Melodrama: Metropolis: Modernity

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The work presented in this thesis is the candidate's own.

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Abstract

The principal aim of this thesis is to extend current understandings of the dynamics of stage melodrama, as it was practised on the stages of the minor theatres in London during the second quarter of the nineteenth century, specifically by exploring the ways in which the genre represented, mediated, inflected, processed and systematised the experience of life in the new metropolis.

A critical methodology has been employed in this study that is best described as hybrid, combining elements of cultural materialist analysis with a more performance-oriented mode of textual analysis. Where appropriate, reference is made to surviving publicity surrounding original productions such as playbills and reviews and, in order to locate the work within a concrete culture of production and consumption, to available data on the minor theatres in which it was performed. The theoretical underpinning of this study draws on a range of existing arguments surrounding the relationship between melodrama and modernity, but also on the work of urban theorists and cultural historians who have identified the metropolis as a significant catalyst in the formation of modernity.

After outlining the conceptual framework and reviewing existing literature in the field, chapters continue with discussions of the emergence of proletarian protagonists in melodrama and their relationship with developing notions of metropolitan class consciousness; melodramatic representations of metropolitan space and the dynamics of movement through that space; nostalgic stagings of the rural past; melodrama's relationship to Simmelian notions of metropolitan 'mental life'; and the synergies between melodrama, the spectacular, and metropolitan culture.

The overall aim is to add to current understanding of how melodrama interpreted the shifting physical forms and subjective and social experience of the early nineteenth-century city, but also how the city itself shaped, limited and enabled the forms of expression adopted by melodramatists.

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Introduction

Melodrama, Metropolis, Modernity

The aim of this thesis is to consider the operations of a number of early Victorian melodramas by exploring the ways in which they mediated, reflected, processed and systematised the experience of life in the new metropolis. This connection between melodrama and the city is foregrounded throughout the study. The arguments here are underwritten by the assumption that melodrama, as a particular type of popular stage practice, and the metropolis, as a form of new social organisation, are of real and lasting cultural significance and deeply bound up with the processes of modernity.

The performance culture of nineteenth-century London was extremely rich and diverse. As Tracy Davis and Peter Holland's 2007 collection *The Performing Century* demonstrates, for example, a large number of forms, including burlesque, farce, circus, music hall, ballet, comic opera and circus, coexisted happily, or jostled for ascendancy at a wide range of performance venues across the city throughout the greater part of the century.[1] Audiences were similarly large, diverse and fluid. Consequently, while conscious of the need to understand melodrama as one thread in a rich tapestry, this study does not attempt to capture theatre practice in the period in anything like its entirety, or even to capture melodrama across the range of its manifestations. The field of study is simply too large. Instead the more modest aim is to shed light on the ways in which a number of popular plays interpreted the shifting physical forms and the subjective and social experience of late Georgian and early Victorian London, roughly speaking between 1825 and 1850. The plays in question, which include John Baldwin Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer*

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[1] Tracy C. Davis and Peter Holland, eds., *The Performing Century: Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

(Adelphi 1826), Douglas Jerrold's *Martha Willis the Servant Maid* (Pavilion 1831), John Thomas Haines *Jonathan Bradford* (Surrey 1832), Edward Lancaster's *Ruth, The Lass that Loved a Sailor* (Royal Standard 1841), William Moncrieff's *The Scamps of London* (Sadler's Wells 1843) and Thomas Taylor's *The Bottle* (City of London 1847), were originally produced at minor theatres and have been selected as part of a deliberate strategy to shift focus away from the patent houses, and largely away from the West End, in the hope of capturing a clearer sense of how melodrama engaged with metropolitan sensibilities and anxieties for the mass of the people of the city, especially the working poor and the artisan classes. While a number of theatres like the Adelphi, the Surrey, the Pavilion and the Britannia receive particular attention in this thesis, the growing importance and influence of the minors was increasingly apparent across London in this period. Their rising reputation and commercial appeal brought the iniquities of the Patent system increasingly under scrutiny and in certain quarters public opinion began to shift in their favour:

> We hope that the law respecting public amusements will soon be brought under the notice of the legislature. The attempt to crush the Minor Theatres will end, like most persecutions, in a Reformation. The merits of the question between the majors and the minors are easily understood. Take a practical view of it – go to the Adelphi, the Olympic – or, if you don't dislike travelling the Surrey, and see clever pieces admirably acted in all their parts, nothing neglected, nothing slurred, and each performer seeming to feel an ambition to give the best effect to the character allotted to him, - go to Covent garden or Drury lane, - and go to sleep.[2]

As well as the theatres, the plays under discussion in this thesis have been chosen because of their relatively immediate socio-political relevance for metropolitan audiences of the period. They tend therefore not to feature the haunted castles, humble peasantry or roving banditry of foreign lands of Gothic and Romantic melodramas, and largely, but not exclusively, have contemporary settings. All were originally produced in London. Finally, although some mention is made of the Lord Chamberlain's manuscript copies of individual plays, each play under discussion in this thesis exists elsewhere in print, and thus can be assumed to have some kind of afterlife in performance beyond the dates of original production. It is worth remembering,

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[2] Theatrical Examiner, 'Majors and Minors', *The Examiner*, 1 January 1832, p. 5.

after all, that countless plays of this period were never printed, and it seems safe to assume that those that were had some kind of particular resonance for audiences that made them popular, and therefore worth re-staging.

All of the plays selected can be loosely labelled 'domestic melodrama', following the definition developed by Michael R. Booth in his 1965 study *English Melodrama*.[3] In Booth's definition the 'domestic' is a relatively broad term used to describe melodramas characterised both by native setting, and a focus on contemporary social problems. Such plays invariably focused on the trials and tribulations of the poor and dispossessed, and often on families torn apart by circumstances outside their control. Melodramas in this category shared a number of characteristic tropes and, as Marvin Carlson has observed, many had class conflict at their centre, played out:

> … in variations of the paradigmatic situation of a virtuous but poor young woman, loved by a virtuous but poor young man but pursued by a corrupt and ruthless aristocrat, landed gent, factory owner, etc. who uses his superior power, wealth and social position to advance his own suit.[4]

As a specific manifestation of melodramatic practice, the domestic rose to prominence in London theatres in the middle decades of the century at a time of rapid expansion in the city's population and significant political and cultural upheaval. It is possible therefore to interpret domestic melodrama, as Martha Vicinus has argued, as:

> … the working out in popular culture of the conflict between the family and its values and the economic and social assault of industrialization …[5]

The speed of industrialisation described by Vicinus was accompanied, of course, by equally rapid urbanisation, which was to transform social life both in existing cities and throughout the country. As a consequence, during the industrial revolution the influence of great cities and the new patterns of social organisation they engendered began to be felt far beyond the cities themselves, so that they began to dominate both in terms of their economic influence, but also through their pull on the consciousness of the nation as a

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[3] Michael R. Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), p. 118.

[4] Marvin Carlson, 'He Never Should Bow Down to a Domineering Frown: Class Tensions and Nautical Melodrama', in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, eds., *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1999), pp. 147-166, p.153.

[5] Martha Vicinus, '"Helpless and Unfriended": Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama' *New Literary History*, 13:1 (1981), pp. 127-143, p. 128.

whole. Louis Wirth's seminal essay 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' is worth quoting at some length in this regard:

> The technological developments in transportation and communication which virtually mark a new epoch in human history have accentuated the role of cities as dominant elements of our civilization and have enormously extended the urban mode of living beyond the confines of the city itself. The dominance of the city, especially of the great city, may be regarded as a consequence of the concentration in cities of industrial and commercial, financial and administrative facilities and activities, transportation and communication lines, and cultural and recreational equipment such as the press … theatres, libraries, museums, concert hall, operas, hospitals, higher education institutions, research and publishing centers, professional organizations, and religious and welfare institutions.[6]

The first half of the nineteenth century was to witness the most rapid urbanisation in history. Across Britain, 'the swiftest rise in the proportion of people living in cities of 100,000 or larger occurred from 1811 to 1851', so that by the second quarter of the century London was not only the largest city in the world; it was the largest city the world had ever seen.[7] The period from 1825 to 1850, in particular, saw unprecedented change and rapid growth in the city and its population. As Roy Porter emphasises, in the decade between '1841 and 1851 alone, some 330,000 migrants flooded into the capital, representing a staggering 17 per cent of London's total population'.[8] So profound was the transformation that the term 'metropolis' in reference to London as an entity came fully into common usage, becoming firmly fixed in common parlance and in the national imagination with the establishment of the Metropolitan Police in 1829.[9] Perhaps unsurprisingly, the theatre was implicated in and deeply affected by London's rapid expansion and an explosion in theatrical culture accompanied population growth. Many new theatres were built in an effort to service the demands of a burgeoning metropolitan population. In the East End alone, for example, following the opening of the Pavilion in Whitechapel in 1828, the next fifteen years saw six theatres established; the Garrick (1831); the Grecian (1832); the Effingham

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[6] Louis Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', *The American Journal of Sociology,* 44:1 (1938), pp. 1-24, pp.4-5.
[7] Kingsley David, 'The Urbanisation of the Human Population', in Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout, eds., *The City Reader* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 1-11, p.2.
[8] Roy Porter, *London: A Social History* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), p. 248.
[9] See Francis Sheppard, *London: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 279.

(1834); the Standard (1835); the City of London (1837) and the Britannia (1841).[10]

The decades immediately preceding the 1830s and '40s witnessed particularly rapid social, political, and theatrical transformation. As well as the Reform Act of 1832, for instance, the final demise of the institution of patent monopoly, which had strongly influenced the development of melodrama and dictated the practices of London's theatres for more than a century, occurred in 1843. David Worrall summarises the position in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries:

> The basic structure of British drama during this period was largely determined by the effects of two political and legal realities. The first was the role of the two London Royal theatres in Covent Garden and Drury Lane. Employing patents or monopolistic authorities originating from the Restoration, the two patent theatres were the only playhouses within London's Westminster allowed to produce drama of the type most readily recognizable to a modern reader as the five-act spoken drama familiar to us from Shakespeare's play. The second determinant was the office of the monarch's Lord Chamberlain who employed an Examiner of Plays to vet and censor not only the appropriateness of the texts of dramatic entertainment but who also helped, effectively, to safeguard the privileges of the patent houses.[11]

Entertainment culture, of course, does not exist in isolation, and the rise of the minor theatres and their subsequent struggle against the unfairness of their institutional position had implications beyond the theatre itself and resonated throughout the capital, as Jane Moody has shown:

> The indefatigable excitement surrounding the cause of parliamentary reform, the popularity of laissez-faire principles in economics, and even the topical issue of religious toleration all provided powerful momentum for the minor theatres' campaign against dramatic monopoly. … In a variety of ways, the cause of the minor theatres dovetailed with fervent enthusiasm for political reform and a pervasive antipathy to commercial monopolies.[12]

Throughout the period covered by this thesis the existence and subsequent abolition of the patent monopoly was a factor in shaping the ways in which melodrama was written and performed. Many of the plays under discussion were performed at minor houses outside the boundaries of the city of

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[10] See Heidi Holder, 'The East-End Theatre' in Kerry Powell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 257-276, p. 257.

[11] David Worrall, *Theatric Revolution: Drama, Censorship, and Romantic Period Subcultures 1773-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 33

[12] Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 44-45.

Westminster to substantially, if not exclusively, lower-class audiences. Consequently, the reception of individual plays was often affected by class sensibility and class disdain, and inevitably subject to mediation in journalistic accounts. This is particularly the case for the East End theatres, accounts of which were often coloured by class prejudice and, as the century progressed, overt anti-Semitism.[13]

By choosing a period of especially intense social and political change, and by focusing on a set of plays performed largely at commercial neighbourhood theatres, this study attempts to privilege the felt experience of the popular metropolitan audience. In so doing it inevitably raises questions of ideology, especially in relation to critical approaches to popular forms and the popular audience. As it happens, melodrama has had a particularly turbulent critical history in spite or perhaps because of its widespread popularity. This history is worth summarising, both because the class prejudices inherent in it need highlighting and challenging, and because such a summary provides relevant critical contexts for the chapters that follow. The aim of the section that follows therefore is to outline key trends in melodrama scholarship and to evaluate these principally in terms of their relevance to the arguments presented later in this thesis. The section begins with a brief outline of the key features of melodrama itself and its place in nineteenth-century theatre history.

That melodrama was the defining theatrical mode of the nineteenth century is not really in question. Such was its widespread popularity that by the middle of that century, as Elaine Hadley observes, 'stage melodrama and its distinctive style of presentation had become so common in most London theatres that plays of a melodramatic cast no longer identified themselves as such; in most respects melodrama was drama'.[14] Louis James assesses the genre's cultural impact as follows:

> In the nineteenth the modality was that of melodrama, the dialectic of absolute forces in conflict towards a resolution – the 'good' heroine against the 'bad' villain, Malthus's struggle of population against the laws of subsistence, the class conflict

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[13] See Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*: *London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), pp. 41-54.
[14] Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885*(Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), p. 1.

of Worker against Capitalist of Marx and Engels, or Darwin's natural selection of the species.[15]

In the event, melodrama was extremely flexible and protean, and existed in countless variations responding both to the tastes of local audiences and to political and social events. As a dramatic form, and at a fundamental level, melodrama is productively thought of as a powerful expression of the logic of the excluded middle, as staging a perpetual battle between forces of good and evil. Alongside the use of music to accompany action, generate mood and create tension, from which the genre draws its name, the omnipresence of active villainy is perhaps the distinguishing feature of the genre. The villain functions in every case to trigger a series of events that poses a threat to the hero or heroine's reputation, livelihood or safety. Each individual melodrama typically ends with the trouncing of the villain and the neutralising, at least for the moment, of the particular danger he represents. The virtuous invariably survive the ordeal to continue their lives in relative peace and stability.

This pattern was repeated in one form or another in London theatres during the period covered by this study and, indeed, for much of the nineteenth century. As well as staging primordial contests between good and evil from which the good tended to emerge unscathed, melodramatic plots invariably moved towards scenes of heightened emotional intensity and incident in which hidden truths were uncovered, or characters encountered compelling new circumstances. Towards the end of John Baldwin Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer; or, the lost Son* (Adelphi 1826), for example, the identity of the long lost son is revealed to his astonished family, but only after he has rescued them from certain death in a vicious arson attack:

> MICHAEL. Stop – Hear old Gypsy Mike;- Master Luke stole away your boy and sold him to me; I took care of him until one day –
> PHILIP. He ran away and went to sea – I am that boy!
> MIKE, FARMER, DAME, CLARA, CHARLES. You!
> WAKEFIELD. My boy! My Boy![16]

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[15] Louis James, 'Was Jerrold's Black Ey'd Susan more popular than Wordsworth's Lucy?' in David Bradby, Louis James and Bernard Sharratt, eds., *Performance and Politics in Popular Drama: Aspects of Popular Entertainment in Theatre, Film and Television, 1800-1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 3-16, p. 4.

[16] John Baldwin Buckstone, *Luke the Labourer; or, the Lost Son* (London: John Cumberland, 1834), p. 46.

Another important and accompanying focus of melodrama was its recourse to scenes of suffering designed to elicit maximum amounts of pathos, or sympathetic identification. For instance, in Fitzball's *Jonathan Bradford, or, the Murder at the Roadside Inn* (Surrey, 1833), the eponymous innkeeper is condemned to death for a murder he did not commit. His loyal wife Ann is visiting him in his cell, when the couple's two young children are brought to see their father for the last time:

> ANN. Why, what a rosy cheek is this – a red, sweet lip!
> And this, too, my, young spring bud. (*kissing it*)
> Look at them Jonathan, kiss them.
> BRAD. I do, Ann, for the last time. (*kissing them*).
> Oh! In this kissing would my heart could burst!
> CHILD. (R. of ANN) Dear mother, why don't you come home?
> ANN. Home! I – I will soon.
> CHILD. (*gets to L. of ANN, and takes her gown and pulls it
> towards L.)* Soon! Why not now – now?
> ANN. How shall I tell it them – how will they understand?
> Home! where is their home? , no mother's voice.
> No father's admonition! Outcasts – abject –
> Branded with the name of infamy.
> Shunned – degraded! Oh, my children, my children!
> What will become of them? (*wringing her hands*)[17]

In this sequence and in countless others, pathos takes the form of what Ben Singer describes as, 'a kind of visceral, physical sensation triggered by the perception of moral injustice against an undeserving victim'.[18] In this regard melodrama relied for its effects on the ability to move its audience, ideally to tears, by encouraging them to identify with the suffering of others. Melodrama, as Peter Brooks has argued, is 'a mode of high emotionalism and stark ethical conflict'.[19]

Until the final decades of the twentieth century, mainstream theatre history tended to downplay or ignore melodrama's significance in theatrical and cultural production. If considered at all, melodrama was typically disparaged for wanton theatricality, lack of psychologically complex characters and over indulgence in providential plotting. This marginalisation is partly due to the fact that by the middle of the twentieth century melodrama had become

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[17] Edward Fitzball, *Jonathan Bradford; or, The Murder at the Roadside Inn* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy 1863?), p. 24.
[18] Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 44.
[19] Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), p.12.

firmly established as 'the characteristic form of the Nineteenth Century' and thus inevitably 'caught in the inescapable trap of being the form of the drama in decline'.[20] Between the era of the comedies of Sheridan and Goldsmith and that of Wilde and Shaw, according to this version of theatre history, nothing much of interest or value occupied the stages of England. Thomas Postlewait has shown how far the sidelining of melodrama was ideologically driven, largely by those who wished to privilege the significance of the arrival of realism later in the century and the several varieties of modernism that followed.[21] However, although melodrama's poor critical reputation was cemented by late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century criticism, it seems important to acknowledge that controversy surrounding the form did not start there. A link between melodrama's effectiveness for mass audiences and cheap thrills and escapism, for example, had been forged a lot earlier. For much of the nineteenth century in fact, middle-class critics and commentators reiterated a scornful attitude toward melodrama's sensation-seeking and pleasure-enhancing tendencies, and particularly its blatant commercialism. More than any other genre melodrama came to represent, for its detractors, the descent of English drama into vulgarity. Reviewing a production of Douglas Jerrold's *The Witch Finder* (Drury Lane, 1829), for instance, which he describes as a 'feeble abortion', the critic of *The Morning Post* chastises the dramatist for his willingness to respond to the demands of the commercial stage by producing new works in rapid succession:

> If Mr Jerrold wishes to succeed he must appear less frequently before the public; he must be content to the discipline that others have endured; and utterly eschew the foolish thought that expedition and excellence go together. [22]

In addition to being viewed with hostility in some circles, by the beginning of the 1830s 'melodrama' was already a semantically slippery and ambiguous term, despite being in common usage. Critics, commentators, and even practitioners disagreed as to what precise ingredients constituted a melodrama, and the Select Committee on Laws Affecting Dramatic Literature

[20] Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 14.
[21] Thomas Postlewait, 'From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama', in Hays and Nikolopoulou, eds., *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre,* pp. 39-60.
[22] 'Drury-Lane Theatre', *The Morning Post*, 21 December 1829, p. 3.

in 1832 heard testimony that evidenced this confusion. During the Committee hearings the dramatist John Poole, for instance, used the term melodrama rather loosely, to describe any comedy or tragedy with musical accompaniment. For Poole the extent to which nature was 'outraged' was also a factor in distinguishing melodrama from the 'legitimate' drama. Douglas Jerrold on the other hand, testified that a melodrama, 'is a piece with what are called a great many telling situations' adding, 'I would not call a piece like the Hunchback a melodrama, because the interest of the piece is of a mental order'. [23]

Both comments are worth unpacking because they constitute early considerations of the essential nature of melodrama. Poole's observation about the melodramatic being related to nature being 'outraged' carries a strong sense of the characteristic most commonly associated with the genre: its tendency towards the hyperbolic. As Ben Singer has observed, 'the essential element perhaps most often associated with melodrama is a certain "overwrought" or "exaggerated" quality summed up by the term *excess*'.[24] Melodrama's predisposition towards overstatement has commonly been understood as one of its most defining, and even deplorable, features and Poole's early account re-emphasises this connection. Jerrold, rather more subtly perhaps, speaks of 'telling situations', conveying an understanding of melodrama as essentially concerned with action rather than character. Jerrold's testimony is interesting because it articulates a distinction in terms of characterisation between melodrama and other forms of drama. Speaking to the Select Committee as a successful practitioner, having written a number of highly profitable melodramas including *The Mutiny on the Nore* (Pavilion, 1830), *The Rent-Day* (Theatre Royal Drury Lane, 1832) and *Black Eyed Susan* Surrey, 1829), Jerrold argues that the interest in melodrama should not be of a 'mental order' suggesting that, for him at least, internal conflicts are not an important focus. It is not certain, of course, that Jerrold's attempt to make a distinction in his testimony to the Select Committee carried with it any implicit value judgement.

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[23] 'Report from the Select Committee Appointed to Inquire into the Laws Affecting Dramatic Literature' (1832), in Marilyn Norstedt, intro., *British Parliamentary Papers, Stage and Theatre*, Vol. 1 (Shannon, Republic of Ireland: Irish University Press, 1968), pp. 193-198, p.195.
[24] Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, p. 38-39.

In the first half of the twentieth century critical approaches to melodrama remained more or less consistent and led to the reiteration of reductive appraisals of the genre and its audience. In 1966 J. O. Bailey, for example, argued that melodrama 'delivered under-educated audiences from the unpleasant realities of urban life through escapist spectacle'.[25] Elsewhere, however, a number of theatre historians continued to take a serious interest in the popular Victorian theatre, and specifically in melodrama. In *English Melodrama* (1965), for instance, Michael R. Booth argued a persuasive case for a more expansive critical account of melodrama and its popularity. This study is indebted to this kind of work particularly insofar as it provides invaluable information about a large number of early nineteenth-century plays, actors and theatres. Maurice Disher's *Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and its Origins* is also useful in this regard, as is A. E. Wilson's *East End Entertainment*.[26]

An important shift in the seriousness of melodrama studies across a number of disciplines was initiated in the 1970s by the publication of Peter Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976). Although as Ben Singer points out, it 'echoed and expanded on insights already articulated' by scholars, such as Thomas Elsaesser and Eric Bentley, Brooks's study went farther than any previous work on melodrama in providing a weighty theoretical discussion of the genre's appeal.[27] This new wave of criticism, of which Brooks's study was a part, was substantially enabled by the emergence of cultural studies in the 1960s with its leftist perspective and its interest in popular culture, and popular forms such as melodrama. According to Brooks, melodrama is best understood as:

> ... a form for a post-sacred era, in which polarization and hyperdramatization of forces in conflict represent a need to locate and make evident, legible, and operative those large choices of ways of being which we hold to be of overwhelming importance even though we cannot derive them from any transcendental system of belief. [28]

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[25] J. O. Bailey, *British Plays of the Nineteenth-Century* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1966), p. 31.

[26] Maurice Wilson Disher, *Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and its Origins* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1949). A. E. Wilson, *East End Entertainment* (London: Arthur Parker Ltd., 1954).

[27] Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, p.133. See Thomas Elsaesser, 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', *Monogram 4* (1972), pp. 2-15 and Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (New York: Athenaeum, 1964).

[28] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, 'Preface' to the 1995 edition, p. viii.

For Brooks, the key to understanding melodrama's power over the modern imagination is to see it as a hyperbolic response to the collapse of belief in European culture in any kind of reliable universal sacred order. It is no coincidence that melodrama achieves prominence in the boulevard theatres of Paris in the immediate aftermath of the French revolution, an event that signals the irrevocable secularisation of Western culture. Brooks emphasises not only melodrama's ethical dimension but also, by tracing it from the stages of Paris to the late nineteenth-century novels of Balzac and Henry James, its existence as an aesthetic mode. While it has the benefit of establishing melodrama's importance to nineteenth-century cultural production Brooks's privileging of the adjective over the noun, the melodramatic over melodrama, also has the unwelcome effect of de-historicising the genre and consequently diverting attention from individual plays and the material circumstances of their production. Unsurprisingly, the problems inherent in this critical move have not gone unnoticed. In a recent essay surveying melodrama criticism, for instance, Juliet John notes how Brooks:

> … removes melodrama from its original ideological and theatrical contexts and, in framing characters as 'psychic signs', buries the cultural politics of melodrama's lack of interest in the psyche.[29]

Nonetheless, the influence of Brooks' thesis was widespread and profound. In the introduction to *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* (1994)*,* for example, the volume of essays published to commemorate the first international interdisciplinary conference on melodrama in 1992, Jacky Bratton, Christine Gledhill and Jim Cook make a point of acknowledging the centrality of Brooks's study to the developing field of melodrama studies:

> Peter Brooks' *The Melodramatic Imagination* has been a foundational text in theorising the genre, not only by providing a model of 'classic' melodrama based on French theatre from 1790-1830, but by making links to the Freudian narrative of the psyche and building a bridge whereby film could be reconnected to its nineteenth-century precursor. The influence of Brooks's work is felt throughout this anthology… .[30]

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[29] Juliet John, 'Melodrama and its Criticism: An Essay in Memory of Sally Ledger', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 8 (2009), pp. 1-20, p.4. Available at www.19.bbk.ac.uk, Accessed 23 September 2010.
[30] Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, Christine Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* (London: British Film Institute, 1994), p. 1-2.

It is certainly the case that since the publication of *The Melodramatic Imagination* in 1976 an increasing number of scholars have sought to develop explanations for the enormous popularity of the genre and the importance of the nineteenth-century popular stage. The work of many of these scholars will be drawn on at various points in the chapters that follow, but it seems apposite at this point to provide a short review of those titles that have been particularly influential and enabling in the writing of this study.

In *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalised Dissent in the English Market Place, 1800-1885* (1995), for example, Elaine Hadley traces what she describes as a melodramatic 'mode' in myriad Victorian social contexts.[31] She argues that melodrama emerged at the beginning of the nineteenth century as a polemical response to the massive social and cultural upheaval that accompanied the consolidation of market culture. Melodrama, Hadley insists, did not exist separately from the larger ideological ambitions and debates that animated Victorian culture:

> During these discursive contests, the distinction between melodrama and literature, between literature and other sorts of texts, between texts and historical events, and between melodrama and political practice, distinctions that appear relatively fixed and timeless at our historical moment were unstable, engaged in the negotiations that would only later result in the demarcations we accept today.[32]

Like Brooks, Hadley is not a theatre historian and has little to say about nineteenth-century stage practice. Nevertheless her book makes a significant contribution towards establishing the melodramatic mode as audible and ubiquitous in nineteenth-century culture, and has been enabling in the context of this study particularly because of its insistence on the melodramatic mode as publicly engaged in a battle for control over communally agreed modes of ethical behaviour. Hadley shows how melodrama continued to play a very public and active role in metropolitan culture and how, in spite of its poor critical reputation, it was utilised throughout the nineteenth century by a variety of constituencies. It continued to be flexible enough to be the chosen

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[31] Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Market Place, 1800-1885* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1995).

[32] *Ibid*., p. 8. Hadley is especially concerned in her study with the impact of classificatory procedures put in place by English bureaucracies such as the New Poor Law of 1834 and later in the century the Contagious Diseases Acts and in how melodramatic rhetoric was employed as a method of resistance.

mode of expression in a wide range of metropolitan theatres, and to appeal to audiences with diverse, even opposing, economic interests.

Both Jacky Bratton and Jane Moody have demonstrated in book length studies how far a focus on the popular theatre can offer fresh insight into the operations of nineteenth-century culture. In *New Readings in Theatre History*, Bratton reviews the current state of theatre history as a discipline by 'considering the forces that determined and shaped it in the Nineteenth Century as part of the hegemonic battle for possession of the stage itself'.[33] The 1830s are of particular importance in Bratton's argument because the Select Committee led by Bulwer Lytton in 1832 is understood as a pivotal moment in the construction of a theatre history that privileges the dramatist's 'text' whilst denigrating 'the *textus receptus* of theatre lore along with that of the plays'.[34] Amongst other things, Bratton uses skilful reading of playbills and memoirs, alongside the autobiographical performances of Charles Mathews the elder and Fanny Kelly, to demonstrate the vitality of a performance culture long consigned to the dustbin of theatre history. The richness and diversity of this theatre are also investigated in Jane Moody's *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, the most recent book to explore the institutions, performance history, and repertoire of the illegitimate stage.[35] Like Bratton, Moody posits a very powerful argument for the importance of the minor theatres to the capital's culture in the early decades of the nineteenth century.

Barred from using legitimate dramatic texts, illegitimate theatre responded, Moody contends, by privileging gesture and other non-verbal signifiers over spoken language and rhetoric, making explosive use of the performing body, for instance, and exploiting silence as well as utilising the power of music. She argues that the illegitimate stage with its hybrid and promiscuous mix of genres constituted a revolution in stage practice, and in addition that in a time of war and national emergency this radical promiscuity was inflammatory, provoking variously accusations of sedition and cultural degeneracy. Although the illegitimate stage delivered satirical attacks which were readily decoded by audiences as larger indictments of the oppressive

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[33] Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History,* p.5.
[34] *Ibid.*, p. 88.
[35] Watson Nicholson, *The Struggle for a Free Stage in London* (London: Constable, 1906), covers some of the same ground but not in as much detail.

power of the state, Moody demonstrates that 'in such an unstable field of interests and meanings oppositional voices were often ambivalent. The worlds of the patents and the minors colluded as well as competed, a radical prologue could be recuperated in a conservative denouement'.[36] This emphasis on ambivalence is especially enabling in the context of the present study because the intention is to develop an understanding of domestic melodrama as neither radical nor conservative, but often both. Moody's book is also helpful in establishing how far 'melodrama came to represent the source and origin of theatrical decadence' in establishment circles, and how vociferously critics campaigned to keep it off the stages of Covent Garden and Drury Lane.[37]

Jim Davis's work on audiences at the Britannia in Hoxton and elsewhere has also been particularly influential both in restoring spectators to their rightful position at the centre of the dynamics of any theatre culture, and also in debunking a number of persistent myths about the Victorian theatre in general.[38] In *Reflecting the Audience*, for instance, through careful and detailed consideration of source materials including census records, Davis and Victor Emeljanow provide an extremely thorough and convincing challenge to the myth of Samuel Phelps' spectacular transformation of Sadler's Wells. In Davis and Emeljanow's account the tale of Phelps' management of the theatre is recast from that of an improving educator disciplining a rowdy audience, to one of an astute manager responding to the changing taste of his audience.[39] This work has proved invaluable both in providing an exemplary methodology and also because of the amount of contextual information it offers, both about the theatres in which many of the plays discussed in this study were originally produced, and also about their audiences.

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[36] Peter Bailey, 'Review', *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies*, 34: 2 (2002), pp. 325-326, p.325.
[37] Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London,* p.54.
[38] See also Jim Davis, 'The Gospel of Rags: Melodrama at the Britannia 1863–74', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 7 (1991), pp. 369–89 and Davis, Jim and Davis, Tracy C., "'The People of the People's Theatre": The Social Demography of the Britannia Theatre (Hoxton)"' *Theatre Survey,* 32 (1991), pp. 27-41.
[39] Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, pp. 108-136.

The accelerating technological and scientific advances that accompanied rapid urbanisation in the period covered by this study inevitably brought with them a growing awareness of the social and humanitarian costs that such progress entailed. Consequently, one of the central arguments of this thesis is that domestic melodrama embodied these technological advances whilst at the same time critiquing their negative effects on social life in the metropolis. Ben Singer's *Melodrama and Modernity* has proved particularly useful in the development of this strand of the argument because, in offering what David Mayer describes as a 'fluent, precise and excellently historicized account of the interaction between early narrative cinema and the processes of modernisation', Singer emphasises the link between key formal features of melodrama, such as its manipulation of temporal structures, modernisation, and urban spectatorship.[40] London, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, was a city of constant and rapid transformation and, as Michael Sheringham has recently reminded us, although 'the processes through which a city endlessly mutates – planning, unplanning, demolition, renovation, gentrification, migration' may be the result of human industry, they 'cannot be fully known or stabilized'.[41] Thus the impulse to make the city readable, to make sense of its every changing surface, and the tacit acknowledgement of the impossibility of such an undertaking, of the city's impenetrable and mysterious nature, provide a key tension animating the plays under discussion in the following pages.

As its title suggests, this thesis understands both melodrama and the metropolis to be manifestations of the cultural phenomenon widely known as modernity. In the interests of clarity and balance, but also in an attempt to capture the ambivalence that characterises melodrama in this period, its precise relationship with the city is discussed, from chapter to chapter, in relation to two distinct but inter-related strands of modernity: the political and the perceptual. Political modernity is understood here as being driven by rising awareness of class relations in the aftermath of the major revolutions of the eighteenth century and in response to Enlightenment values. In this sense the

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[40] David Mayer, 'Review: Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*', *Modernisms/Modernity*, 9:2 (2002), pp. 345-347, p.345.
[41] Michael Sheringham, 'Archiving', in Matthew Beaumont and Gregory Dart, eds., *Restless Cities* (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 1-17, p.16.

arguments draw on the work of influential twentieth-century cultural historians such as E. P. Thompson who, in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), identified the first half of the nineteenth century as a key period in the formation of working-class consciousness, and consequently of class-consciousness in a wider sense, since conceptions of working and middle-class identity were mutually dependent. The most exhaustively discussed manifestation of rising class awareness in England during this period is the Chartist movement. Historians of the 1830s and '40s invariably see Chartism as the 'expression of class consciousness – the culmination of working-class experience during industrialization'.[42] In addition, and more recently, Pamela Sharpe has identified a consensus among historians that 'the process of urbanisation was crucial for the development of class-consciousness for both the working and middle class'.[43] The metropolis is thus widely acknowledged as a key player in the development of class-consciousness, and both are understood as deeply embedded in the processes of modernity. These insights are of particular relevance for scholars interested in metropolitan theatre practice during this period and, unsurprisingly, signs of emergent working-class consciousness can be readily traced in the popular plays of the period. For instance, the late 1820s saw the emergence of the proletarian hero in domestic melodrama, and this figure is discussed at some length in the chapters that follow, especially in Chapter Five of this study.

The link between rising class awareness and an increased frequency in the appearance of working-class characters on the minor stages of London in the 1830s is significant, but while it acknowledges the importance of this phenomenon this thesis is not exclusively concerned with the political content of individual melodramas. A good number of essays and chapters have been produced in this area including, for instance, Daniel Duffy's 'Heroic Mothers and Militant Mothers' and Kristen Leaver's 'Victorian Melodrama and the Performance of Poverty', both of which are valuable in arguing the cultural significance of melodrama. The concern of this thesis, however, is to explore

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[42] Miles Taylor, 'Rethinking the Chartists: Searching for Synthesis in the Historiography of Chartism', *The Historical Journal*, 39:2 (1996), pp. 479-495, p. 481.

[43] Pamela Sharpe, 'Population and Society 1700-1840' in Peter Clark, ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain, Volume II, 1540-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 491-528, p. 521.

melodrama's connection with a broader range of manifestations of metropolitan modernity.[44] Melodramatists such as John Baldwin Buckstone, William Moncrieff, Douglas Jerrold and Edward Fitzball regularly foregrounded the political concerns of the lower classes, but they chose to do so via a dramaturgy of arousal, fascination, speed, suspense and terror. Their persistent emphasis on excitation and hyperbole as well as on speed, suspense and the manipulation of temporal logic, is understood in this thesis as inflecting the rhythms of metropolitan modernity at a material level. Alongside a demonstrable focus on the socio-political concerns of the emergent working class, then, at the level of lived experience and sensory perception domestic melodrama also manifested a kind of perceptual modernity. It is worth recalling here that the cultural upheaval that characterised the early part of the nineteenth century should be thought of as initiating a rupture in the aesthetic and perceptual, as well as in the political history of the West. Consequently, the experience of 'modernity', as Jonathan Crary has argued, should be understood as encompassing:

> not only structural changes in political and economic formations but also the immense reorganisation of knowledge, languages, networks of spaces and communications, and subjectivity itself.[45]

For Ben Singer, this shift is best understood as explicitly reflecting a 'different register of subjective experience, characterized by the physical and perceptual shocks of the modern urban environment'.[46] The modern metropolis, in this way of thinking, provokes a new kind of sensory engagement. In particular a number of scholars, Singer and Crary among them, have noted the extent to which the nineteenth-century urban subject came to rely on vision as his/her primary sensory activity, and there is already a sizeable body of literature on the subject of spectatorship, modernity and the city which has been useful in supporting the arguments developed in this thesis. Such work is based on 'the

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[44] Daniel Duffy, 'Heroic Mothers and Militant Lovers: Representations of Lower-Class Women in Melodrama of the 1830s', *Nineteenth-Century Theatre,* 27:1 (1999), pp. 41-65 and Kristen Leaver, 'Victorian Melodrama and the Performance of Poverty', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27:2 (1999), pp. 443–56.

[45] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990), p. 10.

[46] Ben Singer, 'Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism', in Leo Charney and Vanessa Schwartz, eds., *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995),p. 72.

assumption that the ways in which we intently listen to, look at, or concentrate on anything have a deeply historical character', and has useful applications for the study of melodrama in relation to the city not least because the genre's dependence on, and constant recourse to, visual strategies would seem to suggest its engagement with new regimes of perception as they were in the process of taking shape.[47]

As far as developing a more critically informed sense of the textures of daily life in the metropolis, how these differed from previous forms of social organisation, and how this new social reality might in turn have impacted on the practice of melodrama, two key texts in urban sociology have been crucial in enabling the development of the arguments presented in this study. A close reading of the German Jewish sociologist Georg Simmel's influential 1903 essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' provides the critical framework for Chapter Three of this study, but Simmel's thinking about the metropolis in this essay and elsewhere has impacted across the thesis to the extent that a summary of his ideas in this introductory chapter seems apposite.[48]

According to Simmel, because of the sensory onslaught that characterises metropolitan life, the intellect is forced to act as a kind of defence mechanism, shielding the subject from over-stimulation. In the metropolitan economy, intellect and money are mutually reinforcing, while precisely calculated and synchronised time schedules add another element to the rationalisation and objectification of human relations. For Simmel, hyper-stimulation in combination with pronounced intellectualism produces a blasé attitude, which he sees as typical of the metropolitan subject. He views this as another facet of the general leveling of value that occurs in the metropolis. The vast numbers of people here and their relative anonymity makes individuals, of necessity, more reserved in their social interaction. This kind of reserve is the outward manifestation of the metropolitan individual's indifference and even aversion to others. For Simmel, one consequence is a heightened sense of individuality and freedom from group restrictions or dictates. In effect individuality becomes the mark of the metropolitan

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[47] Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press), p. 3.

[48] Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, translated and edited by Kurt H. Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1950), pp. 409-424.

personality. At the same time however, increasing specialisation in the metropolitan labour market has the effect of limiting individual self expression and hampering the subject's ability to differentiate itself from others. Thus, a tension arises in Simmel's metropolis between the will toward, and the very real pressures militating against, individuality. Again it is this idea of tension between the potential freedoms on offer and the obviously oppressive structures of metropolitan life that makes Simmel's thinking particularly useful in considering the rhetoric of domestic melodrama as it developed and was performed in a metropolitan context.

The second sociological text that is drawn upon regularly in this study is Louis Wirth's 1938 essay 'Urbanism as a Way of Life'. Wirth was a leading member of the Chicago School of urban sociologists and as a German Jewish immigrant he maintained a particular interest in the experience of minority communities in the United States throughout his career. In this, his most famous essay, Wirth proposes a new paradigm for thinking about the city as sociological construct in the belief that scholarship in the field would be enabled by a clearer and more comprehensive account of the defining characteristics of urbanism. Wirth outlines three main areas of concern: population size, population density, and demographic heterogeneity. In relation to the first, he follows Simmel in noting that urban dwellers encounter and depend upon more individuals in their daily interactions than their rural ancestors, and that although these encounters 'may indeed be face to face' they are nevertheless necessarily 'impersonal, superficial, transitory, and segmental'.[49] As such they engender 'reserve, indifference and a blasé outlook', all of which urbanites utilise to 'immunize themselves against the personal claims and expectations of others'.[50]

On the subject of density, Wirth describes the highly differentiated system of specialisation, particularly in terms of occupation, which operates in the metropolis, as resulting in the segmenting of activities and consequently as 'increasing the complexity of the social structure'.[51] In the end, a social world in which people are identified solely by their function, most obviously via

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[49] Wirth,'Urbanism as a Way of Life', p.12.
[50] *Ibid.*
[51] *Ibid.*, p.14.

the uniform, and not by their personal attributes or idiosyncrasies, produces a developed 'sensitivity to a world of artefacts' in the city dweller and thus a form of alienation as man becomes 'progressively farther removed from the world of nature'.[52] Daily interactions may be functionally close, according to Wirth, but they remain socially distant, and this dynamic lays the ground for exploitation between group and individuals, who lack meaningful mutual interests. On the positive side, Wirth is careful to stress how far the 'juxtaposition of divergent personalities and modes of life' in the city 'tends to produce a relativistic perspective and a sense of toleration of differences', which is to be welcomed.[53] In discussing heterogeneity, the third of his suggested areas of focus, he offers an explanation of the complicated phenomenon of affinity groups in the large city. In the first place he argues that diversity 'tends to break down the rigidity of caste lines and to complicate … class structure'.[54] He observes that city dwellers typically have multiple group loyalties including those associated with political affiliation, neighbourhood, workplace, religion, and attendance at particular places of entertainment and leisure, and as a result of the constantly shifting dynamic of the city these affiliations can be subject to quite rapid change. In addition, Wirth stresses that group affiliations have a potentially homogenising effect:

> When large numbers have to make common use of facilities and institutions, an arrangement must be made to adjust the facilities and institutions to the needs of the average person rather than to those of particular individuals.[55]

For Wirth as for Simmel, then, the city exerts conflicting pressures on the individual, on the one hand towards homogenisation and on the other towards specialization and individuality.

In the closing section of his essay Wirth suggests that urbanism should 'be approached empirically from three interrelated perspectives', as a physical structure, a system of social organization, and as a set of attitudes and ideas.[56] From the physical perspective, according to Wirth, the metropolis has become dominant because of the superiority and variety of services and

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[52] *Ibid.*
[53] *Ibid.*, p.15.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 16.
[55] *Ibid.*, p.18.
[56] *Ibid.*, pp.18-19.

institutions it can offer. These are 'characteristics of the city which derive in large measure from the effect of numbers and density'.[57] In terms of social organisation, and specifically social well-being, for Wirth urbanisation has a profoundly destructive impact, providing the conditions for 'the substitution of secondary for primary contacts', and the subsequent 'weakening of bonds of kinship, and the declining social significance of the family … and the undermining of the traditional basis of social solidarity'.[58] Wirth acknowledges on the other hand that the disintegration of traditional social bonds has the effect of liberating the individual in a way previously unimagined, and here he enters the territory of attitudes and ideas. In spite of his newly found freedoms the city dweller's capacity to assert himself as a unique individual is always curtailed by competition, and therefore he is drawn to 'fictional kinship groups' as the only available outlet for expression and mobility.[59] The condition of the metropolis militates against the survival and effectiveness of 'actual kinship ties'.[60] For Wirth, crowded metropolitan environments reduce the sophistication of communication to basic levels, encouraging a focus on 'those things which are assumed to be common or to be of interest to all'.[61] Clearly these pressures towards conformity and homogenisation are in conflict with the privileging of uniqueness, eccentricity and individuality that both Simmel and Wirth identify as characteristic of metropolitan life. Wirth sees this tension as one of the city's defining characteristics, and this aspect of his work is of particular interest in the context of the arguments presented in this thesis, because this very tension is identified as animating the dramaturgy of domestic melodrama, both in its movement towards the 'typical' in characterization and plot, and in its renderings of individuality and eccentricity in the figure of the villain and the many comic characters who populate the genre in this manifestation.

This study focuses on a group of plays that were originally performed in London in the 1830s and '40s for the most part to socially mixed audiences such as those described by Davis and Emeljanow in *Reflecting the Audience*.

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[57] *Ibid.*, p.19.
[58] *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.
[59] *Ibid.*, p.23.
[60] *Ibid.*
[61] *Ibid.*, p.24.

It offers details about the political and social climate outside the theatre, the particular theatres in which these performances took place and their location. It sometimes explores the contribution of particular actors who performed prominent roles in the plays, the dramatists who composed them, and the effect of censorship on their content and structure. Overall, it seeks to assert a dynamic relationship between melodrama and the metropolitan environment in which it was produced, and in so doing to make a contribution to the larger body of criticism that argues melodrama's centrality to the modern condition.

Melodramatic practice in the 1830s and '40s was marked by the kind of ambivalence that Simmel and Wirth identify as characteristic of the metropolitan sensibility. In most of the plays discussed in the following chapters, fear and anxiety about the effects of urbanisation are balanced by explorations of the potential freedoms on offer. In addition the plays are typically uneven in tone, featuring a mixture of comic, serious and sometimes satiric voices, as well as multiple and inter-connected narrative strands. They also tend to move at speed through a wide range of settings. They regularly appear to be privileging a sense of the disparate and fractured, or at least bringing this sense into dialogue with overarching melodramatic plot lines and their accompanying rush toward narrative resolution. In the hope of capturing some sense of this variety, and the tensions it generated, a hybrid critical approach has been adopted in the thesis that combines cultural materialism with close reading of playtexts and other artefacts in order to read the arrangements and effects of performance. The aim is to capture some sense of the variety of practice that characterised domestic melodrama and its relationship to a city that was in a state of constant transformation and thus substantially decentred.

Although her work has a more contemporary focus, in her 2009 study, *Theatre & the City*, Jen Harvie argues the efficacy of a hybrid critical approach to the study of theatre in the city. Alert both to the limitations of a materialist practice that might always 'see the theatre industry's material conditions as inevitably constraining' and a performative approach that may run the risk of being overly optimistic in its claims about the liberating potential of theatre,

and indeed of the metropolitan environment, Harvie forwards the notion of a performative materialism or a materialist performativity. [62] She concludes that:

> A materialist performative analysis might … work to qualify some of performative analysis's more utopian claims, to show how they are certainly conditioned and likely constrained – if not entirely cancelled out by capital and other materialities. The mission of this approach would not be wantonly to destroy performativity's utopianism but to suggest how performative analysis's claims might be more carefully qualified.[63]

Since the aim of this study is to examine the ways in which certain plays and aspects of plays, in the face of the bustling confusion of the new metropolis, worked towards making some kind of sense of urban experience, Harvie's approach seems worth noting, especially since an additional aim of this thesis is to show how melodrama attempted to make sense of the metropolis without ever completely dispelling the notion of the metropolis as a threat to social and material wellbeing.

The arguments about melodrama presented in the following chapters entail a relatively wide-ranging discussion of the genre's position in the stage history of the metropolis, and the stage's position in the history of the metropolis itself. Part of the work of the chapter following this introduction is to establish this connection between melodrama and metropolis in relatively straightforward terms by exploring the ways in which scenes of metropolitan life and landmarks functioned within the dramaturgy of individual plays. Large-scale views of the new metropolis were prominent in the melodrama of the 1830s and '40s, for example, and can be understood as working at least partly to orientate city-dwellers and thus as producing a kind of spatial coherence. No less pervasive, however, were the street scenes, the ground-level representations of the city that captured characters in their daily routines and often in transit. In these sequences the movement of characters from scene to scene, setting to setting, whether facilitating narrative development or pointing towards larger thematic concerns, often involved both the fragmenting and cohering of metropolitan space. Such scenes often focused on the practice of urban passage and, perhaps not surprisingly, given the condition of the mysterious and labyrinthine metropolis, some characters lost

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[62] Jen Harvie, *Theatre & the City* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), p.73.
[63] *Ibid*.

their way and some did not. In either case a concern with the problem of reading the city is apparent.

The study continues in Chapter Three with the analysis of domestic melodrama in relation to Simmel's 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' mentioned above. Again the aim is to strengthen the central argument that melodrama is productively thought of in a specifically metropolitan context. In considering certain aspects of melodramatic villainy, for instance, attention is paid to the manner in which Simmel theorises a pronounced form of individualism as a peculiarly metropolitan phenomenon. In domestic melodrama, of course, hostility to doctrines of individualism was expressed most forcefully through repeated stagings of the individualistic villain. As Juliet John has noted:

> The villains of nineteenth-century melodrama are … types struggling to become individuals; and this impulse towards individuality constitutes in large measure the definition of melodramatic villainy.[64]

By tracing particular instances of melodramatic villainy in the 1830s and '40s in relation to Simmel's ideas, and by showing that melodramatic practice often enacted a celebratory as well as condemnatory attitude to villainy, the aim is to show how deeply melodrama was engaged with the complex politics of metropolitan subjecthood.

The remaining chapters in the study explore further the connections between melodrama and the metropolis in a number of areas, the intention being to approach the domestic melodrama from a range of perspectives. Many accounts of melodrama emphasise, following Brooks, its ethical dimension with the result that other aspects of melodramatic practice are over-shadowed or relegated to the sidelines, and the aim is to counteract this tendency by approaching the plays from a broad enough range of perspectives to capture their complexity and flexibility. By focusing on the textures and rhythms of domestic melodrama as well as its more exhaustively critiqued ethical and political dimension the hope is to contribute to a more comprehensive appreciation of its cultural significance. This also involves challenging a number of critical orthodoxies about the more totalising aspects of melodramatic dramaturgy. For example, melodrama has long had a

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[64] Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 49.

reputation for utilising nostalgia as an affective tool, a strategy that has, among other things, contributed to critical evaluations of the genre as essentially conservative and reactionary. In Chapter Four of this study, however, melodramatic nostalgia is read as a more complex and nuanced phenomenon, not as straightforwardly conservative and employed primarily in defence of traditional obligations, but also and importantly as a defence of popular rights and popular culture against the encroachments of liberal deregulation and capitalist material practices. These encroachments were, after all, most vividly and visibly apparent in the metropolis. As the city appeared to move beyond the limits of human scale, and as technology changed the fabric of social and working life, melodrama explored the psychological disturbance caused by these rapid changes, partly by conjuring remnant forms of community life, especially those associated with village life. These nostalgic renderings of bygone days drew their meaning substantially from the metropolitan context in which they were performed, and they were often interwoven with tensions of different kinds, not least those between social classes which were becoming increasingly apparent in the new urban environment.

As the short discussion of political modernity offered above establishes, the process of urbanisation and the massive demographic shift it engendered meant that by the 1830s domestic melodrama had become an important site for exploration of the tensions and anxieties that defined the lives of lower-class Londoners. In the new metropolis the formation of what came to be thought of as class-consciousness was a discursive as well as a material process and it seems obvious that consideration of the types of popular entertainment enjoyed by lower-class audiences can provide useful perspectives on this process. More particularly, and this is the subject of Chapter Five of this study a number of dramatists including John Baldwin Buckstone, John Thomas Haines, T. P. Taylor, Douglas Jerrold, George Dibdin-Pitt and Edward Fitzball began to write plays featuring lower-class protagonists in which the lower classes were portrayed as the authentic core not only of the city, but of the nation itself. Close reading of these plays can shed light on conceptions of lower-class identity and agency as they were in the process of taking shape.

As the oppressed increasingly became the leading characters in their own stories, domestic melodrama continued to rely for their rescue on an 'emphasis on divine providence as the agency of a benevolent moral order that rewards the good and punishes the wicked'.[65] The recognition of virtue is a chief driver of melodramatic dramaturgy and happy endings continued to be the order of the day. This stubborn, almost demented belief in divine providence has typically been read as evidence of melodrama's conservative bent. Jeffrey Cox, for example, in 'The Ideological Tack of Nautical Melodrama', has argued that in a number of plays of the late 1820s and 1830s the happy ending functioned to reinforce the conservative ideology that enabled the oppressive operations of naval justice.[66] In Chapter Six of the present study, conventional readings of melodramatic providence are extended and problematised to account for the possibility that providential plotting could be employed as a strategy for challenging and revealing uneven distributions of power and the institutions of the state that supported them, and not always straightforwardly naturalising or reinforcing them. In addition this chapter considers how perceptual disturbances triggered by urbanisation might be thought of as impacting on the speed and force of melodramatic narrative. The work of the French theorist Paul Virilio, in particular, is used to open up a consideration both of melodrama's accelerated plots and its recourse to scenes of sensational disaster and accident.

The metropolis was a radically new environment and unsurprisingly it provoked new forms of social interaction and new pressures on the individual. In Chapter Seven insights drawn both from previous chapters are combined and extended in a fuller discussion of minor characters in domestic melodrama, specifically in relation to developing notions of metropolitan agency. Again, the intention is to make a meaningful contribution to the larger project of reading domestic melodrama in its fragmented entirety, rather than focusing exclusively on its political content or the narratives of its protagonists, which tend to be shaped by the melodramatic logic of the excluded middle. In

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[65] John G. Cawelti, 'The Evolution of Social Melodrama', in Marcia Landy, ed., *Imitations of Life: A Reader in Film and Television Melodrama* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1991), pp. 33-49, p.38.
[66] Jeffrey N. Cox, The Ideological Tack of Nautical Melodrama' in Hays and Nikolopoulou, eds., *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre,* pp. 167-190.

particular the aim is to draw attention to the ways in which processes of 'individualisation', as outlined by Simmel and Wirth, were reflected and inflected in the eccentricities of minor comic characters in domestic melodrama, as well as in the more widely discussed figure of the villain. Although rarely considered at length, minor comic characters were omnipresent in domestic melodrama of the period, and typically offered a pragmatic and easy-going perspective that cut across and mediated the more elevated rhetoric of the hero or heroine and the Machiavellian plotting of the villain. One interesting characteristic of such figures was their ability to negotiate metropolitan space with relative ease. In contrast to the heroes and heroines of domestic melodrama they often appeared entirely at home in the modern city and for this reason alone they deserve and reward closer attention. In addition, in spite of their ostensible marginality to the plot, celebrated performers often played these roles.

The final chapter of this study places domestic melodrama within the context of an increasing emphasis on visuality and spectatorship in the nineteenth-century metropolis. Whether in the popular theatre, scientific, philosophical and technological discourse, the development of photographic and print technologies, or film, spectatorship as a dominant cultural activity acquired ever more significance as the nineteenth century progressed, nowhere more so than in the city. Melodrama's signifying practices are located in, and best understood as, part of a developing metropolitan culture that was substantially and pervasively visual. The particular aim of this chapter is to demonstrate the extent to which such an emphasis bolstered, and even naturalised, forms of spectatorship already inscribed in the social practices of the city, and especially in the theatre itself. As the work of the collection, *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* demonstrates, the idea of continuity between melodrama and visual culture, especially the cinema, is by now a commonplace. In the context of this thesis, however, this connection is explored less for what it reveals about the genealogy of film than for what it can tell us about the role of visuality, and its theatrical manifestation in domestic melodrama, in defining, reinforcing, problematising and disseminating cultural imperatives as they emerged within the context of the new metropolis.

From the outset there were competing tensions in accounts both of the nineteenth-century metropolis and melodrama. For many commentators, the process of urbanisation seemed almost entirely desperate and despairing. It was as though culture could not hope to survive the rapid mechanisms of metropolitan life and its most cherished values would most certainly be lost and crushed in the anonymous crowd. In the subsequent outcry over disease, urban overcrowding and inhuman working and living conditions, in which melodrama was to play a significant role, there was repeated and consistently articulated fear of the city as another country, an alien environment, so much so that in a straightforward sense melodrama can be understood as functioning at once to give voice to these fears and to confront and process them. On the other hand the experience of metropolitan living was not entirely a negative one. Even celebrated twentieth-century theorists such as Walter Benjamin, who raged against the city as the locus of capitalism and its attendant social evils, continued to be infatuated with the metropolis and the peculiarities of urban life.[67]

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[67] See for instance Michael W. Jennings, ed., Walter Benjamin, *Selected Writings*, *Volume 4: 1938-1940* (London: Belknap Press, 2002).

2

Making Sense of Metropolitan Spaces

Given what is known about poor housing conditions and sanitation in the nineteenth-century city, the precise appeal of London for migrant workers must be considered complex but was nevertheless tangible. H Llewellyn Smith vividly describes the city's magnetism:

> The contagion of numbers, the sense of something going on, the theatres and the music halls, the brightly lighted streets and busy crowds – all, in short, that makes the difference between the Mile End fair on a Saturday night and a dark muddy land, with no glimmer of gas and with nothing to do. Who could wonder that men are drawn into such a vortex? [68]

In spite of its undoubted magnetism the reality of the rapidly expanding capital in the 1830s and '40s, was often experienced by visitors to the capital as shocking and disorienting. In 1834 Thomas De Quincey, for instance, described London's famous crowds as 'a mask of maniacs … a pageant of phantoms' while Thomas Carlyle was appalled by what he saw as the dehumanising effects of London life:

> How men are hurried here, how they are hunted and terrifically chased into double-quick speed; so that in self-defence they must not stay to look at one another! [69]

This critical focus on the dehumanising effects of city life was to become a constant. In general terms, for many critics of the metropolis, both reactionary and radical, the process of social upheaval that marked the rapid urbanisation of the early nineteenth century produced disorder, alienation and the erosion of many cherished values. Mourning the decline in influence of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, for instance, a critic in *Blackwood's Magazine* in August 1840 describes the proliferation of neighbourhood theatres as the

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[68] H. Llewellyn Smith, 'Influx of Population' in Charles Booth ed., *Life and Labour of the People in London*, *Vol. 3* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1902), pp. 59-143, p.62.
[69] Thomas De Quincey, *The Nation of London* (London, 1834), p.182. Thomas Carlyle cited in Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), p. 215.

planting of 'places of utter idleness in the midst of the lowest orders of the great city'.[70] This process he argues will inevitably 'ruin the great London theatre ... all dramatic literature ... and the actors themselves'.[71]

On the other hand, not all theorists have argued that the growth of cities is regrettable and the urban subject an eternal victim: always and only acted upon. A significant number of twentieth-century cultural commentators have observed, for example, that the physical dimensions and organisation of cities can in fact reflect the preoccupations and desires of the people who live in them, and in addition can offer welcome and unexpected freedoms when contrasted with the relatively fixed social strata of the village or small town. Perhaps not surprisingly, the most attractive feature of the modern city for these commentators has been its heterogeneity. If city dwellers have been regarded as more impersonal and seemingly less friendly than rural people they have also been regarded as more socially tolerant. In his essay 'Urbanism as a Way of Life' the influential American sociologist Louis Wirth makes this argument:

> The social interaction among such a variety of personality types in the urban milieu tends to break down the rigidity of caste lines and to complicate the class structure, and thus induces a more ramified and differentiated framework of social stratification than is found in more integrated societies. The heightened mobility of the individual, which brings him within the range of stimulation by a great number of diverse individuals and subjects him to fluctuating status in the differentiated social groups that compose the social structure of the city, tends towards the acceptance of instability and insecurity in the world at large as a norm.[72]

Wirth's notion of heightened 'mobility' as a defining characteristic of urban experience provides one useful bridge between an understanding of metropolitan life and metropolitan theatre practice. The heterogeneity of the theatrical culture that the thousands of migrant workers who entered London in the 1830s and '40s encountered was obvious and unavoidable. Hack dramatists, plagiarists, impresarios and celebrity performers peopled the theatre. Illegitimate forms, including melodrama, but also burlesque and pantomime, successfully invaded the stages of the patent theatres. An endless range of entertainment was on offer. In addition, citizens from every

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[70] 'The Metropolitan Stage' *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, August 1840, pp. 234-249, p. 240.
[71] *Ibid.*
[72] Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', p.16.

walk of life shared auditoria, thus providing opportunities for the kind of 'social interaction' among 'a variety of personality types' that Wirth identifies as characteristic of urban modes of existence.

This new metropolis and its heterogeneous performance culture provided the context for the emergence of domestic melodrama in the 1830s and it would be disingenuous to suggest that this study breaks entirely new ground in asserting this connection. In 1973, in his chapter 'The Metropolis on Stage', Michael R. Booth, for instance, remarks on:

> The deliberate artistic and thematic use of the city as an oral symbol and an image of existence, as well as a strikingly visual and human presentation of the realities of its daily living, originates in the theater with the Victorian stage rather than with any earlier period in the development of English drama.[73]

The notion of the city as subject matter and theme in melodrama is not, then, entirely new. It is worth noting, however, the extent to which, in addition to an upsurge in plays set in and around London, melodramatic staging at the minor theatres in the 1830s and '40s increasingly reflected the heightened movement and variety that characterised urban life. The influence of the metropolis was felt as much in the textures and tempo of melodrama as in its subject matter. One effect of this was that large numbers of scene changes became commonplace. J. T. Haines's version of *Jack Sheppard* which opened at the Surrey on October 21 1839, for instance, featured no less than thirty-nine scene changes and the Surrey *Jack Sheppard* was not unusually elaborate. In addition dramatic shifts in scale from large busy scenes to small-scale scenes of a more intimate nature became a feature. The opening sequence of Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer; or, The Lost Son* (Adelphi 1826), for example, relies for impact on a contrast between a large-scale scene of the village engaged in annual harvest celebrations which opens the play, and the impoverished interior of Farmer Wakefield's small cottage which is the setting for Scene Two.[74] Such relatively extreme shifts in scale and focus were commonplace, and the trend is particularly noticeable in the ubiquitous crowd scenes that were a special feature of urban melodrama. The opening sequence of William Moncreiff's *The Scamps of London, or; the Crossroads of*

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[73] Michael R. Booth, 'The Metropolis on Stage', in H. J. Dyos and Michael Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities Vol. 1* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 211-224, p.211.
[74] Buckstone, *Luke the Labourer,* p. 12.

Life (Sadler's Wells 1843), provides an excellent example. Before any character enters the narrative, the melodrama identifies London as its setting by presenting a densely populated railway station as its opening image:

> London Terminus of the Birmingham Railway. Curtain rises to bustling music. *DICK SMITH* (with Congreves), Cabmen, Baked Taters, Fried Fish, Lucifer matches and other Vendors and Hawkers, with Miscellaneous Vagabonds, discovered. *TOM FOGG* seen lying on the ground, leaning against a kerb stone, on one side in a half-stupefied state, taking no notice of anyone. Various cries of '*Baked Taters, all hot,*' '*Fried Fish, a penny a slice,*' '*Lucifer Matches,*' & c. heard confusedly mingling together.[75]

This sequence presents the audience with modernisation as spectacle and is worth considering in some detail. The scene is intended to represent Euston station, which was in 1843, as it remains, within easy walking distance of Sadler's Wells theatre. As well as being a powerful symbol of modernisation in general, Euston station was a key signifier of the transport revolution, which initiated a radical physical transformation of the capital in the middle decades of the century. This transformation was not always welcome. For example, in the preface to George Almar's *The Clerk of Clerkenwell; or, The Three Black Bottles* (Sadler's Wells 1834) which was performed at the same theatre, and featured nostalgic stagings of local landmarks, the critic expresses regret at the changing physical environment of the city:

> The march of improvement has done much to destroy what … the hand of time has spared; it has levelled not a few of the most stately monuments of ancient grandeur; and though its destructive course has been partially arrested by the piety and good taste of the discerning few, something stronger than mere argument is required to check its progress.[76]

Clearly this critic felt relatively powerless in the face of modernisation. It seems likely, in addition, that residents of the new metropolis would have shared his concern. It is worth remembering, after all, that London became the 'focal point of the railways' not as a result of any structured government policy but because the railway companies themselves, 'who were motivated solely by commercial considerations', had the power to propose all new routes. [77] As Sheppard goes on to suggest, in the 1830s and '40s 'the state did little more

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[75]W. T. Moncrieff, *The Scamps of London; or, the Crossroads of Life* (London: John Dicks, 1883?).

[76] George Almar, *The Clerk of Clerkenwell; or, The Three Black Bottles* (London: John Cumberland, 1834), p. 5.

[77] Sheppard, *London: A History*, p. 265.

than impose operating regulations and by innumerable Acts of Parliament confer the compulsory powers of land acquisition needed by the companies'.[78] Completed in the autumn of 1838, the London to Birmingham railway ran from Curzon Street in Birmingham to Euston in London and while it certainly brought added accessibility and prosperity to the capital, it also created massive upheaval insofar as its existence was predicated on the disruption and even destruction of many residential communities. Like other advances in the early decades of the century the railway provoked controversy and produced ambivalence. Given the amount of upheaval it caused, it seems clear that this kind of rapid development would have fed into a sense of modernisation as anarchic and out of control.

One thing is for sure, the spectacular staging of Euston station in 1843 provided an excellent opportunity for Thomas Greenwood as the manager of the Wells, and Henry Marston as his stage manager, to capture the heightened movement and bustle that increasingly characterised metropolitan existence in general, and life around Sadler's Wells in particular. References to the theatre as being frequented by residents of Bloomsbury and Pentonville have been located dating from as early as the mid-1820s and it seems certain that Londoners who frequented the station and its environs were in regular attendance at the theatre.[79] Like many formerly suburban outposts the area around Sadler's Wells had been transformed in the early decades of the century as the city expanded ever outward:

> The fields and dreary roads, which of yore isolated the spot, have now, as by pantomime magic, given place to a new and populous town, entirely surrounding the Wells, and presenting avenues in every direction, abounding in lamps, watchmen, and hackney vehicles of all descriptions.[80]

Ongoing transformation of the physical environment was a feature of metropolitan life during the 1830s and '40s, and it was reflected in melodramatic dramaturgy and sceneography. In the opening sequence of Moncrieff's play, the focus on heightened movement and noise as well as on density of signification is striking. Another characteristically metropolitan

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[78] *Ibid.*

[79] Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, p. 111.

[80] Unidentified clipping, undated, *Sadler's Wells Collection*, Finsbury Library, London, cited in Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, p. 110.

feature of the sequence is the way in which it foregrounds the differentiation of individuals explicitly in terms of their occupations. Its array of cabmen, porters, vendors of various types and vagrants, as well as its businessmen, bankers and tourists, prefigure Wirth's description of the effects of urbanism a century later:

> The specialization of individuals, particularly in their occupation, can proceed only, as Adam Smith pointed out, upon the basis of an enlarged market, which in turn accentuates the division of labor. The large market is only in part supplied by the city's hinterland; in large measure it is found among the large numbers that the city itself contains. The dominance of the city over the surrounding hinterland becomes explicable in terms of the division of labor which urban life occasions and promotes.[81]

This aspect of urbanism, specialisation in occupation, was manifest in a number of large-scale stagings of public metropolitan spaces in the 1830s and '40s. The railway station in particular proved a popular setting so that while the staging of Euston may have had particular resonances for the Sadler's Wells audience the basic formula was repeated elsewhere. By the time Thomas Hailes Lacy's acting edition of Moncrieff's play was published in 1850, for instance, the opening sequence had switched location to Bankside, but its effects were basically the same:

> SCENE FIRST– Exterior of South Western Railway station and view of Waterloo Bridge. Time: eight o'clock at night. … Boys calling out, "Cigar lights, a halfpenny a box," baked potato man, men with boards, and mob of people pass and repass. Arrangement of this business to be left to the discretion of the stage manager.[82]

Clearly London was intended to appear in this sequence as a hive of activity filled with strangers of all classes, a place of arrivals and departures; its status as the locus of dramatic possibility underscored by the strains of 'bustling music'. The following year at the Strand Theatre Charles Selby's *London by Night* set off in very a similar vein:

> SCENE I – A London railway Terminus (exterior), the stage filled with passengers – newspaper boys calling out the names of their papers – shoeblacks following their occupation – vendors of fruit and cigar-lights – porters with baggage – railway and engine heard without – the scene, in fact, to realise the arrival of a train.[83]

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[81] Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', p. 13.
[82] William Moncrieff, *The Scamps of London; or, the Crossroads of Life* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1850), p.2.
[83] Charles Selby, *London by Night; A Drama in Two Acts* (London: John Dicks, 1865), p.3.

While repeated and borrowed effects were characteristic of theatre practice in the mid nineteenth century, each of these individual stagings nevertheless represented an attempt to capture the movement and transience that typified urban experience. In addition, in a sudden shift in perspective that might be thought of as pre-figuring zoom techniques associated with cinema, the opening sequence of Selby's drama, like Moncrieff's, moves from a large-scale view of the urban crowd to a chance encounter between two significant individuals. The opening sequence of *Luke the Labourer*, despite its rural setting, also moves from a large-scale celebration of the incoming harvest to a chance encounter between the heroine and her suitor.[84] Both of these opening sequences and the beginning of *London By Night* can be thought of as embodying what Deborah Epstein Nord has called 'two dominant perceptual … modes of evoking the early nineteenth-century city: the panoramic view and the sudden, instructive encounter with a solitary figure'.[85]

The chance encounters that inform the exposition in these plays are understood in context of this thesis as part of a strategy for imposing order onto the chaotic physical and social surface of the metropolis, but also as evidence of a growing sense of the possibilities for new connections afforded by the city. Some coincidences are more believable than others, of course. In *Luke the Labourer*, for instance, the chance meeting between Clara Wakefield and her suitor Charles Maydew that closes the first scene might appear credible because the characters are members of the same small rural community, and both might reasonably be expected to attend the celebrations that mark the bringing in of a harvest. Some eighteen years later, however, in *London By Night*, the full-blown representation of urban flux of the busy railway station is contained and controlled by the overlaying of a most unlikely melodramatic coincidence. The opening scene is filled with anonymous newspaper-boys, porters, passengers, cigar and fruit sellers, shoeblacks and others, all going about their business in the crowded urban setting. Henry Marchmont, the returning hero of the piece, who has been abroad for a number of years, 'appears among the crowd' and is approached by a

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[84] Buckstone, *Luke the Labourer*, p. 10.
[85] Deborah Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets: Women, Representation and the City* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1995), p. 21.

shoeblack who instantly recognises him: '… you're Henry Marchmont, my old school fellow, who used to pitch into all the big boys that pitched into me. Tip us your fist, I see you are not too proud to shake hand with an old pal who has seen better days'.[86] This fortuitous if extremely unlikely meeting is to prove crucial in the development of Selby's narrative. Among other things it privileges the notion of the city as offering opportunities for welcome if unlikely connections. Later in the same scene, the shoeblack, who goes by the name of Ankle Jack, recognises Hawkhurst, the principal villain of the piece, decides to spy on him, and in so doing discovers a plot to dupe Henry's profligate brother Frank. In this opening scene, then, the bustling city frames the actions of the principal characters, as if to propose the metropolis and its accompanying crowd as an omnipresent catalyst in their eventual survival or destruction.

Considered in relation to nineteenth-century urbanism, the bravado of these opening sequences might also be read as a rejoinder to growing cultural anxiety about the expanding metropolis as a centre of power and energy. The opening sequences of *The Scamps of London* and *London By Night* display far more of the city than is necessary to illustrate the narrative, and do so through the complicated and expensive use of stage technology. Budget allowing, the ambition seems to have been to generate a plethora of signification, movement, music and sound effect, that any individual audience member would have had difficulty grasping in its entirety. These sequences might be thought of as representing an attempt to simulate the sensory overload that characterised metropolitan life, the 'rapid crowding of changing images … and the unexpectedness of onrushing impression' that the metropolis generated.[87] The impact of the opening sequences of *The Scamps of London* and *London By Night* also depended on the superimposition of melodrama's dramaturgy of recognition onto a spectacular representation of urban flux and movement. In effect, these sequences asserted the tangibility of London, its chaotic nature and subversive currents, whilst simultaneously

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[86] Selby, *London by Night,* p.3.
[87] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p.410.

working 'to make urban space finally knowable' by imposing the certainties of melodramatic logic.[88]

Attempts to stage the city as a 'text' that might be 'read' were common in this period, and can be understood as part of a wider cultural imperative to make the city cohere. At the Surrey in October 1839, for example, the scene painter Brunning produced a spectacular diorama for Jack Sheppard's 'Procession from the Old Bailey to Tyburn':

> Jack is put on a cart outside Newgate, but the diorama pauses on Holborn Hill, outside St Andrew's Church, for a scene where the mob attempts to rescue him. The cart 'moves' onto the Crown Inn, where, during another pause, 'according to Ancient Custom, the criminal Drank his Last Refreshment on Earth'. Finally the cart 'moves' on to Tyburn for the final scene.[89]

As Michael Booth shows in 'The Metropolis On Stage', there was a growing appetite for urban settings among early Victorian audiences. Heidi J. Holder has also commented, in this regard, on the popularity of urban melodrama in the East End theatres, arguing that East End audiences never tired of 'seeing the problems of the London poor resolved on the stage'.[90] This proliferation of urban scenes on London's stages was more than a matter of fashion. It suggests theatre practitioners responding to a perceived need to make sense of the ever-changing surface of the metropolis, a daunting yet pressing task for all Londoners in the early decades of the nineteenth century. In this sense the preoccupation with urban settings and urban themes, including crime, poverty and alienation, that is apparent in melodrama of the 1830s and '40s should be understood as part of a larger cultural engagement with the problem of the new metropolis. Attempts to provide a coherent language through which the city could be 'read' were not confined to the theatre, or to

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[88] Al Deakin, 'Fear and Sympathy: Charles Dickens and Urban (Dis) Ability', in Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy, eds., *Urban Space and Representation* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), pp. 71-81, p. 71.

[89] William G. Knight, *A Major London Minor: The Surrey Theatre 1805-1865* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1997), p.162. Brunning's fabulous panoramas were not confined to melodrama and were an important draw for the Surrey pantomime for a number of years. The panoramas also regularly featured London scenes. The critic in *The Satirist*, 2 January 1842, for instance, commented on an interlude in the pantomime *Harlequin Puck; or, the Elfin Changeling and the Enchanted Statue of the Crystal Fountain*: 'Mr Brunning's 'magnificent annual panorama' lulled the audience for a while into admiration. It commences with new London Bridge, and represents all the scenes and objects down the river to Greenwich …', p.3.

[90] Heidi J. Holder, 'The East-End Theatre', in Powell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, pp. 257-276, p. 263. Holder notes that urban subject matter continued to prove fertile ground for melodramatists in the East End later in the century.

melodrama, and might even be described as a characteristic impulse of the period.

As well as the example of Charles Dickens, whose work has been widely theorised as deeply engaged with the problematics of reading the Victorian city, social critics and reformers including Sir James K. Shuttleworth, Friedrich Engels and Henry Mayhew, while treasuring very different political ambitions, all attempted in their work 'to produce modalities which would force the city to cohere and consequently create some sense of a knowable object at work'.[91] In James Donald's assessment Shuttleworth's desire to turn the metropolis into a readable text 'was a precondition for governing the city and policing its population through the imposition of social norms'.[92] Engels' ambitions were, of course, rather more radical. For him, transforming the bourgeois city into a text was a prelude to its destruction or transformation into a just and classless metropolis. Similarly although perhaps less ambitiously, Henry Mayhew's campaigning journalism, published in 1861 as *London Labour and the London Poor*, was intended systematically to chart and make visible and legible, the lives of lower-class Londoners. The express aim was to bring their plight to the attention of the more privileged in sufficient detail to provoke social reform.[93] In the early part of the mid century, melodramatists were also bringing the lives of ordinary and underprivileged Londoners to the stages of minor theatres, and employing dramaturgical strategies that repeatedly attempted to impose ethical and formal coherence onto the chaotic surface of the new metropolis. This was to prove a difficult task, of course, and the impossibility of dispelling the latent fear, anxiety and paranoia that characterised metropolitan life is apparent in the many repetitions, revisions and re-stagings typical of melodramatic practice during the period. The impulse to find a theatrical language through which the city could be made legible and coherent to its large and mixed audience was increasingly

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[91] Deakin, 'Charles Dickens and Urban (Dis) Ability' p.72. See also Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England in 1844* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1892), pp.45-54 and Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1985). For an account of Shuttleworth's thinking on this subject see Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England Since 1830* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1987), pp.19-21.

[92] James Donald, 'The City, the Cinema: Modern Spaces', in Chris Jenks, ed., *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 77-95, p. 80.

[93] Mayhew's work had originally appeared as a series of articles in the *Morning Chronicle* from 1849-50, and then independently from 1851-52.

pressing, and consequently stagings of smaller scale local landmarks proliferated alongside spectacular scenes like those that opened *The Scamps of London* and *London By Night*, or Brunning's lavish diorama in *Jack Sheppard*.

Many plays that featured scenes of local interest are now lost, having neither been published nor submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for licensing, because the theatres in which they were originally performed fell outside the Lord Chamberlain's jurisdiction. Traces of a number of these plays survive, however, in the publicity that was used to promote them, principally in playbills and sometimes in reviews and newspaper advertisements. Between 1838 and 1843 a number of melodramas featuring local settings were staged at Sadler's Wells including T. E. Wilks's *The Ruby Ring, or, the Murder at Sadler's Wells*, *The Fair Maid of Tottenham Court* and *The Clerk of Islington*, as well as *The Scamps of London*.[94] Elsewhere, the Surrey staged local dramas with a nautical feel such as *Jacob Faithful; or, The Life of a Thames Waterman* (1834), and John Faucit Saville's *Wapping Old Stairs* (1837), which did survive in print and will be discussed in more detail in later chapters.[95] The Surrey Playbill for *Wapping Old Stairs* evidences the importance of scenes of local interest in attracting audiences, advertising a 'Street in Wapping!' as a particular attraction.[96] The play also featured scenes of Wapping Old Stairs by moonlight and a view on the banks of the Thames over the Isle of Dogs.[97] Even J. T. Haines's famous nautical melodrama *My Poll and My Partner Joe* (Surrey, 1835), which was first produced when 'naval actions against the slave trade were at their height' and in which the legendary T. P. Cooke liberated a slave ship almost single-handedly, emphasised Surrey-side allegiances.[98] Haines's hero, played by Cooke, was Harry Halyard of Battersea and his heroine Pretty Poll of Putney.[99] Sometimes melodramas included nostalgic renderings of local settings. At Sadler's Wells in 1834

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[94] See Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, p.113.
[95] *Wapping Old Stairs* was advertised in *The Morning Post* on 16 November 1837, p. 2, and again in *The Examiner* on 19 November, p. 749. *The Standard* reviewed *Jacob Faithful* on 9 December 1834, p. 1, and *The Morning Chronicle* on Wednesday 10 December, p.2.
[96] Reprinted in Knight, *A Major London Minor*, p. 160.
[97] John Faucit Saville, *Wapping Old Stairs* (London: John Cumberland 1828-42).
[98] Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representations of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 53.
[99] John Thomas Haines, *My Poll and My Partner Joe* (London: John Cumberland 1828-1842).

Almar's *The Clerk of Clerkenwell; or, The Three Black Bottles* featured a scene of the Clerk's Well with the river Fleet in the distance, and one of Islington Green illuminated and by moonlight. At the Pavilion in Whitechapel *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green* was staged in 1828 and *The Lone Hut of Limehouse Creek; or, The Sailor and the Miser* in 1832.[100] According to its playbill the latter was set 'in the days before Limehouse was covered with its hundreds of magnificent repositories of wealth and commerce'.[101] *Wilkins the Weaver, or Bethnal Green in the Olden Times* appeared at the same theatre in 1834.[102]

Elsewhere, Edward Fitzball's *The Negro of Wapping* (Garrick, 1838), now considered important because of its prominent representation of blackness, also contained scenes of local landmarks and, in a pattern repeated across the capital, Thomas Greenwood's adaptation of *Oliver Twist* (Sadler's Wells, 1839) 'emphasised the connection between Clerkenwell, Pentonville and the novel'.[103] In the following decade, Nelson Lee's *Red Ruth the Gypsy of Hanger Lane; or, a Legend of Tottenham* (City of London, 1841), George Dibdin Pitt's *The Fool of Finsbury; or, the Beggar of Crosby Hall* (City of London, 1842), T. P. Taylor's *The Bottle* and *The Drunkard's Children* (City of London, 1848), and *The Factory Girl Rose Maynard* (Garrick, 1845), which featured 'a view of Whitechapel High Street from Aldgate Church', were among a large number of plays that presented scenes in streets, garrets, apartments and public houses in the areas of Chick Lane, Bank, Bankside, Moorfields and Finsbury.[104] The ubiquity of street scenes in melodrama of this period is worthy of further comment. Often extended sequences took place in settings described simply as 'a street'. This may be a partly a function of the logistics involved in setting new scenes behind the cloth, but street scenes often featured key events and important plot developments. J.P. Hart's *Jane the Licensed Victualler's Daughter* (Pavilion, 1840), for instance, includes an extended climactic scene that takes place in 'A Street'.

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[100] Playbill for *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green*, V&A Theatre Collections.
[101] Pavilion Playbill, 3 October 1832, British Library.
[102] Pavilion Playbill for *Lurline; or, the Revolt of Water Nymphs*, March 1834, gives advance notice of *Wilkin the Weaver*. V & A Theatre Collections.
[103] Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, p. 114.
[104] Playbills for all plays mentioned are held in the V&A Theatre Collections.

Jane is a barmaid at the Sun Tavern. She is in love with her employer's son Alfred who returns her feelings enthusiastically in spite of his father's disapproval. Mr Brewel, although not an unkind man, is overly conscious of his standing as a businessman and would like his son and heir to marry someone of higher social standing. As the second acts opens, in 'a street', Jane and her dear friend Nancy stand accused of theft, having been set up by Jane's jealous suitor Ralph the cellar man. They are paraded in public by the police and near the beginning of the scene, surrounded by onlookers a devastated Jane throws herself at the feet of Mr Brewel, her employer and accuser:

> Spare me, I implore you; let my tears move you – that I am innocent your own heart must tell you – it does tell you so; your face confesses what your heart believes; then why have me dragged like a common felon through the public streets? Why let the hootings and sneers of a vulgar mob assail me? Why, I demand, am I to be pointed at as a t-h-i-e-f? The word almost chokes me. Father! Mother! From your pauper graves rise up – cast off the decaying remnants of afflicted mortality – in your rotten shrouds appear and witness my degradation – my innocence – tell them your daughter is no thief – no thief – t-h-i-e-f![105]

At this moment of intense emotional power, the assembled 'mob', which includes almost every named character in the play, is seen 'pointing reproachfully at Mr Brewel' as Jane, who has fainted is carried off by the police. Her exit is swiftly followed by the entrance of Nancy, also in custody and 'crying violently'.[106] Not without sympathy for the girls, Mr Brewel is persuaded by this parade of suffering to drop the charges, saying he 'will not appear against them' although Jane's reputation is so far tarnished in his eyes he resolves never to let her enter his house again.[107] Nancy's lover, the redoubtable mechanic Jemmy Filer, rushes off to secure the girls' release leaving Ralph alone momentarily. The cellar man resolves, rather guiltily, to take full advantage of Jane's destitution by proposing marriage: 'It's wicked I know what's done, but I couldn't help it, and no one knows it but myself'.[108] Jane re-enters, now free, but still infected 'by the tainted breath of

[105] J. P. Hart, *Jane, The Licensed Victualler's Daughter; or, The Orphan of the Almshouse* (London: John Dicks, 1885?), p.11.
[106] *Ibid.*
[107] *Ibid.*
[108] *Ibid.*

suspicion'.[109] In a highly charged sequence Ralph assures her of his continued devotion, and his desire to make an honest woman of her in spite of recent events, while mercilessly impressing upon her the seriousness of the break with Brewel: ' – you will never again be allowed to cross his threshold – his heart is closed against you, so are his doors'.[110] Unable to requite his passion and still in a state of distress, Jane tries to let Ralph down gently, telling him she is not able to consider his offer in her current state of anxiety. This rejection sends him into a jealous rage that is only heightened when Alfred Brewel rushes on, assuring Jane of his faith in her innocence and his determination to convince his father of it. Ralph now loses his temper completely, accuses Alfred of dishonest intentions, 'dashes him to the ground and fastens on his throat as if to strangle him'.[111] Jane screams and her cries alert Jemmy, Nancy and others who re-enter to break up the fight. Both suitors demand the right to offer Jane their protection but she consents instead to accept the hospitality of her friends Nancy and Jem. As the forlorn trio leave, the street is entered by yet another character, the eccentric grocer Mr Concise who brings evidence of Ralph's involvement in the burglary of which Jane has been wrongly accused. Finally, protesting his innocence, but increasingly desperate, Ralph enlists the help of two known criminals, Slink and Skulk, to abduct Jane, and presumably force himself upon her.

As the above description demonstrates, this street scene is complex and lengthy, involving a significant number of exists and entrances, key events, and the participation of a large cast of characters. It is not entirely unusual. In Scene Two of Douglas Jerrold's *Martha Willis the Servant Maid* (Pavilion, 1831), for instance, the miserly Nunky Gruel conducts his complementary businesses of fencing and money-lending in the street, in a scene that introduces both the miser himself, who is the principal villain of the piece, and Walter Speed, the childhood sweetheart of the play's eponymous heroine, who has been drawn, with some encouragement from Gruel, into a life of crime and metropolitan fast living.[112] Similarly, the hard-hearted bailiff Spike, in T.P. Taylor's *The Bottle* (City of London, 1847), lays plans for the seizure of

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[109] *Ibid.*, p.12.
[110] *Ibid.*
[111] *Ibid.*
[112] Douglas Jerrold, *Martha Willis the Servant Maid* (London: John Dicks, 1883?), pp. 5-6.

furniture and other goods in the street encouraging his associate 'to go in with the milk – that is to say, when they open the door, which they're safe to do, to take in the milk, you immediately introduce yourself'.[113] These scenes, and others like them, argue for the significance of the street as an urban space. The street as setting functioned in domestic melodrama not merely as a neutral location behind which the complex manoeuvre of replacing one interior setting with another could take place, but as a space in which characters might engage in a wide range of meaningful social interactions that allowed them ownership of the city. Henri Lefebvre sums up the importance of the street to metropolitan life as follows:

> It serves as a meeting place (topos), for without it, no other designated encounters are possible (cafés, theaters, halls). These places animate the street and are served by its animation, or they cease to exist. In the street, a form of spontaneous theater, I become spectacle and spectator, and sometimes an actor. The street is where movement takes place, the interaction without which urban life would not exist, leaving only separation, a forced and fixed segregation.[114]

Varied though generic street scenes and scenes of recognisable landmarks were in content and mood, they invariably functioned to locate their audiences squarely in the metropolis, and consequently to frame their ensuing narratives as determinedly urban in character. Understood as a widespread representational practice, they might even be seen as engaging in a centring operation in which both stage and spectator were positioned in the city, and in which the metropolis was presented as frenetic, mysterious and dangerous, but also ultimately visible and knowable.

It seems clear from the surviving evidence that the primary impact of larger scale metropolitan scenes was visual. This particular connection, between melodrama's visual strategies and metropolitan experience, is explored at some length in Chapter Eight of this study, but it is useful to note at this point the extent to which urbanism in general 'privileges … vision and the visual' as a mode of sensory engagement.[115] Louis Wirth elaborates:

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[113] T. P. Taylor, *The Bottle* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1850), p. 17.

[114] Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution* (1970), translated by Robert Bononno (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p. 18.

[115] Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy eds., *Urban Space and Representation* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p.7.

> The urban world puts a premium on visual recognition. We see the uniform which denotes the role of the functionaries and are oblivious to the personal eccentricities that are hidden behind the uniform. We tend to acquire and develop a sensitivity to a world of artefacts and become progressively farther removed from the world of nature.[116]

As the example of Brunning's diorama in the Surrey *Jack Sheppard* illustrates, the middle decades of the nineteenth century witnessed the proliferation of new visual technologies that affected the ways in which the urban environment was represented and inhabited. The massive programme of monumental building, which included the railway terminus discussed earlier, visualised progress itself for nineteenth-century Londoners and in addition, the popularity of such entertainments as the panorama, can be linked to a wider desire to make the city legible or, to be more precise, to make the city 'cohere' by rendering it whole:

> Panoramas represented one of the most successful mechanisms photographers used to civilize the city and make it comprehensible. By enclosing and encapsulating the city they give it holistic identity. And to an urban culture characterized by vague, constantly shifting boundaries and a tenuous unity threatening always to breakdown into its cultural, economic, or geographic subcategories, closure and identity were precious commodities.[117]

By seeking motifs that expressed the city as a totality, an image that might be viewed and conceived of as a unity, melodrama also often attempted to realise this panoramic vision. Many urban melodramas, such as *The Bottle*, *Wapping Old Stairs* and *Jack Sheppard*, included panoramic views of the London skyline, sometimes glimpsed through windows, again suggesting that movement from synoptic overviews of the city to dark street corners and garrets was an important feature of the genre's urbanism.

It is one thing to make the city appear whole, but the commercial importance of the appeal to local audiences was an additional factor in encouraging the staging of local landmarks at neighbourhood theatres. The management of the Pavilion Theatre in the 1830s, for example, produced a mixed repertoire that combined legitimate drama with nautical melodrama, presumably aimed at the significant number of people employed in and

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[116] Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', p. 14.

[117] Peter Bacon Hales, *Silver Cities: The Photography of American Urbanization 1839-1915* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), p.73. For a comprehensive history of the panorama see Stephan Oetterman, *The Panorama: The History of a Mass Medium*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone, 1997).

around the docks who lived within walking distance of the theatre, as well as a significant number of performances featuring settings of local interest.[118] Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow rightly caution against reductive or overly simplistic assumptions about the homogeneous make up of local audiences at the East End theatres. Nonetheless, a wide variety of melodramas with nautical themes were performed at the Pavilion in the 1820s and 1830s including Douglas Jerrold's *The Mutiny at the Nore,* which was written for the theatre. Other titles included *Black-Ey'd Susan; The Dumb Sailor Boy; The Pilot; The Shipwrecked Sailor and His Dog; Fifteen Years of a British Seaman's Life; The Union Jack* and *Ben the Boatswain.* Anita Cowan has shown that the people who lived in the area surrounding the Pavilion in the mid-century were more likely to be employed in river trade than in any other occupation, and it seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that the theatre's managers employed settings of local interest, including those relating to the river and the sea beyond, as a way of attracting local clientele.[119] The transformation of the physical fabric of the river and its environs was also a feature of the period:

> The East End of London began developing after the building of the London docks: the West India Dock in 1799, the London Dock in 1802, the Surrey Dock in 1804, and the East India Dock in 1805. The initial phase of London dock-building was completed by 1828 with the St Katherine's Dock, and enabled London to serve as the nation's principal trade centre. Naturally, the docks and the river attracted a wide range of businesses related to exports and imports, factories and workshops, all clustered east of the City of London.[120]

In any case, the survival of neighbourhood theatres like the Pavilion depended upon their ability to respond flexibly to audience demand and as such these institutions 'were uniquely placed to "reflect and inflect" urban experience while it was undergoing a continuous, semi-subterranean process of change and development'.[121]

Surviving evidence about the popularity of local settings suggests that melodrama worked to make the city legible and knowable for its audiences –

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[118] See Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, p.246.
[119] Anita Cowan, 'The Relationship Between Theatre Repertoire and Theatre Location: A Study of the Pavilion Theatre', in K. V. Hartigan, ed., *All the World: Drama Past and Present* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), pp. 43-65.
[120] Michael R. Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age,* p.4.
[121] Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.2.

at least partly – through the imaginative rendering of recognisable places and spaces. It also relied on a recognisable dramaturgy, stock characters and ethical certainties, to make sense of what was otherwise a bewildering landscape. Citizens of the new metropolis were constantly presented with new situations, with new people in new settings, and were continually under pressure to understand the interactions of others in order that they might themselves behave in appropriate ways. Partly as a result of these pressures, the experience of theatre going was given special significance in early nineteenth-century London. On a social level, regular attendance at neighbourhood playhouses was important because it enabled city dwellers to become involved in ritualised sets of interactions with others and for many Londoners theatre-going was among the realities of everyday life. Alongside going to work, shopping, or going to church, it was negotiated in a concrete environment. A number of neighbourhood theatres, such as the Pavilion and the Britannia, quickly became recognisable urban spaces in their own right, spaces that could be occupied with some comfort and ease – and indeed were specifically designed to be occupied with comfort and ease – by a newly emerging working class.

Edward Dimendberg has argued that 'representing the metropolis is never an innocent gesture but one that is always motivated by cultural needs and ambitions'.[122] This is no less true of melodrama than it is of other representational forms. Often the melodrama staged at local theatres revealed a fundamental ambivalence about the city and its new forms of social life. For example, while evidence suggests that urban melodramas often featured recognisable locations, many of them were also, and significantly, marked by the absence of a manifest centre. In spite of numerous recognisable landmarks, the vivid and continual motion of the scenes in such plays suggests an important shift in the identity of nineteenth-century London. In the autumn of 1839 within weeks of Harris's version appearing at the Surrey, the Adelphi production of John Baldwin Buckstone's *Jack Sheppard* called for twenty three scene changes, including four in the Prologue, which told of the

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[122] Edward Dimendberg, *Film Noir and the Spaces of Modernity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2004), p. 89.

disgrace and ultimate demise of Sheppard's errant father. The final scene of the Prologue involved a staging of the Old London Bridge:

> *Wood is heard crying for help–the window is broken open, and a rope ladder with a lighted horn ladder attached to it, is let down. Wood is seen ascending it with the child in his arms; he gains the window; the child is taken in; and as he prepares to enter the drop descends amidst a shower of tiles, bricks and stones.*[123]

This extract captures something of the sensational appeal of the original staging. Considered in relation to the Surrey version, with its thirty-nine scene changes and its spectacular diorama, this Adelphi production cannot even be viewed as uncharacteristically extravagant for its time. In the event, a large number of melodramas of the period were characterised by an increased focus on movement, a relatively high number of scene changes, and a wide variety of locations. *The Scamps of London*, for example, has ten changes, *Wapping Old Stairs* and *The Bottle* sixteen. In *London by Night* the scene shifts from a London railway terminus to the Adelphi arches by the Thames, to a dilapidated garret, to the handsomely furnished saloon of a restaurant in Leicester Square, to the street outside the restaurant, to a public tea garden in the suburbs, to a comfortable apartment in Wandsworth and finally to the Brick Fields at Battersea. This heightened focus on mobility and the transition between scenes can be understood as one significant marker of melodrama's urbanism, and in addition has been understood as directly influencing the techniques of early cinema:

> The essence of much melodrama was speed and mounting tension, qualities that required rapid transitions between scenes as well as spatial juxtapositions and skills in movement and change on stage. Echoing related preoccupations with time and space in other narrative forms, the nineteenth-century theater explored transitional devices which clearly anticipate the techniques of the motion picture.[124]

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[123] This extract is taken from George Taylor, ed., Oxford World's Classics: *Trilby and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 20. Taylor's text is based almost entirely on the printed version of John Baldwin Buckstone's *Jack Sheppard* (London: Webster & Co., n.d.). Taylor believes the likely date of publication in 1839, xxv. The title page of this early edition describes the text 'As performed at the Theatre Royal Adelphi. Correctly printed from the prompter's copy, with the cast of characters, costumes, scenic arrangements, sides of Entrance and Exit, and relative positions of the Dramatis Personae'.

[124] John L. Fell 'Dissolves by Gaslight: Antecedents to the Motion Picture in Nineteenth-Century Melodrama', *Film Quarterly*, 23: 3 (1970), pp. 22-34, p.26.

It is also the case that unease about the uncertainty of life in the new decentred city, as well as a desire to make the city cohere by covering as much of its ground as possible, might reasonably be located in the continual shifting of the scene in these plays and in the manifest absence of a stable setting, interior or exterior, around which the action is organised. Knowledge in the city, as Douglas Tallack has noted, depends 'at least to some extent, upon achieving *a point of view'*, and for much of the population and for most of the time in the early Victorian city this stable point of view remained elusive.[125] Although unifying visions remained at best unstable, as did definitive accounts of what was actually going on in London in the mid nineteenth century, popular artists did not give up on the attempt to make sense of metropolitan experience. The ever-changing mid-century metropolis was an environment that promised defeat to individuals and groups who failed to maintain some kind of epistemological grip on it, so that while in one sense the widespread staging of recognisable landmarks might be attributable to a commercial imperative in new minor theatres to attract and entertain local audiences, it should also be understood as part of a more widespread representational practice that worked to orientate Londoners.

Inevitably, because the complex cultural effects of metropolitan life produced ambivalence, the dynamic between real and imagined urban space and experience was rendered opaque as well as transparent by the power of melodramatic representation in the 1830s and '40s. Urban spaces as encountered by the heroes and heroines of melodrama were often environments in which they found themselves alone, unaided and in danger. In particular, the heroines of domestic melodrama were liable to find themselves caught between the twin evils of poverty and sin in the great metropolis. Susan, the heroine of John Stafford's *Love's Frailties; or, Passion and Repentance* (Surrey, 1828), for instance, is lured to London by a seducer. Overcome by guilt, she attempts suicide by throwing herself into the Serpentine.[126] Jerrold's Martha Willis comes into service in London only to find herself incarcerated in Newgate having been falsely accused of theft. Louisa,

[125] Douglas Tallack, 'City Sights: Mapping and Representing New York City' in Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy eds., *Urban Space and Representation*, pp., 25-38, p. 27. Emphasis mine.
[126] John Stafford's *Love's Frailties; or, Passion and Repentance* (London: John Dicks, 1886).

the heroine of Selby's *London By Night,* enacts a classic melodramatic final scene of familial reunion, in which she discovers that she is in reality the long lost daughter of Dognose, an inveterate drunk. Describing the scene as 'one of horror and darkness, such as to freeze the current of my blood', the unfortunate Dognose is subsequently knocked unconscious by the villain Hawkhurst, and left for dead on the railway track in the path of an oncoming train.[127] Finally, in accordance with melodramatic convention, he is rescued in the nick of time, and father and daughter are safely reunited and reconciled. *London by Night* opens, then, with a vibrant and optimistic scene designed to '*realise the arrival of a train*' and closes with one in which a locomotive thunders past '*with a roar and a whistle*' narrowly missing the head of the heroine's estranged father. Such scenes and their characteristic juxtapositions enact a deep ambivalence to the modernisation and new technologies that mark metropolitan experience, clearly imagining the impact of modernisation in very different ways.[128] Their appearance at either end of one play suggests a significant level of ambivalence towards its machinery.

As the final scene of *London By Night* demonstrates, the popularity of urban melodrama in the 1830s and '40s suggests an impulse to make sense of life in the new metropolis, not only in terms of clear structures of identity, community and civic responsibility, but also in terms of a dramaturgy of desire, fascination and terror. A sense of the city as opaque, mysterious, labyrinthine and dangerous is typically coexistent in these plays with melodrama's characteristic dramaturgy of recognisibility and recognition. Looking again, and more closely, at Moncreiff's *The Scamps of London,* for instance, one encounters a complex melodrama which deals with the underside of London life, features a number of intertwining plots, a range of city 'types', and several contrasting urban settings. The constant movement of the city, the overwhelming diversity of its sights and sounds, were manifest in Moncreiff's play in the rapid succession of scenes laid in streets, taverns, restaurants, gaols, garrets, railway stations, markets and derelict arches. The opening sequence, as already noted, was much imitated and, as well as being visually arresting, called forth a rich soundscape that utilised the acoustics of the

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[127] Selby, *London By Night*, p.11.
[128] *Ibid.*

metropolis. The combination of 'bustling music' with the sounds of trains arriving and street traders calling their wares was juxtaposed with the introduction of significant characters whose destinies were caught up with the machinery of the city. These combined effects are less to do with an impulse towards realism, what Michael Booth describes as a strategy concerned 'primarily with reproducing the surface details of life [by] … reconstructing the immediate physical environment of the lives of London audiences', than an attempt to realise the textures of urban experience in theatrical form.[129] The activity of representing the metropolis theatrically is, after all, one that cannot help but involve a degree of conceptualisation. Moncreiff's opening scene, along with the many other scenes mentioned in this chapter, reveals London's fascination with itself and the new kind of urban life which was in the process of emerging as a result of demographic changes and a technological revolution which rapidly altered Londoners' conceptions of time and space. These conceptions were also being challenged by radical changes in the built environment, which brought fully into focus what Chris Jenks describes as, 'the "seen" or "witnessed" character of space and particularly urban space'.[130]

Questions of how public space might meaningfully be occupied by individuals and groups are also explored in melodrama. Charles Selby's *London by Night*, for instance, begins with two contrasting representations of large numbers of urban bodies in metropolitan space, moving from the exterior of a crowded London railway terminus, to a community of vagrants occupying the Adelphi arches by moonlight. At the beginning of the second scene Ankle Jack is himself recognised as he approaches the community of down and outs he lives with under the arches – 'Ah, that's Ankle Jack – I can tell his whistle from a hundred'.[131] Selby is particularly concerned to stage the community of vagrants, who are represented primarily as respectable people who have experienced unforeseen downturns in their economic circumstances, as genuinely cohesive and supportive.

Through a sequence of noticing and disregarding other people, the melodrama underscores the balance between the activities of acknowledging

[129] Booth,' The Metropolis on Stage', p. 219.
[130] Chris Jenks, 'Watching Your Step', in Chris Jenks, ed., *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 142-160, p. 144.
[131] Selby, *London By Night*, p.4.

and ignoring others that characterised metropolitan existence. The arrival of the villain Hawkhurst, and his accomplice Shadrack Shabner, halfway through the first scene, emphasises the studied indifference of the urban crowd. Unnoticed by everyone but Jack and. through his agency, the audience, these dastardly villains are able to plot their next crime in the open street, unconcerned about the possibility of detection. They exit happily through the bustle accompanying the arrival of another train. The metropolis in *London By Night* is at once the locus of randomness, anonymity, danger and faceless crowds, and also of meaningful chance encounters, unexpected relationships and hidden social structures. The activity of revealing the interconnectedness of individual and group narratives and histories is clearly an important driver of melodramatic narrative in this period, to the extent that narrative credulity is commonly stretched beyond breaking point. In this context, Ankle Jack's exaggerated powers of detection are usefully understood as idealised, as embodying 'the enduring Enlightenment aspiration to render the city transparent'.[132]

The city of London was an awesome phenomenon in the 1830s and '40s, and so was its entertainment culture. The domestic melodramas discussed above were originally performed in minor theatres whose material practices during the period were characterised by the drive to increase audience capacity, responsiveness to local demands, and entrepreneurial spirit.[133] In this context, the widespread preoccupation with urban settings and urban themes outlined above can usefully be understood as part of a larger cultural engagement with the problem of the new metropolis in the early to mid nineteenth century. Importantly, the experience of the metropolis was not readily separated from the experience of *representations* of the metropolis. As Rob Shields has argued: '"The City" is a slippery notion. It slides back and forth between an abstract idea and concrete material'.[134] In the 1830s and

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[132] James Donald, 'The City, the Cinema, Modern Spaces', in Chris Jenks, ed., *Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 77-95, p.78.
[133] Entrepreneurship was not, as Jane Moody has noted, a quality usually associated with the Covent Garden or Drury Lane, which had for a century-and-a-half, 'relied for their capital on established traditions of cultural patronage'. Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, p. 148.
[134] Rob Shields, 'A Guide to Urban Representation and What to do About It: Alternative Traditions of Urban Theory', in Anthony D. King, ed., *Re-Presenting the City: Ethnicity, Capital and Culture in the Twenty First Century Metropolis* (New York: New York University Press, 1996), pp. 227-252, p. 235.

'40s, the dynamic between real and imagined urban space was negotiated partly through the force of theatrical representation. While melodrama's appeal for its audience was related to the tensions it resolved, it was also and importantly related to those it generated and sustained. In addition, the ubiquity of images of London life on stage fostered the powerfully modern notion that 'the everyday might be transformed into the shocking and sensational' and that the individual might at any moment be 'lifted from the anonymity of urban life and into the world of spectacle'.[135]

In the second quarter of the nineteenth century domestic melodrama was a vibrant and extraordinarily flexible popular form engaged in a complex range of cultural work. One important aspect of such work was to systematise and process attitudes and ideas about the city and, as the city itself changed under the pressure of historical forces so in turn did melodrama's representational strategies, 'exhausting traditional modes as [it called] for new meaning often by parodying the emptiness of older forms'.[136] Through its recognisable forms and signs, spectators, managers, critics, dramatists and performers attempted to construe the new and ever-changing metropolis and engage with it robustly in its most enabling and disabling aspects.

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[135]Vanessa R. Schwartz, *Spectacular Realities: Early Mass Culture in Fin-de-Siècle Paris* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 36

[136] Richard Lehan, 'Urban Signs and Urban Literature: Literary Form and Historical Process', *New Literary History*, 18:1 (1986), pp. 99-113, p. 99.

3

Re-Imagining Melodrama in Simmel's Metropolis

Throughout the period covered by this study, melodrama was the pre-eminent form in a theatre of spectacular power, free enterprise and rapid social transformation, just as London was the pre-eminent city in a metamorphosing world. The inter-dependency of these two discourses is a key focus of this thesis. One way of establishing that early domestic melodrama can be productively thought of specifically in relation to the metropolis is to demonstrate that key texts and concepts in urban sociology can be used to add to existing understandings of the workings of the genre. Consequently, the arguments presented in the previous chapter drew on Louis Wirth's essay 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', and the title of this present chapter directly acknowledges a debt to one of the most influential essays about the effects of modern city life on the human subject, Georg Simmel's 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903).[137] Specifically, the intention in this chapter is to extend Simmel's insights about metropolitan culture to an analysis of a number of key formal and thematic characteristics of the genre, and to their practical application in the theatre, in order to show how domestic melodrama's familiar patterns can be understood as linked to its material condition as a metropolitan form. In addition, the aim is to begin to point towards some firm conclusions about the reciprocal relationship between melodrama and the modern metropolis, which will be developed in later chapters.

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[137] The essay is among Simmel's most widely read sociological works, and it continues to be a key text in a number of areas, as evidenced by its inclusion in many recent anthologies of social and cultural theory. The essay is reprinted, for instance, in James Farganis, ed., *Readings in Social Theory: The Classic Tradition to Post-Modernism,* 3rd edition (New York: McGraw Hill, 2000), pp. 149-157 and in Vanessa R. Schwartz and Jeannene M. Przyblyski, eds., *The Nineteenth Century Visual Culture Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 51-55. It also appears in Jan Lin and Christopher Mele, eds., *The Urban Sociology Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp.23-31, and in Sharon M. Meaher, ed., *Philosophy and The City: Classic to Contemporary Writings* (Albany: State University of New York, 2008), pp. 96-101.

The arguments presented in this chapter draw on a number of sources besides Simmel himself, and in particular on Julie Choi's essay, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life in the Novel' which also uses Simmel's seminal essay as a tool for analysis.[138] In this essay, Choi is specifically intent on mapping Simmel's thinking onto the 'psychological or otherwise descriptive realism' that she sees as characteristic of the eighteenth-century novel, and in this sense her subject matter is very different from that of this thesis. However, her explication of Simmel's concept of the blasé is particularly insightful and has directly influenced the account of melodramatic villainy presented later in this chapter.[139] Elsewhere, Simmel's writing has been used to extend understandings of art and literature in a number of forms. Ian Boyd White's chapter 'The Architecture of Futurism', for instance, explores the connections between Simmel's thinking and modernist art.[140] Douglas Tallack in an essay entitled, 'City Sights: Mapping and Representing New York City', draws on Simmel's work to examine the Ashcan School of painting in *fin de siècle* New York while Richard Lehan's more ambitious study, *The City in Literature*, acknowledges the efficacy of Simmel's sociology as an interpretative tool.[141]

As Simmel's work demonstrates, modern metropolitan culture and its effect on the interior life and exterior behaviour of the city dweller, his tastes and preferences, were to become a focus of particular interest among cultural critics towards the end of the nineteenth century as the discipline now recognised as sociology began to take shape. Although his own interests were relatively wide, ranging across logic, the principles of philosophy, the history of philosophy, ethics and psychology, it is as a founding father of sociology that Simmel is best known in the Anglophone world.[142] Simmel's

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[138] Julie Choi, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life in the Novel' *New Literary History*, 37:4 (2006), pp. 707-724.

[139] Ibid., p.722.

[140] Ian Boyd White, 'The Architecture of Futurism' in Günter Berghaus, ed., *International Futurism in Arts and Literature* (Berlin and New York, de Gruyter, 2000), pp, 335-372.

[141] Douglas Tallack, 'City Sights: Mapping and Representing New York City' in Maria Balshaw and Liam Kennedy, eds., *Urban Space and Representation*, pp. 25-38. Richard Lehan, *The City in Literature: An Intellectual and Cultural History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), pp. 71-72.

[142] According to Deena and Michael Weinstein, for instance, 'Simmel is distinguished from other major figures such as Emile Durkheim, Vilfredo Pareto, Ferdinand Tönnies and Max Weber by his breadth of intellectual interests and contributions.' Deena Weinstein and Michael Weinstein, *Postmodern(ized)*

conceptualising of the modern city and its impact on the individual psyche was developed in response to Berlin towards the end of the nineteenth century. His insights can nevertheless be used productively to think about London in the earlier part of the century, both because of the unprecedented population explosion that occurred in the city at that time, and because this demographic shift was accompanied by the emergence of a mature financial economy, or commodity culture. These are both factors that concerned Simmel deeply in 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'.

London was the first truly modern metropolis. For Simmel, the metropolis is the pre-eminent 'site of modernity, its characteristic and all-comprehending structure'.[143] The metropolis is the 'seat of the money economy' because, as Simmel argues, in the city 'the multiplicity and concentration of economic exchange gives an importance to the means of exchange which the scantiness of rural commerce would not have allowed'.[144] Thus, as David Frisby has observed, it is 'the metropolis rather than industrial enterprise or production of rational organization, that is the key site of modernity' in Simmel's writing, particularly insofar as life in the modern city 'sets up a deep contrast with small town and rural life with reference to the sensory foundations of psychic life'.[145]

Simmel is interested in how the constituent parts of society interacted with each other, and not least how individuals in the metropolitan environment engaged and disengaged with each other. In 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' he argues that urban dwellers develop particular identities and sets of personality traits in response to the modern metropolitan environment. Throughout 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' he stresses how far the sensory onslaught experienced by citizens of the modern metropolis is unprecedented

Simmel (London and New York, Routledge, 1993), p. 115. Partly because of his influence on Robert E Park and the Chicago School of sociology, Simmel is typically included in lists of founding fathers alongside other giants of the discipline such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, and Max Weber. As Peter Baehr observes, these figures 'are primarily evoked as heroes of a discipline that would be unrecognizable without their presence.' Peter Baehr, *Founders, Classics, Canons: Modern Disputes over the Origins and Appraisal of Sociology's Heritage* (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction, 2002), p.6. See Martin Bulmer, *The Chicago School of Sociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), for an account of Simmel's place in the development of the discipline in the United States in the period after his death.

[143] Weinstein and Weinstein, *Postmodern(ized) Simmel,* p. 108.

[144] Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 411.

[145] David Frisby and Mike Featherstone, eds., *Simmel on Culture* (London: Sage, 1997), p.12. Georg Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 410.

in human history. His stated objective in the essay is to conduct an 'inquiry into the inner meaning of specifically modern life' and to this end he seeks to 'solve the equation which structures like the metropolis set up between the individual and the super-individual contents of life'.[146] In particular, Simmel is interested in 'how the personality accommodates itself in the adjustments to external forces'.[147] He begins by emphasising that the 'psychological basis of the metropolitan type of individuality consists in the intensification of nervous stimulation which results from the swift and uninterrupted change of outer and inner stimuli'.[148] Out of necessity metropolitan man, according to Simmel, 'develops an organ protecting him from the external currents and discrepancies of his environment which would uproot him'; he 'reacts with his head instead of his heart'.[149] Thus defined, this phenomenon of increased 'intellectuality', or emotional distancing, as a metropolitan trait is best understood in Simmel's argument as a kind of retreat, as a means of preserving 'subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life'.[150] Furthermore, in the Simmelian metropolis 'the money economy and the dominance of the intellect are intrinsically connected. They share a matter of fact attitude in dealing with men and with things; and in this attitude a formal justice is often coupled with an inconsiderate hardness'.[151]

The inhumanity demonstrated by many of the villains, both major and minor, of domestic melodrama comes to mind here, as they navigate the new social arrangements of the metropolitan money economy. The appraiser who coldheartedly makes off with Ruth Thornley's furniture in Taylor's temperance melodrama, *The Bottle* (City of London, 1847), for example, sticks to the letter of the law when begged to take pity on the impoverished family:

> RUTH. You will perhaps, for the poor children's sake, leave me the little bedstead, will you not?
> SPIKE. Nonsense! There's nothing obliging in law; this is the way mothers spoil their children – too much indulgence; let'em sleep on the floor – make'em hardy.[152]

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[146] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 409.
[147] *Ibid.*
[148] *Ibid.*, p. 409-410.
[149] *Ibid.*, p.410.
[150] *Ibid.*, p.411.
[151] *Ibid.*
[152] T. P. Taylor, *The Bottle*, p. 22.

Later in the scene, the appraiser refuses to leave Ruth the picture of the little village in which she grew up, on the grounds that legally Thornley's debts require repayment and there is no room for sentiment in such matters. This exchange between Ruth and the bailiff echoes numerous other scenes, in which the dangers of an overly 'matter of fact' attitude to suffering under the arrangements of the emerging money economy are highlighted. The wicked landlord Doggrass in Jerrold's *Black Eye'd Susan* (Surrey, 1829)*,* for instance, is similarly intent on evicting his helpless niece and the elderly and frail Dame Hatley for failure to pay rent:

> DOGGRASS. Can Dame Hatley pay me the money?
> SUSAN. No.
> DOGGRASS. Then she shall go to prison.
> SUSAN. She will die there.
> DOGGRASS. Well?
> SUSAN. Would you make the old woman close her eyes in a gaol?
> DOGGRASS. I have no time to hear sentiment. Mrs Hatley has no money – you have none. Well, though she doesn't merit lenity of me, I'll not be harsh with her.
> SUSAN. I thought you could not.
> DOGGRASS. I'll just take whatever may be in the house and put up with the rest of the loss.[153]

Similarly, the miserable fate of the 'respectable licensed victualler, who failed in business and consequently died in distressed circumstances' in Hart's *Jane, the Licensed Victualler's Daughter* (Pavilion, 1840), serves as another example of domestic melodrama's particular focus on the victims of the emerging money economy.[154] The regularity with which such sequences occur in the plays of this period suggests that what is being staged is something other than old-fashioned meanness. Admittedly, greed and self-interest have long been key characteristics of villainy in Western drama. The sheer volume of occurrences of this trope in domestic melodrama, however, argues that it is manifesting a social anxiety particular to its time.

While it is certainly the case that supporters of commercial society in early Victorian culture identified prosperity with happiness, its critics saw it as producing a 'joyless economy'.[155] In the absence of coherent cultural formations to map out the limitations of needs, values and social aims, it was

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[153] Douglas Jerrold, *Black Eye'd Susan, or, All the Downs,* in George Rowell ed., *Nineteenth-Century Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 1-44, p.10.
[154] J. P. Hart, *Jane, the Licensed Victualler's Daughter*, p.4.
[155] The phrase is borrowed from the title of T. Scitovsky, *The Joyless Economy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976).

felt, the insatiable desire for wealth could only be a source of torment. Instead of being able to assess their satisfaction in relation to a desired way of life, consumers seemed destined to become obsessed by relative wealth as a measure of happiness. Among other things, domestic melodrama critiqued this culture of greed. The villain of George Almar's *The Clerk of Clerkenwell; or, The Three Black Bottles* (Sadler's Wells, 1834), for instance, openly boasts about his greed: 'To sum up all, I am a villain! The power which formed me forgot to add a heart. I know no passion but avarice and avarice shall absorb me'.[156] Almar's villainous clerk is singular in his vice, eschewing lechery even when he has the chance to marry the beautiful daughter of his benefactor. A less playful attack on avarice can be found in Douglas Jerrold's *Martha Willis the Servant Maid* (Pavilion, 1830). The greed of hypocritical pawnbroker and money-lender Nunky Gruel goes hand in hand with an extremely callous attitude towards the young men to whom he lends money: 'the sooner he has spent his money the sooner he will turn from sin – if I make him a beggar I shall make him a saint'.[157]

In Simmelian terms, Gruel's lack of feeling for his fellow man is symptomatic of a money economy in which human beings become mere links in an extended chain of means. Other hyperbolic examples of this phenomenon exist in the notorious figures of Sweeney Todd and his accomplice Mrs Lovett, first seen on stage in George Dibdin-Pitt's version of the penny dreadful for the Britannia in 1847.[158] Mrs Lovett's particularly gruesome money-making scheme has become legendary, but similarly brutal if not quite so evocative crimes were committed for monetary gain in numerous melodramas throughout the period. Almar's devious clerk, for instance, poisons his benefactor with the intention of gaining rights over his estate, while Squire Craverly, the villain of Saville's *Wapping Old Stairs*, conspires to disinherit his amiable nephew George by having him assassinated and his body dumped in the Thames.

In its repeated attempts to open up a space in which something like genuine sympathetic identification could survive, domestic melodrama

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[156] Almar, *The Clerk of Clerkenwell; or, The Three Black Bottles*, p.17.
[157] Jerrold, *Martha Willis the Servant Maid*, p.5.
[158] George Dibdin-Pitt, *Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber, or; The String of Pearls* (London: John Dicks, 1883).

typically condemned every hard-hearted or self-interested action. Melodrama was a construction that relied completely on an 'other', in the form of the villain, not only to develop its characteristics, but to become a visual, narrative, and critical agency in the first place. In the modern metropolis the excesses of the money economy were increasingly manifest in the daily interactions of the general population, as Simmel observes, and consequently they were regularly personified, or 'othered', in the figure of the melodramatic villain. In the event, both Simmel's 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', and his lengthier study *The Philosophy of Money*, can serve as explanatory models for the persistence of key features of villainy in domestic melodrama as it rises in popularity in the early Victorian period.[159] According to Simmel the individual, who is obsessed with accumulating money for its own sake, is a product of the modern age:

> There is no period in time in which individuals have not been greedy for money, yet one can certainly say that the greatest intensity and expansion of this desire occurred in those times in which the most satisfaction of individual life-interests, such as the elevation of the religious absolute as the ultimate purpose of existence had lost its power. At present … the whole aspect of life, the relationship of human beings with one another and with objective culture are coloured by monetary interests.[160]

A few pages later Simmel describes the condition of metropolitan modernity as producing, in certain individuals, a 'remarkable psychological mania for accumulation'.[161] He observes that 'such people pile up precious collections of any kind without getting satisfaction from the objects themselves'.[162] In domestic melodrama this drive towards the accumulation of wealth for its own sake is embodied, and strongly condemned, in figures like Jerrold's Nunky Gruel, who in an early scene in *Martha Willis the Servant Maid* is discovered counting money:

> Hark! I hear them singing at the chapel – but I am a sinner, a vile sinner! – (counts money) – a reprobate! – twenty-five – a hardened transgressor! – thirty – a worm in the face of heaven! – forty – but there is hope! – forty-five – blessed be the thought there is hope! – there is – (looks about the table then violently

[159] Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, trans., Tom Bottomore and David Frisby (London and New York: Routledge 1990).
[160] Georg Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, p .236.
[161] *Ibid*., p.239.
[162] *Ibid*.

exclaims) Damnation! Where are the two pounds that – (moves candle-stick) Oh here! I'm so hasty, I must mortify and humble myself; there. (ties up bags).[163]

For Gruel the accumulation of wealth has become an end in itself, and takes precedence over all other considerations, personal, ethical and spiritual. Gruel does not use his wealth to improve his current living conditions. He does not channel it into other enterprises or money-making ventures, nor does he plan to retire to the country and live the life of a wealthy gentleman. Instead, he expends all his daily energies in amassing more wealth, which he obsessively stores in his humble abode, a room Jerrold is specific in describing as 'meanly furnished'.[164] Even in his final moments, when he is in the process of being robbed by Walter Speed, the childhood sweetheart of the play's eponymous heroine and one of the young men he has corrupted, Gruel is unable to contemplate physical separation from his fortune, although it is clear that parting with a portion of his wealth would save his life:

> SPEED. … Martha must be saved – I must have gold, too – for no chance must be lost – here is wealth.
> *(Rushing up to chest)*
> GRUEL. (*Stands before him*.) Not an ounce – not an ounce.
> SPEED. Tempt me not. I am desperate.
> GRUEL. I have been patient until now – you have abused and reviled me. Heaven pardon you – be content – not a penny – not a penny – you shall not.
> SPEED. (*Drawing dirk*) Do you see this dirk?
> GRUEL. (*Furiously*) I see only my money.[165]

Like Sweeney Todd and the Clerk of Clerkenwell, Nunky Gruel is a hyperbolic representation, a melodramatic distillation, of the adverse effects of the money economy. According to Simmel, however, the effects of the money economy are not limited to a small number of individuals but are felt throughout metropolitan culture. They are, in fact, constitutive of mental life in the modern city:

> Money is concerned only with what is common to all; it asks for the exchange value, it reduces all quality and individuality to the question: How much? All intimate emotional relations between persons are founded in their individuality, whereas in rational relations man is reckoned with like a number, like an element which is in itself indifferent. … The matter of fact attitude is obviously so intimately interrelated with the money economy, which is dominant in the

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[163] Jerrold, *Martha Willis the Servant Maid*, p.7.
[164] *Ibid*., p.7.
[165] *Ibid*., p.13.

> metropolis, that nobody can say whether the intellectualistic mentality first promoted the money economy or whether the latter determined the former.[166]

It is, then, the sublimation of all other considerations to the money economy that results in the emergence of the intellectually driven and calculating attitude that Simmel sees as characteristic of metropolitan life. Indeed, without it, the metropolis simply could not function:

> The relationships and affairs of the typical metropolitan are so varied and complex that without the strictest punctuality in promises and services the whole structure would break down into an inextricable chaos. Above all, this necessity is brought about by the aggregation of so many people with such differentiated interests, who must integrate their relations and activities into a highly complex organism. … Punctuality, calculability, exactness are forced upon life by the complexity and extension of metropolitan life. [167]

As well as offering one explanation for the persistence of hard-hearted and avaricious villains in domestic melodrama, Simmel's emphasis on precise organisation of time – 'punctuality, calculability, exactness' – can provide a useful way of reading melodrama's notoriously over-determined and mechanistic plot structures, as well as its reliance on suspense and the conscious manipulation of temporal logic. As Simon Shepherd has recently noted, melodrama relies substantially for its effectiveness on encouraging its audience to 'cathect the momentary, as against the sequential narrative'.[168] This strategy can be seen both in the widespread use of tableau for punctuation and emphasis, and in the frequent suspending of onward narrative momentum while characters overhear the machinations of villains, or speak their intentions directly to the audience in the form of asides, or even in the insertion of comic episodes which are a regular feature of domestic melodrama throughout the period. For Jeffrey Cox 'the urgent forward thrust of the serious plot' is the defining characteristic of melodrama, and while the strategies listed above might be seen as interrupting this motion, they can also be seen as contributing to a pattern of tension and release that ultimately serves to heighten the force or speed of the action.[169]

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[166] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 411-412.

[167] *Ibid*., pp. 412-413.

[168] Simon Shepherd, *Theatre, Body and Pleasure* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 112.

[169] Jeffrey Cox, 'The Death of Tragedy; or, the Birth of Melodrama', in Tracy C. Davis and Peter Holland, eds., *The Performing Century: Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 161-181, p. 172.

Simmel's comments on the levels of precision in organisation that metropolitan life demands, and the 'aggregation of so many people with such differentiated interests' in the modern city, lead to his next major insight about metropolitan character:[170]

> There is no psychic phenomenon which has been so unconditionally reserved to the metropolis as has the blasé attitude. The blasé results first from the rapidly changing and closely compressed contrasting stimulations of the nerves. From this, the enhancement of metropolitan intellectuality, also, seems originally to stem. … A life in boundless pursuit of pleasure makes one blasé because it agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all.[171]

Simmel's conception of the blasé as a peculiarly metropolitan attitude illuminates the practice of melodrama in a number of useful ways. We know for instance, that as the mid century approached, melodrama, which had always relied on an inexorable movement towards scenes of hyperbolic emotional intensity for its sensational effects, took recourse in evermore spectacular and realistic scenes of fire, flood and rescue.[172] Among other things, the popularity of such scenes evidences a developing blasé attitude in London theatre audiences who appeared happy to be subjected to ever increasing levels of stimulation. It is certainly the case that discomfort with public taste for extreme sentiment, and reservation about the melodramatic tendency towards over-stimulation, were features of mid century bourgeois criticism of the genre. The critic George Henry Lewes, for instance, in his review of Dion Boucicault's *The Corsican Brothers* (Princess's, 1852) while clearly enjoying the spectacle of Charles Kean's production, was nevertheless careful to condemn melodrama's excesses:

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[170] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 412-413.

[171] *Ibid*., p. 413.

[172] The popularity of the sensation drama reached its height in the 1860s and its most successful and famous exponent was the Irish dramatist Dion Boucicault, who, according to some accounts, coined the phrase himself. For a fuller account of this phase in the development of melodrama see for instance: Lynn M. Voskuil, 'Feeling Public: Sensation Theater, Commodity Culture and the Victorian Public Sphere', *Victorian Studies*, 44:2 (2002), pp. 245-274.
Nicholas Daly, 'Blood on the Tracks: Sensation Drama, the Railway and the Dark Face of Modernity', *Victorian Studies*, 42:1 (1999), pp. 47-76.
Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensations: Or the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Anthem Press, 2003).

It is the fatality of melodrama to know no limit. The tendency of the senses is *downwards*. To gratify them stimulants must be added and added, chilli upon cayenne, butchery upon murder, "horrors on horror's head accumulated!"[173]

Lewes's views are coloured by class prejudice but they also foreshadow Simmel's insofar as they imply incapacity in melodrama's audience 'to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy'.[174]

As well as offering one explanation for the growing appetite for sensationalism, Simmel's notion of the blasé attitude also provides a context in which the melodramatic turn to intense sentiment might be usefully understood. In particular, domestic melodrama's nostalgic rural turn, a move that it shares with romantic discourse, can be usefully understood as a reaction against the worst social effects of the calculating, heartless and alienating metropolis. This aspect of melodramatic practice is discussed more fully in Chapter Four of this thesis, but it is worth noting here that, for Simmel, it is precisely the experience of urban existence that enables a new kind of imaginative connection to nature and the rural past:

Whoever lives in direct contact with nature and knows no other form of life may enjoy its charm subjectively; but he lacks that distance from nature that is the basis of aesthetic contemplation and the root of that quiet sorrow, that feeling of yearning estrangement and of a lost paradise that characterizes the romantic response to nature.[175]

In the new metropolis, the absence of traditional frameworks for the expression of value and meaning gives renewed impetus to the search for value and meaning, which is expressed in the practice of melodrama as well as in a range of other discourses.

Another especially enabling aspect of Simmel's thinking about the metropolis and its effects on the individual psyche is that, in his writing on the subject, he does not quite condemn this blasé attitude. On the contrary, he remains stubbornly ambivalent about the moral implications of this development and prefers instead to understand the blasé as an inevitable and necessary response to metropolitan culture. In domestic melodrama, the urgency of the search for value and meaning is apparent not only in the longing for a pre-industrial rural past, or in the manner in which melodrama's

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[173] George Henry Lewes, *The Leader*, 28 February 1852, p.209.
[174] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 414.
[175] Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, p. 478.

heroes and heroines unfailingly struggle towards the restored familial tableau that ends most plays, but also in the way in which the precise ills of modern metropolitan culture are repeatedly embodied in the figure of the melodramatic villain. Blasé attitudes operated alongside overt avarice in the characters discussed earlier in this chapter. A significant number of prominent melodramatic villains of the 1830s, including Walter Speed in Jerrold's *Martha Willis* and Almar's scheming clerk, as well as the anti-heroes of the many crime melodramas that occupied the stages of the minor theatres during the 1830s, displayed pronounced blasé attitudes. Mirroring Simmel's ambivalence about the development of this particularly metropolitan trait, such villains were enjoyed by audiences as much as they were condemned, so much so that their popularity caused alarm in establishment circles. Significantly, such characters operated in ways that engaged not only with negative aspects of metropolitan sensibility, but also its potential attractions and advantages. They embodied the tension Simmel identifies in 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' between 'what seems to be an especially dark aspect of the metropolitan spirit, indifference, and its most rewarding, if inevitably compromised counterpart, freedom'.[176] To be blasé, indifferent, self-interested, yet enviably free – this is the precise condition of a significant number of particularly attractive melodramatic villains of the 1830s.

The Chevalier Fitzhazard, the villain of William Moncrieff's *The Heart of London; or, The Sharper's Progress* (Adelphi, 1830), provides an excellent example.[177] Fitzhazard is as blasé and unscrupulous a gentleman swindler as one can find anywhere in melodrama of the 1830s. Motivated entirely by greed and the pursuit of pleasure, he acts without reference to any pre-existing moral code, and is entirely indifferent to the feelings of others. The plot of Moncrieff's play is straightforward enough. Because he is illegitimate, Fitzhazard has no legal right to an inheritance on the death of his father, the wealthy nobleman Lord Hauton. In order to support his gaming habits he therefore conspires to defraud his father's widow of her fortune by marrying an associate of his, Wilton, to his half-sister Emily Hauton. Emily is Lord Hauton's only legitimate heir and stands to inherit the entire estate. By these devious

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[176] Choi, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life in the Novel', p. 714.
[177] William Moncrieff, *The Heart of London; or, The Sharper's Progress* (London: John Dicks 1883?).

means Fitzhazard plans to gain control of his father's fortune. The marriage goes ahead but the crime is discovered immediately after the ceremony. In the confusion, Fitzhazard makes off with the spoils. The villain's unfortunate associate, Wilton, whose position has been compromised from the outset because he has recently deserted the army, has been a reluctant accomplice and has fallen genuinely in love with Emily. Nonetheless, he is led off to Newgate in disgrace. Here the first act ends, with Fitzhazard seemingly in the ascendancy and the young lovers separated.

In the second act, after a time lapse of two years, Wilton is discovered deeply repentant and languishing in Newgate. Fitzhazard and his servant Blackburn, who have by now fallen foul of the law, soon join him. The villains conspire to help Wilton to escape so that he can attempt reconciliation with his wife, Emily, now living in poverty. By the final act, another two years have passed. Wilton is discovered reunited with his wife and, having assumed a false identity, living the life of an honest mercer. The couple's happiness is threatened once more by the return of Fitzhazard and Blackburn who, having now escaped from Newgate, arrive determined to blackmail Wilton. They have discovered that Wilton has acquired an honest benefactor, who keeps a large sum of money at his house near Cheapside. Fitzhazard and Blackburn force Wilton to be their accomplice in a an attempted burglary of the Cheapside property but in the play's final scene the burglary fails due to Emily's timely intervention. As she sings out a warning, the police-rattles sound and in a last gasp attempt at escape, Blackburn fatally stabs Fitzhazard, having mistaken him for Wilton. In retaliation, making no allowance for an honest mistake, Fitzhazard in typically blasé fashion, shoots his servant dead. The villains take Wilton's secret to the grave with them and Emily and Wilton are left free to live the lives of honest diligence and prudence. In this way justice is served and melodramatic logic applied to the play's resolution. However, although the trials and tribulations of the young lovers provide a traditional sentimental narrative focus in Moncrieff's melodrama, for most of the piece Fitzhazard and his villainous exploits remain the centre of interest. He is exactly the sort of attractive and blasé criminal whose presence on the stage of London's minor theatres so exercised the establishment. Among his chief talents is his ability to lead others astray. He entices his late father's servant, James Blackburn,

into a life of crime and almost succeeds in destroying his friend and associate Wilton. Fitzhazard's defining characteristics, apart from indifference to the suffering of others, are a blasé attitude combined with charisma and charm.

Fitzhazard is presented as conscious from the outset that performance, pleasure and comic entertainment have the power to corrupt. The play opens in an elegant salon in Green Park, the residence of Lady Hauton, widow of Sir Arthur, Fitzhazard's biological father. It is dawn and an all-night card school is still in progress:

> As the curtain rises FITZHARARD, WILTON and SHUTTLEWORTH are discovered, seated at card tables, engaged at Hazard, with a mixed company of officers and players, others drinking. The candles appear almost burnt down to the sockets – dice, wine &c. on the table – JAMES, JOHN and THOMAS in attendance.
>
> GLEE. – OMNES
> AIR – Waltz in "The Miller and His Men"
>
> How sweet night passes
> With flowing glasses'
> Toasting the lasses
> In generous wine.
> Sporting and playing,
> Joy's flight delaying,
> Sorrow's course staying -
> Oh 'tis divine!
> Pastime exciting,
> Moment inviting,
> Who raptures slighting
> Such bliss would decline.[178]

Fitzhazard does not want the game to end, both because he is winning and because he has been seduced by the vulgar pleasures of the young man about town as expressed in the play's opening song. Fitzhazard exploits the logic of self-help to draw the reluctant Wilton into his plan:

> WIL. I cannot lend myself to such a scheme.
> FIT. Not to obtain a woman you adore – a splendid fortune – who in a foreign land will know the truth? – you've but to sign and seal and love, wealth – happiness, are yours – you but assume an empty title, all sheeting's fair in love. …
> WIL. It is an act of villainy –
> FIT. Of necessity – love, gratitude, self-preservation, all demand it – could you desert your love – forsake your friend – destroy yourself – or, will you make her blest, serve me forever, and yield yourself security and rapture.[179]

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[178] *Ibid.*, p. 3.
[179] Moncrieff, *The Heart of London*, p. 5.

Despite Wilton's unease he is seduced by Fitzhazard's powers of persuasion.

Fitzhazard's attitude, in accordance with Simmel's formulation of the blasé metropolitan type, is marked throughout by remarkable levels of indifference, not only to the feelings of others but also to the danger of his plans being discovered. He demonstrates complete confidence in his own abilities and is almost entirely unflappable. When in the first act Wilton panics on being recognised by members of his regiment, who have unexpectedly arrived on the doorstep, Fitzhazard's response is typically blasé:

> WIL. I am lost! The 12th Hussars, the regiment in which I had enlisted when first I met you at Canterbury – the regiment from which your fatal counsel led me to desert –
> FIT. Well, what of that?
> WIL. Is here. They have just marched into town – have entered the park from Constitution Hill, on their way to the Horse Guards, and are now under our very window. Letting your friends out, I opened the door directly on my Captain; he must have recognised me. I shall be taken – shot. (*Gate bell without.*) Hark! They seek admittance – nothing can save me. Where shall I fly? [180]

Fitzhazard proceeds by introducing Wilton to his own Captain:

> FIT. My friend, Algernon Sidney, of Magdalen Hall, Oxford, and Beechy Park, Dorsetshire.
> WIL. At your service sir.
> CAP. Amazement – I could have sworn –
> FIT. My friend has just returned with me from a three year's tour on the Continent, for the happy purpose of becoming my brother, by a marriage with my sister – the Honourable Emily Hauton – we shall be proud to enlarge the circle of our acquaintance by the opportunity chance has offered us in this recontre.
> WIL. (*Aside.*) Matchless effrontery.
> CAP. I must certainly be mistaken – yet the resemblance – the voice – but it cannot be – I thank you for your politeness, sir, and have to request your pardon for this intrusion – that blundering Sergeant Brut – but I will reprimand the fellow – I have to make a thousand apologies – your servant, gentlemen.
> FIT. Don't mention it, I beg – James, see the gentleman to the door.[181]

Through the agency of this blasé villain, deception is made to seem effortless and attractive, while the threat of the firing squad is treated comically, thereby anaesthetising its force as a real life threat. At the climatic moment Fitzhazard takes full control of the scene, instructing Wilton to 'compose' himself and his late-father's servant, James Blackburn, whom he has recruited as his

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[180] *Ibid.*, p. 4.
[181] *Ibid.*, p.5.

accomplice and confidant, to 'answer no questions'.[182] It is precisely Fitzhazard's ability to respond in a cool and calculating manner to unexpected and rapidly changing circumstances, his 'matchless effrontery', that retrieves the situation.

Simmel finds an explanation for the increasingly freestanding and individualistic character that Fitzhazard exemplifies, and the extraordinary powers of self-sufficiency he displays, in the specialisation that is required by the metropolitan money economy. As a result of specialisation, he argues, inhabitants of the modern metropolis become dependent on increasing numbers of individuals for their survival, but nonetheless the particular conditions of the metropolitan money economy mean that individuals remain 'remarkably independent of every member of this society' because the significance of the other man 'for us has been transferred to the one-sided objectivity of his contribution'.[183] Thus, metropolitan culture 'grants to the individual', according to Simmel, 'a kind and an amount of personal freedom that has no analogy under other conditions'.[184] Quite obviously questions of personal freedom and their relationship to personal responsibility are not only negatively defined. Fitzhazard's escapades can be seen, at least partly, as a more positive expression of metropolitan individuality, or to use Simmel's phrase, 'the particularity and incomparability' which every city dweller must seek to attain.[185]

This 'incomparable' aspect of Fitzhazard's character can be brought further into focus when we consider that Fred Yates, then manager of the Adelphi, played Fitzhazard in the original production. Yates began managing the Adelphi with Daniel Terry in 1825 and after Terry's death in 1829 continued to run the theatre with Charles Mathews the elder, and subsequently Thomas Gladstane, until his own untimely death in 1842. By the time he took the role of the Chevalier Fitzhazard in *The Heart of London,* Yates was an established figure in the London theatre scene, a skilled performer, a shrewd businessman and a successful orchestrator of

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[182] *Ibid.*, p.5.
[183] Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, p. 298.
[184] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 416.
[185] *Ibid.*, 420.

spectacular entertainments. His obituary in the *Morning Post* gives a flavour of his stature and achievements:

> His extraordinary talent as a manager has been universally acknowledged and his loss will be severely felt by the playgoers of the metropolis. The command he possessed over the audience has been frequently exemplified – by one word addressed in his peculiar way he could quiet the most uproarious gallery and secure the goodwill of his hearers under the most embarrassing circumstances.[186]

As played by Fred Yates, Fitzhazard demonstrated an acute understanding of the way in which fiction, given an appropriately blasé attitude, can be manipulated to achieve one's own ends: principally wealth and status. Fitzhazard/Yates's conscious deconstruction of life/fiction boundaries was doubly compelling because his construction as a character derived from a similarly sophisticated play with the same boundaries. Although the character of Fitzhazard borrowed heavily from the stereotype of the gentlemanly melodramatic villain, the audience's response to Yates's performance relied on its knowledge of well-established theatrical conventions about melodramatic villainy as well as its knowledge of the proprietor as star performer.

The kind of exaggerated commitment to individual freedom expressed by overtly criminal characters like Fitzhazard had increasing appeal for London theatre audiences in the 1830s and by the end of the decade the widespread popularity of crime melodrama in the minor theatres was exciting anxiety in establishment circles. As indicated below, the craze for blasé criminal personalities on stage reached a notorious climax in the autumn of 1839 with the many London stage adaptations of William Harrison Ainsworth's novel, *Jack Sheppard.*[187] At the Adelphi, John Baldwin Buckstone's adaptation of Ainsworth's novel became the most successful production of the decade. Elsewhere, the first stage version of the novel opened at the Pavilion on 17 October. Four other adaptations opened soon after on 21 October: a version by W. T. Moncrieff at the Royal Victoria, another by J. T. Haines at the

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[186]'Death of Mr Yates', *The Morning Post*, 23 June 1842, p.5.

[187]The serialisation of Ainsworth's novel began in *Bentley's Miscellany* in January 1839 and it *became* an overnight sensation. For four months it overlapped with the serialisation of Dickens's *Oliver Twist*. George Cruikshank illustrated both serialisations. When Bentley published the novel in book form in October 1839, it sold three thousand copies in one week. See Keith Hollingsworth, *The Newgate Novel 1830-1847* (Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University Press, 1963), p. 134.

Surrey and the same night a production at the Queen's Theatre Tottenham Street and another at the City of London Theatre in Bishopsgate Street.[188] On 28 October a version by Thomas Greenwood opened at Sadler's Wells and there was also a pantomime, *Harlequin Jack Sheppard, or the Blossom of Tyburn Tree* at Drury Lane that year.[189]

Critical responses to the Jack Sheppard craze of 1839 reveal unease not only about the content of individual plays but about what Jane Moody has described as, 'the ubiquity of illegitimate representation'.[190] The critic of *The Examiner* in November 1839, at the height of the mania, gave expression to these very anxieties:

> Jack Sheppard is the attraction at the *Adelphi*; Jack Sheppard is the bill of fare at the *Surrey*; Jack Sheppard is the choice of morals and conduct at the *City of London*; Jack Sheppard reigns over the *Victoria*; Jack Sheppard rejoices crowds at the *Pavilion*; Jack Sheppard is the favourite at the *Queens*, and at *Sadler's Wells* there is no profit but of Jack Sheppard … In everyone of these places, the worst passages of a book whose spirit and tendency we are about to describe to our readers are served up in the most attractive form to all the candidates for hulk and rope – *and especially the youthful ones* – that invest this vast city.[191]

This commentator's anxiety is partly related to the low criminal subject matter of the plays, and the widespread conviction among middle class critics that such spectacles were likely to corrupt the lower classes. In addition it was becoming increasingly clear that the Lord Chamberlain's limited power in controlling the staging of such dramas beyond the boundaries of Westminster was a problem in that, for some, his influence did not reach far enough.[192] The success of the many versions of *Jack Sheppard*, and other plays of its type, as Jane Moody has commented, 'raised the frightening prospect of endless representations at the very theatres patronised by those classes perceived to

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[188] The Surrey version had the distinction of Ainsworth's seal of approval, a fact that George Davidge, then proprietor of the theatre, felt compelled to advertise on the playbill. Cruikshank himself superintended the painting of the scenery for the Surrey production. See Knight, *A Major London Minor,* p. 157.

[189] See, Horace Bleackley, *Jack Sheppard; with an Epilogue on Jack Sheppard in Literature and Drama, a Bibliography, a Note on Jonathan Wild, and a Memoir of Horace Bleackley, by S. M. Ellis* (Edinburgh: W. Hodge & Co., 1933).

[190] Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London,* p. 111.

[191] 'The Literary Examiner', *The Examiner*, 3 November 1839, p. 691.

[192] See Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, pp. 110-12 on the controversy surrounding Newgate melodrama. See also Martin Meisel, *Realizations*, pp. 265-271, for a discussion of Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* on the London stage and Keith Hollingsworth, *The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847* for an overview of the controversy in print.

be the most susceptible to immorality'.[193] William Makepeace Thackeray's attitude to the Newgate craze as expressed in *Fraser's Magazine* in April 1839 supports the view that this 'frightening prospect' was a live issue:

> Mr Long Ned, Mr Paul Clifford, Mr William Sykes, Mr Fagin, Mr John Sheppard, … and Mr Richard Turpin … are gentlemen whom we all must admire. We could 'hug the rogues and love them,' and do - *in private*. In public, it is, however, quite wrong to avow such likings, and to be seen in such company.[194]

Thackeray's coy admission of admiration for the attractive dimension of the 'Newgate' protagonists, accompanied by his insistence that they be encountered in 'private', reveals something of his own prejudice, but also indicates an anxiety about the public performance of such narratives in theatres outside the direct jurisdiction of the Examiner of Plays. In early December of the same year Thackeray referred again to the Sheppard craze in a letter to his mother:

> I have not read this latter romance [Jack Sheppard] but one or two extracts are good: it is acted at *four* theatres, and they say that at the Coburg people are waiting about the lobbies selling Shepherd-bags – a bag containing a few pick-locks that is, a screw driver, an iron lever, one or two young gentlemen have already confessed how much they were indebted to Jack Sheppard who gave them ideas about pick-pocketing and thieving which they never would have had but for the play. Such facts must greatly delight an author who aims at popularity.[195]

Lower class audiences were present in the theatres of London in the 1830s in unprecedented numbers, and their very presence was a cause for genuine anxiety among certain sections of the political and theatrical establishment.

As well as staging metropolitan ambivalence about individual freedom and the threat it posed to traditional obligations and social norms, Newgate melodrama, and the Newgate novel on which it drew substantially for material, can be understood as engaging with and articulating metropolitan anxieties about the rise in crime, and also the appropriateness of traditional

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[193] Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, p. 111.

[194] William Makepeace Thackeray, 'Horae Catnachianae', *Fraser's Magazine*, 19 April 1839, pp. 407-24, p. 408.

[195] Gordon N. Ray, ed., *The Letters and Private Papers of William Makepeace Thackeray, Vol. 1* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1945), p. 395.

punishments.[196] Ainsworth's novel *Jack Sheppard* was partly based on the life of John Sheppard who had been hanged for burglary over a century earlier but had achieved fame principally because of his several successful escapes from prison. He escaped twice from the condemned cell at Newgate. Like Jack Sheppard, Walter Speed and the Chevalier Fitzhazard, the criminals who featured in Newgate melodrama in the 1830s were typically house-breakers, confidence tricksters, pick-pockets and forgers, exactly the sort of criminals likely to flourish in an urban setting because of the anonymity afforded by the metropolitan environment. In addition, such figures had an appeal that related specifically to their exaggerated metropolitan individuality, to their ability to meet the challenge, in Simmelian terms, of asserting their 'own personality within the dimensions of metropolitan life'.[197] As Simmel observes towards the end of 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in the context of the new metropolis, 'only unmistakability proves that our way of life has not been superimposed by others', only a kind of rampant individualism enables us to stand out from the crowd.[198]

Just as the loss of value and meaning that characterised metropolitan culture gave renewed impetus to the search for these qualities in melodrama, so the objective and impersonal fabric of metropolitan existence gives rise to a kind of cult of personality. In melodrama, this process of 'individualisation' is seen in the eccentricities of some of the minor comic characters discussed more fully in chapter seven of this thesis, but most consistently in the figure of the villain, who is at once the most important and the most consistently individualised figure in the melodramatic canon. As Juliet John observes:

> The villains of nineteenth-century melodrama are … types struggling to become individuals; and this impulse towards individuality constitutes in a large measure the definition of melodramatic villainy. The villain is a villain in any genre because he poses a threat to the dominant social and dramaturgical order. Melodrama is an anti-intellectual genre which eschews subject-centred, psychological models of identity. In melodrama the villain is a threat because he is individualistic, valuing self before society. [199]

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[196] In reality, the Jack Sheppard of history was a petty thief better known for his several daring and ingenious escapes from prison than for his crimes. He was born in 1702 and hanged at Tyburn in 1724 at the age of twenty-one. See Hollingsworth, *The Newgate Novel*. p. 134.
[197] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 420.
[198] *Ibid*.
[199] John, *Dickens's Villains*, p.49.

John develops her reading of melodramatic villainy partly by interrogating Brooks' influential psychoanalytical reading of the genre, so powerfully expressed in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, but Simmel's explanation of the impact of the objectification of culture on the individual is an equally enabling tool for developing an understanding of melodramatic villainy:

> The individual has become a mere cog in an enormous organization of things and powers which tear from his hands all progress, spirituality, and value in order to transform them from their subjective form into the form of a purely objective life. It needs merely to be pointed out that the metropolis is the genuine arena of this culture which outgrows all personal life. Here in buildings and educational institutions, in the wonders and comforts of space-conquering technology, in the formations of community life, and in the visible institutions of the state, is offered such an overwhelming fullness of crystallized and impersonalized spirit that the personality, so to speak, cannot maintain itself under its impact.[200]

In the closing pages of 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' Simmel gives full focus to questions of individualism and individuality, as they manifest themselves in the modern city. He observes that two distinct types of individualism were 'nourished by the quantitative relation of the metropolis, namely, individual independence and the elaboration of individuality itself'.[201] By his account, the eighteenth-century ideal of liberalism, with its notion of free individuals nonetheless equal in nature, became complicated in the nineteenth century, on one hand by the individualistic doctrines of Romanticism, and on the other by the economic division of labour. As a consequence, 'individuals liberated from historical bonds now wished to distinguish themselves from one another'.[202] In the modern metropolis, 'the carrier of man's values is no longer the "general human being" in every individual, but rather man's qualitative uniqueness and irreplaceability'.[203]

The spectacularly successful return to the pages and stages of London in the late 1830s of the figure of Jack Sheppard can be linked to his status as an exemplary figure, a unique individual, in the exercising of personal freedom. Jack excelled at nothing, after all, so much as locating the improbable avenue of escape. Buckstone's adaptation of *Jack Sheppard* at the Adelphi evidences the extent to which the celebration of uniqueness, of

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[200] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 422.
[201] *Ibid*., p. 423.
[202] *Ibid*.
[203] *Ibid*.

'individuality' and 'personality' had become central to the illegitimate theatre's commercial and aesthetic practice at that time.[204] Undeterred by outpourings of disapproval, the search for uniqueness and irreplaceability had become a commercial driver at the Adelphi as elsewhere. A short account of the production provides ample evidence of this, especially insofar as it indicates the extent to which the performance culture at that theatre was resonant with the subject matter of the 'exceptional' individual'.

In a production that advertised itself as 'unrivalled' as 'a picture of life', the part of Jack was played as a breeches role by Mary Ann Keeley.[205] She was a sensation in the role. Between October 1839 and April 1840 she played it no less than 121 times to widespread critical acclaim:

> Nothing could be more exquisite than Mrs Keeley's acting; the naiveté, the assurance, the humour, and the boldness of Jack were excellently delineated; the slang was given without the least admixture of vulgarity.[206]

In addition, the actress went to some lengths to develop a detailed and nuanced performance which was distinguishable from all other interpretations of the role. By her own account, she visited Newgate and spoke with prisoners and jailers, she planed real wood chips in the carpenter's shop scenes, and really carved her name on the beam in her cell – for which purpose she was trained by the stage carpenters. She wore 'real' locked handcuffs for the great escape:

> When I slipped [the handcuffs] off it was no stage slip, but a bona-fide operation. And it hurt me sometimes! But I contrived to squeeze my hands out by bringing the broad part together … I came down to the front, in full blaze of the footlights, so that the audience might fairly judge, and I always got an extra round of applause. I think I deserved it.[207]

Keeley's 'extra round of applause' confirmed her status as a stage personality. Insofar as she was known to her audience and insofar as this intimacy distanced her 'stage persona' from the characters she was playing, she and

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[204]The Adelphi *Jack Sheppard* was the most successful of the adaptations of Ainsworth's novel to appear on the London stage in the autumn of 1839. See Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1983), p.271.

[205] Adelphi Playbill, 4 November 1839, V & A Theatre Collection.

[206] 'Theatre Royal, Adelphi', *The Morning Chronicle*, 29 October 1839, p.3.

[207] Walter Goodman, *The Keeleys on the Stage and at Home* (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1895), p. 73.

other established members of the Adelphi company, such as Fred Yates, Daniel Terry, John Buckstone, John Reeve and Richard 'O' Smith, can properly be called 'star' actors in spite of their being part of a stock system. In their professional lives these performers began to embody the 'qualitative uniqueness and irreplaceability' that Simmel argues are the criteria of value for modern metropolitan man. In addition, displays of the metropolitan were not confined to the stage of the Adelphi. During the 1820s the theatre had acquired a reputation as a favoured destination for young men-about-town and was increasingly characterised by critics as flash and disreputable or, in Simmelian terms, blasé.[208] Its move toward respectability was not fully consolidated, in fact, until Benjamin Webster took over its management in 1859, at which point seats were installed in the pit and the gallery making the theatre more suitable for families. Female ushers were also introduced and perhaps most significantly half-price admission was abolished. As Davis and Emeljanow point out, this change did much to exclude audience members whose 'working practices prevented them from attending the theatre before 8:30 or 9pm'.[209] It also and quite deliberately discouraged the casual pleasure-seekers who had formed a significant part of the Adelphi audience under Yates's management, 'patrons for whom the theatre was merely part' of an evening's entertainment and to whom *The Heart of London* and *Jack Sheppard* were partly addressed.[210]

The various productions of *Jack Sheppard*, and other Newgate melodramas that dominated the stage towards the end of the 1830s provided their audiences with a range of villains from which to choose, and invited judgement according to a moral code that existed in tension with, if not in direct opposition to establishment norms. In Buckstone's version, although Jack is re-captured in the play's final scene, he is not actually hanged. The playwright's outright condemnation is reserved rather for Jonathan Wild, the thief-taker, who is the genuine villain of the piece. While Jack is characterised as feckless, pleasure seeking, profligate and selfish, Wild is represented as

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[208] For accounts of the make up of the Adelphi audience see, Bratton, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', p. 42, and Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, p. 39.
[209] Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, p. 187.
[210] *Ibid*.

motivated by avarice and revenge. He confesses as much to the audience in the soliloquy that opens Act 3 scene 2:

> I'll have him yet, and the Trenchard estates too – all shall be mine, and then I'll leave this busy life, and live in calm retirement – but not till I have hurt Jack Sheppard: no, no, my pet dream of revenge shall first be realized – he has given me the slip again, has he? But my janizaries are after him; he's now ripe for Tyburn, and soon shall swing.[211]

In the end Wild meets a most terrible end, much to the consternation of the *Athenaeum* critic:

> At the Adelphi, Jonathan Wild is burned alive in his house; and as he struggles to escape, the mob dance around in triumph, hurling brick-bats at the suffocating wretch, while Jack Sheppard points with a smile of exultation to the face of his foe![212]

It seems clear that in their interpretation of the life of Jack Sheppard, Buckstone and his associates at the Adelphi created a version of criminality that was playful, provocative and anarchic rather than genuinely threatening, a celebration of individualism and personality rather than a serious attempt to outline the dangers implicit in flirtation with the criminal underworld. Although, Yates's Chevalier Fitzhazard met a more conventionally unpleasant end, almost a decade earlier, both plays nevertheless can be seen as substantially privileging the discourses of the young men who made up a substantial part of the theatre's audience.

Outlining the dimensions and dynamics of melodramatic villainy in explicitly Simmelian terms illuminates a powerful paradox at the heart of melodrama that revolves around the extent to which the genre regularly appears to be celebrating the very thing it condemns. The critic of The Athenaeum quoted above notes that Jack Sheppard is playing 'at no less than seven theatres' and that 'audiences applaud murderers and flash songs with equal vehemence'.[213] This feature is particularly apparent in crime melodramas such as those discussed above, which by their nature have an enhanced focus on transgression. Typically, of course, a desire to be distinguished from others, to be unique, to stand apart from the community and break rules, is assigned to the villains of melodrama. It is precisely their

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[211] Buckstone, *Jack Sheppard*, p. 4.
[212] *The Athenaeum*, 2 November 1839, p. 830.
[213] *Ibid.*

drive towards individuality and individualism that critics agree presents the direct threat to communally agreed value systems.[214] The melodramatic logic of the excluded middle requires that in all cases the villain be condemned or socialised, so that the safety and sanctity of the group can be maintained. The centrality of the villain to the genre's popularity, commercial viability and pleasure-giving effects, however, would seem to suggest something more than a shared, and seemingly insatiable, desire among nineteenth-century theatre audiences to see wrong-doers punished. It is useful to return to Simmel here:

> On the one hand, [in the metropolis] life is made infinitely easy for the personality in that stimulations, interests, uses of time and consciousness are offered to it from all sides. They carry the person as if in a stream, and one needs hardly to swim for oneself. On the other hand, however, life is composed more and more of these impersonal contents and offerings which tend to displace the genuine personal colorations and incomparabilities.[215]

Competing pressures inevitably lead the individual, according to Simmel, to exaggerate the 'personal element in order to remain audible even to himself'.[216] Melodramatic practice during the 1830s and '40s constituted one arena in which these struggles and their possible reconciliations could be played out in public.

For Simmel, the metropolis was the key site of modernity, and in the early Victorian metropolitan theatre, often to the alarm of its detractors, melodrama was the pre-eminent form. Simmel relates the significance of the metropolis to modern life, particularly to its status as the epicentre of the money-economy. Melodrama itself was firmly situated in this economy at a crucial period in its consolidation. It was a blatantly and unashamedly commercial form, and was therefore well placed to capture 'the situation of social atomization and competitive individualism' that characterised modernisation in both its positive and negative aspects.[217] Conceptualising melodrama as a kind of metropolitan social practice can add to current understandings of how the genre engaged with urban audiences as they

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[214] For a useful summary of this critical assessment of the villain of melodrama as essentially individualistic, see John, *Dickens's Villains*, pp. 48-50.
[215] *Ibid.*, p.422.
[216] *Ibid.*
[217] Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity*, p.11.

underwent the process, in Simmelian terms, of developing new identities in response to the modern metropolitan environment. Specifically metropolitan personality traits, matter-of-fact attitudes in social interactions, a marked dominance of the head over the heart, an indifference to the suffering of others and increasingly blasé attitudes to pleasure and hyper-stimulation are apparent in the attitudes and behaviours of melodramatic villains, both major and minor, in early Victorian melodrama. Conversely, a persistent articulation of the rise of individualism as problem is also apparent in domestic melodrama. This is particularly clear in the exaggerated sentimentality and extreme selflessness with which its heroes and heroines attempt to counteract rising levels of social indifference. The worst excesses of the money economy are made startlingly visible in the hyperbolic representations of avarice that haunt melodrama of the 1830s and '40s.

Simmel's work also offers insights into the way in which social interactions and services become compartmentalised in the metropolis, which is understood as a physical and social structure that relies on increasingly exact temporal organisation to function at all. These themes are extended in the following chapters to illuminate certain aspects of the widespread practice of mechanistic plotting and conscious manipulation of time structures in melodrama. In addition, the Simmelian conception of an ever-increasing appetite for sensation in tension with an inability to respond fully to high levels of stimulation is explored in relation to examples of sensory overload in melodramatic staging. Importantly, melodrama's recourse to hyperbolic modes of expression is understood in this thesis not only in terms of its ethical dimension but also in terms of the ways in which it reflects and inflects the rhythms and textures of metropolitan experience. Throughout, Simmel's stubborn ambivalence about the nature of metropolitan experience and its effects on the individual psyche underpin a developing understanding of melodrama as a metropolitan form. As the final sentence of 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' cautions, 'it is not our task either to excuse or to pardon, but only to understand'.[218]

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[218] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 424.

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Dark Utopia: Nostalgia, Paranoia and Village Melodrama

As well as inculcating at the level of formal organisation certain key characteristics of the new metropolis, as the discussion in Chapter Two indicated, domestic melodrama frequently explored the shifting landscape of class that modernisation engendered, and the perceived losses that accompanied urbanisation. Close reading of urban melodramas with their casts of criminal characters and recognisable London landmarks, can provide useful insights into the ways in which early Victorian metropolitan society sought to reinterpret itself, process anxieties about rising crime rates, systematise disturbingly unfamiliar urban experiences, and find new ways of symbolising them. It is worth remembering that the early Victorian city was largely experienced by visitors and inhabitants as 'unnatural' and aberrant, partly because of the density of its population, but also because the rapid pace at which it operated 'cut into and separated life from nature'.[219]

In the event, the corruption of money and the contrast of the city with the country were to become recurring themes in the domestic melodrama of the1830s and '40s. The popularity of plays such as *Luke the Labourer*, *Martha Willis the Servant Maid, The Bottle* and *London By Night,* for example, demonstrate the potency of narratives of rural or provincial innocents corrupted, overwhelmed or bewildered by the speed and fury of the metropolis. The plaintive cries of Fanny, the heroine of J. T. Haines's *The Life of a Woman* (Surrey, 1840), can stand for many:

> Miserable wretch that I am! What will become of me? - Why cannot I die at once? – shall I perish in the streets of this very London, which in the lightness of

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[219] Iain Chambers, *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience* (London: Methuen, 1986), p. 20.

my heart I longed so to behold – die, a starving outcast and degraded wretch in the very place I, in my folly, deemed a heaven of happiness.[220]

In a world of rapid social transformation and increased demographic mobility, traditional communities were disrupted and dislocation became a pervasive feature of everyday life in the city. Tales of the duplicitous nature of the city's inhabitants and the indifference to suffering of its landlords and employers subsequently also gained currency. Taken together these anxieties, and the discontinuity that provoked them, fed into a pervasive nostalgia, expressed as the longing for a more stable and prosperous rural past, that strongly influenced melodramatic practice in the period. This is not to argue that comparisons between the rural and the urban in which the city came off worst, were anything new. The nostalgic strain in domestic melodrama was one of its defining characteristics, and should be understood as a historically specific response to a new set of social circumstances but also as part of a longer tradition in which the city is denigrated. As it happens, oppositions between the rural and the urban have familiar precedents in European and particularly English literatures, so that in one sense their manifestation in melodrama is hardly surprising.[221] It is rather the particular texture and force of this manifestation in domestic melodrama that is worthy of exploration in the context of the present thesis.

As always, it is best to begin with an example. On her first appearance in the play's opening scene, the eponymous heroine of Edward Richardson Lancaster's *Ruth; or, the Lass that Loved a Sailor* (Royal Standard, 1841), sings the praises of the traditional English village:

> RUTH. And now to take the produce of all my industry to the poor cottages beyond the Gipsey's Tomb, after which I will once more seek my own dear village home. Who would dwell in cities, where our days are passed in obscurity; whilst here each rustic belle has the chance to become a rural queen! Ah, my own village home before a palace.[222]

Ruth's valorisation of the values of village life, and her critique of the city – where lives are lived in 'obscurity' without the benefits and social satisfactions

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[220] J. T. Haines, *The Life of a Woman; or, the Curate's Daughter* (London: John Dicks, 1883?), p. 17.

[221] Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City* remains an excellent introduction to this trend in Western literature. See also, David Lowenthal, *The Past is Another Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

[222] E.R. Lancaster, *Ruth; or, the Lass that Loved a Sailor* (London: John Dicks, n.d.), p.3.

of stable and long term relationships – relies on a juxtaposition between recognisability and familiarity as key features of rural life, and alienation and isolation as characteristic of metropolitan existence. These contrasts are repeated in one form or another elsewhere in domestic melodrama. In Jerrold's *Martha Willis*, for instance, the heroine recalls the safety and warmth of her village home at moments of great distress, while Ruth Thornley, the unfortunate wife of the alcoholic Richard Thornley in T. P. Taylor's *The Bottle*, tries with increasing desperation to cling to the image of her idyllic rural childhood.[223] The final loss of this cherished image, which is given material form in a little picture she keeps, is a moment of great sentimental power in Taylor's play.[224] At this level of individual recollection, to Ruth Thornley and Martha Willis can be added the village heroes and heroines of John Stafford's *Loves Frailties, or, Passion and Repentance* (Surrey, 1828), Edward Fitzball's *Jonathan Bradford* (Surrey, 1833), George Dibdin Pitt's *Susan Hopley; or, the Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl* (Royal Victoria, 1841), Leman Rede's *Our Village* (Pavilion, 1844) and John T. Haines's *Alice Grey* (Surrey, 1839). The principal characters of these plays, and others like them, expressed from the stages of the minor metropolitan theatres a mournful longing for a more stable and natural rural past. They did so with such force, persistence and regularity, it is possible to argue the sentimental mood that infused melodrama in this period was substantially created by what would now be termed nostalgia.[225]

The stage of the Royal Standard Theatre from which Ruth, the heroine of Lancaster's play, asked the crucial question, 'who would dwell in cities?' was situated directly opposite Bishopsgate Railway Station in Shoreditch, in the heart of London's burgeoning East End. In July 1840, the year before *Ruth* was produced, the Eastern Counties Railway had opened a terminus in Shoreditch very close to the site of the Standard. Originally called Shoreditch Station it was renamed Bishopsgate Station in 1846 and connected the East

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[223] Jerrold, Martha *Willis the Servant Maid*, p.14.
[224] Taylor, *The Bottle*, p.22.
[225] The term nostalgia was not in common usage in the early part of the nineteenth century. Interestingly it has a diagnostic root and according to the *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, it first appeared in English around 1770 and was used to describe the symptoms of severe homesickness, principally in soldiers. See, Robert K. Barnhart, ed., *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* (Chambers: Edinburgh and New York, 2006), p.710.

End initially to Romford in Essex, but subsequently to East Anglia.[226] Given the theatre's location, Ruth's opening remarks in praise of an idealised rural England can be understood as an expression of longing for something lost, or at least no longer present to the East End audience, and therefore as nostalgic.[227] This pattern was repeated elsewhere in the theatres of the metropolis. George Almar's *The Clerk of Clerkenwell,* for instance, is set in the area surrounding Sadler's Wells several centuries before the encroachment of the modern city, so that Almar's setting effectively returns Clerkenwell to its former status as a village on the outskirts of the City of London.

As the discussion of the opening scene of Moncrieff's *The Scamps of London* illustrates, the area around the Wells had seen particularly extreme and rapid physical transformation in the early decades of the nineteenth century, and Almar's play recalls the area's pre-metropolitan past through scenes set in long-vanished and even semi-mythical locations. His strategy combines a popular interest in all things medieval that had taken hold in the early decades of the century, especially since the republication of Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* in 1816, with the kind of focus on scenes of local interest described in Chapter Two of this study.[228] Luckily for Almar, Clerkenwell had a particularly colourful medieval history on which to draw. In Middle Ages the Clerk's Well in Farringdon Lane, from which the area took its name, had been the setting for annual mystery plays performed by the London Parish Clerks. The surrounding area had a long monastic tradition, the term 'clerken' being derived from the middle-English 'clerc' meaning cleric. In addition, until the dissolution of their Priory in 1540 the Benedictine nuns of St Mary's lived on

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[226] See, Jerry White, *London in the Nineteenth Century: A Human Awful Wonder of God* (London: Vintage, 2008), p.38.

[227] The Standard was to become a major and thriving East End theatre. The ease with which it could be reached by public transport contributed to its commercial success later in the century:

> Last evening … we went to the Royal Standard Theatre. We found the journey neither long nor dangerous. An omnibus hailed in front of our office in the Strand, carried us, in little more than half-an-hour, to the doors of the theatre. On entering we found an audience, not at all resembling the savages of New Zealand, or the Caffres of South Africa, but precisely such people as we have seen in the boxes, pits and galleries of theatres within a mile of somewhere. 'Royal Standard Theatre', *The Morning Chronicle*, 19 December 1856, p. 6.

See also, Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, p.53 and A. E. Wilson, *East End Entertainment*, pp. 112-123.

[228] Sir Thomas Malory, *Morte D'Arthur* (1485), reprinted as *The History of the Renowned Prince Arthur, Kings of Britain* (London: Walker & Edwards, 1816).

the site of the present St James' Parish Church, while the Monastic Order of the Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem also had its English headquarters in Clerkenwell.[229]

Almar's play features an interior of St Mary's Priory, later sacked and burnt by outlaws, and a view of the old Clerks Well with the river Fleet in the background.[230] It also features a scene set near Jack Straws castle on Hampstead Heath. According to legend Jack Straw, one of Wat Tyler's lieutenants, took refuge on the heath during the peasant's revolt of 1381 and, before his subsequent arrest and execution, addressed his followers from a hay cart which became widely known as 'Jack Straw's Castle'. A coaching inn of the same-name was opened on the north western corner of the Heath in 1721, and by the mid nineteenth century this site was occupied by a public house, which was to become a favourite haunt of Dickens and Karl Marx, among others. It is the coaching inn that is the setting for the scene in Almar's play, so it is clear that the dramatist was not overly concerned with historical accuracy. This is not unusual. As Loretta Holloway and Jennifer Palmgren have stressed, 'the historic Middle Ages became, in many ways, of secondary importance to the majority of Victorians' who were likely to have acquired their strongest impression of the period from the novels of Sir Walter Scott or from stagings of Scott's novels, particularly *Ivanhoe*.[231] For the Victorians, medieval 'history became a matter of interpretation, not an "authentic past" but an authentic fantasy' designed to fit the requirements of the day.[232]

The Clerk of Clerkenwell features a loose mixture of historical references and settings as it moves from location to location. It appears not to be set at any specific moment in history, although it is to be assumed that it takes place before the Reformation. It certainly features a significant number of archers and pikemen, as well as the Priory and its nuns. Almar himself played the character of Steel Cap, a chivalrous outlaw in the mould of Robin Hood. In common with many of the melodramas discussed in this thesis, the plot of Almar's play interweaves various narrative strands. Luke Arthur, the richest

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[229] Sheppard, *London: A History*, p.73.
[230] The river Fleet, the largest of London's subterranean rivers, was finally culverted over in the eighteenth century. *Ibid.*, p. 272.
[231] Loretta M. Holloway and Jennifer Palmgren eds., *Beyond Arthurian Romances: The Reach of Victorian Medievalism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.1.
[232] *Ibid.*

commoner in the area, known as the Lord of Islington, has a daughter named Marion who is betrothed to a young doctor called Stanley Blake. Blake has a rival in love and business in the person of the villainous Clerk of Clerkenwell, a former monk who becomes his unwelcome neighbour, and subsequently overshadows him in the practice of medicine by producing a miraculous cure contained in 'three black bottles'. This cure proves to be so powerful it is soon said throughout the parish of Clerkenwell that 'none die now but the undertakers, and they of grief'.[233] The success of his rival reduces Stanley to poverty and despair, and at the play's opening he has purchased a King's commission and joined the Pikemen. Unfortunately soldiering is a profession so despised by Arthur that he disowns the young physician and instead promises his daughter and his estate to the dastardly clerk who has now gained his absolute confidence. Wicked though the clerk may be, lechery does not number among his vices and it transpires that not only is he not interested in Arthur's daughter, but is already married, although he has long since abandoned his unfortunate wife.

As the second act opens, Arthur has consumed the contents of two of the black bottles, and his health having miraculously improved, is about to begin on the third when his daughter, who is entirely hostile to her new suitor, has a premonition of disaster in a dream and persuades him to delay. At this point Stanley returns in disguise, and by submitting the contents of the third bottle to analysis is able to prove that it contains a slow-acting poison. The clerk is in trouble. He now stands accused of the attempted murder of Luke Arthur. However, in a display of further cunning he bribes Steel Cap, the chivalrous outlaw, to disguise himself as a nobleman and act as a character witness on his behalf. This part of the plan backfires when Steel Cap realises that the clerk is none other than the wicked seducer of his much loved and long-lost sister. At the play's climax the Woman of the Well, a kind of vagabond prophetess who tells fortunes when summoned by a bell to the holy Clerk's Well, is brought up to receive judgement for sorcery. She has overheard the Clerk confess his bigamous intentions in an earlier scene, and it is he who has planned her execution, but in this last scene she is discovered

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[233] *Ibid.*, p.12.

to be none other than the long lost sister of the outlaw and therefore also the wife of the wicked clerk. Steel Cap deals out the necessary punishment with his sword and is subsequently pardoned his previous offences. The young lovers, Marion and Stanley are reunited and the clerk dies unrepentant.

With its privileging of medieval chivalric values and its mysticism – prophetesses and alchemists are not generally considered post-Enlightenment figures – *The Clerk of Clerkenwell* might seem to be straightforwardly exploiting contemporary tastes for reaching back into the Middle Ages in search of a more authentic and just England. In this sense Almar's play can be described as nostalgic since nostalgia is usually understood as operating in nineteenth-century medievalist texts such as this principally to express dissatisfaction with a defective present by summoning a more balanced and ethically coherent lost world. In summoning the Clerkenwell of old, Almar's dissatisfaction is aimed at modernisation in general and the condition of metropolitan life in the area surrounding Sadler's Wells in particular. In addition evocation of 'old England' can reasonably be thought of as having radical overtones. A similar move was to become characteristic of certain aspects of Chartist discourse. A decade later, for instance, the Chartist leader Feargus O'Connor was to use the notion of old England as rallying cry:

> Here's that we may live to see the restoration of old English times, the old English fare, old English holidays and old English justice, and everyman live by the sweat of his brow … when the weaver worked at his loom and stretched his limbs in his own field, when the laws recognised the poor man's right to an abundance of everything.[234]

A more straightforward example of the conjuring of 'old England' for political reasons is J. T. Haines's *Richard Plantagenet; or, the Rebellion of Wat Tyler and Jack Straw* (Victoria, 1836), a play that makes explicit distinctions between Norman and Saxon codes of morality:

> WAT. Hold, Norman! Strike not or I'll break thy courtly neck in the gripe of a hand, that has made more and better arms than thou or thy ancestors ever wielded! Back!
> STA. How now? – What bold bird have we here?
> WAT. A poor smith, noble sir – a labourer for others' hire, but still a man.
> STA. And this tailor and tooth-drawer are doubtless your friends.

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[234] Feargus O'Connor, *The Employer and the Employed* (London: anon. 1844), p.15.

WAT. They are.
STA. I thought so.
WAT. For once, then, you are right: they're poor; but honest; I would boast no more. We hold no lordships, have no treasure, sir:- we posses but the health and industry kind heaven given, and having them, despise your lordly scorn.[235]

Conjuring an idealised past was a more complex and nuanced business than surface appearances might imply. It should be noted, for example, that because it required the staging of an absent ideal, melodramatic nostalgia made strong, implicit demands of the material with which it sought to satisfy longing. This longing had its roots in dissatisfaction with the metropolitan present, and consequently melodramatic nostalgia often remained slightly unconvinced by the power of its originals to fulfill expectations. This lack of conviction is most clearly expressed in the omnipresence of villainy in nostalgic or rural melodrama. In *The Clerk of Clerkenwell*, for instance, the characterisation of the avaricious villain, motivated entirely by greed, privileges the standpoint of the present. The past, however longed-for, remained as haunted by threat and anxiety as the metropolitan present.

Another kind of tension is inherent in the dramaturgy of *The Clerk of Clerkenwell*, especially in its juxtaposing of comic with serious scenes. On the face of it, satire and nostalgia would seem unlikely bedfellows since they embody opposing attitudes to the past: one laughs at it and the other longs for it. And yet in Almar's play, they operate within a shared cross-temporal frame, in which past and present are made to pass comment on one another. There are, for example, a good many archers, pikemen and outlaws in this play, who expend a good deal of energy running about hither and thither not always to particularly good effect. In addition, this medieval romp aspect of the play is exploited for comic potential on more than one occasion, by one of the archers who appears entirely exhausted in an early scene, for instance:

Here we have been marching from Islington to Hornsey, from Hampstead to Highgate, from London to Greenwich and from Greenwich to London without avail.[236]

The play also features the comic servants, who were a staple of English melodrama earlier in the century. Luke Arthur's man Absolom Atkins, and

[235] J. T. Haines, *Richard Plantagenet; or, the Rebellion of Wat Tyler and Jack Straw* (London: John Dicks, 1883?), pp. 4-5.
[236] Almar, *The Clerk of Clerkenwell,* p.11.

Marion's woman Dorothea Daisy, or Dolly, are involved in a complicated romantic subplot that serves as a comic foil to the more vexed courtship of Stanley and Marion. Dolly is a feisty wench, strikingly lacking in the kind of deference usually associated with medieval social hierarchies. Not only does she have four suitors whom she merrily plays off against each other, she is allowed a good deal of license by Almar in poking fun at her mistress:

> MAR. Tempted by the beauty of the surrounding scenery I have attempted to make a memento of it in my book. *Look*.
> DOR. Ah, I suppose that is a man's head?
> MAR. No, child, that's a wood.
> DOR Oh a wooden head, is it? Why, really 'tis very natural. And this, I suppose, is a pig?
> MAR. A pig! No 'tis a peacock. Give me the book again, since you are so much mistaken.[237]

Dolly is also the embodiment of lower-class common sense. It is she, for instance, who suspects the ill motives of the Clerk at an early stage calling him a 'wolf in sheep's clothing'.[238]

As well as being a sentimental play, then, *The Clerk of Clerkenwell* is genuinely funny, containing a number of well-turned comic sequences including one in which Steel Cap the robber foils a plot by his own men to burn down Jack Straw's Castle by disguising himself as a deaf old man. This sequence appears to be more about opening up an opportunity for Almar as celebrity performer to display his talents to his metropolitan audience than a genuine attempt to recapture a version of medieval chivalry in the figure of the outlaw. The play also sports an outright clown in the figure of Master Methusalem Hobedehoy, a kind of idiot savant who is kidnapped by Steel Cap and held for a ransom of one thousand pounds, although according to his own judgement he is 'not worth fifty'.[239] Finally, in terms of the juxtaposition of serious and comic elements in the play, the apocalyptic scene of the burning of the Priory of St Mary's in Act One is counterbalanced by a comic scene in Act Two in which Dolly has persuaded her unwelcome suitors to dress as ghosts in order to humiliate them. They are literally smoked out of their hiding places by her lover, the archer Hugh Darnley.

The complications of the comic subplots in this play and the commentary

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[237] *Ibid.*, p.24.
[238] *Ibid.*, p.25.
[239] *Ibid.*, p.22.

they provide on the main narrative are of interest because such accounts of the operations of nostalgia in melodrama as exist, imply a definite separation of past from present in an hierarchical opposition, without allowing for other possible accompanying effects such as those described above. Although it remains largely under-theorised, theatre historians have noted the nostalgic strain that permeated early domestic melodrama and in particular the rural setting that often accompanied it. Michael Booth, for example, goes as far as to identify 'village' melodrama as a subspecies of the domestic:

> The popularity of village settings in melodrama can be directly related to the needs of urban audiences. Enclosure, the disappearance of cottage industry, low agricultural wages, and the rising price of food produced a rural poverty worse than urban poverty … Thus economic conditions drove the rural poor to the towns in great numbers … This new urban proletariat, conscious of its village past, welcomed the village of melodrama, for it was a village where suffering and poverty were only temporary, a village of sentiment and nostalgia.[240]

Booth makes useful links in this paragraph between the idealised villages of particular plays and the tastes and experiences of urban audiences, emphasising the social and economic upheaval that shaped the lives of the new metropolitan working class. He also suggests, perhaps a little more problematically, that the operations of sentimentality and nostalgia in village melodrama are best understood as essentially escapist, privileging as they do the separation of past from present in the hierarchical opposition mentioned earlier. This position is vexed not least because, as the account of *The Clerk of Clerkenwell* above suggests, the operations of nostalgia in melodrama were not necessarily uniform and simplistic. It might even be argued that coexistence of melodramatic sentimentality and comedy in Almar's play complicates a strict division of past and present, effectively challenging the dominance of either. The characterisation of Dolly is strikingly contemporary, especially insofar as it privileges a sense of the innate intelligence and potential agency of the lower classes. Rather than a totalising trope therefore, nostalgia might productively be thought of as only one symptom amongst others in the past/present cultural relation manifest in domestic melodrama as performed in the new metropolis.

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[240] Booth, *English Melodrama*, p. 121.

Given melodrama's long association with escapism it also seems important at least to consider the possibility that nostalgia was in some cases employed by melodramatists to critique the causes and effects of social trauma and not only, as Booth suggests, to lament the passing of an idealised and largely imaginary rural past. Consequently, the aim in the remainder of this chapter is to extend and complicate Booth's insights and, turning to other recent accounts of nostalgia as it operated in melodrama and elsewhere, to develop a more complete and nuanced understanding of how nostalgia functioned in the in the 1830s and '40s. If nothing else, the pervasiveness of the nostalgic turn in domestic melodrama argues for its importance to any consideration of the overall operations of the genre. None of the more recent critical accounts, following Peter Brooks, that have contributed to the recuperation of the genre deals explicitly with nostalgia at any length or in any significant detail. Such a focus is therefore overdue, and in combination with the arguments developed in the earlier part of this chapter, what follows is intended to shed new light on the practice of melodrama by exploring the conditions under which, and for whom, nostalgia's longing for a stable and natural past was performed.

In the first instance it is useful to review prevailing critical orthodoxies, from which Booth borrows, that figure nostalgia as always and everywhere conservative. Such orthodoxies understand nostalgia as fundamentally reactionary, both 'in its political alignment and in its motive to keep things intact and unchanged and consequently the term has acquired almost uniformly negative connotations in criticism over the years'.[241] Many of these associations still cling to it, and by extension to the popular arts with which it is most closely associated, not least to melodrama itself. Booth notes, for instance, that 'the idealization of rural life has been traditional since Theocritus and Virgil' and goes on to suggest that 'an *unsophisticated* expression of the same tradition is present in melodrama'.[242] It is certainly the case that during the nineteenth century the term, while retaining a connotation of homesickness, became associated with a more generalised and sentimental

[241] Susan Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia: Shifting Shakespeare and the Contemporary Past* (London: Routledge, 1996), p.5.
[242] Booth, *English Melodrama*, p.123. Italics mine.

longing for things past, whether in one's own personal life, in art and literature, or in a wider cultural context. This sense of the term as backward looking meant that by the twentieth century, nostalgia typically appeared to critics as anti-progressive. In *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia*, Sylviane Agacinski notices, for instance, that having absorbed this conception of nostalgia as unthinkingly backward-looking, critics inevitably understood it as being in conflict with Enlightenment notions of human progress and, as a result, as 'suspect, indeed, even regressive in light of the necessary movement of history'.[243]

Unsurprisingly, given these critical associations, for the most part progressive radicalism and nostalgia have been perceived as unhappy bedfellows. The presence of nostalgia has typically been read as evidence of an impulse to 'escape from the exigencies of an unsatisfactory present', and not to alter that present in any meaningful way.[244] In this understanding, according to John Frow for example, nostalgia inhibits progress and change precisely because longing for the past 'is a paralyzing structure of historical reflection'.[245] This kind of thinking inevitably led to the term being allocated a fixed political association. Thus, for Susan Bennett, 'nostalgia at its most virulent has been the property of the Right in the Western world'.[246] Similarly, for Susan Stewart nostalgia operates blind 'to history and its invisible origins, and yet longing for an impossibly pure context of lived experience at a place of origin'.[247] Paradoxically, because nostalgia 'wears a distinctly utopian face' it is typically associated in criticism with easy sentimentality and conservative ideology, although utopian ideas are not always and necessarily associated with conservative ideology.[248]

It is worth noting that negative assumptions about the operations of nostalgia have produced problems in accounts of popular culture in nineteenth century studies. More particularly, historians who recycle accepted

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[243] Sylviane Agacinski, *Time Passing: Modernity and Nostalgia,* translated by Jody Gladding (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 106.

[244] Nadine Attwell, '"Bouncy Little Tunes": Nostalgia, Sentimentality and Narrative in *Gravity's Rainbow'*, *Contemporary Literature*, 45:1 (2004), pp. 22-48, p.23.

[245] John Frow, 'Tourism and the Semiotics of Nostalgia', *October*, 57 (1991), pp. 123-151, p.135.

[246] Bennett, *Performing Nostalgia,* p.7.

[247] Susan Stewart, On *Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1984), p.23.

[248] *Ibid*.

critical orthodoxies about nostalgia while simultaneously working on the popular protest movements of the period have regularly come across nostalgia in inconvenient places. In *The Making of the English Working Class,* for example, while conscious of the need to give a balanced account of his contribution, the Marxist historian E. P. Thompson finds the widespread expressions of loss in William Cobbett's descriptions of the rural poor problematic, describing him in negative terms as a 'nostalgic romantic'.[249] Similarly, when historians of nineteenth-century radicalism writing in the second half of the Twentieth Century turned their attention to the use of popular aesthetics, including melodramatic sentimentality and nostalgia, in Chartist writing of the 1840s, they invariably found this a matter of regret. Steve Devereux, for example, has argued that Chartist novels of the 1840s were 'crucially weakened by the demands made by the conventions of the popular'.[250]

Such narrow conceptions of the possible operations of nostalgia do not enable an account of early Victorian domestic melodrama that is fully alert to the genre's flexibility, performativity, and modernity. The most immediate problem is that Devereux's argument and others like it rely on Althusserian conceptions of popular culture as a type of state apparatus that, far from reflecting popular grievance, is actually employed to control the thought processes of the masses.[251] Working from the markedly less rigid critical position outlined in the opening chapter, the arguments presented in this chapter allow for the possibility that the relationship between the popular arts and radicalism in the earlier part of the nineteenth century was fluid and dynamic, and that popular and commercial art forms were sometimes politically engaged and anti-authoritarian. This seems a reasonable position not least because, as Alastair Bonnett has noted, if 'we look at the first hundred years of English socialism we find a movement wedded to a nostalgia

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[249] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 821-837. For a concise account of the problems inherent in theorising nostalgia and radicalism as mutually exclusive see Alastair Bonnett, 'Radical Nostalgia', *History Today,* 7:2 (2007), pp. 41-42.
[250] Steve Devereux, 'Chartism and Popular Fiction' in John Lucas, ed., *Writing and Radicalism* (London: Longman, 1996), pp. 133-157, p.136.
[251] See Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses' in Louis Althusser, *Essays on Ideology* (London: Verso, 1970), pp. 1-60.

for a more settled and natural past'.[252] In the accounts of melodramatic nostalgia offered in the following pages, the intention is not to deny the powerful sense of loss and longing that animated the trope in the period under discussion, but rather to foreground the efficacy of its other possible accompanying effects, especially its assertions of continuity between past and present, which militate against strict divisions of time and challenge the notion of nostalgia as always and everywhere anti-progressive.

As Booth points out, melodramatic nostalgia can be understood as reflecting and inflecting urban concerns, by relying for its effects on distance and discontinuity. The early Victorian metropolis could provide both, of course, and in ample measure. In the early part of the century London's population explosion depended mostly on migrant labour from the surrounding countryside flooding into the capital in search of better wages or more extensive charitable provision, and after 1800 'the population was increasing at the rate of 20 per cent a decade'.[253] The effects of this unprecedented demographic shift were particularly pronounced during the 1840s. As H. J. Dyos and D.A. Reeder have noted, 'the net migration into London in the 1840s resulted in the addition of about 250,000 inhabitants, or almost one-fifth of its mean population for the decade'.[254] At the 1841 census less than two thirds of the capital's population had been born there. Since only the passing of time and physical distance generate the possibility of nostalgia, and since it relies on upheaval and dislocation for its effects, the stage was set for a nostalgic turn. In the simplest terms, the actress playing Ruth at the Royal Standard theatre in Shoreditch, could not have hoped to generate nostalgia for village life unless she was performing at some remove from it.

In the same year that Ruth appeared on East End stages, on the other side of the river Susan, the heroine of George Dibdin Pitt's, *Susan Hopley; or, the Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl* (Royal Victoria, 1841), fell on hard times and was forced to quit both her rural home and her childhood sweetheart:

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[252] Bonnet, 'Radical Nostalgia', p.41.
[253] L. D. Schwartz, *London in the Age of Industrialisation: Entrepreneurs, Labour Force and Living Conditions, 1700-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 8.
[254] H.J. Dyos and D. A. Reader, 'Slums and Suburbs', in Dyos and Wolff, eds., *The Victorian City: Images and Realities* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), pp. 356-386, p.362.

> You will think of me, William, when you pass the favourite spots where we so oft have met—where first you talked of love ;—and, when you are the happy father of a family, as you cross that stile and gaze on the old church porch, you will sometimes think of Susan, your once loved, once merry maid.[255]

The sentimental note struck by this speech is reliant on the portrayal of grief produced by the contemplation of something precious but forever lost, in this case not only the rural idyll – which again existed at some temporal and physical distance for the inhabitants of Lambeth, where the Royal Victoria was situated – but also Susan's imagined domestic future with William. Following a natural trajectory, the latter would have taken the lost rural idyll for its setting. In the event, many nostalgic scenes used fond recollection to juxtapose an idealised past with an alienated present. The scene in which Jerrold's Martha Willis unpacks her box on arrival in London provides another example:

> *Mar*. Oh dear! I was so unhappy when I came away, I was afraid I'd left half my things behind me … (*Taking them out*) here are the ballads, "Dusty Miller", "Sheep-Shearing", and "Blue-Eyed Mary" … and my grandmother's wedding ring, and the needle case Ralph Thomas would give me … and my sampler when I was a little girl. Oh those were happy days! And here's the picture of our church and village that Mr Carmine painted for me, and told me always to keep with me.[256]

As well as relying on the contrast between past and present, this scene juxtaposes an idealised 'far' with an alienated 'near', again emphasising discontinuity and absence. Yet another example of nostalgic recollection is provided by the unfortunate Ruth Thornley, in T. P. Taylor's *The Bottle*. While enduring the terrible indignity of seeing her furniture removed by the bailiffs, Ruth pleads to be allowed to keep a small memento of her rural girlhood:

> I must beg of you not to take that; it is a picture of the village church where I worshipped as a girl, and that saw me wedded in my womanhood; there are a thousand dear recollections connected with it, humble though they be. There was a meadow close by, over whose green turf I have often wandered, and spent many hours, when a laughing, merry child; and dearer far it is to me, for beneath a rude mound in that far resting place, poor father and mother lie. You won't refuse me the picture?[257]

The bailiffs are indifferent to her pleading:

[255] George Dibdin Pitt, *Susan Hopley; or, the Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1850?), p.31.
[256] Jerrold, *Martha Willis the Servant Maid*, p. 6.
[257] Taylor, *The Bottle*, p.22.

Well, it ain't worth much, certainly; but you women are such rum'uns, you are. You wouldn't believe it but one woman begged and prayed for a set of fire-irons and because I wouldn't let her hav'em positively fainted. Such funny fancies![258]

The lack of empathy demonstrated by the bailiffs for Ruth's suffering – and the more general sufferings of the poor – is understood in Chapter Three of this study, as one manifestation of the emotional distancing that Georg Simmel identifies with the metropolitan mindset. This heightened level of indifference also served to emphasise the pathos of Ruth's sentimental recollections. A pattern of fond recollection was central to the way in which melodrama expressed its indignation at the social devastation brought about by industrialisation and urbanisation. At the heart of domestic melodrama's continual struggle was the relationship between tradition and modernity, often figured as the relationship between a stable and relatively affluent rural past and a precarious metropolitan present. In Taylor's temperance drama the temporal and geographical distance between the rural backdrop to Ruth and Richard's courtship, and the metropolitan nightmare in which they lose their happiness, home, and family to the bottle, is one aspect of the melodrama's powerful social critique.

In order to capture a developed sense of the radical potential of nostalgia in domestic melodrama, it is important to see it as part of a wider trend that saw nineteenth-century popular artists and political radicals experiment, in markedly different ways, with the feasibility of marshalling aspects of tradition to combat the problems of industrialisation, enclosure and urbanisation. Melodrama's idealised village of 'Old England' operated in a significant number of cases as a construction of class-consciousness, built on a perception shared by theatre practitioners and their audiences of the relative economic prosperity of the past. It should be remembered that this shared memory of a more affluent rural English culture was partly based on actual experience and not solely on some retrospectively imposed sentimental fantasy. It may be that this experience of better times was substantially that of the grandparents and great grandparents of members of the metropolitan audience in the 1830s and '40s but it was an experience nonetheless. Declining living standards among the rural poor in eighteenth and nineteenth-

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[258] Taylor, *The Bottle*, p.22.

century England were a reality that could be demonstrated by use of simple arithmetic:

> By uniting wheat and provisions in one account, and comparing it with labour, it appears … that food has risen, through the last three periods of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries, in every case more than labour.[259]

It was this kind of knowledge and accompanying sympathy for the plight of the rural poor that John Baldwin Buckstone brought to the writing of *Luke the Labourer* in 1826. The play tells the story of Luke, an embittered rural labourer dismissed by his employer for persistent drunkenness. His reputation in ruins, Luke is unable to find work and subsequently his wife dies of starvation. Buckstone combines nostalgic elements, like the opening scene of harvest home, with more biting criticism of the extreme economic vulnerability of the rural poor, not just by focusing on Luke's economic vulnerability but also the vulnerability of his original employer, the tenant Farmer Wakefield, whose economic situation is so precarious that he is facing eviction at the play's opening. This focus on powerlessness among the working poor would undoubtedly have had resonances for metropolitan audiences. In addition this darker aspect of the rural idyll is supplemented in the play by the comic aspirations of Bobby Trott, whose single ambition, continually thwarted, is to quit his home in rural Yorkshire to sample the pleasures of the metropolis:

> BOBBY. Well, here I be once more, ready to start for Lunnun: this makes the fourth time I've had my Sunday clothes on, and my bundle a my back, when, somehow, summut have always happened to make I turn whoame again; but now I will go, come what may. All's snug about, nobody have seen me, and I ha' gotten three half-crowns, two silver sixpences, and a penny halfpenny in copper to pay my way there, which be 187 miles; and as to coming back again, that must take care of itself. Perhaps I may never come back; who knows but some grand lady, wi' a coach and a blackamoor servant, may say, Bobby, thee be'st a pretty lad, wool't come and be my husband. He, he, there be no telling: for I be told there be wonderfuller things come about in Lunnun than in any other town out of Yorkshire.[260]

This opening speech was made from the stage of the Adelphi theatre on the Strand to an audience that contained significant numbers of young men who worked in and around the City, so that among other things it asserts continuity between the ambitions of the young man in the play, however foolish, and a

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[259] Arthur Young, *An Enquiry into the Progressive Value of Money in England* (London, McMillan, 1812), p. 90.
[260] Buckstone, *Luke the Labourer,* p.14.

substantial constituency in the Adelphi audience. In this way the hierarchical opposition between the city and the country on which Buckstone draws elsewhere in the play is problematised.

Luke the Labourer opens with a festive staging of harvest celebrations. By recapturing selected aspects of tradition, such as communal celebrations or strong connections to local environments as they lived on, however precariously, in the historical present, melodramatists were able to gain much-needed perspective on the predicament of modernity. In the 1830s and '40s the potentials of tradition to create and sustain social cohesiveness were under attack. Consequently, they needed to be emphatically resuscitated. In the event, domestic melodramas often took the form of exercises in redemptive criticism. Nostalgia for traditions, especially those that involved rigid social stratification and deference, could be stultifying and regressive, but nostalgia also provided the route to valuable resources of social solidarity and meaning, as well as a sense of belonging and place. It was widely employed by melodramatists in this context. It is possible to think of this kind of situated nostalgia as necessary precisely because so many of the material connections to the rural past had been severed by the processes of urbanisation. 'One of the consequences of modernity', as David Gross has observed 'is that the connection between the need to feel anchored or "at home" and the availability of tradition to satisfy this need, has been broken'.[261]

According to the logic of domestic melodrama, the forces of market and state, typically represented by the villain, have combined to render valuable traditions fragile, and even to obscure them completely. This explains the hyperbolic mode via which melodrama calls these traditions back into play. The particularly vivid apprehension of this loss in village melodrama was designed to produce feelings of sadness that are now recognisable to us as nostalgia. This is apparent in the sentimental recollections of individual characters at moments of extreme stress – in both *Martha Willis* and *The Bottle* the idealised village takes the form of an image, a picture conjured at a moment of emotional climax – and also in the way villages were staged. The

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[261] David Gross, *The Past in Ruins: Tradition and the Critique of Modernity* (Amherst: The University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), p.90.

opening sequence of John T. Haines's *Alice Grey, the Suspected One; or, the Moral Brand* (Surrey, 1839) provides a good example:

> SCENE FIRST: *The entrance to the village of Heathfield from the London Road. The Cornflower Inn, a neat rural tavern, with its vine covered front and rudely painted sign stands R.- a gaudily painted house with green veranda and blinds, and a huge brass plate on the door, inscribed "Mr Caleb Kitt" is L. – at the back, as the village is supposed on a hill, a very extensive and picturesque landscape seen below, with the road for a great distance … The curtain ascends to Gay Music…HUSBANDMEN discovered drinking.*[262]

Given that hill villages are not a particular feature of the English landscape, it seems clear that this setting was designed to display as much as possible of the idealised English landscape, and the merry village of popular memory. Haines's pastoral utopia is also the egalitarian organic community, populated by honest blacksmiths and diligent village maidens in clean aprons, which radicals harked back to consistently throughout the century in their attempts to expose the worst effects of modernisation. Placed largely in and around the picturesque village of Heathfield, Haines's characters included the village carpenter, the grocer, the blacksmith, the innkeeper, his ostler, various husbandmen and the local farmer. Pastoral scenes were repeated elsewhere. Lancaster's *Ruth; or, The Lass That Loved a Sailor*, for instance, opened with the picturesque rural scene of a 'landscape, with distant view of a village on one side and the ocean on the other. A hedge-row traverses the stage; stile in centre …', while Buckstone's opening scene in *Luke the Labourer*, offered 'a village with a distant view of the city of York'.[263] The appeal of these rural scenes for audiences is further evidenced by their regular inclusion on playbills. The Garrick playbill for 13 January 1840, for instance, advertises *Woman's Heart; or, the Black Wolf's Den* as including 'the exterior of the widow Clement's farm, with distant landscape'.[264]

One criticism of melodrama might be that it attempted to restore tradition artificially, that it sought to provide ersatz traditions, but solely on its own commercial terms. It is certainly the case that contemporary social criticism, of the type found in domestic melodrama, was made from within a

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[262] J.T. Haines, *Alice Grey, the Suspected One; or, the Moral Brand* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1850.), p.5.
[263] Lancaster, *Ruth; or, the Lass that Loved a Sailor*, p.3. Buckstone, *Luke the Labourer*, p. 9.
[264] Garrick playbill, 13 January 1840, V&A Theatre Collections.

commercial context. Nevertheless melodrama regularly mobilised the potential of tradition to illuminate the failings of the metropolitan present, particularly as they related to the economic vulnerability of the working poor. These failings were especially present in the lives of audiences in the East End and on the Surrey side but some of the more widespread and disturbing effects of urbanisation impacted on the urban population across a wider range of social classes. As Friedrich Engels, observed in 1845:

> Londoners have been forced to sacrifice the best qualities of their human nature, to bring to pass all the marvels of civilization which crowd their city; that a hundred powers which slumbered within them have remained inactive, have been suppressed in order that a few might be developed more fully and multiply through union with those of others ... The brutal indifference, the unfeeling isolation of each in his private interest becomes the more repellent and offensive the more these individuals are crowded together, within a limited space ... The dissolution of mankind into monads of which each one has a separate principle and a separate purpose, the world of atoms, is here carried to its utmost extreme.[265]

In its insistence on a publicly acknowledged shared value system, and in its widespread use of stereotype and stock-character, melodrama offered an alternative to the 'dissolution of mankind into monads'.[266] It strove towards the 'typical' in an effort to assert shared values and socially affirmed standards of behaviour. Through nostalgia, it was able to identify the rural past as both the repository for memories of better times, and, as a communal possession, the property of the people. Essentially, village melodrama looked forward to better times precisely by imagining that such times once existed. In this sense it offered a vivid, if sentimental, manifestation of the discontinuity occasioned by modernisation and urbanisation. As contemporary social criticism as well as the popularity of village melodrama evinces, the felt absence of the firsthand connections that had characterised rural life in previous centuries, was a reality in the new metropolis. John Murray provides a good example:

> … the great machine of society revolves, like the tread wheel, by the labours of individuals "Condemn'd to hope's delusive mine," who, while they walk, "their weary round," know only that they are putting in their time, but remain in ignorance whether the machine picks oakum, raises water, or grinds succory; who are unconscious, in a word, of the grand results of that machine revolving by

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[265] Friedrich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1892), pp.68-69.
[266] *Ibid.*

their individually powerless, but united, all powerful exertion. In London, few know their next door neighbour … .[267]

In ways that seem quite straightforward, then, the village of melodrama can be seen as offering an antidote to the more unsettling effects of urbanisation. Narratives that relied on recalling a time or space in which ethical social relations remained intact and clearly recognisable, were hostile to the most salient effects of urbanisation as described by Engels and Murray. The worship of hearth, home and village life that was expressed in village melodrama is not fully explicable without acknowledging the pressure that the modern metropolis brought to bear upon it. As Tristram Hunt has recently noted, the 'predominantly rural mindset' that lingered among London's population 'was deeply disturbed by the energy of the city'.[268]

Hunt's notion of the 'rural mindset … deeply disturbed' by the realities of metropolitan life is pertinent when considering the competing tensions that animated melodramatic nostalgia. In reality, the overall effects of individual melodramas were rarely entirely dependent on this sentiment. In the first place, village melodramas like *Ruth, The Lass That loved a Sailor* or *Susan Hopley* shared a key characteristic with all other examples of the genre in that they were haunted by the fear and paranoia engendered by the omnipresence of villainy. The evil that disturbed the rural idyll in these melodramas often took the form of an avaricious or negligent squire, or a hard-hearted landlord, for instance, in *Luke the Labourer*, *Black Ey'd Susan*, or *Ruth, the Lass that Loved a Sailor*. Such persons or their agents invariably conspired to harass the poor, virtuous, diligent and helpless out of house and home, so that the spectre of rural poverty and forced eviction is never far away in these plays. Even in an opening sequence partly designed to trigger a nostalgic longing for the communal rituals of 'merry England', Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer* introduces tension:

A village, with a distant view of the city of York. Harvest-carts in the background; a group of villagers discovered , celebrating the Harvest Home.- An alehouse on

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[267] John Murray, 'The World of London', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, April 1841, pp. 483-487, p. 485.

[268] Tristram Hunt, *Building Jerusalem: The Rise and Fall of the Victorian City* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004), p. 44.

the side and LUKE discovered at the door, smoking, and disregarding their actions.[269]

Luke's separateness and his deliberate refusal to join the seasonal celebrations serve both to identify him as a threat to social cohesion, and therefore a villain, and to highlight the idyllic quality of the rural scene he observes so disdainfully. As he looks on the merry villagers sing:

> Our last load of corn is now in, boys
> 'Tis time that our mirth should begin boys;
> For grief would be worse than a sin, boys
>   At this our harvest home.
> Our labours have now a relief, boys,
> So there's bacon and cabbage and beef, boys;
> But a barrel of ale is the chief, boys,
>   To rule o'er a harvest home.[270]

There is in this opening scene a conflicting impulse, on the one hand drawing on the cohesive possibilities of tradition and lamenting its disintegration, and on the other drawing on techniques that are best understood as formal and thematic manifestations of modernity. The stage holds both a socially approved and desirable fiction of social cohesion, the harvest celebration, and simultaneously, in the disturbing figure of Luke, the paranoia that defines the melodrama as a narrative of conspiracy.

Melodrama draws much of its power from its providential rhetoric, its insistence, in an era otherwise characterised by general decline in belief in providential and religious explanation, that there is some sort of guiding power governing the outcome of all narratives in explicitly ethical terms. Without providence, longing for social justice and order can be satisfied either with political progress – one major discourse of the nineteenth-century – or with paranoia. Thus the animating forces of melodramatic narrative become on one hand the impulse towards the reiteration of publicly approved standards of social and ethical behaviour, sometimes through nostalgia, and on the other a pronounced sense of injured or under-appreciated merit. Precisely because it is so often reiterated as a persecution complex, this pervasive sense of injured or unrecognised merit can be productively thought of as a type of paranoia. The experience of the new metropolis was one in which

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[269]Buckstone, *Luke the Labourer*, p. 9.
[270] *Ibid.*

there was too much to pay attention to, let alone control. This engendered a sense that forces or individuals outside of one's control or understanding might be lurking nearby, and be of a malevolent disposition. Paranoia became no longer a mental aberration but a widespread response to modernisation and urbanisation. To embody this phenomenon melodrama summoned a host of villains intent on robbing, discrediting, de-flowering and dispossessing the innocent. They were as omnipresent in village melodrama as in the genre's other strands of the domestic. In addition, they often displayed in exaggerated form the tendencies characteristic of metropolitan sensibility outlined by Simmel in 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'.

By way of a final example, the conjunction of nostalgia and threat in village melodrama can be found in Dibdin Pitt's *Susan Hopley*, especially in the figure of its charismatic villain. Walter Gaveston is the head clerk of Susan's employer, the rich and kindly Mr Wentworth. At the play's opening, having won the affections of Mr Wentworth's daughter Fanny by dishonest means, Gaveston is set to marry her and thereby inherit Wentworth's entire estate. His expectations are thwarted by a will in which the old merchant makes a fair distribution of his property, leaving a large share to Harry Leeson, an orphan in his care. Gaveston resolves at this point to steal the document, destroy it, and murder the old man, in order that his earlier plan might be brought to fruition. He enlists the help of an accomplice, George Remardon, a local roué who has already squandered his own fortune on profligate metropolitan pursuits. Together they lure the old man to a secluded location, stab him while he sleeps and blame the crime on Susan's brother Andrew, whom they also murder. Although not directly implicated in this horrible crime Susan is dismissed. It is at this point that she sets off to London to seek work. A year passes. Susan returns to the country having secured a position as housekeeper to a local gentleman. At the house of her new employer Mr Cripps, a merchant of the East India Company, she recognises Gaveston, now going by the name of Colonel Jones, and Remardon, also using a false name. It transpires that having squandered Wentworth's fortune, Gaveston has deserted the unfortunate Fanny and plans to repeat his money-making scheme by marrying Mr Cripps's daughter Caroline. The villains are alarmed to see Susan Hopley, of course, and fearing their identities may be

discovered and their scheme aborted, they instruct their servant to murder the innocent girl. Fortunately the servant proves too cowardly to carry out the deed and in the play's resolution the villains are unmasked and duly brought to justice.

Like Fitzhazard in *The Heart of London* and Almar's Clerk of Clerkenwell, Gaveston and Remardon are presented in this play as entirely mercenary, as willing to commit any crime, however dastardly, for the opportunity to squander ill-gotten gains on a life of metropolitan debauchery. These villains are blasé and unscrupulous, motivated entirely by personal gain and the pursuit of pleasure. Not only do they act without reference to any accepted moral code, they do so with relish. They are utterly indifferent to the suffering of others. Calling to mind Simmel's explanation of this independent and individualistic character in the specialisation that is required by the metropolitan money economy, it is possible to argue that metropolitan paranoia is as much a complimentary aesthetic in village melodrama as the nostalgic rendering of the idealised rural past. According to Simmel, the particular conditions of the metropolitan money economy produce individuals who remain 'remarkably independent' of others, because the significance of the other man 'has been transferred to the one-sided objectivity of his contribution'.[271] The figure of Gaveston is both a hyperbolic example and a pointed critique of what happens when metropolitan man is granted, in Simmelian terms, 'a kind and an amount of personal freedom that has no analogy under other conditions'.[272]

The purpose of this chapter has been to establish that the village of domestic melodrama functioned as a metaphor that allowed for the articulation of values and purposes expressed by popular traditions, rather than as a historical reality or an escapist fantasy. The means of expressing value and purpose in melodrama vary, and can be difficult to isolate when its positive tendencies seem vague and general, compared to the sharpness of its attack on the things it dislikes. The most obvious expressions of value in domestic melodrama are devoted to the celebration of home, family and the rural past, and are often delivered in semi-religious tones. But to remark that

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[271] Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, p. 298.
[272] Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', p. 416.

melodrama, like many other nineteenth-century representational forms, was characteristically in love with rural life, does not explain very much. A reason for taking these plays seriously is that they will help clarify as well as illustrate cultural preoccupations. Clearly, melodramatists were prone to using nostalgia as an affective tool. This conservative impulse need not be read as straightforwardly defending traditional feudal obligations and *ancien régime* regulation, but also and importantly as a defence of popular rights and popular culture against the encroachments of liberal deregulation, bourgeois power, and lived daily experience in the metropolis in which these effects were concentrated. As well as acknowledging a shared impulse to escape the unpleasantness of city life, melodrama also utilised nostalgia to engage with the politics of identity in the post-traditional city.

Phrasing her question to the audience at the Standard Theatre in Shoreditch in 1841 as a universal – 'Who would dwell in cities, where our days are passed in obscurity?' – Edward Lancaster's Ruth demonstrates that the nostalgia of village melodrama is not merely an expression of the pain of a single character but of a shared experience.[273] At the same time, each instance of nostalgia in these plays acts as something of a revelation. Dramatists working in village melodrama found the knowledge of discontinuity that such scenes express sufficiently revealing to return to it repeatedly. Indeed the repeated playing out of this motif in front of metropolitan audiences suggests a nostalgia generated by the specific circumstances of urban resettlement. Although the village Ruth inhabits is her own, it is a newly imagined place in which the remains of past ways of life are configured as ethereal presences that arouse mourning. In this way, melodrama's nostalgic villages exposed the nineteenth-century context of modernisation and urbanisation. No modern history of remembrance and nostalgia in the period is complete without considering this context.

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[273] Lancaster, *Ruth; or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor*, p.3.

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Enter the Proletariat

Although intensified by rapidly increasing levels of population and urban squalor, negative responses to the metropolis were nothing new. At the dawn of the nineteenth century this critical discourse was already gathering speed:

> For a multitude of causes unknown to former times are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind, and unfitting it for all voluntary exertion to reduce it to a state of savage torpor. The most effective of these causes are the great national events that are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident which the rapid communication of intelligence hourly gratifies.[274]

Writing here as an early critic of modernity, William Wordsworth prefigures many of the concerns of later commentators especially in his anxiety about the consequences of the 'increasing accumulation of men in cities' and its negative impact on the human spirit and imagination. In the event, a significant number of theorists have subsequently understood the isolation of the individual as a principal by-product of urbanisation. Following Marx, Simmel and Weber, for example, twentieth-century critics, both conservative and radical, have argued that far from liberating the individual subject, the capitalist project that had sought to free him/her from excessive social control and authority had actually left him/her isolated and disorientated. F.R. Leavis and Theodor Adorno, for instance, have attempted to explain this isolation in specifically sociological terms and in order to achieve this they have charted the disappearance of traditional communities and the face-to-face relations that had characterised them. In addition Adorno has also cited the weakening of the authority of the family and particularly the father and the decline of the

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[274] William Wordsworth, 'Preface', *Lyrical Ballads*, (2nd Edition,1800) in William J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser, eds., *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 128-129.

centuries-old associations of traditional society, especially religion, as contributing to the isolation of the individual. [275]

As well as providing spectacular entertainment, by the 1830s domestic melodrama had become an important site for the exploration of tensions and anxieties that defined the lives of lower class Londoners, who found themselves gathered together in housing developments, workplaces and theatres, in larger number than had been imaginable less than a century earlier. This concentration of population provided the context for the emergence of a new kind of politics and, alongside industrialisation, urbanisation is generally understood as a pre-condition for working class mobilisation. As Stefano Bartolini observes:

> These processes create and intensify the social problems and grievances of the working classes and lower classes in general; at the same time, they constitute the structural preconditions for these problems to become sources of organization and mobilization efforts. The resulting social mobilization gives rise to new social groups; it increases the self-awareness of those already existing; and it intensifies existing conflicts and provokes the explosion of latent ones.[276]

The formation of class-consciousness, as evidenced by the formation of the Grand National Consolidated Trade Union in 1834 and the publication of the *People's Charter* in 1837, was in its early stages in the period covered by this study, and was as much a discursive as a material process. Consequently analyses of the sorts of entertainments enjoyed by lower class audiences can provide useful perspectives on this process. It is certainly the case that in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, working mostly at the minor theatres, a number of dramatists began to write plays in which the previously disdained lower orders were portrayed as the authentic core of the nation and the city, and in so doing to produce new visions of lower class identity and agency. This shift in perspective was pronounced, especially when compared to the approach taken to the staging of the lower orders in the earlier part of the century.

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[275] See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (London: Verso, 1979) and Christopher Lasch*, The Culture of Narcissism* (London: Abacus, 1979). On the isolating and disorientating effects of urban life see, for example, Denys Thompson, *Discrimination and Popular Culture* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964) and F .R. Leavis, *Mass Civilization and Minority Culture* (Cambridge: Minority Press, 1930).
[276] Stefano Bartolini, *The Political Mobilization of the European Left, 1860-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 122.

In the melodrama of the first quarter of the nineteenth century lower class characters appeared largely in the role of servants and henchmen. Sometimes these characters had a political aspect and were figured as repositories of good sense and fairness – a good example is the figure of the servant Fiametta in Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery* (Covent Garden, 1801) – but typically the protagonists of early nineteenth-century melodrama remained upper or middle class. Generally speaking, a desire to keep the poor at some distance persisted even into the 1820s on the London stage.[277] Pierce Egan's phenomenally popular *Life in London* provides a model for how the lower classes were represented in the early part of the 1820s. Its remarkable literary success immediately provoked a plethora of theatrical adaptations, the most famous of which was William Moncrieff's extravaganza *Tom and Jerry; or, Life in London* (Adelphi, 1821).[278]

Both Egan's original sketches and Moncreiff's adaptation featured an array of lower class metropolitan characters, but neither was substantially about them. Instead, Egan's protagonists Corinthian Tom, the city swell and Jerry Hawthorne, his country cousin, were clearly figured on page and on stage as upper class spectators, out and about in the metropolis. Their encounters with the lower orders were thus mediated through their own class perspectives and prejudices so that *Tom and Jerry* is essentially a tale of Regency bucks engaged in an activity Roy Porter aptly described as 'trendy slumming'.[279] Egan's sketches were originally published in shilling numbers. The first appeared in September 1820 with illustrations by Robert and George Cruikshank. Moncrieff's version was the hit of the season at the Adelphi. It opened on 26 November and proceeded to play every night until the end of the season, a total of 94 performances. It continued to be revived for many

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[277]Lower class figures also featured in urban literature and graphic satire in the early part of the century, but largely as 'a subject for ridicule, not compassion … their real sufferings kept at arms length.' M. Dorothy George, *Hogarth to Cruikshank: Social Change in Graphic Satire* (London: Penguin, 1967), p. 73.

[278] Pierce Egan, *Life in London, or The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorne Esq. and his Elegant Friend Corinthian Tom in their Rambles and Sprees through the Metropolis* (London: John Camden Hotten, 1869). W. T. Moncrieff, *Tom and Jerry; or, Life in London* (London: Thomas Richardson, 1828).

[279] Porter, *London: A Social History*, p.216.

years.[280] The success of the production, 'which featured a rich collection of popular songs as well as brilliantly realising Cruikshanks' illustrations, transformed the Adelphi almost overnight into London's most popular theatre'.[281] In the event, *Tom and Jerry* was a piece of entertainment that wilfully defied any attempt at easy categorisation, as can be seen from the description on the Adelphi playbill: 'An entirely new, classic, comic, operatic, didactic, moralistic, Aristophanic, localic, analytic, Terpsichoric, panoramic, camera-obscura-ic, extravaganza burletta of fun, frolic, fashion, and flash'.[282]

The controlling perspective of Moncrieff's extravaganza, like that of its source, remained that of Corinthian Tom:

> … the roving gentleman, the vaguely disreputable "man of the world" who is familiar with the customs and language not only of his own class and neighbourhood but also of the larger world - in this case the world of London. In *Tom and Jerry,* the urban specialist "Corinthian Tom" provides lessons in London life to his unschooled country cousin, Jerry (presumably a stand-in for those members of the audience who might be similarly unschooled).[283]

Tom's role as metropolitan educator is especially apparent towards the end of Moncrieff's play when he takes Jerry to the back streets of London to witness the unmasking of the city's beggars. Here they observe the 'true' character of the urban poor: a woman who has been begging with twins returns the children to the people from whom she has hired them; a pillow is removed from beneath the clothes of a supposedly pregnant women; an old blind man's sight is revealed as perfectly intact. These encounters come towards the end of a piece in which Tom and Jerry have indulged in numerous entertaining and yet potentially disturbing encounters with the poor. The scene is especially important because the unmasking of the 'undeserving' poor reassures the audience, as Deborah Epstein Nord has observed, 'that what has seemed so disturbing should not be contemplated with too much

[280] See, http://www.emich.edu/public/english/adelphi_calendar/hst1821.htm for further details. Accessed November 24, 2010.
[281] Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, p.39.
[282] Adelphi Playbill 1821, Harvard Theatre Collections.
[282] Porter, *London: A Social History*, p.216.
[283] Heidi J. Holder, 'Outcast London on the Victorian and Edwardian Stage', *Theatre History Studies* 23 (2003), pp. 49-64, p. 52. Under the proprietorship of James Rodwell and Willis Jones from 1819-24 the Adelphi became a favourite haunt of Regency bucks, a trend that was consolidated by the success of *Tom and Jerry*.

concern after all'.[284] Residual anxieties about the harsh social realities of urban life are thus displaced, or even replaced. The real victims in this scenario are the 'charitable and humane persons' who have been duped by dishonest rogues.[285]

The Adelphi production of *Tom and Jerry,* like its source *Life in London,* celebrated 'the sheer miscellaneity and peripatetic enjoyment' of the life of the city swell. [286] Its tone was riotous throughout and given its enormous popularity it provides an interesting point of comparison with the kinds of melodrama that appeared later in the 1820s at the Adelphi and other minor theatres. Although produced only five years after Moncreiff's extravaganza, Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer*, for example, focused almost entirely on the trials and tribulations of a group of lower-class characters.[287] As previously indicated, it tells the story of Luke, an unemployed farm labourer who is dismissed by his employer, a tenant farmer, for persistent drunkenness. His reputation in ruins, he is unable to find honest work and subsequently his wife dies of starvation. The tenant farmer, Wakefield, then becomes the focus of Luke's bitterness and rage, and giving himself over entirely to thoughts of revenge he spends years working for the dastardly local Squire in order to gain financial power over Wakefield. As the play opens Luke has been successful in pursuing his revenge. Wakefield is ruined and languishing in a debtor's prison.

Much of Luke's personal history and motivation is revealed early in the play in an extraordinary sequence when, having arrived at the farmer's cottage to gloat over his victory, he finds the old man unexpectedly released. He is then overwhelmed by an impulse to explain his motivation:

> LUKE. I ha summut to say, summat at my tongue's end-it must come out. Farmer, do you recollect when you sent me awayfra' your service? Do you recollect when I were starving for want o' work, and, because I were at times given to drink, you turned your back upon me? I ha' never been a man since that time.
> WAKEFIELD. What, do you wish to rake up old affairs that ha' been gone by mony a day?

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[284] Epstein Nord, *Walking the Victorian Streets*, p. 35.
[285] Egan, *Life in London* p. 375
[286] Williams, *The Country and the City*, pp. 217-18.
[287] This shift in class perspective occurred after Daniel Terry and Fred Yates had taken over the theatre in 1825.

LUKE. If it had been gone by a hundred years, and I alive, I should never have forgotten it; and I must and I will tell thee on't. I never had the chance 'afore; but now it do all come fresh upon my brain, my heart do seem ready to burst wi' summut buried in it, and I cannot keep it down. You turn'd me away, and I had no character, because you said I were a drunkard. I were out o' work week after week, till I had not a penny in the world, nor a bit o' bread to put in mine nor my wife's mouth. I then had a wife, but she sickened and died-yes, died-all-all along o' you.[288]

This is something of a moment, not only in the play itself but in the development of domestic melodrama.[289] Its significance lies in the extent to which Buckstone gives Luke, the lower class villain, a kind of righteous authority. The drama in this scene is derived from a meaningful exchange between a rural labourer and a tenant farmer, both figures whose livelihoods were particularly put at risk by the social and economic upheavals that characterised the early decades of the century. In the context of emergent class-consciousness Luke's speech can be read as part of a wider discourse about contested attitudes towards the poor in the early decades of the nineteenth century. The prominence given to Luke's discourse in the play as a whole suggests that it was no longer acceptable to the Adelphi audience to simply blame the poor for their own predicament, or to laugh at them.

In the original production Luke was played by Daniel Terry who was at that time a leading actor at the Adelphi and joint manager of the theatre. The scene outlined above, in which the labourer was allowed to critique the rural economy and the old Poor Law among other things was clearly designed to allow Terry to elicit some degree of sympathy for the character. The Adelphi audience would have been aware that the process of land enclosure that accelerated in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries had involved the seizure and privatisation of previously common land. While this process remains a contested area among economic historians, social historians such as E.P. Thompson have interpreted it as 'a plain enough case of class

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[288] Buckstone, *Luke the Labourer,* p. 21.
[289] *Luke the Labourer* has attracted more critical interest than most melodramas of the 1820s. See for instance Martha Vicinus, '"Helpless and Unfriended": Nineteenth-Century Domestic Melodrama' and Simon Shepherd, 'Pauses of Mutual Agitation' in Bratton, Cook and Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, pp. 25-37, p.29, both of which include brief discussions of the play. See also Maura L. Cronin, '"We commence … with one of the oldest and most agreeable of our remembrances – Mr. T. P. Cooke", *Nineteenth-Century Theatre & Film*, 29: 1 (2002), pp. 6-31, which includes a discussion of T. P. Cooke's performance as Philip, the lost son of the title. David Mayer also notes the play's significance in the development of domestic melodrama in his survey of the genre, 'Encountering Melodrama', p.156.

robbery'.[290] Enclosure led to the rural population becoming increasingly dependent on wages for their survival, and so becoming proletarianised.[291] In Buckstone's play sympathy for the labourer is offset by some of the more disturbing effects generated by the character. His vengeful wrath was, according to one reviewer, 'pourtrayed with a force and truth that frequently made portions of the audience shudder with alarm and dismay'.[292] These comments are a tribute to Terry's effectiveness as a melodramatic performer, but the complexity of the role of Luke undoubtedly allowed the actor to generate a range of emotional responses that were not straightforwardly processed or resolved.

The appearance and prominence of characters like Luke marks a change in the theatrical culture of London in the early decades of the century that resulted in a larger number of lower-class characters taking centre stage and effectively becoming the protagonists in their own stories. This phenomenon should be understood as embedded in, and inflecting, emerging discourses of class-consciousness in the metropolis. It is possible, for example, to see the particular venom directed at the landed aristocracy in plays such as *Luke the Labourer* as part of a wider discourse. As E. P. Thompson has shown, 'throughout the nineteenth-century the urban worker made articulate the hatred of the landed aristocrat which perhaps his grandfather had nourished in secret'.[293] This is not to say that melodrama existed outside the logic of capitalism and was always and everywhere radical in reflecting the aspirations of the lower classes, but rather that it was capable of producing forms of community that were meaningful and critical in their own way. A number of influential critics have already emphasised this connection, noting that melodrama was 'particularly appealing to the working-class' who

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[290] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p.128.

[291] More recently revisionist historians have argued that the traditional rights of the rural peasantry prior to enclosure have been exaggerated and therefore its effect is disproportionately blamed for rural poverty. See for instance, J. Humphries. 'Enclosures, commons rights, and women', *Journal of Economic History*, 50: 1 (1990), pp. 17-42 and Leigh Shaw-Taylor, 'Parliamentary Enclosure and the Emergence of an English Agricultural Proletariat', *The Journal of Economic History*, 61:3 (2001), pp. 640-662.

[292] Unidentified review of *Luke the Labourer* dated 22 October, 1826. Adelphi cuttings book, V & A Theatre Collections.

[293] Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, p.254.

throughout this period faced 'great dangers without economic power'.[294] Most, however, have tended to produce readings that understand melodrama as working fundamentally to produce comfort for, rather than resistance in, lower-class audiences. In her influential essay "Helpless and Unfriended" Martha Vicinus, for instance, observes that:

> Tragedy appeals to those who feel, however erroneously, that they have some control over lives ruined by personal decision and error; melodrama to those who feel that their lives are without order and that events they cannot control can destroy or save them.[295]

Without wishing to dispute melodrama's compensatory effects or indeed to directly contradict Vicinus's argument, the aim of this chapter is to identify domestic melodrama as a site of resistance as well as a source of comfort for lower class audiences in the new metropolis.

Theatre historians agree that a substantial number of working class protagonists featured in melodramas of the 1830s and '40s and their dramas were often played out in front of largely urban lower-class audiences.[296] These audiences were themselves involved in negotiating new conceptions and/or models of shared identity and community. Communities, as social theorists such as Benedict Anderson and Anthony Cohen have argued, are created and sustained when individuals imagine that they have shared values and interests.[297] In addition communities are, at least partly, symbolic constructions and consequently the characteristic forms and content of the narratives they consume should have something to tell us about the range of ways in which they imagine themselves. At minor theatres such as the Pavilion, the Britannia and the Surrey, a certain amount of licence was exercised in the period before 1843 because these theatres fell outside the immediate jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain's Office and its agent, the Chief Examiner of Plays.[298] As Peter Thomson has reminded us, the Lord

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[294] Vicinus, '"Helpless and Unfriended" p. 131.
[295] *Ibid*, pp. 131-132.
[296] See, for instance, Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, William Knight, *A Major London Minor*, Michael Booth, *English Melodrama* and Maurice Disher, *Blood and Thunder*.
[297] See, Benedict Andersen, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1991) and Anthony Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction of Community* (London: Tavistock Press, 1985).
[298] For details of censorship legislation as it applied in this period see, for instance, John Russell Stephens, *The Censorship of English Drama 1824-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), pp. 48-54; Katherine Newey, 'Melodrama, Legitimacy, and "The Condition-of-England

Chamberlain's 'control over the minor theatres was much less assured … than his control of the patent houses' repertoire'.[299] During its heyday illegitimate theatre enjoyed a reputation among 'nervous legislators and horrified reviewers' as a 'transgressive domain' although, as Jane Moody points out, its transgressions were often considered moral rather than political.[300]

While it may be tempting to characterise minor theatres as hotbeds of radicalism, it is important to remember that although the East End and transpontine theatres were free from direct censorship, they were nevertheless obliged to apply annually for the renewal of their licenses to the Quarter Sessions. Their managers would thus have been acutely aware of the risks of staging overtly licentious or politically radical entertainments. They were, after all, in the business of making money and consequently had some investment in promoting reputations for respectability, not least because they needed to appeal to the respectable working people who formed the mainstay of their audience. In 1828 the newly opened Pavilion theatre in Whitechapel, for instance, advertised itself as featuring 'elegant and commodious boxes [which] have been constructed and adapted for respectable Family Parties and which the Proprietors flatter themselves are fitted up in a manner to give satisfaction and ensure Patronage'.[301] Commercial pressures and motives obtained. Melodramas focusing on lower-class concerns and giving prominence to lower-class characters began to appear in the late 1820s as part of nightly programmes that also featured burlesque, farce, burletta and pantomime, and became commonplace over the next decade on the stages of London's minor theatres. Typically and repeatedly, such plays featured ordinary people suffering various forms of persecution and ill luck until finally released by the unlikely interventions of fate.

Luke the Labourer was originally performed at the Adelphi, which was situated, as it is now, on the Strand, and was consequently obliged to operate directly under the authority of the Lord Chamberlain. When play-making involved the mediation of lower class life for predominantly lower class

Question"', in Joanna Innes and Arthur Burns, eds., *Rethinking the Age of Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 238-253, and Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*.
[299] Peter Thomson, *The Cambridge Introduction to English Theatre, 1660- 1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 174.
[300] Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, p.79.
[301] Quoted in Wilson, *East End Entertainment*, p.68.

audiences outside the boundaries of Westminster – and consequently the Lord Chamberlain's direct control – further differences in emphasis and perspective were to be found.[302] In the final scene of Douglas Jerrold's *Martha Willis the Servant Maid* for instance, the eponymous heroine, an innocent country girl who has come to the metropolis to enter domestic service, weeps over the body of her childhood sweetheart Walter Speed, who has tragically been drawn into a life of crime. At the play's climax, Martha attempts to save Walter from the gallows by drawing onto herself the blame for his crimes. This last desperate attempt to save her childhood sweetheart fails. Walter drinks poison, confesses his guilt, announces her innocence, and dies partially redeemed:

> *SPEED*. Bless you all- and let my fate warn such as would wildly venture in a sea of pleasure-which leads to guilt, to infamy and death. There is a ringing in mine ears! Is that not my mother there-in dazzling white? She smiles and holds forth her hands! I am coming, mother-I-I-
>
> (*Dies.-Martha casts herself beside the body, Scarlett stoops to raise her.-Music.-Picture.*)[303]

The play's message, to beware the seductive pull of the metropolitan criminal underworld, seems clearly expressed here in its final image, its effects driven home by way of the customary tableau accompanied by music. Again the final tableau features the dead body of a lower-class man who has fallen from grace at least partly under pressure from external economic forces. There are a number of significant differences, however, between Jerrold's play written for the Pavilion audience in Whitechapel and Buckstone's written for the Adelphi. The absence of upper class characters in *Martha Willis*, for instance, is even more marked than in *Luke the Labourer*. Apart from a gentleman of fortune who serves only as the dupe for one of Walter's scams, Jerrold's play is populated entirely by servants, coachmen, porters, shop workers, pawn-brokers, money-lenders, beggars and thieves. This marks a significant change in the texture and tone of representations of the lower classes in the early part of the nineteenth century and is a consequence of metropolitan theatrical

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[302] Jane Moody notes that part of the alarm caused among critics by productions such as Tom and Jerry or Jack Sheppard was related to the fact that imitation productions quickly sprang up outside the confines of Westminster and the Lord Chamberlain's control. Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, pp. 110-111.

[303] Jerrold, *Martha Willis the Servant Maid*, p. 15.

culture adapting to the demands of a new and growing lower class audience. The Pavilion Theatre in Whitechapel was the most important East End theatre to open in the late 1820s and a brief account of the theatre and its constituency is useful here by way of context for further analysis of Jerrold's play.

The theatre had emerged from the ruins of a disused clothing factory opposite the London Hospital on the Whitechapel Road in 1828 and from that time until the opening of the Britannia at Hoxton in 1841 it remained the principal East End theatre.[304] The area around the theatre was a 'typical low-income working class neighbourhood' and contained a substantial number of people employed in the docks and on the sea beyond and, less dependably, in the silk trade which was in decline during this period.[305] For a time, during its early years, the theatre was associated with radical nautical melodrama which presumably reflected the interests of its audience. Jerrold's own anti-authoritarian *Mutiny on the Nore* (1830), for instance, premiered at the Pavilion and alongside crime melodramas like *Martha Willis* helped establish the theatre's reputation for 'plays that were critical of aspects of British society in those turbulent years leading up to the first Reform Bill of 1832'.[306] The theatre also developed a reputation for sensationalism and vulgarity. By 1840 Frederick Tomlins, for example, was able to comment that 'the Newgate calendar and tales of terror stand in the same place' to the theatre 'as Homer did to the ancient dramatists'.[307] Contemporary accounts of the East End theatre during the nineteenth century are often biased and Tomlins' remarks tell us as much about his own class prejudices as they do about the Pavilion. For a host of suspect reasons, as Jane Moody points out, contemporary commentators 'portrayed the East End theatre as a threat to social order and economic discipline'.[308] However, the question remains as to whether the combination of a newly established theatre and a newly developing repertoire

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[304] Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, pp. 37-38.
[305] Cowan, 'The Relationship Between Theatre Repertoire and Theatre Location: A Study of the Pavilion Theatre', p. 10.
[306] Davis and Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience*, pp.55-56.
[307] F. G. Tomlins, *A Brief View of the English Drama, from the earliest period to the present time: with suggestions for elevating the present condition of the art, and of its performers* (London: C. Mitchell, 1840), p. 65.
[308] Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, p. 38.

genuinely realised what Elaine Hadley has described as melodrama's 'subversive potential as a challenge to the quickly consolidating truisms of bourgeois ideology'.[309]

The ideological content of melodrama varied considerably according to the circumstances in which it was performed. A number of critics have argued that melodrama, in the East End in particular, provided an important mirror in which the views and aspirations of artisan and working class audiences could be reflected.[310] The Pavilion was no exception. Like the country bumpkin Jerry Hawthorne in Moncrieff's adaptation of *Life in London*, Douglas Jerrold's heroine Martha Willis is unschooled in the ways of the metropolis. The major difference is that she enjoys none of the protection afforded to Hawthorne by his class or his sophisticated metropolitan cousin, Corinthian Tom. Martha is 'a good girl, the darling' of her village, but without the protection of class she is out of her depth and in peril in the metropolitan environment.[311] In the play's opening sequence, as soon as she steps off the coach from Derby she is accosted by an old gypsy woman who identifies her as 'new to the town' and consequently a soft touch.[312] Some time later the same gypsy woman abuses Martha's trust in order to gain access to her lodgings, where she takes the opportunity to steal silver cutlery from Martha's employer, an action that leads directly to Martha's wrongful imprisonment. Unlike Jerry, Martha has no experienced city swell to act as her guide. She is naïve and open-hearted and consequently dangerously unable to distinguish between those she can trust and those she cannot.

Although Martha's naivety is exaggerated, her situation nonetheless mirrors that of a significant section of the Pavilion audience who would have moved into the city from relatively stable rural communities in which the task of recognising friend from foe was straightforward. In the metropolis Martha is almost entirely surrounded by strangers. A good deal of tension is generated in this play by Jerrold's use of dramatic irony, insofar as Martha repeatedly fails to recognise villainy by its outward appearance and demeanour while

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[309] Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics*, p. 136.

[310] See for example, Jim Davis 'The Gospel of Rags: Melodrama at the Britannia, 1863-74' and Daniel Gerould, 'Representations of Melodramatic Performance', *Browning Institute Studies* 18 (1990), pp. 55-71.

[311] Jerrold, *Martha Willis the Servant Maid*, p. 4.

[312] *Ibid.*, p. 4.

familiar melodramatic conventions aid the audience in performing this task.[313] Unlike Corinthian Tom, who confidently introduces his reader to a pantheon of London types with whom both are familiar, Martha is completely surrounded in Jerrold's play by characters more skilled at reading the metropolis than she is. Thus, rather than privileging the discourse of a socially superior spectator, Jerrold places Martha Willis, an extremely victimised lower class woman, at the centre of his drama. Throughout the play she is acted upon and buffeted by forces outside her understanding or control. She is also, like Jerrold's other famous heroine *Black Eye'd Susan* (Surrey, 1829), fundamentally passive and obsessively loyal.

Martha does not change nor does she learn from her mistakes. Instead she doggedly insists on retaining the identity she brings with her to the metropolis and this stubbornness produces a number of interesting rhetorical effects within the play. For instance, Martha is pathologically loyal to her childhood sweetheart Walter, with whom she naively hopes to be reunited in the metropolis. Against all evidence, she refuses to believe that he is a thief and a highwayman: ''Tis three years since I saw him – since he left the village, and his friends have heard nothing of him. Nothing but what I know cannot be true – for Walter, my Walter – though he has forgotten me – turn dishonest! Oh! They spoke falsely of him'.[314] This blind loyalty leads Martha to the condemned cell at Newgate where she languishes in the final scene, falsely accused of collaborating with Speed in the robbery of her employer, until Speed's last minute confession and suicide prove her innocence. Rather than condemning Speed outright, or distancing him from Martha, Jerrold gives prominence to the version of Speed that is kept alive in the heart of his heroine; the naïve and headstrong country lad who is a devoted childhood sweetheart and who is corrupted by the metropolis and its attendant temptations. This is one of the ways in which Jerrold's melodrama resists easy delineations between the innocent and the guilty. Rather it presents its lower class audience with a variety of lower class types, who are enabled or

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[313] For instance, Joannah's first line is an aside which commonly acts as a signifier of villainy in melodrama: 'A pretty Lass, this, and new to the town.' Jerrold, *Martha Willis*, p. 7.
[314] *Ibid.*, 4.

disabled according to their relationship with the treacherous urban environment they are obliged to inhabit.

Martha's final act is to 'cast herself beside the body' of her dead lover.[315] She is saved but she does not change in her affiliations. By presenting its heroine in such an exaggeratedly fixed manner, it is as if the melodrama accepts or even asserts the primacy of social reality, insisting that the heroine is trapped by circumstances that she cannot transcend simply by an act, or acts, of individual will. Such are the odds stacked against her that she effectively cannot win. In the end the only response Martha can muster to the city is to leave, to return to her village and quit the metropolis forever:

> Oh why–why did I leave my home? – why leave the good and happy friends that loved me? There was truth–here, nothing but deceit; there I was at peace–here I am a wretch.[316]

Martha's story articulates a 'sense of destiny out of control', that must have resonated with large sections of the Pavilion audience whose daily lives were plagued by the twin spectres of unemployment and homelessness.[317] The fantasy element of the ending – the possibility of returning to the rural idyll – is given extra poignancy by the fact that Jerrold sets his play in 1745. Within the world of the drama the possibility of return still exists, but it has largely disappeared for the Pavilion audience in 1831. In the event characters who, like Martha, doggedly cling to their lower class identities are common in the domestic melodrama of this period and can be read as indicators of emerging discourses of class awareness in the metropolis. It is possible to read their passivity as capitulation but also as an embryonic form of resistance.

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[315] *Ibid.*, 36.

[316] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

[317] Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight*: *Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1992), p.86. Unemployment was a constant threat during this period. In his account of the decline of the silk trade, for instance, which was a major employer in Whitechapel, Gareth Steadman Jones reports, 'it is estimated that the East London silk weaving industry employed 50,000 persons in 1824. The long decline of the industry reached crisis proportions in the 1830s when in some years 30,000 were said to have been unemployed. Although there was some migration to other silk centres, a substantial number remained.' Gareth Steadman Jones, *Outcast London: A Study in the Relationship Between Classes in Victorian Society* (Oxford and London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 101. In addition, ordinary people were typically at the mercy of unscrupulous landlords. As Francis Sheppard notes, everyone involved in housing, 'whether as ground landlord, developer, builder or investor, did so in the hope of financial gain; and at any rate until the creation of the London County Council in 1889 there was little public regulation of their activities.' Sheppard, *London: A History*, p.274.

T. P. Taylor's *The Bottle* provides another useful example. One strand of the plot of Taylor's play 'realises' George Cruikshank's famous sequence of temperance images in which the alcoholism of the mechanic Richard Thornley leads to the utter destitution and destruction of his family.[318] Cruikshank's cautionary tale is augmented in Taylor's melodrama with several other narrative strands. The story of Esther, an honest seamstress, and her sweetheart George Gray is of particular interest. George is introduced as a colleague and friend of Thornley, who in the first part of the play attempts to rescue him from disgrace and despair. Unfortunately, George disappears in the middle of the first act when, unbeknown to Esther, he is press-ganged by a corrupt official. In the second act, alone, nearly destitute and believing herself deserted by her lover, Esther bemoans her fate:

> Work, work, work and yet of no avail; it will not clear away the poverty by which I am surrounded. The dreadful threat of the few things I have got together being taken from me, the fear of being thrust forth homeless, checks every zealous intention, defies all industrious efforts.[319]

Esther is dragged into poverty in spite of persistent honesty and diligence. As the extract above demonstrates, Taylor opens up a space in which she is allowed to reflect on her position in explicitly class related terms. Furthermore, he supplements Esther's critique of the prevailing economic situation by allowing other characters to comment on her situation:

> She has struggled on, and held life and soul together, by working hard and fast at the needle. It's a very small instrument, that, but it's astonishing how fine and gay it makes folks. I have often thought whether any of these grand people have an idea how many long, long hours are consumed, and how many sleepless nights have been passed and spent, about the finery they wear. Oh, no! They've got it, and they never bestow a thought upon the maker. I am out very late, and when I have returned from my last round, I've seen the light in her window, and her shadow there, working away, night after night, and at an hour when everybody who had a bed had gone to it.[320]

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[318] In 1847 George Cruikshank produced a series of eight temperance engravings illustrating the devastating effects of drink on the working man. In the series the mechanic Richard Thornley loses his job, and his belongings. His children are made homeless and finally, he murders his long-suffering wife in a fit of alcohol induced rage and is carted off to the lunatic asylum. The series is discussed in Chapter Eight below. The following year Cruikshank produced a sequel entitled *The Drunkard's Children*. See, Richard A. Volger, *Graphic Works of George Cruikshank* (New York: Dover Publications, 1979) and Michael Wynn Jones, *George Cruikshank: His Life and London* (London: MacMillan London Ltd., 1978).

[319] Taylor, *The Bottle*, pp. 30-31.

[320] *Ibid.*, p.29.

At the play's resolution Esther is on the verge of being evicted when George returns unexpectedly from overseas having made his fortune. This miraculous arrival, while offering the consolations associated with happy endings, again exposes the impossibility of Esther triumphing over circumstances through individual effort alone. The extremely unlikely rescue that brings relief for Esther, in combination with Taylor's sympathetic staging of her vain attempts to 'work' her way out of poverty, can be seen as critiquing emerging middle-class doctrines of self help. The death of Ruth, Thornley's long suffering wife, at the hands of her maniac husband, also emphasises the inadequacies of the doctrine of laissez-faire as regards the protection of the vulnerable. Both perspectives, it could be argued, are distinctively working-class.

A significant number of lower class characters who appear in the melodrama of this period are, like Esther, markedly more self aware than Martha, and are consequently able to articulate in explicit terms the relationship between their suffering and the prevailing socio-economic situation. J. P. Hart's, *Jane, The Licensed Victualler's Daughter; or, the Orphan of the Almshouse* (Pavilion, 1840), as mentioned above, features one such character in the figure of Ralph, the cellar-man. The main setting of Hart's play is the Sun Tavern, a hostelry on the outskirts of London where Jane, its heroine, works as a barmaid. The plot is simple enough. The Landlord of the tavern, the appropriately titled Mr Brewel, has discovered that his son Alfred, on whose education he has spent a good deal of money, is in love with Jane. She is decent and clever, he concedes, but she is nonetheless the orphaned daughter of a licensed victualler who fell on hard times and died in disgrace. Brewel instead wants his son to marry the daughter of his wine merchant because she brings a fortune with her, and he considers her status more suitable. He wants Jane, on the other hand, to marry Ralph his cellar-man who is 'a countryman, coarse, ignorant and shrewd', but also in love with Jane.[321] Brewel decides to keep Jane on in his employment for fear of fanning the flames of his son's ardour through enforced separation, and also to provide himself with opportunity to engineer the match between Ralph and the barmaid. Ralph in the meantime is driven to distraction by his unrequited

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[321] Hart, *Jane the Licensed Victualler's Daughter,* p.5.

passion for Jane. Comparing himself to the educated and genteel Alfred, he curses his own ignorance and rails explicitly against the limitations of his lowly social position:

> RALPH. *(In bitterness.)* Aye, aye, that's all very well for them as has scholarship and learning- they can speak as it pleases 'em-learning makes 'em superior-they can reason and talk wi' good books and all that; but them as has been neglected when young, and got no scholarship, has only their hands to work wi'-they can't work wi' the head; if they do, they get confused in a net that fastens 'em more and more.
> BREW. The want of learning is certainly an awful drawback in any station of society.
> RALPH. A drawback! It's death-misery-madness! None can tell its wants but the ignorant who's deprived of it! What is left for such as me but drudgery-hard work and toil - the lowest of the low-no chance of release - no hope but to bear degradation- how can I rise in man's goodwill? - the want of knowledge cut me off, my industry can gain me no more than the place of a drudge, and what consolation has my tired body? - none but the sleep of the brute! The sacred volume-the comforter of the weary man, is a dark blank to me.[322]

Ralph turns out to be the villain of the piece, driven by his 'daily curse' the 'want of education' to place his master's watch in Jane's box, hoping to have her accused of theft and consequently dismissed.[323] His plan is complicated by the arrival of a couple of genuine burglars, Slink and Skulk, who re-steal the watch before it has been discovered, but the ensuing confusion sees Jane and her cousin Nancy sent off to jail. After much distress and no little public humiliation the girls are eventually released for lack of evidence. Mr Brewel declines to testify directly against them but Jane is dismissed from her job and devastated by the cruel twists of fate. Her character now stained, she returns to the alms house where her parents died in poverty and ignominy. Finally the truth is revealed and Ralph confesses his crime, again insisting that lack of education has contributed to his downfall:

> *Ralph. (In desperation)* I am the thief! Caught in my own snare: I did it to gain Jane, but she was too good for me. Heaven has defeated me- want of learning has cursed me! Lead me to prison, for without Jane, I cannot live!-my heart, my heart is broken![324]

It is noticeable that Hart, while clearly condemning his actions, remains at least partly in sympathy with Ralph's frustration and powerlessness, and in

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[322] *Ibid.*, p. 5.
[323] *Ibid.*, 8.
[324] *Ibid.*, 14.

this sense the play offers a critique of the contemporary education system in explicitly class related terms.

Like Jerrold's *Martha Willis* almost a decade earlier, Hart's play is entirely populated by lower-class characters and centres on the experiences of a virtuous but victimised lower-class heroine who is wrongly imprisoned for a crime she did not commit. Beyond constructing sympathy for their heroines, both melodramas probe the dynamics of sympathetic exchange in the new metropolis in terms of nightmarish fantasies. Their heroines are swept up by events outside their control in narratives that give dramatic shape to the uncertainties and insecurities that characterised the lives of the ordinary people who made up the audiences for these plays. Beyond being "helpless and unfriended", to borrow Martha Vicinus's phrase, these characters can also been seen as functioning to lay bare the operations of the prevailing economic system as it impacted on the lives of ordinary people in the urban complex.[325]

In *Tom and Jerry* the metropolis is figured as a playground, while in *Martha Willis the Servant Maid*, *Jane the Licensed Victualler's Daughter* and *The Bottle* it features almost exclusively as a source of stress and anxiety. While the visits to gin palaces and gambling dens that pepper *Tom and Jerry* can be read as evidence of increased concern about the existence and condition of the poor in the new metropolis, its central characters are invariably able to distance themselves from the worst aspects of actual suffering and hardship and retreat to the safety provided by their superior social status. The protagonists of the later melodramas are afforded no such hiding place. This is made clear in the opening sequence of *Martha Willis* when Scarlet, the honest guard of the Derby coach, advises Martha to be cautious because, 'London, my lass, to a young country girl is more dangerous than the orchard grounds of Squire Leanskin – there's spring guns, man, child, and woman traps in every corner'.[326] For his own part, and more directly, in a preface to an early printed edition of the play, Jerrold went to some lengths to highlight both the contemporary moral lesson of Martha's story and the realism of its setting:

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[325] Vicinus,'"Helpless and Unfriended"', p.127.
[326] Jerrold, *Martha Willis the Servant Maid*, p. 4.

It is the object of the present drama to display, in the most forcible and striking point of view, the temptations which in the metropolis assail the young and inexperienced on their first outset in life - temptations which, if yielded to, inevitably conduct their victim to wretchedness and shame. It being the peculiar province of the stage to 'hold the mirror up to nature,' to deter by example, and warn by precept, - it is trusted that the present Drama, which abounds in strong and highly wrought pictures of real life, - which contains characters whose originals are to be met with in almost any street in London, will be found not only worthy of the attention of those whose situations in the world it more immediately applies but also interesting to those Patrons of the Theatre who are desirous of finding in a drama skilful combinations of powerful, yet naturally wrought incidents, and vivid portraitures of men and manners as they really are. One of the great geniuses of modern times has said 'truth is strange - stranger than fiction.' This great metropolis teems with persons and events, which, considered with reference to their dramatic capabilities, beggar invention: - every knave has his mystery, every dupe his sorrow, every street its romance of real life. It is these scenes of everyday experience - it is these characters, which are met in our hourly paths - that will be found in the present Drama, but so displayed and grouped, that, whilst they gain an animations and a strength from contrast, they sacrifice no jot of their identity or nature; they lose nothing, save their original grossness. In the Drama, Vice is anatomized, in order to be shunned and hated - and not robed in specious finery, to lure and destroy.[327]

Jerrold's assertion 'persons and events, which … beggar invention' suggest the social and economic realities that characterised modern metropolitan life were not yet a given, did not yet appear as transparent or unremarkable. Despite being ostensibly a history play, *Martha Willis,* stages the metropolis as something new and disquieting.

The ongoing process of rapid urbanisation intensified class awareness and division. The imminent dangers posed by the city may have been felt most acutely by those members of the Pavilion audience who had, like Martha, migrated from the countryside in search of work having previously experienced nothing but rural life. Nevertheless, any worker caught in the machinery of modern capitalist society would have been sensitive to the harsh realities of metropolitan modernity. These were the people to whom *Martha Willis* and *Jane the Licensed Victualler's Daughter* were addressed, and for whom they would have been most likely to resonate as the reflection of a new reality. In preserving for their audiences some opportunity to identify sympathetically with working class characters, such as Walter and Ralph who have fallen from grace, these melodramas also suggest that environmental factors have a significant part to play in the creation of criminals and

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[327]Douglas Jerrold, 'Address to Martha Willis' in *Martha Willis, The Servant Maid: An Original Domestic Drama* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1850), p. 2. Jerrold's, 'Address' is not reprinted in the Dicks' edition quoted elsewhere in this thesis.

criminality. This is something different from attributing villainy to individual and/or selfish motives.

Jerrold's villains in *Martha Willis* are implicitly connected with the city's new and hostile environment. Joannah the gypsy is a sharper and con woman; her son Slug a pickpocket and thief; the outwardly pious pawnbroker, Nunky Gruel, a money-lender and fence. Martha's village sweetheart, Walter, is corrupted by Gruel and drawn into a life of crime as a house-breaker and con artist. Each of these villainous characters embodies a vice particularly associated with the urban environment insofar as population density and anonymity afford increased opportunities for the house-breaker, the fence, the con artist and the pickpocket. The pickpocket and the fence were shortly to be immortalised by Dickens in *Oliver Twist* (1837-38), and went on to become synonymous with early Victorian London. Jerrold also presents both Martha, the honest working class country wench, and the audience with a variety of dubious metropolitan types, whose criminality is encouraged or discouraged according to the shifting urban and non-urban environments that they inhabit. This is most obviously the case in the figure of Speed, who is an honest, if headstrong, youth as long as he remains in his native village but succumbs to temptation almost immediately on arriving in London. Jerrold is as concerned to consider the causes of crime as he is to indulge in excessive representations of it. This is most clearly expressed in the fate he reserves for Nunky Gruel, the thief-maker and corruptor of innocents. Towards the end of the play Gruel suffers a horrible death at the hands of the country lad he has been responsible for corrupting:

> SPEED. Die then. (*Stabs him, he falls – Speed rushes to the chest and takes out plate – Gruel staggers to chest and throws off Speed.*) Ha! This, then, shall finish it. (*Stabs him again – Gruel falls partly into the chest – Speed advances to the body, holding the dirk over it.*) He is dead! The miser's blood is running 'midst the gold; and this is what he laboured for, (*lifts the body into the chest*) to be a murdered corpse upon his wealth. In and rot with all your gains. (*locks chest*) …[328]

This sensational and rather lurid event does not occur without explanation or provocation:

[328] Jerrold, *Martha Willis, the Servant Maid*, p. 13.

GRUEL. You will not murder me?
SPEED. 'Tis life against life.
GRUEL. But why seek me?
SPEED. Why seek you? Why who should the son in peril seek but the father?
GRUEL. I the father.
SPEED. My second and accursed father. When I first knew you I was a happy youth; 'twas you who drew me from the path of peace to the road of guilt.
GRUEL. Slander, 'tis false.
SPEED. What? True you did not say "enter that man's dwelling – drain that stranger's purse," but who when I brought the produce of my crime received me with smiles, with kindly salutations? "Make money," was your cry. I robbed – gained – cheated – you took the gain, and still your cry was "make money." What was a novelty became a habit – you schooled me and your advice made me what I am. Now I dare not name the good man who was once my father – but you, yourself a devil, made a fiend, and I came to you and claim you for my father.
GRUEL. Have you not leagued with a set of villains?
SPEED. If I have, who but you and such as you are, made them villains?[329]

Speed's ironic manipulation of the father/son relationship, and his subsequent brutal murder of the miserly Gruel, transform this scene into something more than a macabre version of the traditional melodramatic encounter between the villain and his victim.[330] While Jerrold's villains are all transgressors, it is the relationship between their transgressions and their interactions with the new urban space that engenders varying levels of sympathy and/or condemnation in the spectator. Jerrold suggests that different kinds of criminal behaviour are being produced and repressed by the shifting environment of the city and its economic organisation. Gruel is judged the dastardlier villain. Consequently, his punishment is more severe and he is denied opportunity for redemption.

This pattern of differentiation continues into the final scene of the play which takes place inside the notorious Newgate prison. In it, alongside the sad conclusion to Martha and Walter's story, Jerrold places an emotionally charged encounter between the environmentally determined criminal Slug and his mother, the gypsy Joannah, which adds nothing to the play in terms of plot development but allows a tacit critique of the criminal justice system. Slug is a

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[329] *Ibid*., p. 12.
[330] The newspapers would have made Jerrold well aware of the growing number of elusive and successful London fences. The most notorious of these, Isaac or Ikey Solomon, whom many believe to have been the model for Dickens' Fagin, was transported to Australia in 1831. At the time of his arrest in 1830 property in Solomon's house was valued at 20,000 pounds. He was tried on 9 July 1830 and his activities were to remain a matter of great public interest for many years. See, Camden Pelham, *Chronicles of Crime; or, The Newgate Calendar* (London: 1843), pp. 235-41.

member of a gang of urban thieves, the child of a criminal mother who has bred him 'from the cradle to the gallows'.[331] He is last encountered awaiting execution.

> JOAN. Answer me, my boy. You know me?
> SLUG. Yes – I wish I never had. I tell you, leave me.
> JOAN. Is this treatment for a mother?
> SLUG. Mother! Yes – ha, ha, ha! Mother!
> JOAN. Did I not give you life?
> SLUG. Yes, and you've given me these.
>   (*Showing his chains*)
> JOAN. Oh! Do not reproach me.
> SLUG. Who then should I reproach? You, my mother, made me what I am – almost before I could speak I was a thief … Because I had been a rogue so long so successfully, I thought justice had forgotten me. I never reflected when I was free, but stone walls work wonders – they make the hardest of us think. I say, leave me! I am to die tomorrow, and you know, as well as I do, how unfit I am to die! … Hence and leave me!
> JOAN. I will not till you forgive me.
> SLUG. All, all but you.
> JOAN. My child!
> SLUG. There it is! – those who took me, brought me here, did their duty, I forgive them – I forgive the officers, the judge, the hangman – they do their duty, I forgive them; but that you have not done yours, I cannot forgive you.

The exchange is compelling because Slug's repentance and self-awareness combine with a clear sense of the environmental factors that have contributed to his early death on the scaffold. Jerrold suggests that criminality is a condition that is relative to social circumstances and not a given, that it is learned rather than innate. *Martha Willis* confronts the issue of increasing levels of crime in the new metropolis more directly, with more immediacy in performance, and with what we might even describe as more 'realism' than we find in Moncrieff's version of *Tom and Jerry*. Although Egan's original features a number of scenes set in Newgate, these are cut in Moncrieff's version. A reluctance to confront grim social realities head-on is apparent, for example, in the cutting of an image of two men awaiting execution in Egan's original.[332] This disturbing scenario is replaced, or even displaced, in Moncrieff's extravaganza by a relentless parade of merriment:

> Now for life in London Town
> Sprees and rambles day and night

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[331] Jerrold, *Martha Willis the Servant Maid*, p. 14.
[332] *Ibid.*, p. 261.

> High and low, and up and down
> Over the hills and far away.[333]

Jerrold, on the other hand, seems intent on allowing his audience to see the condemned man close up, to enter into his discourse, to sympathetically identify with his situation:

> SLUG. My heart swells! (*struggling with himself.*) No, no, I cannot bless her –
> (GAOLER *comes down.*) I cannot! Take her hence. (*crosses to L.*)
> GAOLER. (*lifting her up.*) You'll say farewell to her?
> SLUG. Away with her!
> GAOLER. Only one word.
> SLUG. No, no, away with her! – take her away!
> (GAOLER *has moved her to R.,* SLUG *turns round, and after a moment approaches her, takes her in his arms and exclaims*, "My mother!" *Music.* –
> SLUG *bears her off, followed by* GAOLER, R.)

Slug's tale is a cautionary one, and it evokes the terrible vulnerability of life among the urban poor in 'the unstable market culture of the early nineteenth century, where traditional patterns of deference and paternalism had been eroded'.[334] Jerrold's play features two villain/victims, Slug and Walter, each of whom pays the ultimate price for straying from the straight and narrow and each of whom is allowed a moment of self-awareness and repentance. Martha herself is both the victim of an unhappy social formation – the city itself – and a touchstone for the values that its formation so clearly lacks. Martha's role in the melodrama is largely that of a signifier against which other characters' criminality and deviance are measured. By contrast, Tom and Jerry emerge remarkably unscathed and unshaken from their adventures in the metropolis, although equally confirmed in their social status:

> TOM. … Well, we have been amused, by Life in London, now let us endeavour to profit by it; - let our experience teach us to avoid its quicksands, and make the most of its sunshine;- and in that anticipation, let us hope our kind friends will pardon Tom, Jerry, and Logic, all their sprees and rambles.[335]

The class perspectives that gave rise to *Tom and Jerry* and the other melodramas discussed in this chapter were clearly substantially different. As London moved into the 1830s, entertainments began to appear that engaged with the vicissitudes of London life from a more identifiably lower class

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[333] Moncrieff, *Tom and Jerry*, p. 13.
[334] Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight,* p. 86.
[335] Moncrieff, *Tom and Jerry*, p.72.

perspective. In the earlier play the focus never leaves the upper-class observer whose experience is always privileged, so that, although the crossing sweepers, beggars and chimney sweeps of London might figure as part of the metropolitan spectacle in these representations, no meaningful space is opened up for the expression or exploration of their inner narratives. Unlike Martha Willis, Ralph, Esther or Ruth Thornley, the lower class characters of *Tom and Jerry* do not act as introductions to the wider social scene of which they are part, nor do they offer critiques of their own economic situation.

Domestic melodrama with a decidedly lower class slant became staple fare at the new generation of theatres that sprang up in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. By the 1840s their subject matter included temperance, factory conditions, the inequities of the legal and educational system: land rights, housing conditions, rural poverty, urban poverty, and all manner of class relations. Numerous plays written for the minor theatres in this decade by dramatists such as George Almar, George Dibdin Pitt, Edward Fitzball, William Moncrieff, T. P. Taylor, Thomas Haines, John Walker and Douglas Jerrold and John Baldwin Buckstone, addressed social issues of specific relevance to their predominantly lower class audiences. Their plays featured lower class heroes and heroines struggling to live decently and with dignity in economic conditions that made this humble ambition an increasingly difficult task. Invariably, in these plays, virtuous lower class characters demonstrated diligence, loyalty and patience in the face of economic injustice, unfair legal systems, unscrupulous employers, ruthless landlords and poverty. Domestic melodramas such as *Martha Willis*, *The Bottle* and *Jane the Licensed Victualler's Daughter* are thus often exemplary texts for understanding how popular artists managed the tension between the desire to make the city readable and knowable and anxieties about poverty, crime, alienation and the city's impenetrable and disorientating labyrinthine forms. As Walter Benjamin noted, 'fear, revulsion and horror were the emotions that the big city crowd aroused in those who first observed it', and such emotions were often experienced by the heroes and heroines of urban melodrama as

they battled against the forces of wickedness marshalled against them in a world of strangers.[336]

The minor theatres of the East End and the Surrey side may not have been hotbeds of working class radicalism, but nevertheless there was a reciprocal relationship between the form and content of the melodramas the lower-class audiences who attended these theatres enjoyed, and the textures of their daily life in the metropolis. The existence of a growing lower class audience in the new metropolis impacted not only on the expansion of theatre building that occurred during the period, but also on the repertoire performed at these new venues. What Rob Breton has described as the 'romance of the lost cause' is manifest in the melodramas discussed above, and represents acknowledgment in the popular imagination of the inability to achieve social betterment and economic justice within existing social structures.[337]

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[336] Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, translated by Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1983), p. 131.
[337] Rob Breton, 'Ghosts in the Machina', p. 563.

6

Accelerated Plotting and Happy Endings

In his 2007 chapter 'The Death of Tragedy; or, the Birth of Melodrama', Jeffrey Cox, makes interesting use of the work of French 'philosopher of speed' Paul Virilio in a discussion about the temporal dynamics of patent house melodrama during the Napoleonic period.[338] In particular, Cox draws on Virilio's 'analysis of the connections between a culture of speed and the militarisation of modern life', arguing that:

> … melodrama gains its initial power as perhaps the key means of both representing and creating the accelerated culture of perpetual war during the Napoleonic era, by which I do not mean that we should read each melodrama as an allegory of the battle with Napoleon but rather that the theatrical tactics of the melodrama begin to organize the audience to see the militarized world that they come to inhabit.[339]

The important ideological questions for audiences and for critics circulate around the precise nature of what the melodrama is waging war against, and for Cox the answer is clear. Melodrama is perpetually battling against 'the energies unleashed during the age of democratic revolutions' and fighting to preserve 'a supposedly transcendent order of, church, state and family, of God, King and Father', and is essentially reactionary, anti-progressive and anti-democratic.[340] Cox is writing about melodrama in a different manifestation and period than those covered in this study, and his conclusions about the ideological operations of the genre are quite different from those presented here. The aim of this chapter, however, to extend Cox's assertion that Virilio's ideas about acceleration and perpetual war as defining features of the mechanisation of Western culture can help to explain the temporal and thematic organisation of melodramatic narrative. Such a connection is

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[338] Jeffrey N. Cox, 'The Death of Tragedy; or, the Birth of Melodrama' in Davis and Holland, eds., *The Performing Century*, p.171.
[339] *Ibid*., p.175.
[340] *Ibid*., p.176.

especially helpful in shedding light on the relationship between melodrama and the organisational centre of Virilio's new accelerated culture, the metropolis.

Paul Virilio is a thinker of immense range and influence, and it is not within the scope of this chapter to draw upon his entire oeuvre. The usefulness of his theoretical work in the context of this thesis stems from his emphasis on speed as the defining characteristic of contemporary Western culture. For Virilio, technologies of war are of crucial significance in all debates about urbanisation and the organisation of Western cultural life in the modern and postmodern eras. Unlike Marx, he argues that the movement from feudalism to capitalism was not primarily an economic transformation but a military and technological one, so that where Marx postulates a materialist conception of history, driven by market forces and changing methods of production, Virilio expounds a military one, arguing that 'in fact, there was no "industrial revolution," but only a "dromocratic revolution"; there is no democracy, only dromocracy; there is no strategy, only dromology.[341] Dromology, derived from the Greek dromos, meaning 'to race,' is the term Virilio coins to describe the logic and politics of speed. In perhaps his most influential text, *Speed and Politics,* he offers a war model of the expansion and transformation of the modern city, in which the fortified city of the feudal period is understood as a relatively stationary and largely unassailable war machine. He argues that 'history progresses at the speed of its weapons systems'.[342] The development of increasingly transportable and accelerated weaponry undermined the stability of the feudal city because these technological advances transformed siege warfare into a war of *movement.* Crucially, Virilio insists that the speed at which something happens can change its essential nature, and technologies that move faster quickly dominate those that are slower.

The next section of this chapter presents a case for rethinking certain aspects of melodramatic plotting by exploring conceptual links between melodrama and Virilio's notion of accelerated culture. It is not a particular aim

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[341] Paul Virilio, *Speed and Politics: An Essay on Dromology*, translated by Mark Polizzotti (New York: Semiotext(e), 1986), p. 46.
[342] *Ibid.*, p. 68.

of this analysis to promote a Virilian world view, but rather to establish a mutually constitutive relationship between melodrama and the metropolis forged via the cultural imperative to compress time delays, an imperative initiated by the rapid development of technology. One obvious example of time compression through technology would be the railway, a technology that effectively collapsed the temporal distance between places, thus accelerating all kinds of cultural exchange. In practical terms, melodramatists working within a Virilian accelerated culture were obliged to employ artistic machinery of specific kinds to engage and hold the attention of a hyper-stimulated metropolitan audience, in a theatre environment that provided many potential distractions. There was often little variation, for example, between lighting levels on stage and in auditoria, a situation that allowed audiences to observe each other as clearly as they did the action on stage.

Alongside effects such as the spectacular rendering of recognisable landmarks discussed in Chapter Two, the realisation of recognisable images from other media, or the use of music to create atmosphere and tension, melodrama was marked by an intensification of narrative energy and, in particular, a fixation on forward motion. This can be seen, for instance, in the streamlining of narratives required by the widespread practice of adapting literary sources for the stage. Commenting on George Almar's adaptation of *Oliver Twist* (Surrey, 1838), for example, the critic of *The Times* – after giving a very negative assessment of the appeal of Dickens's novel – commends the melodrama for its narrative economy:

> The drama, however, may be spoken of with almost unqualified praise, both as regards the incidents selected for scenic effect, and the manner in which they are rendered effective in the representation. The tedious portions of the novel are necessarily left out, the monotonous descriptions are avoided, and the repetition of endless vulgarisms removed. In a word, the play is the essence of the book.[343]

Reports of audience responses to stage adaptations of *Oliver Twist*, especially the scene in which Bill Sykes kills Nancy, testify to the effectiveness of sensationalist melodramatic machinery in fixing the attention of and emotionally engaging the audience, as well as streamlining Dickens's narrative.

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[343] 'Surrey Theatres', *The Times*, 21 November 1838, p.5.

Some of these accounts have become the stuff of theatre lore, passed down from generation to generation. In his study of the Surrey Theatre in its heyday, *A Major London Minor*, William Knight quotes Erroll Sherson's *London's Lost Theatres* at a point where Sherson is quoting John Hollingshead's description of the death of Nancy, for instance. In *Ragged London* Hollingshead conjures the atmosphere inside the Victoria theatre at the crucial moment, and comments more generally on the audience's full-blooded response to villainy:

> The yell when Bill Sykes murders Nancy is like the roar of a thousand wild beasts, and they show their disapprobation of the act, and their approbation of the actor, by cursing him in no measured terms. I once heard an eminent performer say that he looked upon hisses as applause when he played Iago; and if he played it at the Victoria Theatre, earnestly and powerfully, he would stand a chance of being spit upon and pelted.[344]

Elsewhere in this thesis a number of arguments are developed that foreground complicating factors in domestic melodrama, particularly the presence of secondary narratives, comic subplots and star performers, thus stressing its satirical and inter-textual qualities. However, the powerfully forward-moving motion of melodramatic narrative is undeniably central to its appeal, and while certainly punctuated by moments of intense emotional energy and comic relief, melodrama was primarily fuelled by suspense, by the need to know how the central mystery or injustice in each play would be resolved. Hollingshead's account demonstrates among other things, for instance, the strength of the audience's desire to see Sykes punished for his crimes. This use of suspense to propel the forward motion of melodramatic narrative might also explain why Taylor adds the narrative of George and Esther to Cruikshank's pictorial rendering of the relentlessly downward trajectory of the Thornleys in *The Bottle.* After all, while there may be horrid fascination, there is no great mystery for the audience in witnessing the Thornley narrative. The question of how and when Esther and George will be reunited, however, remains unresolved for most of the play and therefore generates suspense that both holds the audience's attention and creates the sense of onward movement towards the resolution. Many individual

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[344]John Hollingshead, *Ragged London* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1861), pp. 180-181. See also, Erroll Sherson, *London's Lost Theatres of the Nineteenth-Century* (London: John Lane, 1925), p. 13, and Knight, *A Major London Minor*, pp. 174-175.

melodramas contain moments of heightened suspense that intensify this effect. The sequence in the brick fields of Battersea in Selby's *London By Night*, for example, when the heroine's ill-fated father is tied to the railway tracks in the path of an oncoming train, fixes the audience in a moment of intense anxiety, or even terror, that makes the relief of the rescue all the more welcome.[345] Relief in such circumstances comes in a rush, thus accentuating the forward motion of the narrative.

It is worth acknowledging, as Cox does, that such insights are not entirely new. A number of theorists, including Simon Shepherd and Ben Singer for example, have commented on the ways in which 'melodrama raises situations of threat, terror or frustration which suspend the audience in an anxious state, that demands a resolution'.[346] It is specifically on the relationship between melodrama and speed, however, that Cox's use of Virilio becomes illuminating. Cox argues:

> Melodrama is built for speed. This is not to suggest that melodramas proceed at one pace, but it is to argue, with the philosopher of speed, Paul Virilio, that speed is always present, even when we are moving in a lower gear, at a lower speed; or, to use another Virilian formulation, an engine built for speed must have a brake, so that the breaks in the forward motion of the plot are brakes on the action's speed, but the plot's motor keeps running.[347]

Accounts in this study of the process of urbanisation in the early nineteenth century and the metropolis it produced demonstrate that speed, and an often alarming sense of acceleration, were defining characteristics. Wirth notes, for example, how far 'technological developments in transportation and communication' and the accompanying collapse of 'natural' time differences enabled the rise of the modern city, creating a new era in human history.[348] Everything was faster.

Alongside his theorising of an accelerated culture, Virilio's notion of the 'integral accident' is helpful in explaining the affective power of the moments of violence, disaster and crisis that typified melodramatic dramaturgy. For Virilio, accidents are a key feature of technological advance. He argues that in

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[345] Selby, *London By Night*, p.12.
[346] Cox, 'The Death of Tragedy', p.171.
[347] *Ibid*.
[348] Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', p.4.

every case when new technology is engineered, weaknesses and errors accompany its creation:

> The accident is an inverted miracle, a secular miracle, a revelation. When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck; when you invent the plane you also invent the plane crash; and when you invent electricity, you invent electrocution...Every technology carries its own negativity, which is invented at the same time as technical progress.[349]

According to Virilio, then, technology and the accident are trapped in an active relationship. As technology becomes more advanced the problems that cause it to malfunction become more elusive. Consequently, the development of new technology typically constitutes an attempt to regulate the irregularities manifest in the system and to eradicate the anarchic power of the accident. This notion of an ongoing battle against the negativity produced by technological innovation provides a useful way of thinking about melodrama's repeated patterns. Virilio is usually thought of as a theorist of contemporary mediatised culture but his understanding of speed as a defining characteristic of modernisation, and his notion of the accident as an omnipresent threat, allow a consideration of two important aspects of melodramatic practice. Firstly, melodrama's existence as an extraordinarily time-based, forward-moving art form can be linked to the accelerated culture of the new metropolis. Secondly, the apocalyptic aspects of melodrama, its recourse to an 'aesthetics of shock, not contemplation', and its endless focus on 'things going wrong' can be related to Virilio's theory of the integral accident. [350]

In Dibdin Pitt's adaptation of *Sweeney Todd* the speed of the action increases and intensifies, as first Todd and then his opponents appear in the ascendancy. In addition, the frequency with which the balance of power shifts from one side to the other increases as the play progresses, ensuring the audience's continued engagement. To avert detection Todd incarcerates his neighbour, murders his accomplice, has his servant committed to an asylum and frames an innocent man for murder. The fast moving apocalyptic flavour of the narrative is reflected in Sweeney's own rhetoric:

[349] Paul Virilio, *Politics of the Very Worst* (New York: Semiotext(e), 1999), p.89.
[350] Chambers, *Popular Culture: The Metropolitan Experience*, p. 20.

> SWEE. Gathering clouds warn the mountaineer of the approaching storm; let them now warn me to provide against danger. I have too many enemies to be safe. I will dispose of them one by one, till no evidence of my guilt remain.[351]

Later in this scene Todd murders his accomplice and disposes of her body in the furnace of her own pie shop, the same furnace in which she has disposed of the remains of his other victims:

> SWEE. Now let the furnace consume the body as it would wheaten straw, and destroy all evidence of my guilt in this, as it has in my manifold deeds of blood.
>
> *(Sweeney opens the furnace door, c.; a fierce glare lights the stage – he drags the body of Mrs Lovett to the oven as Act drop falls.)*

The tale of Sweeney Todd, which was to have a long afterlife in the many versions that proceeded from the original Penny Dreadful story, is a powerful manifestation of anxiety about anonymity and stranger-danger in the new metropolis. Sweeney's mechanised barber's chair, of course, is a death trap and along with Mrs Lovett's furnace is the story's most enduring image.

In the final scene of Dibdin Pitt's adaptation, Colonel Jeffrey stands in the dock accused of the murder of his friend and colleague Mark Ingestrie, who has fallen victim to Todd's murderous greed and the mechanical chair in the play's opening scene:

> JEFF. My lord, circumstances are against me. I can make no defence, call no witnesses to prove my innocence – the stranger from whom I received those pearls has failed to make his appearance, and my bare word is nothing –
> JUDGE. The statement that you received those pearls from an unknown stranger in a public thoroughfare, is so improbable, that it cannot be accepted for a moment as truth.
> JEFF. Then I must sink into the grave with ignominy, and my name, which has been hitherto untarnished by dishonour, become the scorn of all decent men.[352]

At this climactic moment it seems unlikely that evidence will arrive to save Jeffrey. The audience knows, after all, that the masked stranger from whom the colonel received the incriminating string of pearls is none other than Todd himself. Equally sure of Jeffrey's innocence and Todd's guilt, the audience is brought to a heightened state of suspense and effectively what agitates it 'is frustration, an emotional effect derived from non-communication'.[353] Such

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[351] Dibdin Pitt, *Sweeney Todd, p.7.*
[352] *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
[353] Simon Shepherd and Peter Womack, *English Drama: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1996), p. 196.

effects work to engage the audience members' attention and intensify the desire for narrative resolution, even though their knowledge of generic conventions tells them Todd will be unmasked and Jeffrey will be saved. In the end the ghost of Mark Ingestrie appears in the courtroom causing a terrified Todd to confess his guilt.

The majority of melodramas were animated by a sense of inevitability, a sense of moving swiftly and inexorably towards a desired outcome. The organisation of materials in the run up to the desired outcome was of crucial importance in managing and maintaining audience interest and involvement. Some melodramas were, after all, far more successful than others, although their resolutions might be thought of as equally predictable. In common with other nineteenth-century fictions, melodrama relied unashamedly on a clear sense of plotting or 'plottedness' for its affective power. Melodramatic narratives often foregrounded their own plottedness by increasing the speed with which they were delivered. The structuring operations deployed by narratives are always historically and culturally specific and melodrama was no exception, as the discussion of Virilian notions of acceleration, the integral accident and the metropolis indicates. The nineteenth century is typically thought of as a heyday for unselfconscious plotting – and not just in melodrama. In his 1984 study *Reading for the Plot*, Peter Brooks notes:

> … the range of meanings assigned to the word plot in the dictionary includes the sense of the scheme or machination to the accomplishment of some end – the sense apparently derived from the "contamination" of the French *complot* … nineteenth-century novels regularly conceive plot as *complot*: they are structured by a plotting for and toward something, a machination of desire.[354]

As the arguments presented in the previous chapter demonstrate, the popularity of Jerrold, Buckstone, Haines, Fitzball and Dibdin Pitt with audiences in the second quarter of the century was a product of and a licence to engage with contemporary social issues, through confidently and speedily plotted action in a highly demonstrative mode. In this sense it is plotting as an activity, as the development of meaning specifically through sequence and

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[354] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984), p. 113.

succession that might provide the best route to understanding the enormous appeal of a successful domestic melodrama.

John Faucit Saville's *Wapping Old Stairs* (Surrey, 1837) is a good subject for an explication of melodramatic plotting, not least because of its origins.[355] Saville takes a popular ballad of the same name for his source:

> Your Molly has never been false, she declares,
> Since last time we parted at Wapping Old Stairs,
> When I swore that I still would continue the same,
> And gave you the 'bacco box, marked with your name.
>
> When I pass'd a whole fortnight between decks with you,
> Did I e'er give a kiss, Tom, to one of the crew?
> To be useful and kind, with my Thomas I stay'd,
> For his trousers I wash'd, and his grog too I made.
>
> Though you threaten'd, last Sunday, to walk in the Mall
> With Susan from Deptford, and likewise with Sal,
> In silence I stood your unkindness to hear,
> And only upbraided my Tom, with a tear.
>
> Why should Sal, or should Susan, than me be more priz'd?
> For the heart that is true, Tom, should ne'er be despis'd;
> Then be constant and kind, nor your Molly forsake,
> Still your trousers I'll wash, and your grog too I'll make.[356]

The lyric, sung from the perspective of a young woman slighted in love, contains limited narrative information. Its affective power and widespread appeal rely on local interest and on privileging the discourse of the faithful lover undervalued. Saville begins, then, with a source that is well known but lacking in plot, indeed necessarily in search of a plot.

He opens with Molly anxiously awaiting the return after a two-year voyage of her sweetheart Tom to his mooring at Wapping Old Stairs. Tom's arrival is imminent and promises to bring financial respite, a ring, and the much anticipated nuptial celebrations. But Tom does not come, and Molly is obliged to send Sam Sallow a former servant of her father's to look for him. In Saville's version Tom is less faithless than hot-headed and easily led, and Sam discovers him fallen into bad company, carousing with a group of ne'er-do-wells and gambling away most of his hard-earned nest egg. He has apparently forgotten his faithful Molly, and throws a beaker at Sam's head

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[355] John Faucit Saville, *Wapping Old Stairs,* (London: Cumberland's Minor Theatre Vol. 13, 1828-42).
[356] The lyric is anonymous but exists in a number of printed versions with piano accompaniment from the early part of the nineteenth century onwards. The version reprinted here is John Percy, *Wapping Old Stairs, A Favourite Song* (London: G. Shade, 1818).

when reminded of his pledge to her. In the cold light of day, however, crippled by remorse and thoroughly ashamed, Tom learns that Molly is in abject distress and about to lose her furniture to the bailiffs. He resolves to do what he can to help his beloved girl and her ailing father, but when Molly comes to seek him out on his boat, fate intervenes again and a misunderstanding sends Tom into a jealous rage, ending in him rejecting Molly. Blinded by tears, Molly accidentally falls from the gangway into the river, affording Tom the opportunity to rescue her and demonstrate that he is good-hearted and brave after all, if more than a little foolish. This much of the narrative, with suitable embellishments, is extracted quite straightforwardly by Saville from the ballad, but it takes place in the first act of the play, and alongside it Saville introduces the gradual precipitation of a darker plot which grows up around the young lovers and threatens to overwhelm them.

Molly lives with her father Adams, an old sailor who suffers from fits of delirium that hint at something troubling his conscience and lying heavily on his soul. Wide-eyed and trembling, at once fearful and moody, quick to anger and still quicker to tears, it is clear that Adams 'has done a deed in days gone by, for which he cannot rest', and from which presumably only confession and repentance will bring relief.[357] Adams has a secret, then, which is repressed, the expected revelation of which generates suspense, direction and intention in the unfolding plot of *Wapping Old Stairs*. In the second half of the play the plot moves inexorably and with increasing urgency towards its exposure. There is a growing sense that the characters, and especially old Adams, will have to deal at some point with the return of this repressed narrative, a sense which is partly created by the repetition of moments when visual impressions of the past horror break through into the consciousness of the old man during his fits of delirium. There are, in the first instance, three plots in Saville's drama: the 'official' plot, drawn from the well known source, the repressed plot of Old Adams and a comic sub plot, mention of which will be made later.

The example of Adams's secret is useful because its addition points to the importance of repression to the power of melodramatic narrative in general. Saville generates through the mystery of old Adams's ravings an

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[357] Saville, *Wapping Old Stairs*, p.5.

intense level of energy that cannot be released through the surface plot, any more than it can be drawn from it, since this kind of energy is simply not present in the original ballad. It is clear from the opening scene that forward progress in the narrative will necessitate the solving of mysteries set up at the outset, and this is important because in any well-plotted melodrama the energies released and aroused, and the desires they provoke, especially in the early stages, are never lost. In *Wapping Old Stairs* Saville seeks to conserve and manage this energy by way of a dialectic between Adams's enigmatic past and the inexorable forward motion of the narrative towards the desired resolution.

In the second act Adams's unsympathetic landlord, Squire Craverly, who is responsible for the repossession of the old man's furniture, becomes interested in the ravings of the ancient mariner and resolves to interrogate him. Adams duly recognises Craverly as the very villain who years earlier had induced him to commit the dastardly crime that has so troubled his conscience. Craverly, it transpires, had a nephew named George whom he wished to disinherit. He paid Adams to assassinate the youth, to deal him a blow to the head and dump his body into the river. It is the events of that fateful evening long ago that still trouble the old man. But Adams has retained and hidden one vital document, a will that would have given the uncle legal possession of his nephew's property. Craverly determines to exhort this document from the old man by fair means or foul, but since no amount of threats can induce the old man to reveal its whereabouts he is duly incarcerated in the cellar of Craverly's mansion until such time as he can be persuaded to tell all.

The uncle's plans have been doubly frustrated it turns out. His nephew George did not die on that fateful night but instead swam to safety and continued on his journey to India. He has recently returned to London on the very same ship as Tom, the young men having become firm friends. George is determined to bring the Squire to book and seek justice for Molly's father but in a further accidental plot complication he is wounded by Tom, who mistakes him for a robber. Tom now stands wrongly accused of theft and attempted murder and faces the gallows, a situation that intensifies suspense and emphasises the onward motion of the plot. Of course Tom is no less likely

to be hanged than George is to be drowned and in the end both men are destined for happiness. The narrative drives through speedily to a denouement in which the injured man speedily recovers, the missing will is discovered hidden under one of the eponymous Wapping Old Stairs, a portion of the estate is the reward for Tom's loyalty and honesty, the lovers are reunited, and the old man is pardoned.

Three prominent aspects of this melodrama – its fast forward-moving plot line, its recourse to sensational incident (Molly falling into the river, Tom wrongly accused of attempted murder) and its providential ending – are also manifest in Dibdin Pitt's version of *Sweeney Todd* and in many of the other plays discussed in this study. Such characteristic tropes did nothing to improve the genre's image with middle-class critics who objected to these generic works on the grounds of their primary relation to the demands of the popular audience for escapism and sensationalism. In the event, definitions of melodrama, and by extension its appeal, continued to be a matter of selective emphasis and by the end of Victoria's reign the link between melodrama's poor reputation and classist constructions of the popular audience had been all but cemented. George Bernard Shaw's assessment can stand for many:

> Its formula grew up in the days when the spread of elementary schooling produced a huge mass of playgoers sufficiently educated to want plays instead of dog fights, but not educated enough to enjoy or understand the masterpieces of dramatic art.[358]

The grounds on which generations of scholars criticised melodrama varied, but were often political. One approach was to characterise it as crude, as providing 'a panacea for the easily satisfied', its lack of sophistication evidenced by the fact that it always dealt 'out the most rudimentary variety of poetic justice'.[359] According to Michael Booth, it is best understood as drama for the 'the new uneducated and largely illiterate urban masses, who lived in bleak and depressing circumstances'.[360]

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[358] George Bernard Shaw, 'Against the Well-Made Play', in *Preface to Three Plays by Brieux* (London: A. C. Fifield, 1911), p. xviii.
[359] Kent G. Gallagher, 'Emotion in Tragedy and Melodrama', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 17: 3 (1965), pp. 215-219, p. 215.
[360] Michael R. Booth, *Prefaces to English Nineteenth-Century Theatre* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), p.25.

Melodramatic narrative, according to this way of thinking, is always predictable, comprised as it is of elements demanded by the popular audience. Thus, for James L. Smith, melodrama's 'clear cut endings offer[ed] an audience emotional pleasures equally clear-cut and extreme'.[361] What emerges is a very strong focus on the 'ending' as the defining moment in any given melodrama. Since the 1990s scholarship has sought to complicate the ideological assumptions that underwrite such simplistic readings of melodrama, by drawing attention both to its affective power and the ways in which its audience may have experienced it as multidimensional. Even so, it is still generally accepted that when an honest melodramatic hero overcomes seemingly insurmountable odds and manages a victory at the end, melodrama displays the qualities 'demanded by the audience – that of a corrective dream world'.[362] Conventions in narrative and plotting invariably respond to cultural pressures and the clear-cut endings, often figured around unlikely interventions of fate, that were typical of melodrama appeared by the mid twentieth century entirely out of step with critical and aesthetic tastes. As far as the theatre is concerned a growing mistrust of neat endings can be seen in the work of Samuel Beckett, for instance, and in the practices of the theatre of the absurd and various manifestations of postmodern theatre. No neat endings, no easy revelation of the play's meaning, no pandering to the audience's desire for meaningful closure, 'no spectacular dénouement, no distribution of awards and punishments, no tie-up, through marriages and deaths' of the characters' lives.[363] By contrast, as Martha Vicinus has observed, in melodrama happy endings 'tying everything together offer solace by their very nature, because they assert that unwilled events will finally bring good fortune'.[364] As Vicinus's comment demonstrates, the unlikely interventions of fate that enable the happy ending in melodrama have most often been read as conservative, and therefore as politically reactionary and anti-progressive. In this sense they are usefully considered in relation to the

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[361] James L. Smith, *Melodrama* (London: Methuen, 1973), p.9.
[362] Hartmut Islemann, 'Radicalism in the Melodrama of the Early Nineteenth-Century', in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, eds., *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* , pp. 191-210, p. 202.
[363] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot,* p. 314.
[364] Vicinus, '"Helpless and Unfriended"', p. 131.

arguments about political modernity and its manifestation in domestic melodrama developed elsewhere in this thesis.

One result of what might be called the 'problem of the happy ending' in melodrama is that some critics by locating the subversive only in exceptional melodramas have sought to assert the genre's radical potential. The perceived radicalism of John Walker's *The Factory Lad* (Surrey, 1832), for example, has become associated precisely with its rejection of a number of recognisable melodramatic tropes, particularly the happy ending.[365] Johann Schmidt has noted, for instance, that 'the final rescue' of the hero 'with its obligatory poetic justice' fails to materialise in Walker's play, and has argued that the customary relief associated with melodramatic closure 'is deliberately set aside' for the sake of making a strong political statement.[366] Indeed, one of the ways in which critics have argued for the political efficacy of *The Factory Lad* is to contrast its unhappy ending favourably with other happy endings from the same period.[367] The arguments presented in this thesis, by contrast, are intended to locate a more widespread popular lower class aesthetic at work in mainstream domestic melodrama. The aim in the opening section of this chapter was to demonstrate that accelerated 'plottedness' offered its own pleasures to metropolitan audiences, pleasures that were experienced in the unfolding textures and dynamics of melodramatic narratives, as well as at their resolutions. The aim of the next section is to offer a new reading of melodrama's providential happy endings, by considering typical examples rather than searching out and focusing on exceptions.

Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer* again provides fertile ground. Beyond foregrounding the concerns and anxieties of the rural poor in the figure of Luke himself, the play's resolution rewards closer attention and analysis. The final scene involves Luke's death, and thus the removal of the most direct threat to the tenant Farmer Wakefield's livelihood. The old man is reunited

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[365] John Walker, *The Factory Lad,* (London: J. Duncombe & Co., 1825?).

[366] Johann N. Schmidt, *Aesthetik des Melodramas: Studien zu einmen Genre des populären Theatres um England des 19. Jahrbunderts* (Heidelberg: C. Winter, 1986), p. 53. Louis James also notes those 'Labour historians who have seized on John Walker's *The Factory Lad* (1832) as the beginnings of socialist drama' while ignoring earlier plays such as Douglas Jerrold's *Mutiny on the Nore* (Pavilion, 1830). Louis James, 'Taking Melodrama Seriously: Theatre and Nineteenth-Century Studies' in *History Workshop Journal*, 3:1 (1977), pp. 151-158, p.156.

[367] See, for instance, Ilsemann, 'Radicalism in the Melodrama of the Early Nineteenth Century', p. 204.

with his long lost son, who as a child, it will be remembered, has been sold to gypsies by the vindictive Luke. Buckstone thus provides the kind of 'happy ending' that has come to be seen as characteristic of melodrama. The unlikely return of the lost son precisely at the moment of his family's greatest distress provides a typical example of the *deus ex machina* device that has been seen by critics both as evidence of the genre's aesthetic incoherence – the *deus* offering the only way out of ridiculously unrealistic and complicated melodramatic plots – and also its audience's 'psychological regression in the face of the harsh external world'.[368] In 'Radicalism in the Melodrama of the Early Nineteenth Century' Hartmut Ilsemann augments this line of criticism by understanding the effects of the mechanical plot device employed at the end of *Luke the Labourer* as fundamentally politically conservative and recuperative:

> The happy end and the comparatively mild punishment dealt the villain are comfortably balanced, which indicates that the affective structure of *Luke the Labourer* … promotes submission and conformity with the system rather than social change.[369]

Since Luke's death can hardly be described as 'mild' punishment, it is possible that Ilsemann is reading the local Squire, whose lecherous designs on the farmer's daughter are thwarted by the timely return of her brother, as the major villain in the piece. He is also addressing Jerrold's *The Rent Day* (Covent Garden, 1832) at this point, which might add to the confusion. Nevertheless, although the Squire is certainly a dastardly villain, the really significant and emotionally charged relationships in *Luke the Labourer* exist between the lower class characters, and all affective suffering, joy, aspiration and disappointment relates to their experience. Alongside Terry's decision to take the role of the character eponymised in the play's title, the focus in contemporary accounts of the disturbing effects of the figure of Luke argue that he is the more important figure. At the play's climax, the Squire is notable only for his absence. As the Wakefield family is on the point of being burnt alive by the vengeful labourer who has climbed onto the roof of their cottage,

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[368] *Ibid*, p. 202.
[369] *Ibid*., p.204. Ilsemann is in the process, at this point, of arguing that John Walker's *The Factory Lad* (Surrey, 1832) is more radical precisely because it refuses the conventionally happy ending of melodrama.

satisfactory resolution in Buckstone's play is achieved only by the providential return of Philip, Wakefield's long-lost son. Philip is thankfully vigorous enough to protect his aging parents and his sister and despatches the villain. The immediate danger to the Farmer's well-being and livelihood is thus removed. The circumstances and actions of the honest tenant farmer are of interest here.

Like Esther in Taylor's *The Bottle,* despite persistently deferring gratification and being consistently diligent, Wakefield is unable to achieve prosperity within the existing system through his own efforts. Both the vengeful labourer and the local Squire, who is intent on exploiting the fiscal distress of his tenant to extort sexual favours from his daughter, mercilessly persecute him. In Buckstone's narrative, rather than extricating himself from difficulty by his own efforts, or appealing with any success to legal or fiscal authority, Wakefield is obliged to rely on the intervention of a mechanical plot device for relief. He is rescued by an extremely unlikely intervention of fate. Significantly, the important societal conflict between the tenant farmer and the landowner that drives the action of this play is never actually resolved. On the contrary, at the end of *Luke the Labourer* Wakefield has no more power over the economic forces that control his life than he did at the height of his distress. Diligence and prudence have not proved enough to produce contentment or prosperity. The use of the mechanical plot device to achieve resolution in this play can therefore be read as 'exposing' the extent to which 'the only way to survive in an unjust world is through an unworldly intervention'.[370] Thought of in these terms, the extremely unlikely happy ending, so synonymous with melodrama's supposed aesthetic poverty, can be seen as a technique for highlighting the extent to which ordinary people were excluded from established apparatuses of power. In the case of Buckstone's play, although within the its ethical system Luke is definitely on the wrong side, he is represented as equally powerless in the face of economic forces. The final tableau, which features the tenant farmer reunited with his lost son, is complicated by the presence of the dead body of the vengeful labourer centre-stage.

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[370] Rob Breton, 'Ghosts in the Machina: Plotting in Chartist and Working-Class Fiction', *Victorian Studies*, 47:4 (2005), pp. 557-575, p. 560.

Elsewhere in domestic melodrama lower class heroes and heroines struggled to live decently and with dignity in economic conditions that made this an increasingly difficult task. Invariably, in these plays, virtuous characters demonstrated diligence, loyalty and patience in the face of economic injustice, unfair legal systems, unscrupulous employers, ruthless landlords and poverty. Typically they were saved from ruin at the last moment by some unlikely intervention, such as the timely return of a long lost relative or friend, as in Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer* and T. P. Taylor's *The Bottle* (City of London, 1847); or the discovery of some hitherto unknown inheritance, as in Lancaster's *Ruth, the Lass that Loved a Sailor* (Royal Standard, 1841) and Saville's *Wapping Old Stairs* (Surrey, 1837); or the recovery of a crucial piece of evidence, as in J. P. Hart's *Jane, The Licensed Victualler's Daughter* (Pavilion, 1840) or Jerrold's *Black-Ey'd Susan* (Surrey, 1829). The sensational ending of the latter provides another interesting example of the operations of the *machina* conclusion both because it has attracted negative criticism and because it was the most acclaimed and enduring nautical melodrama of the century. *Black-Ey'd Susan* is also an interesting hybrid, combining elements of nautical melodrama with its patriotic emphasis and the more local and familial concerns of the domestic.

In the course of Jerrold's play, the honest sailor William's pretty wife Susan is persecuted by a variety of villains. The opening scene introduces us to Dograss, her heartless uncle and landlord, who has tricked William into going to sea and is now threatening to evict the poor girl for failing to keep up with the rent. In the subsequent scene Hatchet, the leader of a gang of local smugglers who has altogether more lustful designs on the heroine, lays plans to supplant William by giving Susan a false report of his death. Susan's crises deepen when, at the beginning of the second act, William's commanding officer Captain Crosstree also falls under her spell and declares his lustful intent: 'I know it is wrong, but I will see her—and come what may, I must and will possess her'.[371] Subsequently a drunken Crosstree's attempt to molest Susan provokes William to violent action in defence of his wife. He is soon after court-marshalled and sentenced to death for the crime of striking a

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[371] Jerrold, *Black-Ey'd Susan,* p. 21.

superior officer. In the final scene William is seen stoically accepting the sentence of his hastily convened court martial:

> SCENE V. *The Forecastle of the ship—Procession along the starboard gangway; minute bell tolls.*—MASTER-AT-ARMS *with a drawn sword under his arm, points next to the prisoner;* WILLIAM *follows without his neckcloth and jacket, a* MARINE *on each side;* OFFICER OF MARINES *next;* ADMIRAL, CAPTAIN, LIEUTENANT, *and* MIDSHIPMEN, *following.* WILLIAM *kneels; and all aboard appear to join in prayer with him. The procession then marches on and halts at the gangway;* MARINE OFFICER *delivers up prisoner to the* MASTER-AT-ARMS *and* BOATSWAIN, *a* SAILOR *standing at one of the forecastle guns, with the lock-string in his hand.—A platform extends from the cat-head to the fore-rigging. Yellow flag flying at the fore. Colours half-mast down—Music—*WILLIAM *embraces the union jack— shakes the* ADMIRAL's *hand.*
>
> *Master-at Arms.* Prisoner, are you prepared?
> WILLIAM. Bless you! Bless you all—
>
> <div align="right">[*Mounts the platform*.</div>

This elaborately choreographed sequence, which goes to some length to emphasise William's piety, loyalty and humility, is interrupted by the timely intervention of William's commanding officer who produces a previously unheard of document which proves that William had in fact already been formally discharged from the navy before striking Captain Crosstree, thus ensuring the longed-for reprieve. The document has literally surfaced in the hands of Susan's wicked uncle Doggrass, who has been drowned. In this highly artificial way melodramatic justice is satisfied and the audience is rescued from the terrible prospect of witnessing the hero's death.

Hostility to the particularly mechanical and artificial ending of this play has been a feature in recent discussion. According to these accounts, not only is William unacceptably passive in the face of an unjust legal system but the *machina* device allows the audience to escape this harsh reality into a fantasy world governed by poetic justice. Thus, Jeffrey Cox reads the ending of *Black-Ey'd Susan*, and the play as a whole, as reactionary and as defending institutional structures of power including the military and the patriarchal family:

> He [William] faces death, like Schiller's Karl Moor or Kleist's Michael Kohlhass, accepting his sacrifice to the moral order. Luckily for him Susan's evil uncle has drowned and on his body is found William's discharge: he was not in fact a sailor at the time he struck his captain and thus he can be freed as a properly enraged husband.[372]

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[372] Cox, 'The Ideological Tack of Nautical Melodrama', p. 177.

On one level certainly, *Black-Ey'd Susan* can be seen as negotiating 'the moral tensions between the nautical drama's respect for class order and discipline, and the domestic drama's deep suspicion of rank and privilege'.[373] It appears for much of the drama, for instance, that William cannot effectively be a good sailor and a good husband. His desire to be a good husband, in fact, comes into direct conflict with his desire to show respect for naval authority and its institutions. Even if William's passivity in the face of his own unfair conviction can be read as a tacit acceptance of the hierarchical military codes of justice that oppress him, he cannot easily be described as a socially confirmed hero, in the sense of his exemplary behaviour being rewarded by those in authority. On the contrary, he is in the first instance coerced into joining the navy. He then patiently delays personal gratification by tolerating an extended separation from his wife, who is forced to suffer almost constant sexual harassment in his absence. While in His Majesty's Service, he shows exceptional diligence and bravery in saving the life of his captain. He never knowingly breaks a rule and is at all times respectful of authority. In spite of all this he finds himself on the scaffold awaiting a fate from which only the intervention of the *machina* can save him. William is caught up in a sequence of events that are played out at break-neck speed and involve such trampling of virtue that the accelerated modality is itself implicated in moral failure until 'arrested' by providential closure. The affective power of these elements – acceleration and providence – depends on their being brought into tension. This emphasis points to a different reading of the potential effects of the play's ending than that offered by Cox. In a navy in which the ordinary sailor is denied any legitimate access to power and in a culture in which speed is a defining characteristic, the *machina* can be seen as implying that diligence, deference, virtue, physical bravery and obedience, cannot suffice as a guarantee of success, happiness or even personal safety.[374] Thus thought of, the *machina* raises the question of what kind of society requires the ordinary

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[373] Marvin Carlson, 'He Never Should Bow Down to a Domineering Frown', in Hays and Nikolopoulou, eds., *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre*, pp. 147-166, p. 154.

[374] Both Jerrold and T. P. Cooke, who played William, had joined the navy as boys, and therefore had first-hand experience of its hierarchical and authoritarian disciplinary procedures. Jerrold's play *Mutiny on the Nore* (Pavilion, 1830) also deals directly with the impact of unfair justice systems on the ordinary sailor.

man to trust to luck rather than established systems of justice for a fair deal. William can only really be described as a hero in the ironic sense. Lacking any real power or agency he is essentially a reacting centre around which various crises of culture converge.[375]

Melodramatic closure demands, to borrow Peter Brooks' famous phrase, 'the *recognition* of virtue'.[376] Consequently melodramas typically close with scenes 'in which the villain is recognised, caught, expelled or otherwise punished'.[377] While the widespread presence of such endings in melodrama constitutes a definite pattern, their effect is less clear. It is also true that the expulsion of the villain is regularly enabled by some extremely timely and deeply unlikely intervention. It is also true that the complications of melodramatic plot are often thus conveniently unravelled. It nevertheless remains possible, in certain circumstances, however to challenge the totalising conception of melodramatic closure as expressed, for example, in David Mayer's assertion that 'the threatening circumstances with which he [the villain] has become conflated are also reduced and made less threatening' by the typically melodramatic ending.[378]

In the context of melodrama the 'god from the machine' is usually understood as offering a perfunctory, artificial, and prescribed solution to social problems that denies process, and as succumbing to the popular audience's desire for a comforting resolution. It is also thought of as offering relief from the overly mechanistic, providential and sometimes ridiculous machinations of melodramatic plot. The potentially subversive effect of the *machina* ending on which melodrama notoriously relied, however, should also be taken seriously as one aspect of melodrama's commitment to plot as a major carrier of meaning and effect. There are a number of striking similarities between the plots and resolutions of the melodramas discussed in this thesis

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[375] Thomas Potter Cooke, the most famous of all English stage tars, also played Philip in *Luke the Labourer*. Cooke was a sensation as William. He also played the role of Harry in John Thomas Haines's *My Poll and My Partner Joe* (Surrey, 1835), which became another phenomenal success. In September of that year, one critic suggested the Surrey's new manager G.B. Davidge make a 'permanent arrangement with Cooke, who appears to be his best card', *The Age*, 20 September 1835, p.302. See, Cronin, Maura, L., '"We commence … with one of the oldest and most agreeable of our remembrances – Mr. T. P. Cooke"', *Nineteenth-Century Theatre & Film*, 29:1 (2002), pp. 6-31.
[376] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 27
[377] David Mayer, 'Encountering Melodrama', in Kerry Powell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, pp. 145-163, p.151.
[378] *Ibid.*

but that is not to say that their combined effects were anaesthetising or that the popular audience was unaware of or insensitive to the artificiality of the melodramatic plots it so enjoyed. This is an important point to make because the notion of domestic melodrama reflecting, inflecting and processing the uneven experience of the new metropolis relies on an understanding of its operations as open to a variety of interpretations. Edward Lancaster's *Ruth; or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor* (Royal Standard, 1841) is worth examining in this regard because it features an extremely manufactured and contrived plot, even by the standards of the day, and is topped off by a supremely unlikely ending.

The hero of Lancaster's play is Michael Lancewood, a young seaman returning from the foreign wars who has accidentally happened upon the village of his birth. Unusually for a domestic melodrama of this period, Lancewood is discovered to be a disinherited heir of the aristocracy.[379] The audience is made aware of this very early, via a series of bizarre rhyming prophecies recited by various local characters. In simple terms the play tells the story of how Lancewood's true identity is made public, and he is restored to his rightful social position. Each and every unlikely coincidence is foregrounded and celebrated. From the outset, the most innocent of actions on the part of the hero is likely to prompt an unsolicited poetic outburst. In the opening scene, for instance, he is observed by one of the estate workers sitting on a stile:

> PIPPS. Bless me that is very odd! It puts me in mind of the old rhymes of the gypsy who lies buried beneath yon tomb.
> "When from noon to set of sun shall wait
> A *stranger* upon Belville's gate
> The token will be that a time is near
> Of trouble, turmoil – of woe, and of fear;
> Fair virtue will suffer, and Belville's heir
> Like a fly in a web, shall be mesh'd by a snare"[380]

In the third scene Lancewood returns the heroine to the care of her aged father, having saved her from the unwanted attentions of local villains. Even

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[379] Stories of foundlings who turn out to be of noble blood were not commonly reproduced in theatres that attracted predominantly lower-class audiences. Instead, as the examples of *Martha Willis*, *The Bottle* and many others illustrate, virtuous lower-class characters tended to maintain their class identity throughout.
[380] Lancaster, *Ruth; or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor*, p. 4.

before he enters the scene the unusual significance of two domestic objects in the room, an old chair and a seaman's hat both of which were last used by the old master of the estate before his mysterious disappearance, are established:

> "When a stranger shall sit in Belville's chair
> Let men keep watch for Belville's heir
> Again –
> "The hat to the hall by its peg shall be wed
> 'Til it reach the lawful owner's head"[381]

Michael, of course, staggering in exhausted with the heroine in his arms, innocently puts on the hat and collapses into the chair. This particular hat, it transpires, is one of three to be embroiled in the complications of Lancaster's plot so that, as Jacky Bratton has observed, 'sensational struggles and complex misunderstandings depend on their manipulation':[382]

> Here is the murdered seaman's hat; my old eyes cannot decipher them, but there are characters inside which, no doubt, reveal the owner's name … 'Michael Lancewood … How! That too was the name of our late lord. This, then, must have been the youth who was stolen away in his infancy. Neighbours- Lancewood of Beville Green lies murdered in his own inheritance. (*A general expression of contending interests. The scene closes on the picture.*)[383]

It transpires that Michael's uncle, the villain Sir Walter Beville, has murdered his brother in law, Michael's father, and seized control of his estate. In the play's final scene Sir Walter has Michael force-marched into the forest to have him murdered. At the crucial moment Ruth, the heroine and Michael's sweetheart, arrives with a group of sailors she has summoned to his defence and the final battle ensues:

> (*Combat at the end of which a thunderbolt strikes the Mandrake's Hollow and reveals a skeleton.*)
> BEVILLE. Hence hideous sight! Tis the bones of Lancewood, Lord of Belville. Yes I confess it! I slew him – slew him for the possessions my sister brought him. Harcourt was my accomplice and there – there stands the rightful Lord of Beville Green!
> (*Beville falls dead at the feet of Lancewood*)

The whole ends with the customary arrival of the comics who have discovered the evidence necessary to prove Michael's identity:

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[381] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
[382] Jacky Bratton, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', in Bratton, Cook and Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, p. 46.
[383] Lancaster, *Ruth; or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor*, p. 10.

> *Enter PIPPS with papers in his hand, and followed by DOBBIN and villagers.*
> PIPPS: Hurrah! I have discovered these papers in an old chest, which pronounce Michael the true heir of Belville! Shout then for Michael Lancewood and RUTH, THE LASS THAT LOVED A SAILOR!
> OMNES. Hurrah!
> (*Ruth rushes into the arms of Lancewood, The sailors seize Harcourt. The underwood catches fire, and a red glow is emitted upon the tableaux as the curtain fall.*)[384]

In the broad sense this kind of plotting and resolution is not uncommon in melodrama. In this case, however, the devices seem so pointedly contrived, so self-consciously artificial that we can reasonably assume that the effect was intended to be substantially comic. Jacky Bratton has made this point in her discussion of the play in 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama':

> They are, I think, not to be taken seriously all the time; the audience is expected to recognise the standard tropes, and to enjoy them on several levels, relishing both the turns of the plot and their own expertise in anticipating those turns.[385]

Bratton falls short of arguing that the heightened artifice and theatricality of the devices exaggerated by Lancaster in his play were intended be read as parody, emphasising that the 'participatory pleasure' enjoyed by the audience was 'not intended to discredit the moral assumptions' on which the play was based.[386] This may be so, but it is also the case that elsewhere in domestic melodrama alternating comic and serious voices offered a critique of prevailing socio-economic realities, and of unfairness and corruption, by presenting different points of view on such realities. These different perspectives are explored at some length and in some detail in the next chapter. What makes *Ruth* unusual, however, is that comic and serious elements occur simultaneously. As a result, although the central characters enjoy the audience's sympathy throughout, their suffering is distanced by means of a kind of omniscient comic presentation. The unusually pronounced comic tone of this melodrama suggests a firm knowledge of, affection for and healthy scepticism about the compensatory aspects of melodramatic providence, at least in the Royal Standard audience. The totalising conception

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[384] *Ibid.*, p.4.
[385] Bratton, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', p. 47.
[386] *Ibid.*

of melodrama as 'an early form of debased mass culture' that provided 'mythical resolutions to historical conflicts,' is thus thrown into question.[387]

Melodrama enacts a residual belief in providence but it does so under extreme pressure, both in terms of the cultural shifts it is grappling with and its own dramaturgical logic. One primary indicator of this increased pressure in the accelerated modality of melodramatic plotting. As it operates in *Sweeney Todd, Wapping Old Stairs, Black Ey'd Susan*, *Luke the Labourer*, *Ruth, the Lass that Loved a Sailor*, and numerous other domestic melodramas, providence is not of the benign and gentle variety associated with sentimental comedy. Melodrama's exaggerated reliance on the providential interventions of fate and its fast moving plots, like its recourse to nostalgic renderings of the rural past, need to be understood in the context of its modernity. For some critics the abandonment of the idea of providence is a distinctive feature of modernity, and modernisation is understood as signalling 'its departure from "secular" public discourse'.[388] Its persistence in exaggerated form in melodrama may be read as evidence of reliance on, or desire for, its compensatory effects, but in certain circumstances melodramatic providence can also be understood as operating to highlight and critique the mechanisms of oppression to which its popular metropolitan audience were subject. These assertions rely perhaps on an understanding of melodrama as more nuanced and heteroglot than has typically been imagined. In the next chapter the potential for melodrama to explore contemporary issues from multiple perspectives is explored in relation to character rather than plot, but the overall intention remains the same: to demonstrate that melodrama's enormous appeal for audiences was related to the variety of powerful ways in which it engaged with the texture and experience of life in the new metropolis.

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[387] Ian Haywood, 'Editor's introduction', *Woman's Wrongs: Chartist Fiction* Vol. 2 (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), p. xx.

[388] Genevieve Lloyd, *Providence Lost* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008), p. 302.

7

Minor Characters and Metropolitan Agency

As well as embodying accelerated culture and reflecting the political and social concerns of its lower-class audiences, domestic melodrama in the 1830s and '40s featured a significant number of minor comic characters who displayed the blasé attitude identified by Georg Simmel as distinctively metropolitan. In George Dibdin Pitt's *Sweeney Todd*, for example, Jarvis Williams, 'a lad with no small appetite', is first encountered seeking employment from Mrs Lovett who, it will be remembered, is the proprietor of the notorious pie-shop in Bell's Yard, Temple Bar:

> MRS L. Go away, my good fellow; we never give anything to beggars.
> JARV. Don't you, mum? I ain't no beggar, mum, but a young man who is on the look-out for a situation. I thought as how you might recommend me to some *light* employment where they puts the *heavy* work out.
> MRS L. Recommend you! - Recommend a ragged wretch like you!
> JARV. Bless your innocent heart mum, it's the conduct, it ain't the toggery as makes the gentleman. There's often vice in velvet where there's virtue in velveteen. I've seen better days, mum, I have. I kept a vehicle.
> MRS L. A vehicle.
> JARV. Yes, you never saw such a barrow of greens and taters as I used to turn out; but monopoly made me bankrupt. The big shops ruins the little ones and starves the coster. Blowed shame – ain't it? … that's the way of the world. There's always sufficient argument by the rich against the poor and destitute to keep 'em so; but argifying don't mend the matter. I'll look after another job.
> <div align="right">(going R.)</div>
> MRS L. …Stay, you have solicited employment of me; if I give it you, you must furnish me with a reference.
> JARV. Reference mum; I haven't got one about me. Mayhap this toothpick as I have just found may do; it's *real* German silver.
> MRS L. Fool, I am speaking as to character!
> JARV. Character –um-that's one of them things as I told you I'd lost. Besides, character ain't no use now-a-days. If a rascal only subscribes to a bit of plate for a rascal bigger than himself, he is set down as a right earnest gentle man, and the world never axes about his respectability.[389]

Jarvis's philosophising in this section gives comic shape to a number of urban concerns, and speaks directly to the question of the co-existence of comic and

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[389] George Dibdin Pitt, *Sweeney Todd, The Demon Barber of Fleet Street; or, The String of Pearls* (London: John Dicks , n.d.), p.6.

serious elements in domestic melodrama. Most critics agree with Peter Brooks that the 'melodramatic' mode requires putting clear water between vice and virtue, and further necessitates that vice, once identified, be expunged utterly. The 'comic' mode, as utilised by Dibdin Pitt in the figure of Jarvis Williams, however, does not fit straightforwardly into this scheme. Rather than championing a vision of absolute ethical purity, Jarvis accepts 'an imperfect but going world'.[390] He adopts a laissez-faire attitude towards his own fluctuating circumstances, although he is more than aware of the inequities of market capitalism – 'The big shops ruins the little ones and starves the coster'. Initially he is presented as 'unclear about virtue and vice' – the audience is never given details, for instance, of the manner in which Jarvis acquired the silver toothpick, although it can be assumed they took his assertion that he 'found' it with a pinch of salt – and yet his good-natured banter signals that he intends on the whole 'to keep the former in the saddle'.[391] It is clear from the outset that he is a pragmatist, but nonetheless Jarvis is inclined to do good in the world. It is he who rescues Todd's apprentice, Tobias Ragg, from the lunatic asylum in which the demon barber has had the boy incarcerated and it is he who unmasks the sanctimonious and hypocritical Dr. Lupin, a minor villain with lecherous designs on the play's heroine.

Jarvis's assertion that, 'character ain't no use now-a-days', calls to mind Simmel's emphasis on *personality* as a necessary attribute of metropolitan man. Social life in the metropolis is largely concerned with surfaces and its negotiation requires flexibility and dexterity rather than the fixed attributes associated with men of character. The ability to adapt to shifting circumstances is of vital importance. Less than a decade ago Iain Sinclair described this modern city as 'a theatre of possibilities' in which citizens might 'audition lives that never happened'.[392] This notion of the metropolis as a place of opportunities for the performance of new identities, and in particular Sinclair's notion of 'auditioning' is pertinent to the consideration of figures like Williams because it succinctly captures a sense both of their exploratory

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[390] Robert Bechtold Heilman, *The Ways of the World: Comedy and Society* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978), p.104.
[391] *Ibid.*, p.104.
[392] Ian Sinclair and Rachel Lichtenstein, *Rodinsky's Room* (London: Granta, 1999), p.72.

nature and the unprecedented, and therefore unpredictable, character of the modern city itself. The aim of this chapter is to consider a range of minor comic figures in domestic melodrama specifically in relation to their metropolitan context and to argue that in certain cases they can be productively thought of as manifestations of metropolitan modernity.

The term 'modernity' is usually taken to indicate the experience produced by and accompanying 'modernisation'. Modernisation, in turn, is the expression used to describe the complex web of socioeconomic and technological processes that enabled and emerged alongside Western industrial capitalism in the wake of the Enlightenment. In terms of its impact on subjectivity and consequently on conceptions of dramatic character in the period under discussion, Don Slater's assessment of modernity is helpful. According to Slater modernity is an idea that:

> … constitutes itself around a sense of the world experienced by a social actor who is individually free and rational, within a world no longer governed by tradition but rather by flux, and a world produced through rational organisation and scientific know-how.[393]

While critics disagree about where to locate this notion of the emergence of the rational social actor in time, they tend to agree that the effects of modernisation were profound and widespread.[394] The unprecedented transformative powers of modern industrial capitalism had the potential, according to Karl Marx for example, to be 'the open book of the essential powers of man, man's psychology present in tangible form'.[395] For Marx the stuff of modern capitalist culture was manifest in estranged form, and subsequently concepts such as estrangement and alienation were to become a staple of critiques of modernity, modernisation and the modern metropolis. Part of the work of this study has been to suggest that these concepts are embedded in the practices of domestic melodrama.

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[393] Don Slater, *Consumer Culture and Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), p. 9.
[394] For example, Anthony Giddens locates the seeds of modernity in the seventeenth century whereas Krishan Kumar links it very specifically, and forcefully, to the development of industrial society in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth centuries. See Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 1. See also, Krishan Kumar, *The Rise of Modern Society: Aspects of the Social and Political Development of the West* (Oxford Blackwell, 1988), p.3.
[395] Karl Marx, *Early Writings* (Harmondsworth: Penguin/New Left Review, 1975), p. 354.

As the discussion of his work in Chapter Three of this study indicates, the perceptually disturbing aspects of metropolitan life were for Georg Simmel the defining characteristics of modern metropolitan experience. According to Simmel, 'the growing pressure of heterogeneous impressions, and the ever faster and more colourful change of excitements' that constitute urban life have strained our capacity for assimilation of information to breaking point.[396] Such are the stresses of everyday metropolitan life, asserts Simmel, that the urban subject is obliged to develop a *blasé* attitude in response to this constant over-stimulation.[397] This blasé attitude is as manifest in the figure of Jarvis Williams as it is in the melodramatic villains discussed more fully in Chapter Three. Taken together Marx's concept of alienation and Simmel's emphasis on the psychic impact of metropolitan life are of relevance to any discussion of domestic melodrama in the 1830s and '40s because alienation was a major motor of the genre. The greater the feelings of estrangement produced by the metropolis, the greater the need for a representational form that could reveal temporarily hidden but nevertheless deeply felt connections and ethical imperatives. Increasingly widespread and tangible sensations of alienation and disorientation, exemplified in the experience of urban culture, were consistently critiqued in domestic melodrama in its scenes of familial affirmation, its recourse to the mechanisms of accelerated providential plotting, and to minor comic characters that possessed enhanced skills in deciphering the confusing surface of the new metropolis.

Simmel was deeply interested in the pressures towards individualisation and individualism that the metropolis exerted in the late nineteenth century. Throughout the 1830s and '40s the minor theatres responded with flexibility to such pressures, both in their choice of repertoire and in their privileging of individual performers and their unique stage personalities. The processes of 'individualisation' that Simmel describes are

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[396] Georg Simmel, 'The Berlin Trade Exhibition' (1896), in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 8 (1991), pp. 119-123, p. 120.

[397] Max Weber's critique of bureaucracy shares with Simmel's and Marx's the central insight that modernity, and its attendant increase in levels of mechanisation, produces a marked deterioration in the quality of human experience: 'Rational calculation . . . reduces every worker to a cog in this bureaucratic machine and, seeing himself in this light, he will merely ask how to transform himself into a somewhat bigger cog. . . . The passion for bureaucratization drives us to despair.' Max Rheinstein, ed., *Max Weber on Law in Economy and Society*, trans., Edward Shills and Max Rheinstein (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), p. iii..

embodied in the figures of major villains such as the Chevalier Fitzhazard, who are the most consistently individualised figures in the melodramatic canon. However, the eccentricities of ostensibly minor comic rogues, such as Jarvis Williams and Ankle Jack in Selby's *London by Night*, are also worthy of close attention. In the first place such characters often acted as mediators of the tensions played out in central narratives. Secondly, they were often figured as distinctively metropolitan types.

In *London By Night* Ankle Jack is pivotal because of his ability to read the crowd effectively – that is, to extract from its confused and ever-changing surface meaningful connections. This power is intimately linked to his ability to see, a quality that sets him apart from all other characters in Selby's melodrama. Jack sees through disguises both sentimental and nefarious; he notices similarities that others miss and he sizes up dangerous situations at a glance. It is Jack, who recognises the play's hero Marchmont in the opening scene, identifies the villains and correctly positions himself to overhear their dastardly plans. He is invariably in the right place at the right time. Like Jarvis, Ankle Jack is impoverished, living with other vagrants under the arches at Charing Cross and polishing shoes for a living. He is not figured straightforwardly as an outcast, however. Neither confused by the metropolitan scene nor downhearted about his reduced circumstances, he remains in good spirits:

> We're rough spun but always go upon the same tack – hat is, if we can't bring our means to our wishes, we can keep our wishes down to our means, and that comes to the same point, namely – content.[398]

Jack is a regular London type, an urbanite not confounded by the labyrinthine forms and dangerous atmosphere of the city. He appears to know everyone and to have some minor interest in their progress without being centrally involved. While to some extent he can be viewed as a descendent of the lower-class comic figure of earlier English melodrama, his confidence and skill in negotiating, and indeed de-coding, the urban milieu mark him out as the embodiment of a new kind of urban sensibility.[399]

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[398] *Ibid.*, p.4-5.
[399] Like the servant Fiametta in Thomas Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery* (Covent Garden, 1802), for instance, Ankle Jack embodies the common sense and pragmatic values of the lower classes and is

Louis Wirth's definition of urbanism comes in useful in illuminating a number of key characteristics of both Ankle Jack and Jarvis Williams:

> Characteristically, urbanites meet each other in highly segmented roles. They are, to be sure, dependent on more people for the satisfactions of their life needs than are rural people and thus are associated with a greater number of organized groups, but they are less dependent on particular persons, and their dependence upon others is confined to a highly fractionalized aspect of the other's round of activity.[400]

Jarvis and Jack display characteristics associated with the skilled urban spectators of earlier nineteenth-century literature, such as Egan's Corinthian Tom, notably sharing a buoyant and untroubled confidence in their own abilities. Both, however, in line with melodrama's social imperatives, are markedly less distanced from the urban spectacle than their literary counterpart. Each acts instead as a kind of suture, holding the melodramatic narrative together. Although not fully personally invested in their outcome, they step nimbly in and out of their respective narratives to solve problems and point the way to successful resolution, as and when necessary. The chaotic circumstances of their lives – vagrancy in Jack's case and unemployment in Jarvis's – and an accompanying awareness of the social misery contained within the city, serve to accentuate social frustrations and anxieties doubtless shared by the audience. Paradoxically these are among the details the melodramas exploit in order to minimise the more socially alienating aspects of metropolitan living. In *London By Night*, for instance, Selby establishes a tangible sense of community among the vagrants at the opening of the play's second scene:

> SCENE II.- *The banks of the Thames and Adelphi Arches by moonlight. Craft moored in the river. Waterloo Bridge in the distance. – some are sleeping, some playing at dominoes, some singing.* NED DAWKINS *and numerous vagrants discovered. Cadgers chorus as scene opens …*[401]

Ankle Jack continually expresses the belief that good will triumph over evil and that all human actions can be evaluated with reference to the motives behind them. He is confident in his capabilities: 'leave the matter in my hands,

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invaluable in offering sound advice to the hero or heroine. See Bratton 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama' for a different discussion of the effects of these comic characters in melodrama of the 1830s and 40s.

[400] Louis Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', p. 12.

[401] Selby, *London By Night*, p. 4.

and who knows but that these sons of Lucifer may find a match in Ankle Jack'.[402]

Selby's Ankle Jack and Dibdin Pitt's Jarvis Williams are examples of minor characters in domestic melodrama whose skills and perspectives are well suited to city life. Their heightened powers of observation and laissez-faire attitude to their own fluctuating circumstances mark them out as urbanites. Wirth again provides a useful reference point:

> The heightened mobility of the individual, which brings him within the range of stimulation by a great number of diverse individuals and subjects him to fluctuating status in the differentiated social groups that compose the structure of the city, tends toward the acceptance of instability and insecurity in the world at large as a norm.[403]

Just as Jarvis's fluctuating status is evident in his opening scene with Mrs Lovett – he used to have a flourishing barrow business – so Jack's is demonstrated early in Selby's play. He is first encountered in the opening scene surrounded by strangers and plying his trade as a shoe black, a lowly function by any standards. At the beginning of the second scene, which is set among the homeless community on the banks of the Thames, his arrival is heralded by a fellow vagrant, Ned Dawkins the crossing-sweeper: 'Ah, that's Ankle Jack, I can tell his whistle from a hundred'.[404] In this instance he is welcomed as a valued member of his community. Throughout the play, Jack is encountered in a variety of settings. In addition to the railway terminus and the banks of the river, he appears in a dilapidated garret, a public house in Borough, a tea garden in the suburbs – where incidentally he encounters Ned Dawkins who, due to a sudden change in his own circumstances, is now togged up in the latest fashion – a well furnished apartment in Wandsworth and, finally, the brick fields at Battersea. Jack is constantly on the move, caught up in the complex meanderings of Selby's plot but also, and importantly, in the 'ceaseless mobility' that was fast becoming one of the 'hallmarks of urban civilization'.[405]

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[402] *Ibid.*, p.5.
[403] Wirth, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life', p.16.
[404] Selby, *London By Night*, p.4.
[405] Sheppard, *London: A History*, p.264.

That Ankle Jack and Jarvis Williams are presented as vagrants, signals an important transformation of the outcast figure which can be detected in a number of other melodramas of this period. Typically outcast figures such as Louisa and Dognose in *London By Night* live in fear, rejected by the world of honest people, orphaned, deserted and betrayed. While such characters remain a mainstay of domestic melodrama throughout the period, their co-existence with characters like Jack suggests more than one perspective on suffering. Jack's comic, laissez-faire attitude acts as a way of putting the world at arm's length, indicating a shift in the status of the outcast figure, in this melodrama at least, from abjection to comic inclusion. Jack's attitude, like Jarvis's, is presented as a question of choice, a philosophical position consciously adopted in response to his circumstances.

Louisa, the heroine of Selby's *London By Night,* like many of the heroines of domestic melodrama is 'helpless and unfriended'. In a number of instances, by contrast, minor and often substantially comic characters like Ankle Jack and Jarvis Williams suggest alternative possibilities for engaging with and negotiating urban culture. Such characters represent a productive area of study if only because existing critical perspectives on melodrama have tended to concentrate on examining the protagonists of the plays, their heroes, heroines, and especially their villains. This critical focus on the ethical dimension of melodrama, the clash between good and evil which animates much of its dramaturgy and the ideological assumptions that underwrite these clashes has, since the publication in 1976 of Peter Brooks's seminal *The Melodramatic Imagination,* been largely the norm. A notable exception to this trend is Jacky Bratton's 1994 essay, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', in which she discusses the importance for audiences of the comic element in English melodrama, arguing that even at the time of production the plays provoked a variety of audience responses and 'were being read as multidimensional'.[406] This comic element, which Bratton reads as a significant feature of English melodrama, tends to be located in lower-class characters:

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[406] Bratton, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', p.48.

British melodramatists used comedy from the beginning, and added it to the French texts they translated. They employed the conventional figures of current practice, mostly low comic servants, whose appearance in high comedy or in tragedy goes back to pre-Restoration drama via the deliberate stratifications of character introduced to purify the protagonists in sentimental comedy.[407]

Throughout the 1830s and '40s the heroes and heroines of domestic melodrama, such as Martha Willis, Henry Marchmont, Ruth Evergreen, Susan Hopley and Clara Wakefield, continued to function outside the comic tradition. They remained, alongside the villains, the principal carriers of melodrama's unambiguous messages and were largely presented to audiences in unadulterated form as archetypes. Comic characters, on the other hand, added other dimensions and their function within individual plays and the genre in general was less fixed – so much so that the coexistence of impulses towards control and dissolution in domestic melodrama can be traced in the interplay between the narratives of minor and dominant characters and between comic and serious elements. Thinking of domestic melodrama as a substantially 'urban' art form can help illuminate its contradictory and ambivalent energies – energies that simultaneously affirm and destabilise the impulse towards urban 'legibility', and both condemn and celebrate the new urban social order.

Sometimes comic characters and comic sequences provided relief from the tensions created by the machinations of melodrama's villains. In the first act of Buckstone's *Luke the Labourer*, for instance, a sequence in which the Squire's rapacious intentions towards the play's heroine are revealed, and one in which the distress of the impoverished tenant farmer's family is staged, bracket an overtly comic sequence in which the low comic characters Bobby Trott and his sweetheart Jenny play out a domestic squabble. Intent on running away to London to find his fortune, Bobby is persuaded to stay in the village by, among other things, an offer of cold pease pudding. The scene climaxes in a duet about the temptations of London's curiosities. The importance of such roles to melodrama's appeal is evidenced by the fact that when the play was revived in the following season, the character of Bobby was played by Buckstone himself. *The Times* reviewer commented on this development noting, 'there are some additions to the corps dramatique [which

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[407] *Ibid.*, p.39.

are] … likely to prove very useful acquisitions. Amongst these, we may notice John Baldwin Buckstone, who appeared as Bobby Trott'.[408] In the event, Bobby Trott makes several abortive attempts to leave the village for a new life of adventure in London. The opening speech in which he asserts his belief that 'wonderfuller things come aboot in Lunnunn than in any other town out o' Yorkshire' is delivered directly to the audience and is a good example of the frame-breaking performance mode typical of the period, especially among comic performers.[409] The irony of Bobby's rather foolish idealisation of London life in combination with his repeated attempts and ultimate failure to escape rural existence, cannot have been lost on the Adelphi audience, which contained substantial numbers of young single men our for an evening on the town. Many entered the house at nine o'clock in order to take advantage of the half-price policy, a minority of whom were inclined toward rowdy behaviour.[410]

Elsewhere, comic characters and sequences performed similar functions, interrupting the onward motion of the narrative only to release its energies again often at an increased pace. Comic figures were also used to highlight contemporary preoccupations and concerns. The chance meeting between Ankle Jack and the hero Henry Marchmont in the opening scene of *London By Night*, for example, gives dramatic shape to a couple of important metropolitan insecurities and preoccupations. Anxieties surrounding the necessity of operating among strangers in the metropolis are assuaged by the scene's insistence on the possibility of meaningful chance encounters. The scene also manifests a new attitude to the urban dispossessed. Significantly, although obviously down on his luck, Jack is not held personally responsible for his reduced circumstances. He is presented rather as a victim of the times, his narrative thus giving partial shape to fears amid the audience concerning the 'vulnerability of life in the unstable market culture of the early nineteenth-

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[408] *The Times*, 3 October 1827, p. 2. Such was Buckstone's success in the role, that it was mentioned in his lengthy obituary in the *New York Times,* over fifty years later. According to the journalist, 'He joined the company of the Adelphi Theatre first as Bobby Trott, in "Luke the Laborer", a drama of his own.' *The New York Times*, 1 November 1879, p.2.
[409] Buckstone, *Luke the Labourer*, p. 14.
[410] For further accounts of the make-up of the Adelphi audience, see Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London*, p. 39 and Bratton, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', p. 42. Davis and Emeljanow trace the process of 'commercialisation and exclusiveness' that isolated the West End as the century progressed.. *Reflecting the Audience*, pp. 186-7.

century' metropolis, where financial ruin was a very real possibility for many.[411] Economic disasters brought about by unscrupulous landlords, heartless employers, corrupt business associates, false friends and jealous relatives were a staple of domestic melodrama, and tended to be represented in its central narratives in suitably bleak terms. The narratives of minor characters, by contrast, offered opportunities to explore economic instability in ways that demonstrated with more flexibility the newly emerging 'urban' sensibility described by Wirth. Typically drawing on the conventions of comedy, minor characters were more likely than its heroes and heroines to display blasé attitudes to life's hardships and significantly more opaque attitudes to the ethical certainties usually associated with melodrama.

In Saville's *Wapping Old Stairs,* for instance*,* there is a rather complicated and particularly anarchic comic subplot involving Sam Sallow, a former servant of Adams', his Irish sweetheart 'Vegetable Sarah' and Poor Jack, an elderly sailor who has a strong preference for telling long, fanciful and convoluted tales. Poor Jack's attitude to poverty is extremely light-hearted. He carries a plank around on his shoulder that he calls his 'freehold', and rents the use of it to people wishing to keep their feet out of the mud in and around the docks. This small business gains him enough money to get tipsy a couple of times a day. The appeal of such characters for audiences is demonstrated by their appearance in most, if not all, domestic melodramas of the period. At the Surrey, George Davidge, at that time manager of the theatre, took the role of Poor Jack by some accounts to hilarious effect. According to the editor's preface in the Cumberland's Minor Theatre edition, Davidge was 'a glorious fellow for the Surrey side. No muscle can withstand his fun … he hitched up his trousers, and winked his larboard eye, with indescribable archness and drollery'.[412]

Like many of his contemporaries Saville took liberties with his source material. Playwrights regularly embellished source materials with minor characters entirely of their own invention, and these figures are of particular interest because they give some indication of the additions that melodramatists felt were most likely to please their audiences. One quite

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[411] Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight,* p.86.
[412] Saville, *Wapping Old Stairs*, p.7.

elaborate example occurs in T. P. Taylor's adaptation of *The Bottle.* As previously noted, the play was based on George Cruikshank's famous temperance engravings and tells the tale of the mechanic Richard Thornley and his disastrous descent into alcoholism. Thornley's terrible weakness for the bottle results in the loss of his job, his furniture, his home and his youngest child, who dies from cold and starvation. At the play's climax, Thornley kills his long-suffering wife 'with the instrument of all their mischief', and is removed to a lunatic asylum, leaving his remaining children to survive on the streets as best they can. This narrative Taylor owed directly to Cruikshank, but to it he added two invented narratives.   The first, which was touched on in the last chapter, told the story of Thornley's friend and colleague George Gray and his sweetheart, the seamstress Esther Clare. As well as providing evidence of the emergence of nascent working-class consciousness, their narrative provided a foil for that of the unfortunate Thornleys. George is the hard-working hero Richard Thornley ought to be. He continually entreats Thornley to control his drinking habits, urging him in the opening scene to 'shun forever the cause of all … miseries – the public house'.[413] Taylor's second additional narrative relates to Sam Coddles, a local pot-boy, his sweetheart Kitty Crump, a shoe-binder, and their developing romance.

Like Ankle Jack and Jarvis Williams, Coddles exists largely on the periphery of the central drama and is presented as an outsider looking in. He begins near the bottom of the social scale, as a pot-boy selling beer in the street. Ever cheerful, he shares Bobby Trott's misplaced optimism about his prospects for rising socially – 'I want a rich heiress – and why not? Sometimes heiresses go off with tall footmen, and why not with a middle-sized pot-boy' – but also Ankle Jack's pragmatism:

> I must hope for the best; and as a man that ain't married is a sort of Robinson Crusoe on a desolate island, if an heiress don't turn up, I must be contented with Kitty Crump. That's what I call combining arithmetic with worldly policy.[414]

Kitty, however, has another suitor: the local policeman Binks, or 'gallant officer 242', as Sam calls him.[415] When Sam resolves to seek his fortune elsewhere, Kitty responds with equal pragmatism:

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[413] *Ibid.*, p.7.
[414] *Ibid.*, pp.12-13.

> Well anything in the shape of a man is better than none at all; but for the present, Kitty, your visions of matrimony are all knocked on the head. … I have not lost much in Mr. Coddles, for he had nothing – take nothing from nothing and nothing remains. Binks has a pound a week, and that's consoling.[416]

Sam and Kitty are reunited in the second act, after a time lapse of three years, during which Sam has acquired a penny-pie stall. Kitty finally confesses her fondness for him, and they agree to pool their resources and open a little shop together:

> KITTY. A thriving business
> CODDLES. Yes, and thriving children; but since you've started the race I want to know who is come in the winner?
> KITTY. Why, upon the promise of amendment, you.
> CODDLES. Me! The sole proprietor of the little property, the penny pieman is lost to the inhabitants forever. Boys, your half-penny friend is gone, never to return.
> KITTY. Come, we'll talk it over as we go along.
> CODDLES. You may, under existing circumstances, take my arm.[417]

The ascending narrative of these lower comic characters, and their refreshing pragmatism, are juxtaposed in Taylor's play with the bleak descending temperance narrative of the Thornleys, whose doom is utterly sealed by Richard's continuing dependence on the bottle. Coddles even swears off alcohol, having learned from observation that 'drink is the beginning and the undertaker is the finish'.[418] Kitty has a similar journey. In the play's opening scene she is seen sharing a drink with Thornley, but in the second act, having witnessed Ruth Thornley's suffering at close quarters, Kitty sees the error of her ways and determines to marry Sam, partly because he doesn't frequent 'the public house so much'.[419]

One significant difference between *The Bottle* and *London By Night* or *Sweeney Todd* is that by the end all the major narratives in Taylor's play make sense according to the stark logic of the temperance movement, with its insistence on absolute abstinence. The satirical aspect of Sam and Kitty's characters – their potential to critique the largely middle-class doctrines of temperance, which is hinted at in the first act – is contained by their conversion to the doctrines of temperance. The temperance movement

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[415] *Ibid.*, p.13.
[416] *Ibid.*, p.21.
[417] *Ibid.*, p.36.
[418] *Ibid.*, p.30.
[419] *Ibid.*, p.35.

concentrated its efforts largely on the drinking habits of working class men, and shared its central values of self-denial and self-reliance with other middle class Victorian doctrines such as Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism. Not surprisingly, many working class men objected to the movement's emphasis, arguing firstly that it was patronising and secondly that it diverted attention from the real sources of working class misery, which were then, as now, economic.[420] Nevertheless, in spite of his recuperation, Sam Coddles is presented as a character of the street and of the city itself. He rarely appears indoors, for instance, except in the parlour of the High-Mettled Racer which is of course a public space. With his jovial demeanour and his pragmatic attitude he acts as a kind of mediator between the audience, to whom he speaks directly on his first entrance, and the more full-blown melodramatic narratives of the Thornleys and George Gray and Esther Clare.

A range of metropolitan anxieties and concerns cluster around the various minor characters so far discussed in this chapter. Their comings and goings, of which there are many, can be seen as reflecting the heightened mobility that characterised metropolitan existence, and their competence in negotiating the labyrinthine spaces of the city is demonstrated by their unfailing ability to turn up in the right place at the right time. In addition, they are often the carriers of crucial pieces of information, such as the whereabouts of misplaced loved ones or long-lost relatives, and therefore can be understood as functioning to foreground the inter-connectedness of metropolitan lives in the face of the confusing surface of the city. Sometimes they embody contemporary anxieties about economic insecurity in ways that contrast with the central narratives of victimisation and villainy. Their largely relaxed attitude to their own fluctuating, and often extremely low, status amounts to a transformation of the outcast figure from one of abjection to one approaching comic detachment.

Comic characters, then, introduce various kinds of interesting tension in domestic melodrama. As a mode of expression, after all, the melodramatic, with its preference for absolutes, might be considered antithetical to comedy,

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[420] See F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise of Respectable Society* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988) and Lilian Lewis Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

with its fondness for good-natured acceptance, so that while acknowledging their co-existence in a large number of plays Robert Heilman, for example, can conceive of the melodramatic and the comic as 'rival claimants to the world'.[421] For Michael Booth, 'the problem of definition [of nineteenth-century comedy] is acute in a theatrical age in which potentially tragic and pathetic material is so often mingled in the same play with low and eccentric comedy, serious characters with comic ones, and a constantly shifting dramatic tone'.[422] Booth is absolutely correct in identifying 'shifting dramatic tone' as characteristic of theatre practice in the nineteenth century, and of melodrama in particular. Consequently, a discussion of the use of such contrasts, and in particular of the relationship between comic detachment and satirical engagement in melodrama, should enhance existing understandings of the operations of the genre and its engagement with the metropolis in which it was produced and consumed. Like melodrama, satire trades heavily with the coin of exaggeration, and it is not entirely unusual to find both registers operating in domestic melodrama of the 1830s and '40s.

In the climatic final scene of William Moncrieff's *The Heart of London*, several villains attempt to rob the Cheapside residence of the banker Shuttleworth. Here, the melodrama pauses over some of the contrasts of city life:

> –A street, with gaslights, leads down the back of the stage; two streets, right and left, intersect it. Leading down from Shuttleworth's House to the front of the stage are a range of shops, a Grocer's, a Haberdasher's, &c., a Stable on the other side, a lamp in the Milners's. It is snowing. As the curtain rises COVEY is discovered sleeping on a bench, by the public-house, in the bar window of which Tradesmen are discovered drinking; a GIRL is seen in the Milners's Shop. A YOUNG MAN enters and makes signals to her. WATCHMAN passes across the stage.[423]

This scene is organised around the stock contrasts of melodrama but also of satire; contrasts between wealth and poverty, virtue and vice, housed and homeless, friend and friendless, day and night. The manner in which these contrasts are so easily dropped into place suggests that an understanding of a number of radically different worlds co-existing in the city is older than

[421] Heilman, *The Ways of the World*, p.98.
[422] Michael R. Booth, 'Comedy and Farce', in Powell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, pp. 129-144, p. 129.
[423] Moncrieff, *The Heart of London,* p.20.

melodrama. In fact, the filth, crime and disease of the city, the private interest or indifference of its citizens, and the corruption of its rulers, had for many centuries been a favourite subject of satire. The city has always proved a fruitful setting for satirical attack on human folly, and consequently over the centuries satirists developed certain conventions for describing it, some of which Moncrieff draws on in *The Heart of London*. [424] However, as Alexander Welsh has argued, the conventions of satire were put under considerable strain by the previously unimagined experience of the nineteenth-century metropolis. Consequently, to trace the satirical element in a melodrama of the 1830s is at least partly to describe conventions for critiquing the city under extreme pressure, their convergence with new interpretations, and sometimes their breakdown.

To capture a sense of the potential for satire in *The Heart of London* it is necessary to consider the play in relation to the material circumstances of its original production. Some knowledge of the Adelphi, as it operated at the beginning of the third decade of the nineteenth century, is therefore crucial. Chapter Three of this study considers the impact of Fred Yates, as proprietor of the theatre, in the role of the blasé villain Chevalier Fitzhazard but in the same production the company's most successful and popular comedian, John Reeve, played the minor role of petty criminal and recidivist Andrew Covey. Within the context of an expanding commercial and illegitimate metropolitan theatre, comic entertainers such as Reeve, who could manipulate the audience's emotions and evoke pleasure, were particularly powerful figures. Indeed, the significance of established comedians to the reputation and commercial success of the Adelphi under Yates's management is evidenced in the contemporary literature. In *The London Literary Gazette* in January 1828, for instance, the reviewer found Wilkinson, 'quietly, drily and wonderfully amusing', noted that Reeve 'secured his usual roars of laughter', and considered Buckstone 'little if at all inferior to Hartley and Keeley, of whom he frequently reminded us'.[425]

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[424] James Boswell remarked in the late 1760s, for instance, that contemporary imitations of Juvenal's third satire by Johnson and others, 'prove, that great cities, in every age, and in every country, will furnish similar topicks of satire'. G. B. Hill ed., *Boswell's Life of Johnson* Vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 118.
[425] 'Adelphi Theatre', *The London Literary Gazette*, 26 January 1828, p. 60.

According to *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography,* Reeve created an intimate, frame-breaking relationship with his audience:

> Mr Reeve is one of those who invariably shake hands with their auditors at the commencement of a piece, and keep up a kind of social communication with them, until the curtain drops. When our hero has an aside speech to deliver, he pops it at the pit, as if anxious to divide the joke with them, and seems really to wink at the house, whilst he is cajoling the opposite character on the stage.[426]

Jacky Bratton notes that 'Reeve gagged his way through plays, never learning his lines' and making little or no effort to disguise his own personality, instead producing a running commentary on the play for the benefit of the house.[427] This commentary would frequently have had a satirical edge, since Reeve's knowing persona was always present to his audience and never completely subsumed in the character he was playing. The figure of Covey in *The Heart of London* provides a good example of Reeve's working methods. Although his asides and improvisations are not recorded in the printed text or on the copy licensed by the Lord Chamberlain, Reeve's anarchic influence is felt most acutely in the second act, in which he appears as Covey 'the Old Bailey Jester'.[428]   This part of the play is essentially bracketed off to provide a platform for Reeve to display his talents, which were considerable. His face, according to Fanny Kemble, was 'the most humorous mask I ever saw in my life'.[429]

Near the beginning of the second act Covey, in conversation with Fitzhazard, waxes lyrical about the joys of the convict life:

> … there was old Fetterlock, the keeper of Bridewell, I served the best half of my apprenticeship under him – learnt to pick hemp and pockets at the same time – and then there was Lame irons that commanded the Paradise transport – never did but one good thing in his life, hanged himself to save Jack Ketch the trouble – because, instead of taking convicts he had to bring some back, those were the men for giving you vinegar and pepper with your meat – regular cruets.
> FIT. Eh! You're a Sidney bird my friend – studied Botany at the Bay.
> COVEY. Yes Chevalier – I've travelled at the expense of the government – I'm a true patriot – like other great men, I've been abroad for the sake of my country.[430]

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[426] Catherine and William Oxberry, eds., *Oxberry's Dramatic Biography and Histrionic Anecdotes,* New Series, Vol. 1 (London: George Virtue, 1827), p. 190.
[427] Jacky Bratton, 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', p. 42.
[428] Moncrieff, *The Heart of London*, p.5.
[429] Fanny Kemble, *Records of a Girlhood* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1883), p. 508.
[430] Moncrieff, *The Heart of London*, p.11.

Reeve's work in this section of the play is marked throughout by deliberate artificiality and disdain for any constricting obligation to narrative development. As well as reminiscing about his own transportation, he constructs a comic role call for the introduction of prisoners and leads the company in no less than three songs about the joys of prison life:

> I'll sing you a song about Newgate, brave boys,
> Ri tol li tol li tol tiddle do.
> Those who rail against Newgate don't know half its joys;
> Ri tol li tol li tol tiddle do.
> Board, lodging, and washing, for nothing, we boast,
> And servants provided at government cost. [431]

A meaningful commentary on Reeve's performance as Covey does not depend on seeking exact correlations between Moncrieff's play and 'real' life. *The Heart of London* is a play full of consummate liars, of characters 'performing' themselves inside and outside the confines of the main narrative, at least one of whom appears to be making himself up as he goes along. Covey is a character at once manic and calculating, whose antics replicate the episodic and quick-fire nature of the narrative. If Reeve's characterisation of this jovial low criminal type owes something to the pantomime, it is also indicative of a newer conception of identity as fluid and unstable. In a sense, performing itself acts as a kind of metaphor in *The Heart of London*. It is presented both as a mode of representation and a way of being in the world. With ceaseless and anarchic energy Covey, like Fitzhazard, reinvents himself. An understanding of the *The Heart of London* and its relationship to attitudes about urban crime, therefore, does not solely emerge from an exploration of the ways in which the play reflects actual social concerns. It seems unlikely that the Adelphi Company were principally concerned with critiquing the condition of the criminal law at the beginning of the 1830s. Their play is rather a self-referential investigation of the complex relationship between the performer's stage and reality in the new metropolis at the beginning of the fourth decade of the nineteenth century.

The tendency in *The Heart of London* to trivialise criminal behaviour is nowhere more apparent than in the second act, which is set entirely within the walls of Newgate, and plays like an extended comic sketch with Andrew

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[431] Ibid., p, 14.

Covey as master of ceremonies. As always, in the final act the necessary moral lessons that enforce the choice of honesty – concentrated in the figure of Wilton – are eventually delivered and with some force. What engages and entertains the audience for large parts of the play, however, is an exploration of, and more crucially, the enjoyment of alternative choices. The schisms to be negotiated are those between the moral high ground that melodrama claims and the more pragmatic tacit understanding of the world shared by the Adelphi audience and their favourite performers. Moncrieff's text is a good example of the 'double melodrama', a monopathic, simplistic, melodramatic world of emotions and pleasures, co-existing with an inherently divided self-reflexive satirical critique of the same. The strong impulse to forge narratives or connect series of events in order to make sense of the world, which is a feature of urban culture, co-exists in this domestic melodrama and others with the anti-narrative, comic principle, which celebrates immediate pleasures of emotion and the body – hence Bobby Trott's fixation on pease pudding. In *The Heart of London* this doubleness does not take the form of conflict. The impulses simply co-exist. The text both accepts criminal behaviour as a fact of metropolitan life and at the same time, by using comedy, distances its more appalling effects for the victim and the perpetrator. Perhaps this was achievable because the Adelphi audience, made-up as it was of mainly young men who worked in and around the City, may not have seen itself as especially at risk from the effects of criminal activity.

Almost all the plays discussed in this thesis contain comic characters and typically comic subplots. In most cases minor comic characters provided a model for engagement with the city that acted as a counterweight to the more serious critique offered by central melodramatic narratives. It is easy to overlook the importance of minor comic characters to domestic melodrama's appeal for audiences. However, it seems clear that through these characters and their narratives, melodramatists and their audiences explored a variety of modes of possible engagement with the city and the challenges it presented to social and cultural life. In particular a significant number of minor comic characters, Bobby Trott, Ankle Jack, Sam Coddles and Andrew Covey among them, embodied an ambivalent attitude to urban life and its potential pleasures and pressures. Such characters regularly demonstrated

exaggerated awareness of the physical spaces of the city and a pronounced ability to read its surfaces accurately. Their facility for the successful negotiation of urban space was staged in marked contrast to the confusion and befuddlement experienced by most heroes and heroines of domestic melodrama, who found the city overwhelming. In addition, the capacity of minor comic characters for, and indeed palpable pleasure in, coping with heightened mobility evidences a nascent ambivalence about urban existence. The city provides previously unheard of possibilities for the performance of social freedoms while at the same time producing unforeseen social and economic inequalities. Ambivalence, in the sense of holding two conflicting feelings about the same thing simultaneously, is a characteristic response to urban existence and can be discovered embedded in the practices of domestic melodrama. As Jen Harvie has noted, 'the city seem[s] to deprive us of social and material opportunities' while at the same time the 'practices of everyday life in the city seem to provide us with social opportunities to change'.[432] These tensions are mirrored in domestic melodrama in the fluctuating status of characters like Ankle Jack, Jarvis Williams and Sam Coddles, in their enviable freedom and in the laissez-faire attitude they adopt to their own precarious circumstances.

Beyond simply stimulating laughter or offering relief from and managing tension, comedy was used by melodramatists to effect a transformation of the marginalised figure of the outcast from one of abjection to one approaching some kind of self-determination and self-awareness. Furthermore, comic characters, like their audiences, existed outside the absolute melodramatic logic of virtue versus villainy, and thus offer insights into the ways in which melodramatic logic was mediated by city dwellers in the early part of the nineteenth century. The question of how seriously lower-class audiences took melodrama's vision of ethical certainty remains important, because any straightforward assumption that audiences read melodrama literally can lead to infantilising and limiting conceptions of the competence of the popular audience. It is safer to assume that the more opaque and pragmatic attitudes to ethical certainty expressed by comic characters such as Bobby Trott, Jarvis

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[432] Harvie, *Theatre & The City*, p.70.

Williams, Ankle Jack and Sam Coddles reflected similar attitudes in the popular audience. Significantly, the satirical impulse suggested by the comic element in domestic melodrama can be located particularly in the ways that certain comic figures engaged with and were engaged by metropolitan life. Such figures are of interest not only because of the manner in which they reflected and inflected the ethical certainties of the dominant narratives of melodrama, but because the importance of the comic performers who played these roles to the commercial viability of the theatre is a matter of record.

8

Visuality and Spectatorship in the Metropolitan Metropolis

In his memoir *Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author's Life*, the playwright Edward Fitzball recalls events leading up to the staging of one of his more successful melodramas, *Jonathan Bradford, or; Murder at the Roadside Inn* (Surrey, 1833). Fitzball dwells, admittedly with the benefit of hindsight, on the anxiety expressed by members of the Surrey company at the first read-through of the play about an experimental sequence in which the action occurs simultaneously in four separate rooms:

> When it came to the four room scene, everyone stared at each other, asking mute questions with their eyes, like people who look over a game of chess without comprehending a single move. When the reading came to a conclusion, some glided mysteriously one way, some another, as if afraid of being trapped into an opinion.[433]

According to Fitzball, Mrs West, the actress playing Ann Bradford, urged the theatre's manager to place his faith in the author, while admitting that she herself could not see how the sequence would work.[434] Misgivings seem to have lingered among the company until an overview of how the sequence would work in practice began to develop:

> Sad murmurings were heard, during the rehearsals in the four boxes … where the performers could neither see each other nor hear each other's voices. As the night of representation approached, more than one of the actors began to unravel, and to catch a glimpse of that singular effect, and to anticipate a favourable result … [435]

The production was (literally) a spectacular success. Opening on the 12 June 1833, it ran at the Surrey for 264 consecutive nights, and was often revived

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[433] Edward Fitzball, *Thirty-Five Years of a Dramatic Author's Life* Vol. 1 (London: T. C. Newby, 1859), p. 238.
[434] *Ibid.*
[435] *Ibid*, p. 240-241.

thereafter.[436] Such was its commercial value that Henry Wallack, who played the role of the villain Dan Macraisy in the Surrey production, left for America early in the run, taking a copy of the manuscript with him. He subsequently produced the play in New York City with great success. Fitzball recalls how George Dibdin Pitt was quickly rehearsed into Wallack's role, and performed it to such similar acclaim that the playwright became inclined to believe that rather than depending on a star turn 'the piece might have had something to do with its own popularity'. [437]

The visual impact of the four-room scene, and of the play as a whole, was intrinsic to *Jonathan Bradford's* appeal. The reviewer for the *Caledonian Mercury, for instance,* having spent the evening at the Theatre Royal in Edinburgh in November 1833 recommended that the manager join with his 'London brethren' in abandoning the legitimate drama in favour of 'the horrors and extraordinary scenic effects' of J*onathan Bradford*, arguing that 'in these spirit-stirring times mere real life won't do'.[438] The particular appeal of the four-room sequence is also evidenced by the inclusion of an illustration representing the scene on the playbill.[439] This is an important detail because in the 1820s and '30s playbills were printed by letterpress technique, usually using only black ink and typically not including illustrations.[440] They were the principal form of advertisement for the minor theatres during this period so much so that many had daily print runs. Sometimes a woodcut image or engraving of an important scene was added, but this would have been expensive, and it is safe to assume therefore that David Webster Osbaldiston,

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[436] Knight, *A Major London Minor*, p. 89.

[437] *Ibid*., p. 243.

[438] *Caledonian Mercury*, 28 November 1833, p. 3.

[439] The playbill is reproduced in Knight, *A Major London Minor*, pp. 90-91.

[440] Colour ink was available but needed to be added in a separate process, and thus involved added expense. Advances in print technology were to affect the design and distribution of playbills in the coming decades, as Catherine Haill has noted:

> Playbills were larger in the 1840s when paper became cheaper and easier to produce in longer lengths and various colours … Advances in colour lithography in the 1860s along with the introduction of the 'long run' heralded the demise of the typographic playbill and the introduction of the more manageable theatre programme which could feature illustrations and raise revenue by selling advertising space.

Catherine Haill, 'Playbills, Programmes and Posters', at the *East London Theatre Archive* , available at: (http://www.elta-project.org/theme-playbills.html), accessed 24 November, 2010..

manager of the Surrey, considered the four-room scene in *Jonathan Bradford* a very particular attraction.

As the misgivings of the actors at the Surrey demonstrate, along with the illustration on the playbill, exposition in the four-room sequence in *Jonathan Bradford* depended on the audience having an omniscient vantage point not shared by the performers. In this instance, to see is to know, and to know is to have power, as this melodrama implies – power to differentiate good from evil, one action from another, victim from villain. *Jonathan Bradford* provides a particularly striking example, but an emphasis on 'looking' and close observation, both as theme and technique, is repeated often in domestic melodrama of the 1830s and '40s. This pattern suggests that melodrama had a special investment in the power of reading visual detail, as a way not only to diagnose social problems but to constitute the object of knowledge itself. In this sense, much of the detail offered in Chapter Two of this thesis about the staging of recognisable landmarks in melodrama in the 1830s and '40s might also be understood as privileging a specifically visual discourse, even where sophisticated acoustic backgrounds usually accompanied large-scale scenes of this type. In terms of its relationship to key developments in the play's plot, however, Fitzball's four-room scene in *Jonathan Bradford* both assumes a high level of visual competence in its audience, and demonstrates an investment in the idea of 'seeing' as a means of constituting knowledge.

It is by now a commonplace to describe the Victorian stage after 1850 as substantially visual.[441] According to Martin Banham, for instance, 'scenery and machinery were vital parts of the Victorian spectacular theatre'.[442] As the century progressed:

> Technical advances, particularly the more widespread use of controlled lighting, further contributed to increasingly convincing scenic effects. Scenic artists themselves were as famous as actors and it became common for a play or an opera to be popular because of the scenery. Certain types of elaborate scenic spectacle developed using no actors at all, making the designers and painters famous. Scenic artists worked in greater concentration than ever before, or

[441] See, for instance, Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre, 1850-1910* (London: Routledge, 1981).

[442] Martin Banham, *The Cambridge Guide to Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.340.

possibly since, due to increasing demand for scenic decoration in the theatre and related entertainment.[443]

This preoccupation with visuality was not limited to the second half of the century however, or to the stage. As Kate Flint has observed, 'the Victorians were fascinated with the act of seeing, with the question of the reliability – or otherwise – of the human eye, and with the problems of interpreting what they saw'.[444]

In the 1830s, both in their dramaturgy and staging, melodramatists began to employ techniques that foreshadowed those exploited by theatre artists later in the century and by the pioneers of early cinema, to the extent that it is now a critical commonplace to describe melodrama as an important ancestor of cinema. In their introduction to *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, for example, Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook and Christine Gledhill observe that a significant gain for melodrama scholars from a range of disciplines, including theatre studies, musicology, art history and film studies, has been 'the recovery of cinema's relation to its melodramatic inheritance'.[445] Film historians have chosen especially to emphasise melodrama's use of music and its explicitly visual rhetoric as evidence of its influence on the early film industry, while theatre and film historians alike have emphasised the extent to which 'silent cinema ... reaches out to melodrama for the stylistic features that allow meanings to be conveyed without words'.[446]

What theatre and film historians have generally construed as aesthetic development can also be regarded as evidence for what Jonathan Crary has described as the 'modern and heterogeneous regime of vision' which began to manifest itself in nineteenth-century culture.[447] Under this new specular regime, an appeal to the eye began to play a major role in the circulation and production not only of information but also of ideology. According to Crary, a rupture in the genealogy of visual culture occurred early in the nineteenth

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[443] Peter Beudert and Susan Crabtree, *Scenic Art for the Theatre: History, Tools and Techniques* (Burlington, Massachusetts: Focal Press, 2004), p. 390.
[444] Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p.1.
[445] Bratton, Cook, Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, p. 1.
[446] Peter Brooks, 'Melodrama, Body, Revolution', in Bratton, Cook, Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, pp. 11-24, p. 11.
[447] Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer,* p.3.

century as the subject/observer was 'made adequate to a constellation of new events, forces, and institutions that together are loosely … definable as modernity'.[448] Christian Metz develops a similar argument in *The Imaginary Signifier* when he observes that the 'regime of perception' perpetrated by cinema is one for which the spectator has been prepared by 'the older arts of representation'.[449] In the wider context the emphasis on visuality in the nineteenth century, whether in theatre, film, scientific, philosophical or technological discourses, was manifest most clearly in the metropolis, where spectatorship was promoted as a dominant cultural activity. The importance of popular discourses in processing and mediating the experience of the new metropolis during the early decades of the century is evidenced by the fact that representations of the city itself became increasingly the preserve of popular culture:

> The absence of London in the work of major Romantic artists like Turner, Wilkie, Constable, Bonnington and Haydon is significant … To find images of London we must turn from high art to popular print culture, to broadsides, book illustrations, and topography.[450]

Fitzball's signifying practice in the four-room sequence in *Jonathan Bradford,* then*,* is usefully thought of in relation to the emergence of visual culture through popular modes of representation. By the end of the century a metropolitan 'visual' emphasis had bolstered, and even naturalised, forms of spectatorship already inscribed in the social practices of the city, in the theatre itself, and especially in the practices of film pioneers. The idea of continuity between melodrama and cinema may therefore be of interest less for what it reveals about the genealogy of the cinema, than for what it tells us about the role of visuality, and its theatrical manifestation in melodrama, in defining, reinforcing, problematising and disseminating cultural imperatives as they emerged within the context of the new metropolis in the early decades of the century. In addition, a fuller account of the visual techniques employed in the production of successful melodramas might also contribute to existing

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[448] Ibid., p.9.

[449] Christian Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p.118.

[450] Ann Bermingham, 'Urbanity and the Spectacle of Art' in James Chandler ed., *Romantic Metropolis: The Urban Scene of British Culture, 1780-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 151-177, p. 151.

understandings of melodrama as an agent of modernity in the nineteenth-century metropolis.

The notion of a dynamic relationship between Victorian theatre and nineteenth-century pictorialism, or visual culture, has been the focus of some, if not extensive, critical interest since the 1980s. A number of articles have appeared, for instance, some of which will be referred to later in this chapter, but only one major study has been published. Martin Meisel's influential monograph, *Realizations*: *Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England,* has particular relevance for the arguments developed in this chapter because it establishes dynamic synergies between the novel, stage practices, and painting in the mid nineteenth century. By arguing that each medium shared a set of narrative conventions and gestures that became recognisable to the popular audience, Meisel shows how interconnected the popular arts were in this period. Not only did the theatre convert narrative materials drawn from the novel, painting and illustration into drama, Meisel demonstrates, but these other artforms increasingly utilised theatrical effects to heighten the impact and intensity of their own narratives. Metropolitan culture accelerated the range and diversity of opportunities for spectatorship in the early Victorian period and this is nowhere more apparent than in the theatre, and especially in melodrama. In a later essay in *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, Meisel stresses the extent to which melodrama makes a particular appeal to the eye:

> There is a fit between how eye and mind are equipped to deal with the world and the spectra of melodrama, between the visual receptors and processors and the selective bias in the genre.[451]

More recently in the collection *Ruskin, the Theatre and Visual Culture*, a number of significant scholars have explored the relationship between theatre and visual culture in the later part of the nineteenth century.[452] Organised around a focus on Ruskin's aesthetics and written from a range of critical perspectives, these essays, although engaging in cultural analyses of materials outside the period covered in the present study, contribute

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[451] Martin Meisel, "SCATTERRED CHIAROSCURO: Melodrama as a Matter of Seeing." In Bratton, Cook, Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen,* pp. 65-81, p.65.
[452] Anslem Heinrich, Kate Newey and Jeffry Richards, eds., *Ruskin, the Theatre and Victorian Visual Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2009).

significantly to a general appreciation of theatre practice as deeply embedded in discourses of visual culture in the late Victorian period. Janice Norwood, for instance, writes about visual culture and the repertoire at the Britannia Theatre in Hoxton, while Richard Foulkes explores visuality in Victorian stagings of *The Merchant of Venice*.[453]

In summary, then, there is a growing consensus that particular ways of organising visual material, of seeing and of constructing the subject in relation to representation, developed in the early nineteenth-century city, in a manner that is deeply bound up with the processes of modernity. Cultural forms such as melodrama existed in a circular relationship with other structures of spectatorship, giving material shape to the value with which particular persons, images, objects and scenarios were already invested in culture. This is not to imply that audiences at the minor theatres in the 1830s and '40s had no agency and that melodrama's claims and rhetorical strategies were irresistible, but rather that melodrama employed explicitly visual strategies in interpolating those subjects who responded to its call via the cultural values with which they engaged.

To this end the spectatorial nature of melodrama entailed different tropes of perception. As well as employing visual strategies in the staging of recognisable landmarks, scenes of conflagration, danger and disaster, or simultaneous sequences of action, a number of very successful domestic melodramas contained supernatural sequences in which characters encountered instructive visions. These plays are of particular interest because of the ways in which they articulate relationships between knowledge, representation, spectatorship and morality. The most famous examples of vision scenes in melodrama occur later in the century, in Dion Boucicault's *The Corsican Brothers* (Princesses, 1852) and Leopold Lewis's *The Bells* (Lyceum, 1871), for instance, which were career-defining productions for Charles Kean and Henry Irving respectively, but such scenes began to appear earlier. George Dibdin Pitt's successful melodrama *Susan Hopley; or, The Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl* (Victoria, 1841) provides a good example. It is instructive to look in some detail at the ways in which Dibdin Pitt adapted and

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[453] *Ibid.*, pp. 135-153 and 169-186.

extended his source material in order to privilege vision (indeed, visions) and bring the supernatural into spectatorial view.

Dibdin Pitt's play is based on a three-volumed novel, *Susan Hopley; or, Circumstantial Evidence*, published by Saunders and Oakley of London in December 1840, with no named author. The review of the first volume *The Examiner* on 28 February 1841 describes a plot considerably more complex and convoluted than Dibdin Pitt's adaptation, including scenes of Susan's misfortune in London itself. Dibdin Pitt retains a rural setting throughout his melodrama and simplifies the plot. His only major addition is a number of supernatural sequences, in which Susan sees her brother, which were celebrated in a review of the production:

> "Susan Hopley", a drama of considerable interest has nearly achieved its hundredth representation. It is played with great talent and the scenery is of a very high order of excellence. The various situations are striking and the murders and spiritual visitings are unexceptionable. Of the latter, we have nothing from the novel of which it is dramatised: but so much the greater merit in the adaptor, in introducing horrors which experience, no doubt, had taught him are the staple commodity of the Victorian market.[454]

The powerful appeal of these vision sequences is further evidenced by the fact that Routledge published another novel, *Susan Hopley, the Adventures of a Servant Maid*, by Mrs Catherine Crowe, in 1852 which now included the supernatural sequences central to the effects of Dibdin Pitt's drama. The latter began its successful career at the Royal Victoria in June of 1841, after which it was 'applauded in London for upwards of three hundred nights, and in the provinces for about as many more', later touring as far afield as Australia and the United States. [455]

The basic story itself was not particularly new. Jerrold's *Martha Willis*, Hart's, *Jane the Licensed Victualler's Daughter* and Haines' *Alice Grey*, for example, were among a significant group of melodramas that told similar tales of the tribulations of honest working girls. The eponymous Susan Hopley is an honest servant girl who loses her position when her beloved brother Andrew is wrongly accused of a vicious murder. In reality her brother has fallen foul of the real criminals, been shot and his body concealed behind a wall at the

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[454] *The Era*, 24 October 1841, p5.
[455] D—G., 'Remarks' in Dibdin Pitt, *Susan Hopley; or, The Vicissitudes of a Servant Girl*, p.8.

scene of the crime. As the play reaches its climax the spectre of Andrew Hopley makes its appearance:

The Form of ANDREW *rises up, c.*

AND. Sister – beloved sister! The time is come – follow the murderers to the Old Manor House at Upton – let them not escape! Be Firm! Save the innocent – avenge thy brother and confound the guilty in the stronghold of their crimes!
[*The figure points to the wound and disappears. c.*][456]

Susan of course follows her brother's instructions, and the criminals are duly captured, Andrew's body discovered, and Susan's reputation restored. By focusing on virtues of diligence and honesty, Dibdin Pitt's melodrama privileges the discourse of the working poor, in a mode similar to many of the melodramas discussed previously, including *The Bottle*, *Jane, the Licensed Victualler's Daughter* and *Luke the Labourer*. In so doing, however, it employs a range of visual strategies that can be productively explored not only at the overtly political level, but also at the level of apprehension and sensation. To understand the complexity of this melodrama's appeal for urban audiences it is necessary to consider the visual strategies through which it reached them.

As the discussion of nostalgia in Chapter Four of this study indicates, melodramatists were as likely to employ idealised imagery as they were to stage scenes of disaster and distress. In the opening scenes of Dibdin Pitt's play, Andrew Hopley is presented as the very picture of virile English youth, lively, likeable, honest, brave, diligent, loyal, and possessed of a very good nose for sniffing out a villain. He makes his first entrance wet from having saved the young master of the house from drowning, and surrounded by a gaggle of admirers. As well as establishing character and providing exposition in terms of plot and action, the early sequences of rural contentment and comfort compel spectatorial desire by gesturing towards an idealised pre-industrial world in which work resembles play. In the world of *Susan Hopley* all servants are merry and contented providing they are treated fairly. The significance of this nostalgia for an idealised rural past has been explored in some detail above. Its naturalness here is asserted by means of a strategy that identifies seeing with desiring, for the theatre itself acts as a framing device that identifies the contents as desirable. Visitors to Oakland Hall, the

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[456] *Ibid.*, p.46.

residence of Mr Wentworth, Susan and Andrew's employer, encounter easy hospitality, a kindly master, a roaring fire, a clean bed and companionable servants on arrival. The picture is rosy.

The setting of this lively opening scene – like that in *Luke the Labourer*, *London By Night*, and even that depicting the late night card school that opens *The Heart of London* – is one way in which the melodrama dramatises the power of its own representations, and thus emphasises its own modernity. The seductiveness of such scenes for metropolitan audiences was a function not only of their status as images, but also of what Laura Mulvey calls the 'to-be-looked-at-ness' of what is represented.[457] What prevents the urban spectator at the Royal Victoria in Lambeth, or the City of London in Norton Folgate, from recapturing the rural idyll presented to them in Dibdin Pitt's domestic play, defines both the reality of what is seen and the spectacle's condition as representation. The spectatorial here combines condensed verisimilitude with extravagant fantasy, making for a powerfully familiar yet exotic an unobtainable pictorialism. This combination of desire and inaccessibility hints also at the status of rural England in Victorian culture as 'representation'. It also gets to the heart of the spectacular appeal of the supernatural in the play.

Susan Hopley depicts an uncommon psychic connection between the siblings that is made manifest through a series of visions. Susan begins to feel premonitions of danger threatening her brother in Scene Two of the first act:

> Somehow, when Miss Fanny bid me goodbye, I felt so down-hearted, and when Master said I was silly and that they should be back again in a few hours, I fairly bursted out crying, and the more Andrew laughed, the more I wept. What could make me so foolish?[458]

Later as midnight approaches she thinks she hears her brother calling out to her, and the sigh of her dead mother. As she falls asleep at her work:

THE VISION

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[457] Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 18-19.

[458] Dibdin Pitt, *Susan Hopley*, p. 17.

The figure of ANDREW*, ghastly pale, and bleeding at the left breast, glides from* L. 3d. E. *and crosses slowly to* R*. and pointing to the wound sits in the chair opposite to Susan.*

SUSAN. [*In her sleep*.] Ah me! I know something has happened to the family. [*Calling*.] Andrew! Andrew! – Where is Andrew? – Miss Fanny! Master! – Where are they?

[*The figure of Andrew rises from the chair and slowly recedes.* R. s. E. – *A pause – The scene is darkened in front and lightened up behind the gauze flat, discovering an antique wainscoted bedroom in the Old Manor House at Upton – a bed,* c. *– a practical sliding panel in the wainscot,* L. F.- *Mr* WENTWORTH *asleep in bed.*

Enter GAVESTON *cautiously,* R.U. e*. – he turns and beckons and is followed by* REMARDON*.*

SUSAN. [*Dreaming*.] Ha! The dark man at the garden gate!

[*Gaveston and Remardon go to the bed – Gaveston draws a will from under the pillow, and holds it up. – A chord.*
SUSAN. [*Dreaming*.] Ha! – the will! – the will!
[*Remardon goes to the back of the bed, throws up the curtains, and he and Gaveston stab Mr. Wentworth.*
SUSAN. [*Uttering a suppressed scream*.] Oh!

Enter ANDREW HOPLEY, R.U.E.

SUSAN. [*Dreaming*.] Merciful Providence! Oh! Save him!
[*Gaveston seizes Andrew , drags him to* L*., and raises a dagger.*
SUSAN. [*Dreaming*.] Steep not your reeking hands still deeper in the blood of innocence! If e'er ye hope for pardon at the Throne of Mercy, in pity, spare my brother!
[*Andrew is stabbed by Gaveston and Remardon and he falls*

SUSAN. [*Dreaming*.] Ha! They strike – they have murdered him!
[*Remardon slides back the panel in the wainscot* L*. They take up the body and are concealing it when a loud knocking and ringing is heard without and the vision closes. – Lights up in front.*[459]

Even in the printed text, this sequence gives a strong sense of the perceptual impact and sensational effect delivered by its staging. It worth noticing how far, in the service of relating a fairly standard melodramatic plot, Dibdin Pitt demands a theatricalisation that is substantial, complex and highly visual. Susan's dream sequence might be thought of as taking the form of a flashback, introduced by the ghostly figure of Andrew Hopley, or even an expanded present since events occur more or less simultaneously in the housekeeper's room at Oakland Hall where Susan is sleeping, and in the bedroom at the Old Manor House where her brother is so cruelly set upon. By projecting the brother's murder into the near past, and by repeating the

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[459] *Ibid*., pp. 23-24.

ghostly vision in the final act, Dibdin Pitt's melodrama allows its audience to see the unseeable. What is more, it shows Susan seeing, as a horrified witness who is both impotent – she cannot affect the action – but also, through her vision, both enlightened and empowered. The images here are simultaneously those of the dastardly melodramatic murder and the appalled loving sister. The melodrama thus elaborates the circular relation that exists between, on the one hand, spectacular forms of cultural representation and, on the other, persons, objects or scenes that are familiar to audiences and thus already loaded with ideological value. In other words, the melodrama circulates and re-circulates idealised images of family and virtue that are already due to their status as images, inherently spectacular. Such a reading of *Susan Hopley's* representational effects can help illuminate the peculiar power of spectacle as a vehicle for ideology in the early Victorian city. For while the play elaborates the relationship between an individual subject, Susan, and spectacular culture, it also, like all melodrama, unfolds as an allegory of the subject's relation to culture in general.

Alongside *Jonathan Bradford*, *Susan Hopley* is one of the period's most visually evocative domestic melodramas. In its reliance on contrasts between light and dark, its construction around a series of visions, its engagement with the dynamics of spectatorial desire and, not least, its enormous commercial success, it is a useful text for locating and exploring the dynamics of visuality as it was developing in the metropolis. The mechanism that drives the narrative in this play is, after all, spectatorship. The central character sees 'visions', which lead her towards identifying the correct course of action. A model for socialisation through spectatorship, the play posits the visual as the means towards achieving knowledge and power.

There is another and slightly more extreme instance of this trope towards the end of another Dibdin Pitt melodrama, *Sweeney Todd*, which was produced at the Britannia in Hoxton in 1847. At the climax of this play, as described in Chapter Six of this study, Todd is giving evidence in court having framed the innocent Colonel Jeffrey for the theft of the famous string of pearls and the murder of the sailor Mark Ingestrie to whom they belonged:

> … witness, proceed with your attestation.

> *(A green light burns at the gauze window, and the form of MARK INGESTRIE appears for an instant. Sweeney stands transfixed.)*
>
> SWEE. 'Twas his form - I saw it distinctly! Can the dead rise from the grave?
> JUDGE. Why do you pause witness? – the Court is waiting.
> SWEE. My lord, it is impossible that I can give evidence while that figure is gleaming upon me from yonder window. (*Mark Ingestrie vanishes.*) Gone! – 'twas the picture of a distraught brain. Your pardon my lord - a sudden giddiness, nothing more.[460]

The judge then asks Todd to identify the pearls:

> JUDGE. And you have seen it in the possession of Mark Ingestrie?
> SWEE. Have I seen it in his possession? Shame, shame – why do you ask such a question? Do you not see him coming to claim it? As him, I say – he is coming towards the judgement seat.
> > *(The figure of MARK INGESTRIE appears behind the judge from panel, c.)*
> Look; my Lord Judge, Mark Ingestrie is by your side! Do not whisper to him. Your ermined robe is stained with blood! Ha, ha, ha!
> > *(The figure again vanishes.)*[461]

At his third appearance the spectre of Mark Ingestrie induces the desired confession from the villain by standing beside him in the witness box. The barber is overwhelmed; 'Ha, ha! 'tis useless to deny my guilt, the very dead rise from their cerements to prove Sweeney Todd a murderer'.[462] The effects of Todd's instructive vision are all the more pronounced because the ghost is in terms of the plot not really a ghost. Both Todd, and the audience, are expected to believe the spectre to be the ghost of Mark Ingestrie, but the play's final lines provide a typically unlikely ending:

> ALL. Mark Ingestrie living!
> MARK. Yes, Mark Ingestrie, who, preserved from death by a miracle, returns to confound the guilty and protect the innocent.[463]

Quite how Ingestrie is supposed to have survived is never made clear, but the instructive vision remains the device through which an otherwise unrepentant Todd is forced to bend to societal norms and confess his guilt.

The spectator's relation to the vision scenes described above would also have been affected by the material conditions that prevailed in the London theatres during the period. The practice of darkening the auditorium during a performance, for instance, had not yet taken hold in London, and at the Royal

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[460] Dibdin Pitt, *Sweeney Todd*, p. 12.
[461] *Ibid.*
[462] *Ibid.*
[463] Ibid.

Victoria or the City of London the auditorium would have been practically an extension of the stage when viewed in terms of light intensity.[464] The spectator in the Victorian theatre was positioned outside the spectacle. The oppositional tension between light and dark created subsequently in the modern theatre, with its darkened auditorium and brightly lit stage, was present only to some extent. In the spectral play of ghostly half-light employed in Susan's vision sequences, this kind of tension was introduced through different means. Instead of reducing light in the auditorium the stage lighting at the Victoria was lowered to create an atmosphere of suspense and dread. Rather than encouraging passivity, such spectacles drew the audience in by making them look harder, sit forward in their seats, and strain their eyes. These demands were made precisely at moments of crucial sympathetic importance in the development of *Susan Hopley* so that the audience was required literally to strain to see the 'reality' of these pivotal sequences. The imperative to identify, to locate oneself within the play's spectacles, was thus given greater force by the physical demands of the viewing experience.

During 'THE VISION' sequences the production also engaged in techniques that emphasised its control over the audience's modes of viewing. By insisting on a pause before the scene is '*darkened in front and lightened up behind the gauze flat'*, for instance, the melodrama eroticised seeing, in what, in a different context, Metz describes as a 'veiling-unveiling procedure' designed to excite the spectator's desire.[465] The alternating appearance and disappearance of the spectre of Mark Ingestrie performs a similar function in Sweeney Todd. The levels of concentration, focus and anticipation created in the spectator during these sequences paralleled their importance in the development of the narrative and guaranteed that they achieved more presence than some of the play's more ostensibly realistic scenes. Consequently, because it made expressly visual techniques necessary for the production of sympathy and thus, in the end, a scenario of social harmony, Dibdin Pitt's play can be understood both as participating in and reinforcing the new perceptual regime described by Jonathan Crary in *Techniques of the*

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[464] For details of the development of stage lighting practices in the theatres of London see, Terence Rees, *Theatre Lighting in the Age of Gas* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1978).
[465] Metz, *The Imaginary Signifier*, p.77.

Observer. Taken together, the range of techniques employed show the extent to which melodramatic practice was embedded in the complex formations of urban spectatorship, and also the extent to which the spectacular aspects of everyday life in the city had begun to define modernity. At stake in the melodrama's appeal to visuality is not just the assertion of a connection between spectatorship and sympathy but a definition of spectatorship as a means of access to cultural life and understandings of cultural value.

One further element in the discourse of 'recognisibility' that operated in *Susan Hopley* is worth mentioning here, and that is the celebrity of the melodrama's key performers. In particular, in the central role of Susan, Eliza Vincent appears to have performed a kind of idealised version of early Victorian lower class femininity that had appeal for audiences. The Lacy's Acting Edition of the play includes opening 'Remarks' by D—G. which testify to Vincent's popularity:

> What shall we say of Miss Vincent in the servant girl? A part so various, so full of frankness and feeling, pleasant mirth and salutary woe. True to nature she made it, not the sentimental, pretty-spoken, mincing, would-be-genteel and can't-be-romantic Abigail, masquerading in a white cap and a neat apron! – but the genuine village lass, speaking her mind openly; sorrowing as an honest heart sorrows; and rejoicing as an honest heart rejoices. To her praise-worthy and successful efforts much of the extraordinary attraction of Susan Hopley may be justly attributed. [466]

Eliza Vincent's skill as a performer and her image, to use the word in a more contemporary sense, were significant in the play's production of meaning and important to its commercial success, as is evidenced by her prominence in reviews of and publicity for the production. The critic of *The Standard,* for instance, reviewing the opening night of the Victoria production in June 1841, commented:

> The character of the heroine is excellently sustained by Miss Vincent, and we rejoice to find that this lady has again a stage on which she can display her varied abilities. Exhibiting much real feeling her performance of last evening tended materially to raise her in public estimation, and we venture to prophesy that her delineation of Susan Hopley will for a long time draw crowds of admirers to this theatre. [467]

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[466] D—G., 'Remarks' in Dibdin Pitt, *Susan Hopley*, p. 8.
[467] 'The Theatres', *The Standard*, I June 1841, p.3.

By 23 July she was the *The Morning Chronicle's* 'acknowledged heroine of domestic tragedy'.[468] Eliza Vincent died in 1856 and was described in her obituary in *The Era* as having 'achieved great popularity as the representative of the heroines of domestic drama'.[469] Her performance as Susan imagined a consolidation of past and present by combining the unspoiled and natural rural idyll with the very image of a wholesome, healthy, sensible, unpretentious and ordinary English girl. While offering relatively detailed and extravagant staging in the vision scenes, the production focused elsewhere mainly on less exotic objects, persons, attributes and scenarios that were already spectacularised in Victorian culture and thereby already loaded with cultural value and desire. These included the home, family, filial sympathy and the longing for an idealised rural past. Such images were given added valorisation by their association with the image of Eliza Vincent herself.

In the early Victorian theatre, spectacle depended on a distinction between vision and participation, a distance that produces desire in the spectator, and turned him or her into a consumer. Often what melodramatists chose to present as spectacle in the 1830s and '40s already existed in visual form. The theatre's practice in this regard emphasised its own centrality to culture by suggesting that it could transform any material into public spectacle. Perhaps the most powerful examples of this strategy are to be found in those melodramas that were based directly on illustrations, which themselves had increasingly powerful appeal in the period. Such was the popularity of George Cruikshank's illustrations for Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard*, for instance, that William Makepeace Thackeray was prompted to observe 'that Mr Cruikshank really created the tale and that Mr Ainsworth, as it were, only put words to it'.[470] There may be more truth in Thackeray's observation than one might imagine. Advances in print technology, particularly the new process of stereotyping, accounted for a rapid expansion in the availability of inexpensive images in the 1830s. As Patricia Anderson has shown, Ainsworth's choice of subject matter in his two Newgate novels of that decade, *Rookwood* (1834), which featured Dick Turpin's famous ride to York, and *Jack Sheppard*, was to

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[468] 'Public Amusements', *The Morning Chronicle*, 23 July 1841, p.2.
[469] 'The Death of Miss Vincent', *The Era,* 16 November 1856, p.10.
[470] Quoted in Meisel, *Realizations*, pp. 247-48.

some extent dictated by the pre-existing popularity of these figures in London's expanding print culture.[471]

It had been the practice of popular playwrights for decades, of course, to leave no stone unturned in their search for materials with which to ply their trade, and with the appearance of the illustrated novel in the mid thirties, as Jonathan Hill has observed, 'dramatists were provided with an additional bonus: visual guides to staging, scenic design, costume and character appearance'.[472] These illustrations also provided scenic artists, and the theatre managers who employed them, with the opportunity to stage realistic recreations of well-known images in the form of tableaux. In the event the perceptual impact and pleasurable effects of these tableaux in stage adaptations of *Jack Sheppard*, to take one example, depended substantially on a specifically visual and pictorial recognition and were possible only because, as Matthew Buckley has shown, Cruikshank's images 'were more widely known even than the popular novels they illustrated'.[473] More significantly in terms of melodrama's influence on the developing dynamics of a specifically metropolitan visual culture, the relationship between Cruikshank's illustrations and the stagings they provoked was not entirely one way. In his interesting account of the *Jack Sheppard* phenomenon in 'Sensations of Celebrity', Buckley emphasises the extent to which Cruikshank's visual language, by the time he came to make the illustrations for Ainsworth's novel, was influenced by 'an entire structure of dramatic language and conflict' drawn from melodrama.[474] Both Meisel and Hill note in addition that the collaboration between Ainsworth and Cruikshank on *Jack Sheppard* was influenced from the outset by the imperative to create images that would submit to effective dramatic realisation.[475] The symbiotic relationship between melodrama and other popular manifestations of visual

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[471] Patricia Anderson, *The Printed Image and the Transformation of Popular Culture, 1790-1860* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 164.

[472] Jonathan Hill, 'Cruikshank, Ainsworth, and Tableau Illustration', *Victorian Studies* 23:4 (1980), pp. 429-459, p. 442.

[473] Matthew Buckley, 'Sensations of Celebrity: *Jack Sheppard* and the Mass Audience', *Victorian Studies* 44 (2002), pp. 423-463, p. 437. On pictorial effects in relation to *Jack Sheppard,* both in print and on stage, see Martin Meisel's detailed discussion in *Realizations*, pp. 265-271.

[474] *Ibid*., p.442.

[475] Martin Meisel, *Realizations*, pp. 247-251. Jonathan Hill, 'Cruikshank, Ainsworth, and Tableau Illustration', pp. 446-447.
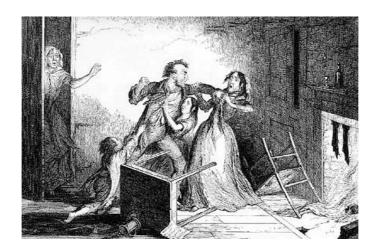
culture is explored below by way of one final and familiar example. T. P. Taylor's temperance melodrama *The Bottle* has been discussed at some length in earlier parts of this study in terms of its nostalgic tone in Chapter Four, its articulation of urban lower class resistance to developing doctrines of laissez-faire in Chapter Five, and the extent to which its comic subplots suggest a model for urban citizenship in Chapter Seven. Taylor's play also rewards closer reading in terms of the way in which it articulates the relationship between melodrama and visual culture.

Cruikshank produced his famous series of eight temperance engravings, which illustrate the descent into alcoholism of one man and the terrible effects of his addiction on his family, in 1847. The series had immediate commercial impact and was quickly adapted for the stage. As previously discussed, Taylor augmented the basic narrative provided by Cruikshank's engravings with a couple of narrative strands of his own, but the visual impact of the production was largely built around precise realisation in the form of tableaux of Cruikshank's images. The play opens, for instance, with a tableau of Cruikshank's first plate, 'The Happy Home; The Bottle is Brought Out For the First Time' accompanied by the instruction to 'see Plate 1'.[476] *Lacy's Acting Edition* instructs the user to 'consult the series of plates' for details of costume.[477] More importantly, the extent to which Cruikshank's images were themselves influenced by the aesthetics of melodrama is evident at a glance. In terms of the organisation of figures, the plates emphasise clear melodramatic gesture, including clarity of line and facial expression. Typically, central characters appear in profile, clearly delineated, an arrangement most clearly demonstrated in plate 6, below, entitled, 'Fearful Quarrels, and Brutal Violence Are the Natural Consequences of the Frequent Use of the Bottle'. [478]

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[476] T. P. Taylor, *The Bottle*, p.5.
[477] *Ibid.*, p.4.
[478] For the original plates see, *The Bottle. In eight plates, designed and etched by G Cruikshank* (London: David Bogue, 1847).

The illustrations in general are characterised by strong lines of opposition and outward movement, and even when the images depict closed spaces, as in plate 6 above, they regularly indicate potential exits. In addition, each image is balanced in such a way as to provide a stable perspective for the viewer. In short, the engravings in their original form already bear a striking resemblance to scenes from a melodrama.

If Cruikshank borrowed from the language of melodramatic tableaux in composing his engravings, over the series as a whole he drew on quite an extreme version of melodrama's structures of dramatic action and conflict, particularly its commitment to the apocalyptic logic of the excluded middle, and its insistence on the centrality of the villain. The original series ran as follows; 'The Happy Home; The Bottle is Brought Out for the First Time'; 'He is Discharged for Drunkenness'; 'An Execution Sweeps off the Greater Part of their Furniture'; 'He Still Supplies the Bottle'; 'The Dead Child'; 'The Quarrel'; 'The Bottle has Done its Work'; 'The Madhouse'. In this relentlessly descending narrative sequence, the bottle appears five times and is finally used as the murder weapon. This repeated visual emphasis on the bottle itself is significant because the bottle and the dangers it represents to family life and social cohesion are the villains of Taylor's melodrama, not Thornley, although his actions are represented as reprehensible and selfish. Cruikshank's engravings dramatise precisely those narrative moments when melodrama's modes of recognition are marshalled most strongly against the evils of alcohol, while Taylor's adaptation employs the pictorial and sensational logic of realisation to induce its audience to adopt Cruikshank's

own perspective. The arrangement of tableaux in *The Bottle* created moments of pictorial recognition that invoked the compelling visual economy of print media, and also calls to mind what Mary Ann Doane has described as 'scenarios', arrangements of objects or persons loaded with cultural significance. These were effectively 'images of images displayed to evoke desire in a spectator' who recognised the values embedded in them.[479]   By relying so substantially on the effective realisation of familiar and commercial images, the production explicitly drew attention to its own status as a commodity and as dependent upon the spectator, now figured as a consumer. After all, it was upon the spectator's appreciation of the accuracy of the images that the success of the production depended.

The visual techniques employed in this production and elsewhere worked more or less to facilitate the spectator's absorption in and identification with the spectacle. They also structured spectators as consumers of spectacle, and consequently defined spectacle as an increasingly desirable commodity. These practices were deeply linked to the way in which melodrama figured sympathy in the new metropolis, as constituted through the subject's relationship to representation, and indeed the subject's conspicuous consumption of representation. In her discussion of the dominant version of subjectivity produced by Victorian fiction, Audrey Jaffe, makes a similar point:

> For such a subject ... only the moment of consumption offers an illusion of presence, giving the self that consumes the opportunity to coincide, phantasmatically, with the idealized and temporally detached self projected into the object consumed. In a never-ending narrative of self-creation and transformation, that is, commodity culture may be said to work its effects by making its subjects feel incomplete without the objects they may purchase to complete themselves.[480]

In the tableaux that punctuate Taylor's play, the four-roomed sequence in *Jonathan Bradford*, the vision sequences in *Susan Hopley* and at the end of *Sweeney Todd*, the melodramatic stage operates as an important site for the production and consumption of representations *as* commodities in early Victorian culture. In the purchasing of such commodities, spectators became

[479] Mary Ann Doane, *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), pp. 13-14.

[480] Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 39.

present to themselves precisely through expressing identification with representations. Moreover, the images realised in, for example, *The Bottle* and the various productions of *Jack Sheppard*, provided the spectator with something to do: to attempt to judge the accuracy of the image in relation to their own pre-existing knowledge and experience of Cruikshank's work, thereby to exercise visual judgement. In this way the technique of dramatic realisation that grew in popularity among melodramatists in the 1830s enabled spectators to participate actively in the circulation of representations – a circulation that melodrama increasingly defined as participation in metropolitan culture.

The move here is towards watching – the witness of spectacle – as an act of implicated engagement that enables various forms of social participation and resolution. The mechanism that drives the narrative closure in *Susan Hopley* is spectatorship. As accounts of the opening sequences in *The Scamps of London* and *London By Night* offered in Chapter Two indicate, the melodramatic stage in the 1830s and '40s was actively engaged in transforming reality into spectacle and drawing attention to its control over, and manipulation of, visual techniques. In the vision scene towards the end of *Susan Hopley*, Susan's brother Andrew returns to guide her towards the appropriate action and apprehension of the villains. In this instance, the image is presented as desiring – indeed, requiring – its onstage spectator for whom, specifically, it appears. Susan is now figured as a consumer, whose completion of the crucial tasks that will result in an appropriate conclusion to the narrative is dependent on her recognising and identifying with the appropriateness of the image to her needs and circumstances. The inclusion of the earlier dream sequence in Dibdin Pitt's adaptation positions Susan, at a relatively early stage in the drama, as a reader and interpreter of scenes. By contrast, in the final scene of Dibdin Pitt's version of *Sweeney Todd,* identification with the image's need for ownership and 'proper' interpretation is exactly what the villain is intent on refusing.

The full seriousness of Todd's crimes becomes clear very early in the play when he murders the young seaman, Ingestrie, to gain possession of a string of pearls. The final courtroom scene concludes the narrative's dramatic evolution from the rule of secrecy – nobody suspects Todd's guilt apart from

Mrs Lovett who is duly disposed of – to the hierarchical rule of visual and spoken justice. Throughout the play Sweeney is presented as a character entirely without conscience and extremely unlikely to confess his crimes, fearful as he is of the consequence, which would undoubtedly be hanging. The final scene is played out in full view of an audience both on and off stage, and in this way Todd's secret self is made public, visible and hence susceptible to communal judgement. In publicly exposing not only Todd's crimes, but also the process by which they are recognised and acknowledged, the melodrama reinforces ethical order, however crudely, by expressly visual means.

Emphasising the quality of its projections and the projective quality of its content, melodrama in the 1830s and '40s worked to collapse the substantial difference between the real and the image. It thereby promoted itself in a burgeoning commodity culture as a commodity *par excellence*. This is not to say that the commodity form straightforwardly dominated early Victorian theatrical culture, rather that melodrama drew some of its power from its status as an exemplary form of metropolitan culture and from its affinity with culture as a system of representation. As narratives whose ostensible purpose was the production of social sympathy, *Jonathan Bradford*, *Susan Hopley, Jack Sheppard, The Bottle* and *Sweeney Todd*, like countless other melodramas, both recalled and revised scenes from the sentimental drama of the eighteenth century that modelled sympathy for spectators positioned as witnesses. There was a world of difference, however, between eighteenth-century drama's scenes of sympathy and the spectacles observed by the nineteenth-century audience. From a display of virtue meant to teach judgement to and incite imitation by a relatively select audience, the drama has moved to a profound manipulation of the wider public's visual sense in the form of, and by means of, the mass marketing of sympathetic representations in the new metropolis.

9

Conclusion

This thesis began with a discussion of a number of slippery and contested terms – melodrama, modernity, metropolis – that in spite of concerns about their exact meaning and scope, remain in common usage. Of the three, melodrama has had the most troubled critical history. As the review of critical literature in Chapter Two of this study establishes, most accounts of nineteenth-century theatre history, and melodrama's place within it, certainly before Peter Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination*, were wedded to larger models of dramatic development that emphasised a continuous and overarching Western theatrical tradition from the Greeks to the present day. In this schema naturalism was perceived as the saviour of English drama, initially as it arrived from Europe in the final decades of the nineteenth century, and subsequently as the dominant theatrical aesthetic. As Cary Mazer puts it, 'the British advocates of the New Drama and the New Theatre had the wisdom to champion Ibsen and the gumption to create a canon of British playwrights'.[481] Perhaps inevitably, this line of criticism, which depended on the valourisation of naturalism, supported twentieth-century readings of melodrama as crude, overblown and inferior.[482] The rise of cultural studies in the 1960s, and the interest in popular forms it engendered, contributed to melodrama's recuperation as a field of study. In recent decades it has become an increasingly important area of Victorian studies, so much so that in 2009 Juliet John was able to observe:

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[481] Cary M Mazer, 'New Theatres for a New Drama', in Powell, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre,* pp. 207-221, p. 209.

[482] See Thomas Postlewait, 'From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama', in Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou, eds., *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996), pp. 39-60, for an account of this process in America. Postlewait documents the ways in which advocates of naturalism in the American theatre continually maligned melodrama in the closing decades of the nineteenth century and the first two decades of the twentieth.

> Having recently compiled the melodrama entry for the planned Oxford Online Bibliography of Victorian Literature, I am acutely aware of the prolific expansion in melodrama studies that has taken place in the last decade alone.[483]

John's own study, *Dickens's Villains*, is one of a number that explore the impact of melodrama on popular novels of the nineteenth century. Elsewhere a significant number of scholars, including Ben Singer in *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts,* have stressed melodrama's centrality to the development of film and film aesthetics. In the theatre itself the field of melodrama studies is enormous. Literally thousands of plays of this type were performed across a range of styles over decades, in a wide variety of settings, in London alone. One consequence of the welcome increase in scholarly output in the field has been the highlighting of certain important discontinuities in the practice of melodrama. Jacky Bratton, for instance, has clearly articulated distinctions between the practice of English melodrama and classical French melodrama as described by Peter Brooks.[484] In *Melodramatic Formations,* Bruce McConachie turns his attention to the relationship between American melodrama and culture in the run up to and immediate aftermath of the civil war.[485] Such discontinuities are, as this thesis has attempted to show, crucially important in developing appreciation of the form as it was responding to shifting social circumstances and anxieties. *Melodrama: Metropolis: Modernity*, then, contributes to a larger reassessment of melodrama. It does so by engaging closely with one expression of the genre.

Domestic melodrama differs in a number of significant ways from gothic or nautical melodrama, as it does from the sensation drama that was to develop later in the century, just as its subject matter in the 1830s and '40s differs in emphasis and scope from that of the 1870s and '80s. The aim of this thesis has been to establish that in its domestic manifestation in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, melodrama is usefully thought of in a specifically metropolitan context. During this period a rapid expansion in metropolitan theatre culture, accompanied by increasingly organised efforts to

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[483] John, 'Melodrama and its Criticism', p.1.
[484] Bratton 'The Contending Discourses of Melodrama', pp. 38-49.
[485] See Bruce A. McConachie, *Melodramatic Formations: American Theatre and Society, 1820-1870* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992).

monitor and control theatrical output, took place against a backdrop of unprecedented urbanisation and modernisation in British culture. The arguments presented above emphasise melodrama's flexibility in responding to the rapidly shifting environments in which it was performed, and suggest that the heterogeneity of its performance practices was a particular strength in a period of intense social upheaval. In the second quarter of the nineteenth century, indeed, this heterogeneity allowed melodrama an enviable degree of flexibility and freedom in reconceiving the metropolis.

Domestic melodrama functioned in London in the 1830s and '40s to mediate and make sense of the experience of the rapidly changing urban environment, both by highlighting the threat to traditional values and ways of life posed by the city, and by exploring the potential freedoms and agencies suggested by this developing form of social organisation. In order to capture these competing tensions, a critical methodology has been employed in this study that is perhaps best described as hybrid, combining elements of cultural materialist analysis with a more performance-oriented mode of close textual analysis. On one hand a cultural materialist approach has allowed substantial focus on the material conditions of the commercial theatre in early and pre Victorian London for both theatre practitioners and their audiences. On the other hand textual analysis has been used to show that melodrama in spite of the material restrictions placed on its practice, nevertheless offered a range of models for performing the self in the metropolitan context that were sometimes new and innovative, and often enabling.

Like all critical strategies, cultural materialism and performance-oriented textual analysis have their strengths and weaknesses. An exclusively cultural materialist analysis of melodrama that emphasises its condition as a mass form of commercial entertainment, for instance, can run the risk of concluding that socially progressive melodrama was an impossibility, because melodrama was always and everywhere hamstrung by its material conditions. Conversely, an exclusively playtext-based analysis might run the risk of suggesting that melodrama was endlessly progressive, and offered countless opportunities for its lower-class audiences to reinvent themselves with unlimited agency in the new metropolitan context. Neither of these approaches is satisfactory. An attempt has been made in this study to

combine them in order better to analyse and understand melodrama's complex meaning-making strategies, as well as the complexities, inequalities and contradictions of lived experience in the city.

In the middle decades of the nineteenth century London was to become the largest city the world had ever seen. It was partly the explosion in population that characterised the new metropolis and set it apart from both rural and previous urban experience. In addition, and for the first time, this rapid increase in population was accompanied by full-scale technological modernisation, conspicuously concentrated in the ingression of speed and measured time into everyday life. From the steam engine, the train, the telegraph and the tram to the sharp separation of work from leisure modernisation directed cultural life into new networks, responding to fresh imperatives. Nineteenth-century London was not the product of systematic planning. On the contrary, earlier models of geometrical symmetry were rapidly overwhelmed by the growth of the new metropolis as it burst over the countryside and erased previous rural patterns.[486] As the discussion in Chapter Three suggests, this city could no longer easily be imagined as an organic unity. For many commentators, Wordsworth, Engels, Shuttleworth and Mayhew among them, the disorganised assembly of hastily thrown up tenements, filthy streets, smoke-belching warehouses and ubiquitous crowds represented a breakdown in the proper order of things, and an unnatural society. The experience of living in this new metropolis was at once exhilarating and terrifying. The presence of large numbers of strangers inevitably put pressure on pre-existing patterns of social interaction, such as those that had defined rural English culture in the centuries immediately preceding modernisation. The nineteenth-century metropolis asked its inhabitants to deal with an ever-increasing number of stimuli, and accompanying this increase was a loss of belief in providential explanation.

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[486] For fuller accounts of the progress of urbanisation in the nineteenth century see, for example:
H. J. Dyos, ed., *Exploring the Urban Past: Essays in Urban History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
G. Kearns and C. Withers, eds., *Urbanising Britain: Essays on Class and Community in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)
Robert John Morris and Richard Rodger, *The Victorian City: A Reader in Urban History, 1820-1914,* (London: Longman, 1993).

Thus the conditions were ideal, as Leo Braudy suggests, for 'either socially approved fictions or personal paranoias to fill the aching gap of ignorance'.[487]

Domestic melodrama was well equipped to thrive under these circumstances. Its scenes of sympathy worked to fill the gap in personal relations made manifest by the experience of the new metropolis. In particular, as traditional models for the preservation of personal relations buckled under the great strain placed upon them by the conditions of the city, the threat to established relationships – those between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons and childhood sweethearts – became an ever more persistent narrative focus as evidenced by the central storylines of many of the plays discussed in this thesis. Each night across the great city, in numerous venues, the heroes and heroines of melodrama were rescued from the clutches of the villains who threatened their livelihoods and personal safety. Relief, and public recognition of the wrongs done to them, were to be the sum of their good fortune. Such was the force and regularity with which this pattern was repeated that it is useful to think of domestic melodrama as insisting on the right to happiness as fundamental, and in this sense as part of a larger movement in Western culture towards a focus on individual rights.

In his early work, Jean Baudrillard describes some of the conditions of the new landscape in which the nineteenth-century subject found herself situated. In summary, for Baudrillard as for Peter Brooks, one of the major consequences of the bourgeois political revolutions that marked the last decades of the eighteenth century was the ideological force that animated the mythology of the 'rights of man', or more explicitly the right to equality and happiness. Baudrillard argues that in the nineteenth century, for the first time, observable proof was needed to establish beyond doubt that these rights had been attained. In addition, such rights had to be '*measurable* in terms of objects and signs', something that was present to the eye in terms of '*visible* criteria'.[488] Melodrama had a widespread presence in the new metropolis, and although it operated within the confines of a market place whose governing

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[487] Leo Braudy, 'Providence, Paranoia and the Novel', *ELH,* 48:3 (1981), pp. 619-637, p.621.

[488] Jean Baudrillard, *La Société de Consommation* (Paris: 1970), p. 60. Emphasis in original. Peter Brooks has emphasised that 'melodrama's simple, unadulterated messages must be made absolutely clear, *visually* present, to the audience'. Peter Brooks, 'Melodrama, Body, Revolution', in Bratton, Cook, Gledhill, eds., *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*, pp. 11-24, p.18. Emphasis mine.

principle was one of supply and demand, it remained an important carrier of this message. It insisted, repeatedly and with the rousing approval of its audiences, on the right to happiness as universal, and on the inalienable right of each individual to be treated fairly by those in power. Furthermore, it often did so in explicitly visual terms.

This emphasis on the visual, on an appeal to the eye, is examined in the final chapter of this thesis with reference to the work of visual theorists such as Jonathan Crary. Melodramatic representation in the early nineteenth-century theatre developed a particular way of seeing and of constructing the spectator that responded to the changing dynamics of metropolitan modernity. Melodrama existed in a symbiotic relationship with other representational forms in the city, such as print, and with other forms of spectatorship, such as the panorama, not only exploring but also embodying a set of specific anxieties and preoccupations that were in themselves a product of modernity. As the discussions of *Jack Sheppard* and *The Bottle* in Chapter Eight are intended to show, often what dramatists and stage managers chose to present as spectacle in the 1830s and '40s already existed in visual form. Melodramatic spectatorship depended on a distinction between watching and taking part, a distinction that produced longing in the spectator but where nonetheless watching *was* a form of taking part in the circulation of common experiences and agreements.

Elsewhere, a number of arguments presented in this thesis propose that the affective structures of melodrama draw on and transform traditional understandings of social organisation from the eighteenth century and earlier. This can be seen, for example, in the genre's rebalancing of the relationship between the personal and the public. Melodrama assumed an understanding of subjectivity as publicly and socially constituted, as created via sympathetic exchange. In his famous study *The Fall of Public Man,* in which he examines the transition from public to private conceptions of the individual that characterised modernisation, Richard Sennett reflects:

> Playacting in the form of manners, conventions, and ritual gestures is the very stuff out of which public relations are formed, and from which public relations

derive their emotional meaning. The more social conditions erode the public platform, the more are people inhibited from exercising the capacity to playact.[489]

Throughout the period covered by this study, the commercial metropolitan theatre provided precisely this platform on which questions about how to act in public and the emotional meaning of social intercourse were explored. According to the logic of melodrama, the subject comes into being precisely through sympathetic identification with others in a social context. 'Ethical imperatives', as Peter Brooks has argued, 'have been sentimentalized, have come to be identified with emotional states … so that the expression of emotion and moral integers is indistinguishable. Both are perhaps best characterized as moral sentiments'.[490] Such sentiments were also and always culturally specific. By continually recalling and revising traditional versions of human subjectivity as constituted in the sympathetic encounter, melodrama sought to combat the less acceptable effects of modernisation in ways that were quite distinct from Romantic discourse, with its emphasis on interiority and the individual.

In its efforts to mitigate and critique the losses accrued during urbanisation and industrialisation, melodrama also made extensive use of nostalgia. This tendency to look backwards became a focus of criticism, especially for those who wished to denigrate the form by characterising it as reactionary and anti-progressive. This thesis proposes a different perspective. The disruption and dislocation caused by modernisation, the accompanying upheaval caused by the unprecedented demographic shift and rapid urbanisation and the loss of traditional communities and the social relations that had characterised them, were part of the felt experience of Londoners in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Domestic melodramas featuring lower class characters and the indifference to their suffering of landlords and employers subsequently became increasingly popular. The anxiety and discontinuity that underwrote plays such as *Martha Willis*, *Sweeney Todd* and *The Bottle* also provoked a widespread nostalgia, which was typically expressed as a longing for a more stable and prosperous rural past. As the account offered in Chapter Four of this study suggests, the nostalgic turn in

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[489] Richard Sennett, *The Fall of Public Man* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 29.
[490] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p.42.

domestic melodrama can be understood both as a historically specific response to a new kind of social formation, that of the modern metropolis, and as part of a longer tradition in Western art and literature in which the city is denigrated. In either case the use of nostalgia as an affective does not always and everywhere signal a latent reactionary or anti-progressive politics.

Melodrama also drew on the widespread pre-Enlightenment investment in the idea of providence, relying for some of its logic on traditional assumptions about the existence of a 'divine' force holding together the visible and invisible world. As Peter Brooks suggested in 1976, melodrama may be born of the very anxiety created by the guilt experienced when the 'allegiance and ordering that pertained to a sacred system of things no longer obtained'.[491] According to this way of thinking, in the early nineteenth-century metropolis, as Braudy suggests, 'the sufficiency of spiritual cosmology had been undermined by the rise of empiricism and scientific rationalism' and the widespread social upheaval that accompanied industrialisation and rapid urbanisation. [492] The seductive power of providence, the way in which it allowed individuals to see themselves as part of a pre-existing universal order, continued to have currency, as is evidenced by the widespread popularity of melodramatic plots, with their restorative endings and dispensing of just deserts. The material circumstances of the city itself, however, put a previously unimagined strain on providence's resources. Sometimes, as the discussion in Chapter Six of this study suggests, providence's limitations could actually be exposed by the operations of melodramatic plot. In particular, overtly mechanistic endings, such as those employed by Jerrold in *Black Ey'd Susan* or Buckstone in *Luke the Labourer,* could in certain circumstances operate to reveal uneven distributions of power, and therefore need not always be thought of as naturalising it. In addition, as the account of Lancaster's *Ruth, the Lass that Loved a Sailor* in the same chapter indicates, for example, there is some evidence of a healthy, if affectionate, scepticism about the limits of providence among lower class audiences in early Victorian London.

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[491] Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination*, p. 200.
[492] Braudy, 'Providence, Paranoia and the Novel', p.619.

As well as creating socially approved fictions and insisting on the right to happiness, melodrama vividly imagined the stability and wellbeing of society as being constantly under threat, even when it took the nostalgic English village as its setting. It can thus be usefully understood as an expression of paranoia. Providence and paranoia are interesting bedfellows, and their co-existence in most of the plays discussed in this thesis is a key indicator of melodrama's modernity. In a study published in 2006 entitled *Paranoia and Modernity*, in which he argues that paranoia is a by-product of modernisation, John Farrell defines paranoid thinking as follows:

> … it can appear in people who function relatively normally but whose thinking displays what may be described as a 'paranoid slant', a penchant for over-estimating one's own importance, for feeling persecuted, being morbidly preoccupied with autonomy and control, or finding hostile motives in other people's behavior.[493]

Aspects of Farrell's description of paranoia map straightforwardly onto domestic melodrama as defined in this thesis. For instance, melodrama's over-blown and hyperbolic signatures might be thought of as self-important. Melodrama is not shy of drawing attention to itself. It constantly re-circulates narratives of persecution such as those offered in *Jonathan Bradford*, *Susan Hopley,* or indeed any of the plays discussed in this thesis. Furthermore, melodrama is deeply concerned with limitations on, and possibilities for, different forms of agency that are afforded by the new metropolis. The accounts of Fitzhazard, the villain of Moncrieff's *The Heart of London* in Chapter Three, for example, and of Ankle Jack in Selby's *London by Night* in Chapter Seven, are illustrative of this trend. Finally, and most importantly melodrama finds villainy lurking round every corner. If nothing else this fixation compellingly evokes the presence of persecution and hostility. As the discussion above suggests, domestic melodrama stages paranoias attributable to the modern metropolis partly in order to mitigate them.

The energies of melodrama were not simply those of anxiety and amelioration. They were part of a process of rapid accommodation where they were brought to bear on representations of urban space and urban experience in a theatrical context. As the account given in Chapter Two of this

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[493] John Farrell, *Paranoia and Modernity: Cervantes to Rousseau* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), p.1.

study suggests, by employing a range of visual, technological and dramaturgical strategies, melodrama worked to make the city legible and knowable for its audience. At the same time however, the relationship between actual and imaginary urban space was rendered opaque as well as transparent by the force of melodramatic representation, so that large-scale or totalising views of the city, such as the one offered in the opening scene Moncrieff's *The Scamps of London,* were typically balanced with street-level perspectives where characters might find themselves lost and under threat. Both of these tropes are understood in this study as part of a larger ongoing effort to make sense of the new spaces of the metropolis.

A further indicator of melodrama's modernity was its focus on the vulnerability of the urban poor. In the 1830s and '40s domestic melodrama became a key site for the exploration of the anxieties that coloured the lives of lower class Londoners, who found themselves gathered together in larger numbers than had previously been imaginable, often in harsh and over-crowded conditions. As the arguments presented in Chapter Five of this thesis are intended to suggest, these novel social formations provided the context for the emergence of a new kind of class awareness. Lower class characters became a significant focus of interest in melodrama, and in a wider context, the city and the modernisation it embodied became important enablers in the formation of middle class as well as working class identity. The metropolis, with its ever-expanding crowds and its lower-class inhabitants, became a recurring preoccupation in middle class literary texts. In the newly established theatres of the East End, Southwark and Lambeth, melodrama provided a platform for the development of lower class characters as the absolute central focus of their own narratives. Such a focus was far less typical in novels of the period.

Melodrama was not overtly radical in most instances or in all aspects. Following its own logic of the excluded middle, it is tempting to read the genre either as a bourgeois collaborator acting in collusion with the monopolising tendencies of the market, or as a valiant resistance fighter doggedly attempting to combat the worst excesses of modernisation. However, as this study proposes, melodrama could both unwittingly adopt and knowingly subvert the value system of emerging institutionalised capitalism.

Furthermore, it did this work at the centre of the capitalist machine, in the greatest new city of the era. Reading and re-reading domestic melodrama in an explicitly metropolitan context allows it to be appreciated not only as a localised period convention but also as an active participant in the shaping of modern culture. Melodrama was a form that by definition strove not to offend the tastes of its audience, and to make money for the theatres that produced it. In order for an individual melodrama to be successful and comprehensible, the dramatist had to manage confusion and conflict in the spectator. He did this in part by creating a work that embodied in its structures ideological presuppositions designed to elicit the recognition and approval of the audience. Readability in a melodrama is to some extent dependent on a relationship of complicity between the spectator and the stage involving the acceptance of shared cultural values as well as the enjoyment of a relatively fixed narrative organisation. Melodrama's sensationalism, intrigue, paranoia, suspense and providential plotting, like most of its tropes, attest to the combative conditions under which it strove to represent communal and stable values in the heart of the nineteenth-century urban complex. Continually complicated and compromised by the market in which it operated, and yet continually complicating and contesting that market, melodrama was, as its earliest critics recognised, a truly heterogeneous form. In reality, the practice of domestic melodrama, with its multiple plots and serio-comic performance registers, continually complicated its own formal wholeness. The sheer variety of melodramatic practice offered a sustained challenge to fallacious notions of cultural coherence and progress that remained in currency throughout the period.

Finally, the arguments presented in this thesis are not intended to reduce melodrama to a reverberation of metropolitan socio-economic or cultural life. Instead they suggest that melodrama existed, and exists, as a response to a particular historical context, and to a large extent embodies in its forms the tensions and dynamics of that context. History inscribes itself into popular texts as a range of practices, but these practices can be, and often are, rewritten. This aim of this study has been to illuminate the crucial symbiosis that exists between 'melodrama' and the 'metropolis', and in so doing, to pinpoint a number of ways in which melodrama plays a productive

role in the processing, organising and understanding of the experience of the nineteenth-century city.

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