

UNIT 2/I

NINETEENTH-CENTURY ANTEBELLUM THEATER. TYPOLOGICAL DIVISION OF PLAYS AND ITS REFERENCE TO AMERICAN CONTEMPORARY LIFE. NATIVE AMERICAN CHARACTER TYPES & THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD THEATER. COMEDY, FARCE & MELODRAMA.

I. INTRODUCTION: DRAMA OF A NEW NATION, 1800-1865. A PERIOD OF EXPERIMENTATION AND IMITATION

From the beginning of the century through the period of the Civil War, the progress of American drama was steady but generally unimpressive. The theater continued to expand amid difficulties, and various actors and actresses achieved reputations which gained them applause in America and even in England, but such appreciation was due to youthful exuberance rather than to mature excellence. Between the actor or the manager and the playwright there was little sympathy and even less cooperation.

The power and influence of the actor (and particularly the actor-manager) was supreme; the tastes of American audiences were no higher than usual; and the dramatist was an insignificant person. The actor claimed the privilege of giving full vent to the declamatory style of acting then popular, although a few actors specialized in a single character such as the stage Yankee.

The American dramatist, meanwhile, was forced either to imitate the style of successful foreign plays or to write a play for a particular actor. With very little professional status and without the protection of a copyright law -not to mention the pirating techniques of that day- the playwright could gain very little. The American dramatist was truly at the mercy of managers whose reasoning, if unethical, was at least understandable: Why pay Americans to write plays when we can get [steal] new plays from England for nothing?

Perhaps the time was not ripe for serious and creative dramatists.

Certainly, from 1800 to 1865, only a handful of dramatists achieved anything approaching literary quality. Besides, most critics throughout the century were notorious for their ignorance of drama as literature as well as of drama as a scenic and declamatory production. In America as in England, criticisms of the theater were published in the "Sporting and Theatrical" journals such as the *New York Clipper* and the *New York Illustrated Times*. The earliest theatrical newspaper was the *New York Dramatic News and Society Journal*, established in 1874.

Before the Civil War, the greatest opportunity for the person interested in writing plays lay in becoming an actor or actor-manager-dramatist. (John Howard Payne, Dion Boucicault, John Brougham). It seems to have been neither a very happy time for the serious American dramatist nor a very productive period for good American drama.

The trends of the end of the eighteenth century of theater as entertainment, political weapon, means of glorifying the nation, and as teacher of moral behavior continued as playwrights experimented further with this material. As wars were fought and a self-conscious new nation became aware of the necessity of tradition, various aspects of America's past appeared on the stage -all patriotically glorified. Those playwrights who wanted to write serious drama imitated the romantic verse plays of England and with a few notable exceptions remained simply imitators. Native characters soon proved an effective source of comedy, and while the Negro became a minstrel(trobador) as well as a serious character in plays, the stage Yankee as a comic character was expanded into an evening's entertainment. As cities grew and social classes became distinguishable, the particular characteristics of these classes provided the object of ridicule in plays, and comedies of social caricature gained popular acclaim. In essence, American drama developed constantly, though slowly, and with significance in some areas, but it still showed the divided interests of a country: (1) struggling for existence and experimenting with its material, and (2) attempting to gain status by imitating the drama of England and Europe.

II. NATIVE AMERICAN CHARACTER TYPES: JONATHAN, SAMBO AND METAMORA

The spirit of the American Revolution which had fostered feelings of personal and national independence was intensified by the so-called "Second War of Independence", the War of 1812. As the common man found his voice more powerful in politics through the election of men like Andrew Jackson and saw a measure of his individual accomplishments in building a new country, his pride became sensitive. He assumed an anti-foreign attitude, particularly toward the Irish immigrants who came by the tens of thousands in the 1840's, and a few years later, he created an "American Party" with the slogan "Americans must rule America". This strong sense of Nationalism made itself felt - significantly- in literature and in the theater.

Intense nationalism in politics spilled over into literature until, in 1837, Ralph Waldo Emerson's address, "The American Scholar", became recognized as America's Declaration of Intellectual Independence. Individualism and self-reliance were important for a nation as well as for an individual -for literature and the arts as well as for politics. But the people had to be provided with a representative American man -a symbol of their distinctive qualities- and Royall Tyler's Jonathan from *The Contrast* presented one solution for this problem.

In the drama, both custom and character met in the Jonathan caricature, who was aided in his representation of America by other characters -the Negro and the Indian. All enjoyed a certain similarity. Each was introduced into the drama before 1800, and each developed irregularly during the nineteenth century.

I.1. The Yankee Character

Jonathan of *The Contrast* developed from a greenhorn(pardillo), whose credulity and prejudices made him an object of ridicule, to a shrewd hero, a witty storyteller whose clothes and language made him even more picturesque. However, his popularity resulted in

part from the 1822-23 visit to America of the English actor Charles Matthews, who, after his return to England, collaborated with Richard B. Peeke to write *Jonathan in England* (1824). This play's success was so great that it inspired numerous actors in America to write or request Yankee plays. About the same time, the Yankee began to appear in humorous essays and poems.

The Yankee is... made of contrarities -simplicity and cunning: inquisitive from nature and excessive curiosity, confirmed by habit; credulous, from inexperience and want of knowledge of the world [...] docile, when rightly managed; when otherwise treated, independent to obstinacy; easily betrayed into ridiculous mistakes [...] suspicious, vigilant, and quick of perception, he is ever ready to parry or repel the attacks of raillery(chanzas) by retorts of rustic and sarcastic, if not original and refined, wit and humour. (David Humphreys' *The Yankee in England*)

As the century progressed, the Yankee became a chief character in plays, and his personality became more fully developed. The most significant step, however, in the saga of the Yankee was David Humphreys' *The Yankee in England* (1815) which included a sevenpage glossary “of words used in a peculiar sense in this drama; pronounced with an accent or emphasis in certain districts; different from the modes generally followed by the inhabitants of the United States”. Finally, several plays had Yankee gals -Jedidah in *The Stage Struck Yankee*, Jerusha in *The Yankee Pedler* -but they were minor characters.

II.2. The Negro Character

The Negro, who had been a clownish servant, became both a minstrel character and a dramatic hero by mid-century. In the minstrel show, and in the farce or social comedy, the servant Sambo became both Uncle Tom and Bones. By the time of the Civil War, he had become a major character in drama. His social inferiority was frequently exploited by the Yankee. People made jokes about Negroes and used them to play jokes upon others.

In the few social comedies of this period, the Negro enjoyed higher social status and more character development, and was exploited for his comic possibilities. Zeke, from Mrs. A. C. Mowatt Ritchie's *Fashion* (1845) also illustrates this different attitude towards the Negro. Zeke's language indicates an acquaintance, though inadequate, with literate people, and he is not a stupid servant; in fact, he fulfills his part in the intrigue of the play very well. It is interesting that the only person who treats him with great disrespect is Adam Trueman, the Yankee.

The Negro minstrel show was begun through the talent and imagination of Thomas Dartmouth Rice, in 1828, and expanded into a business in which, from 1850 through 1870, there were hundreds of minstrel companies.

The most successful plays with Negroes as heroes were Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Boucicault's *The Octoroon*.

II.3. The Indian Character

The Indian, primarily exploited as a major character from the beginning, continued in a primary role until John Brougham burlesqued him out of existence.

The first play with the Indian character written by an American was *Ponteach; or, The Savages of America* (1776) by Robert Rogers. *Pocahontas* (1830) by George Washington Parke Custis, is the best illustration of the use of the Pocahontas theme, and *Metamora* (1829) by John Augustus Stone, the most successful on the stage. Romantized and idealized, the Indian reached the height of his popularity in the 1830's and 1840's. Then, quite suddenly, initiated by the clever burlesques of John Brougham, the Indian play lost its appeal. One result was the growth of the American backwoodsman plays -James Kirke Paulding's *The Lion of the West* (1831) and the dramatization of novels by Cooper and Simms -which were extremely popular after the Civil War.

The Indian appeared in numerous plays as both a major and a minor character. A majority of the plays, however, were about particular Indians. The single character which

appealed to the most playwrights, however, was Pocahontas. Among these plays, Robert Dale Owen's *Pocahontas* (1837) attempts a more complete picture than usual.

II.3.1. THE INDIAN RIDICULED: JOHN BROUGHAM'S BURLESQUES

The exaggerated characterization and interpretation of the noble Redskin by dramatists and actors finally brought about his fall from popularity. The man most responsible for helping change public tastes was John Brougham, a good actor and productive playwright, who was called the "Aristophanes" (Greek dramatist) of the American stage by Laurence Hutton in *Curiosities of the American Stage*, New York, 1891, p. 164). And in no plays was he more deserving of this title than in his burlesques of the Indians.

Brougham's *Metamora; or, The Last of the Pollywogs* (renacuajo) (1847) was an obvious satire on the Stone-Forrest success. A better burlesque was Brougham's 1855 production of his "Original, Aboriginal, Erratic, Operatic, Semi-Civilized, and Demi-Savage Extravaganza of Pocahontas", *Po-Ca-Hon-Tas; or, The Gentle Savage*. Captain Smith's description of the court of "Pow-Ha-Tan I, King of the Tuscaroras -a Crotchety(cascarrabias) Monarch, in fact a semibrave" suggests the humor of the play.

II.3.2. THE INDIAN REPLACED: APPEARANCE OF THE BACKWOODSMAN

Soon before the Indian character began to disappear from the stage, *The Lion of the West* (1831) by James Kirke Paulding appeared. But not until after the Civil War did the backwoodsman achieve popularity on the stage -long after the Indians had ceased to be "noble savages" and had become "varmint(alimañas) Redskins". In the 1830's, Kentucky was the West. Twenty years later, the frontier had changed; the frontiersmen considered the Indian more of a menace than a "noble savage"; the Homestead Act of 1862 opened more land; wars were fought; and legends grew- legends of the backwoodsman's powers. Soon plays appeared with a new hero! And alas, the poor Indian vanished -at least, the theatrical

Indian, who fits well Mark Twain's description of the literary Indian: a member of "an extinct race which never existed".

III. MIRROR OF THE TIMES

To a greater or lesser degree, the theater reflects the interests of a people, the views of social critics, and the culture of a period. The years reflected in this mirror -from Jefferson to Lincoln- are marked by growth and change, war and confusion, opportunity and idealism. A new nation was trying to establish itself; a new social culture was starting to develop while problems appeared: war and border disputes, economic panics, political arguments, population increases, expansion and transportation difficulties. By mid-century, America was becoming a vast and rapidly developing country, whose changes were reflected in its people and society. It had become known as a nation of hustlers(jugadores), "dollar grabbers (atracadores)"-optimistic and boastful, rough-and-tumble(duros) individuals who practiced Ralph Waldo Emerson's doctrine of self-reliance and worked for their future, "Root(hecha raíces), hog(acapara), or die". The East became distinct from the West, and people throughout expressed an individuality -anti-foreignism, the American Temperance(abstinencia, moderación) Society in 1826, the Mormons trek to Utah in 1846-48, the Gold Rush in California, agitation for women's rights, political and social difficulties that led to the Civil War- which stimulated social problems.

Strictly speaking, of course, there was no established society in the first half of the nineteenth century, but Tidewater Virginia, Back Bay Boston, and the Patroons of New York were the main pretenders. The playwright may have lacked the material for comedy of manners, but he had much material for drama; and mainly in farce and melodrama, he provided many caricatures of society and dramatized numerous social, political, and civil problems.

The major literary figures in America had little to say about the drama; but that it had an appeal for them, there is no question. Irving, Paulding, Bird, Poe, Longfellow -all

wrote plays. Perhaps they hoped to improve the literary quality of American theater, but they were unsuccessful in their efforts, as were Shelley, Browning, and Byron in England. Toward the contribution of American playwrights, the English attitude ranged from abuse to amused toleration to enthusiasm. Generally, the effect of American drama was theatrical rather than literary, and perhaps that distinction suggests a major characteristic of the times. It was a time of idealism, individualism, and romance, when the open, frank movement of life was apt to be sensational and spectacular. Thus the drama, a mirror image of society, truthfully reflects the more theatrical than literary quality which was the spirit of the times.

III.1. The Comedy of America

In a strict sense, the comedy of this period in America was farce (not well-drawn characters), or to be quite liberal, farce-comedy. The witty portrayal of some aspect of society with well-drawn characters who were logically motivated in both speech and action and whose thoughts and struggles directed the plot of the play -these characteristics of drama were largely lacking. Plays with a foreign setting came nearest to comedy; American people and society were caricatured. Fashionable life, of course, was a favorite target. Comedy in America in the first half of the nineteenth century, then, variously emphasized three important aspects of American drama at that time: a dependence upon foreign setting; a reflection of American attitude toward the American people, society, and morals; and a concern for realistic touches.

III.1.1. THE COMIC IDEA WITH A FOREIGN SETTING

They wrote to moralize, to satirize, to inform, and to entertain. They were not interested in objective views or detached attitudes. Consequently, only a few plays could boast some of the characteristics of comedy: detachment on the part of the author, well-developed characters, and witty and clever lines commenting on society. Invariably, the writer of anything approaching comedy either adapted a foreign play and kept the foreign

scene because it was too difficult to change it to American circumstance or wrote of a foreign scene because somehow it facilitated a certain detachment in a playwright's works.

III.1.2. FASHIONABLE LIFE

Various aspects of social life in America were caricatured in a number of farce-comedies, but few plays attempted to portray fashionable life. As the century progressed, however, social structures were becoming recognizable in major cities from Boston to Charleston, and both a genuine and an imitated sophistication became evident. At the same time that one part of American society was reacting to nationalistic pressures, however, another part (the *nouveau riche*) was attempting to gain social standing by obvious adulation and imitation of foreign manners and customs.

Plays about fashionable life were part satire, part farce, with a strain of melodrama, a pretension toward social comedy, and a liberal amount of frank nationalism. Using Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* as a model, playwrights wrote numerous satiric caricatures of American fashionable society.

III.1.2.a. ANNA CORA MOWATT RITCHIE AND *FASHION; OR, LIFE IN NEW YORK*, 1845

(Discussion) In her *Autobiography of An Actress* (1854), Mrs. Ritchie (1819-1870) tells of her early prejudices against the theater, which "melted" away as she grew. After writing her first "positive attempt as a dramatist", *The Gypsy Wanderer; or, The Stolen Child* (1836), at seventeen, circumstances and desire started her on a career in the theater. When her husband lost his fortune, she reluctantly accepted a suggestion that she give public readings, and her success soon brought her an offer to appear on the legitimate state(públicamente)- an offer she most indignantly refused because people of her social station did not act on the stage. Later, however, she wrote *Fashion*, and its success on the New York stage changed her views: she now "determined to fulfill the destiny which

seemed visibly pointed out by the unerring finger of Providence... I would become an actress". And she was successful. When she retired from stage in 1854 for reasons of poor health, she had by her presence on it raised the reputation of theater in America and through her written plays had added to the stature of American drama.

Fashion was her major contribution to the drama and has since become a landmark for the development of social comedy in the history of American drama, providing as it does, a halfway point between Royall Tyler's *The Contrast* and the transitional social comedies of Bronson Howard, W. H. Howells, and Clyde Fitch. Mrs. Ritchie's preface to the London edition of her play, 1850, shows her objectives:

The Comedy of *Fashion* was intended as a good-natured satire upon some of the follies incident to a new country, where foreign dross(basura) sometimes passes for gold, while native gold is cast aside as dross; where vanities rather than the virtues of other lands are too often imitated, and where the stamp of fashion gives currency even to the coinage of vice.

In spite of its obvious inadequacies, *Fashion* illustrates better than any American play of its time the characteristics of social comedy. Its theme is the relationship of the individual to society, and its characters, though mainly caricatures, suggest a variety of social levels. The manner in which society is satirized, the wit, and the epigrammatic(a terse, sage, or witty and often paradoxical saying) quality of the lines also add to the comedy: "A woman of fashion never grows old! Age is always out of fashion"; fashion is "an agreement between certain persons to live without souls! to substitute the etiquette for virtue -decorum for purity- manners for the morals!". Mixed with this comic caricature, and frequently dominating it, are aspects of farce and melodrama. The gestures, the exaggerated actions of Mrs. Tiffany, the cudgel(porra, garrote) waving by Trueman -all are farce actions. Disguises, letters, a forgery(falsificación) theme, a dastardly(ruin) villain - these are the hallmarks of melodrama. There is still, however, a great deal of charm and

brilliance in *Fashion*; Mrs. Ritchie understood her society well, and she was a clever writer.

III.2. An Active and Growing Society

Significantly social movements, important events, and particular social problems provided subject matter for those playwrights and theater managers who were eager to please a fickle(volatile) public. From 1830 to about 1865, the new nation developed a very active and growing society, and the drama reflected this activity.

Perhaps the most obvious change in social structure stemmed from the population increases and shifts. From 1830 to 1860, the population jumped 150 per cent and a major reason for this growth was the mass immigration of Europeans, particularly the Irish and the Germans. Along with their native cultures, however, the immigrants brought social problems which were immediately recognized by outbursts of anti-foreignism among the "natives". Because of their individuality in language and their striking personal characteristics, the Irish were ready-made characters for the theater, and were exploited in plays just as Jonathan and Mose had been popularized. [Mose was the New York fire b'hoy(agitador?). A roughneck who enjoyed physical action and practical jokes and who would fight a fire, sing a song, or love a girl with equal zest, Mose was a character that enjoyed a brief but spectacular success] Plays about the Germans -or "Dutchmen", as they were usually called- were less popular, possibly because the Germans were less exuberant than the Irish.

The social problems created frequently became theater fare(tema). Temperance movements grew in response to the drinking habits of the Irish and Germans -and temperance plays multiplied. Americans also perceived a threat to their freedom of worship in the Roman Catholicism of the Irish and Germans. The Mormon trek westward was motivated mainly by a desire for religious freedom, but it was also part of the geographical

expansion in which the immigrants became involved even before the discovery of gold in California sent the wagons rolling westward.

In this period of 1830 to 1860, the seeds of the Civil War were planted. The problems of Negro slavery -the abolitionists' arguments, the underground(clandestino, subterráneo) railroad (southern Blacks to freedom), the Compromise of 1850 (California, Utah, New Mexico, Columbia District, Fugitive Slave Law, Kansas-Nebraska territories), "Bleeding Kansas" (fraudulent elections 1852-4), the Dred Scott decision (Blacks treated as property in the North), John Brown (abolitionist finally executed)- became material for the playwrights.

III.2.1. RACIAL GROUPS: IRISH

Beginning about the turn of the nineteenth century with John Murdock's *The Triumphs of Love* (1795) and John Minshull's *Rural Felicity* (1801), the Irishman reached his greatest popularity about mid-century. By then, his heroic actions and comic traits had made him a popular hero, recognized by specialty actors and playwrights.

James Pilgrim wrote a good percentage of the popular Irish-American farces: *Paddy the Piper*(gaitero) (n.d.) and *Shandy Maguire; or, The Bould Boy of the Mountains* (1851). Shandy was the typical Irishman of the farces -quick with his wits, his fists, and a joke, but in reality a softhearted hero who protected widows, saved the heroine from the villain, and beat up all the ruffians.

An actor-manager-playwright, Brougham was born in Dublin and had some success in the London theater before coming to America in 1842. Among his best Irish plays were *The Irish Fortune Hunter* (1856) and *Temptation; or, The Irish Immigrant* (1856). He was second to none in the 1850's as an actor-manager-playwright.

Boucicault play's were concerned with Ireland rather than with the Irish in America and really do not reflect the American scene. As "sensational dramas", his Irish plays -*The*

Colleen (Irish girl) *Bawn* (1860), *Arrah-na-Pogue* (of the kiss) (1864), *The O'Dowd* (1872), and *The Shaughraun* (1874)- were excellent and very successful melodramas.

III.2.2. RACIAL GROUPS" GERMAN

Misunderstood and disliked, the "Dutchmen" most frequently reached the stage as objects of ridicule, although sometimes they were treated with sympathy: *The Persecuted Dutchman; or, The Original John Schmidt* (1845) and *The Dutchman's Ghost* (1857)

III.2.3. PLAYS ABOUT MORMONS

Led by Brigham Young, the Mormons made their famous trek to Utah in 1846-48. Soon the Mormon adventure appeared in the theater: the anonymous *Deseret Deserted; or, The Last Days of Brigham Young* (1858); *Life of the Mormons at Salt Lake* (1858) by C. W. Taylor (?); and *The Mormons; or, Life at Salt Lake City* (1858) by Dr. Thomas Dunn English.

Using the common melodramatic devices of escapes, rescues, disguises, and a revenge theme in the subplot, *The Mormons* is obviously anti-Mormon as it dramatizes the activities of a new group of arrivals at Salt Lake City.

III.2.4. PLAYS ABOUT THE MOVEMENT WESTWARD

Apart from the backwoodsman's plays, a number of plays described the trip to California and the brand of society found there: the anonymous *A Trip to California Gold Mines* (?), and *A Live Woman in the Mines* (1857), show some of the admirable and fearless characteristics of Western people. Also *Fast* (libertino, veloz) *Folks; or, Early Days of California*, by Joseph A. Nunes. These plays presented a miscellany of social history, local color, and folk drama.

III.2.5. TEMPERANCE PLAYS

Within a few years after the American Temperance Society was formed at Boston in 1826, a thousand-odd local groups sprang up along with temperance crusades employing pictures, pamphlets, and reformed drunkards as lecturers. As the century progressed, the fervor of temperance supporters grew, but the best temperance plays were written about the middle of the century: Clifton Tayleure, *The Drunkard's Warning* (1856); H. Seymour, *Temperance Doctor* (n.d.); and the two minor classics, W.H. Smith's *The Drunkard; or, The Fallen Saved* (1844) and William W. Pratt's dramatization of the novel by Timothy S. Arthur, *Ten Nights in a Bar Room and What I Saw There*.

III.2.6. SLAVERY AND THE SOUTH

There had been slaves in all the thirteen colonies before the Revolution, but after Congressional action in 1808, the importation of slaves to America was illegal. This, however, did not solve the social or moral problem, the question of the "fortunate" slave vs. black bondage (cautiverio). The argument continued, and plays reflected the turbulent events that immediately preceded the war -such as the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 (last Compromise), publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1852, The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, John Brown's Pottawatomie Massacre in 1856 (awareness of slavery in the North), the Dred Scott decision of 1857 (Blacks as property), the Harpers Ferry incident of 1859, and the subsequent hanging of John Brown.

The most famous of these plays, of course, was *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, billed as "The World's Greatest Hit". Another very popular melodrama about Southern slave life was Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon*. Mrs. Stowe's second novel of slavery, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal* (tenebroso) *Swamp* (pantano, ciénaga) (1956) was dramatized several times but never successfully. (also other minor plays and dramatization of novels).

III.3. The Appeal of Melodrama before the Civil War

Melodrama appealed to the majority of those who attended the theater -this is perhaps the only undebatable statement that one could make about America before the Civil War. Since the theater of the time was controlled by a manager who wanted to make money and an actor who desired popularity, it is not surprising that a high percentage of the plays written or adapted during that period were melodrama. From Dunlap, who made a career of Kotzebue, to Boucicault, a master of melodrama, whether the play was written in poetry or prose or was concerned with political issues, native characters, or social problems, the techniques of melodrama were prominent. (Also farce is related to melodrama as popular entertainment) This interest in melodrama was far from a passing fad(modas); many plays of the later nineteenth century became more violently and purposefully melodramatic.

III.4. Shortcuts to Popularity: Adaptations, Translations, Burlesques

From the very beginning, American dramatists looked to Europe -especially England- for the material of their plays -characters, settings, themes, plots-, either (1) a complete play adapted to American circumstances or translated for an American audience, or (2) particular characters or plot themes from successful plays, or (3) the language of the foreign dramatists.

The three most successful adaptations of mid-century America are *Nights in a Bar Room*, from the novel by T.S. Arthur, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, from H.B. Stowe's novel, and *Rip Van Winkle*, from Washington Irving's story.

III.5. Poets and Novelists as Playwrights

Some poets and novelists tried their hands as playwrights: Washington Irving (with John Howard Payne) with *Charles the Second* (1824), Poe with *Politian* (1835) and Longfellow with the poetic dramas *The Spanish Student* (1842) or *The Golden Legend*

(1851). However, in no instance has a first-rate American novelist or poet become a successful dramatist.

III.6. Transatlantic Evaluation: American Drama in England before the Civil War

Although some plays had been produced earlier in London, the production of J.H. Payne's first play at Covent Garden in 1815 established a foothold for American drama in the London theater. Most enthusiastically received were the plays which exhibited the peculiar traits of Americans, Yankee plays, Negro minstrels and skits(sátiras), and pioneer adventure plays enjoyed long runs in London.

American poetic tragedy, such as *The Gladiator*, by R. M. Bird, had a mixed reception in England. The Yankee plays were generally loved by English audiences and kept him in the theaters for nearly thirty years, even enticing (atrayendo) English playwrights to try their hands at writing Yankee plays. Backwoodsman plays, such as *The Kentuckian; or, A Trip to New York*, adapted from James Kirke Paulding was one of the most popular in England, as well as the adaptations of Cooper's novels. But more successful and popular were the adaptations of Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Boucicault's *The Octoroon* and other plays treating Southern problems.

Just as the Civil War seems to interest modern English historians more than any other aspect of American history, the problems leading to the Civil War had their fascination for contemporary audiences.

IV. YANKEE ORIGINALITY: AMERICA'S CONTRIBUTION TO WORLD THEATER. The Minstrel Show, The Showboat Theater and The Tom Show

The three of them created excitement; they reached out to the average man and made him laugh and cry; their arrival with a parade as colorful as the company's resources could make it: "Come on! Come on! Here is the kind of entertainment and excitement that you want, born in America!".

IV.1. The Minstrel Show

Imitating an unhappy Negro with a deformed right shoulder and rheumatism in his left leg, Thomas Dartmouth Rice (1828) invented the minstrel show, in which he -with clothes borrowed from the old Negro- performed the song and dance between the acts of the play. His Jim Crow routine earned for him the title of the Father of American Minstrelsy. The first presentation of a minstrel show was that of the Virginia Minstrels at the Bowery Amphitheater in New York, February 6, 1843. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century, minstrel companies sometimes included a hundred people, and the minstrel show with its definite pattern was an evening's entertainment in itself. Unfortunately, by the second quarter of the twentieth century, America's only "original contribution to world theater" had been left to the movies and the amateur stage for whatever means of survival it could manage.

IV.2. The Showboat

It was in July 1831, when William Chapman's "drama barge" appeared floating down the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers giving one-night shows, that the era of the showboat started. Soon the entire gamut of theater fare -Shakespeare, minstrels, melodramas, the latest New York plays- could be seen on showboats run by some of the most colorful theater people. By the end of the nineteenth century, the need which stimulated the showboat theater business was lessened by stock and touring theater companies. Revived as a curiosity in the early twentieth century, the showboat was sunk by the Depression of the Thirties. (now only through universities)

IV.3. The Tom Show

After more than ninety years on the stage, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* has joined the minstrel show and the showboat as a curiosity in the history of American drama and

theater. Based on Mrs. Stowe's great novel, it owed its early success to its attack on slavery and then continued to be produced as a melodrama and spectacle play. The best dramatization of the novel seems to have been George L. Aiken's, which was produced first in the Troy (New York) Museum on September 27, 1852, though one characteristic of *Uncle*

Tom's Cabin is the variety in the stage versions.

As time went on, members of the theater companies that played it became known as Tommers, and their shows were called "Tom Shows". Interested in only the one play, these players were quite like a family of troubadours living the various characters in the melodrama. The aim of the play was always the same: virtue must be rewarded and sin punished!