpenproletariat; although Macheath survives The Beggar’s Opera for a sequel, stagings of
lumpen villains had more consistently moved to bring them to justice in the nineteenth century.
The spectacles of theatrical punishments, however, always meet the popular counter-tendency of
excarceration. Bringing Jack to the gallows highlights his escapes; audiences hope for another,
and in some versions, Jack does achieve one last act of resistance. Furthermore, the lumpen
escape artist dangerously inspires collective violence, even in the more conservative stagings.

In Buckstone’s adaptation, justice appears faint of heart, avoiding the unabashed display
of a public execution. The gallows, the stage on which Jack enacts his last performance, moves
out of view, occurring after the final curtain. The script cannot resist a final moral lesson,
however. On the way to Tyburn, Jack appears “deadly pale, and without his iron bar,” his tool
of escape, and summarizes the lesson in one last speech:

It’s all up! They unkennelled me from Wych-street. I’ve darted from them, but
now where can I run?--I’m surrounded on every side. Yes, it’s no use--it’s all up
with Jack . . . I can do no more--they must come and take me. To day will end my
life--my short and wretched life! For let guilt be as bold and as brave on the outside as it may, all is surely misery, bitter misery, within! The poor London lads will, I hope, be warned by me, and my fate, for here is the end of sin! (70)

Although Jack appears cowed at this point, the stage versions hint at alternatives to Jack’s orderly discipline and punishment. His “unkennelling” provides a lingering model of lumpen resourcefulness and charisma.

Mob violence represents the return of the irrepressible lumpenproletariat. Riots at hangings occurred sporadically throughout the eighteenth century, and Linebaugh’s numerous and dispersed examples in *The London Hanged* reveal that fears of mob action at a hanging had a basis in reality. In Buckstone’s version, the seething crowd does not rescue Jack; justice, inevitably, is served. Jack has become a tragic hero and a moral exemplar by this point, submitting, even if unwillingly, to discipline. Requiring an outlet, however, the mob turns its fury against the thief-taker Jonathan Wild and his accomplice Mendez. It is, to some extent, an inconclusive ending; Meisel argues that the scene reveals the “tendency to go easy on Jack... Jack’s fate is left ambiguous despite Wild’s triumphant cry.”

I am less convinced that the play leaves Jack’s punishment in doubt. Judging from the dialogue and a diagrammed “disposition of the characters” at the end of the script, the play ends with Jack finally hemmed in (Figure 18). There appears no escape. A protective cordon of turnkeys and soldiers separates Jack from potential rescue by the crowd, which has receded into the background. If the lumpen hero escapes, he does it by implication only—after the performance ends, off stage, outside the boundaries of Buckstone’s play.

![Disposition of the Characters](https://example.com/image)

However, the widespread moral panic over lumpen performances reveals that lumpen resistance, at least in a figurative sense, did indeed survive his onstage hanging. Jack escapes to live again in Atlantic theatre culture. The tensions between crime and punishment, charisma and discipline acted out in Buckstone’s 1839 *Jack Sheppard* articulate broader cultural conflicts over the influence of the play and lumpen performances. Jack’s re-emergence, like many of his predecessors in the cultural cycles of lumpen characters, triggered a profound anxiety on the part of more respectable critics. The concerns, it seemed, were not groundless—the novel supposedly inspired a copycat crime with as much sensationalism as any melodrama when, on May 5, 1840, a valet murdered his upper-class employer, Lord William Russell. After his trial and sentencing, B. F. Courvoisier confessed that he Ainsworth’s story and the Surrey performance of J. T. Haines’s adaptation had inspired his transgression.232 The crime fulfilled the vague threat sensed by Sir John Fielding in 1773 when he warned against the tendency of *The Beggar’s Opera* to produce imitators of Macheath’s gang. The valet’s murderous imitation of Sheppard seemed to confirm the hazards posed by representations of the criminal lumpenproletariat, and the licensing authorities began to refuse permits to further versions of *Jack Sheppard*.

The moral panic surrounding *Jack Sheppard* persisted in its most institutionalized form for about a decade. John Stephens’s account of its censorship reveals that the Sheppard plays inspired a series of skirmishes between theatrical freedoms and official control. Early in the 1840s, the play was not formally suppressed, but “authorities lost no opportunity to discourage its appearance,” as Stephens observes. In 1845, for example, authorities prevented Frederick Fox Cooper’s City of London Theatre from admitting patrons to *Jack Sheppard* at half price. Unable to make the production profit at full price, Cooper abandoned the effort. The clampdown gradually tightened; the following year, the Lord Chamberlain required theatres to submit playbills for approval, and in 1848, as Stephens recounts, the Lord Chamberlain notified the Surrey and Haymarket theatres of his “refusal to sanction any further versions of the play in question.”233 Other attempts to revive *Jack Sheppard* or other “Newgate plays” met increasing obstinacy on the part of the licensing authorities after 1848.

The popularity and rising institutional resistance to *Jack Sheppard* suggests that, perhaps more so than at other times, the lumpenproletariat stood at the center of anxieties about cultural production and transmission. A caricature in the *Penny Satirist*, for example, reveals public concern over such matters (Figure 19).234 The print depicts a group of unruly young boys, caps tilted rakishly, “Just Come from Seeing Jack Sheppard,” as the subtitle announces. The image does not specify which performance they have just viewed; the playbills posted in the background indicate that the youths might have attended any one of the versions at the Adelphi, Surrey, Victoria, Garrick or Sadler’s Wells theatres.

Printed dialogue (accompanying the picture but unavailable for reproduction) clarifies their reasons for attending the “robber-piece,” as they call it—moral plays are “so precious dull” next to the charismatic and “jovial” performances of the underclasses. Even more dangerously, the youths wish to “be among ’em in real arrest.” This, of course, is the threat implied in Courvoisier’s murder of his master Lord Russell. The corruption of the city’s youth seems one of the social problems targeted by this image; at the same time, the image asserts that the real danger lies elsewhere. The grimacing, caricatured faces of the youngsters provoke laughter, rather than outrage or fear, and their comically gangly grouping exhibits none of the threatening qualities even of a Tom, Jerry, and Logic walking the streets of London. Their words (“it only wants a little pluck to begin with”) expose their admiration of their lumpen hero as simply laughable.
The real danger, the illustration suggests, resides in cultural transmission. Jack accomplishes his cultural jailbreaks in popular culture now. The cartoon puts its finger on this when one of the boys admires "how such coves are handled down to posterity, I think it’s call’d, by means of books, and plays, and pictures!" Recognition of the power of cultural transmission (or the "March of Knowledge," as the cartoon titles it) constitutes a significant part of lumpen appeal. The lumpenproletariat survives, not just in its jailbreaks and its Atlantic circulations, but in its persistence in the popular memory. Perhaps that motivates the confession of the murderous valet Courvoisier—by paraphrasing and claiming the influence of Ainsworth’s novel, he inserts himself into the lore cycle, into the chain of cultural transmission, looking over Hogarth’s shoulder as he sketched Jack. Such conscious participation in the cycles of cultural production and reception brings Gay and Hogarth into Buckstone’s play. Fitzball tapped into this when he had his characters in The Tread Mill use Egan’s Life in London as a tourist guidebook, and Mose resuscitates such participation referring to the bar full of “Billy Waters” types. The lumpen lore cycles thrive on self-reference and, as the Penny Satirist’s cartoon reminds readers, become
dangerous at least in part because of the ability to pass on coded legacies despite the strictures of
official society.

*Jack Sheppard* in America

The lumpen, as it had before, conducted its breakout legacies along the circum-Atlantic currents. No matter how hard authorities fought the popularity of lumpen performances, and no matter how often they executed him onstage, Jack Sheppard managed to transfer his excarceral skills to broader cultural arenas. Jack gave authorities the slip repeatedly, spreading to other locales. Jonas B. Phillips’s adaptation, for example, appeared at New York City’s Bowery Theatre within two months of Keeley’s premier as Jack in London. Mid-century New York City had grown into one of the largest, most active waypoints in the transfer of Atlantic goods, people, and culture. Amidst myriad cultural interconnections, Atlantic performances of race and class hit close to home. The quick transfer of cultural material underscores *Jack Sheppard*’s liveliness in making its way along nodes in the chains of cultural transmission. It also reveals once again the penchant of popular theatricals, like their lumpen heroes, for breaking out, for enacting the same excarceration they thematically represented. This dynamic movement, the slipping of cultural bounds, takes center stage in the American version as the lore cycle plays variations on its dominant themes.

Phillips’s *Jack Sheppard, or the Life of a Robber!* premiered at the Bowery Theatre, New York’s working class theatre, on December 30, 1839. Phillips was no stranger to theatricals of underclass life—five years earlier he had penned (also for the Bowery), the popular *Life in New York*, a local version of Tom and Jerry’s escapades. At the Bowery, Phillips’s Jack enjoyed, as Odell writes, “all the rope he needed” after a brief interruption by Edwin Forrest’s *Metamora*. The Bowery’s act followed the Adelphi’s lead, putting Jack in cross-dress while all the rest of the characters appeared conventionally cast. The Bowery seems a particularly fitting place to stage the escapes and insouciances of the Atlantic lumpenproletariat. The audiences, actors, and managers of antebellum New York participated in an extended period of cultural reshuffling. Peter Buckley calls the transition a “cultural bifurcation” that eventually separated the New York theatrical scene in different social strata. That concept, however, seems much too simplistic and binary to describe the unstable landscape of antebellum New York theatre, a scene where the Chatham theatre could go from lower-class theatre to church and back again within the space of a decade. Although “bifurcation” misses most of the processes of antebellum theatre, class associations did solidify during this period.

In the years leading up to Phillips’s *Jack Sheppard*, the Bowery entertained the working classes while the Park Theatre gradually became the upper-class venue, offering, as Buckley writes, a “mix of Shakespeare, farce and sentimental drama.” The Bowery Theatre, with Thomas Hamblin as manager from 1830, embarked on a deliberate campaign of innovative offerings, drawing working-class crowds with “performing animals, scenic effects, including dioramas, and afterpieces such as living statuary and impersonations.” Although New York City had very different institutions of theatrical authority, the Bowery resembles the illegitimate theatres of London of the same period in its variety and resistance to “legitimate” forms. As one might expect from a theatrical venue in the middle of public negotiations over the relationships between class and culture, the Bowery was a tumultuous place. It saw frequent riots, which centrally inform Phillips’s production of *Jack Sheppard*—offstage violence shoves up against
onstage rioting, the performances intermingling, reacting to and constructing the contexts for the other. The staging of popular violence in Phillips’s *Jack Sheppard* impels the lumpen lore cycle in significant new directions.

The Bowery’s *Jack Sheppard* emphasizes many of the same themes as did the London productions. Jack’s audacious sumptuary display signals once again resistance to cultural authority through appropriation of elite status symbols. He appears in the second act flaunting his freedom in a “rich scarlet riding suit, a broad belt, with a hanger attached, high boots and laced hat in his hand” (2:4). Later, in Act 3, he enters the dining room of Kneebone, one of Jonathan Wild’s partners, “in a handsome roquelaure, which on entering he throws off. His dress—coat of brown flowered velvet laced with silver, richly embroidered white satin waistcoat, shoes with red heels and large diamond buckles, pearl coloured silk stockings a muslin cravat edged with lace, ruffles of the same material and handsome sword” (3:1). The clothing and fashion accessories that Jack steals punctuate his brazen entrances, claiming a place at fashionable tables where he is not welcome.

The major significant difference of Phillips’s version occurs in the ending, the play within-the-play staging Jack’s public execution. Phillips’s rewrite of the ending represents a significant riff on the Atlantic stage lumpen. It grants the lumpenproletariat more active agency, more effective resistance to authoritative discipline, more solidarity with the mass of common people. Most of all, Phillips’s rewrite offers Jack the chance to speak out at the end. *Jack Sheppard*’s ending, regardless of the version, plays with the order and details of four significant events: Jack’s procession to Tyburn, a rescue attempt, usually by Blueskin, the death or potential death of Jack and Blueskin, and the death of Wild. The order and outcome of each of these endings makes significant statements about the relationships between lumpen rebellion, authority, individual action, and mob violence. More or less radical social statements emerge depending upon the targets of the crowd violence, how Jack dies, and whether the authorities complete the public performance of Jack’s hanging. These endings range from J. T. Haines’s Surrey version, in which mob violence fails to rescue Jack; T. L. Greenwood’s version allows the official drama of Jack’s death to run its course, hanging Jack amidst crowd violence. Buckstone’s adaptation, of course, leaves almost all of this violence, including Jack’s hanging, to the audience’s imagination.

Each of these versions gives and takes lumpen radicalism in different proportions, tempering violence with discipline, collective action with submission to authority. The Bowery performance, although it too offers a hesitant vision of radical lumpen breakout, enacts a significantly different conclusion. In the Bowery production, Jack’s gang actually rescues him from hanging amidst the commotion of the crowd. Collective action and underclass cooperation abort the narrative sequence of proper punishment. Jack still, however, dies in the end—radical lumpen acts have their onstage limits. At the climactic moment of the official drama of execution, Jack’s lumpen cohort disrupts the script. The stage directions read:

> “Music. He ascends the Platform—a murmur through the crowd. He kneels and as the executioner is about adjusting the rope, Blueskin and his followers rush through the crowd, cut the rope. The soldiers fire and wound Blueskin and Jack. At this moment, Wild’s house appears in Flames—shouts—as Blueskin rushes through the crowd with Jack in his arms” (3.6)

The rescue, although not directly prompted by rioting, comes under cover of crowd action (as the mob begins to “murmur”). Importantly, it is collective action, the lumpen cohort rescuing its
The ending is much closer to Haines’s version, which rescues but then shoots Jack. The differences are subtle but important, centering on the play’s ability to imagine viable popular action.

The Bowery performance begins to imagine such mob violence when Jack’s mother narrates a dream of a popular disturbance at the gallows:

“Listen. I’ll tell you of a dream I had last night. I was at Tyburn. There was a gallows erected and a great mob around it. Thousands of people, with corse-like faces. In the midst of them, there was a cart with a man in it, and it was Jack, my son Jack. They were going to hang him. And opposite to him, with a book in his hand, sat Jonathan Wild in a parson’s cassock and band. And when they came to the gallows, Jack leaped from the cart. And in his stead they hung Jonathan Wild. How the mob shouted and so did I. Ha! Ha! Ha!” (2:5)

Jack’s mother, delusional and nearly incoherent in the madhouse, dreams of the dispensation of popular justice. It occurs, however, with only minimal assistance from the assembled throngs. Her dream crowd, “corse-like,” eerily echoes the passivity of most of Jack Sheppard’s onstage mobs. Retelling her dream, Jack’s mother verbalizes the tendencies of most performances of Jack Sheppard; if Jack should survive hanging, he must do it just as he performs his prison breaks, alone. The various English versions of the play all hint at this kind of ending, inevitably delivering only partially satisfying performances of the crowd’s verdict. Jack’s mother, of course, dreaming the crowd’s approval, hints at the potential for underclass disorder and mayhem. Their shouting, echoed by the insane laughing of Jack’s mother, brings to audible life the frightening power of the rioting crowd. Phillips’s version acts out such an ending, drawing it out and allowing some level of effective resistance to authority.

The effectiveness of theatrical lumpen resistance in this scene turns on Jack’s voice, on his words and how he uses them. The various endings of Jack’s performance usually see him remorseful or repentant; the narrative sequence silences Jack and the scripts usually reduce his actions to a paragraph of pantomimic scene description, voice neither implied nor heard. Buckstone’s and Haines’s versions, especially, script the ending in a dizzying blur of pantomime and visual spectacle; the lumpen voice echoes only distantly in the crowd noise.

Phillips, however, allows Jack to voice the sentiments of lumpen resistance at the end. Audiences at the Bowery in 1839 heard Jack deliver what might be an inspiring speech. Phillips’s version thus represents a significant deviation from the other Jack Sheppard plays. In one of the random, ironically effective accidents of historical preservation, however, the last leaf of the play’s only known version, a manuscript in the Harvard Theatre Collection, has been torn, excising Jack’s speech. Jack is silenced, almost certainly inadvertently, by an unknown hand, in all likelihood one with no personal stake in silencing the lumpen. This seems the too-frequent fate of popular culture’s physical remains, the result of some combination of elite disdain and loving overuse. The workings of cultural transmission, however, have the last word, and we cannot know what Jack said.
Mob Performances

1839, the date of Jack Sheppard’s resurgence, stands at the midpoint of perhaps the most important two decades in the formation of an Atlantic culture of collective violence and mob identity. These ten years represent a significant stage in London’s imaginative performance of lumpen rebellion, excarceration, and mob violence. By 1848, London’s official censorship gradually relegated Jack Sheppard’s theatre of rioting from mainstream culture to the ducking and dodging responses of smaller theatres. The 1830s and 1840s represent significant decades in American theatre culture as well. Phillips’s 1839 Jack Sheppard followed a decade of theatrical disorder on and off stage. The period immediately following Jack’s debut, though quieter than the riot-prone 1830s, saw a shift in American cultural performances of crowd violence and lumpen unruliness. The dip in violence did not forecast the waning of mob violence; instead, it led up to the Astor Place Riots of May 1849, which mark a drastic shift in American public culture and the role of the unruly underclass.

The specter of rioting crowds haunts Jack Sheppard, and the moralizing English censorship reveals that such fears extended off the stage. Of all the transatlantic stagings of the story, the Bowery version comes closest to enacting the power of radical “mobocracy.” At the same time, rioting and other collective violence are tricky actions, as E. P. Thompson famously argues about eighteenth-century food riots. Popular violence, he argues, frequently operates according to a conservative “moral economy” that works to restore conventional perquisites of the lower classes. The disempowered exercise their collective power, but do not always serve the most radical of social agendas. Such might have been the situation at the Bowery Theatre, where, as Bruce McConachie argues, the bulk of the working-class audience seems “traditionalists,” as opposed to labor radicals or “revivalists.”

In the antebellum American theatre, however, certain forms of direct popular action, often violent action, had come to be the norm. As Paul Gilje argues in The Road to Mobocracy, riots “became a fixed feature of the American stage in the first half of the nineteenth century.” Peter Buckley describes the period from 1833 to 1837—the years directly preceding the appearance of Jack Sheppard—as the “Anni Mirabili” of collective violence, a period remarkable for the fifty-two riots “of varying duration” recorded in New York City newspapers. The frequency of these events points to a social logic of rioting; the mob’s habitual success, Buckley argues, testifies “to the fact that the legitimacy of audience sovereignty remained in effect.” Ritual and recurring mob action represents a persistent element of antebellum American society, an accepted and effective strategy for social expression. Even if the working-class audiences held conservative views on various subjects, they participated enthusiastically in an assertive plebeian public culture, which makes the appearance of an American Jack Sheppard and its riot-prone mobs an important moment in stagings of lumpen culture.

Theatrical Celebrity and the American Lumpenproletariat

When Jack Sheppard arrived in its American guise, it followed a decade of intense public unruliness inside and outside theatres. Mob violence and boisterous resistance, the excarceration of the onstage lumpen played out off stage in New York City. The stage had also prepared the way with popular representations of underclass rebellion. Robert Montgomery Bird’s 1831 hit
The Gladiator, popular alongside Jack Sheppard, offers perhaps the most forceful staging of underclass rebellion in antebellum American theatre. It also presents a very different style of lumpen resistance than Jack’s slick escapes. The play’s muscular star, Edwin Forrest, produced an iconic moment in the theatre of underclass when he struck a defiant pose and proclaimed:

Death to the Roman Fiends, that make their mirth
Out of the groans of bleeding misery!
Ho, slaves, arise! It is your hour to kill!
Kill and spare not—For wrath and liberty!—
Freedom for bondmen—freedom and revenge!

At his cry, battle commenced; the audience heard “Shouts and trumpets” and watched the enslaved gladiators “rush and engage in combat, as the curtain falls” (198). With scenes such as this, The Gladiator found immediate popularity and held the stage for over twenty years, helping to cement Edwin Forrest’s reputation as the preeminent American actor. Forrest’s presence defined the Bowery Theatre’s style, and audiences watching Jack Sheppard inevitably witnessed the star perform there.

Bird’s play presents the story of Spartacus, loosely based on the well-known actions of the historical Thracian slave-turned gladiator (d. 71 B.C.) who led a revolt against the Roman authorities. Attracting oppressed masses, Spartacus’s revolt reputedly achieved its initial goal of escape from Italy. Following the classical formula of hubris and downfall, the rebels returned to Italy for more plunder, where Roman forces eventually killed their leader and executed the rebels in mass crucifixions. Compressing the timetable and simplifying the action, Bird’s production presents a heroic leader’s inspiring revolt against Roman power, an uprising which finally fails after Spartacus’s forces split into uncoordinated fragments.

With The Gladiator, a new lumpen hero emerged on stage, exemplified by Edwin Forrest’s muscular, aggressive acting style. Theatrical portraits emphasize the traits that made Forrest a favorite with the Bowery crowd. A caricature from 1852, while confirming Forrest’s popular cultural presence, depicts his characteristic style. The caricature depicts Forrest in an exaggerated manner that amplifies details of his stage presence. His muscular physicality (he often played the role bare-chested) appealed to the laborers in the audience. As Peter Buckley notes, the Bowery faithful were typically of the laboring classes, defined significantly by their participation in the physical business of making a city run. Forrest appealed to the same sense of laboring physicality that Mose later acts out in running with the local fire company’s machine and using his fists as all-purpose negotiating tools. The depiction of Forrest also highlights the extent to which a particular style of masculinity was on display at the Bowery. Leaning aggressively forward, he clearly asserts his own male presence in a way that tolerates no resistance.

The lithograph pictures Forrest in what could have been a dangerously suggestive role—acting the part of a slave (albeit a Roman one) in a script that makes multiple, if veiled, allusions to race and ethnicity. The Gladiator’s presentation of Roman slaves rebelling conjures up (indirectly, at least) the specter ever-present in antebellum America of slave revolt. Forrest appears quite pale-skinned in this image; in other depictions, however, he appears slightly darker
of skin, and one print pictures his hair curlier than the wild coiffeur pictured in the caricature (Figure 20). The plays never directly link Roman bondmen with American slaves, but one might read hints of the association in his stage presentation. The muscular male body, constantly on display in an economy of slave exchange, could also visually signal African American slavery to an antebellum viewer.

Figure 20. Forrest as Spartacus in *The Gladiator*, courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection.

Audiences, too, would have been subtly, and perhaps subconsciously, aware of the performances rhetorical associations with slavery; Spartacus had appeared before as a character in accounts of slave rebellion in the Atlantic world. The prospectus accompanying Fawcett’s
pantomime version of Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack, for example, declared that Jack had “ascended above Spartacus.” Just before Bird’s Gladiator staged Roman rebellion, Ira Aldridge (a New York African American actor of rising fame) acted the part of Three-Finger’d Jack nobly in William Murray’s popular melodrama version for English and American audiences. Echoes abounded onstage, and the Bowery’s acts let slip the interracial genealogies of underclass rebellion. Forrest’s Roman rebellion performed the rebellious Atlantic lumpenproletariat, even if inadvertently.

Bowery audiences, moreover, enjoyed early blackface performance, which one might read as evidence of condescension and racism. In the 1830s, however, as W. T. Lhamon, Jr., argues, T. D. Rice’s jumped an interracial Jim Crow to popular approval. An anonymous painting depicting his 1833 engagement at the Bowery, for example, captures the physical energy and crowd participation of Rice’s blackface act. The audience’s B’hoys, almost crowding Rice off the stage, do not keep their condescending distance. They rush the stage in what Eric Lott describes as a “grand collective lunge toward the performer that has itself taken on theatrical interest.” Instead, the audience appears enthusiastically receptive to blackface and racial representations. The onstage crush of bodies and the fight on the left side of the scene, as Lott argues, suggest that violent male working-class self-promotion does play an important part in the reception of blackface performance. At the same time, it is important to remember that the violence and self-promotion that Lott finds in the image are byproducts—the result of the audience’s desire to claim Rice’s lumpen, blackened, turning and wheeling charisma. The same desires that had pushed earlier representations of race onto New York City stages work here as well. The dances of African Sal and Dusty Bob, not to mention those of T. D. Rice, shadow performances of The Gladiator, even if blackness appears only obliquely in Forrest’s acts.

Such staged echoes of interracial, underclass rebellion do not necessarily mean, of course, that the Bowery Theatre was a lumpen venue. Buckley’s careful study of the Bowery audiences concludes that they we would not particularly consider them lumpenproletariat. They were, he finds, generally well established in the community, moving around less than one might expect. They were not an outcast or unassimilated bunch, and there seems to be no demographic sense in which they might be labeled outcast, underclass, or lumpen. They did maintain, however, a theatrical mobility of identity and a flamboyant street presence that, as Buckley argues, produced a continual street travesty of “Uppertendom.” Their conspicuous display remains visible in 1848, in scenes from Baker’s Glance at New York, and they continued marking their territory long after the initial rise of working-class Bowery culture.

The marked divergence of cultural styles and class identifications in the two decades after the premiere of Bird’s Gladiator solidified Bowery culture as (if not lumpen) decidedly anti-elite and anti-aristocratic. As the painting of Rice’s blackface act reveals, the Bowery blurred the distinctions between pit and stage, between performer and audience; young B’hoys climbed on stage to dance along. They answered the call, still echoing from Inkle and Yarico’s performances of “Come Let Us Dance and Sing,” to participate in lumpen, interracial theatre culture. They wished, along with Jack Sheppard’s young London fans, to join the march of lumpen cultural transmission. Moreover, Forrest’s performances took full advantage of these practices. His exploitation of physical languages of emotion and gesture worked to “collapse the distinction between his self-expressive and his representational modes in performance”; thus, when Spartacus shouted, “Freedom and revenge!” he spoke, as McConachie argues, “not only to the enslaved gladiators on stage, but directly to the audience as well.” For Forrest’s audiences,
The Gladiator acted out provocative and dangerous variations on Jack Sheppard’s underclass themes, converting hints of mob violence into outright rebellion. Audiences watching plays like The Gladiator and Jack Sheppard celebrated the rebellious potential of underclass characters.

The Mushroom Warriors of Roman Dunghills

The Gladiator, according to some assessments, is a conservative play tailored for conservative working-class audiences at the Bowery. Bruce McConachie, for example, reads heroic plays such as The Gladiator and Forrest’s popular Metamora as allegories of the failure of working-class emancipation. Invariably, an epic hero inspires a violent revolution against an oppressive and much more powerful foe, only to be undone by his own followers. McConachie claims that the popular heroic melodramas starring Forrest were “[o]stensibly concerned to assert the equality of all men”; at the same time, such plays “actually empower a charismatic hero and reduce the people to the status of victims.” There is a degree of credibility to this interpretation. Forrest, playing the part with vigor and action, dominated the stage much as his heroic characters dominated their common followers. His roles dominated stagings, overshadowing the less charismatic commoners. The plays’ lower-class characters, divided and confused, seem always to abandon their best chance at freedom, undermining their own rebellion. Moreover, the people do not just fail to emancipate themselves; they actively turn on and defeat the rebellion, working against their own best interests and making such plays antidemocratic and hero-worshipping. As McConachie concludes, such productions in the end declare the “fickle, childlike nature of the people.”

Recognizing the limitations of such performances provides a useful starting point from which to understand how plays featuring popular underclass protagonists could exist in an arguably conservative social setting. Spartacus’s rebellion, however, presents a more complicated (and perhaps more radical) vision than McConachie’s interpretation allows. Instead of representing the failure of democratic rebellion, The Gladiator presents an allegorical performance of class mobility, re-enacting a complicated story of how the lumpenproletariat constructs and disrupts collective organization. The play’s structure of class oppression produces groups of people that look and act something like Marx’s lumpenproletariat. The lumpen initially provides the raw material—the manpower and the social conditions—for Spartacus’s rebellion, but lumpen impulses also act as a limiting factor, destabilizing the rebellion when it aspires to aristocratic status. The play envisions the lumpenproletariat as cause and effect of shifting class formations, a productive force that continually disrupts existing class relations. The assumption that the play represents a heroic leader betrayed by the unreliable common people fails to account for the shifts in class position and the production of new class identities during the course of the plot.

Early in the play, Spartacus follows an ironic and complicated path to the position of lumpen outcast. Before his capture, he is a shepherd and leader in pastoral Thrace, embodying a utopian combination of the working and ruling classes. As his Roman masters observe, “Spartacus, so late a bondman, has a soul for master; though a shepherd breed, he has fought battles, ay, and led men too,—[s]ome mountain malcontents in his own land” (199). Spartacus, in fact, has actively subdued what might pass for Thrace’s disgruntled lumpen underclasses. The gladiator hero thus occupies a precarious class position, as the play’s script makes clear. Crassus, for example, agrees that “The rogue is not a common one” (199). Spartacus’s lumpen
status makes him, in characteristic theatrical formulation, admirable and uncommon, but at the same time outcast. Brought back to Rome, he is made, as he says, “a slave. I was bought, I say, I was bought. Do you doubt it? That man scourges me; thou didst threaten me with stripes; every Roman I look upon, speaks to me of scourging. Nay they may: I was bought” (179). The script reduces Spartacus to the lowest possible class location, as much of a “rogue” as Jack Sheppard, the Red Rover, or Morano.

Spartacus’s ascendancy to a leadership role in the revolt occurs quickly, almost invisibly, as if to assert his natural pastoral leadership. At the same time, his leadership solidifies the lumpenproletariat as a class. Spartacus proclaims his intent to “rouse up and gather the remnants of those tribes by Rome destroyed, invited to their vengeance” (216). United by a common foe, the slave rebellion prefigures Melville’s motley “Anacharsis Clootz deputation,” with its beginnings of underclass solidarity across tribal and national lines. Spartacus, for example, asserts a nascent lumpen commonality when he says, of a fellow gladiator from Spain, “I should bethink me of his country, as of mine, ruined and harried by our common foe; his kinsman slain, his wife and children sold, and nothing left of all his country’s greatness, save groans and curses on the conquerors” (193). Class position begins to assert itself against the divisions of national identities. Spartacus’s revolt builds on the slaves’ collective sense of rootlessness, of disconnection, of dispossession—traits that Marx used to define the lumpenproletariat in 1852, and which had consistently defined the underclasses in theatrical performances. Spartacus knew it, too; in a line that Bowery audiences must have found rousing, he refers to his men as “the mushroom warriors of Roman dunghills” (214).

As Spartacus slides toward lumpen status, he becomes part of an increasingly theatrical underclass. As a gladiator, he is an actor, fighting in public performances. Within the economy of the play, this role is a disdained one; as Crassus, a Roman Praetor, remarks, “my flesh always creeps, to see these cold-blood slaughters” (187). The ambivalence about spectacular entertainments, the play-within-the-play of the gladiatorial show, seems equal parts complicity in the traditional anti-theatrical prejudice and distaste for the waste, rather than productive labor, of such a theatrical entertainment. It reveals, perhaps, a latent distrust of the lumpenproletariat—for elements of society that, unlike the working-class audiences of the Bowery, carry out less discernible functions in society.

As the lumpen rebellion gains momentum, it becomes ever more theatrical. The mutinous characters even costume themselves, reminding audiences of innumerable such acts of defiance on Atlantic stages. The Centurion Jovius, for example, relates that each “rogue has got a Roman harness on, filched from the carcass of a Roman veteran” (199). Crassus finds it, much as reviewers found Bannister’s drag Macheath, or as authorities found Jack Sheppard’s audacious clothing theft, “scandalous!” (199). The theft of attire (or armor) serves a more practical purpose—namely, protection—than Jack’s sumptuous thieving did. At the same time, “scandalous” seems a little overstated if one is only concerned with the practicalities of warfare. Crassus finds outrageous (and audiences loved about the lumpenproletariat) the impudence of filching armor off dead soldiers, the audacity of stripping the enemy and using their costuming against them. These theatrical, symbolic, insouciant acts of the lumpenproletariat persist in Atlantic culture from Macheath’s first appearance onward.

The scandalous resistance of The Gladiator’s slaves, of course, must come to an end. Spartacus’s downfall begins before the “people” betray him, when he usurps the same authority that he initially rebels against. The gladiator hero becomes, in the play’s economy, just like his Roman oppressors. As he gradually assumes the rhetoric and actions of the dictatorial forces he
resists, his underclass rebellion falls apart, ultimately betrayed by the insubordinate action of some of his forces. In the fifth and final act, he begins to echo the language of the Roman oppressors; he uses the same scornful “SIRRah!” with which the Roman masters addressed their gladiator slaves (224). As Spartacus achieves military success, the slave revolt generates its own authority structures. As the lumpenproletariat force becomes institutionalized, however shakily, it experiences its own rebellion, a “mad mutiny,” as the rebel leader calls it, which ultimately gives victory to the Roman forces (223). Faced with this insubordination, Spartacus indignantly abandons them to defeat, exclaiming, “I should be very glad: did I not lead them ever on to victory? And did they not forsake me? Wretched fools, this was my vengeance, yea, my best of vengeance” (223). His reaction reveals his rhetorical performance of his oppressors’ identity; “Even as the Romans punish, so I’ll punish,” he declares (223).

The play completes Spartacus’s rhetorical upward movement as he bravely faces the overwhelming strength of the Roman forces. The events of the play’s ending have a quality of inevitability about them reminiscent of Jack Sheppard’s trip to the scaffold; the rebellious character cannot last long in the face of such power. Spartacus dies, but after a rather predictable sequence of heroic and doomed stands, sinks to the stage as a heroically overcome character. The near-deification of Spartacus in the ending (reinforced by the starring charisma of Forrest) allows, almost forces, audiences to mourn the hero’s defeat. Everyone, including his fellow characters, recognizes the heroizing effect of the inevitable defeat. Even his Roman archenemy Crassus declares that Spartacus should be regarded “not as a base bondman, but as a chief enfranchised and ennobled. If we denied him honour while he lived, justice shall carve it on his monument” (242). By the play’s end, the characters that began underclass have become institutionalized, suitable for monuments and honors.

Spartacus’s assimilation into the ranks of respectability by way of the narrative of historical inevitability, however, does not completely de-claw the lumpenproletariat. Disruptive underclasses enact the last independent action before historical inevitability takes over. With things falling apart around Spartacus, he finds he must rely for escape upon “perfidious pirates,” who “are most treacherous hounds, and may set sail without us,” as a lieutenant says (224, 226). The Gladiator’s pirates signal the play’s structural reliance on the lumpenproletariat. Although it makes only passing reference to the genre, in 1831 nautical melodrama saturated Atlantic stages, and decades of theatricals condition audience response. As Spartacus begins to act out the rhetoric of the Romans, audiences look elsewhere for their underclass heroes; the pirates, although only a shadowy presence in the play, nevertheless represent a mode of collective agency that contrasts with Spartacus’s growing tyranny. The pirates do indeed desert the rebel force, assuring the rebellion’s defeat.

The play’s performance of the lumpenproletariat demands consideration of the opportunistic pirates in the background who act just as the slaves did earlier, breaking away in rebellion. I read the play, then, as (if not more optimistic about the possibility of liberating revolt) at least more perceptive about the changing nature of class relationships. The story acts out the uptake of the lumpenproletariat, the heady vertical urge of group organization that roves Spartacus to bring together the disparate parts of a fragmented underclass, and then to organize them in a replica of the social order against which he rebels. In the end, as he earns respect from his foes, another lumpen rebellion splinters off from the slave revolt. We might read it as a pessimistic vision, focusing on the inability of the lumpenproletariat to remain united and organized. At the same time, the play celebrates the rebellious potential of mobility, slipperiness, and opportunism. The Gladiator presents a more complex vision of dynamic class
affiliation and direct democratic action. If Bird’s *Gladiator* represents the failure of working-class rebellion, its lumpenproletariat acts out a more complex, dynamic view of class relationships and collective action. Slippery segments of the play’s class structure play the part of the lumpenproletariat, first enabling and participating in Spartacus’s rebellion and finally escaping defeat at the end. We might understand Bird’s *Gladiator*, then, as performing the defeat of upward-reaching ambitions by the horizontal mobility of the reliably unreliable lumpen.

Bowery audiences watched similar outcomes for lumpen rebellion in the struggles of Phillips’s London gang and Forrest’s “mushroom warriors.” The hero might go down in the end (valiantly, as Forrest’s Spartacus demonstrates), but both plays assert the lumpenproletariat’s underclass volatility against the discipline of authority. As Marx later did, both *The Gladiator* and *Jack Sheppard* work through processes of containing the excarceral urges of the rebellious remainders of society. London’s vigorous censorship of *Jack Sheppard* perhaps represents a more complete containment, but Jack’s gallows mob still seethed at the end of the play for most of a decade. In America, the lumpen appeared perhaps more active on stage; certainly, collective violence was a more pronounced marker of American street culture through the end of the 1840s. Among them, the performances reveal the continual and popular transmission of slippery underclass elements, characters liable to escape, to rise up in revolt. Despite the continued resistance of authorities, the breakout acts of Macheath, Morano, Three-Finger’d Jack, Tuckitomba, and Mose continued to give Atlantic audiences what they came to see.

**Epilogue: Dreams of Desire and Disavowal**

As Jack went underground in London, and just a few years before Marx names the lumpenproletariat in the *Eighteenth Brumaire*, the Astor Place riots of May 1849 theatricalized mob action and class relationships in the New York streets. For three days in early May, mobs rioted outside the Astor Place Opera House, where William Macready was scheduled to appear. The climactic event of the riots occurred on the evening of May 10, when thousands of working-class New Yorkers gathered outside the Astor Place Opera House to protest Macready’s presence. Amidst showers of stone and shattered windowpanes, members of the vastly outnumbered militia fired into the crowd. Twenty-one people died and over a hundred received serious injuries. The following night, mobs again gathered to hear inflammatory speeches in City Hall Park, and some five thousand of them then marched toward Astor Place, where others had already gathered. This crowd, however, dispersed without violence or loss of life, and the riots drew to their denouement on their third night.

The simple version of the story is that an actor’s quarrel caused the riots. Edwin Forrest, the representative of melodramatic theatrical style, working-class masculinity, and American nationalistic sentiment, had developed a public and contagious rivalry with William Macready. The first convergence of their careers occurred in 1826, when Macready, on his first American tour, competed with Forrest for publicity, though not for audiences. Forrest, the junior competitor, had already claimed the Bowery audience, and Macready sided with the Park and its elitist patrons. The feud simmered for nearly two decades, until 1845 and 1846, when audiences hissed during Forrest’s London tour and Forrest returned the insult at one of Macready’s Edinburgh performances. Those events returned to haunt Macready’s American tour in 1848 as audiences protested his appearance and rioted repeatedly at his performances.
The event, labeled the result of a “paltry quarrel of two actors,” represents more than an absurdly disproportional response to cultural frictions. Instead, the riots play out a street-level version of the Bowery’s acts, the logical mass response to cultural developments in New York City. The Astor Place riots enacted the growing tensions in a city characterized by an “Upper Ten” and a “Lower Million,” as George Lippard sensationally described the city’s class divisions in 1853. The riots, in addition, responded to elites that had claimed association with English culture; theatrical style, elitist snobbery, and economic advantage all fed into the riots. Peter Buckley describes these developments vividly:

From the Park—both theatre and public ground—of the 1820s, New York’s culture grew along two routes: one course followed Chatham Street and then up the Bowery—the home of melodrama, menageries and the B’hoys of Edwin Forrest, Mike Walsh and Ned Buntline; the other followed the uptown march of fashion along Broadway to the luxury of the Fifteenth Ward and finally to the Opera House, the home of Macready. These two cultural axes were not initially [in] opposition, yet gradually there developed, especially after 1837, two distinct idioms, two audiences and two versions of what constituted the “public” sphere of communication and amusement. In 1849, the cultures clashed at a point where the two roads almost met—Astor Place. (30-31)

The riots mark a watershed moment on the American side of looming class struggles; before the Astor Place events, theatre rioting had held an accepted and conventional place in American theatres. Before 1849, authorities used little use of force against rioters; the mobocracy exercised legitimate control in the theatre. The Astor Place riots, in contrast to the more conventional prerogatives usually exercised inside American theatres, presented the threat of something more insidious: the transformation of the working class into something like an uncontrollable lumpenproletariat. The press had followed the actors’ quarrel that led up to the riots with the “interest usually reserved for the careers of notorious pugilists, criminals and politicians,” as Buckley notes. Audiences watched the events, one might argue, with the entusiasms they usually reserved for representations of Atlantic underclasses.

The events outside the Astor Place Theatre in 1849 are important because they make obvious, physically, locally, and painfully evident, the trends that had been shaping Atlantic culture. The city, with its densely layered physical construction of theatre culture, condenses the relationships constantly reproduced and riffed upon all across the Atlantic world. The violent disturbances evoked broader contexts of riot and rebellion: as Dennis Berthold writes, the riots prophesied the coming of the European revolutions of 1848. George Templeton Strong, a well-educated and cultivated member of New York’s elite, observed that everything “looked much in earnest there—guns loaded and matches lighted—everything ready to sweep the streets with grape at a minute’s notice, and the police and troops very well disposed to do it whenever they should be told.” The Astor Place riots, as much as the European revolutions of the year before, marked in the minds of contemporaries an irreconcilable split between high and low culture. More dangerously, it marked the possibility that New York City’s lower ten million could collectively transform from the relatively peaceful Mose into violent insurrectionists like Morano, Three-Finger’d Jack, and Jack Sheppard and his mob.

Marx, writing within a few years of these events, blamed the failure of Europe’s 1848 revolutions on the lumpenproletariat, echoing Bird’s Gladiator. In America, observers seemed intent on identifying and isolating the lumpen elements who, in their view, must have caused the
riots. Post-riot legal proceedings and the incarceration of some rioters at Blackwell’s Island, outside the city, allowed “the history of the Astor Place Riot to be situated once again outside the normal social relations of the city.”\textsuperscript{258} The move re-enacts the transportation of Macheath’s cohort in Polly, The Gladiator’s distancing of lumpen uprising with historical and geographical distance, and Three-Finger’d Jack’s Caribbean exoticism safely detaching revolt from American and English audiences. The conclusion of the American 1848 also echoes Marx’s relegation of the lumpenproletariat to the inexplicable, disconnected, and counterrevolutionary dustbin of history.

The Astor Place riots of 1849, of course, do not mark the end of the Atlantic world’s cultural representations of class struggles and lumpen outcasts. Performances of the unruly, rebellious, disconnected classes continued to appear on stage. The cultural cycles of the lumpenproletariat passed along, and this study stops short of various important moments in Atlantic cultural history. Harriet Beecher Stowe’s Uncle Tom’s Cabin, for example, presented a massively popular depiction of Jack Sheppard’s excarceration translated into the terms of abolitionist sentiment. The novel began reaching audiences in 1851, and reached the stage in America and England just as Marx was publishing his views on the lumpenproletariat. Henry Thoreau’s essay on civil disobedience appeared while Melville continued to examine the implications of slave revolts in his 1855 short story “Benito Cereno.” Martin Delany’s Blake, or the Huts of America (1859-62) narrated yet another perspective on the mobility and theatricality of lumpen insurgency. English authors dealt with the same issues; Dickens’s Great Expectations (1861) revolves around the relationship between Pip and the transported convict, a less celebrated version of Jack Sheppard. In a less openly fictional vein, Henry Mayhew’s popular London Labour and the London Poor (1850) fed audiences’ appetites for depictions of London’s seamy underbelly; it also reproduced the lumpenproletariat, identifying those theatrical, dislocated, unproductive members of society who “will not work.”

These literary depictions surface in a circum-Atlantic culture still definitively theatrical as the Atlantic stage also continued producing the lumpenproletariat. Dickens’s novels, for example, were popularly adapted, and increasingly professionalized playwrights such as Dion Boucicault produced plays like The Poor of New York (1857), which staged once again versions of the urban outcasts. Obi; or, Three-Finger’d Jack finally reached the stage in Jamaica in 1862. We may trace the lumpen lore cycles through these twists and turns, the underclasses of the Atlantic world appearing in always-shifting relationships with other groups. Polly’s “arrant beggars,” whom Colman and his crew had propelled onstage in 1777, continued to capture the imagination of Atlantic audiences a century later. Charismatic lumpen characters, always on the verge of escaping, rebelling, and cheating, continued to act out the notorious theatricality, mobility, and class resentment that had brought them to popular audiences for the past century.

Watching the staged lumpenproletariat, thus, foregrounds the processes of cultural transmission. The classic paradigms of cultural production and consumption only tell part of the story, for the goods made and handled are gestural, performative. They do not wear out, and their audiences do not consume them. The Atlantic world’s cultural currents continue exchanging elements of the lore cycle, acting out afterpieces in dreams of desire and disavowal. The lore cycles are not particularly narrative—the lumpen appears in fragments of poses and flashes, snatches of overheard song. Arrant Beggars, though it traces patterns, does not propose to order them into a sequential historical narrative, and neither Marx’s naming nor the riots of the late 1840s constitute an ending. The movement of performed bits of culture overlaps the conventional boundaries of nationality, racial identity, and class affiliation. Following the
hurtling, hurdling material and gestural traces of these acts takes one quickly beyond Atlantic currents, and past the arbitrary chronological scope of this work. Their resonances appear far removed, as flashes of metaphorical resemblance, but the lore cycles leave their traces at ground level, connecting vast networks of culture in metonymical relationships. The imaginative productions acted out in Atlantic popular theatre layer onto ever-changing structures of collective memory and self-imagining. The histories of cultural transmissions do not need, do not permit, smoothing over or containing. The notorious, arrant characters of Atlantic culture continued wandering, staging their charismatic moves for admiring audiences, insisting that they not be imprisoned or disregarded.
Notes

1 John Gay, *Polly* (London: Published for the author, 1729), v. There seems to be no lack of references to the term in literary sources; the *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that Swift, Defoe, Fielding, and Washington Irving, among others, used the term during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

2 Each of these individual forms has its own institutional histories and contexts as well as ongoing critical conversations, but time and space demand that I engage these only tangentially. Rather than studying the complex interplay of class and race in printmaking visual culture, for example, I argue the influence of specific engravings on the cultural production I explore. While acknowledging the importance of those disciplinary contexts, I must leave their elaboration for a later time.


4 See W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1998) for a discussion of the term lore cycle and its application to various types of culture. Such cycles as I conceive them link elite and plebeian culture; I have chosen to treat the terms “cultural cycle,” “lore cycle,” and “theatrical cycle” as rough cognates when dealing with this material, although, for example, we might view the first as more widely-encompassing, and the last as the most limited in scope. Interchanging the terms emphasizes the fact that materials often shift cultural “strata,” moving, for example, from the theatrical to the folkloric, and from canonical culture to fugitive culture and back again.


Haverkamp argues, in contrast, that “the paradigmatic instance of the dialectical image’s existence in language is citation: language reused and reread. One might be tempted to go so far as to say that the word image is the metaphor—and a very suggestive one—for citation, while the word “dialectical” has to be taken as ‘reading.’ The expression ‘dialectical image’ has to be translated into and put to use as ‘reading citation’” (Haverkamp: 71). Theatre, however, resists both metaphors of self-evident visual reception and of textual reading.


12 See Tracy C. Davis and Thomas Postlewait, eds., Theatricality (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 1.


14 Earlier works of popular theatre have tended to focus on the structure of popular theatre, forcing emphasis onto inertia and corruption of form, with particular emphasis on “melodrama.” Examples of these tendencies are widespread and address both American and English theatre. They include Michael R. Booth, English Melodrama (London: H. Jenkins, 1965); Maurice Willson Disher, Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and Its Origins (London: Muller, 1949); David Grimsted, Melodrama Unveiled: American Theater and Culture, 1800-1850 (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1968). Even work as recent as Bruce A. McConachie, Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870 (Iowa City: U of Iowa P, 1992) tends to replicate this emphasis. [0]My move away from defining terms like “melodrama” and towards the category of the “popular” emphasizes production and consumption within acts of transmission, rather than the aesthetic unity and stasis implied by imposing generic categories such as melodrama.

Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, trans. Michael Holquist and Caryl Emerson, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 272. I deliberately engage less the Bakhtinian thematic of the carnivalesque, which seems to have a much more celebrated presence in performance and theatre studies. Nineteenth-century popular theatre, of course, emerges from a distinctly different performance culture than that of early modern carnival. If popular theatre produces acts of inversion, it does so within the qualified, self-limited bounds of theatricality, and it does so by creating new theatrical communities rather than carnivalizing the existing ones.


See David S. Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance: The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (New York: Knopf, 1988). In contrast to Reynolds’s argument, I do not seek to illuminate the influence of a popular “substrata” of elite culture. Instead, my project searches for popular cultural connections among different cultural spaces. The theatre incorporated literary influences, musical and visual culture, and vice versa—hierarchies of cultural production break down rather quickly when analyzing cultural cycles’ movements. A history of popular theatre’s connections, then, lays the groundwork for later histories of, for example, literary-theatrical cycles, which would elaborate more fully on the ways that literature and theatre interacted formally and thematically.


Work such as Dana D. Nelson, *The Word in Black and White: Reading "Race" in American Literature, 1638-1867* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), and David R. Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (New York: Verso, 1991) have established the influences of race on culture, especially in areas of culture where the influence is less visible or apparent.


Instead of analyzing the internal unity of American or English culture, the new scholarship importantly attends to multiple cultures and aspects of cultures, and the multiple ways in which cultures register politics. See Philip Fisher, "Introduction: The New American Studies," *The New American Studies: Essays from Representations*, ed. Philip Fisher (Berkeley: U of California P, 1991). Sacvan Bercovitch exemplifies this approach as he discusses the cultural “office” of Hawthorne’s *Scarlet Letter*, demoting the de-historicized Puritan context in favor of the social consensus encouraged by mid-century debates over slavery, sectionalism, and
the European revolutions of 1848. Likewise, Eric Sundquist examines how Twain’s *Pudd’nhead Wilson* “receive[s] and condense[s] cultural models,” re-enacting the same logic that underpins legal decisions such as the US Supreme Court’s Plessy v Ferguson decision (Fisher, xviii). The shift of focus from ideology to rhetoric(s), complicating the role of ideology in culture, is indicative, although Fisher’s account itself verges dangerously on replacing one kind of exceptionalism with another.


28 After the wave of scholarship that identified and explained blackface’s racist characteristics, a generation of scholarship has analyzed the working-class affinities for the form. Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993) and Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder: Early Blackface Minstrels and Their World* (New York: Cambridge UP, 1997) are perhaps the most engaging recent accounts. W. T. Lhamon, Jr., *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003) also argues for the importance of lower-class interracial mutualities.

29 Linebaugh and Rediker use the term hydrarchy to “designate two related developments of the late seventeenth century: the organization of the maritime state from above, and the self-organization of sailors from below”; hydrarchy, they claim, “arose at sea to pose the era’s most serious challenge to the development of capitalism” (144-45).


33 Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), examines the negotiations that developed a democratic popular culture in the face of middle-class controls—Bailey’s emphasis on the “knowingness” of participants in popular culture provides an alternative to limited, Foucauldian “top-down” interpretations of the censorship and controls that established popular and legitimate as opposites.


35 Stallybrass: 90.


Although there is a certain value to recognizing the Foucauldian aspect of theatre, I prefer to give as much emphasis to culture as a Gramscian “war of position,” the idea that culture is produced in the negotiations between groups, not simply imposed from above or asserted from below. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995) has some obvious applications, but I do not see culture as that monolithic or constantly combative. Peter Stallybrass and Allon White likewise map a complex terrain of “discursive sites where social classification and psychological processes are generated as conflictual complexes”; conflictual, I think, is different from simply antagonistic. See Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1986), 25.


On Porter, see L. W. Conolly, "Anna Margaretta Larpent, the Duchess of Queensberry and Gay's *Polly* in 1777," *Philological Quarterly* 51.4 (1972): 956; Porter, later married to John Larpent, the Lord Chamberlain’s Examiner of Plays, accompanied the Duchess to the opera and recounted the experience in her journal entry of June 23, 1777.

Fielding’s actions are recorded in the *Gentleman’s Magazine*, September 1773: 463-64.


Colman, of course, was motivated by a combination of desires: he wanted to make the play as agreeable to Haymarket audiences as possible, to avoid a repeat of Sir John Fielding’s attempted suppression of *The Beggar’s Opera* in 1773, and to take advantage of the continuing popularity of the characters. Colman’s cuts (adding very few lines) most directly affect pacing, speeding up the resolution of the play.


Although *Polly* was not performed until 1777, it was published in 1729, and appeared fairly frequently in new editions between its initial publication and the printing of Colman’s


56 Dryden: 546.

57 This strategy seems a persistent feature of class relations in the modern Atlantic capitalist world. Linebaugh and Rediker, *Many-Headed Hydra*, discuss the multiple guises of the Atlantic proletariat and the history of authorities’ attempts to identify and control the various heads of the underclasses as they reared, from Surinam to London, from Charleston, South Carolina to New York City and along the trade routes connecting such entrepôt.

58 See Burling, 9. Despite its smaller receipts, the theatre appears to have provided Colman with a comfortable income. In 1777, for example, Colman “made more in four months than he is ever known to have earned for his one-fourth share at Covent Garden for any full winter season (Burling, 143).


60 Bannister’s voice, with its incredible and comical range, earned him praise in high-profile singing roles like Macheath and, as in *Polly*, Macheath in blackface. Alongside Bannister (and getting top billing, in newspaper bills and in printed editions of the play), Charles Dubellamy (d. 1793) played Polly’s native American love interest, Cawwawkee. James Fearon (1746-89), a “strong supporting actor from Covent Garden,” appeared in the role of the Caribbean Indian king Pohetohee (Burling, 124). Various of the cast had made careers out of playing supporting roles—often in *The Beggar’s Opera*, and just as often in very similar roles.


62 *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser*, August 8, 1781. Cross-dressing certain parts proved persistently popular, and numerous playbills in English and American theatres reveal at least one female part, usually Moll Brazen, played by a male actor. Less often, but still with significant frequency, a female (usually a breeches-role star) played Macheath.

63 *The Gentleman’s Magazine and Historical Register*, April 1782: 207.

64 *Advertiser* August 9, 1781.

65 A drawing by J. Sayer, in the Harvard Theatre Collection, depicts Bannister as Polly in *The Beggar’s Opera*. The caption identifies the depiction as representing a performance of August 20, 1781.

66 John Bell’s *British Theatre* suggests this by publishing, in February 1777, an engraving of Cargill as Polly; see Kalman A. Burnim and Philip H. Highfill, *John Bell, Patron of British Theatrical Portraiture: A Catalog of the Theatrical Portraits in His Editions of Bell’s Shakespeare and Bell’s British Theatre* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1998), 113; entry 125. Drawing by J. Roberts, engraving anonymous. Burnim also mentions an illustration in *New English Theatre*, 1782, of Cargill as Polly in *The Beggar’s Opera*. *Bell’s British Theatre* also pictured Hester Boyd Colles as Polly in *Polly* (entry 134).

Senelick, 2.

See Cheryl Wanko, "Three Stories of Celebrity: The Beggar's Opera 'Biographies'," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 38.3 (1998): 481-98. Women, especially, acted out a conflicted relationship with the bourgeois public sphere, not fully inside, nor completely excluded, professional yet still subject to personal judgments.

Blake’s engraving dates from 1789 or 1790; the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco possesses a print of the image, “Beggar’s Opera, Act III, ‘When My Hero in Court Appears, &c.’,” engraving, 45.5 x 58.4 cm. Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco, San Francisco, CA; Gift of Dr. Leon Kolb [1957.185.15]; the image is also catalogued in the AMICO Library [FASF.44539].

Andrew Gurr, *Playgoing in Shakespeare's London* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) discusses the established tradition of allowing spectators onstage; importantly, the freedom of the scenes often provided opportunities for misbehavior, onstage viewers acting out their own licensed version of lumpen unruliness. Susan Cannon Harris, "Clearing the Stage: Gender, Class, and the Freedom of the Scenes in Eighteenth-Century Dublin," *PMLA* 119.5 (2004): 1264-78 also provides a recent and pertinent analysis of the practice during the same time period I examine, although in Dublin rather than London.


The *Morning Post* of January 5, 1776 reports this anecdote.

*Morning Chronicle*, October 7, 1776.

Roach, 2.

*St. James’s Chronicle*, October 18, 1781.

Kidson also presents an early but useful perspective on the form of ballad opera and the pervasive influence of *The Beggar’s Opera* on theatricals formally, rather than just thematically.


81 See Seilhamer, 1:235, 39 and 58-61 for dates and a cast list.


85 Wright, 80. Seilhamer, 2:135.

86 *The Kingston Privateer* appears an alteration of Pilon’s *Liverpool Prize*, Seilhamer tells us (2:156). Avoiding the strictly local focus of much early theatre history, Seilhamer supplies perhaps the most complete summary of the troupe’s movements over time. The latter of these plays, written by the actress Miss Cheer, excited local disapproval when they perceived disparaging topical references to Jamaican customs. The fictional representation of the Caribbean returned to England represents a fascinating forerunner to various other fictional returns, and a counterpoint to the theatrical, circum-Atlantic dispersal of Macheath and his crew.

87 Wright, 97; Wright’s account, published in 1937, is one of the few sources detailing Jamaica’s theatre culture; despite its importance, his liberal use of phrases like “the filthy Maroons” reveals that he approaches his subject matter from a very different perspective. Wright draws upon the *Journal of the Assembly*, 7:203; cited in Wright, 350 n.4.

88 The prologue, yet to be located in any North American archives, appears in Seilhamer, 2:149. In addition, an announcement in the *Kingston Gazette* for October 6, 1780 reports that wardrobe articles had been stolen; with no support for his assertion, Wright suspects they were stolen by “a gentleman of color who sold these gaudy coats to an Obeah man up in the bush.” This, of course, is a racist assumption; it is also part of a discourse which produces and re-figures slave and maroon theatricality in Jamaica (Wright, 117-18).


92 I quote George Colman and Samuel Arnold, *Inkle and Yarico; an Opera, in Three Acts, as Performed at the Theatre-Royal in the Haymarket, on Saturday August 11th, 1787* (London: G. G. J. and J. Robinson, 1787), 76. Further citations will be parenthetical.

93 The image I discuss, which could not be reproduced, appears on the title page of George Colman, *Inkle and Yarico: An Opera, in Three Acts* (London: Printed by D.S. Maurice Fenchurch-street; sold by T. Hughes, 35 Ludgate street; J. Bysh 52 Paternoster row; and J. Cumming, Dublin, 1820); from the library of Amos Bronson Alcott, Houghton Library [*AC85 A1191 Zz820e v.9*].

94 As we would expect with such a high-profile success, numerous publications review the play, including *The European Magazine and London Review* and *The World and Fashionable Advertiser*, which seems occasionally hostile to Colman, but for the most part offers even-handed reviews. *Morning Chronicle and London Advertiser* 6 August 1787.

95 Burling, 150-51, tabulates the numbers of the most popular mainpieces and afterpieces; *Inkle and Yarico* (with 20 performances in its first season, 19 in its second) represents the most popular mainpiece in the years between 1777 and 1788; no other mainpiece during that period exceeded twenty performances in a season. Moreover, *Inkle and Yarico* only falls five short of the most popular afterpiece’s single-season total (Colman’s 1780 *The Manager in Distress*) during those years. Most plays never saw near the numbers of nights that *Inkle and Yarico* did. The *Morning Chronicle* for September 17, 1787, implies that the “Romp” mentioned is a “Pastoral Dance” that appears in newspaper announcements toward the end of the season.

96 Frank Felsenstein discusses the literary reception of *Inkle and Yarico* (Felsenstein, ed., 33). The reviews appear in the *World* August 6, 1787 and the *Morning Chronicle* August 6, 1787. Elizabeth Satchell Kemble was the wife of Stephen Kemble, one of the numerous Kembles onstage at the end of the eighteenth century.

97 *Inkle and Yarico* 55. Various historians and critics have noticed the reference to “rosso antico” Wedgwood products, and Trudge’s disavowal clearly represents a slip of sorts: an attempted disavowal that inadvertently invokes miscegenation. He inadvertently refers to the darker Wedgwood products, which Patty’s reaction confirms. These products were also associated with the famous Wedgwood abolition medallions featuring a (very black) kneeling slave in chains and the motto, “Am I not a man and a brother?” For more on the material culture of abolition, see Daniel O’Quinn, "Mercantile Deformities: George Colman's *Inkle and Yarico* and the Racialization of Class Relations," *Theatre Journal* 54.3 (2002): 389-409, and Nandini

98 *World* August 6, 1787. In contrast to Yarico, whose lighter skin augments her femininity, Wowski’s blackness renders her rhetorically less feminine: “she” becomes the devil “himself,” in the words of the sailor.

99 See Herman Melville, *The Confidence-Man: His Masquerade* (New York: Norton, 1971), 6, for Melville’s detailing of the interracial, motley crew that makes up this version of the intermingling cultures of the Atlantic world.


101 See *The London Chronicle* August 4-7, 1787.


103 *World* August 6, 1787; *Morning Chronicle* August 7, 1787.

104 Frontispiece illustration from George Cruikshank, *Inkle and Yarico* (London: Cumberland, c. 1827).


106 The edenton broadside comes from the American Antiquarian Society’s collection of Colonial Williamsburg and related materials. In New England, the Massachusetts Historical Society, for example, has playbills indicating the play’s performance at the Boston Theatre, Federal Street, on March 20, 1799. The Harvard Theatre Collection holds playbills advertising a different version, a “celebrated Comick Opera, in 2 Acts, called, INKLE and Yarico; Or, the American Heroine,” undated but probably from the first decade of the nineteenth century. This version, the playbills reveal, traveled from Maine to Rhode Island.

107 The etymology of the word reveals that the Maroon communities came first, and marooning as punishment followed. In the *OED*, the earliest noun form of maroon refers to a “member of a community of fugitive black slaves or (subsequently) of their descendants,” especially “those who settled in the mountains and forests of Surinam and the West Indies” (*OED*, s.v. “Maroon”). The verb’s derivation from the noun implies that the act of abandonment somehow rendered the victim in the condition of a maroon-as-fugitive-slave, rather than implying that the Maroons derive their status from the practice of nautical abandonment.


109 Campbell, 131. Robert Charles Dallas, *The History of the Maroons from Their Origin to the Establishment of Their Chief Tribe at Sierra Leone: Including the Expedition to Cuba, for


Benjamin Moseley, A Treatise on Sugar (London: G. G. & J. Robinson, 1799). The account of Three-Finger’d Jack appeared in two other editions of Moseley’s Treatise within the next year. Almost all of the newspaper reviews of Fawcett’s Obi mention Moseley’s account, and the printed material given to spectators at the performances featured credited excerpts from the portion of Treatise on Sugar dealing with Jack and obeah. Newspaper accounts of the play, accordingly, refer to Fawcett’s Jack or his historical model variously as a “valiant robber,” a “ruffian,” and a “freebooter.”

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Moseley, 197. Moseley, 199-200 quotes Governor Dalling’s Proclamation of January 13, 1781.

Moseley, 200-01. Quashee appears to be the same Maroon who cut off Jack’s fingers; Moseley identifies Sam as “Captain Davy’s son, he who shot a Mr. Thompson,” which would make him, according to Mavis Campbell, Sam Grant, who had advanced by 1803 to the rank of “Major of Maroons, and Chief Commander at Charles Town.” Campbell, 205-06; Moseley, 205.

John Fawcett and Samuel Arnold, Songs, Duets and Choruses in the Pantomimical Drama of Obi, or, Three-Finger’d Jack, 11th ed. (London: Woodfall, 1809), 5; at least one edition of Songs appeared each year of the play’s first decade, and it also appeared in a Philadelphia edition. The second source for reconstructing the pantomime’s staging is the more detailed but less contemporary John Fawcett, Obi, or, Three-Finger’d Jack! A Serio-Pantomime, in Two Acts [and in Verse and Dumbshow]. vol. 59 (Duncombe, c. 1825). I will cite the word-book parenthetically as Songs, referencing page numbers, and the Duncombe’s edition in-text as “Obi,” citing act and scene.

See Linebaugh and Rediker, Many-Headed Hydra.


“Rosa in Jack’s cave, Act II, Scene 4, from the Obi Pantomime”; engraving by Sylvester Harrison and Edward Orme; courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection.

See Janet Schaw, Journal of a Lady of Quality: Being the Narrative of a Journey from Scotland to the West Indies, North Carolina, and Portugal, in the Years 1774 to 1776, eds. Evangeline W. Andrews and Charles M. Andrews (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1921), 107-09. White outsiders may not have completely fabricated the connection between obeah and performance, however. Frederic G. Cassidy, Jamaica Talk; Three Hundred Years of the English Language in Jamaica (London: Macmillan, 1961), analyzing the etymology of the name
“Jonkonnu” itself, suggests the possibility that it derives from the Ewe language, in which dzonc or dzonko denotes “‘sorcerer man’ or ‘witch doctor’” and the suffix -nu means “man” (259).

121 The dramatis personae in Songs fails to list “Jonkanoo,” probably including him among the “Planter’s servants,” but the libretto of that document does refer to him in a repeated chorus: “One funny big man be master of all. ’Tis merry Jonkonnu” (17). He is a central character, and one that Fawcett recognizes as representing the carnivalesque inversion of Jonkonnu (Dutton, 20).


123 For description and analysis of Jonkonnu, see Craton: 18-19. Lewis, Journal, 24; his journal entry describes the New Year’s festivities of 1816.

124 Peter Linebaugh’s The London Hanged discusses in detail the various ways the Atlantic world organized its labor.

125 Etching on paper by John Thomas Smith, depicting Joseph Johnson; from John Thomas Smith, Vagabondiana; or, Anecdotes of Mendicant Wanderers through the Streets of London (1817); image courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum, The Rev. C. H. Townshend Bequest [Museum Number E.3453-1902].

126 See Gilroy, 3.

127 See Gilroy, 2.

128 I have not yet, however, found any performances of Three-Finger’d Jack in the slaveholding south; the chances of finding slave rebellion performed among the slaves seems increasingly slim the later we look. Errol Hill, The Jamaican Stage, 1655-1900: Profile of a Colonial Theatre (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1992), 100. Hoskins and Southern date Obi’s American premiere as 27 May 1801 at the Park Theatre, whereupon it also showed in Boston and Philadelphia (27, n.40). The play remained popular, and in many forms; Laurence Hutton, Curiosities of the American Stage (New York: Harper, 1890) reprints a bill advertising the “African Company” performing Obi at a Mercer Street theatre, which George Thompson, A Documentary History of the African Theatre (Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1998), believes dates from 1823 (132). See John Nathan Hutchins, Hutchins Improved, Being an Almanack and Ephemeris ... For the Year of Our Lord 1802 (New-York: Printed and sold by Ming and Young, 1801). Hill writes that the play “was produced at the Theatre Royal, Kingston, on September 16, 1862, by J. Thompson, supported by amateurs” (101).

129 Rzepka: 122. Hill (though he is not the only one to do this) conflates the melodrama and the pantomime, giving the erroneous impression that there is only one version (101). Shane White, Stories of Freedom in Black New York (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002) discusses in detail the career of Aldridge, revising the overall portrait created by his twentieth-century biographers, Herbert Marshall and Mildred Stock, Ira Aldridge, the Negro Tragedian (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 1968). By 1860, Aldridge’s “usual programme” prominently featured slave rebellion depictions, including “Othello, The Padlock, The Slave, The Black Doctor, Macbeth, Obi, Bertram, Titus Andronicus, and Robinson Crusoe, or The Bold Buccaneer [. . .], in which Aldridge played Man Friday, the Carib slave of Robinson Crusoe” (Marshall and Stock, 250).

130 Roach, Cities of the Dead, 122.


Joe Cowell, *Thirty Years Passed among the Players in England and America, Interspersed with Anecdotes and Reminiscences of a Variety of Persons, Directly or Indirectly Connected with the Drama During the Theatrical Life of Joe Cowell, Comedian* (New York: Harper &., 1844), 2.68.

Pencil on paper, “Popular Dance in Fetters from *The Beggar’s Opera*,” 1836, Harvard Theatre Collection [15461.805 PF*]. Toward the end of the ballad opera’s 1777-1778 Covent Garden run, *The Beggar’s Opera* appeared with “hornpipe dancing in an entire New Stile” before *The Sailor’s Revels at Portsmouth; or, British Glory*, “in which will be introduced an accurate view of the Isle of Wight, and the fleet now riding at Spithead.” (Harvard Theatre Collection playbill, Covent Garden Theatre, May 2, 1778). Hullet’s record appears in Odell, 1:68.

See Colman and Arnold, *Inkle and Yarico; an Opera, in Three Acts, as Performed at the Theatre-Royal in the Haymarket, on Saturday August 11th, 1787*, 12, for the sailor’s chorus. For the advertisement of Polly, see the *London Evening Post*, June 16, 1777. The New England playbills are for the Portland (Maine) Theatre, August 18, 1800, in the Harvard Theatre Collection. Similar performances also appeared in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island as the troupe traveled.


Rowson (1762?-1824) acted, managed, and wrote plays as well as her more famous fiction. See Susannah Haswell Rowson, *Slaves in Algiers; or, a Struggle for Freedom: A Play, Interspersed with Songs, in Three Acts. By Mrs. Rowson. As Performed at the New Theatres, in Philadelphia and Baltimore.* (Philadelphia: Printed for the author by Wrigley and Berriman, no. 149, Chesnut-Street, 1794); the Houghton Rare Books Library holds this edition. Elizabeth Maddock Dillon argues convincingly that Rowson’s play reveals a nascent nationalism forming in a globalized setting, with racially-defined outsiders assisting in gender construction and national identity formation. At the same time, the underclass characters who perform the bulk of
the play’s cultural work indicate the importance of class in the globalized process of nation-
building. See Elizabeth Maddock Dillon, "Slaves in Algiers: Race, Republican Genealogies, and
140 Charles S. Watson, *Antebellum Charleston Dramatists* (Tuscaloosa, AL: U of
141 See chapter six of Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of the National
142 Isaac Pocock, *Tuckitomba; or, the Obi Sorceress*, in *Plays Submitted to the Lord
Chamberlain, British Library* (London: 1828), ff. 533-602. I will cite further references in-text,
referring to the page numbers of the manuscript (rather than act and scene) for accuracy.
George Daniel (London: J. Cumberland, 1837), 6. Daniel’s remarks appear as the introduction,
signed as “D.—G.” Further citations of *The Red Rover* will be parenthetical, giving page
numbers for accuracy.
144 Giles, *Transatlantic Insurrections*, 2, describes this effect as the “points of
transnational convergence and interference that arise out of works incorporating their own
particular local perspectives.” In the case of the melodramatic adaptations I discuss, the points
of interference and convergence become evident in the sometimes slight, sometimes major
changes between various versions of the plays and novel.
(1938): 66. *The Red Rover* was also, as Michael Davitt Bell notes, among the books Cooper
wrote while living in Europe. Primary publication in Paris and London, of course, helped protect
the author’s earnings in those countries. See “The Beginnings of Professionalism” in Michael
Davitt Bell, *Culture, Genre, and Literary Vocation: Selected Essays on American Literature*
146 John Peck, *Maritime Fiction: Sailors and the Sea in British and American Novels,
1719-1917* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 90. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Red Rover; a Tale*
(New York: A.L. Burt, 1850), 486. Further citations are parenthetical.
147 Chapman’s biography appears in James Rees, *The Dramatic Authors of America*
148 Nicoll, 1:97 and 2:303. *The Red Rover’s* run overlaps, as well, with Fitzball’s
adaptation of Cooper’s *The Pilot*, the first part of the trilogy of nautical novels.
149 The depiction appears as the frontispiece illustration to Edward Fitzball, *The Red
Rover or, the Mutiny of the Dolphin a Nautical Drama, in Two Acts* (London: Davidson, 1833).
150 A meeker embodiment of the play’s underclass energies, Hector was played
charismatically by James P. Wilkinson, whose “retirement to America in chagrin and
disappointment,” George Daniel writes, “we, in common with every lover of the drama, cannot
but regret” (8). Wilkinson’s move to America, of course, was common for actors of the time,
and he joined many other performers staging the same sorts of characters on the western littorals
of the Atlantic.
151 Douglas Jerrold (1803-1857), the “father of nautical melodrama,” served in the navy
before his apprenticeship writing for the minor theatres. After his success with *Black-Ey’d
Susan*, he continued to produce popular plays and write for *Punch* and *Lloyds Weekly
Newspaper*. I will cite further references to *Black-Ey’d Susan* parenthetically, giving page

152 The American acting edition lists the cast as featuring Placide, Simpson, Chapman, Blakely, and Woodhull. Mrs. Hilson and Hackett supplied the two female parts. It appeared as *Black Eyed Susan*, labeled “as acted at” New York City’s Park Theatre in 1830.

153 See Cox, 176ff, for a discussion of the domesticating urges of nautical melodrama.

154 Gay had written the ballad, reportedly, in tribute to the actress Susan Mountfort, fusing the early popularity of nautical themes with the celebrity of well-known actresses. See Winton, 32.

155 Title page, illustrated printing of *Black-ey’d Susan, in four parts* (London, n.p., c. 1770), shelf-mark 15460.249.40*. The song saw frequent reprints throughout the century. It found its way across the Atlantic as well; Harvard holds a Boston broadside titled, “Black ey’d Susan’s lamentation for the departure of her sweet William, who was impress’d to go to sea,” dated between 1731 and 1776. *The Tea-Table Miscellany: Or, a Collection of Choice Songs, Scots and English*, only one of the song collections which included the ballad, saw at least twenty editions between 1740 and 1794 published in various cities in the British Isles.


157 David Mayer, *Harlequin in His Element; the English Pantomime, 1806-1836* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1969), 82-83, describes the *Davy Jones* pantomimes at the Sans Pareil and Drury Lane. Knight dates the Coburg’s as July 11, 1825; he also discusses the Surrey’s later William and Susan (59, 279). The Harvard Theatre Collection holds an acting edition of Frederick Fox Cooper’s *Black-eyed Sukey, or, All in the Dumps: A Burlesque Extravaganza in One Act* (London: T. Richardson, [1830?]); and also a promptbook of the burlesque published in the 1820s as number 432 of Cumberland’s Minor Theatre series.

158 Knight, 58, recounts the conflict between the theatre managers over the alleged imitation production.


160 Gnatbrain’s words also reveal an awareness of the operations of cultural transmission, a self-reflexive performance that emerges even more markedly in *Jack Sheppard*. The quote is from John Baldwin Buckstone, *Jack Sheppard: A Drama in Four Acts* (London: Webster, 1839), 62.


162 Moncrieff’s *Tom and Jerry* appeared 75 more times in the following season, dominating the stage along with its sequels, pantomimic adaptations, and imitations for quite some time. See Alfred L. Nelson and Gilbert B. Cross, *The Adelphi Theatre Calendar* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990) for detailed records of the play’s runs during this period. A comprehensive narrative history of the Adelphi remains unwritten, but Moody’s *Illegitimate Theatre* provides a detailed analysis of London theatre culture, including the Adelphi.

A playbill at the Harvard Theatre Collection dated November 11, 1821, announcing the play’s first performance at the Adelphi Theatre on November 26, 1821. I quote from W. T. Moncrieff, *Tom and Jerry, or Life in London, an Operatic Extravaganza, in Three Acts* (London: J. Cumberland, n.d.) and Pierce Egan, *Life in London, or, the Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq.: And His Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom: Accompanied by Bob Logic, the Oxonian, in Their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* (London: Printed for Sherwood, Nealy, and Jones, 1820); Harvard’s Houghton Library has a copy of Egan’s text [EC8.C8885.820e]. I will make further citations to both texts parenthetically in-text. To reduce confusion, I will refer to Moncrieff’s play as *Tom and Jerry*, I will abbreviate the novel’s meandering title to *Life in London*, and I will refer to the characters as Tom and Jerry without italics or quotation marks.

The presence of the women accentuates and contrasts with the rituals of masculine belonging the three ramblers act out. At the same time, their often clever responses to dilemmas allow the women to provide an ironic and humorous contrast to male upper-class life in London. Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation, and the City* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1995) discusses the implications of gender in the acts of streetwalking and urban observing much more thoroughly than I can here.


Benjamin A. Baker (1818-1890), playwright, actor and manager, served as the prompter for Mitchell’s Olympic Theatre, and Frank S. Chanfrau (1824-1884), star of Baker’s *A Glance at New York in 1848*, continued a long career in roles such as Kit, the “Arkansas Traveler.”

Moody, 218.

Reid, 77, discusses Barrymore’s version.

Undated clipping, Victoria and Albert Museum, accompanying an illustration of Billy Waters [E.1070-1921].

This image of Waters is a hand-colored print in a scrapbook in the Victoria and Albert Museum; it originally appeared in *Costume of the Lower Orders* by Thomas Busby, which was published in London in 1820 [E.1070-1921].


177 Dana Arnold, *Re-Presenting the Metropolis: Architecture, Urban Experience and Social Life in London 1800-1840* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 31. Foucault’s influential arguments about nineteenth-century cultures of surveillance certainly have their applications. However, the privileging of acts of disembodied observation and discipline (which have their obvious analogues in the theatrical viewer) become complicated by popular theatre, its audiences identifying with the observed and its performances embodying observer/observed characters such as Tom and Jerry. See Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, and also Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990) for a recent analysis of the visual culture of the nineteenth century.

178 This image appears in the 1820 edition of Egan’s *Life in London*, opposite page 286, subtitled “Tom, Jerry, and Logic among the unsophisticated Sons and Daughters of Nature at ‘All Max’ in the East.”

179 Of course, the three heroes do not ever become lower class. Those few characters who do cross the line downward, however, represent no sort of threat at all; they are merely pitiable characters, figures who make their brief appearance, state their moral lesson, and disappear.

180 In Egan’s text, however, their class status actually compromises the success of their act: “Although Tom was disguised as a beggar, yet he did not lose the traces of a gentleman; according to the old adage, that a gentleman in rags does not forget his real character. Jerry did not make his look beggarly enough; but Logic gammoned to be the Cadger in fine style, with his crutch and specs” (346).


182 See Pierce Egan, *The Life & Adventures of Samuel Denmore Hayward, the Modern Macheath Giving an Account of the Extraordinary Manner in Which He Raised Himself from the Mean Situation of a Tailor's Apprentice to an Association with the Most Fashionable Circles of Society* (London: Sherwood Neely and Jones, 1822); Hayward’s crime was apparently, in part, rising above his station, as Egan’s subtitle indicates. According to Nicoll, Moncrieff’s *Jack Sheppard* appeared at the Coburg on April 18, 1825 and at the Victoria on October 29, 1839. A playbill in the Harvard Theatre Collection proudly proclaims that the “life of this remarkable Robber . . . offers a complete picture of customs that are now no longer to be seen. The manners of those classes of Society which are industriously hid from the public eye have lately been objects of intense curiosity; and it is thought, that an animated Picture of Life in London 100 Years ago, will be found scarcely less amusing or less interesting than the Adventures of Tom and Jerry.”

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See Linebaugh, _London Hanged_, 363, and also, for a history that picks up chronologically approximately where Linebaugh leaves off, V. A. C. Gatrell, _The Hanging Tree: Execution and the English People 1770-1868_ (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1994).

See Pierce Egan, _Pierce Egan’s Finish to the Adventures of Tom, Jerry, and Logic: In Their Pursuits through Life in and out of London_ (London: G. Virtue, printed by C. Baynes, 1830); in Harvard’s Houghton Library [*EC8 C8885 828eb*]; its theatrical adaptation is T. L. Greenwood, _The Death of Life in London, or, Tom and Jerry’s Funeral, an Entirely New Satirical, Burlesque, Operatic Parody in One Act: Not Taken from Any Thing, but Taking Off Many Things, Full of Wit, Pregnant with Sensibility, Abounding in Effects, Pathetic, Moral, Instructive, and Delightful, Being the Last That Ever Will Be Heard of Those Two Popular Heroes: Performed for the First Time at the Royal Coburg Theatre, on Monday, June 2, 1823_ (London: Printed for John Lowndes, 1823); in Houghton Library’s Harry Elkins Widener Collection [HEW 3.5.20].

Knight describes the premiere of _The Treadmill; or, Tom and Jerry at Brixton_ at the Surrey on November 18, 1822 (35). According to Nicoll, 2:535, an anonymous version appeared at the Olympic Theatre on November 4, 1822. The acting edition of Fitzball’s script, Edward Fitzball, _The Tread Mill, or, Tom and Jerry at Brixton a Serio, Comic, Operatic, Mill Dramatic, Farcical, Moral Burletta in Two Acts_ (London: J. Lowndes, c. 1823) claims to be “as performed originally at the Surrey Theatre;” for accuracy, I will cite page numbers parenthetically.

In pamphlet form, a _Description of the Tread Mill Invented by Mr. W. Cubitt ... For the Employment of Prisoners, as Recommended by the Society, Etc._, (London: Society for the Improvement of Prison Discipline, 1822) circulated in London as the _Tom and Jerry_ craze began to peak and as Fitzball’s play reached the public. The treadmill, like _Tom and Jerry_, was a transatlantic phenomenon, although it never caught on in America; David H. Shayt, "Stairway to Redemption: America's Encounter with the British Prison Treadmill," _Technology and Culture_ 30.4 (1989): 908-38, discusses the development of the treadmill as a disciplinary device by Sir William Cubitt (1785-1861) and subsequent attempts at transatlantic implementation of the disciplinary technology.


See Richards, 1-57, for a recent edition of the play. Richards identifies Tyler (1757-1826) as the “first successful American dramatist” and _The Contrast_ as “the first full-length comic play by an American to be performed by a professional company” (1, 4).

Anonymous introduction to Richardson’s edition of _Tom and Jerry_, promptbook in the Harvard Theatre Collection.

Charles Durang, _The Philadelphia Stage. . . By Charles Durang, Partly Compiled from the Papers of His Father, the Late John Durang; with Notes by the Editors_ (Philadelphia: 1854-57), vol. 6, ch. 10, n.p., records _Tom and Jerry_’s appearance in Philadelphia. The Harvard
Theatre Collection newspaper clipping indicates *Tom and Jerry*’s sequel on February 13, 1824, at the “Philadelphia Theatre,” as an afterpiece—“For the 2d time, a new satirical, burlesque, operative Parody, called The Death of Life in London; or, the funeral of Tom & Jerry.” A newspaper clipping at the Harvard Theatre Collection, hand-dated 1826, announces “the celebrated Burletta, called TOM AND JERRY” at the Boston Theatre, featuring Mr. Hamblin in his last night there.


Odoll describes the success Phillips’s play found promising to “afford some glances at Home.” The play later incorporated new scenes written for T. D. Rice, after which “the farce had even a stronger hold on life” (3:685). Odell also describes a *Life in New York, or, Firemen on Duty* on January 24, 1827 (3:263).

William Warland Clapp, *A Record of the Boston Stage* (Boston: Munroe, 1853), 477. Durang, vol. 6, ch. 18, n.p.; I cite a copy in the Harvard Theatre Collection (TS 275.10.F) without page numbers; further citations will be parenthetical by volume and chapter.


Newspaper clippings at the Harvard Theatre Collection, according to Richard M. Dorson, "Mose the Far-Famed and World-Renowned," *American Literature* 15.3 (1943): 288-300, reveal the play’s progress into Chanfrau’s star vehicle.

Lhamon, *Raising Cain*, 28ff, sketches the struggle over cultural autonomy in New York City’s places of entertainment as it played out in the Chatham and other theatres.

Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988) traces this process on a larger scale, explaining something of the way culture produces performances defined as “high” and “low”; unfortunately, his dualistic and somewhat static approach fails to appreciate the way that the high and low interact dynamically to produce the in-betweens of shifting, category-defying culture. Levine’s mode of analysis also grants perhaps too much control to the elites in its account of their
defining, claiming, and sacralizing of culture; the working-class rowdies at the Bowery and the Chatham had more to do with actively selecting the elements that would become “low.”

Dorson discusses the influence of Moncrieff’s play on Chanfrau’s star vehicle, but he limits himself to a vague assertion of thematic influence. Benjamin A. Baker, *A Glance at New York: A Local Drama in Two Acts* (New York: S. French, 1857), 3. Further citations will be parenthetical, giving page numbers for accuracy.

Pierce Egan, *Boxiana, or, Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism* (London: Printed by and for G. Smeeton, 1812), which ran out to 5 volumes by the mid-1820s, appears to be one of the best, if not only, sources for Cribb’s life.


208 Lithograph poster, “Set-to with a Bear,” 1849; archived in theatrical portraits of Frank S. Chanfrau; courtesy of the Harvard Theatre Collection.

The play advertises itself as “an extravaganza in one act, intended for representation at the Royal Standard Theatre on Monday Oct. 9th 1848”; the manuscript is in the Lord Chamberlain’s Plays, vol. 150 (Sept.-Nov. 1848) [BL Add. MS 43014 (6), ff. 189-209b].

Thomas Butler Gunn, *Mose among the Britishers; or, the B’hoy in London* (Philadelphia: A. Hart, 1850); I cite further references parenthetically from an as-yet uncatalogued copy in the Harvard Theatre Collection.

J. B. Buckstone, (1802-1879), worked as theatrical owner and the playwright of some 150 plays, mostly conventional melodramas and comedies. As a low comedian, he acted at the Adelphi and the Haymarket during the late 1820s and early 30s. W. H. Ainsworth (1805-1882) was known for his Newgate novels such as *Jack Sheppard* and *Rookwood* (which sensationally presented the highwayman Dick Turpin in 1834) and later, historical romances such as *The Tower of London* (1840). He worked closely with George Cruikshank, becoming one of the most popular literary figures of his time, although his literary reputation has since suffered. The high profile of these three stage versions results partly from their popularity and circulation, partly from their institutional affiliations, and partly from accidents of archival preservation. See John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama, 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 63ff.


The playbill in the Harvard Theatre Collection quotes Act 4, scene 3 (page 63) of Buckstone’s *Jack Sheppard*, which I will cite parenthetically from now on, giving page numbers for greater accuracy. Hogarth (1697-1764), of course, was a contemporary of Gay’s, and (although the prison cell scene is an invention) produced paintings of scenes from *The Beggar’s Opera*. 
Playbill, Coburg Theatre, April 18, 1825, Harvard Theatre Collection. The bill appears in an extra-illustrated volume of Arnold's Collection Illustrating the Theatre, vol. 1, n.p. [TS 999.8].

Both Matthew Buckley, "Sensations of Celebrity: Jack Sheppard and the Mass Audience," Victorian Studies 44.3 (2002): 423-63, and Meisel, 248, note the importance of Cruikshank’s images to the reading experience but conclude that they did not precede the narrative, although Cruikshank’s work did influence other texts he collaborated upon.

Buckley, "Sensations," 449. Sheppard thus becomes the chief player in what Buckley sees as “an exceptional mechanism of the period’s rapid shift in collective consciousness—driving, and not simply describing or reflecting, the crucial shift from political to perceptual modernity” (426). The novel, however, is more theatrical than Buckley recognizes. He only tangentially addresses the novel’s theatricality; the plot, for example, is dramatically structured in three parts, roughly analogous to acts in a play. Buckley also reads Ainsworth’s novel as a compelling but isolated case, and thus fails to account for the novel’s place in a longer theatrical lore cycle.


Meisel, 271. At this point, he notes that “Mrs. Honner played Jack at Sadler’s Wells; but Mr. E. F. Saville, played him in the version Ainsworth and Cruikshank endorsed, at the Surrey.”

The illustration appears originally in the serialization of Jack Sheppard in Bentley’s Miscellany, 1839. Reprinted in W. H. Ainsworth, Jack Sheppard (London: G. Routledge, 1884), facing page 288. The painter Sir James Thornhill (c. 1675-1734) was Hogarth’s sometime art instructor and father-in-law; James Figg (1684-1734), a contemporary figure of prizefighting fame, was perhaps the first recognized champion of England at bare-knuckle boxing. Austin, the turnkey, may have been an historical figure, or may have been an embellishment drawn from the numerous Jack Sheppard narratives.

Buckstone, Jack Sheppard, 62. Gay’s The Captives, a 1724 tragedy indeed performed at Drury Lane and read for the Princess, has been almost completely neglected in literary scholarship; John Richardson, "John Gay, The Beggar's Opera, and Forms of Resistance," Eighteenth-Century Life 24.3 (2000): 27, refers to it in passing as representing themes similar to those in Polly, though set in a “comfortably mythologized Persian past.”

Playbills in the Harvard Theatre Collection advertise performances at the Adelphi Theatre on December 28-30, 1840, and the week of January 4, 1841. In Keeley’s burlesqued Beggar’s Opera, Polly was played by Paul Bedford, the actor who took the role of Jack’s accomplice Joe Blueskin in the Adelphi’s Jack Sheppard. In dismissing Keeley’s breeches role as incidental, Meisel, of course, precedes the criticism now in the process of attending to such theatrical techniques (271).

The image, “Mary Anne Keeley as Jack Sheppard at the Adelphi Theatre, 1839,” from an engraving, appears in Walter Goodman, The Keeleys, on the Stage and at Home (London: R. Bentley and Son, 1895).

Buckley, "Sensations," 449.

describes Vestris’s “cross-dressing on the stage and her crossover into the male professional sphere” as “both ambiguous and threatening” to contemporaries. William Worthen Appleton, *Madame Vestris and the London Stage* (New York: Columbia UP, 1974) chronicles Vestris’s career.

The much later example of *The Stone Jug*, Benjamin Webster’s 1873 modification of *Jack Sheppard* for the Adelphi, suggests that Jack’s womanizing had enduring shock value. Official approval, John Stephens observes, came only after the play’s “radical remodeling,” especially with respect to Jack’s bigamy (75-76).

Linebaugh, *London Hanged*, 244. Linebaugh’s empirical data only suggests trends, and he does not ruminate upon the reasons for this. Nevertheless, clothing, trinkets, handkerchiefs, trimmings and the like—items signaling luxury and prestige, for the most part—constantly recur in the records of London petty crime. It is as if there existed a longstanding, concerted underclass assault on the costuming prerogatives of the affluent.

The song, written by G. Herbert Rodwell, became a craze in England; William Makepeace Thackeray, in *Little Travels and Roadside Sketches* (1840), grumpily recounts a “fat Englishman in a zephyr coat” singing the song in Antwerp.

Meisel, 277.

The image appears in most editions of Buckstone’s play; I take the image from John Baldwin Buckstone, *Jack Sheppard: A Drama in Four Acts*. London: Webster, 1839.

Few versions are more charitable to Jack; T. L. Greenwood’s version, which played at the Sadler’s Wells Theatre, has Jack hanged at the end amidst rioting while Blueskin shoots Wild and is in turn shot by a police officer.


Cooper, known for such satirical productions as Frederick Fox Cooper, *Black-Eyed Sukey, or, All in the Dumps: A Burlesque Extravaganza in One Act* (London: T. Richardson, n.d.), a burlesque on Jerrold’s *Black-Éy’d Susan*, seems to have consistently maintained an edge in his theatrical activities. See also Frederick Renad Cooper, *Nothing Extenuate: The Life of Frederick Fox Cooper* (London: Barrie and Rockliff, 1964), which reproduces on pages 231 through 242 letters between Cooper and the Lord Chamberlain about *Jack Sheppard*. Stephens, 66, addresses *Jack Sheppard’s* friction with theatrical authorities, relying upon the Public Records Office’s collection of the Lord Chamberlain’s correspondence, 7:7, May 23, July 24, 1848.

“The March of Knowledge,” originally printed in *The Penny Satirist* 15, December 1839, with more extensive captioning than is visible in this reproduction; image courtesy of the Enthoven Collection, Victoria and Albert Museum.

Jonas B. Phillips, *Jack Sheppard, or the Life of a Robber! Melodrama in Three Acts Founded on Ainsworth’s Novel*, 1839, Autograph Manuscript, Harvard Theatre Collection [TS 4336.123]. I will cite further quotations parenthetically in text, giving act and scene since the manuscript inconsistently numbers pages. The manuscript I cite is the only one in the Harvard Theatre Collection, and may be the only one in existence anywhere. Biographical details on Phillips are hard to come by—we know that he wrote a few other popular melodramas, but he had nowhere near the number of hits that many other authors did.

Buckley, “To the Opera House,”, perhaps the most wide-ranging and oft-cited work on New York City theatre and culture, proposes the term “bifurcation,” although his account traces a much more complex process (151). Levine’s *Highbrow/Lowbrow* traces this process on a larger scale, explaining something of the way culture produces performances defined as “high” and “low.” Unfortunately, Levine’s dualistic and somewhat static approach fails to appreciate the way that the high and low interact dynamically to produce the in-betweens of shifting, category-defying culture. Levine’s mode of analysis also grants perhaps too much control to the elites in its account of their defining, claiming, and sacralizing of culture; the working-class rowdies at the Bowery and the Chatham had more to do with actively selecting the elements that would become “low.” See also Lhamon, *Raising Cain*, 28ff, for an account of the New York City theatrical scene’s shifting landscape.

The manuscript’s title page identifies the play as “founded on Ainsworth’s novel.” In the early parts, however, it follows J. B. Buckstone’s version fairly closely—yet another reason why Buckstone’s adaptation might be considered one of the more influential.


The print is also held in the Billy Rose Theatre Collection and reprinted in McConachie, 115.

Maggie Montesinos Sale, The Slumbering Volcano: American Slave Ship Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity (Durham, NC: Duke UP, 1997), discusses the lingering threat of lave revolt in American culture. The prospectus for Obi, circulated in Dutton, also saw republication in American almanacs, consistently providing a popular frame of interpretation for the play’s numerous performances. See Marshall and Stock, as well as White, for accounts of Aldridge’s career.

Dennis Berthold, "Class Acts: The Astor Place Riots and Melville's 'The Two Temples',' American Literature 71.3 (1999): 434, argues that admirers of Forrest and his style “also hated blacks, abolitionists, and foreigners.” This is, however, probably an unfair overgeneralization, and in any case a mischaracterization of the Bowery B’hoys audience, who were unfairly aligned, after the Astor Place riots, with violently nativist and anti-abolitionist groups who appeared closer to the Civil War. Buckley argues that the “resilient history of the Bowery B’hoys militant nativism began in the decade following the riots” (315).

The Museum of the City of New York holds this print; they also hold a similar image, an oil painting on canvas, which they counter-intuitively identify as based upon this engraving. Eric Lott discusses the image, which I have been unable to reproduce here, in Love and Theft (125).

Lott, 124-27, discusses the picture’s construction of working-class identity in response to what he sees as the fascination and ridicule of blackness.

See Buckley, "To the Opera House," 296; the Bowery public’s anti-elitism also inflects perceptions of national allegiances; as Buckley also observes, “Anglophobia was one of the few feelings in which both native born and Irish—therefore the majority of the city’s working population—could share” (315).

See McConachie, 115-16.

See McConachie, 91-92 and 106-07.

According to Buckley, "To the Opera House," 14-16, estimates of the numbers of spectators at the speeches ranges from eight thousand to twenty-five thousand, while the rioters numbered around sixty-five hundred persons.

The historiography of the “paltry quarrel” first becomes evident in the Boston Traveller May 17, 1849; quoted in Richard Moody, The Astor Place Riot (Bloomington, IN:
Buckley recounts the historiography of the riots which, beginning the day after and continuing until twentieth-century histories such as Moody’s, which overemphasize the role of the press and of bad seeds in the mob in causing the riots. Lippard formulated class division in George Lippard, New York: Its Upper Ten and Lower Million (Cincinnati, OH: H. M. Rulison, 1853); see also David S. Reynolds, George Lippard, Prophet of Protest: Writings of an American Radical, 1822-1854 (New York: P. Lang, 1986) and Shelley Streeby, "Opening up the Story Paper: George Lippard and the Construction of Class," boundary 2 24.1 (1997): 177-203.

Buckley, "To the Opera House," 9.


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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

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