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Intersections of Race and Class in 1830s Othello Burlesques

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INTERSECTIONS OF RACE AND CLASS IN 1830s *OTHELLO* BURLESQUES

A Dissertation

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by

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Abstract

In recent years, we have come to better understand how nineteenth-century burlesques critiqued and lampooned the respectable humbuggery of patent theater productions and middle-class culture. Their carnivalesque spectacle and low humor turned topsy-turvy what was falsely revered or pretentious in English society. This study, however, explores the extent to which some burlesques responded conservatively to social and legislative change, which supposedly weakened established hierarchies constituting English culture and society. My chapters examine how two burlesques of Shakespeare's *Othello*—Charles M. Westmacott's *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* (1833) and Maurice M. G. Dowling's *Othello Travestie* (1834)—contributed to discourse surrounding debate concerning the 1832 Reform Act and the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act. These burlesques ultimately reject the transformative potential bound up in such legislation, and their mechanism of critique is a punitive compounding of low social standing with blackness, with the implied inferiority of each descriptor inflecting and intensifying the other. Finally, I suggest this link helps explain why many burlesques, and specifically ones depicting black characters, originated in and remained popular at London's West-End minor theaters but not others, in that their demeaning coupling of blackness with low social standing limited their appeal to more socially varied audiences at other metropolitan theaters.

Introduction

A Black Footman Plays Othello

On April 10th of 1832, actor Ira Aldridge trod the boards of London's Covent Garden for the first time, in the titular role of Shakespeare's *Othello, the Moor of Venice*. His performance marks the initial instance a black man played a leading dramatic role in one of England's patent theaters, and it sparked a maelstrom of outrage and indignation by some English theatergoers and critics.¹ Their anger stemmed not only from the locale of Aldridge's performance but also the subject matter: he was appearing as the hero of a Shakespearean tragedy. By this point, Shakespeare was largely heralded as England's national poet, and his plays and characters increasingly occupied a canonized and anointed place in the English cultural imagination. Seeing one of his central tragic heroes performed by a black man, then, proved untenable to some viewers, revealing the country's complex relationship with issues of race.

Most conservative reviews and even some moderate ones roundly pan Aldridge's performance, and their mode of attack rests almost entirely on Aldridge's racial otherness rather than his acting prowess. Several, however, also display a curious conflation of Aldridge's race with low social standing. For instance, an article appearing in the April 6th issue of the satirical paper *Figaro in London*, by owner Gilbert á Beckett, provides a starting point for examining this epistemological overlap. In a previous review, á Beckett had derided Aldridge as a "stupid looking, thick lipped, ill formed African" for appearing on a Lancaster stage (qtd. in Lindfors, "Ira" 146). Here, á Beckett compounds racial discrimination with that of class. He is disgusted by

the introduction to the boards of Covent Garden theater, of that miserable nigger whom we found in the provinces imposing on the public by the name of the *African Roscius*. This wretched upstart is about to defile the stage, by a foul butchery of Shakespeare, and Othello is actually the part chosen for the sacrilege. Is it because nature has supplied the man with a skin that renders soot and butter superfluous, is it on the strength of his

blackness that he considers himself competent to enact the part of the Moor of Venice? We have before jammed this man into atoms by the relentless power of our critical battering ram, but unless this notice causes the immediate withdrawal of his name from the bills, we must again inflict on him such chastisement as must drive him from the stage he has dishonored, and force him to find in the capacity of footman or street sweeper, that level for which his color appears to have rendered him particularly qualified. (qtd. in Lindfors 150)

This passage accuses Aldridge of using color (a hereditary trait, provided by “nature”) rather than talent to earn the part, a line of critique usually wielded by liberal reformers. Yet, á Beckett precludes any possibility of a black man playing Shakespeare, pointing to the supposed natural racial inferiority of blackness as cause. Aldridge’s very presence is defiling and dishonorable, and á Beckett slips into an odd sort of elitist defense of social hierarchy in support of this exclusion.²

I am struck by the severity of á Beckett’s critique, and its conflation of race and class. This attack comes before Aldridge even took the stage. Aldridge’s social status—or the social status á Beckett allocates for him—works in tandem with his blackness to disqualify him from the stage. As Hazel Waters explains of the situation, here was a black man “attempting to engage, on equal terms, with two national shibboleths at once—Shakespeare and the home of legitimate drama, a center of national prestige” (71). Ultimately, Aldridge’s “color,” according to á Beckett, makes him eligible specifically for the “level” of “footman or street sweeper,” these occupying the same lateral position along related hierarchies of race and class.

Á Beckett was not alone in this pairing of blackness with low social class, and other reviewers made much, for instance, of Aldridge’s former occupation as a footman, this an apocryphal story.³ Furthermore, á Beckett’s critique alludes to the figure of the black crossing-sweeper—supposedly based on an actual man—which had become a popular piece of London lore and was commonly featured in comedic portrayals of working-class life. Blackness, then,

had already entered into the London cultural imagination as socially aligned with the working class, and á Beckett merely calls on existing tropes to negate what he perceives to be Aldridge's anomalous foray into respectable, white theater.

What interests me most about this epistemic overlap is how it could be wielded offensively, literally put on the attack against individuals who challenged the racial inferiority of blackness, or who appeared to illegitimately appropriate subject positions or cultural artifacts (such as Shakespeare) beyond their reach. Á Beckett's language is unnervingly violent in its discursive enforcement of hierarchy. Using phallic sexual imagery, he reminds us that his earlier review "jammed [Aldridge] into atoms by the relentless power" of its "critical battering ram," and he intends his current article to physically "drive" Aldridge from the stage. Even further, he hopes to "force" Aldridge into an appropriate "level" via occupation, thus evacuating Aldridge's assumed social standing and enforcing an inflexible bar to such social and racial mobility. This is, in essence, a repeated discursive rape, putatively carried out for the protection of respectable, white culture.

Nearly contemporaneous with Aldridge's performance, and with á Beckett's verbal attack, was the staging of two burlesque productions of Shakespeare's *Othello* that dramatically take up such comparison. Burlesque productions put on what were essentially extended parodies of more famous plays and other works. They transformed these pieces by transposing high culture with low (and vice versa), by including topicalities and other details of modern culture, and by inserting sequences of song and dance into the main plot. Such changes produced comedic, fast-paced productions that directly interacted with their immediate contexts. In *Not Shakespeare*, Richard Schoch explains that the key function of burlesque moves beyond humor to critical analysis. Burlesques "interpret" the "precursory texts" (21) and call attention to the flaws and

exaggerations associated with legitimate productions. Their object of critique is not the original play itself but, often, the theatrical renditions and star actors of major stages. Jane Moody explains that, in the first decades of the nineteenth century, “Shakespeare productions at [the Theaters Royal] had... come to represent the patrician complacency of the political establishment, and the moribund moral correctness sweeping through the middle classes” (123). As Schoch tells us, “These eminent tragedians were nothing if not earnest.” Ultimately, they and “the pious pretensions of ‘legitimate’ Shakespeare culture” were “simply begging to be ridiculed” (3). Thus, patent actors, theaters, and production trends increasingly came under fire, both for their incessant need to close ranks against the minors, and, as Moody points out, their simultaneous adoption of the highly successful hybrid dramatic genres put on at supposedly inferior playhouses. Burlesques brought into focus the contradictions latent in legitimate theater and in the supposedly respectable middle-class culture aligned with it.

As we will see, though, burlesques critiqued more than London’s patent theaters and their respectable moral stance; they added to discourse regarding nineteenth-century England’s ⁴ most contentious issues, taking part in attempts to define and thus contain the parameters of English national identity and its established hierarchies at a time of much social and ideological change. Schoch brings into focus this interaction:

[P]erhaps the most consistent burlesque 'usage' of Shakespeare was political: to invite audiences (or readers) to think through different models of nationhood, national identity, and national origins at a time of gradual democratic reform. The Shakespearean affinities of politically minded burlesques only strengthen their topical force since, in nineteenth-century debates about political reform, Shakespeare provided a consistent frame of reference for thinking about issues of inclusion and exclusion. (151)

My subsequent chapters focus on the ways in which 1830s burlesques of Shakespeare’s *Othello* explore “issues of inclusion and exclusion.” Although Schoch uses questions of nationhood and democracy as the starting point for his investigation of how parliamentary legislation enforced

theatrical hierarchies and shaped the dramatic landscape, I examine nineteenth-century *Othello* burlesques in light of the broader ontological concerns occurring at this time, and that can be seen in the cluster of legislative changes occurring in the early 1830s, such as the 1829 Catholic Relief Act, the 1832 Reform Act, and the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act, to name a few. As Elsie Michie writes, “The debates that took place over these acts focused on the benefits of admitting previously excluded groups into centers of social power” (1), and their passage “began to release the bonds that kept individuals separate from one another...” (“On the...” 6). Moody suggests that the minor theaters, and specifically illegitimate productions of *Othello*, represent one site where we see this sort of questioning. Such renditions—here regarding mainly melodrama—“traded in the contemporary as well as the historical meanings of injustice, prejudice, and oppression” (137). A look at concurrent burlesque productions, however, which mainly appeared in West-End minors, reveals a more ambivalent, even hostile, attitude towards the spirit of reform apparent in other productions and in the 1830s culture at large. They reveal significant reactionary impulses bent on exclusion and containment, on re-girding established hierarchies unsettled by legal and ideological change.

We can see this exclusionary impulse in two *Othello* burlesques performed concurrent with such legislation. Both Charles M. Westmacott’s *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* (1833) and Maurice M. G. Dowling’s *Othello Travestie, in Three Acts* (1834), (this last play performed in London in 1836 under the title *Othello! ‘According to an Act of Parliament’*), imaginatively pin the play’s tragedy on twinned causes: Othello’s blackness and his status as a social climber. It is ultimately this combination of qualities that engenders Othello’s disgrace and death, rather than his blackness alone. In true burlesque fashion, both adaptations draw artistic inspiration

from their surrounding cultural contexts. Yet, these plays also take part in the surrounding discourses of race and class preoccupying the 1830s English political scene.

While much discussion regarding burlesque highlights the genre's transgressive potential and the ways it challenges the "humbug" and imposed limits of respectable culture, the *Othello* burlesques I study reveal distinctly conservative stances on questions regarding national identity, social belonging, and the place of poverty and racial otherness in English culture. Indeed, an in-depth investigation of West-End minor theater culture reveals that such productions were written at a specific historical moment when that theater scene's target audience—young, wealthy males—was tending with calls for expanded social and civic legitimation. The burlesques explored here adapt Shakespeare's *Othello* in order to envision how a person might elevate his or her social position, attain an expanded civic presence, and thus sue for a more legitimate and fulfilling standing within the English nation, as rational, thinking adults. What's more, they present us with these possibilities only to reject them. Specific pieces of legislation were affecting a redefinition of the nation's social landscape, and many citizens felt unease or outright hostility at the shakeup of established hierarchies. Portrayals of blackness and the working class performed in 1830s West-End minor theaters provide an avenue for studying particular responses to these changes, and specifically ones that reveal the conservative leanings of some West-End comedic productions.

The burlesques I examine ask us to consider the degree to which signifiers of racial and social identity inflect each other and are subject to change; how such categories of race and class might be mutually constitutive; and, ultimately, what happens to individuals who attempt to transgress culturally accepted boundaries. This dissertation takes up such questions, and in the

process, allows us to explore how the burlesque genre and the dramatic history of *Othello* play into and are inflected by nineteenth-century discourses of race and class.

Race, Class, and Reform in Nineteenth-Century England

In the following chapters, I explore the discursive link between blackness and the working class at one specific historical moment: England in the 1830s. My point is not to rehash the work of Douglas Lorimer, Norma Myers, and others regarding this connection but to further investigate how tension over social and ideological change inflected adaptations of *Othello* performed at this time. The link between blackness and the working class in these productions is not passive; rather, both groupings come under attack for being, in essence, “climbers” in their attempts to alter existing conservative hierarchies of race and class. The *raison d’être* of these burlesques seems to be the dramatic containment of upward mobility, to contend with ambiguity evoked by and represented in ideological and legislative change. My work helps illuminate the mechanism responsible for this coupling’s imaginative efficacy and helps refine our understanding of how, exactly, these particular burlesques present *Othello* as in need of rebuke, as putatively aligned with the working class, which, as á Beckett’s review of Aldridge indicates, was the “level” of blackness.

We can imagine nineteenth-century English society as cross-hatched with overlapping and interconnected hierarchies, of which race and class are just two of many. Individual subjectivity, then, depended upon a range of factors, and social striation was largely accepted as natural. Catherine Hall and Keith McClelland characterize the foundations of this view as “stadial,” with England and Englishness occupying the top rung of civilized society (7). If cultures and peoples existed at varying points along a Great Chain of Being, they were, at this historical moment, conceived of as capable of improvement and change. Very often, such views

motivated missionary and reformist efforts bent on helping colonial or lower-class subjects raise themselves up, with white, middle-class English society positioned as their guide and model. In part due to such efforts, more people began questioning the fixity of racial and social categories, and people's places within them. What qualities were innate and what were merely custom? What factors might bar someone from a more respected social standing when others might not? What did it mean to be English, or to behave as an English citizen? What did it mean to be white, or black, or some other racial category?

These questions became increasingly important during the French Revolution and England's subsequent war with France. Previous Enlightenment thought placed a premium on individuals' capacity to reason, and it prompted concerns regarding aristocratic control of the state and the government's supposed tendency towards waste and jobbery. The start of the French Revolution incited an uptick in calls for radical reform in England, with some arguing that the aristocracy/monarchy and the current electoral process hindered necessary change. Although some thinkers, such as Thomas Paine in his influential *Rights of Man* (1791), advocated revolutionary action to counteract monarchical tyranny, the bloodshed and mayhem of the French Revolution tempered much English radicalism for the time being, especially after England's own war with France in 1803. From this point, a more moderate view held sway, one touting English rationality and exceptionalism, and, as is commonly associated with William Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), the benefits of gradual change over drastic, sweeping measures.

As Linda Colley has so cogently argued, England's early nineteenth-century identity depended on its contrast with France. If France was implicated in violence, faction, and upheaval, then England was a model of order and solidity. If the French government starved and

mistreated its people through its own decadence and tyranny, then the English government took care of and listened to its subjects, via the parliamentary process. Indeed, many people in England considered themselves the freest of any country, not because individuals had free reign to do as they pleased, but because their government protected the will of the people. They pointed to England's system of justice as the bedrock of individual rights, with its laws and practices guarding all citizens against favoritism and tyranny. These qualities represent the essence of Enlightenment social contract theory; it was these laws, some suggested, and the democratic process afforded by parliament, that emblemized and protected the individual freedoms thought to be a part of the English constitution—a term used here in its juridical sense and with regards to innate national characteristics.

In many ways, though, these ideals exemplified the paradoxes and inconsistencies at the core of this national identity, some of which fomented into calls for legislative change. England was still home to much inequality, as reformers of the 1820s and 30s pointed out, and much of its population remained disenfranchised or excluded from a full civic identity. Its cities were home to legions of beggars and working-class families trying simply to subsist. Its expanding industrial centers were powered by poorly paid workers, many no more than children. Even further, colonial plantations provided the raw goods necessary for factory production, but these supplies were reaped through the blood, sweat, and tears of slaves. Much as proponents of English freedom touted their country's exceptionalism, their society still fostered much that was ethically and morally questionable, often in the name of tradition or economic profit.

The 1820s and 30s were years of much legislative activity aimed at ameliorating these concerns, and concurrent debates regarding reform help us see the unresolved questions and underlying ideologies surrounding what constituted English national identity. Very often, what

rights people might expect, and how they perceived themselves within the nation's hierarchical social structure, depended largely on extraneous factors: one's religion, trade, family history, gender, age, nationality, and education level. Legislation often concerned itself with how factors such as these qualified or disqualified someone from becoming an acknowledged, active citizen who could be trusted with the responsibilities inherent in that position. The repeal of the Test and Corporations Act in 1828 and the passage of the Catholic Relief Act in 1829, for instance, in part signaled attempts to contend with whether Catholicism and nonconformist Christianity could be figured as a defining characteristic of Englishness, as well as where England's Irish constituency fit within this identity after the 1801 Act of Union. The 1832 Reform Bill can be interpreted as an effort to make sense of how much the upwardly mobile and increasingly influential commercial middle class, or populations of industrial hubs, should guide parliamentary decision-making, and whether the working-class deserved a role in this process. In short, what personal qualities or elements of people's backgrounds might bar them, or prove them unfit, for active civic identities? Whereas religious doctrine and family history might not do so, as we will see, the litmus test for civic identity increasingly became financial and, implicitly, behavioral. A man's financial potential became a central qualifier for franchise, and such markers aligned increasingly with middle-class notions of respectability and propriety.

I detail the specifics of franchise reform in Chapter 1. My reason for introducing the topic here is to help us better understand what underlying ideologies informed key legislative decisions. As I will show, the way in which financial standing metonymically represented particular personal characteristics complicates rather than clarifies the difference between an enfranchised citizen and one lacking that standing (as did most of the working class). It is this

notion of lack that provided the imaginative link between the working class and blackness, and that factored into depictions of Othello's inferiority in the 1830s burlesques I examine.

Property qualifications for franchise ultimately aligned a measurable financial quantity with certain less-tangible personal criteria and qualities a man might possess: education, reason, and respectability, for starters. As Holly Brewer tells us, the Enlightenment focus on the necessity of these qualities in rational, capable citizens played a part in shifting paradigms of legal and governmental legitimacy, with "authority based on consent...opposed [to] authority based on inherited right" (13). Increasingly, parliamentary legislation signaled who might make rational choices, and at what age (if ever). As we will see, "[this] limitation on consent became a powerful weapon in the hands of those who sought to limit the radical implications of equality within the new ideology [of governmental legitimacy], either to maintain old exclusions or create new ones" (8). Brewer writes specifically about age limits here, which determined the right to marry, for instance, without parental oversight, but monetary markers (in addition to those of gender and age) provided a qualitative standard for civic identity in the place of quantitative exclusionary criteria, which were difficult to measure or define. The imagined substitution of property for respectability, or education, or reason, illustrates the slipperiness of qualities deemed necessary for civic identity. How can we tell if a person is capable of reason, or is morally sound? What does it mean to be respectable? As I will show, these categories abutted deep-seated (and sometimes conflicting) notions of gender, class, and race, where prejudice often prefigured and guided, if implicitly, the crafting of legislation.

How did race factor into issues of reform? Both domestic populations of black citizens and newly freed slaves might be impacted by legislative reform, to different effect. Norma Myers approximates that about 10,000 black citizens lived in England in the early nineteenth century,

with 5,000 of those centered in London (35). Not extensive numbers, to be sure, but enough to provide the average (white) person at least a passing familiarity with non-white citizens, in addition to literary or dramatic portrayals. These populations had come to England of their own accord or were brought as former slaves and servants.⁵ What's more, as David Daybdeen makes clear, the majority of them "were assimilated into lower white society to a considerable degree, finding pleasure, companionship, and a degree of protection amongst the ranks of the common people" (qtd. in Myers 131), making the discursive link between blackness and low social standing partially founded on actual demographics.

Yet, the function of this imaginative coupling in drama points to both an unease with the social class in which many black citizens resided, as well as a growing acceptance of separatist, or polygenetic, notions of racial hierarchy. Douglas Lorimer has extensively studied these populations and how white citizens perceived them. He contends that outright racism did not foment until the middle of the nineteenth-century, when demeaning slave stereotypes made their way from America. He labels color-based discriminatory behavior before this point as ethnocentric rather than racist—meaning it pertained broadly to outsiders in general—and he presents social standing as the determining factor in how people were treated, regardless of race: "When a black visitor entered mid-nineteenth century England, his social position, not his color, determined the quality of his reception" (56). My investigation of 1830s *Othello* burlesques complicates and refines this timeline. We can see a specific, putative coupling of blackness with low social standing, or within critiques of reformist ideologies promoting social and racial equality, on West-End minor stages in the 1820s and early 1830s, which serve as evidence of an earlier ossification of separatist thinking and an attempt to re-inscribe the parameters of traditional hierarchies amidst liberal legislative change.

Although domestic populations of black citizens might have entered into the nineteenth-century cultural imagination as working class, perhaps the most resonant context through which white English citizens encountered blackness was in discourse on slavery. Many people prided themselves on commitment to the abolitionist cause, and the cause of “freedom” in general. As Waters explains, “Those years of war with France had inflected the very notion of liberty as in the English gift—and the English saw themselves as gifting that liberty to traded African slaves” (53). Legislation in 1807 and 1833, it was argued, signaled England’s position as a country intent upon ending inequality and injustice. This self-satisfied view continued regarding England’s condemnation of American slavery. If France provided the national Other to which England could gauge the state of its civil liberties, then America functioned similarly, providing the brutal, backwards Other to its own progressive treatment of former slaves.

The 1833 Slave Emancipation Act fostered conversation regarding the legitimacy of England’s self-styled identity as a home of freedom and justice. Even further, conservative responses to the Act signal hesitation and resistance to the implications of such legislative change. As Helen M. Cooper suggests, “[T]he fact of slavery was intimately associated with the formation of the imagined community of the English nation, even if the practice within England’s geographical borders was limited” (196). Legislators took on the task of spelling out what responsibility the English government had towards its colonies and the people living there. Did colonial populations inherit or display the same national constitution as those of the metropole? If *Jane Eyre*’s Bertha Mason is any indication of popular thought, the answer did not bode well for populations raised in the tropics. If black citizens living in England experienced no specific legal or civic sanctions due to race, did their colonial counterparts deserve the same treatment? While the 1833 Act and subsequent revisions certainly signaled a legitimization of

black identity in the colonies (though its practical effect is questionable), it illustrates a legal adjustment, a change of practice, carried out for the sake of England's national identity.

How a person answered these questions depended largely upon his or her stance towards slavery and the foundations of race in general. Catherine Hall describes a “war over representation” that took place between abolitionists and the plantocracy, and that made its way into popular representation (108). As we will see in the next chapter, monogenetic conceptions of race, forwarding notions of the noble or child-like savage in need of white instruction, were at loggerheads with increasing insistence on polygeneticism and the natural inferiority of blacks.

The rise of such scientific racism, expounded through the work of anthropologists and anatomists, definitely had a hand in legitimizing notions of racial difference. But, as Lorimer tells us, “popular and literary sources were just as significant as scientific ones in the formation of the ‘nigger’ stereotype, and the concomitant conviction of English superiority” (160).

As my work with *Othello* burlesques illustrates, the comic stage of the 1830s clearly took up the question of how blackness fit within English society, specifically where and in what manner.

Such populations exist at a transitional period in representation, when notions of racial fixity were on the rise, but when many citizens were still trying to figure out what an expanded British identity meant for England and where socially mobile or newly freed populations of black citizens fit within it.

Importantly, the timing of these burlesques, and their mode of characterization, corresponds directly with debates raised regarding parliamentary legislation of the 1830s. If, for instance, the 1832 Reform Act represents an effort to define a reasoning, responsible citizen—one worthy of franchise, for instance, which became litmus test for full subjectivity—then who or what did the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act define? Clearly, it impacted enslaved populations in

the colonies, but it was also as much about defining Englishness and whiteness. What's more, we should pay attention to what it failed to define: a feasible alternative route to legitimate English identity for non-white citizens and former slaves. These groups, both at home in England and in the colonies, remained in a state of legislative limbo, neither entirely separate from nor part of the nationality to which they purportedly belonged. Both Westmacott's *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* and Dowling's *Othello Travesty* explore what a socially mobile black citizen might look or act like, and, importantly, they do so to reject such movement in English society. We can see these burlesques as exploring ways to envision and imaginatively contain facets of society and modes of demarcating identity that had been unsettled by shifting ideology, legislative debate, and eventual parliamentary action.

Not Only / But Also: Imagining Blackness and the Working Class on the Nineteenth-Century Burlesque Stage

As I have shown, no law or restriction barred non-white populations from claiming the same rights and protections as white citizens, and their civic participation in English culture depended upon the same financial qualifications. Yet, they nonetheless remained a population apart. Written at time of much social and ideological change, the burlesques examined in this dissertation contain these unwieldy or problematic facets of English society. First performed in the 1830s, these productions can be situated in a time of ideological evolution concerning notions of race and class, and they illustrate hesitation at or a rejection of such change and those liberal reformers who would further it. Although Waters locates the main shift towards fixed racial hierarchy at T. D. Rice's premier of his "Jim Crow" skits in 1836, we can see harbingers of this sort of thinking prior to the wild popularity of Rice's act.

I view as instructive the exact manner in which 1830s *Othello* burlesques present blackness in relation to working-class populations. Through a sort of alchemic epistemological

compounding, race and class were conflated in much nineteenth-century portrayal as a means of further justifying the inferior positioning of particular racial and social categories in the English cultural imagination. Negative or inferior qualities of the working class and racial minorities reinforce and intensify each other, making both mutually inappropriate and figuratively reconstituting what is legally indefinable.

Somewhere in the process of compiling my research and considering these plays, I realized I kept presenting this amalgamation grammatically, in the following manner: “Not only is he black, but he’s also a beggar or a social climber.” For instance, not only was Ira Aldridge a black man, but he was also a footman or a sweeper, and it is both of these facets that are seemingly needed to disqualify him from performing Shakespeare. The fact that both halves of this complex sentence routinely appear in nineteenth-century portrayals reveals the anxiety induced by each category, and the shaky ground on which the rationales for racial and social exclusion were built. The “Not Only / But Also” construction helps me conceptualize this connection because it hinges on two nearly commensurate halves that essentially balance and intensify what is perhaps inherently lacking when each is considered singly. Either side is contingent upon the other and cannot stand alone grammatically; each needs the other half to make sense as a statement.

The following chapters parse out the complexities of this link, as well as the minutia of each episteme. Readers should understand upfront that many sections of this study—indeed, some whole chapters—do not directly concern themselves with nineteenth-century conceptions of race and blackness. What made the study of overlapping discourses of race and class so richly intriguing to me relates to the myriad and highly nuanced ways class and social boundaries could be conceived of and patrolled. While much work has been done regarding conceptions of class

and England's changing economy, or of the rise of middle-class respectability, some of the more subtle modes of differentiation (accepted paradigms of justice) and representation (the Gretna Green topos) demand more attention. Thus, I spend a great deal of time parsing out these particulars and establishing discourses of class in order to demonstrate how they relate to those of race. Certain questions of authorship and biography also factor into my discussions, and, ultimately, these sometimes disparate strands of inquiry coalesce in and bolster my discussions of the interplay between notions of race and class at this historical moment. My goal in taking the scenic route, so to speak, around my topic—and visiting these myriad attractions along the way—is to help us better grasp how a burlesque's immediate contexts informed the tenor of its portrayals of both black characters and the working class.

Chapter 1 provides a contextual overview of 1830s England, specifically exploring the related hierarchies of race and class and how these factored into debates about English national identity as a whole. It also situates burlesques and the minor theaters within this milieu, in addition to introducing Shakespeare's reputation and why his *Othello* served as an apropos host for exploring these contemporary issues. The subsequent four chapters are comprised of two chapter pairs, each of which relates to a specific *Othello* burlesque. The first part of each pair (Chapters 2 and 4) provides a detailed look at each burlesque's attempts to redefine or re-inscribe notions of social mobility and identity. The second part of each pair (Chapters 3 and 5) illustrates how such re-inscription combines with issues of racial otherness and blackness on the West-End burlesque stage.

Thus, Chapters 2 and 3 work as a unit to explore Charles M. Westmacott's 1833 burlesque *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*. Chapter 3 uses the specifics of Robert Waithman's early political career and his reputation as a middle-class trader to introduce shifting notions of

social class and middle-class respectability. In particular, an examination of Waithman's early radicalism and his commitment to notions of justice and freedom help us see the ideals against which writers such as Westmacott seem to respond. While Westmacott briefly references Waithman in his play, he also implicitly draws on specific contexts of the middle-class, commercial City of London society in which Waithman operated. This chapter, then, uses Waithman's life as a frame of reference and entry point through which we can better understand the contexts affecting Westmacott's adaptation.

Chapter 3, although not specifically about Waithman, instead uses his social world as the setting in which to explore issues of race and class. Westmacott envisions hierarchies of race and class as fixed and intertwined, and he does so through Othello's relationship with a Waithman-esque Lord Mayor and his adoption of the sorts of ideals of justice and equality that were under investigation via legislative reforms that implicitly took to task questions regarding English identity and social hierarchy. My discussions explore how Westmacott links Othello's racial otherness—and thus his racial inferiority—to his presumptuous attempts to ingratiate himself in the City of London's mercantile middle-class, and, in effect, to acquire a higher social standing despite his continued occupation as a street-sweeper. Specifically at issue here is whether racially and socially inferior populations could elevate themselves by taking on middle-class morals and behaviors. More specifically, Westmacott envisions England's "culture of justice," its commitment to fair, equal treatment within the law, as what Othello specifically displays in his adoption of a higher social standing. Ultimately, Westmacott asks readers/audiences to reject such modes of social mobility, and to critique middle-class reformers who would encourage lower-class populations to behave in a way seemingly contrary to their innate or proscribed social standing. What's more, the imagined link between race and class works to compound or

reinforce Othello's racial otherness by way of imaginatively ejecting him from the moral middle class. Not only is Othello black, but he's also a social climber. And the implicit addendum here is to lay blame on those reformers, like Waithman, who would encourage him to seek such advancement.

Chapters 4 and 5 make up the second chapter pair, this time exploring Matthew Dowling's 1834 *Othello Travesty* and its participation in debates over another divisive form of social mobility: the elopement of underage, inter-class couples. Chapter 4 provides a detailed history of nineteenth-century marriage law regarding elopement, tracing its origins back to the 1753 Marriage Act and what I view as its attempts to regulate social mobility via marriage. In particular, the chapter explores the mythic identity of Gretna Green, Scotland, which, due to its exclusion from the 1753 law, made it an apropos discursive site for exploring the issues of class and individual rights in debates regarding marriage law reform. I am most interested in how the trope was used conservatively, to critique a mode of social advancement that negates heredity or birthright and that is achieved supposedly through deceit rather than honest work.

Chapter 5, then, uses this contextual background to better understand Dowling's incorporation of the Gretna Green topos in Shakespeare's plot. Othello is imaginatively disqualified from legitimate society through his clandestine marriage at Gretna Green and that site's association with the lower class and commercial greed. The play explores a central means by which one could ascend the nineteenth-century social ladder: through an advantageous marriage. As with Westmacott's adaptation, Dowling's rejects this mode of social mobility, presenting Othello's elopement as further evidence of his unsuitability as Desdemona's suitor. Not only is he a Gretna husband, and thus a social climber, of sorts, but he's also black, and these two traits consistently inflect each other, maintaining Othello's inferiority.

The pieces of legislation and burlesques discussed in this chapter in part grew out of Enlightenment ideals and the reformative impulse of late-eighteenth-century revolution, but their relationship to these ideals proved complicated. As Brewer explains, “Parliamentary actions and the debates surrounding them adjudicated—both legally and discursively—who had a right to legal and social legitimation. They signaled what individuals, families, and groupings had a right to ‘legal identity itself’” (342). Burlesque productions of the 1830s had a hand in the discursive legitimation (or exclusion) of particular populations, and my conclusion builds upon this discussion and hypothesizes that particular West-End minor theaters played a distinct role in establishing this discursive link between race and class and in limiting the “legal and social legitimation” of supposedly inferior groups. While essentialist, demeaning portrayals of blackness seem to have originated in the West-End minor theaters in the 1820s and 1830s, as many scholars have noted, productions incorporating them didn’t experience widespread success until T.D. Rice’s “Jim Crow” performances, which premiered in 1836. What perhaps led to Rice’s success was his presentation of a particularly American black character type, one that loosened the connection between urban blacks and the working class. Thus, we see Rice perform at a range of venues and for diverse audiences, whereas productions negatively linking blackness and the working class remained largely at the West-End minors.

The 1830s *Othello* burlesques studied in this project help us refine our understanding of the nineteenth-century afterlives of Shakespeare’s *Othello*. Even further, they serve as examples of the imaginative link between blackness and the working class and illustrate how trends in adaptation played a part in delineating the boundaries of race and class when, as many people feared, such boundaries were compromised by a changing economy and social climate. As my discussion of the West-End minors suggests, these various lines of inquiry interconnect and

inform each other, making for burlesque productions that can, in the same performance, mock the ostentation of the Theatres Royal and its actors, while also upholding notions of social and racial hierarchy that dovetail with the ideology of legitimate culture and theatrical tradition. These *Othello* burlesques contain within themselves competing impulses of “inclusion and exclusion” (Schoch 151), revealing a society caught up in the clamor for extended rights and legitimation yet fearful of change. I begin my investigation at the site of this ideological tug and pull.

Notes

¹ Felicity A. Nussbaum indicates that Aldridge was actually the first black actor to perform in England, when he took on the role of Oronooko at the Cogburg Theater in 1825 (72). He also performed *Othello* and other “legitimate” roles at provincial theaters before his turn at Covent Garden (Waters 72).

² Á Beckett even calls Aldridge an “upstart,” unintentionally evoking Robert Greene’s disparagement of Shakespeare as an “upstart crow” lacking original talent.

³ For instance, the *Athenaeum* laments, “Mr. Henry Wallack’s black servant in the character of *Othello*—*Othello*, forsooth!” (qtd. in Waters 74).

⁴ I specifically use England rather than Britain in this study because the burlesques I explore are particularly concerned with how colonial expansion and relations with Scotland and Ireland affected their conservative conception of English identity.

⁵ The legal standing of the latter category proves highly complex. In 1772, Lord Mansfield ruled on what became known as the Somerset Case, which determined the following,

[A] servant could not be forced to leave the country against his will. . . . [A]ccording to English law, slaves brought to England from the colonies enjoyed freedom only so long as they stayed within the country. If an immigrant black servant voluntarily returned to the slave colonies, he could be legally resold as a slave until slavery itself was abolished in 1833. (Lorimer 28)

Many later studies falsely interpreted this ruling as abolishing slavery in England, but, as Myers illustrates in her examination of newspaper reports and other official documents, some domestic servants were bought and sold in England as late as the 1820s (58-61). The 1807 Slave Trade Act technically ended the purchase and sale of new slaves but allowed for the continuation of slave practices in English plantation colonies. Only in 1833 did parliament abolish slavery in most colonies, but a controversial apprenticeship system maintained the racial hierarchies of slavery until 1838.

Chapter One

1830s *Othello* Burlesques In Context

I often think of the burlesque genre as the *Saturday Night Live* of the nineteenth century, with its constant trade in pop culture references and lampooning of current figures and events. Schoch labels this quality of burlesque its “spirited timeliness” (48). If we are to better grasp how nineteenth-century audiences might have understood the *Othello* burlesques of the 1830s, and how these productions took part in discourses on race and class, we must get to know the contextual lay of the land. This chapter first concerns itself with Shakespeare and the nineteenth-century theatrical scene—the differences between major and minor theaters, their repertoires, and their target audiences—and it situates legitimate productions of *Othello* within this theatrical milieu. I explore Shakespeare’s nineteenth-century reputation and how his status as a national icon, natural genius, and social climber all endeared him to a wide swath of England’s population. From here, I locate legitimate productions of Shakespeare and their burlesque counterparts within London’s theater hierarchy to establish the target audience for *Othello* burlesques. Such discussion provides the foundation for an account of *Othello* on the patent stages and illustrates how shifting attitudes regarding race and class guided the way key productions characterized the play’s titular tragic hero. The last two sections detail specifics regarding the 1832 Reform Act and the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act, further exploring the interrelated hierarchies within nineteenth-century culture that inflected major and minor portrayals of *Othello*. I examine how these Acts went about defining particular sections of the English national identity, and, in particular, how both wrestled with making manifest facets of that identity—namely the social and racial parameters of legitimate English society. Ultimately, these indistinct qualities sparked questions regarding citizens’ potential for civic agency and social legitimation, which the burlesques studied here take up and attempt to answer.

Shakespeare and the Nineteenth-Century Theater Scene

Shakespeare's nineteenth-century reputation makes him and his plays ideal imaginative sites for exploring England's national identity. They help us determine the parameters of that identity, and the ways certain populations were excluded from it. Shakespeare seemed to embody within himself the highs and lows of English culture. He was at once a national monument and particular product of the patent theaters, as well as a man of the people, and often viewed as *for* the people.

As Jonathan Bate explains, many eighteenth-century neoclassical critics faulted Shakespeare's lack of education, his bawdy or unrefined characters, and his irreverence to the dramatic unities. Yet, they also considered him a natural prodigy with the ability to create believable yet ideal depictions of real life. Thus, John Dryden describes Shakespeare as having the "largest and most comprehensive soul" (qtd. in Bate 7), and Samuel Johnson deems him "the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his reader a faithful mirror of manners and of life" (qtd. in Bate 8). Later, Romantic writers¹ highlighted Shakespeare's Protean creative capacity.² His ability to craft organically, his skill sprung from nature and cultivated through informal schooling, made him a fascinating subject for poets consumed with refining the creative process and seeking universal truths. In their view, Shakespeare's creations unfold their inner workings as realistic individuals. Although the majority of the population probably never encountered these views, such sentiments permeated the English cultural imagination. Indeed, faith in Shakespeare's ability grew throughout the nineteenth-century, a sentiment best captured in this 1860 newspaper quotation: "If human nature were quite destroyed, and no Monument left of it except [Shakespeare's] Works, other Beings might know *what man was* from those Writings" (qtd. in Taylor, *Reinventing* 114).

A sort of “cult of Shakespeare” permeated English culture—what we now call Bardolatry. Shakespeare became a mythic hero, a distinctly English creative genius and national poet. The trajectory of his late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century reputation directly correlates to a few key factors, the central of which Bate explains,

[He] had furnished the literary establishment with a model of distinctly English (un-French, un-neoclassical) genius; he was coming to serve as a cultural icon for the expanding section of the population, of both sexes, who were newly literate but not schooled in the classics. And, most tangibly, certain of his plays were becoming texts for the articulation of patriotic identity at key moments in the life of the nation. (28)

Shakespeare’s popularity is the result of a convergence of these circumstances and others, especially given England’s frequent conflicts with France. While Shakespeare’s plays never drew the sorts of consistent crowds as other comedic productions,³ his acknowledged role as England’s homegrown poetic genius assured him a place on patent stages. Rallying around Shakespeare became a form national pride. Very often, the managers of Covent Garden and Drury Lane—two of London’s patent theaters—tailored their dramatic selections in a given season to match the temperament of the nation. So, Shakespeare’s history plays (namely *King John* and *Henry IV/V*) were staged during upticks in tensions with France, but other plays (such as *Coriolanus* and *King Lear*) might be avoided or significantly altered to address tabooed or incendiary subject matter. In fact, *King Lear* disappeared from the stage altogether during the Regency years of George III’s mental instability (Bate 85). Instead, other more patriotic plays took its place, and Shakespeare’s works came to be seen as national treasures, and ones in which all citizens theoretically had a stake.

Despite the monopoly of patent theaters, which I will discuss, Shakespeare’s plays, plots, characters, and words circulated freely within the nineteenth-century cultural imagination as annotated or illustrated editions, character studies, parodies, epigraphs, burlesques, and myriad

other iterations. His works became ubiquitous due to advances in print culture, which gave rise to a thriving industry of periodical articles and affordable editions of the plays. Many of these pieces catered to particular demographics,⁴ and representatives of every social stratum claimed Shakespeare as their own. Thus, women readers and audience members might point to Shakespeare's support of strong, resourceful, yet womanly female characters, who validated women's expanded involvement in various causes and could serve as role models fit to educate England's girls. As Georgianna Ziegler writes, "All the women who wrote about Shakespeare and who acted the roles of his heroines found their self-expression enabled by him, and concurrently demonstrated through their lives that woman was more than a wife and 'Queen' of her own garden,⁵ but could also make an acceptable place for herself in the world" (223). Likewise, many working-class readers and radical reformers highlighted Shakespeare's humble origins and lack of education as representative of their own affinity to the playwright, and as evidence of their personal potential. Kathryn Prince suggests that Shakespeare's life became "a model for the ambitious working-class intellectual, a representative of that class who had risen through the ranks simply by the virtue of his own intellectual prowess and hard work" (16). Bate takes this notion and highlights its radical potential, indicating that "there is a strand within Bardolatry which turns Shakespeare against the power of the State and repossesses him in the name of liberty" (7).

Shakespeare's life seems particularly well suited to this sort of identification. Born in the bucolic midland town of Stratford-upon-Avon in 1564, he was the son of an upwardly mobile tanner whose growing business afforded him a prominent civic presence and a decent education for his children. When, in 1596, William Shakespeare successfully applied for a family coat of arms (one denied his father at an earlier date), he in many ways exemplifies the figure of the

social climber. He embodies the goals of many nineteenth-century citizens hoping to better their own lives and serves as a medium through which one can legitimate one's place in society—or one's *hoped-for* place in society.

Shakespeare also came to represent the apotheosis of Englishness, but the qualities signifying that “Englishness” varied, be they a staunch commitment to tradition, a forthright rootedness in English morality, or a stalwart, dogged resistance to oppression and tyranny. In this way, Shakespeare became embroiled in the many political and social debates of the early nineteenth century, serving as emissary and advocate for all sides. His protean abilities, his talent for dramatically rendering real people and imbuing them with authentic personhood, could be imaginatively harnessed by individuals seeking a more meaningful or expanded existence within English society. This ability is especially important when examining adaptations of Shakespeare in the heady years of the 1830s, where formerly disenfranchised or repressed groups sought a more robust social and civic presence. Shakespeare is capable of literally engendering, of bringing into existence, characters imbued with personhood and humanity. Groups that claim an affinity to him or legitimacy through him tap into this same potential. Or, he might be used conservatively, to forestall such legitimation, as in the burlesques explored in this project. We cannot, ultimately, simplify Shakespeare's nineteenth-century standing, how he was used, for what purposes, and by whom. What is clear is that Shakespeare's status as a universal genius made him open to accommodation by disparate groups who drew on his cultural capital to legitimate their own goals. He became a posthumous advocate of myriad disparate causes.

Legitimate Othellos and the Nineteenth-Century Evolution of Blackness

The 1830s were a time when social and political unrest prompted many citizens to take stock of their place within the nation and decide whether others had the ability or right to situate

themselves similarly. Dramatic productions—such as those of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, or later burlesques of the play—participate in the chatter generated by such questioning. Indeed, the subject matter of Shakespeare’s original text provides a fertile base for exploring such issues of belonging. As Marjorie Garber tells us, “Race, class, and gender become crisis points when they categorize something, or someone as different, and also as out of place: out of place, of course, from the view of traditional society.” She explains that, of Shakespeare’s plays, *Othello* most clearly “record[s] the tensions around and within these categories” (588). *Othello* is, in part, a play concerned with how being “out of place” takes its toll on a person, or how a society reacts to otherness. *Othello* is most obviously *racially* other, and dominant ideologies regarding a society’s conception of race, then, determine how dramatic productions tend with that otherness.

As we have seen, scholars generally agree that, in the second half of the nineteenth century, conceptions of racial difference became more fixed and overtly demeaning towards black populations. Prior to this rigidity, though, a range of factors determined how such otherness might be treated. As Myers explains, Renaissance experiences with “the powerful impact” of blackness, through encounters with African populations, “arous[ed] both curiosity and speculation,” with the “darkest of strangers...encounter[ing] greater aversion and distrust” (39). Blackness had, by this point, entered the cultural imagination as the diametric opposite of whiteness—as “synonymous with evil and sin,” “filthiness,” and “carnality,” and the inverse of English “purity” and “chastity” (40). That dark-skinned people visually manifested these qualities set them at a disadvantage when they attempted to assert their humanity.

Yet, even at this point, such systematic discrimination was often difficult to justify. Starting in the mid-sixteenth century to 1807, a confused exchange of back-and-forth common law rulings both upheld and ruled illegal the slave trade. For instance, after slavery had been

deemed illegal, a 1677 case, intent on clarifying the standing of slaves as cargo within the terms of the Navigation Acts, “ruled that Negros as infidels could be purchased and sold” (qtd. in Mtubani 72), and thus considered as other cargo. Yet, several later rulings upheld the freedom of slaves within England, for instance, and some people argued that baptized slaves should, by virtue of the 1677 ruling, be freed. This sort of give-and-take continued until the 1807 Slave Trade Act ended England’s continued trade in human cargo.⁶ At issue here is their legal standing, whether one person could own another and if all people could claim themselves equally human.

Such questions permeated the Renaissance and Enlightenment stage, with playwrights testing the waters as to what characteristics —namely high social standing—could offset the supposed taint of blackness. Shakespeare’s *Othello* is an obvious case in point, as is Aphra Behn’s *Oronooko* (1688), which was dramatized by Thomas Southerne in 1695. Before the end of the eighteenth-century, and prior to the height of debates over the slave trade, portrayals of black characters such as these generally incorporate two key tropes: the revenge villain or the noble prince. Plays that include black revengers evoke fears of invasion or conquest. This figure embodies the “evil” of Myers’s description and acts as a frightful foe, who is propelled by his native passions to mete out punishment for perceived wrongs committed against him. Conversely, the trope of the African prince—such as Behn’s *Oronooko* and, subtly, *Othello*—idealizes representatives of black nobility who are hobbled and degraded by the wrongs of slavery. In these depictions, criteria *other than* or *in addition to* blackness elevate our opinion of the character. In particular, Waters lists “class” as being able to “offset color, rendering such a protagonist worthy of respect as well as fear” (23), and military prowess serves a similar function in the case of *Othello*. Thus, Virginia Mason Vaughn characterizes pre-Victorian iterations of the

hero as “conceived in terms of similarity,” styled as the “officer and gentleman of the Restoration and eighteenth century” (*Othello* 160), a recognizable figure to audience members. To achieve this effect, productions of *Othello* dressed the hero in military garb, a move that downplays his blackness and elicits a sense of cultural and social similarity rather than racial difference.⁷ John Glavin explains these choices in costuming:

Until the end of the eighteenth century, Othello had been portrayed as a British General, uniformed, with full wig, and with no significant attention paid to his color in either characterization or *mis en scène*. Surprising as this may seem to us now, the Enlightenment Othello’s Moorishness seems to have been as inert a marker as Hamlet’s Danishness. This is unsurprising, perhaps, when we hear about contemporary tales of Spanish noblemen (read Mediterranean and southern) behaving to their ladies exactly like Othello. Enlightened Othello was alternative, then, but not subaltern. (“Othellos” 826)

Glavin implies that this elision of blackness allowed dramatists to bring out other character complexities that weren’t tied to race, providing for a more robust characterization overall.

We can see this line of thinking regarding early nineteenth-century English attitudes towards urban black populations. A lack of primary sources makes it difficult to tell what life was like for black citizens, or what most white citizens believed regarding them. As Lorimer makes clear, at least in the first half of the nineteenth century, black citizens may have met with little outright racism. He explains,

The nineteenth-century discussion of the racial question rested upon values and assumptions molded by this hierarchical, class-conscious, social order. The question, ‘does a black man equal a white man?’ had little meaning in an age when few thought all white men deserved equality.

Even reformers and missionaries advocating for black populations and former slaves saw nothing amiss with characterizing such groups as inferior: “[F]ew commentators espoused egalitarian principles, but they still believed that the individual through industry, self-help, and education could improve his social standing. They asserted that these avenues for self-improvement were open to all individuals, blacks as well as whites.” As a group, black populations simply had to

raise themselves from a lower initial standing than whites (15). Thus, citizens who were black and poor garnered little popular attention as nuisances apart from their general connection to poverty. “English behavior upon meeting blacks was not simply determined by an adverse reaction to their dark skin and other distinctive physical traits,” Lorimer notes. “Social standing as much as racial difference determined the attitude adopted toward individual blacks” (45). Tellingly, though, this alignment of blackness with social standing met with increased hostility “when individual blacks could claim to be educated, polished gentlemen, and therefore could not be treated as representatives of the lower orders.” Then, such equanimity regarding black citizens in English society proved problematic, as in the *Othello* burlesques I examine illustrate.

Late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century productions similarly adjusted their overall characterization of blackness, and figures like Othello could not as easily embody both nobility and blackness within the same person. Hall provides an overview of this shift:

While supporters of anti-slavery claimed that African men and women were brothers and sisters, the plantocracy claimed that they were fundamentally different from, and inferior to, their white superiors. While the icon of the planters was Quashee—evasive, lazy, childlike and lacking judgment—the missionaries and their allies constructed new figures, the black Christian man and woman. This man and woman were childlike, and in that sense linked to established colonial discourse, but also able to accept guidance, ready to learn, ready to labor and to live in families. These men were human beings, with feelings and thoughts, and the capacity for redemption. (108)

As Hall and others stress, both modes of characterization were deeply demeaning to black populations and presented whites and English culture as uniformly superior. What’s more, after the middle of the nineteenth century, most studies point to a rise in a more rigid racial hierarchy, with blackness indicating one’s innate and immutable inferiority.

A number of potential causes exist for this shift. Lorimer describes English culture prior to the mid-nineteenth century as “ethnocentric,” which, rather than present racially different populations as innately and unchangeably inferior, “admits the possibility of the outsider

conforming to the supposedly superior norm” (16). Hall and McClelland label this view “stadial” (7), and Hall elaborates, using the term “cultural differentialism” to explain how people “who lived in less developed cultures...would be able to advance,” if “[g]iven the right conditions” (17). Another term for this view is “monogenetic,” which presents all humanity as springing from a common source (Lorimer 134). These beliefs clearly present racially other cultures as inferior to white, English culture, but they admit at least a distant connection between all people.

This rise in missionary/philanthropist activity had a hand in forestalling more complex depictions of blackness. If missionaries, colonizers, and philanthropists cast themselves as the saviors and cultivators of supposedly up-and-coming cultures, then the objects of their efforts must be correspondingly uncivilized and weak, just the sort of people needing help. Indeed, many abolitionists furthered such a view in their appeal to the sympathies of white voters and created a positive image of themselves as rescuer. The goal for many wasn’t just to free enslaved populations and then leave them be; rather, they took on the burden of civilizing and guiding black populations as a sort of national, Christian responsibility. Indeed, some defenders of slavery touted the benefits of bringing slaves under the care of English masters; enslaved populations were deemed better off without freedom rather than remaining in a state of uncivilized brutality and ignorance (Hall 110). The cost of this line of thought was the complexity and dignity of enslaved populations, who could no longer figure as “noble savages” but instead entered the popular imagination as uninformed children, needing guidance and direction. Importantly, this alignment represented a key reason against granting slaves and colonial freed blacks an expanded civic presence.

Although conceptions of race became more fixed after mid century, evidence of overt racism isn’t hard to find. Hall labels this sort of thought “biological racism,” which focused on

“the notion of permanent physical differences which were inherited and which distinguished groups of people from another” (17), a view that coincides with “polygenetic” thought, where different races originated from different origins rather than a shared humanity (Lorimer 132). What is distinct about the 1830s, though, is the degree to which overt racism and the missionary/philanthropist impulse were uneasily poised within the same discursive arena. Exactly when the balance tipped to a polygenetic predominance is difficult to tell. In the 1830s, we see much ambivalence with regards to black subjects and slave populations, even if the more philanthropy-driven, abolitionist sentiments still held sway overall.

Thus, when we look at patent productions of Shakespeare’s *Othello* during the first half of the nineteenth century, we can see evidence of a general ambivalence towards blackness, especially when combined with noble qualities or revered aspects of English culture, like Shakespeare. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century productions of *Othello* took part in and visually manifested changing perceptions of blackness, which, as Waters tells us, directly related to England’s involvement in the international slave trade, as well as its contact with later American notions of blackness conveyed through such mediums as comic minstrelsy. The burlesques studied in this project appear at a transitional point, when the concept of racial hierarchy was still evolving and when racial otherness increasingly entered the cultural imagination as a prominent (and mainly negative) criterion affecting one’s social standing and sense of belonging. Within these contexts, how did productions of *Othello* handle the blackness of their leading man? How did they portray a character who inhabited a seemingly contradictory subject position, as racially inferior but socially and artistically superior, as one of Shakespeare’s characters? Gail Marshall explores Othello’s character complexity: “As both a dark-skinned, non-European man and a Shakespearean tragic hero, Othello was a hybrid, impure figure, vacillating continuously

between Otherness and Identification” (72). As one of Shakespeare’s heroes, he could be interpreted as a “true” representation of humanity, one worthy of a prominent dramatic, imaginative standing. Yet, as a noble black man, he physically manifested an ideological conundrum: Could a Negro man be respected, competent, and beloved by a white woman? Could he maintain a high social standing? Major production trends indicate that Othello’s high social standing no longer as clearly signaled his place within the community, and patent actors began experimenting with ways of better aligning his race with his status and demeanor.

Playing Othello at Drury Lane from 1785 to 1805, John Phillip Kemble depicted a recognizably militarized hero. As Julie Hankey tells us, Kemble’s general acting style was “all-of-a-piece, in the best neo-classical manner” (31), and his physicality and demeanor—“tall, statuesque, patrician”—also matched his performance style (36). Given these attributes, Kemble excelled in military parts like Coriolanus but lacked the emotional range, the warmth and volatility, necessary of Shakespeare’s lovers. A “hybrid” role like Othello, then, which embodied both character types, “suffered an amputation in his hands” (31), and neither audiences nor critics celebrated his time in the role. As for appearance, Hankey relates that, in 1787, Kemble “assumed ‘the Moorish habit,’” and was received by critics as if it “were not yet customary” (41). In the minds of commentators and audiences, though, he probably came off as “no more foreign than a southern European” (31).

Kemble’s take on Othello was also inflected by the era’s turn towards propriety. Hankey describes a “gathering atmosphere of embarrassment” at the “play’s very subject matter,” here regarding its openly crude references to sexual impropriety (31). ‘Legitimate’ portrayals of Othello and many of the printed editions and other commentaries placed a premium on maintaining the hero’s honor, nobility, and respectability, prompting productions to first “deny

[Othello's] jealousy and then to de-sex his love" (42). In order to maintain this mode of characterization, certain parts of Shakespeare's text, such as Othello's eavesdropping scene and epileptic fit (Shakespeare 4.1), were excised to "preserve heroic propriety" (29).

To varying degrees, subsequent Othellos maintained many of these cuts, as well as this focus on middle-class domesticity, although some actors better embodied the character's emotional range than Kemble. Edmund Kean, known for his fiery acting style, took on the role in 1814 at Drury Lane. Hankey describes him as "short, mercurial, a man of the people," a diametric opposite to Kemble's statuesque staidness (36). His representation of Othello thus focused more on the man's "soul" than his physical posturing (37), displaying "thrilling transitions" between the character's highs and lows (38). Indeed, Kean's acting style made him a favorite of the Romantics. His contemporary, William Charles Macready, who played the role at Covent Garden from 1816 to 1851, struck a compromise between Kemble's austerity and Kean's chiaroscuro. Macready's own deep-seated sense of respectability motivated further cuts to Shakespeare's text, and his performances conveyed a domestic temperament neither too stately nor brutal. Vaughn explains that, especially regarding Macready, this focus on domesticity further familiarized the figure of Othello, making his character and his marriage relatable. No longer the brave military hero, he was instead the "doting husband" (Vaughn, "Othello" 158), a move that made the play's tragedy more domestic and personal.⁸ For this reason, though, Macready's rendering also generally fell flat with audiences, who felt that it lacked the sort of transcendence or sublimity of other performers (Hankey 44-6).

This move to the domestic affected Othello's appearance and costuming, and, more broadly, reflects shifting attitudes towards his race. Macready's interest in historically accurate attire led him to represent Othello as eastern rather than "sub-Saharan" (Hankey 44), a change

maintained by many later actors. Around this time, Kean also inaugurated an Othello with much lighter or “tawny” skin (Glavin, “To Make” 30), one that paired well with the vogue for oriental attire. Macready’s and Kean’s physical alterations of Othello move him higher up the racial hierarchy, a shift that better accommodates—indeed, makes intelligible—his social positioning and marriage. As Andrew Carlson states, here in relation to how white critics responded to black performances of Shakespeare but representing overall attitudes as well, white culture “claimed an ownership of racial definitions and used different strategies to achieve a similar goal: the separation of Othello's nobility from his blackness" (177). And this need for separation stemmed from an incompatibility between blackness and respectable, manly traits, as well as the complications that legitimate white actors faced in taking on black characters. As Glavin explains, “[The] line that cannot be crossed here is the color-line. While the actor can enter and play out the inner life of the moral other, even at its most despicable, he cannot convincingly find in himself the racial other, even at its bravest and most passionate” (“To Make” 34). In order to tend with such unruly qualities, actors simply whitened Othello, lessening the contrast between the two sides of this demarcation. Perhaps such a change would have appeased Coleridge, who asserted, firstly, that Shakespeare would never have been “so utterly ignorant as to make a barbarous Negro plead royal birth,” and, secondly, that “it would be something monstrous to conceive this beautiful Venetian girl falling in love with a veritable Negro” (qtd. in Ziter 610). That Coleridge refers to blackness as “veritable,” meaning authentic or genuine, signals the presence of polygenetic thought well before midcentury. Here, a true Negro had distinct qualities or characteristics apart from other racial groups. That Othello is a Moor, with lighter skin, rather than a “Negro,” legitimizes Shakespeare’s portrayal and better aligns the character with

nineteenth-century conceptions of noble masculinity. As a master dramatist, able to see into the heart of human nature, Shakespeare knew better than to conceive of Othello as a black man.

Ultimately, Coleridge's rigid and demeaning conception of blackness existed within a broader culture still attempting to figure out if and how English identity—the supposed pinnacle of cultured society—could accommodate blackness. As Vaughn tells us of this timeframe, “[Othello's] Otherness had not been institutionalized. In his nobility, honor, and manly dignity, he could be conceived, as Macready seems to have viewed him, as a gentleman very much ‘like us’” (*Othello* 139). By “institutionalized,” Vaughn points to the consistency and ubiquity of demeaning polygenetic stereotypes affecting black figures and other “non-whites” after the 1850s, but that were still coalescing at this point. To a certain extent, though, changes in depiction—here regarding Othello's blackness and his domesticity—represent a particular *stage* in the institutionalization of racial stereotypes. It's not that nineteenth-century audiences were not yet racist, and thus could still interpret Othello as “like us,” but rather that subtle shifts in portrayal helped maintain a sense of connection. As we will see, this alignment with middle-class domesticity makes Othello's relationship with Desdemona more recognizable, in addition to deemphasizing its sexual component. It highlights the valorization of respectable, moral behavior seen as representative of the increasingly powerful middle ranks of society. Given the ubiquity of information on philanthropy and missionary efforts to help civilize “heathen” Negro populations, we cannot ignore the imaginative, contextual link between this sort of domestication and the shift that Othello's character undergoes. What's more, concurrent efforts to lighten Othello's skin perhaps subtly reveal hesitation or ambiguity regarding the potential success of these reformist efforts. Could a black character, one who was a “veritable” Negro, undergo such a transformation?

Characters that couldn't be whitened and amended in this manner, and that didn't have Shakespeare's name as backing, met with more demeaning treatment. Waters describes how representations of black characters in serious drama became less complex after the turn of the century, and especially towards midcentury. Here, in relation to changes to *Oronooko*, she explains that, by the 1830s, "the process of reducing the drama's complexity and the amount of agency and universal human quality...is well under way" (46). The figure of black nobility "has passed through bombast and affectation...to pleading, almost feminized dependency" on the affirmation of white society. Likewise, "the threat posed by black vengeance on a slave trading society has receded," becoming something "tamed and self-defeating." In relation to both character types, "all are securely held within a fixed and increasingly dominant racial paradigm" (57). These portrayals, bereft of either dignity or danger, better align with a hierarchy of race that seemed to make blackness and character complexity mutually exclusive. No more could other criteria excuse or elide blackness and thus allow for a black character's higher social standing.

Indeed, even Othello proved susceptible to the tide of racial prejudice, despite his more familiar light skin and domestic bearing. Glavin explains that, as a character and play, *Othello/Othello* largely failed after early nineteenth-century portrayals: "It's not only that there are no more great Othellos, but that there are rarely Othellos of any kind. Actors either avoided the role, or failed in it" ("To Make" 32). The play no longer held a prominent place in the patent theaters' Shakespeare repertoire, and, indeed, the only tragedian to meet with success in it, and "make it come alive," was "the distinctly non-English Tommaso Salvini" (33), who took on the part in 1875 at Drury Lane and in 1884 at Covent Garden. Salvini's Italian heritage perhaps made him a better match for Othello's passionate and savage, his Other, qualities. As Waters points out, "The English middle-class...defined themselves equally in opposition to other

Europeans, non-Protestant religions, the Irish, the Scots, and even the working class” (8-9). Thus, while the racial and temperamental difference between a black, or even “tawny,” Othello might have proved too “Other” for white actors to embody, perhaps an Italian man (whose nationality was understood as more fiery and sensual, with darker skin) might better inhabit the role.

London’s Theatrical Hierarchy and Depictions of Race and Class

A key factor in the play’s disappearance becomes clear if we look at portrayals of blackness that *did* meet with popular success, and the venues in which we could find such portrayals: the comedic and melodramatic productions of the minor stage. Where nineteenth-century audiences encountered Shakespeare often depended on their social rank and where they lived in London, specifically in relation to its theater scene. Such local specificity also determined what form of Shakespeare they might encounter.

The venues putting on these shows were, like English society, highly stratified. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, England’s major theaters had a long history of fighting for a respectable reputation and throwing off earlier associations with ribaldry, urban grit, and dubious women. By “major” theaters, I mean the patents—namely London’s Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and during the summer, the Haymarket, as well as a few other venues around the country—which held exclusive rights to perform spoken drama. As Katherine Newey tells us, in 1662, Charles II granted Thomas Killigrew and William Davenant patents to produce legitimate drama, meaning “spoken or regular drama of the repertoire of plays in English (the Legitimate drama) in London” (141). Thus, although London was home to many theaters, only a few could perform the works of Shakespeare, or, for that matter, any other spoken production. George Taylor characterizes theater patents as “a form of property,” which could be bought and sold like other

possessions (25). Thus, patent theater managers maintained a legacy of preferential treatment and exclusive rights, which they passed down to their managerial predecessors. In order to maintain this exclusivity, the Lord Chamberlain in London and magistrates in parishes and boroughs around the country approved plays for performance, assuring that staged content was neither seditious nor lewd, and that it didn't infringe on the rights of patent productions (Davis and Emeljanow ix). Michael Pisani indicates that, in the nineteenth century, "[b]oth Great Britain's 'legitimate' royal houses and the 'illegitimate' theaters produced works under the rubrics of opera, pantomime, spectacle, ballet, and farce" (73), but the patent houses retained the right to perform straight comedy and tragedy, a stipulation that curtailed the range of productions available to minor theaters. What's more, the patent system helped the Theaters Royal shake their earlier dubious associations with "moral pollution," through a sort of legal and ideological "alchemy" (Moody 11). This official supremacy lasted until 1843, when the Patent Act allowed for the performance of 'legitimate' drama on minor stages.⁹

Before 1843, though, theaters technically existed within a hierarchy, and patent theaters and their repertoire figured as superior and more legitimate than those of the minor houses. In addition to relating to specific theater locations, to be 'legitimate' at this time, explains Moody, was to adopt and present "an extensive set of institutions and associated moral values based on aristocracy, property, heredity, monarchy, and the Established Church" (53). Thus, theatrical productions at the majors often forwarded these ideals. Not everyone accepted this conception of legitimacy, though; indeed, what constituted "legitimate" and "illegitimate," and where one might find representative productions, became subjects of debate in the nineteenth century's early years. As both Schoch and Moody illustrate, the Theaters Royal, their monopolistic patents, and the managers and star actors who manned them all came under attack for hindering the

laissez-faire economy of theatrical productions of the sort thought to lead to more true-to-life, legitimate productions.¹⁰

What's more, even minor theaters became associated with their own hierarchy based on location and social class, with West End theaters often characterized as more elite than those in the East End and Surrey-side. Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow examine the nuances of these supposed hierarchies in *Reflecting the Audience*, compiling such information as census data and first-hand accounts of playgoers to better understand areas of overlap between supposedly disparate theater communities. As they explain, nineteenth-century audiences "have usually been defined in terms of binaries based on the notions of 'center' (the West End) as opposed to the 'periphery' (south London or the East End, for example)." This binary did not necessarily reflect lived experience, though. "London theater audiences in the mid-nineteenth century were so diverse that generic definitions are clearly inappropriate," they explain. "This diversity existed not only across London but also within specific theaters and neighborhoods. Indeed, London theater audiences were far more socially and physically mobile than previous accounts imply" (226). Audiences from the various quadrants of London, then, might attend productions outside their immediate communities, and individual theaters attracted a range of social groupings at each performance. Yet, the *perception* of social difference between east and west, and between major and minor, persisted throughout the period, and, as I discuss below, it shaped the way theaters operated and how they presented social striation and race.

In general, theater repertoire and audience composition correlated to a theater's location, although not entirely.¹¹ Covent Garden, Drury Lane, and the Haymarket are located in London's West End, an area that reputedly catered to the commercial and entertainment tastes of the social elite. Davis and Emeljanow note how the patents' proximity to "the fashionable and aristocratic

neighborhood of St. James” helped maintain this exclusivity. Prior to the 1843 Patent Act and before the flux of “fashionable” people moving from the city center to the suburbs, the patent theaters could rely on local populations to attend productions regularly, in addition to people travelling specifically to see plays not available in the minor theaters (171). The 1830s, then, represent a transitional period when the process of population migration was underway but where access to most legitimate dramatic material necessitated a visit to the patent theaters.

London’s many theaters, major and minor, put on a range of dramatic genres, but, since minor theaters lacked patents, they relied on other comedic and musical fare to fill seats. Taylor labels such productions “mixed-genre pieces” (*French Revolution* 149), variations of burletta, “which usually featured a number of songs for the major characters, as well as choruses and dances,” and pantomime accompanied by music (Pisani 72-3). Thus, burlesques of *Othello*, for instance, take Shakespeare’s basic plot, and perhaps even the gist of his words, and mix in musical numbers and topicalities to render them safe for minor stages. As Marshall explains, “[M]uch of the comedy of the burlesque is generated by the creation of a series of palimpsest texts, a layering of productions, Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean, English and continental, which confounds the notions of the singularity of the theatrical spectacle” (Introduction 7). Moody provides particulars concerning how such productions circumvented patent restrictions: “[R]hyming couplets and dramatic recitative, accompanied by music, provided two important kinds of illegitimate speech at the minor theaters” (28). These spoken/sung portions might be accompanied by dialogue printed on “linen scrolls” and use of pantomime to imply content (28, 87-98). Such showpieces allowed minor theaters to skirt official sanction and produce adaptations of legitimate drama found only on patent stages. While many productions from the 1820s on flouted patent law to varying degrees, making the barest of efforts to meet patent

stipulations, the necessity to alter 'legitimate' content remained, even as opposition to the institutional theatrical monopoly met with increasing resistance (Moody 135).

Some minor theaters became known for specific dramatic genres, which often aligned with their audience demographic. London theater audiences were not homogeneous, whether in the East End, West End, or somewhere in between. Yet, the deciding factor in a person's choice of theater often involved proximity, and most theaters drew patrons predominantly from local residents, who might favor particular types of performance. Schoch tells us that theaters with a "strongly working-class audience," for example, generally "adopted a repertoire heavily weighted toward melodrama," and to the exclusion of such comedic productions as burlesque (107). Davis and Emeljanow further refine these preferences. On the Surrey-side of the Thames, the Victoria "arguably catered to a local, popular audience" of working-class and middle-class families and thus specialized in "domestic drama," or melodramas following the trials and triumphs of domestic workers.¹² Nearby, the Surrey, which had "acquired the reputation as the most respectable of minor theaters (Moody 35), offered more diverse fare given its convenient location at the juncture "where the roads to Westminster and Blackfrairs Bridge" met (Davis and Emeljanow 4). Its usual offerings of "opera, melodrama, burletta, and farce," then, would have "appealed to both a mixed local audience and to visitors from further afield" (39). East-End audiences have generally been categorized as working-class or worse, and while this quadrant of London did contain a high percentage of poor inhabitants, it was still home to a population of better-off citizens, in addition, I might add, to populations of black citizens. As Davis and Emeljanow insist, "Socially, economically, and demographically, the East End was constantly changing." Indeed, "in the earlier years it had been a vibrant, confident hub of trade and industry," even if it declined in the last half of the nineteenth century. Its theaters provided

entertainment for a mix of patrons, from laborers to “affluent inhabitants” not wanting to make the trek to the West End (47), although Moody conjectures that “[f]ew members of the House of Lords...had patronized any of the East End theater” (38).

Theaters in the West End also catered to a range of patrons but drew in a higher proportion of wealthy citizens than others. Thus, this area was home to “a resident community of hard-working men and women, pursuing a craft-based living in various small businesses, and a middle-class professional group attached to government bodies and commercial institutions together with artists, musicians, and actors” (179). This range of patrons visited both major and minor theaters, with ticket prices varying to accommodate a diverse audience and half-price tickets available later in the evening (186).¹³ Certain theaters, however, clearly developed a reputation for more elite crowds. *Cruchley’s Pictures of London* (1831), in which George Cruchley provides a guide to some of London’s theaters, characterizes the Adelphi as “a favorite resort of the laughter-loving gentry during the winter season,” designating it “by far the most fashionably attended of all the minor theaters” (84). Moody adds to this distinction, explaining how the Adelphi “acquired a settled place in the metropolitan economy of pleasure, particularly amongst Regency bucks.” This crowd drew from the metropolis’s middle and upper crust, although we cannot rule out poorer locals attending as well, with seats “being taken weeks in advance; peers and apprentices, dukes and dustmen mobbed the theater to obtain admission” (39). While a range of patrons may have frequented these productions, Schoch makes clear that burlesque audiences “certainly did not include the dog-thieves, pick-pockets, and ‘embryo and mature convicts’” characterized as frequenting other comedic venues (108). Theater location also might not have affected the West-End minors as much as others. Davis and Emeljanow indicate that the West End became a sort of entertainment destination, a “theme park” for people who had

the money and means to get there (173). The common denominator of these crowds, then, was often socioeconomic status rather than location, as well-to-do citizens from all over converged at these destinations for light entertainment.

Specific productions catered to this audience makeup, one with a predominance of young, relatively wealthy men. Schoch explains how “[m]ost of the pieces represented [at the Adelphi were] written expressly for this theater,” with a particular grouping of “comic votaries” (its managers, Charles Mathews and Frederick Henry Yates, for starters) taking on key roles (84). Thus, Yates played Iago in Westmacott’s *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*, which debuted at the Adelphi in 1833. The nearby Olympic is also characterized as having been “raised to a preeminence over all the minor houses,” generally producing “entertainments that are light and musical, and give great promise of popularity” (88). These were the sorts of venues most commonly staging burlesque, a predominance Moody explores: “Burlesque was crucial to the minor theaters’ reputation for vulgar laughter, and to the fame of the Adelphi in particular. Audiences delighted in the plays’ grotesque costumes, incongruous snatches of contemporary song, and absurd mock battles fought with bladders, brooms, and vegetables” (186). Such was the humor that drew in audiences night after night. These theaters staged other sorts of plays as well, but they became known for their burlesques, and specifically their adaptations of Shakespeare.

The target audience of Shakespeare burlesques shares this imagined higher social positioning of the West-End’s minor theaters. Schoch indicates that a burlesque’s success hinged on the audience’s familiarity with its subject matter, and so people attending Shakespeare burlesques would have “[known] enough of legitimate Shakespeare, by whatever means, to appreciate the burlesques’ topical satire” (111). They also would have been familiar with the

topicalities—the humor, songs, and other references—interwoven into Shakespeare’s plot and making up the burlesques’ social and cultural contexts. Prince indicates that Shakespeare burlesques—which “[transform] Hamlet’s soliloquies into musical numbers or [relocate] the action of *Othello* from Venice to London’s Fleet Street”—“reshaped Shakespeare into a cultural commodity accessible even to those without a gentleman’s education” (85). To a certain extent, Prince is correct, but this statement does not take into account the predominance of educated men at these productions, or the plays’ imagined subject positioning in line with this population, a point to which I will return. As Schoch indicates, these productions catered to a distinctly male audience, the “swells,” “sparks,” and “men about town” (134) that frequented such venues as the Adelphi.

This core audience displayed a certain contrariness to respectable convention. Schoch characterizes this target audience as distinctly male, “bohemian” types who displayed a “disposition of...values” that made them amenable to the work of burlesque: “[A]nyone sympathetic to burlesque would be more inclined to question—not affirm—the values associated with legitimate culture” (113). Thus, the topicalities of these productions often directly reference and interrogate cultural norms, as well as “[articulate] dissent from dominant culture and social hierarchies” (135). Clearly, many patrons would have simply enjoyed the spectacle and physical humor of burlesque performances. Yet, the extent that the burlesque genre—including its irreverent critiques—continued to expand throughout the early nineteenth century, peaking in the 1850s (5), points to a degree of comprehension among audience members receptive to and seeking out such irreverent critique and ideological interrogation, rather than spectacle alone.

Even further, the productions of these theaters often examined the pressing social and ideological questions directly affecting its young male audience. As Moody explains, West-End

productions “had begun to explore...a new and confusing world where social roles and forms of business were no longer fixed and immutable, but might be assumed and exchanged, just like parts in a play” (188). Their productions often specifically dramatized “the fears, aspirations, and desires which characterized this world of urban masculinity” (189). Thus, although audiences may have enjoyed the topsy-turvy fun of burlesque, the genre’s habit of toying with and exploding established hierarchies reveals the extent to which such topics weighed on the minds of audiences.

Minor theaters may have battled to gain theatrical legitimacy in light of the patent theaters’ exclusive rights to spoken drama, and burlesques like *Othello Travestie* and *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* specifically lampoon the acting styles of major actors and performance trends in the patent theaters. This does not, however, mean that they were consistent in their support of social equality or other reform efforts. Indeed, many burlesques reveal a socially conservative stance on issues of identity and belonging, and they align imaginatively and socially with the West-End and its perceived wealth. As Schoch makes clear, burlesques did not critique the pretension of respectable society for the sake of less-fortunate citizens. “For all their topicalities and domestications, Shakespeare burlesques did not construct their audiences as working-class subjects,” he states. “Nor did Shakespeare burlesques 'speak' from a laboring-class perspective even though they comically represented the clichéd behavior and leisure pursuits of urban workers. Burlesque characters rarely articulate class-based antagonism” (118-9). In this way, then, we see burlesque audiences constructed by negation, by the productions’ rejection of working-class subjectivity, which affirms the imaginative hegemony of London’s better-off citizens through demeaning, comedic West-End portrayals of social (and racial) inferiors.

My point in delineating general demographics for London's various theater districts is to point out how each seems to have developed particular expectations regarding the portrayal of black characters and the working class, especially before midcentury. This differentiation has gone largely unexplored. For instance, in *Racism on the Victorian Stage*, Waters provides an engaging overview of how notions of blackness, as portrayed in nineteenth-century theater, changed throughout the century. Her approximation of when fixed notions of racial hierarchy coalesced aligns with that of Douglas Lorimer and many others, placing it after T. D. Rice's "Jim Crow" productions in 1836 and beyond. Yet, Waters does not adequately differentiate between target audiences, of both minor and major theaters. Most plays prior to the nineteenth century were performed in the patent houses; the minors simply hadn't been established yet. Of the increase in minor houses, Waters writes,

[T]he early years of the nineteenth century were marked by massive population growth...so that numbers of new so-called minor theaters sprang up. Cheap, accessible and popular, they evaded the monopoly stranglehold of the patent theaters by concentrating initially on pantomime, music and dumb show or a hybrid form known as "burletta," which incorporated some dialogue. These were mostly located in the expanding lower-class districts: the Surrey and the Cogburg (later Victoria, today's Old Vic) south of the Thames, for example, and, subsequently, the Pavilion, the Grecian and, later, the Britannia in the east of London. (38)

While patent theaters generally put on earlier productions involving the black revenger figure and the noble savage (which were at times revived throughout the nineteenth-century), the minors Waters discusses mainly produced anti-slavery pieces presenting sentimental portrayals of slaves and domestic comedies involving cunning but good-hearted black servants. Waters correctly points out the shift between the more threatening earlier character types and later, more benign and pathetic ones. Her discussion of the significance concerning how T. D. Rice's American import "Jim Crow" ushered in an ossification of racial categories is also central to our

understanding of the evolution of nineteenth-century racial stereotypes, even though we must better ascertain the origins of its English ascent.

Missing from Waters's list is an exploration of the influential West-End minors—the Adelphi and the Olympic, for instance—specifically regarding how their target audience and particular repertoire might have been distinct from other minors and played a part in nineteenth-century conceptions of blackness before and contemporaneous with “Jim Crow” mania. Davis and Emeljanow's *Reflecting the Audience* has been instrumental in piecing together this role, as has Schoch's *Not Shakespeare*, which helps us place burlesques of Shakespeare's plays within this nineteenth-century context. As my chapters on *Othello* burlesques will show, the more affluent clientele of West-End minors appears to have eschewed the tamer, pathetic portrayals of blackness presented in East-End and Surrey-side productions (although we cannot rule out their patronizing these performances as well, given audience mobility). As we have seen, the subject position inferred by these burlesques is a specifically male, “bohemian” sort with a conservative social outlook and solid financial standing. Thus, the theaters most associated with this social group—the fashionable West-End minors—presented both working-class populations and blacks in a similarly demeaning manner. These portrayals were contemporaneous with the pathetic and unthreatening black characters of Surrey-side and East-End productions, but they present a singular, caustic edge towards both black populations and the working class that is absent from productions in other areas of London. Waters rightfully associates Charles Mathews's early blackface character pieces as precursors to Rice and to the rigid conceptions of race exemplified in the second half of the century. Yet, we must better attend to the role of burlesque played in engendering these stereotypes, to how the West-End minors staged them, and to the issues of class represented here that differ from other productions and venue locations.

Minstrelsy and other white appropriations of blackness enjoyed widespread success by mid-century, and the comedic mechanism of such portrayals further entrenched blackness at the bottom of an increasingly rigid racial hierarchy. Importantly, such productions often originated in the fashionable West-End minor theaters. Charles Mathews, an English parodist and comic actor known for impersonations and monopolylogues,¹⁴ supposedly culled material from his American travels in *The London Mathews; Containing an Account of This Celebrated Comedian's Trip to America...* to create several highly popular comedic impersonations of African Americans in his sketches. Moody presents Mathews's *At Home* sketches as displaying an "irresistible mixture of satirical caricature and delicate pathos," thus making it "one of the highlights of the theatrical season" (192). These sketches also ruminate on the social concerns plaguing nineteenth-century audiences:

Mathews's entertainments shared with the novels of Charles Dickens a rich and subtle combination of family caricature, social satire (including topical references to such subjects as "the pecuniary crisis" and the bubble mania) and delicate pathos. His caricatures—nervous valetudinarians, jealous apothecaries, gossipy old Scotch ladies, young bloods from Saville Row and Yorkshire gamblers, literary butchers and ignorant "cits"—dramatized the aspirations, anxieties, and embarrassments of an age fascinated by its boundless social mobility. (198)

We can add to this list Mathews's various representations of black characters, including that of a black tragedian—supposedly fashioned after real-life examples¹⁵—and black servants. These examples made use of the comic black dialect and appearance already circulating in the English popular imagination since the 1820s, and his presentation of blackness here, within these sketches, illustrates a key method by which racial otherness increasingly entered into popular thought along with questions of "boundless social mobility." Robert Hornback posits American Mordecai Noah as first consolidating and staging the core features that factored into Mathews's and later portrayals. These qualities include "widened eyes, gaping lips, ill-fitting clothes,

‘nigger’ dialects, and contorted movements” (qtd. in Hornback 135). Such were the lineaments of minstrelized black characters for decades to come, which Mathews incorporated into his performances. *Life in London* was first performed in 1824 at the English Opera House (a West-End theater formerly called the Lyceum, which focused on musical productions and opera). In 1828, Mathews joined actor Edmund Yates in managing the Adelphi Theater, which became one of his main theatrical venues until his death in 1835.¹⁶ Waters notes that W. T. Moncrieff’s *Monsieur Malleet (or, my Daughter’s Letter)*, a direct “spinoff” of Mathews’s blackface depictions, was first performed at the Adelphi, presumably under Mathews’s management (94). He also played Othello in Westmacott’s *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* at the Adelphi in 1833. Although Mathews started out at the West-End’s major theaters, then, we can see his direct legacy in the minors.

Even more popular, though, were the creations of American actor T. D. Rice, whose 1836 character “Jim Crow” built upon Mathews’s performances and sparked a vogue for minstrelsy and blackface comedy that spanned English and American theaters. The effect of such shows, notes Waters, was to essentially “render the black as a species apart” (89), to develop restrictive and essentialist notions of racial hierarchy. Rice’s influence ran the gamut of minor theaters, playing the Surrey and the Adelphi during his 1836 tour, later putting on shows at the East-End’s Royal Pavilion in 1839 (“Burnt Cork”). We must note, however, that many of Rice’s premiers took place either in the West-End or at the well-situated Surrey Theater to the south,¹⁷ which, if we recall, attracted a more diverse audience than other theaters that side of the river due to its prime location (Davis and Emeljanow 4).

The typecasting of black characters presented in these productions imaginatively contained and defused the real-life struggles of black individuals who sought freedom, social

legitimation, and expanded rights. As my discussion of the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act will illustrate, the 1830s was a time when many people questioned whether ex-slaves could hold a legitimate place in English society. While abolitionist and missionary rhetoric might signal the shared humanity of all people, strains of ambivalence, and even outright racism, regarding blackness also entered into discourse. Part of the rationale for Jim Crow's popularity relates to the reactionary entrenchment of racial differentiation in the wake of abolition. As Joyce Green MacDonald explains, "[T]he audiences of minstrel shows or *Othello* 'burlettas' would be offered the more reassuring spectacle of whites acting black, or reasserting a relation between observer and object which affirmed white authority over, and authorship of, narratives of racial difference" (237). Blackface performances circumscribed and reduced black characters and the populations they represented.

Clearly, discourse regarding slavery and English national identity motivated much comic minstrelsy. But, as we know, English audiences didn't have to bend their thoughts across the Atlantic to encounter black citizens and individuals seeking expanded rights. England was home to upwards of 10,000 blacks, most of whom lived in urban areas, and specifically London's East End. Myers reveals most black citizens were male, and, if employed, worked in domestic service, the military, or as sailors. Yet, many lived in poverty, unable to find consistent work. In 1731, the Corporation of London specifically barred black citizens from entering apprenticeships, a piece of institutional racism affecting their ability to enter many skilled professions and thus raise their economic and social standing (56).¹⁸ In 1786, a Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor provided per-diem allowances for almost a thousand needy black citizens in London. Such support, however, and perhaps the difficulty of assimilating the idea of these populations into the English cultural imagination, proved untenable, motivating efforts to

establish a new home for the black poor in Sierra Leone (Myers 22-4). Later, the 1816 Society for the Suppression of Mendicity also listed black beggars as contributing to the poor population (25). These examples, combined with the consistent presence of black individuals in paintings and other representations of the time, reveal the extent that groups of black citizens were a consistent feature of England's working class by the second half the eighteenth century. It is unsurprising, then, that artistic and dramatic portrayals of the 1820s and 1830s consistently present blackness as tied to working class populations. Quite literally, it was the socio-economic level of the majority of black citizens, and many of them lived and worked among the country's white urban poor.

What's more, West-End productions might borrow from racial discourse when presenting depictions of white working-class populations. East-End theaters frequently staged melodramas and other productions valorizing the virtues of working-class citizens,¹⁹ but West-End productions more often reinforced negative stereotypes of poorer populations, objectifying individuals from these groups as sources of comedic spectacle aligning with a vulgar, orientalized "Other" (Davis and Emeljanow 174). Comic performances like Moncrieff's *Tom and Jerry* (1821)—a stage adaptation of Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1820) first performed at the Adelphi—created spectacles of urban otherness for wealthy, fashionable patrons. As Heidi J. Holder explains, such shows present East-End working-class communities as worlds apart from the civilized West End, where affluent audiences vicariously gain a "sense of mastery, of conquering...the challenges of urban existence" through the main characters' slumming (32). Audiences are not meant to identify with or feel compassion for working-class characters but are instead prompted to see them as specimens of squalor and backwardness. The longevity of such

plays as *Tom and Jerry* attests to a general acceptance of, and even revelry in, such class-based representation.

Contemporaneous productions at the East-End and Surrey-side minors might present sentimentalized and/or non-threatening black characters, often with abolitionist undertones, but West-End productions simultaneously use the presence of black characters to objectify and make strange working-class populations in general. Holder highlights the racial diversity often included in West-End representations of urban squalor, and she explains that black characters had become standard comic figures, often included as a means of increasing the “sense of strangeness and the thrill” of coming into contact with London’s underclasses in general (32). Here, examples of racial otherness serve as evidence of the East-End’s “exotic” population (34), and they also illustrate a link between the social immobility shared by lower-class and black populations alike (35). We cannot assume, then, that slavery represented the only paradigm by which nineteenth-century audiences understood issues of blackness. Rather, we must extend our frame of view to position notions of American slavery in relation to concerns over very real domestic black populations, ones that served to further imaginatively distance wealthier white populations from the urban poor.

I see the *Othello* burlesques discussed in this dissertation as poised at a particular historical moment, when abolitionists and those people holding monogenetic conceptions of race were embroiled in debates with both pro-slavery factions and those people who held more conservative notions of social and racial hierarchy in general. The burlesques are highly ambivalent, if not outright hostile, to attempts by supposedly inferior groups (i.e. the working class and black citizens) to claim a more legitimate and involved place within the English cultural imagination, most specifically through civic action. The final sections of this chapter

detail two legislative changes of the 1830s that make up central contextual components of *Othello* burlesques and that represent an integral discursive site regarding questions of inclusion and exclusion, belonging and otherness, that I've been exploring. The debates regarding these pieces of legislation—which are two among many—asked citizens to define Englishness and what rights English subjects could expect through their particular social and racial positionings. Very often, the delineations of these categories proved slippery at best. Through these burlesques' interaction with and responses to debates over social and racial hierarchy and English national identity, we can see emerge a more conservative conception of both blackness and social standing, which provided the imaginative basis for more rigid, polygenetic notions of race. Waters and others are right to pinpoint attempts to create English social unity through the denigration of blackness, slaves, and continued slavery. The 1830s, however, marks a distinctive intermediary moment when this solidarity had yet to coalesce around more rigid notions of race and blackness.

The 1832 Reform Act

The 1832 Reform Act—formally called the Representation of the People Act—was not necessarily the most important reform affecting English populations in the 1830s in terms of actual change. Indeed, as Susie L. Steinbach explains, many historians characterize other legislation as being “arguably more important.” Yet, contemporaries of the Reform Act and thinkers “for over a century afterwards” interpreted it as “the most important event in British political history, one that brought the middle class into the political nation and ushered in an age of democracy” (41). Such an evaluation illustrates the extent to which the franchise had become the imaginative benchmark for civic identity. Furthermore, given the extent to which middle-class men were thought to have spearheaded many of the industrial and economic changes

bolstering England's national prominence, this focus constructs a teleological story of origins, where franchise reform brought about and validated the national ascendancy of the middle class. The First Reform bill, then, has often been figured as a moment when England became more *itself*, living up to its reputation as a bastion of freedom, equality, and morality.

The actual effect of the 1832 Reform Act is debatable. Since representatives of the House of Lords held hereditary, lifetime appointments, only the functioning of the House of Commons stood to change, specifically concerning the distribution of seats, who filled them, and what portion of the population helped directly select MPs. Proponents of reform sought to rectify what they viewed as flaws in current franchise law, which undermined the legitimacy of elected officials and the country's representative government. They pointed to the outdated distribution of seats in light of recent urban growth, the possibility for corruption regarding "pocket" boroughs and "placemen," and the narrow view of what constituted "property" in guaranteeing the vote. As Steinbach explains, pre-reform electorate distribution had not been updated since the fourteenth century and failed to account for population migration and urban development. A high degree of variability also existed in qualifications for who could vote, with drastic differences between counties and boroughs, and among boroughs. Steinbach details the Act's changes to property qualifications: "Rather than the outright ownership of land, the 1832 Act recognized the ability to rent land or a home worth £10 as a form of property ownership, at least insofar as status and political participation were concerned. It also decreed that most adult males who owned or leased land or a home worth £10 could vote." These changes expanded the overall electorate from 516,000 to 1.75 million adult men (Steinbach 40), more than doubling the number of voters electing MPs. Yet, these additions still only accounted for 14% of adult men—nowhere near a majority and still excluding poorer citizens from active participation. Borough distribution also

affected electorate makeup. As Peter Jupp explains, “[T]here was a significant increase in the number of MPs representing county constituencies—the bedrock of the landed and agricultural interest. The Reform Act of 1832 in particular therefore did as much to shore up the landed interest as it did to enfranchise centers of industry” (223). Thus, the move to regularize standards and procedures actually narrowed and made less diverse the possible electoral pool in some counties.

Such qualifications signal the solidification of nineteenth-century ideology regarding what sections of the population behaved rationally and morally. Common thought held that men of property (traditionally in terms of the social elite) more clearly embodied the characteristics necessary for effective leadership: “[P]roperty meant that you had a stake in society and deserved a voice in the governing of the nation.” Such ownership purportedly safeguarded against rash decision-making and the backing of revolutionary candidates, since both scenarios posed potential threats to property and prosperity (Steinbach 33). Proper etiquette, explains the 1834 *Hints on Etiquette*, is “the barrier society draws around itself as a protection against offenses the ‘law’ can’t touch—a shield against the intrusion of the impertinent, the improper, and the vulgar” (qtd. in Moody 200). Of course, we now understand that legal change and ideology regarding proper behavior went hand in hand, with the latter often implicitly encoding the former. Thus, the 1832 Reform Act’s changes in the meaning of what *qualified* as property and ownership, which enfranchised the majority of England’s middle class, signaled the belief that middle class voters displayed the cognitive and moral capacity to choose such representatives, whereas those in the working class did not.

Most Lords and MPs pushing for franchise reform were not ideologically motivated to increase civic engagement, provide for a more equal representative government, or, as Jonathan

Parry notes, specifically reward respectable behavior (5). Nor did they want to alter the class demographics of government representatives. Parry notes concerning party leaders,

All of them shared the standard nineteenth-century belief that civilization depended on the maintenance of social ranks. They encouraged individual self-improvement within all classes not least because of their ingrained assumption that the class structure was preordained and that men of property were society's cultural leaders. (5)

Thus, their goal in reworking franchise qualifications was not to upset this social balance but to assure that voters picked the right representatives, ones who would address social concerns through moderate rather than radical means. More important to them were the proposed redistribution of parliamentary seats and triennial parliamentary elections, which would better represent citizens' needs, especially in urban or industrial areas, and allow for a more frequent shakeup in representatives if proven ineffectual. Indeed, the redistribution of parliamentary seats had more reformative, radical impact than the expansion of middle-class franchise, a point Parry makes clear: "When Reformers talked, as they often did, about bringing the 'middle classes' into the constitution, they envisaged it being done primarily by creating new boroughs, since new ideas and impulses could be obviously best promoted by an alteration in parliamentary personnel, not by a different mix of voters" (84).

What the expansion of middle-class franchise did accomplish was to pacify some (though certainly not all) agitators for reform and to create a governmental atmosphere fostering accountability and openness. Jupp explains that the 1832 Act's most significant accomplishment related to "the recognition that public opinion had become a powerful factor in the constitutional balance; and an acceptance of the necessity of office-holding at whatever level being seen as a matter of public trust rather than private profit (182). MPs could not be viewed as operating within a vacuum of elite power but instead understood the importance of public opinion (Steinbach 41), as well as the need for illustrating a concern for constituency "grievances" (84).

They did not function independently but instead served “as the protector[s] of interests and the expression of the national will,” and in doing so they helped “reconcile” the populace to governmental rule, legitimating its actions (Parry 72).

The Act’s impact should also be gauged in terms of imaginative gains. Whereas other countries (and specifically, it was thought, France) couldn’t enact reform without devolving into violence and chaos, as Taylor explains, popular thought held that England’s reforms illustrated a willingness to eradicate corruption and inequality. Unlike France or America, the country hadn’t succumbed to revolution and violence to achieve this end. Instead, it enacted change through “shrewd negotiation” (*French Revolution* 3). What’s more, even though the social demographics of the electorate and the Commons weren’t overhauled with the 1832 Act, the middle class came to occupy a more influential place in the country’s cultural imagination as a result. Middle-class enfranchisement signaled overarching consensus as to their respectability and morality, and the ubiquity of this reputation justified their further interest in governmental procedure and regulation. As Lauren Goodlad explains, “[I]n the dynamic decades prior to and just after male middle-class enfranchisement in 1832, Britain’s socially ascendant commercial and professional classes constructed a self-authorizing vision of a moral, liberatory civic culture overseen by middle-class pastorship” (39). The middle-class’s actual influence in politics and government is essentially not as important as the *perception* of them as the respectable, moral watchdogs of English government and society. They developed a mythic identity as the nation’s ethical center. What’s more, since land ceased to be the defining qualifier for property, with rents factoring into franchise eligibility as well, more businessmen and traders of smaller means claimed this status since they no longer had to own a property outright to qualify.

Because the 1832 Act did not institute universal suffrage, it actually further instilled prejudice against poorer citizens (and women, for that matter) in its selective legitimization of middle-class, male franchise. This shift created a legal wedge between enfranchised men and their poorer neighbors, altering class relations between social groups. These sections of society had at times combined forces to promote franchise reform, but the Act's 10£ limit shattered this solidarity, given that most working-class men couldn't meet the property requirement. Indeed, Steinbach asserts that the 10£ limit was specifically implemented "to deny [voting privileges] to working class men" (40) rather than grant them to those of the middle class, since many already met the property qualifications. The implicit rationale motivating this exclusion pointed to the moral and intellectual turpitude of the working class. Whereas enfranchisement characterized middle-class citizens as "respectable," as the "safe recipients of the privilege of voting," it indicated the opposite of working-class men (40). Insufficient property symbolizes an inherent lack of reason and intellect, and an ingrained brutality or volatility. Indeed, working-class populations increasingly became objects of middle-class reform efforts, a relationship bolstered by the ideologies of class undergirding franchise qualifications and thus solidifying the community's related social and moral hierarchies.²⁰

The 1833 Slave Emancipation Act

The 1833 Slave Emancipation Act (passed August 28th, 1833, and effective August 1st, 1834) came close on the heels of the first reform bill, and it proves just as complex in its effects as the former, especially concerning how it reflected back on England's reputation as a nation of freedom and fairness. Even further, the imaginative link between issues of race and class, which manifested in nineteenth-century dramatic performances, points to a shared ontological crisis

inflecting notions of racial hierarchy and blackness, the evidence of which made its way into patent productions of *Othello* and their burlesque counterparts.

To what extent was slavery an important concern to nineteenth-century English subjects? For several hundred years, England had been enmeshed in the slave trade, and many individuals had either directly or indirectly grown rich from its profits. As we have seen, this trade had led to the establishment of a small population of black subjects living in England. The physical representations of slavery—either in the form of these domestic populations, or in the goods and products made available through slavery—were everywhere. While Waters is right to claim that slavery and the treatment of black slaves was a more immediate concern to Americans (90), the issue and its representatives were clearly a part of English culture. How, then, could English subjects justify their country’s status as a bastion of freedom and fairness? How could its devoutly religious populations conceive of themselves as morally upright, as in God’s favor, if their nation “sold the heathen for selfish gain” (Colley 353)? Abolition efforts certainly helped bolster this self-styled mythology, but the process of affecting change was protracted and complex.

Proponents of British exceptionalism liked to tout the fact that no person could remain a slave on English soil, but, as we have seen, the legal history justifying and limiting slavery proved highly complex, especially at the common law level. Only in 1807 did England prohibit its ships from participating in slave transportation or stop importing slaves to its colonies, and it still allowed for the continued subjection of current slaves. And, in reality, the 1833 act that purportedly ended English slavery only affected the West Indies and maintained slave practices in territories owned by the East India Company, thus revealing the influence of pro-slavery lobbies in London.²¹

The passage of emancipatory legislation did not, then, represent a complete renunciation of slavery within England, although many proponents of the 1833 Act *were* motivated by benevolence, altruism, and a concern for the well being of enslaved populations. This historical moment represents the span in which monogenetic conceptions of race began to transition into more clearly polygenetic. Legislative changes to end slavery represent one facet of the unsettled racial climate of the 1820s and 30s and indicate England's self-conscious attempts to maintain national ideologies of freedom and equality, which purportedly set it apart from rivals such as America and France. Caleb W. McDaniel explains how some nineteenth-century abolitionists sought to motivate legislative action by eliciting "patriotic shame," by calling out the country's hypocritical claims of moral superiority in the wake of continued slavery (46). Indeed, many economic advancements stemmed in large part from England's participation in slavery, and this fact added another tangle to its claims of moral and social enlightenment: "Black-skinned slaves were the engine of the economic development of European slave trading and slave owning societies, yet glaringly gave the lie to those societies' professed Christian belief system and to the concept of a common humanity in which those beliefs were held to be rooted" (Waters 10). Many English emancipation efforts can be seen as attempts to alleviate the "shame" associated with this hypocrisy and to regain national standing as an exceptional nation, and their efforts often proved effective. As Colley writes of the Act's effects, the loss in slave-related revenue could be recouped in "psychic and political gains" because England "had acquired, through its anti-slavery campaigns, a reputation for moral integrity that even the most cynical foreign observer was likely to pay some tribute to" (359). Importantly, though, these gains retain their imaginative distance from black populations and allowed for the simultaneous assertion of white racial superiority.

Colley is correct when she tells us that these parliamentary changes “revealed as much if not more about how the British people thought about themselves, as it did about how they saw black people on the other side of the world” (351). And this statement holds true regarding alterations to Othello’s character and other depictions of blackness on the nineteenth-century stage, perhaps even more so in England given its physical separation from the sites of slavery and enslaved populations. Slavery could more easily exist as a theoretical concern than in America, acting as a reflexive gauge by which individuals and populations could measure their own enlightenment and morality. These questions can be seen as participating in the same discursive arena as other social concerns, not just about racial hierarchy but about issues of equality and justice as a whole. Thus, many comedic representations of blackness—either in minstrel shows or the *Othello* burlesques that incorporated their portrayals of black characters—also represent concerns over other criteria of social belonging, such as nationality, religion, and, most importantly, social class.

This ideological work is especially important with regards to my investigation of *Othello* burlesques at the Adelphi and other West-End minors, in that the plays’ incorporation of stereotypically vulgar and uncivilized working-class populations interact with their treatment of Othello’s own social standing as a black man in a predominantly white community. Edward Ziter tells us that the “theater traced out the newly discovered scope of human diversity,” where race “was both an external marker and an expression of internal proclivities, drives, and desires” (608). This “scope” and its associated subject positions came to represent a “fixed hierarchy of race” (610) that read in people of darker skin a certain ingrained set and qualities. Most depictions of black characters prove inferior to those of whites of all social classes, with their lower social status stemming from their savage, unrefined heritage. The inclusion of black

characters in depictions of the working-class, then, alters how we are to interpret both, especially in light of this concept of racial hierarchy.

The information provided in this chapter lays the contextual groundwork for my exploration of particular burlesques. We see issues of race and class enter into the English popular thought from various points and venues—from particular pieces of parliamentary legislation and debates regarding them, to productions of *Othello* on the patent stage, to the vibrant, varied world of the minor theaters and their social milieu. These cultural elements form part of the imaginative base of *Othello* burlesques from the 1830s. Both Westmacott's *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* and Dowling's *Othello Travesty* are, upon close examination, representative of hierarchies of genre, race, and class, and we can interpret them as directly impacting concurrent discourse regarding these issues on a national scale. In the following chapters, I make use of and build upon the contextual scaffolding presented here, more finely parsing the ideological and epistemological concerns guiding these adaptations and how they both, ultimately, reveal a particularly conservative stance towards race, class, and social mobility, using burlesques of Shakespeare to figuratively confine sections of the population that challenged or complicated a traditional and unified conception of Englishness and its society.

Notes

¹ Some romantic-era writers were what we might call textual purists, in that they denigrated stage productions of Shakespeare's plays and other "fussy intermediaries" (such as editions with lengthy annotations). They argued that any mediation between Shakespeare's language and the reader, or any visual representation, forestalls the truth of these characters and inhibits the creative, imaginative interplay between dramatist and reader (Taylor, *Reinventing* 152-5). Ultimately, though, such criticism occupied a minor place in nineteenth-century discourse on Shakespeare and stands in contrast to how the vast majority of nineteenth-century citizens valued and experienced Shakespeare's works. Keats and Coleridge held such a view, although Charles Lamb is one of the most oft-cited detractors of the stage. Yet, Jonathan Bate explains in *Shakespearean Constitutions* that Lamb's criticism is more complex than many acknowledge. For instance Lamb's "On the Tragedies of Shakespeare" discusses a number of issues relating to

stage productions: He is “incensed by mangled playhouse texts, especially the Tate’s version of *King Lear*, by a star system that pays more attention to the actor than to the character he personates, by the crudity of delivery that is necessary in a vast building, by cumbersome stage machinery, and by the way the theater reduces to pantomime such evanescent being as the witches and Ariel” (130). As I discuss later in this chapter, though, Lamb’s distaste at seeing some characters on stage—namely *Othello*—might also reveal racial tension.

² William Hazlitt calls him “the Proteus of the human intellect” (qtd. in Bate, *Shakespeare* 15), and Coleridge similarly explains how “Shakespeare darts himself forth, and passes into all the forms of human character and passion, the one Proteus of the fire and flood” (qtd. in Bate, *Shakespeare* 16).

³ Schoch explains that minor houses had a somewhat fraught relationship with the Bard, in that productions of straight Shakespeare (after the 1843 Act) never proved as lucrative as other kinds of supposedly low comedy, but that productions of his plays were a sort of legitimating litmus test for minor stages: “While a devotion of Shakespeare foretold the financial ruin of actor-managers... that devotion was nonetheless a ‘respectable humbug’ without which no legitimate theater could establish a solid reputation. Indeed, a theater’s illegitimate, but vastly more popular, offerings effectively subsided its moral obligation to keep up ‘the civil list of that most expensive and incomprehensible personage of legitimate drama’” (74).

⁴ Charles and Mary Lamb’s *Tales from Shakespeare* (1807) provided children with excised and sanitized prose versions of the plays. This same year, Charles Bowdler published *The Family Shakespeare*, an innocuous and much maligned volume of Shakespeare’s plays deemed safe for family reading. Indeed, his act of expungement spawned its own verb—to bowdlerize—which often pejoratively connoted unnecessary or priggish cuts. Anna Jameson’s *Characteristic of Women* (1832), later called *Shakespeare’s Heroines: Moral, Poetical, and Historical*, represents the first collection of character studies devoted to the female characters. Later, Charles Knight’s *The Pictorial Shakspeare* (published in parts from 1838 to 1841, and as a complete edition in 1841) provided character portraits and other images to accompany the plays. Finally, Mary Cowden Clarke’s *The Girlhoods of Shakespeare’s Heroines* (1850) provides fictitious backstories to teleologically explain these characters’ behavior in Shakespeare’s plays.

⁵ Ziegler’s language here purposefully echoes that of prominent mid-nineteenth-century writer John Ruskin, whose *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) extolls the virtues of Shakespeare’s women in its section “Of Queen’s Gardens.” In particular, Ruskin views Shakespeare as giving us “testimony to the position and character of women in human life.” He represents them as “infallibly faithful and wise counselors;— incorruptibly just and pure examples—strong always to sanctify even when they cannot save” (107). Although many women certainly found Ruskin’s description favorable, others, and many later feminist, point out its singularly domestic and impossibly ethereal presentation of real women, which might foreclose behavior rather than open up expanded opportunities.

⁶ See Mtubani’s “African Slaves and English Law” for a detailed rundown of these divergent rulings. Mtubani ultimately concludes that common law rulings held no sway when parliament,

as represented in the Navigation Acts, upheld the legality of slavery. Only another parliamentary change could clarify this legal quagmire.

⁷ Vaughn refines her reading of eighteenth-century performances in “Race Mattered: Othello in Late-Eighteenth Century England.” Where as in *Othello: A Contextual History* she contends that issues of social class factored into productions more than race, she reinterprets this focus on class and military status as an avoidance of race. Thus, character facets that are silenced—here, Othello’s blackness—illustrate the importance of or discomfort with those qualities rather than the opposite.

⁸ Desdemona underwent similar alternations. Early nineteenth-century audiences would have most identified the character with Sarah Siddons, principal patent actress at Drury Lane, and Kemble’s sister. Her womanliness when playing Desdemona provided an ideal counterpoint to Kemble’s upstanding, staid masculinity. She presented Desdemona as a “warm and passionate woman” who also showed a great deal of “moral strength...representing goodness and courage in a vicious world” (Hankey 34). This representation extended to other modes and genres. Margaret Rose explores the shift in artistic portrayals of Desdemona, explaining that during this time span we see Desdemona increasingly portrayed as an “innocent woman” (50). Depictions in the growing genre of character study take up this trend as well, exemplified by Jameson’s influential *Characteristics of Women* (1832). She highlights the woman’s “perfect simplicity and unity of delineation,” her “modesty, tenderness, and grace,” her “artless devotion of the affections,” and her “almost ethereal refinement and delicacy” (149). Shakespeare’s Desdemona clearly exhibits many of these qualities, but nineteenth-century depictions made them the primary focus, both concerning the heroine’s behavior and how other characters behave towards her. As with Othello, ‘legitimate’ productions excised sections of her part to maintain this respectable, womanly interpretation. For instance, as a means of “tidying away...indecenties” (30), they did away with many references to Desdemona’s sexual relationship with her husband. Such changes highlight Desdemona’s affectionate, domestic qualities, making her an ideal feminine counterpart in marriage.

⁹ We should note, however, that this change had been long in the works, and an 1832 Special Committee on Dramatic Literature took up the task of determining the possible effects of discontinuing the patents’ hold on ‘legitimate’ drama. I discuss this committee again later in the chapter.

¹⁰ See Moody’s Chapter 2 and Schoch’s Chapter 2 of *Not Shakespeare*.

¹¹ As Davis and Emeljanow illustrate, many previous studies concerning London theater populations figure East-End audiences as uniformly working class, vulgar, or worse, and West-End audiences as more affluent and respectable. Likewise, theater experiences in these areas supposedly aligned with the behaviors and tastes of these populations. Yet, much of our knowledge about the nineteenth-century theater-going stems from individual accounts or those displaying social prejudices, which have been replicated and taken as fact by many modern scholars. Davis and Emeljanow seek to break down and examine these accounts in order to show

the complexity of nineteenth-century theater experiences regarding theater audiences and repertoire.

¹² Tracy Davis, in her Introduction to *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-Century British Performance*, provides the following satiric description of domestic drama, given by none other than Charles Mathews:

It is the incarnation of the English ‘domestic drama,’ or rather of the drama of English domestics. There you will always find the truest pictures of virtue in rags, and vice in fine linen. There flourish the choicest specimens of all the crimes that make life hideous, robbery, rape, murder, suicide. It is a country abounding in grand combats of four—a region peopled with angelic maid servants, comic house-breakers, heroic sailors, tyrannical masters, poetical clodhoppers, and diabolic barons. (20)

Mathews specifically presents “the lower orders” as fond on this sort of play; indeed, they “rush there in mobs.” We can take this passage as indicative of what demographic Mathews construed as his own audience.

¹³ Davis and Emeljanow explain that, while the cost of boxes and the pit at West End minors might have discouraged poorer audiences, the availability of half-price admission in the galleries put ticket prices on par with other minor theaters in less affluent areas. As they note, however, we can see attempts to exclude these poorer patrons by the “erosion of the pit” in favor of more high-priced seating, as well as the abolition of half-price admission (186). These changes did not take effect until after the 1830s.

¹⁴ Waters describes the monopolylogue as a performance with “all the characters conducting a dialogue through the medium of Mathews alone” (91).

¹⁵ Hornback provides an introduction to the African Theater, which Mathews claims to have visited while touring America (but which he probably never attended). Formed in 1821 in New York City by populations of freed slaves, this theater specialized in productions of Shakespeare, and its lead male actor, James Hewlett, performed such roles as Richard III, Macbeth, Julius Caesar, and, of course, Othello (129). Mathews’s caricatures of this theater, and of Hewlett in particular, delegitimize their appropriations of Shakespeare and cast their efforts as bumbling and unsophisticated. Hewlett serves as the model for Mathews’s black tragedian, later called the “Kentucky Roscius” (137), even if critiques of Ira Aldridge also use this label (141). Importantly, Mathews’s use of “black dialect” borrows from the sort made popular in Mordecai Noah’s American newspaper, the *National Advocate*, which “standardized and Southernized” portrayals of black speech regarding the following features: “malapropisms, defamiliarized phonetic spellings, swallowed syllables or elided forms, broken English, and the transposition of *ds* for *ths*... and *bs* for *vs* or *fs*.” Hornback lists Mathews as first introducing this dialect to English theater audiences through his impersonations in the 1820s (135).

¹⁶ Mathews’s wife explains her husband’s decision to leave Drury Lane for the Adelphi: “Preeminently successful and lucrative as Mr. Mathews’s engagement at Drury Lane had proved, the size of the stage made acting a serious suffering to him; his lameness having increased excessively, and in proportion to the frequency of performing upon it. Mr. Price had offered him

a renewal of his late engagement for the following season, on the same liberal terms; but his share in the Adelphi offering another source of gain, with less exertion, and less bodily pain, from the contracted sphere of action, he was induced to refuse” (*Memoirs* 335-6).

¹⁷ *Bone Squash Diablo*, at the Surrey (1836); *The Black God of Love*, at the Surrey (1836); *The Virginia Mummy*, Covent Garden (1837); *The Peacock and the Crow*, at the Adelphi (1837); *Jim Crow and His New Place*, at the Adelphi (1839).

¹⁸ I have been unable to locate an end date for this ban, which leads me to believe that blacks were barred from apprenticed trades into the nineteenth century. However, given the fact that the 1814 Statute of Artificers made it legal to practice a trade without having served as an apprentice (Lane 215), the actual impact of the ban on blacks is difficult to gauge.

¹⁹ The *Britannia*, for instance, offered a repertoire “often ideologically in line with the likely attitudes and aspirations of its local community,” staging “melodramas contain[ing] passages critical of social injustices” and even displaying “empowering” plays with “strong female character” (Davis and Emeljanow 92). Furthermore, those in the Surrey-side suburbs often put on “nautical and domestic melodrama” (23). This is not to say that all productions fit within these criteria, but that such genres were particularly popular in these areas.

²⁰ England’s reform efforts may have helped avoid widespread revolution, but its limitations and their implications for the working class did spark social unrest, namely in the form of Chartism. Although detailed exploration of this movement lies outside the scope of this project, it stands as one of the most important effects of the 1832 Reform Act’s failure to acknowledge the civic personhood of working-class men.

²¹ Caleb McDaniel further explains what were perceived by abolitionists as the flaws of the 1833 legislation: “[I]t compensated planters, and it required freed slaves to remain apprenticed to their owners for six years,” although this apprenticeship system was ended in 1838 (49-50).

Chapter Two

Robert Waithman, the City of London, and the Nineteenth-Century Culture of Justice

Since his death in 1833, Robert Waithman has often puzzled historians, who attempt to explain the man's lack of posthumous fame. A linen-draper, radical politician, parliamentary MP, and one-time Lord Mayor of London, Waithman developed a reputation as an honest man-of-the-people, as a politician whose business sense and disdain for tyranny and jobbery helped win him the trust of his constituents. Indeed, although we would be remiss to pigeonhole Waithman as a radical, given his complex political legacy, he was, as J.R. Dinwiddy tells us, "the person who deserves most credit for the shift to the left in City politics" in the first decades of the nineteenth century (64). Why, then, does his name not garner more attention in the annals of London's political history? Walter George Bell tackles this question in *Fleet Street in Seven Centuries* (1912), when he calls our attention to two monuments, poised on either side of Ludgate Circus:

Waithman's obelisk is on one side, and opposite Ludgate Circus is another raised to John Wilkes. . . . All the traffic that flows by Fleet Street throughout the day into London's mighty heart, and at night, with quickened pulsations, is thrown back into residential or trading suburbs, must needs pass between the two obelisks, its close-knit line braced on either side by these memorials of John Wilkes (who was himself) and of Robert Waithman, Radical, reformer, and to his contemporaries almost revolutionary.

In calling our attention to the position of these monuments, Bell asks us to consider the relative reputations of two controversial London politicians. Wilkes is "himself": a famous radical, whose early support for American independence and parliamentary reform is clouded over by his later participation in the Gordon Riots of 1780. Waithman, however, whose life in many ways runs parallel to Wilkes's, has fallen into obscurity. "Wilkes belongs to the nation, whose pride in him is not unalloyed," Bell asserts, but "Waithman is a different case, for he lived in Fleet Street, and made his name and fame there" (466).

Bells implies that Waithman's humble beginnings and connections to the City's trading community present a barrier to historical legacy; in a sense, his social standing and political accomplishments present a confused heritage, one that does not follow a common narrative pattern. Although Waithman became wealthy and influential, he did not, as we would call it, rise above his early middle-class roots, but instead used them to gain political ascendancy.

We see this form of bemused comparison in an earlier article exploring Waithman's political legacy. In "Earl Fitzwilliam and Eorlderman¹ Waithman," the writer presents us with a comparison: "The prince and the shopkeeper: what a difference there was a month ago between these two men—each eminent in his way—and now the distinction is but small!" (86). We are prompted to juxtapose Fitzwilliam's privileged life with Waithman's self-made status, and to reflect on the leveling hand of death. The scenario contains echoes of *Hamlet's* Act 3 closet scene, where Hamlet implores Gertrude to examine two images, one of Claudius (and his false honor) and one of the late King Hamlet (and his innate nobility). "Look here upon this picture," he entreats her, "and on this" (3.4.56). The article makes a similar move between Fitzwilliam and Waithman. "Now look on this picture," it commands, contrasting Fitzwilliam's pampered life with the "picture" of Waithman's toil and forbearance; we are meant to comprehend the preposterousness of unearned or inherited distinction. Just as Hamlet points out the obviousness of his father's natural nobility ("Ha! have you eyes?" he badgers Gertrude), we must also see Waithman's obvious worth, which has been fostered through hard work and honest politics.

My point in beginning this chapter with examples of Waithman's seeming historical irrelevance is to highlight why, according to these articles, he hasn't maintained the same legacy as other influential men. When compared to both Wilkes and Fitzwilliam, Waithman's social status remained low. He might have served a turn as Lord Mayor, but he was a shopkeeper at

heart, and something about that had remained unworthy of remembrance. Both articles chastise a modern society obsessed with fortune and high social standing, when honest and honorable men like Waithman are destined to fade from historical memory. Yet, as Dinwiddy posits, Waithman was, in his time, an influential politician, perhaps precisely because he retained his ties to London's world of trade and commerce.

This chapter tracks a wide arc through Waithman's political career, his various reform efforts, and his contemporaries' responses to them. It re-establishes Waithman as an influential politician in early-nineteenth-century London, and, in doing so, provides the central contextual frame for my later analysis of Charles M. Westmacott's burlesque *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*, which was first performed at the Adelphi Theater in January of 1833, one month before Waithman's death. It had been ten years since Robert Waithman served as Lord Mayor of London, and his political star was on the wane. Yet, Westmacott's *Othello* uses Waithman's life—and the key concerns of his political platform—as the foundation for its own Lord Mayor of London, this fashioned on Shakespeare's Duke, and for the broader issues the play addresses as a whole. More specifically, Westmacott casts a critical eye on “the patriotic linen-draper,” as one publication sarcastically labeled Waithman (“The Garrat Meeting” 39). As we will see in Chapter 4, Waithman's radical leanings, his commitment to various reform causes, and, more importantly, his identification with London's middle-class shopkeepers, all set him up for the sort of conservative lampooning that became a facet of many Adelphi productions. His status as a prosperous trader provided him a complex subject positioning within the City's social structure, representing the new money of the socially mobile middle class amidst both the aristocratic wealth of the City's elite and the supposed poverty and brutality of its lower class.

Waithman's diverse political career serves as a case study in the intersections of debates concerning class and reform in the arena of justice and governance.

Westmacott only directly mentions Waithman on one occasion, but the play as a whole is shot through with more oblique references to him and the sorts of causes he supported. The play's Lord Mayor serves as the key representative of the community's "culture of justice," its commitment to fairness and equality under the law, and its valorization of middle-class virtues, the sort Waithman espoused throughout his life. Westmacott's depiction of these ideals asks us to ridicule the sorts of men who touted such beliefs and encouraged them in others. What's more, by way of Othello's fall from grace—here as a result of Iago's ability to elicit Othello's latent brutality and prove his inability to embody middle-class notions of justice and respectability—Westmacott rejects the ability of "inferior" populations to adopt these ideals as a means of attaining a higher social positioning and a more meaningful civic presence. Thus, although this chapter does not specifically attend to how Westmacott participates in nineteenth-century discourse on the nature of blackness and the uneasy place of black subjects within England's national identity, my discussion of Waithman's ideological beliefs, political career, and the issues of class and national identity bound up in these topics, make this material essential to an overall understanding of how Westmacott compounds Othello's racial otherness with that of low social standing. We can also see how Westmacott ridicules liberal reformers—like Waithman—who challenged the social status quo.

The City of London and Its Social Milieu

The City of London, or just "the City," as it was known colloquially, occupies the square mile of medieval city within London's Roman walls. It inhabits the center of the metropolis and stands as one of England's most established urban areas. As Andrew Harris explains, the City

symbolized the country's financial heart, "containing some of the nation's landmark financial institutions, such as the Bank of England, the Royal Exchange, and the East India Company, as well as a host of lesser but still significant banks, specialized exchanges, and mercantile concerns" (7). Furthermore, its proximity to Westminster, located a few miles to the west, solidified its ties to Parliament and England's high courts. The City's central criminal court—the Old Bailey—also began taking on cases from surrounding areas of the Metropolis, such as Middlesex, Kent, and Surrey, in 1834 (Bentley 55). As such, it "served as the equivalent for the assize for London as well as a neutral ground for cases that were particularly controversial" (Conley 13). In many ways, the City symbolizes England's commercial and judicial heart, and, as Colley explains, Britain was unique among nations because it "possessed a metropolis of trade and population that was also its center of power" (64).

Due to its status as one of England's oldest towns, the City enjoyed much governmental autonomy based on precedent. Its status as the urban forbearer to the Metropolis often exempted it from statute law, its freedom dating from what was commonly termed "time immemorial." As a corporation, the City was distinct from its immediate surroundings, and so debates over its judicial processes, especially in relation to the rest of the Metropolis, set it apart both literally and symbolically. According to Drew Gray, the City of London's civic infrastructure—its corporation—was "fiercely independent, institutionally conservative, and wealthy," with "its influence reaching into every inch of the 'square mile.'"²

The City had a complex social milieu, given its ties to government and commerce, as well as to poverty. It was a place of trade, manufacturing, and export, and some of its inhabitants grew rich on the profits of trade or the funding of it. As such, the City's population was mixed and largely mercantile in character. Although little industrial activity occurred within London,

many factory owners did their banking there and shipped their goods from its expansive port. Other residents were middle- to lower-class tradesmen or craftsmen who remained rooted in the area even after wealthier families began moving to the adjoining Metropolitan suburbs. Indeed, as Waters tells us, metropolitan London's population almost doubled between 1801 and 1831 (38). Many of these new residents were respectable, middle-class citizens who lived and worked adjacent to the City's small-scale traders and its roiling underworld, a mix of slums, commerce, and congestion.

As a middle-class trader, Waithman represents a demographic on the rise in the City of London. Yet, his eventual ascent to political celebrity is perhaps surprising given his humble beginnings. Born in 1763 in Lancashire, he was raised by his uncle, a London linen-draper, and thus took up the trade himself, opening a successful retail store at the Fleet Market, and eventually moving to Newgate Street and Fleet Street (Taylor and Thorne). Even as Waithman worked to establish his business, he also took an interest in political debate, which eventually transformed into a diverse political career within the City, starting out as a representative of the City of London's Livery (the City's trade organization), and later serving on its Common Council (1795-1818) before being elected Alderman (from 1818 to his death in 1833), Sherriff (1820), and Lord Mayor (1823-1824).³

Waithman was a strident advocate for more equal civic opportunities, and his guiding ideals hinged on the belief that England was, by nature, the home of fairness and liberty, and that its current functioning and representation had somehow strayed from that ideal, necessitating reform. He became politically active about the time of the French revolution, and, according to Dinwiddy, he participated in debates at the Founders' Hall, Lothbury, "which was a center for meetings of the more radical citizens in the early seventeenth nineties" (64). More specifically,β

“sympathizers of the French Revolution used it as a meeting place,” earning it the “nicknamed the ‘cauldron of sedition’” (Weinreb et al. 306). Waithman’s participation at these debates signaled his early support of efforts to make English society fairer, with equal opportunities for social advancement. Such support perhaps stemmed from his Quaker roots⁴ and earned him the reputation as a dynamic orator, a skill that aided his later political endeavors.

Waithman most consistently advocated for parliamentary reform. He and other supporters presented this issue as crucial to establishing a fairer government and society overall. In 1809, he championed “a speedy and radical Reform of the Representation of the People in Parliament” (qtd. in Dinwiddy 70), pinpointing this reform as essential to solving many of the country’s other problems. He also claimed change was impossible until expanded and more representative Parliamentary elections broke up the deadlock existing in party politics (“Navigation Laws” 1335). Friend and fellow reformer Sir Francis Burdett argued that other rights (specifically the freedom of the press and trial by jury, which I discuss below) depended upon parliamentary reform. Burdett’s own call for change aligns with Waithman’s: these freedoms, as Burdett asserts, were not secure

but by the existence of a third—he meant a fair representation of the People in Parliament....They had no security for the Liberty of the Press—they had no security for a pure Trial by Jury—if the House of Commons were not what it was intended to be—and what the people had as much right to have, as those who held property under the present system had to it, or as the King had to the Crown—namely, a free, fair, and honest representation of the people. (*Trial by Jury* 5)

Although such change did not begin until the 1832 Reform Bill, Waithman served as an early and consistent supporter. An 1833 obituary in *The Gentleman’s Magazine* illustrates this view, noting that he “always [rose] above his rivals as the steady and consistent advocate of the rights of his countrymen, and the liberties and privileges of his fellow citizens” (“Alderman Waithman, MP” 179). Indeed, upon his death in 1833, Waithman’s friends dedicated a plaque to him in St.

Bride Chapel, Fleet Street, which characterizes him as “a friend of liberty in evil times and of Parliamentary Reform in its adverse days; it was at length his happiness to see the great cause [Parliamentary Reform] triumphant of which he had been the intrepid advocate from youth to age” (qtd. in Daudt, *Critical* 49).

As a middle-class trader, Waithman thought himself well suited to the task of reforming parliament. His radical leanings and distrust of the royalist, upper-class elite consistently motivated his efforts to eradicate the sins of aristocratic favoritism and waste. For instance, his 1800 publication *War Proved to Be the Real Cause of the Present Scarcity...* presents taxation and a decrease in elite expenditures as key remedies to the country’s financial burdens and food scarcity crisis. A write-up of the book in *The Critical Review* provides Waithman’s suggestions for reform, including the repeal of the Income Tax, the sale of crown lands, and implementing a tax on pleasure horses and servants (“Politics...Political Economy” 91). Furthermore, in 1808, he led a common council campaign to end sinecures and promote governmental fiscal responsibility (Taylor and Thorne). The petition indicates that the people’s burdens had been “augmented by great abuses in the management and expenditure of the public money” and “a profusion of sinecure places and pensions” (qtd. in Dinwiddy 69). On various occasions in office, he critiqued governmental luxuries, such as in 1818 when he chastised the City of London’s “wasteful and improvident expenditure” in relation to the “entertainment given by them [the City government] to the liberators of Europe” (qtd. in “Motion Respecting” 594). As these instances illustrate, Waithman’s political platform rested, in part, on disparaging the aristocracy’s supposed waste and corruption and highlighting his own moral superiority as a middle-class trader.

The ideology prompting his efforts sprang from the decidedly bourgeois notion that “the value of ‘middle-class virtues’ [could be] a prescription for society in general” (Dinwiddy 84). Thus, in a February 1819 Commons speech against the renewal of the Insolvent Debtors Bill,⁵ Waithman likens unpaid debt as to a tax and pinpoints middle-class traders as the population most detrimentally affected by the Act. In doing so, he provides a succinct interpretation of what he considers each class’s moral standing. He is reported as stating that money left unpaid by debtors is

all taken from the profits of the most honest, the most industrious, the most laborious, and the most moral part of his majesty’s subjects [meaning traders and merchants]. He did not, when he said this, mean anything invidious to any other class of society; but it was not to be denied that their [traders’] habits were more chaste, their conduct more regular, and their morals more pure, than those of the lower ranks of life, who were too often driven by distress to the commission of improper acts; and than those who, in a state of affluence, had not the checks to control their conduct, that must necessarily regulate the trading part of the community. (qtd. in “Insolvent Debtors Bill” 181-182)

Within this description, the lower class are not naturally uncivilized or morally inferior, but their lack of resources makes them more prone to temptation, and the upper class suffers from a lack of self control. Waithman’s description presents penury and privilege as leading to immorality. In his estimation, because occupations in trade require moral fortitude, no other section of the population is as morally equipped to handle this responsibility as the middle class. We can see here how Waithman’s notion of middle-class morality directly influences his reform efforts. Governmental sanctions should help portions of the population that are “honest,” “industrious,” “laborious,” and “moral.” Implicitly, doing so helps foster such qualities in the country as a whole and sets an example for populations not yet behaving in this manner.

Waithman’s middle-class pride did not stop political rivals from lampooning and disparaging his ties to trade. As mentioned earlier, an 1811 article in *The Satirist* sarcastically dubbed him the “patriotic linen-draper” (“The Garrat Meeting” 39) and, in like manner, many

political opponents critiqued his status as a trader—a shopkeeper, as they called him—which, according to Dinwiddy, was even lower than a merchant in London’s commercial social hierarchy (64). Whereas merchants sold goods at wholesale prices, dealing with other venders, traders participated in the actual, hands-on act of selling products to customers. They more often got their hands dirty, so to speak, in the daily act of bartering, buying, and selling. Yet, Waithman accepted and even reveled in this status, using it as a launch point for his political platform. An 1812 article reporting on support for Waithman’s initial run for MP recounts one such affront and his response:

An attempt had been made by his opponents to cast ridicule on his pretensions [at running for parliament], by representing him as nothing but a ‘puny shopkeeper.’ He thanked them for this mode of undermining him...he recommended to his friends, in the course of their canvas, as the best mode of proceeding, to say—“ I came to solicit your vote for Robert Waithman, a Shopkeeper.”—Was it fair, he asked, that shopkeepers of London should be thus insulted, and that after going through all the drudgery of business in their youth, when they came to that period in life, when the reward ought to await them, they should be told,—“This, the representation of your native city, and of your fellow-citizens, is too great an honor for you; it is fit only for a merchant. (“Meeting of the Friends of Mr. Waithman” 637)

Waithman spins his status as “puny shopkeeper” to highlight the need for a parliamentary representative attuned to the concerns of London’s many traders. Indeed, some argued Waithman was actually a prime parliamentary candidate because he embodied the qualities of an effective, honest trader. His political success, according to his obituary, stemmed from his commercial training:

As a representative of the metropolis of a commercial empire, Alderman Waithman rendered eminent services to his country by applying the test of plain, practical commons-sense and practical knowledge to the fallacious doctrines of the pseudo-economists on the subject of “free trade.” (“Alderman Waithman, MP” 179)

Within this conception of English society, Waithman is the logical choice for MP. Not a harbor for landed elitism, England is instead a “commercial empire,” and it needs representatives whose

backgrounds in trade and business help them make decisions regarding the country as a whole. As an article in *The Mirror of Literature* illustrates, Waithman had a reputation as a self-made man: “[The] Alderman’s useful life will bear out the proposition that he was ‘the architect of his own fortune.’ He owed nothing to Court or even City patronage” (“The Waithman Obelisk” 425), and, by association, his politics were thought to be similarly free from elite influence.

Waithman’s political record illustrates his commitment to commercial concerns, even if some of his stances—especially regarding free trade—created rifts between other liberal reformers and him. Waithman’s worldview, as I have discussed, aligns generally with dissenting radicalism, and he became known as a strident reformer and contemporary of the likes of Francis Place, Henry Hunt, and William Cobbett.⁶ Yet, he eventually fell afoul with these men in large part because of his resistance to most free-trade initiatives, which he thought injured domestic traders and manufacturers, who, due to the burdens of taxation, could not compete with foreign producers. For instance, he presented petitions on behalf of the silk-weavers and the ship-owners of London requesting further governmental trade protection, in the former case even suggesting that a House Committee investigating the condition of silk weavers was purposefully stacked to favor free trade (“Silk Trade Petitions” 1193-2000). Waithman also disagreed with official reports touting the country’s prosperity and rising revenue from exports in the wake of free trade agreements, citing his own alternate findings, which revealed a gap between official and real value of exports (“Trade and Manufactures” 556-66). Waithman denied the legitimacy of political economists—the “pseudo-economists” referenced in the previously mentioned obituary (“Alderman Waithman, MP” 179), and ultimately “expressed contempt for the free trade ‘philosophers and poets’ who ‘think they know better than practical men’” (Taylor and Thorne). Waithman pits himself, who is presumably a “practical” man, against those people without actual

experience in trade, industry, or manufacturing, and who, by implication, weave their theories more from mere conjecture than from knowledge or knowhow.

Waithman proved more moderate than other radicals, many of whom he often agreed with on principles of parliamentary reform and other initiatives limiting governmental waste and increasing citizens' direct civic involvement; he differed, though, regarding the degree of necessary change. While some radicals (such as Hunt and Cobbett) called for universal suffrage and yearly parliamentary elections, Waithman worked for the franchise of all London freeholders and taxpayers—thus excluding many poorer citizens—and suggested parliamentary elections be held every three years. On the one hand, he speaks of suffrage and civic participation as universal: “[T]he people of this country are treated, on some occasions, as if they were destitute of common comprehension. They are thought to be incapable of understanding their own interests, and unfit to be entrusted with the exercise of those rights they inherit from their ancestors” (qtd. in Taylor and Thorne). On the other hand, though, he did not support plans for universal suffrage, noting, “[Some] intemperate men might wish for such a plan, but they were neither formidable for numbers nor talents, so as to create any apprehension or alarm” (qtd. in Dinwiddy 73). In the fashion of Burke, Waithman highlighted the need for moderation in reform: “To give to the public opinion a safe, temperate, and constitutional direction must depend upon the great and leading Characters in Parliament, and men of respectability throughout the Country, —unless they now come forward I fear the business will fall into bad and unskillful hands, —whose folly and violence may lead to mischievous consequences” (qtd. in Dinwiddy 80). Waithman had worked hard to end England's war with France long before its actual demise in 1815, and he perhaps worried that, without proper guidance, the masses would turn to political radicals in search of change rather than to men who supported measured reform.

Radical politicians were clearly put out at Waithman's stances on reform and free trade. Indeed, Hunt disparaged him as "very little better than an aristocrat" due to his tempered viewpoints (qtd. in Taylor and Thorne). As mentioned earlier, though, Dinwiddy posits Waithman as being "the person who deserves most credit for the shift to the left in City politics" in the first decades of the nineteenth century (64). He may not have affected as much political change as he'd hoped, or to the degree that others wanted, but his early efforts helped the reform movement gain momentum, and he remained a vocal champion of the rights of the people and the importance of London traders until his death in 1833.

England's "Culture of Justice" in the Time of Waithman

Part of why Waithman proves such an engaging figure—and why many conservatives derided him—relates to his support of an English national identity built upon certain middle-class notions of what it meant to be moral, respectable, and law-abiding. Nineteenth-century English subjects lived within what Franco Moretti calls a "culture of justice" (196), which consisted of "a pride in the intangibility of one's rights, and in the guarantees they provide against the abuses of political power" (207). It is a culture bound up in the "desire that the realm of the law be certain, universalistic, and provided with mechanisms for correction and control" (213).⁷ Even further, it became a central facet of England's own self-styled reputation as a land of freedom and justice, which guaranteed its status as the most civilized of nations. We can examine Waithman's views on England's "culture of justice" in relation to debates over how applicable it was to the City's lower-class populations, who most clearly experienced difficulty accepting and embodying the shifting paradigms of justice and behavior evident in England's nineteenth-century identity. Even further, the ideals established here had far-reaching implications regarding how other supposedly inferior populations—such as black citizens or

colonial ex-slaves—might or might not claim this identity for themselves and thus demand treatment as fellow citizens.

Goodlad provides an overview of this belief in England's exceptionalism: "Victorian Britons viewed themselves as citizens of a self-governing nation and heirs to ancient constitutional liberties. By custom, by nature, by established tradition—even by divine will—Britons were, it was believed, a vanguard people, able to contrast their freedoms to the noxious state interference endured" by other supposedly less-democratic countries (3). The justice system sat at the heart of English citizens' optimism; there, paupers and statesmen alike could, it was argued, bring their cases, expect a fair trial, and/or be held accountable for their actions. We can see Waithman's belief in this ideal in his efforts to expand the franchise, and specifically when he describes how current laws strip citizens of "the exercise of those rights they inherit from their ancestors" (qtd. in Taylor and Thorne), as well as in his dealings with issues of trial by jury, which I discuss below. In voting, citizens take part in a sort of a civic birthright and confirm the legitimacy of the country's justice system, one that is ultimately run by representatives whom citizens select and whose causes they support.

Certain aspects of the justice system most embodied this ideal, with trial by jury and the capital punishment system serving as two of the most resonant, and controversial, examples at the turn of the nineteenth century. For instance, as Peter King explains, "[T]he broad principle of trial by jury was seen ... as 'the grand bulwark' of every Englishman's liberties" (222), safeguarding citizens from unfair or bias rulings made by individual judges. Furthermore, serving on juries represented a central form of civic participation. It signaled the extent to which the justice process was within reach of ordinary citizens and that, at least ideally, individuals standing trial faced their peers rather than some unknowable, biased official. In addition to trial

by jury, Tyburn's hanging tree, and later, the gallows outside Newgate, were also emblematic of this "culture of justice," even if, as I discuss below, the locale's semiotic meaning shifted amid increasingly calls for a reformed capital punishment system. In theory, the gallows was a place where men of all walks of life met their end under the general public's watchful eye. The violent display of a hanging, notes Thomas Laqueur, confirmed the law's "neutrality" (353) and assured audiences that its country's justice system dealt equally with its most troubling offenders, regardless of social status.

Clearly, this is an idealized view of the nineteenth-century "culture of justice." The reality proved far more complicated, with different factions of society excluded from direct participation in the justice process or unfairly represented within it. Moretti explains that the English justice system exhibited a peculiar "ideological doubling" (196), on the one hand asserting certain universal rights, which neither the government nor anyone else could transgress, while, on the other, steadfastly avoiding change or revolution that would upset the social and civic status quo (204-207). As Douglas Hay notes, "the trick" to maintaining the law's legitimacy without overhauling its social hierarchy was to perpetuate the illusion of "communal sanction" (35), to uphold the notion that the general population approved of the law's actions. Indeed, Moretti argues that the hegemony and legitimacy of "a ruling class" and "an entire social order" depended upon this "idea and practice of the law" (208). He comes to this conclusion in response to E. P. Thompson's description of law's function as ideological, a notion quoted below:

[Law] not only served, in most respects, but also legitimized class power. The hegemony of the eighteenth-century gentry and aristocracy was expressed, above all... in the rituals of the study of the Justices of the Peace, in the quarter-sessions, in the pomp of the Assizes and in the theater of Tyburn... The rhetoric of eighteenth-century England is saturated with the notion of the law... immense efforts were made... to project the image

of the ruling class which was itself made subject to the rule of law, and whose legitimacy rested upon the equity and universality of those legal forms. (qtd. in Moretti 208)

Reverence for the “law” within this context relates specifically to “law as ‘justice,’ in the broadest sense” (207), as an amorphous, overarching ideal rather than a lived reality where individuals of all classes actively played a part. Indeed, this is what English citizens bequeathed to later generations, and presumably to colonial populations, at least in theory. To say that nineteenth-century English citizens lived in a “culture of justice” does not necessarily preclude change, even if legal and social stasis and stability represented key features. Rather, social and legal reformers positioned their efforts as functioning within and even recapturing a *truer* “culture of justice,” one where practice matched ideology.

Waithman participated in some of the key debates over how the country’s and the City’s justice system should function. For instance, his support for William Hone—a dissenting, radical publisher—illustrates both his belief in England’s status as a bastion of liberty and his critique of governmental meddling in the process of justice, which undercut the former. Due to unrest caused by an assassination attempt against Edward IV in 1817, English officials suspended habeas corpus, thus allowing prisoners to be held unlawfully without due process or recourse to a trial. Fearing revolt, they simultaneously cracked down on publications that supposedly incited insurrection against governmental authority. Hone was imprisoned for writing and publishing several parodies that critiqued ministry officials.⁸ Yet, due to legal particulars regarding jury selection, Hone dealt with the possibility of facing a stacked jury, where judges selected available jurymen who were amenable to their views. Defending himself against these charges, then, would prove difficult. Hone’s plight caught the attention of Waithman and other radicals, who worked to publicize the case and bring to light the corrupt governmental practices spurring on the charges against Hone and complicating his defense.

Waithman and others, including Sir Francis Burdett, formed a committee (Friends of the Press and Trial by Jury) to aid Hone, of which Waithman was Chair and Treasurer. With regards to undertaking these positions, Waithman asserts that “no object can possibly tend more to the support of the liberties of Englishmen” (qtd. in *Trial by Jury* 3). Indeed, he maintains, “[W]e cannot be said to have any liberties, unless we have a free Press, and an unshackled trial” (4). Present at this meeting was Charles Pearson, the lawyer who helped prompt reform of the City of London’s Jury List prior to Hone’s trials, thus alleviating the potential of a stacked jury, and he characterized Waithman as having “a wish to serve the great and noble cause of liberty,” making note of “[Waithman’s] entire devotion to those principles of reform and liberty which they all wish to rescue from the powerful grasp of tyranny” (15). At fault in these cases were the British ministry and the judges conducting trials, who trampled the rights of Englishmen in their attempts to limit and punish dissent. Burdett, for instance, asserts that seditious (also called blasphemous) libel cases⁹ such as Hone’s evidenced a corrupt legal system, where cases went forward when “the Law Officers of the crown could persuade twelve men, picked and chosen by the master of the crown office, to believe to be an offense against his Majesty’s ministers” (7). Rulings under these circumstances were hardly impartial or fair and threatened to delegitimize the ideals undergirding England’s “culture of justice.”

Waithman’s concern over the issue of trial by jury spanned his career. In 1819, for instance, in relation to insolvent debtors courts, he lamented that officials at these courts made rulings without oversight, and that they did so with such frequency:

[H]e would say that it was impossible for any individual to do justice to creditors, debtors, and the public, who had above three thousand cases annually to decide upon. This was more business than belonged to the whole of the commissioners of bankrupts and the court of chancery. It was impossible that one individual, without a jury, and without assistance, could execute the duties of such an office. (“Insolvent Debtors—Committees” 1010-1011)

His critiques highlight the extent to which such rulings might be hurried, and thus incorrect or unfair. Waithman continues this theme when, in 1822 while serving as Sheriff of Middlesex, he presented a notice to the county Bench of Magistrates calling on them to provide a yearly, accurate list of all possible jury participants, a task that had “not been sufficiently attended to, or complied with” previously, making the current lists “extremely imperfect and defective” (“Trial By Jury” 152). Waithman here seeks to enforce the reformed law regarding jury lists, which Middlesex had apparently failed to update. Just as Waithman argued that an expanded parliament would more fairly represent the country’s interests, so, too, did a jury of peers—selected from all qualified citizens—provide the most legitimate ruling. Denying men this right was to weaken the country’s justice system overall.

The functioning of the capital punishment system became a point of contention for Waithman and other nineteenth-century reformers. Proponents of the capital punishment system, which was known colloquially as the “Bloody Code,” believed the “terror” and awe produced by public hangings would dissuade other would-be criminals from similar crimes (Hay 18). Yet, the sorts of infractions deemed worthy of death, and the seemingly random manner dictating the Code’s operations, undercut this point. Qualifying crimes encompassed a good many petty property offenses, plenty of which hardly warranted such extreme punishment.¹⁰ Ultimately, many people pointed to the justice system’s handling of capital offenses as irrational or random.

Waithman’s maiden speech as MP, given in 1819, addresses the seeming incompetence of the capital system. As reported in the *London Gazette*, his speech accompanied a petition regarding “the state of the law respecting the punishment of offenders,” specifically in capital cases. Alderman Wood, a fellow representative of the City of London, argued that the “criminal code was unnecessarily severe, and that imprisonment and hard labor might, in many cases, be

properly substituted for the punishment of death.” Waithman, seconding Wood, points out that many convicts escaped punishment because of a jury’s reluctance to convict them, either due to prison overcrowding or hesitation to “bring [prisoners] to justice under the present severity of the system” (qtd. in “Parliamentary Speeches” 2), especially when some small-time criminals met the same dark fate as murderers and other violent criminals. These inconsistencies undermined the legitimacy of capital proceedings and the justice system in general, which supposedly treated all citizens equally.

Furthermore, the gallows’s intended purpose—as a somber show of statist, monarchical authority—also often missed its mark, a point that relates to the complex relationship between the justice system and the working class. Public hangings, which weren’t outlawed until 1868, often drew crowds in the thousands. The general population’s behavior at such public events has, to some, signaled its “sanction” of violent displays (Hay 35) and represented an example of how working-class populations could participate in official justice. Yet, according to Laqueur, the atmosphere of hanging days was “carnavalesque,” with much carousing, drinking, and merriment on the part of the audience (323). Attendees came from all ranks of society, but those of the lower classes were thought to most enjoy the spectacle. Such behavior hardly illustrated awe or reverence and might even signal animosity towards the State. Indeed, working-class audiences might side with the convict, voicing support for him or her and disparaging the law. As Laqueur makes clear, the unpredictability of both the hanging process and the crowd’s response made impossible any sort of “canonical” show of state power (320).¹¹ The semiotics of public hangings could not be tied down and might even work against legitimizing state authority.

Indeed, public hangings and other state-sanctioned violence might point to a troubling brutality that lurked about the corners of respectable, enlightened English society. J. M. Beattie

explains how “judicial violence” was a central facet of the English criminal system, incorporating everything from physical labor, to flogging, whipping, burning, and hanging (75). Yet, many people came to view with distaste such violent displays—be they enacted within the community or in relation to state-sanctioned punishment. As V. A. C. Gatrell notes, “Far from making statements about right order, public executions were making statements about *disorder*” (16). Supporters of this view identified the crowd’s revelry at hangings as evidence of the debasing effects of public violence, with executions representing one of many possible examples.

Although Waithman does not specifically comment on public hangings, as Sheriff of London, he attended over thirty of them at Newgate (“Police of the Metropolis” 812). Other opponents of public, state-enacted execution pointed to an ideological contradiction at the heart of such discipline. In relation to public hangings, Gatrell writes that

the deepest anxiety of the modernizing state was that the unleashed passions of the scaffold crowd mirrored the state’s violence too candidly. The crowd had come to seem like a repudiated alter ego or shadow-self which spoke too truthfully for a progressive nation to tolerate. The crowd gave the lie to the greater world’s representation of itself as civil, benign, and humane. (23-4)

David Lemmings underscores this point, explaining that displays of state-sponsored violence “[imply] a degree of incivility and unreason in the rulers which was not commensurate with an enlightened society” (99). As Colley has made clear, English national identity coalesced in opposition to many elements or cultures deemed Other and that embodied the unacceptable qualities and behaviors by which a specifically English identity could define itself (6). Indeed, such thought was often used to justify England’s continued influence in the colonies, especially concerning racially inferior populations who might benefit from their instruction. How, then, could the English state portray itself as respectable, restrained, and fair—and as an advocate of these qualities—when its mode of punishment displayed anything but, indeed, even proved

contrary to these goals? How could the English justice system remain legitimate if it enforced order by way of qualities signifying the Other, such as violence or irrationality? The justice system and the working-class align imaginatively on this issue, displaying a shared brutality that needed to be sanctioned and reformed.

Even as criticism of the Bloody Code mounted, though, lawmakers did not alter its scope until the 1820s and 30s, with all but the most heinous crimes finally excluded in 1837 (Gatrell 9). In place of the Code, prison sentences and transportation became the standard punishments for most crimes. Laqueur explains the rationale behind these new sanctions: they acted on “the mind and not the body” (308), in that they prompted time for reflection and reformation, which were key ideals in the early-nineteenth-century ethos. Such contemplation might lead criminals to adopt the more staid, respectable habits of their social and moral superiors, and, as Lemmings tells us, the ideological foundations of imprisonment “consisted in nothing less than substituting good bourgeois values for the lifestyle of ‘violence, riot, and dissipation’ typical of hardened criminals” (100).

Ultimately, the very legitimacy of the justice system depended on resolving the judicial and moral quandaries presented in this section. As Bentley discusses, “The esteem in which any criminal justice system is held depends in no small part upon how successful it is in achieving the dual objective of punishing the guilty and acquitting the innocent” (xi). This statement seems obvious, but as my discussion illustrates, some people feared that the justice system’s continued shortcomings hurt the law’s legitimacy as whole, given changing expectations of official behavior and procedure. As the next section explores, the complex process of maintaining the esteem of the country’s respectable citizenry often occurred at the expense of the lower class,

who functioned as both the objects of reform and its troublesome bane, proving unwieldy and revealing the constructed or incomplete quality of the country's reformed "culture of justice."

Class Encounters in City Justice

As my previous discussions of hanging day crowds reveal, significant tension existed between the official justice system and working-class populations. Waithman maintained an apologist's stance on lower-class crime, attributing many criminals' crude or transgressive behavior to poverty. Specifically, he places high taxation—regarding, for instance, the Corn Laws and the Income Tax—and the lack of employment as key factors driving up crime rates:

[It] was taxation that had affected this want of employment. Excess of taxation had depreciated property and trade, and had thus affected a great dearth of employment. He believed that parents found it extremely difficult to find employment for their children, more especially for their boys; and it was only necessary to look into the [Newgate] calendar and observe the number of boys who had been committed, and the small articles which they had stolen—chiefly articles necessary to subsistence—in order to see the consequence of this state of things. ("Police of the Metropolis" 813)

Here, poorer populations are not necessarily criminal by nature but are driven to rash acts in order to survive. Were the government to lower taxes seen as unequally affecting the middle and working class, traders and other businesses would, theoretically, have the funds to hire more employees, thus alleviating poverty and cutting down on the number of crimes committed in the City.

Waithman's view of lower-class criminality differs, then, from the more overarching distrust of lower-class culture expressed in debates regarding the justice system as a whole, perhaps due to his direct experiences with them around Fleet Street. According to many, in order to sustain the country's imagined "culture of justice"—one that had been purged of its particularity, irrationality, and brutality through reform—factions of the population or facets of government that did not ideologically fit within this notion of English identity had to be either

cast aside or reformed. That troublesome populations and aspects of the justice system remained, despite reform efforts, acted as a spot on England's character and cast doubt on the civilizing mission seeking to expand middle-class ideals of equality and respectability touted as the bedrock of the justice system.

If lower-class populations did not adopt bourgeois morality and notions of justice, to what paradigm of justice did they ascribe? Part of the tension between these clashing ideals stemmed from different perceptions of the locus of justice, which were often class specific. The seat of official justice—state-sanctioned representatives and institutions—makes up just one manifestation of law and order. According to King, nineteenth-century citizens “who broke the norms of trust and reciprocity so central to economic survival and social peace...could be punished in a myriad of ways without reference to the formal courts organized by the local or central state” (10). Expanding this view, Michael Ignateiff characterizes nineteenth-century English society as a “deeply woven fabric of permissions, prohibitions, obligations, and rules, sustained and enforced by a thousand points” (qtd. in King 10). These areas of influence serve as many spokes on the wheel of justice, each of which had a hand in formulating a community's conception of right behavior and effective punishment. As Robert Cover notes, the “interpretive commitments” that constitute and cohere a community's judicial framework prove numerous and diverse, “some small and private, others immense and public” (7). If nineteenth-century England was a “culture of justice,” as Moretti claims, then the seat of justice had multiple points of origin, and it was a highly contested space.

These various manifestations of justice often aligned ideologically with class striations, or they took on alternative meanings in light of changing conceptions of “right” behavior. As I have discussed, lower-class citizens at the end of the eighteenth century were often characterized

as respecting or revering the prominent symbols of the “rule of law”—the JPs, different national courts, and Tyburn. Within this “culture of justice,” the ruling class had to abide by the same regulations as themselves. Yet, the manner of behavior often associated with poorer populations belied or complicated their acceptance of, or accommodation within, official justice. Lemmings points to a “general decline of active and unmediated popular participation” (13), the result of which positioned “the common people...as merely objects of the law” (180). They also more frequently populated criminal courts and prisons than their middle- or upper-class fellow-citizens. And, as I have shown, negative interpretations of their presence in hanging-day crowds mark specific instances in which changing ideology had the potential to alienate them from both the process of justice and its legitimating sanction. On a legal and ideological level, their participation in both publically approved and communal acts of violence symbolically joined them with the outmoded and tabooed Bloody Code. Just as state-sponsored displays of disciplinary violence garnered criticism, so too did the public’s participation in these and other events involving supposedly uncivilized or brutal behavior. The government’s actions became antithetical to evolving notions of Englishness and respectable behavior, necessitating reform.

Indeed, working-class culture as a whole met with increasing hostility, especially concerning its entertainment and other public gatherings, which had once been tolerated.

Laqueur points out this ideological shift between social groups, especially regarding the middle and upper classes’ increasing intolerance of violent displays:

For centuries, the enormous and unchallenged power of the aristocratic oligarchy had been purchased at the cost of public disorder. Riot was allowed as the representation of a delicate balance between governors and the governed. The carnival of spirited death and mockery, the overwhelming presence of the crowd and the absence of restraint, the drink, sex and ribaldry inscribed again and again the notion that in England the law, liberty and the state were grounded in community. Carnival and the penalties of the law that were enacted through it became expressive of what at least for the moment seemed community values. (353-4)

Laqueur represents this relationship as a tradeoff, with governing elites tolerating such revelry in exchange for continued power. Indeed, such mutual acceptance of behavior supposedly bound together these disparate sections of society, but, as standards of acceptable action shifted, the meaning of rowdy displays changed as well. They no longer betokened “community” but rather brutality, violence, and anarchy, a change accompanying the increasing dominance of middle-class mores and the spread of more centralized modes of official justice.

Continued ritual violence and other customary behaviors, then, often placed working-class men on the wrong side of the law, and their participation symbolically signaled their exclusion from polite, civil society. Rosalind Crone explores the ubiquity of violence in England prior to the nineteenth century, especially in relation to working-class and rural culture. She states, “Popular culture in pre-industrial England was vibrant, boisterous, and violent. While work and play were closely tied together and were largely based on an agrarian calendar, entertainments encouraged indulgence and celebrated excess. These pastimes could be cruel and dangerous” (7). Indeed, one reason for a rise in prosecution rates leading into the nineteenth century stems from a criminalization of such formerly accepted behaviors, rather than an actual change in the frequency of incident, and “[b]rutality’ was not only to be disparaged as uncivilized but increasingly defined as unmanly, un-English, and unacceptable” (74). Here, in relation to prizefighting but indicative of a more general viewpoint, Crone notes that “violent sports...stood out as a sign of a brutal past that respectable society sought to repress.” These examples point to an evolution of behavior (with English civility represented as morally superior to unrefined or brutal actions) and a simultaneous denial of such evolution (with civility presented as a *quintessentially* English trait). Within both conceptions, working-class individuals

who still participated in violent pastimes were imaginatively excluded from the realm of acceptability by way of behavior, class, and even nationality.¹²

Lower-class or working-class culture often found itself outside the bounds of the English culture of justice, then, in a similar manner as the earlier-discussed qualities associated with the “Bloody Code.” Although Darwin had yet to publish his theory of evolution, the reformist viewpoint presented English culture, and, for our purposes, the nineteenth-century “culture of justice,” as having improved upon and cast aside aspects of a brutal, violent past. Hall and McClelland describe this notion of progression as “stadial” (7). And, as we have seen, even within monogenetic notions of race, particular cultures (i.e. England) were viewed as more advanced. Alison Twells expands on this point, noting how eighteenth and early nineteenth-century conceptions of civilization contended that “[p]eoples were categorized on one progressive scale but in terms of differing degrees of deficit. At the pinnacle of civilization was urban, western Europe, placed there by its commercial, civic, and domestic successes and values” (10), under which were all manner of less-evolved societies. Yet, poorer populations in England also occupied a low moral standing within this hierarchy, as the objects of middle-class do-gooders who “sought the transformation of the English working class in much the same way as they supported the reform of the ‘heathen’ overseas” (7). While uncivilized elements remained within the less-evolved working-class populations, widespread reforms sought to bring these pockets of society into the civilized, modern age through a combination of moral reform and centralized oversight believed to facilitate more rational and equal justice. We can view these less-evolved aspects of City culture as the ideological Other of Colley’s description, against which better-off English citizens constructed their national identity as one of fair, rational, and equal justice. These savage populations just so happened to dwell in the City as well as overseas.

As such, violent hangings and working-class entertainment, to name a few elements, were conceptualized as contrary and inimical to a moral, ordered, and democratic society, one increasingly bent on altering national law and procedure to match ideology. We have already seen how the 1832 Reform Act and the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act both achieved this end. Others might include the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act, 1829 Metropolitan Police Act, the 1834 New Poor Law, and the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, among others. In some manner, each law sought to amend existing legal and social custom that supposedly led to inequality, waste, and moral turpitude. Yet, these efforts to improve nineteenth-century government and society often positioned unreformed or unrefined elements as separate from and inferior to those that had undergone reform. The statutes, in part, represent the efforts of individuals to better align government operations with moral and bureaucratic ideals, but they also contributed to the ideological and imaginative othering of the working class, who were instead characterized as in need of reform. What came before—in relation to protocol or behavior—functioned as an uncivilized and/or inefficient past that improvements swept away or replaced.

The problem, though, was that reformers often met with hostility or a lack of cooperation in their attempts to solidify or unify the British national identity under a uniform behavioral and moral ideal. According to reformers, lower-class culture created a highly visible, persistent, and often-unwelcome reminder of the failures or inconsistencies within this national identity. Indeed, within the close physical proximities of the City, these unwelcome or unwieldy facets of society, and the areas in which they lived, often rubbed shoulders, so to speak, with their betters. Thus, the physical manifestations of legal and ideological reform abutted and were in conflict with those representing that which was in need of reform and sanction. The slums and rookeries of working-class poverty existed in close proximity to the City's physical judicial infrastructure.

They did not remain meekly out of sight or contained within one set locale. What's more, the causes and remedies for such consistent depravation and squalor proved elusive and could not be categorized easily as moral or social remnants, something that would go away with time. Lynda Nead explores the shifting physical manifestations of respectability and civility within the City of London, explaining, "The spaces of improvement were caught up in a ceaseless exchange with the spaces of the city's historical past.... Obscenity was one of the specters that haunted modern London. Obscenity was improvement's other; but it was also the progeny of the modern city" (8). In relation to my discussions of City justice, this close proximity between reformers and the objects of reform served to destabilize the City's self-styled "culture of justice." The fact that brutality and crudeness existed to such an extent at home, despite and even in the face of reformers and their efforts, serves as a constant reminder of the incompleteness and potential ineffectuality of England's justice system and the class-specific ideologies of improvement often accompanying reform. On what ground had the foundations for England's national identity been laid, if such troubling facets remained? To a certain extent, these populations became imaginatively fragmented from England's core identity, with their behavior and pastimes legislated into the realm of criminality and illegitimacy.

Even further, as Nead suggests, the physical conditions of commercial expansion, which were tied to the City's supposedly moral middle classes, can be seen as engendering the ingredients for such unseemly populations and their behavior. Her language recalls that of Gatrell, who characterizes the vulgar hanging-day crowds as the "shadow-self" of an unreformed capital punishment system, which "gave the lie to the greater world's representation of itself as civil, benign, and humane" (23-4). Perhaps these unseemly facets of society weren't of the past, but were distinctly of the present. Perhaps they were a product of the conditions of an expanding

metropolis, with crime, poverty, and congestion springing up with the influx of new residents drawn to the City's urban center.

The following chapter builds upon the information provided here, exploring how Westmacott transforms Shakespeare's *Othello* into a critique of Waithman and his middle-class pretensions of morality and respectability, as well as the reformed justice system that supposedly provided equal access to the justice process and participated in reforms aimed at eradicating England's own savage Others—the working-class populations dwelling at the heart of the City of London. Although much of my discussion here has illustrated the extent that the ideologies undergirding justice reform pitted middle-class morality against working-class brutality, I will ultimately make the case that Westmacott's *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* purposefully breaks down these social, moral, and judicial dichotomies in a way similar to Gatrell's "shadow-self" or Nead's "improvement's other." In doing so, Westmacott dismantles the imaginative separation between these groupings and reveals the latent brutality of the reformed justice system. His adaptation reveals an ultra-Tory, royalist worldview that takes issue with the sorts of reforms (and reformers) prompting legislative and social change, essentially lumping together the aims of middle-class reformism and the ills of London's lower class. Both supposedly jeopardized the foundations of English society. Even further, he uses his critique of Waithman and his reformist prerogative as the imaginative mechanism of Othello's downfall in *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*. Not only does Westmacott's hero present a black blot in London's white society, but he attempts to raise his standing by accepting the ideals Waithman supported. As Iago's machinations reveal, though, such social and racial mobility proves elusive.

Notes

¹ The editor of *The Select Journal of Foreign Periodical Literature*, in which this selection has been republished, provides the following note regarding the original article's usage of "Eorlderman" in place of "Alderman": "The particular spelling of the word Alderman in the following notice of both [deaths], is intended to remind the reader that Alderman...was in Saxon times a title of high dignity and office, equivalent to that of Earl in the present day" (86). This usage supports the article's intent of highlighting the meaninglessness of social distinction in the face of death. Furthermore, it harkens back to "Saxon times" to establish Waithman as the true English noble, one whose personal attributes—rather the privilege of family ties and the supposedly false distinctions fostered under the Norman yolk—warrant the ancient and honorable distinction of "Alderman."

² Gray provides a succinct rundown of the City's governmental infrastructure overseeing its 26 wards:

Each ward was represented by an alderman, elected for life by the freemen of the ward to sit on the Common Council that administered the City. These aldermen then in turn elected one of their number to annually serve as lord mayor. The lord mayor and aldermen formed the basis of the administrative government of the City. (14)

The freemen additionally elected 240 representatives from their ranks, who also served on the Common Council and had a hand in electing important City posts. As Harris explains, these men, as "ward leaders," differed from aldermen in that they "[acted] within their wards as individuals rather than as representatives of the court." They hired "street cleaners, constables, watchmen, and beadles; set, collected, and allocated the poor rates; regulated hours, beats, and activities of constables and watchmen; and heard inhabitants' complaints and suggestions relating to the nightly watch" (13).

³ Dinwiddy tells us that "[it] was thought to be unprecedented for a retail trader to become a member of parliament for the City, and it was very rare for a Common Councilor to do so without graduating through the Court of Aldermen" (83). In particular, Dinwiddy clarifies the distinction between a merchant and a trader, with the former participating in the wholesale selling of goods and the latter actually keeping a shop and engaging in transactions with individual buyers. Merchants held a higher social standing than traders (64), a distinction that helps us better understand the unusual nature of Waithman's rise in politics.

⁴ Thorne presents Waithman's family as Quakers, but Waithman's own religious beliefs are difficult to ascertain. Alfred Neobard Palmer lists the marriage of Waithman's parents in his history of Wrexham nonconformity, and his footnote indicates that, while Waithman's siblings' baptisms are listed, his is not (279). In London, however, Waithman seems to have attended Anglican churches. His children were baptized at St. Bride's chapel on Fleet Street, and this is the same church that held funeral arrangements for him and in which his friends erected a plaque in his honor. Yet, Waithman's early political activity involved many dissenting radicals of various denominations, and Founders' Hall later served as a dissenting chapel. What's more, Bernanrd Manning lists Waithman as serving on the committee of London's Protestant Dissenting Deputies, where, within twelve miles of London, all dissenting churches of

Presbyterian, Baptist, and Independent denominations sent two representatives to act as Deputies, of which twenty one were elected to the Committee. These men “were appointed to protect their [Dissenter’s] civil rights” (2). Manning more specifically writes, “they had successfully defended Dissenters all over the country against petty abuses, disturbances of worship, assaults, unjust demands, refusals of magistrates to do their duty because of prejudice” (14). Waithman’s reform efforts, then, align with this goal, as well as with the basic ideals of individualism espoused by Quakers.

⁵ This bill provided a loophole where individuals unable to pay their debts could choose prison time over allowing creditors to seize their assets. Opponents of the measure, like Waithman, argued that this loophole unfairly punished traders because debtors could spend their remaining money while in the Rules and leave nothing for traders to recoup. For an overview of non-trading insolvent debtors, see Fiona Tomie’s *Corporate and Personal Insolvency Law* (9-10).

⁶ Waithman had a hard time pleasing politicians and reforms of all types, including these reformers. He “found himself being regarded by the whigs (or many of them) as a dangerous radical and by the radicals as a whig” (Dinwiddy 79).

⁷ Moretti discusses England’s “culture of justice” specifically in relation to the narrative structure of the bildungsroman. Whereas the continental bildungsroman featured stories of transformation, its English counterpart highlighted restoration or “preservation” (182), with justice and the law working to subdue and punish the *sujet*—the villain or outside force—whose actions fuel the plot. Although Moretti characterizes legal change and social mobility as foreign to the English narrative, I do so in a way that highlights how liberals like Waithman rationalized certain reforms as a means of recapturing eroded but assured liberties. Such advocates worked within and used the imaginative ideals comprising its “culture of justice” to justify their political causes. When needed, they also prompted legal change in order for the functioning of official justice to better uphold these ideals.

⁸ Due to the suspension of habeas corpus, Hone was imprisoned without being informed of his crime. Although actual charges pointed to his misuse of scripture in three of his parodies—“The Late John Wilkes’s Catechism,” “The Political Litany,” and “The Sinecurists’ Creed,”—he insisted his prosecutors were politically motivated and reacted vindictively to his caricatures (*Trial By Jury*)

⁹ Ursula Henriques deconstructs this view by way of W. H. Wickwar’s account in Warwick’s *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press, 1810-1832*: “Wickwar has pointed out that the essence of blasphemous libel had come to consist in its offense against ‘the peace of our Lord the King, his crown and dignity,’ rather than in its being to ‘the high displeasure of Almighty God, to the great scandal of the Christian religion, and to the evil example of all others.’ Although the latter part of the indictment reflected the outraged feelings of churchmen, the emphasis of lawyers on the first part meant that written attacks on religion were interpreted as threats against peace and security. This was done, firstly, by construing expressions of infidelity as attacks on the constitution, or, more vaguely, as tending to overturn society; and secondly, by showing that

the manner of them was, through ridicule and insult, liable to injure the religious sensibilities of the public” (207).

¹⁰ Detractors pointed to this discrepancy as evidence of the law’s unwieldiness and unnecessary harshness. Furthermore, of the criminals condemned to death, which ones actually met their fate at the gallows was impossible to predict. According to Hay, about half of convicted men were pardoned, either to be transported or imprisoned (43). Very often, the choice between those who were saved and those who were hung seemed, at best, arbitrary, and, at worst, classist, with lower-class convicts facing the highest execution rates. The years leading up to 1837, when Parliament repealed most capital statutes but those for the most serious of crimes (Gatrell 9) were some of the deadliest in terms of numbers hanged. The Code appeared to claim its many victims at random, and this irrationality hardly bolstered people’s faith in the law’s fairness.

¹¹ In part for this reason, state authorities in London moved the main site of public hangings from Tyburn to just outside Newgate in 1783 in order to provide such events a greater sense of gravity, but the change did not sap hangings of their rowdy, irreverent mood.

¹²My point here is that, if to behave in a respectable, dignified way is presented as English, then not doing so is un-English. However, given that many of the lower-class individuals who ran afoul for such behavior actually hailed from Ireland, their otherness more directly relates to nationality, even after the 1801 Act of Union technically made them citizens of the United Kingdom.

Chapter Three

Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street and the City of London's "Culture of Justice"

*Gemmen, keep a sharp eye
On this devilish Moor, lest from justice he fly.
If such actions pass 'fore a judge prison free,
There's an end to the City, to justice, and me.* (scene 2, lines 19-22)

Charles M. Westmacott, *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*

In Charles M. Westmacott's burlesque *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*, first performed at London's Adelphi Theater in January 1833, Brabantio gives representatives of the City of London's justice system an ultimatum, provided above: they must punish Othello for eloping with Desdemona or reveal themselves to be incompetent. Even further, rather than represent an isolated or contained failure, such a flap would undercut the City's broad ideal of "justice" as a whole, this notion figured as foundational to its identity and stability.

Brabantio's challenge pinpoints a central facet of the nineteenth-century English "culture of justice," which was characterized by a general trust in the community's imagined regulatory scaffolding, which state-sanctioned governing bodies and less-official forms of community action supported. In *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*, Westmacott transforms the Venice of Shakespeare's *Othello* into the City of London in the first decades of the nineteenth century, specifically superimposing its justice system onto that of Shakespeare's play. As Brabantio's statement illustrates, Westmacott makes the validity and functionality of this justice system a central concern. His reworking provides an extended meditation on which individuals and governing institutions are best able to ensure that ordinary citizens can redress wrongs committed against them.

As the previous chapter indicates, Westmacott had in mind a specific person (Robert Waithman) and a specific social milieu (liberal reformers and their middle- and working-class supporters) when crafting the world of the play. While Westmacott only directly references

Waithman on one occasion, the play as a whole is steeped in the minutia of Waithman's political career and his complex social positioning. Rather than seeing the play as an individual lampoon of Waithman, I interpret Westmacott's references to the man as entry points into the play's more general critique of middle-class reformers and liberal philanthropists, who fostered belief in the improbability of all people and challenged traditional hierarchies embedded in English society. Westmacott's own political affiliation as an ultra-Tory clearly guided this adaptation. Using the City of London's justice system as his imaginative frame, he populates its ranks with representatives of the middle class, and specifically the sort tied to London's trade and commerce. Such leaders are surrounded by the working poor, and we are meant to question the extent to which these populations can and should adopt the reformist liberal stances represented by Waithman and his ilk. Ultimately, Westmacott's adaptation serves as a rejection of this worldview and casts serious doubt on the ability of middle-class reformers to adequately address the community's needs.

After first establishing Westmacott's authorship, the initial focus of this chapter is the City of London's justice system and how Westmacott envisions it. The community presented here accepts the City's reformed, centralized justice system as its first and best defense against aberrant behavior, as opposed to more individualistic, community-led, and/or unreformed types of sanction, which align with both the unreformed English justice system and the working class. As I will show, representatives of official City justice—which Westmacott embodies, for instance, in particular London locales (the Old Bailey and the Guildhall) and individuals (watchmen, constables, and magistrates)—only make up a section of the City's "culture of justice." The play also includes relationships and situations that present differing conceptions of justice, some of them deemed more legitimate than others. Family, friendships, and other social

groupings (the working-class pub culture of St. Giles and The Beggar's Club, for instance) also establish and uphold the community's standards of behavior, which might differ from those of official justice. These paradigms of justice are class specific. Westmacott's governing officials and representatives of middle-class respectability are ideologically aligned, and they both overtly ascribe to a "culture of justice" centered on the official justice system. In contrast to this overarching system, the City's lower-class populations display a more communal paradigm lacking official legitimation. As the play progresses, however, we see evidence of breakdown between these cultures and modes of sanction.

Othello serves as the most extreme example of such instability, and by first establishing the social affiliations of these justice paradigms, we can better see the complex interplay of race and class that facilitates Othello's downfall. Westmacott uses Othello's overlapping social positioning within this community as the mechanism for his demise, and racial illegitimacy is thus compounded by social and judicial inferiority. Although Othello initially adopts the middle-class mores and centralizing tendencies of the City—indeed, he's a personal friend of the Waithman-esque Lord Mayor—Iago's machinations reveal remnants of an irrational, brutal, and uncivilized past. Othello has essentially been occupying a subject position for which he is unqualified. He may adopt the behavior of his social and racial superiors, but his place within the community, and thus his attitude towards justice and his behavior towards Desdemona, ultimately align with his African past and his adopted working-class community. Westmacott presents racial and social hierarchies as fixed, and it is the interaction between Othello's blackness and his low social standing that negates his assumed position.

Importantly, Othello's primary transgression—attempting to defy traditional hierarchies and assume a more prominent place within the community—is not recognized as such by the

play's community. Rather, as onlookers, we are meant to cast a critical eye on that community and its acceptance of Othello. In fact, Othello's downfall is indicative of a trend, where even the play's highest officials and respectable citizens prove dubious or untrustworthy. Westmacott's depictions serve as a critique of an official justice system helmed by such liberal reformers and philanthropists as Robert Waithman, who are presented as accepting an altered notion of social standing and how one might come to achieve upwards mobility. The play was performed directly following the 1832 Reform Act and the 1832 General Election, which represented a revised franchise and borough distribution, and returned a significant Liberal-Whig majority. As my earlier discussion indicates, this shift was thought to bring about a fairer society in which all individuals might seek upward mobility and trust their government to provide equal opportunities for doing so. Indeed, the 1832 Act made possible such later legislative actions as the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act, which, as Michie explains, had lacked sufficient votes prior to 1832 but later gained ground as MPs "felt the pressure of new constituencies" ("On the" 3). Thus, I interpret Westmacott's rendition of this tradesman-led City of London as participating in discourse surrounding political and social change specific to the early 1830s. As MacDonald tells us, burlesque audiences "would be offered the more reassuring spectacle of whites acting black, or reasserting a relation between observer and object which affirmed white authority over, and authorship of, narratives of racial difference" (237). *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* functions similarly, as a mode of rejecting and containing the epistemological questions regarding race, class, and identity related to legislative change and the reform efforts of men like Waithman.

Here, the City of London justice system is led by inept and/or potentially corrupt representatives of middle-class commercial culture, whose seemingly mistaken legislative and ideological innovations allowed for Othello's respected community standing, one revealed to be

false. Westmacott's depictions serve as a critique of the pretensions of middle-class reformers, revealing the efficacy or legitimacy of the centralized justice system under their lead to be false and illustrating how facets of unofficial, violent, or unfair justice of the lower-class rabble crop up even in the most respected characters and institutions of official law and order. Indeed, as Iago's machinations reveal, all of the social groups represented, including governing officials, prove ineffectual at containing what we come to understand as the threat of unrestrained individualism, this the ugly underbelly of commercial society. Although traders and reformers like Waithman may have touted the virtues of the middle class, Westmacott implies a crude individualism at its heart. In particular, Iago's operations within this community, in addition to facilitating Othello's downfall, ultimately reveal the official justice system's inability to handle the demands of London's growing commercialism, which breed the sort of individuality and greed that undercuts judicial sanctions and social ties alike. Iago's thirst for individual gain undermines and hinders the development of cohesive social ties. He manipulates representatives of local and centralized justice alike, and his motives for doing so illustrate the extent to which any paradigm of justice is always worked upon and represents the beliefs and actions of individuals. If the goal of burlesque is to critique the pretensions of respectable society, then Westmacott's play does so doubly, not only denying the legitimacy of its middle-class governing officials but also pointing to their troubling association with the negative effects of the highly materialistic, commercial culture of the City.

A Note on Authorship

I maintain that Charles Molloy Westmacott authored *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* despite Manfred Draudt's insistence that comedian Charles Mathews, discussed in Chapter 2, should be credited with the work. Indeed, Draudt, editor of the only published version of the

play,¹ spends nearly half of the edition's introduction establishing Mathews as the author, but I find his evidence unconvincing. The task of wrestling with such issues of authorship is important because it sheds light on what biographical and social factors might have entered into the portrayals of blackness and the working class in *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* and other West-End burlesques. Furthermore, many key studies regarding nineteenth-century theater culture and conceptions of race list Mathews as author based on Draudt's evidence,² making his misattribution of scholarly concern.

Pointing to a series of generic and plot based similarities between the play and Matthews's other publications, Draudt finds definitive proof in the broadest of similarities. For instance, he points to the play's inclusion of an Irish song as indicating personal knowledge of Henry Yates's Irish heritage, and he contends that the depiction of Othello drinking gin directly references John Reeve's own heavy drinking (6-10). These personal details, however, were public knowledge, and the comic elements referenced here are of the sort common to many forms of nineteenth-century comedy, and specifically burlesques, travesties, and other farces. Draudt includes a laundry list of other characteristics that, rather than directly tie the play to Matthews, simply illustrate a similar dramatic and historical context. He points out, among other similarities, the use of rhymes, dashes, alliterative character names, comic black dialect, slang and cant terms, references to pugilism, references to current events, references to Shakespeare, and the transposition of low culture with high culture (11-20). He concludes,

The conventional and stock elements that Mathews's entertainments and the *Othello* burlesque have in common indicate, first of all, a generic similarity; yet the cumulative force of the parallels and especially the fact that the works share exactly the same quality of language suggests a particularly close relationship between Mathews and *Othello* and hence a common author. (20)

This statement is supportable in everyway except the last, in its assertion that Mathews is the author of *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*. While the available information doesn't necessarily disprove Draudt's claims, it also doesn't clearly support them.

One of the most striking marks against Mathews's authorship comes from a supposed similarity, the play's use of dialect, and specifically "Negro patois," which Mathews picked up on his American travels (15). Citing Mathews's *Comic Annual for 1832*, Draudt points out a similar use of "the Negro pronunciation 'de' for 'the,'" as well as "a number of eccentric Negro characters" that share the same "pomposity" as the burlesque's Othello (15-6). Yet, these inclusions don't take into account the general vogue of such racial portrayals at West-End minors, a dramatic trend, as I discuss in the introduction to this study, made popular in part by Mathews's own blackface performances and other minstrel shows, as well as Ira Aldridge's contentious portrayal of *Othello* in 1833. Indeed, given the popularity of Mathews's blackface performances, I wonder why an *Othello* burlesque by him would give Othello only one speech using "African patois," as does *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*. As Bernth Lindfors³ explains, the lack of dialect speaks against Mathews's authorship, given that "Mathews had made his reputation as a mimic of unusual dialects and idiolects of English." Thus, "...it is unlikely that he would have participated in crafting a burlesque devoid of this form of linguistic humor" (*Ira*, 350, n. 17). Furthermore, we can compare this slim usage to Dowling's *Othello Travestie*, which was published in 1834 and whose Othello speaks entirely in black dialect. That *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* only sparingly uses such language lowers the likelihood that Mathews wrote it.

Finally, Mathews's career centered on individual performance; indeed, as we know, he popularized monopolylogues, a performance type where, in a one-man show, an actor plays

multiple parts or imitates multiple people. He at times performed in full-length productions but was not, however, known for writing entire plays, such as the *Othello* burlesque. What's more, as a famous performer and theater manager, Mathews's life is well documented. Indeed, his wife published the extensive *Memoirs of Charles Mathews, Comedian*, and, while this text provides detailed information on Mathews's many performances, it does not mention *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*. This memoir may certainly prove incomplete, but such an exclusion is telling, as is the fact that no record pairs Mathews with the burlesque.

Most citations of the play list no author. Only one contemporary record—an 1833 review in *The Town*—lists Charles Molloy Westmacott (1788-1868), a London-based writer and publisher of satiric, political newspapers, as such, although an 1872 article in *The Era Almanac*, detailing the production history of the Strand theater, lists Colley [Charles] Molloy Westmacott as authoring the play (See Conclusion of this study, page 261). Draudt ultimately discounts *The Town*'s attribution (and doesn't mention *The Era*'s), with the following passage representing the core of his critique,

In spite of providing some authentic information, such as that on costumes, the *Town* review is not reliable. The reviewer's critical preconceptions and personal bias are so strong that he distorts facts by misinterpreting the play's ending. His afterthought and attribution to Westmacott, therefore, contradicting his earlier admission that he is 'not acquainted with [the author's] name,' must appear in a very doubtful light, since he all too readily associates 'the disgusting extravaganza' with a notorious author whom he strongly dislikes. (3)

This statement is problematic on several levels. While the review is biased, it is no more so than other critiques of the play, or many literary and drama reviews of the time, in which a reviewer's or editor's vested interest and political affiliation colored included material. Indeed, Draudt lists several instances where reviews provide similarly caustic remarks as the *Town* article,⁴ and the reviewer seems no more acerbic than these others. While Draudt rightfully locates areas where

this and another review (from *The Sunday Times*) seemingly mistake the play's ending—they claim Desdemona miraculously recovers from being poisoned when the text indicates Desdemona's evasion of the attempt—I am inclined to believe that the reviewers are correct, and that the production *did* include the poisoning, since a mistake from two separate reviewers seems unlikely. As we know, dramatic productions are fluid and collaborative, and official playbooks, especially those from the nineteenth century, prove notoriously poor records of actual performance history. Schoch explains this point,

Burlesque texts offered themselves not as inviolable scripts meant to be spoken on stage, but as opportunities for endless revisions, deletions, substitutions, and additions. . . . A 'fixed burlesque script' was a contradiction in terms. When we read a burlesque text, even a manuscript, we are not reading anything approximating what was said, heard, or enacted in different theatrical staginess of the text. (49)

Based on this discussion, I do not, therefore, view the play's plot difference as reason to conclude that the review is "not reliable" because it supposedly "distorts facts by misrepresenting the play's ending," but rather that the particular performance differed from the script.

Even further, Draudt misinterprets another of the review's apparent contradictions, here concerning its statement of authorship, as well as its motive for listing Westmacott. The review, which Draudt reproduces, first states, "We are not acquainted with his [the author's] name," but it amends this view, relating, "Since writing the above we find that Charles Molloy Westmacott. . . has increased his literary fame and public notoriety by being the writer of *Othello; or, the moor of Fleet-street*" (qtd. in Draudt 3). While the meaning of "Since writing the above" seems clear—that time elapsed during the composition of the review—Draudt excludes it from his interpretation and thus finds a contradiction where there is none. Furthermore, we have to wonder why the reviewer would vindictively pair together Westmacott and the *Othello* burlesque

due to a “strong” dislike. To be sure, Westmacott had a dubious reputation; his writings in periodicals such as *The Age* and *The Argus*, to name a few, were highly satiric and politicized, and Westmacott developed a name as a blackmailer,⁵ but it does not follow that a similar dislike of both Westmacott and the play prompted the reviewer to combine them in this manner.

Draudt also points to a supposed dissimilarity between *Othello* and Westmacott’s other writing, stating that the writer’s chief works were “all satirical” and “date from the 1820s.” Of the 1829 farce *Nettlewig Hall; or, Ten to One*, which the *Town* review also mentions, Draudt ultimately concludes that its plot, characters, and writing style “have nothing whatsoever in common” with *Othello* (4). As Draudt describes it, *Nettlewig Hall* “deals with the fooling of an elderly guardian by his clever nephew, who finally succeeds in winning his beautiful young ward” (4), but such a plot seems to share much with *Othello*’s tale of elopement (and with much other nineteenth-century literature). Furthermore, that *Nettlewig Hall* includes “conventional prose” instead of the “doggerel” and “low cant” of *Othello* does not make it “highly unlikely that the two plays should have been written by one and the same author,” as Draudt suggests (4). Rather, Westmacott uses verse and “doggerel” in a similar manner and context as other Shakespeare burlesques, and he thus employs a different writing style and language when working in other genres. Furthermore, what Draudt terms the play’s “excessive usage” of dashes (11), both within sentences and ending lines of verse, and which he correlates to Mathews’s writing, is just as apparent in Westmacott’s various works.⁶ On the whole, Westmacott had a varied career of satirical political writing leading up to his editorship of *The Age*, which David E. Latané describes as displaying a “combination of political advocacy with ribald frivolity” (49), the very sort of material found in *Othello*.

Although Draudt writes off Westmacott's ties to the London drama scene in general, an exploration of his background reveals many connections, and ones that support his authorship of *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*. Latané, who provides one of the few studies of Westmacott's life, describes Westmacott as having "much expertise in both the visual arts and the theater, and good connections among artists and artistes." Early in his career, he worked as a scene painter at Sadler's Wells, and he was a machinist at the Adelphi in 1812 (46). Indeed, he resided on Adam Street, London, during the late 1820s (52), which literally dead-ends across the street from the Adelphi, and so his personal and professional life put him in close contact with London's West-End theater scene. Draudt references several of Westmacott's highly publicized run-ins with patent-theater actors,⁷ but these incidents do not support the conclusion that "Westmacott quarreled fiercely with the actors of his day and had no personal connection with the actors of the Adelphi" (4). Indeed, in his second play, the 1837 farce *King Hal's Early Days*, which was first performed at Drury Lane and which Draudt does not mention, we can see evidence of Westmacott's continued presence within this theater community, as well as his further interest in Shakespeare. A review in *Theatrical Observer* provides us with an outline of the plot,

A new Drama, in two acts, called *King Hal's Early Days* was afterwards acted for the first time, with but indifferent success. The plot turns on a freak of the King who disguises himself as a yeoman of the guards to pry into the conduct of the city watch; in that disguise he hears some wholesome truths, discovers a few intrigues, and the next morning profits by his knowledge to do some acts of kindness and justice. ("Covent Garden Theater")

Although this play is a farce rather than a burlesque, and thus lacks the sort of crudeness and topsy-turviness of *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*, Westmacott still plays with plot here, replicating King Henry's disguised walk through camp the night before the Battle of Agincourt. He also displays an interest in the official justice system—specifically the doings of the city

watch—which perhaps, as I will show, also thematically relates to *Othello*'s own interest in the City's justice system.

What's more, Westmacott maintained various specific connections to the West-End minor theater world during this time. For instance, he developed a friendship with W. T. Moncrieff, a dramatist and writer discussed in Chapter 2 whose hugely successful *Tom and Jerry* (1821) was dramatized by Pierce Egan's *Life in London* (1821). Draudt rightfully lists both of these productions as influential to the writer of *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* and to Charles Mathews, even if these figures aren't one in the same. Westmacott generally satirized London's elite, and so his lampooning of its middle- and lower-class populations is a dramatic departure for him and complicates asserting his authorship of *Othello*. That he exchanged numerous letters with Moncrieff during this time, though, is evocative and perhaps shows his interest in depicting London's underworld.⁸ Indeed, Moncrieff wrote the included "Remarks" preceding the publication of Westmacott's *Nettlewig Hall*, providing a glowing review of Westmacott's career. He characterizes Westmacott as "a very clever man, and can turn his hand to almost anything;—he has been, in his time, an artist, an actor, and an author;—has painted scenes—made properties—concocted pantomimes, and written farces" (9). This inclusion illustrates an established friendship between the two writers and signals Westmacott's reputation within the theater community, one that extended beyond accounts of his feuds or cases of blackmail.⁹

Indeed, much in Westmacott's life aligns him with the imagined subject-positioning assumed by West-End burlesques and their audiences. As Latané explains, although Westmacott was the illegitimate son of Richard Westmacott, a prominent sculptor, he was provided a respectable education (at St. Paul's School and the Royal Academy). His father's death necessitated his career in the periodical publishing industry; at this point, his half-brother (and

Richard Westmacott's legitimate heir) disowned him (45). Westmacott still seems to have identified with a relatively high social standing rather than that of the hardworking, respectable middle class. Furthermore, as an ultra-Tory, he would have held a negative view of many 1830s reforms forwarded by such men as Robert Waithman.

This upbringing helps us understand his relation to Shakespeare burlesques' target audience. As I have shown, this sector of the London theater-scene came to be associated with a particularly male, "bohemian" crowd, a "collective of 'fast,' young men" of middle-class social standing or higher (Schoch 134). Even further, that East-End and Surrey-Side audiences (stereotypically associated with the working-class and the respectable middle-class, respectively) did not generally produce burlesques speaks to an ideological separation between these groups and those frequenting West-End minors. Productions in the West End more frequently expressed derision regarding the working-class, and, while burlesques might lampoon humbug and respectability, we can see a particularly conservative stance on social mobility in productions such as *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*. Based on the information available, Westmacott seems to have occupied a place in this "fast" crowd, one characterized by a "flamboyant disregard for the conventional, the expected, or the wearingly slow" (Schoch 117), but that might still hold conservative views regarding hierarchies of race and class. Importantly, around 1830, and within the timeframe when *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* might have been written, Westmacott frequented such venues as "Cyder Cellar" and "Coal Hole," where what Latané calls "unclubbable men [i.e. not a part of fashionable literary clubs]...met in the late hours" (61). Schoch lists these two locates as among the "drinking establishments cited regularly in Shakespeare's burlesques." He continues, explaining that these venues

were neither gentlemen's clubs along Pall Mall nor local gin palaces in ordinary neighborhoods. These West End establishments were patronized chiefly by 'swells' and

‘fast’ young men. For all its seeming earthiness, the burlesque does not invoke the centrality in working-class life of the local pub, a place where families gathered, friends conversed, and business was conducted. (128)

Westmacott spent his leisure time, then, carousing and drinking in the exact bars specifically tied to burlesques and their target audiences. Furthermore, as Latané indicates, Westmacott perhaps began experimenting, in his “Confidential Sketches” series, with pieces that were “dramatic in character, doggerel in form, and parodic in intent,” even perhaps trying out musical numbers, such as “informal sing-alongs” at the previously mentioned “watering holes” (61). Indeed, perhaps through his experiences here (and in combination with his friendship with Moncrieff), Westmacott developed an interest in the sort of lower-class lampooning and musical extravaganza common in burlesque, but differing from his other caricatures of high society.

This information does not definitively prove Charles Molloy Westmacott wrote *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*, and I still have many unanswered questions. If he did write this burlesque, for instance, why did he use the pseudonym “William Breakspare,” the name listed on the MS, instead of his usual pen name “Bernard Blackmantle”? Why keep this production secret? Despite these unknowns, Westmacott proves the more likely authorial candidate than Charles Mathews.¹⁰ As we have seen, a contemporary review actually names Westmacott author, a fact that isn’t easily discounted. For these reasons, as well as the complications related to Mathews’s possible authorship, I retain Westmacott as author throughout this study.

The City of London and *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*

Westmacott was well poised to discuss the dynamics of the City of London’s social milieu, and his personal affiliations and political views are in accord with the critique of liberal reformists presented in *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*. He initially establishes the City’s official justice system as central to its reformed “culture of justice,” which, as I explained in the

previous chapter, fostered a rational and fair system of law and order to bolster the country's status as a bastion of equality and liberty. One of the ways Westmacott places us within this "culture of justice" is through direct and implicit references to Robert Waithman's life and career. Westmacott's Brabantio, upon learning of Desdemona's elopement, designates Othello as "the Moor who for many a day / Hath swept Waithman's crossing just over the way" (1. 35-6). This reference points to a bit of lore regarding Waithman's life: he supposedly developed a friendship with the black crossing-sweeper who tended the road near his home and business. Popular accounts of this sweeper differ regarding the details, but a few remain consistent. Walter Thornbury and Edward Walford, in *Old and New London* (1872), relate how one of Waithman's daughters "used to send out soup and bread [to the crossing-sweeper]" (67). As legend has it, such interactions between these two led to an usual exchange: the sweeper, whose post proved highly lucrative (in terms of sweepers' pay), left Miss Waithman a sum of money upon his death.¹¹ And, indeed, although Westmacott does not present the play's Lord Mayor as Waithman, he does establish this character's relationship with Othello, who in this play works as a crossing-sweeper devoted to the Lord Mayor's section of road. Even further, Westmacott characterizes the Lord Mayor as a "Dealer in Dowglas" which was "strong, coarse linen" (Draudt 44), a reference clearly related to Waithman's business as a linen-draper, where he sold fine materials and items such as women's shawls. In usual burlesque fashion, Westmacott lowers Waithman's actual trade—selling fine materials and silks—to a more lowly one selling "coarse," cheap material. We can read this change as a subtle jab at Waithman's middle-class standing as a trader, which many political opponents thought unfitted him to the distinctive position of Lord Mayor.

As I have explained, though, *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* is not primarily concerned with attacking Waithman, so much as it broadly draws from and references the main concerns of his career to develop a more general critique of reform. It explores the limits of a reformed justice system and middle-class morality in combatting violence, crudeness, and greed.

Westmacott recreates a social milieu in which many of Waithman's political concerns shape the world of the play. This burlesque's social hierarchy situates middle-class traders at the top, spanning down to lower-class beggars and thieves. In creating this particular community, Westmacott provides a setting ripe for examining issues of justice and morality, and especially the competing, class-specific paradigms of justice for each social grouping and how they interact. Even further, Westmacott establishes this hierarchy in order to reveal the fissures between social groups, especially regarding how individuals in each respond to crime and in whom they seek redress. In doing so, he provides a scenario in which to facilitate Othello's fall, linking blackness and the working-class as in a state of unreformability. Those characters who most staunchly seem to adhere to official justice and middle-class morality ultimately prove themselves hypocrites in action and belief.

Westmacott establishes the context for these concerns by incorporating into *Othello's* plot the City's legitimate venues of trial and punishment and the personnel of these institutions. Accordingly, the Duke, a magistrate in Shakespeare's play, becomes Mr. Duke, Lord Mayor of London modeled on Waithman. When we first meet him, the Lord Mayor holds a session at the Guildhall, and specifically in the Council Chamber, with "Aldermen" and "City Marshals" accompanying him (Westmacott 52). Cassio no longer serves as Othello's lieutenant but instead performs the role of City Marshalman, a Marshal's deputy. Roderigo, rather than act as Iago's love-lorn dupe, is a "Sergeant of the New Police." Furthermore, in relation to spaces of justice, if

charged with a crime, Othello will go to “Newgate” (49, 50), and Iago and Emilia reside near the “Old Bailey” (57). These last two institutions—the City’s central criminal court and its adjoining prison—constitute the literal and symbolic official framework of justice within which Othello’s actions and potential punishment are interpreted and judged.¹²

Yet, the nineteenth-century City of London was also a place of business and poverty in addition to one of law and order, and Westmacott makes this juxtaposition from the start, by altering the play’s title from *Othello, the Moor of Venice* to *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*. In doing so, he evokes one of the City’s busiest roads, and one that linked the world of law and order to one of commerce. This street “runs from the Strand to Ludgate Circus,” a physical positioning that made it one of the most important roads in the Metropolis. It was “the main thoroughfare linking the political district of Westminster, the financial heart of the City of London, and the legal center of the Inn of Courts, and later the High Court” (Brake and Demoor 221).

As Garber reminds us, Shakespeare’s plays often involve a shift in setting, moving between “geographical poles” that represent the competing forces of the play. Thus, concerning Shakespeare’s *Othello*, she designates its two locales—Venice and Cyprus—as “city and wilderness, civilization and anarchy, order and disorder” (589). Although Westmacott centers the play’s action in the City of London, he uses its different neighborhoods in a similar way as Shakespeare’s “poles.” Fleet Street’s relation to the Rules surrounding the Fleet prison, for instance, (which I discuss later in this chapter, as well as in Chapter 5) made it a central locale for crime and intrigue. Allyson May tells us more about this area of London and its poor populations:

They lived primarily in insalubrious and dangerous areas in the interstices at the borders of municipal authority....The older parts of the metropolis—‘the courts of Holborn and

Gray's Inn Lane, the rookeries of St. Giles [...]—had generally become dangerous areas in which to live, as were many of the courts and lanes off Fleet Street and the Strand. (10)

Westmacott brings us to several such “interstices,” then, imaginative borders we navigate in our vacillation between the City's sites of government and the slums surrounding them.

The citizens who reside in the City range from middle-class traders to lower-class beggars and thieves. In addition to the Lord Mayor, who is a “Dealer in Dowglas,” Brabantio is a brazier, or brass worker, rather than a Senator. Indeed, Westmacott even provides Brabantio a wife, “Mrs. B” (1.29), to whom he flies after hearing of Desdemona's elopement. This minor change, given only a single reference, aligns his domestic situation with his social standing. Furthermore, in true burlesque fashion, the community's lower-class characters gather at the “public house,” aptly named “The Beggar's Club.”¹³ As the scene description makes clear, this pub is situated in the City's most notorious slum—St. Giles—and specifically in a section known as the Holy Land, which, as Jerry White tells us, was named ironically for its beggarly but devout Irish Catholic population (11). White characterizes St. Giles as “a small but dense district” of tightly packed housing known for having “a very old concentration of misery and crime”(31). Unsurprisingly, then, patrons of the Beggar's Club are destitute and are given the sorts of names made popular in portrayals of the lower class found in such works as Moncrieff's *Tom and Jerry* and Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), names like “Chirruping Joe,” “Touching Sue,” “Blind Jenny,” and “Billy Bow-wow.”¹⁴ Westmacott designates these people as occupying the lowest rung of the social ladder, indicating that they are “dressed to represent the well-known mendicants of the metropolis” (59). Interestingly, Othello and Iago are street-sweepers by trade, a position at the top of the beggar's hierarchy and one considered more respectable than others. As I will discuss, though, Othello's actual social positioning, and thus his conceptions of justice,

prove contentious given his ties to middle-class City officials and their views on justice and morality.

From a geographical and symbolic perspective, then, the play's action oscillates between the center of City government, the supposed heart of order and civility, to the epitome of crime and filth. Our movement within locations mirrors what Garber describes as *Othello's* "geographical shift in the middle of the play, the movement from the civilized place to a wild one, from a locale of order and law to a place of passion and confusion" (589). In this burlesque, we shift locales, and, in doing so, alternate between social and ideological orientations as well, especially concerning competing paradigms of justice. The play's characters, and their ideological conceptions of justice, especially concerning middle-class traders, supposedly adhere to a "culture of justice" privileging the official justice system and its representatives. As we will see, however, aspects of lower-class culture, and specifically its more communal, brutal paradigm of justice, become manifest in the actions of these characters and in the spaces aligned with official law and order.

City Justice in *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*

Brabantio's statement regarding City justice, with which I open this chapter, signals an expectation of "justice" that makes up a central facet of the community's ethos—it reveals an overall faith that criminal behavior will be detected and punished. This trust is central to my use of Moretti's English "culture of justice" (196), which, as I have discussed, necessitated reform of the justice process in order to align ideology with action. Doing so helped foster "a pride in the intangibility of one's rights, and in the guarantees they provide against the abuses of political power" (207).

As such, Westmacott's use of the interrelated striations of space and class informs his exploration of justice in the City. From the start of the play, Westmacott presents his community as subscribing to a paradigm of justice where City representatives of law and order take responsibility for addressing crime and disorder. These representatives reveal a subtly liberal, reformist stance created through Westmacott's references to Robert Waithman and the implied ideologies of race and class exemplified through Othello's social standing within this community. This faith in official justice does not assure that brutal or irrational elements didn't remain, though. Indeed, for each instance where we see official justice and its complimentary ideology—middle-class morality—evoked in response to crime or transgressive behavior, Westmacott undercuts the validity of these established beliefs and reveals the remnants of crudeness, discretion, and brutality at the heart of the middle-class, official culture of justice.

Westmacott complicates the validity and superiority of official justice even in the play's opening scene. Shakespeare's *Othello* begins *in medias res*, with Roderigo and Iago outside Brabantio's house:

Roderigo: Tush, never tell me, I take it much unkindly
That thou, Iago, who hadst had my purse
As if the strings were thine should know of this.

Iago: 'Sblood, but you will not hear me.
If ever I did dream of such a matter,
Abhor me.

Roderigo: Thou told'st me thou didst hold him in thy hate.

Iago: Despise me if I do not: three great ones of the city
In personal suit to make me his lieutenant,
Off-capped to him; and by the faith of man,
I know my price, I am worth no worse a place. (1.1.1-11)

Roderigo chastises Iago for appearing to favor Othello, Roderigo's romantic rival. Presumably, Roderigo has just learned of Othello and Desdemona's elopement, of which we are not apprised until later in the scene. For the time being, Iago's duplicity and hatred of Othello take precedence, signaling the importance of these particular characteristics and temporarily delaying the scandal stirred by the couple's clandestine marriage.

Rather than begin the play with Iago and Roderigo's stealthy discussion of the elopement, Westmacott includes a Chorus to relate the story, which evokes a sense of cohesive community justice but also portrays residents of the City of London looking to representatives of law and order to redress wrongdoing. The Chorus sings,¹⁵

Lights, neighbors, lights! Here's a pretty piece of business.
A dreadful deed – upon my creed – as ne'er occurred before.
The pretty Desdemona in a fit of Cupid's dizziness
This very night has ta'en her flight and bolted with the Moor.
Must have addressed, or else possessed the lady's brain.
Here's pretty work: this Moorish lurk, will [be] the cause of the
attorneyman.
Brabantio's race will never face the world so fair again.
Knock, neighbors, knock! Ring the bells and make a row!
The brazier sleeps as sound as any copper kettle.
Awake him, shake him, mill his gaze, or anyhow
To ope' his eyes to great surprise and put him on his mettle. (1.1-12; brackets Daudt's)

This passage markedly differs from Shakespeare's version, where the elopement introduces Iago's manipulative qualities and thirst for vengeance. Here, the Chorus establishes the couple's relationship as sensational; their elopement is a "dreadful deed" committed by a foolish girl and her racially inferior beau.

More specifically, Westmacott draws on the historic role of the dramatic Chorus to broaden the range of critique against the couple, a response rooted in community. As John Gassner and Ralph G. Allen discuss, the chorus oftentimes "provides a sense of community involvement in the issue of the action" (65), as it does in this instance. It functions as a "constant

reminder” that a protagonist’s choices affect “a whole community.” It might also, according to Clifford Leech, act as “the voice of wisdom or commonsense which the principal characters disregard at their peril” (73). Thus, the couple’s elopement does not just injure Desdemona’s family but wrongs the surrounding community through its secrecy and disregard of custom and opinion. Although Othello and Desdemona do not break any specific law, the community’s response illustrates a key facet of its paradigm of justice: the import of social connections and the community’s willingness to punish those individuals who transgress custom.

Importantly, though, members of the Chorus do not take the law into their own hands. They make known their disapproval of the clandestine union but trust the official justice system to address this perceived wrong. Thus, Roderigo, a sergeant in the New Police,¹⁶ heads the Chorus’s procession rather than play the part of an easily manipulated buffoon, as in Shakespeare’s play. Indeed, he only interacts with Iago on one occasion, later in the play when Iago advises him not to “submit” to sorrow over losing Desdemona (3.98). His role here signals the extent that citizens looked to the official justice system and its representatives to address crime and community transgression. As we will see, Roderigo merely assumes a trustworthy role, much like Iago in Shakespeare’s play, but this community chorus remains unaware of his duplicity.

Why transform Roderigo into a policeman and the leader of a community Chorus, bent on meting out justice? The answer has to do with issues of policing reform that made up one facet of official justice reform already discussed. A supposed increase in crime—and specifically theft—prompted community leaders to propose better ways to deter such activity. Both the City of London and the Metropolis had been embroiled in attempts to centralize their respective watch forces since the century’s early decades. These debates over the selection and control of the

watch came to a head in the 1820s and 30s, culminating in the establishment of the New Metropolitan Police in 1829 and the City of London Police in 1839, although the City had implemented numerous centralizing measures prior to this consolidation.¹⁷

Although issues of governmental autonomy and finances played central roles in spurring reform, so too did concerns over the moral turpitude of the working class, and specifically what sorts of men should be trusted with protecting the community. What started out as community-led self-policing had gradually transformed into a paid force of substitutes,¹⁸ who were often of a lower social-class than inhabitants, this well before Peel's 1829 New Police Act or the City's own centralization. A number of statutory changes in 1735-6 allowed for "the substitution of taxes for service" (Reynolds 19), and this shift sparked debates over who should choose these substitutes and from what section of the general population. Common thought held that many watchmen were "corrupt, many of them drunken, most of them old or crippled, and all of them useless for almost anything beyond calling the hours of the night" (qtd. in Archer 27-8). Constables came under similar fire. As Elaine A. Reynolds points out, "Corrupt constables, like sleeping watchmen, were a comic stereotype by the eighteenth century" (67). Given that these men were subject to little oversight and acted, for the most part, at their own discretion, many worried that communities were not safe in their hands. Such conditions might foster personal corruption and vice,¹⁹ behaviors that perhaps even pointed to a vulgarity of origins, with one's lower social standing supposedly linked to a higher probability of criminality.

In light of these suppositions, citizens and lawmakers wrangled with how to proceed: Should they trust men who were so poverty-stricken that they agreed to work for what were often very low wages? Were these representatives more open to corruption as a result? Furthermore, watchmen and constables performed their work within one of the "interconnected spheres of

connected judicial space,” in which King claims “deeply discretionary choices were made” (1). Contemporary assumptions regarding the moral turpitude of the working class informed these fears, with lower-class populations deemed naturally disposed towards criminality. Part of the drive to centralize, then, related to increased apprehension over placing lower-class individuals in positions where they are entrusted with protecting a community of betters. Harris notes that concern over the trustworthiness of poor personnel “probably indicated...changed attitudes about the sort of people who, given the low salaries of constables, ultimately took on the office. Centralization thus became an argument for transferring discretion into more trustworthy hands” (25), meaning those who weren’t “too poor or immoral to exercise it correctly” (12).

These were some of the key concerns prompting watch and policing reform in the Metropolis and City, and they should inform our understanding of why Westmacott transformed Roderigo into a sergeant of the New Police. Roderigo ultimately behaves in a way that would have evoked earlier fears of corruption and vice, but here with regards to the supposedly reformed police. Instead of Iago and Roderigo both informing Brabantio of the elopement, in Westmacott’s play, Roderigo does the job: “My duty compels me to tell you your daughter / Has escaped through the area...” (1.21-2). Yet, just as Shakespeare’s Iago discloses his own duplicity to the audience, Roderigo performs a similar move at the end of this scene, “I shall now be revenged for her [Desdemona] diddling me” (1.30).²⁰ To all the other characters, though, he approaches Brabantio as a representative of the official justice system, a role he uses to enable his ulterior motives. Roderigo’s personal cunning and abuse of authority allow him to negatively influence the people around him, and he acts as a catalyst to their condemnation of the couple.

Roderigo’s duplicity here raises the possibility that some of the aims of centralizing reform—to provide a more respectable and effective police force—had yet to be realized.

Roderigo's interactions with members of the community; his status as a policeman, albeit one from the metropolis; and the deceitfulness of his seeming goodwill should clue us into the instability of his identity and his commitment to official justice. Although efforts to centralize the Metropolitan police and the City watch forces highlighted the purported need for respectable, efficient personnel, Westmacott's transformation of Roderigo into a duplicitous manipulator calls into question the extent that such changes would achieve this end.²¹ Indeed, Brabantio does not initially trust Roderigo, even after Roderigo informs him of his occupation: "I'm no thief, but an honest police-man" (1.19). The father, however, proclaims, "You're a common disturber, and so hold your peace, man" (1.20). Although centralized police forces had supposedly weeded out the corrupt or ineffectual members of old watch forces, Brabantio's reference calls into question this shift.

Yet, Roderigo banks on his status as a policeman to bolster his credibility, and his continued emphasis on his role as a professional ultimately wins Brabantio's trust. For instance, Roderigo presents his intervention as part of professional habit, as a "duty," and he hints at having insider knowledgeable of all things criminal. Thus, when Brabantio posits Othello's use of "black magic" to seduce Desdemona (1.11), Roderigo corroborates, saying that he has "read of such things in the rogue's '*Hue and Cry*'" (1.12), this the subtitle to *The Police Gazette*, which Claire Valier describes as a police newspaper including information on crimes and advertisements about particular infractions (23).²² Roderigo presents himself and his information as trustworthy based on his supposed personal integrity and the professional knowledge his occupation provides.

Brabantio finally buys into Roderigo's ploy given these assurances. Bent on catching the couple and preventing their marriage, he exclaims, "Then start, honest bluebottle,²³ quick, follow

quick!” (1.42). And, to be sure, Desdemona *has* eloped. Roderigo is honest in action and information, if not intent. Yet, Brabantio’s use of “honest” here, combined with Roderigo’s own earlier designation of himself as an “honest policeman,” should clue us into his nefarious motives, given Shakespeare’s ironic association of “honest” with Iago.²⁴ Ultimately, Roderigo capitalizes on his reputation as a man of the law in order to gain Brabantio’s trust and heighten his ire, all for the purpose of punishing romantic rather than legal or professional transgression.

Brabantio clearly trusts the official City justice system to help him regain his daughter and punish Othello, but even he displays an inconsistent reliance on official justice. In examining both versions of Brabantio’s reaction to the elopement, we can discern a subtle difference between *who* he expects to help him regain his daughter and *what* motivation he attributes to aid proffered by such individuals. His mixed expectations point to the justice system’s latent brutality and a reliance on favoritism, two elements supposedly remedied through policing reform and anathema to law and order founded on fairness and respectability.

In Shakespeare’s version, upon learning of Desdemona’s elopement, Brabantio relies on official intervention for remedy, but such intervention does not preclude partiality on the part of justice representatives. Brabantio first intends to have Othello incarcerated “till fit time / Of law and course of direct session / Call [Othello] to answer” (1.2.85-7). Yet, upon hearing that the Duke is holding an emergency, late-night council, to which Othello has been summoned for military consultation, Brabantio changes course and decides to bring Othello there instead. He reasons that

[t]he Duke himself,
Or any of my brothers of the state,
Cannot but feel this wrong as ‘twere their own;
For if such actions may have passage free,
Bondslaves and pagans shall our statesmen be. (1.2.95-8)

Brabantio's use of the reflexive "himself" shows that he expects the Duke to personally identify with his plight. His rhetoric, and the designation of his fellow statesmen as "brothers," implies that any sanction brought forward would, in part, relate to the statesmen's personal identification with Brabantio, one assured by the bonds of friendship.

Westmacott's version of this scene presents the conflict in a similar manner but complicates the role individual relationships play in determining access to justice. As I have already indicated, after learning of his daughter's elopement, Brabantio exclaims,

Gemmen, keep a sharp eye
On this devilish Moor, lest from justice he fly.
If such actions pass 'fore a judge prison free,
There's an end to the City, to justice, and me. (2.19-22)

This version excludes any mention of fraternal identification between Brabantio and his fellow statesmen. Brabantio is a citizen—a brazier rather than government official and peer. As such, he does not expect personal identification with his cause but seeks out justice, the kind supposedly guaranteed to all English citizens no matter their social standing. Furthermore, the rhetoric here distances Brabantio from Othello's fate within the justice system. He wants to assure that Othello can't escape "justice," this a more neutral term than revenge or punishment, and he, at least in this instance, does not place himself as taking part in such enforcement.

In both Shakespeare's and Westmacott's version of events, the possibility of Othello's continued freedom calls into question the efficacy and legitimacy of their cities' justice systems. Shakespeare, however, focuses Brabantio's critique on Venice's statesmen, claiming that they'll prove no better than "[b]ondslaves and pagans" if Othello remains free (1.2.98). Such an oversight would reflect poorly on these respected officials, insinuating their incapacity to rule but only metonymically commenting on the justice system as a whole. Westmacott instead more overtly links "justice" and "the City" as in jeopardy if Othello does not serve prison time, and he

places particular focus on the overarching outcome of Othello's continued freedom—"There's an end to the City, to justice, and me" (2.19-22). This passage more directly crystalizes how such an oversight would affect the City. In failing to act, the City belies its standing as rational and fair, as deserving of its ancient freedoms from centralizing encroachment. What's more, the future of English "justice" would be jeopardized, losing a key element constituting its national identity and, as Colley suggests, that which it used to separate itself from lesser societies, "the Other beyond their shores," which might take the form of "Continental foes or colonized populations" (6).²⁵

This reliance on official justice does not preclude the involvement of individual, unofficial support, as well as a personal familiarity with representatives of City justice lower in the judicial hierarchy. In Shakespeare's *Othello*, Brabantio is aided by "Roderigo and Officers with lights and weapons" (page 128). Upon locating the supposed culprit, Brabantio cries, "Down with him, thief!" (1.2.57), a direction intended for the accompanying Officers. In Westmacott's play, the scene direction lists a similar grouping of characters: "Enter Brabantio, City Police, and Friends, with torches, etc." (page 50). Furthermore, upon finding Othello, Brabantio exclaims, "Knock him [Othello] down, my good friends of the City Police" (scene 2, line 14), indicating a mix of official and unofficial support.²⁶ As with the Chorus accompanying Roderigo (and perhaps even including the same gathering), a grouping of citizens looks on as the police perform their official role, signifying community solidarity against Othello's actions. The act combines a portrayal of mixed paradigms of justice—both official and unofficial—which equally seem to prompt and support physical violence and brutality as a means of sanction.

The violence of this exchange, as well as the role of community observers, provides an imaginative link to debates over state-sanctioned brutality (perhaps of the sort enacted before the

populace on hanging days) and the limits of impartial official justice. The City Police act at Brabantio's behest, even acquiescing to his exhortation that they treat Othello roughly. Given that police brutality was a main complaint against some reformed police forces, especially towards lower-class citizens, Brabantio's request implies the partiality of official justice to the middle class. Both Brabantio and the justice system in which he puts his faith betray the existence of qualities not matching the City's ideal culture of justice.

Westmacott's portrayal of the Lord Mayor presents similar complexity, especially given the character's ties to Robert Waithman. One of Waithman's most consistent political stances dealt with equality and fairness in the justice system and the critique of favoritism and corruption. This context combines with the symbolic standing of the Lord Mayor, who is the superior state representative of the City of London and acts as the symbolic center of its governance. However, Westmacott's depiction presents the Lord Mayor's commitment to impartial official justice as tenuous, a move prompting questions regarding the City's commitment to fairness and equality as a whole.

From the outset, Westmacott specifically aligns the Lord Mayor and his representatives with official, centralized government, or rather, he portrays this paradigm as representative of the behavior expected of City officials. When we first meet the Lord Mayor—who is deciding how to tend with an unruly, lower-class mob—his enactment of official justice takes on specific assumptions regarding social standing and respectability:

Marshall: ...in the Strand a mob did me affright
 Of costermongers going to a fight.
 The mill, they said, was to be eastward o'
 From which I guess it will come off a[t] Bow.

Lord Mayor: What is their number, come sir, as you guess?

Marshall: My lord, about a thousand, more or less.

Lord Mayor: 'Tis certain then to Bow the combatants proceed?

Marshall: My lord, 'tis there they'll do the bloody deed.

Lord Mayor: Indeed they won't.... (3.1-14; brackets Draudt's)

The “bloody deed” in this instance references a “fight” occurring “eastward” of the Strand, and thus in London’s East End, and to which the crowd acts as entertained onlookers, but the use of “bloody” in relation to a form of brutal, lower-class entertainment perhaps also hints at the Bloody Code and rowdy hanging-day crowds. Both instances represent facets of nineteenth-century culture deemed anathema to English respectability. As I have shown, in the process of providing more centralized, rational justice for its citizens, City officials often worked to curb aspects of working-class culture deemed unrefined or lewd. Crone characterizes working-class culture as “vibrant, boisterous, and violent,” as celebrating a sort of bacchanal “indulgence” and “excess” (7). Boxing matches like the one presented here, then, were the exact sort of brutal entertainment deemed unacceptable. Schoch contrasts the relatively tame gentlemanly boxing matches of midcentury with earlier ones: “[W]orking-class prizefighters, particularly in London’s East End traditionally fought bare-knuckled. The excitement of such matches was their brutality,” with matches lasting until “one man was knocked out” (126). That the Lord Mayor so staunchly opposes the gathering of “combatants,” a word whose referent could either relate to the boxers or to the costermonger mob,²⁷ directly aligns him with a particular notion of justice tied to middle-class order and rationality. Whereas many burlesques incorporate references to prize-fighting and boxing “as comically ‘low’ versions of swordfights” (124), with a lampoon of low-class culture embodied in the raucous physicality of the fight, Westmacott centers on the social standing of the fight’s audience, and the juxtaposition of their lust for violence with the middle-class order represented in and enforced by the official justice system.

Yet, the Lord Mayor's response to news of Othello and Desdemona's elopement and his behavior at the subsequent summary hearing put in doubt his complete commitment to impartial justice. A brief overview of nineteenth-century debates regarding summary justice helps us understand how the Lord Mayor's actions here might have raised questions as to discretion and bias in summary proceedings. Traditional summary hearings mark the start of the formal trial process for prosecutors and the accused; for most, it ended at this stage as well. These proceedings were often private, with magistrates and involved parties meeting together, sometimes in the magistrate's parlor or a local inn, to mull over the best course of action.²⁸ Although most felonies and serious crimes were, in theory, indicted and bound over to the higher courts, single magistrates, acting independent of oversight, settled or dismissed cases of all types as de facto judge and jury.²⁹

At issue in debates over summary procedure is whether magistrates held the necessary qualifications to adjudicate, especially given the amount of discretion inherent in their posts. Most of them performed their roles without formal legal training, with their high social status supposedly qualifying them for the role. Legal professionals and reformists disparaged this level of discretion, stating that it violated citizens' individual rights by not providing them equal access to an unbiased hearing or a trial by jury, the lack of which, they argued, called into question such rulings' legitimacy. As H. W. Arthurs tells us, "Important decisions were made by people who were not judges, responding to rules not made by parliament using structures and procedures not derived from or efficiently subject to those of the formal legal system" (169). Reformers labeled as "inefficiency" (Harris 6) the flexibility with which magistrates could handle community issues, proclaiming it as "regional diversity" which led to divergent rulings and waste (Reynolds 125, 129). Magistrates' discretionary practices, according to these critics,

led to an “irrational criminal justice system” (6), that, lacking “legal backing,” ultimately threatened the “rights of the accused” (97). While attentive and knowledgeable magistrates might prove a boon to local communities,³⁰ those informed by pettiness, prejudice, inattention, or simple ignorance posed a serious threat to the justice system’s credibility as a whole.³¹

Given Waithman’s commitment to fairness and upholding citizens’ rights, especially regarding fair trials, how a character modeled on him behaves at a summary hearing is of particular import, especially when Brabantio has essentially wagered the legitimacy of the “City” and its “justice” on the Lord Mayor’s response. The City’s early reforms regarding summary procedure had supposedly alleviated many of these concerns,³² but Westmacott’s depiction of a summary hearing raises doubt as to the totality or efficacy of these changes and perhaps calls into question the neutrality or fairness of officials such as Waithman.

After securing Othello, Brabantio comes to the Lord Mayor in a state of alarm, claiming that “[t]he devil or his deputy would [his] child mate” (3.20), an action he can only amount to her having been “abused” or coerced through a “black act” of witchcraft (3.21), terminology that also references Othello’s skin color. Clearly, such a supposed crime demands immediate action, and, in keeping with protocol, Brabantio seeks out a summary hearing, bringing Othello to the Guildhall in an attempt to have him indicted, perhaps for forcible abduction.³³ Before hearing the details, the Lord Mayor vows,

Whoever he be that in this imp’ous way
Hath beguiled your daughter, or astray
Hath led the maid, you, yourself shall read
The bitterest law upon him for the deed. (3.25-6)

This passage closely follows Shakespeare’s original, where the Duke promises impartial sanction:

Whoever he be that in this foul proceeding

Hath thus beguiled your daughter of herself,
And you of her, the bloody book of law
You shall yourself read in the bitter letter
After your own sense, yea, though our proper son
Stood in your action. (1.3.65-9)

Both renditions emphasize the justice system's commitment to punishing wrongdoers, although Shakespeare's Duke goes further, claiming even the ties of flesh and blood wouldn't hinder this commitment. Yet, they also both promise Brabantio a direct role in the punishment, with Westmacott's Lord Mayor even retaining the reflexive "you, yourself" to highlight the father's role. This move works to undercut the impartiality of the Lord Mayor's future decision, even if his ruling is sound. Whereas Brabantio specifically seeks out official justice to redress this wrong, the Lord Mayor offers him personal vindication and solidarity of purpose between respectable men. He reestablishes the reflexive brotherhood of Shakespeare's original regarding Brabantio and "the Duke, himself," not a brotherhood of statesmen but rather one of tradesmen and shopkeepers. Although the inclusion works in Brabantio's favor (at least at this stage of the hearing), it should put us on our guard concerning issues of favoritism and injustice as the event unfolds. What's more, Westmacott's change of "foul proceeding" to "imp'ous way," in addition to echoing Brabantio's earlier claims regarding the devil and witchcraft, the pun hinging on "imp," also perhaps renders Othello's act in moralistic rather than specifically criminal terms, signaling the extent that personal virtue, whether Othello's or otherwise, is a central facet of this culture of justice.

And indeed, the Lord Mayor's neutrality becomes a point of contention, especially concerning his relationship with Othello. Upon learning that the Lord Mayor has a high regard for Othello, Brabantio notes that Othello "...seems / In the full favor of [his] lordship's beams" (3.27-8), hinting at the possibility of preferential treatment. He questions the extent that the Lord

Mayor would uphold his promise to punish the culprit, “[w]hoe’ver he be” (3.23). This statement indicates a more accusatory or suspicious stance than in Shakespeare’s rendition, where Brabantio designates Othello as the man “whom it seems / [the Duke’s] special mandate for the state affairs / Hath hither brought” (1.3.71-73). Here, Brabantio acknowledges Othello’s martial background, which explains the Duke’s “special” summons. Westmacott’s version includes no such recognition of merit. Although Othello has not, technically speaking, committed a crime, the Lord Mayor’s favor appears problematic. Indeed, even Othello comprehends the benefits of his relationship with the Lord Mayor. Upon hearing of Brabantio’s rage, Othello first points out to Iago that “Desdemona’s of age” (2.5), meaning that Desdemona is legally old enough to marry without parental consent. Even further, though, he thinks his ties to City officials will protect him from sanction: “[Brabantio] shall not frighten me: I know the Lord Mayor” (2.7). This statement gives the impression that, even if Othello *were* guilty of some crime, his friendship with influential officials would shield him from blame. Westmacott’s portrayal of the Lord Mayor calls into question the extent that the City was successful in its efforts to curb partiality in its summary justice process and professionalize and regularize its operations. What’s more, this rendering perhaps takes a subtle jab at Waithman’s own moral and political pretensions.

It is within this overarching atmosphere, *this* contested social and judicial space, that Westmacott situates his play. *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* accommodates the framework and representatives of the City of London’s justice system and contributes to concurrent debates over where justice could be found, what qualities its representatives should embody, and which individuals could directly take part in its process. Respected citizens look to local government to address transgressive behavior, and although Westmacott draws our attention to the contradictions and hypocrisies of the nineteenth-century “culture of justice,” he presents most of

the play's characters as unaware of that culture's inconsistencies, or of their own. The more respectable characters adopt the ideals of centralized, rational law and order, and they represent these ideals as superior to what seemed to be the continued irrationality and brutality of working-class (i.e. criminal) culture. Most importantly, though, Westmacott incorporates this culture to undercut it, to illustrate the degree that facets of unrefined, irrational, or discretionary tendencies still affected the operations of justice. The law's legitimacy in this context seems anything but assured.

Othello, the Respectable Crossing-Sweeper

Westmacott's Othello displays the most extreme reversal concerning accepted paradigms of justice, one that calls into question the extent that individuals had the capacity to alter their racial and social status within English culture. Thus, Othello's adoption of middle-class mores and the paradigm of justice espoused by the City's officials proves temporary and illegitimate, and points to innate markers of race and class. As noted earlier, Westmacott based his street-sweeper Othello on one particular figure, the aged black man who, as Brabantio indicates, "[h]ath swept Waithman's crossing" "for many a day" (1.35-6). Othello is representative of the small population of urban black citizens that lived and intermixed with the City's poor white populations. As we will see, though, he is also the embodiment of slavery, and perhaps England's own very recent slaving past, who, upon gaining his freedom, has come to England specifically for its commitment to justice and freedom. His attempts to join English society, then, and to adopt the ethical and judicial paradigms of its governing officials, specifically draw our attention to the way Westmacott enters into debates about the fixity of race, class, and national identity.

Waithman's crossing-sweeper is the most well known of this demographic, perhaps because he so clearly fit (or even helped establish) the imagined ideal sweeper of popular portrayal.³⁴ Henry Mayhew, in *London Labor and the London Poor* (1851), designates crossing-sweepers thusly: "Taken as a class, crossing-sweepers are among the most honest of the London poor. They all tell you that, without a good character and 'the respect of the neighborhood,' there is not a living to be got out of the broom" (466). In addition to maintaining crossings and sidewalks, sweepers might aid families and businesses with a number of menial tasks, from opening and shutting carriage doors, to helping the butlers and servants of wealthy patrons, "running errands, posting letters, and occasionally helping in the packing up and removal of furniture or boxes" (465-6). Thornbury and Walford specifically characterize Waithman's crossing-sweeper as much "respected" and "invariably civil" (67), qualities necessary to staying in the good graces of the community. In return for their services, sweepers in more desirable locales could count on various forms of support on top of the donations of passersby: weekly stipends, regular and/or occasional offerings of food and drink, hand-me-down clothes, and Christmas boxes.³⁵ Popular thought held that a crossing-sweeper's post became a sort of "property" (Mayhew 481), a right to occupy a certain position that was apparently recognized by the surrounding homes and businesses, and that could be sanctioned and upheld by the police in the case of encroachment by other sweepers (466).³⁶

Instead of distinguishing himself in war, Westmacott's Othello embodies the characteristics of this crossing-sweeper ideal. As the Lord Mayor notes, "No beggar's more respected in the City" (3.30), and, as I will illustrate, Othello is equally revered as a moral exemplar within the St. Giles beggar community. Othello's respectable reputation allows him to foster relationships with the City's governing officials, and he sits at the top of the beggar social

hierarchy due to his supposed adoption of middle-class morality. Given this reputation for moral uprightness, it is unsurprising that Othello seems to have adopted the ethical code established by respected city officials, which interpreted England's "culture of justice" through the lens of middle-class morality. Thus, as we learn, the Lord Mayor requires Othello's presence at the next day's City trials, which takes the place of Othello's participation in the Cyprus naval skirmish of Shakespeare's play:

The Recorder, Moor, tomorrow doth commence
The City trials. Let no forced pretense
Keep thee away" (3.81-3).³⁷

Othello quite literally clears the way for official justice in this instance, and the exchange establishes Othello's actual and ideological standing on its side.

Othello's adoption of this culture of justice extends to his domestic life, mirroring the broader nineteenth-century push for reformed working-class citizens to adopt middle-class morality, and thus establish a culture less prone to crime and brutality. For instance, while Othello attends to the Lord Mayor's needs, he advises his new wife to lodge with Iago and Emilia for the time being, and he assures her, "...I'll come home at night / To chat and cultivate each chaste delight" (3.89-92). This description of marital bliss embodies the sentimentalized, middle-class domestic ideal of the nineteenth century, where the displayed emotions and character interactions are civil and respectable. Westmacott continues this characterization by combining Shakespeare's Act 2, scene 1—where Desdemona and Emilia spar with Iago over the worth of women and wives—with Act 4, scene 3, in which Emilia prepares Desdemona for bed. Both of Shakespeare's scenes comment on the proper role of women in marriage, and so Westmacott's consolidation of them into a middle-class domestic tableau logically draws on corresponding nineteenth-century stereotypes regarding feminine behavior. Westmacott's

description of the scene establishes this middle-class setting: “*Iago’s house. A parlor in the Old Bailey. A bow window, transparent and looking into the street. DESDEMONA and EMILIA discovered at needle work*” (page 65). Instead of singing a melancholy song about a jilted woman, as in Shakespeare’s original, Desdemona’s melody recounts some of Othello’s history and demonstrates her love for him:

Never sure was a better fellow;
And though his face is like Japan,
I love my jolly African. (5.11-12)

In referring to Othello’s face as “like Japan,” she perhaps takes a jab at legitimate *Othellos*’ “tawny” Moors, as well as the character’s exotic otherness. Such racial otherness doesn’t hinder Desdemona from marrying Othello or seeking out his affections, though.³⁸ Later, when Othello threatens her, Desdemona attempts to rekindle his affection by drawing attention to her domestic attentions. “[I’d be] useful and kind to my bonny black Moor,” she implores, “I’d cry ‘Buy my matches’ from door unto door” (5.76-7), performing the sort of work considered appropriate to respectable crossing-sweeper wives.³⁹ Indeed, the 1852 article “London Crossing-Sweepers” provides an explanation of the typical crossing-sweeper domestic relationship, which includes honest industry for both spouses: “He [the crossing-sweeper] is a married man, of course, and his wife, a worthy helpmate, has no objection to pull in the same boat with him.” She not only takes up her husband’s crossing post when he’s unavailable or indisposed but also contributes to the family industry in whatever way possible (306). In addition to helping outside the home, Desdemona also promises to continue her domestic duties: “[Y]our linen I’ll wash, and your bed I’ll make” (scene 5, lines 76-9), and “your dinner I’ll cook and your tea too I’ll make” (5.88-9).

Of course, the irony here is that the Old Bailey, and thus a parlor near it, is at the heart of lower-class life.⁴⁰ No middle-class paragons of domesticity, Desdemona and Emilia are the

wives of crossing-sweepers, but the supposed respectability of their husbands aligns them with middle-class mores as well (and, indeed, Desdemona was born into a lower-middle-class home, later marrying down, so to speak). In Shakespeare's telling, Othello's participation in the Cyprus naval battle necessitates Desdemona reside elsewhere, that she should have "[d]ue reference of place and exhibition/ With such accommodation and besort / As levels with her breeding" (1.3.233-5). Westmacott turns this expectation on its head, presenting Desdemona's "breeding" and her interactions with Emilia in a way that rises above her social class in marriage, that rests on behavior rather than socio-economic status. Nineteenth-century audiences would have understood the scene's relation to discourses regarding popular reformist attempts to civilize and moralize working-class manners. Again, as Twells tells us, "Energetic philanthropists from the middle class sought the transformation of the English working class in much the same way as they supported the reform of the 'heathen' overseas." Their efforts "were class encounters" implementing "systems for the improvement of the poor" (6-7). Desdemona and Emilia's demeanor here indicates a successful transformation, as they have adopted at least the outward domestic behaviors advocated by middle-class philanthropists. The question inherent in such a portrayal, however, is whether they are fully capable of keeping their behavior and ideology in line with middle-class respectability, given their social setting.

Through his profession, marriage, and friendships, then, Othello acts as a liaison of official justice and morality within the heart of urban squalor. He is both revered and set apart from his social peers, who have their own ethical code centered on interpersonal loyalty and local community rather than those of the government or City as a whole. We see evidence of this code, for instance, when Othello presses Iago for information regarding the cause of Cassio and Roderigo's "row," the sort of brutal, physical encounter considered typical of working-class

culture. He chastises, “Why, how now, Cassio, are we Ottomites, / that brawl and murder must disturb our rites,” these being jovial drinking in celebration of Othello and Desdemona’s marriage. Then, Othello entreats Iago to “[s]peak of the row,” also requiring the wives to exit (“Ladies, retire”) lest they hear Iago’s sordid tale (4.36-9). Rather than oblige, though, Iago does not want to “turn snitch,” or be seen as betraying the bonds of friendship or the sanctity of their community, by cooperating. While we know Iago to be manipulating this ethical code rather than ascribing to it, his feigned resistance still illustrates accepted behavior within the Holy Land. Here, group loyalty opposes the unbiased, rational justice of centralized government, which the lower-class characters assume Othello to espouse. Iago, ideological chameleon that he is, understands Othello’s acceptance of official justice, and so he frames his later responses to Othello’s questioning accordingly. He adopts the rhetoric of official justice when claiming ignorance of the cause of Cassio and Roderigo’s quarrel, swearing on his “davy [affidavit] as an honest man” that he didn’t see what happened (4.42-3). Othello, however, calls foul, accusing Iago of the same sort of bias that Brabantio attributes to the Lord Mayor (and which Othello implicitly expects for himself):

You like the fellow and therefore funk [lie].
The beak [magistrate or constable] tomorrow may commit us all-
...Come, speak the truth!” (4.45-8; definitions Draudt’s)

Here, official justice aligns with ultimate “truth,” with local codes of conduct tantamount to collusion and a lack of justice.

Cassio, a marshallman who runs afoul of the law due to Iago’s manipulations, further illustrates Othello’s alignment with official justice. Seeking out Iago’s advice on how to work himself back into Othello’s good graces, he wonders, “Say, can I bail in case of manslaughter? / Othello will nose me” (4.61-2). Othello’s reach is so expansive as to thwart Cassio’s attempts to

“bolt” from the scene of the crime (4.60), and from justice. Later, Cassio’s fears of official sanction become manifest after an official investigation: “The coroner’s inquest⁴¹ have brought it in murder. / The warrant is out, and the traps⁴² on the scent” (5.21-2). Indeed, the only escape he can fathom involves donning a disguise, boarding a ship, and “doubl[ing] the Cape” (5.25), quite literally retreating to the heathen civilizations on other side of the globe. Othello represents the arm of official justice—aligning with the magistrate, the courts, and the coroner—working to uphold and promote respectability and order in the heart of the Holy Land.

Indeed, Westmacott presents this commitment to order and justice as the impetus for Othello’s initial trip to England, a country whose supposedly more-evolved judicial system contrasts the injustice and inequality of Africa. Desdemona relates, singing to the tune of “The White Cockade,”⁴³

A Moorish lad my love was born,
The buckra laws he he[l]d in scorn;
For liberty he left his land
To cut a figure in the Strand. (5.5-8; brackets Draudt’s)

The *OED* specifies “buckra” as “white man,” but this word has an etymological history signifying “master” as well. Westmacott’s usage perhaps references a colony or country (America, for instance) still embroiled in the slave trade. Shakespeare’s Othello speaks broadly about being “sold to slavery” by a “foe” subsequent to his “redemption” (1.3.136-7), but whether he was freed or escaped is unclear, and, though obvious, he does not mention his motivation for wanting freedom. Here, Othello made the conscious decision to leave a restrictive and unfair home for England, where he could be assured “liberty.” Given the play’s temporal proximity to debates regarding the abolition of slavery, this usage resonates and points to an implicit debate over what state-sanctioned actions muddied England’s reputation as fostering equality and respectability. As with public hangings, many English citizens highlighted the barbarity and

cruelty of the slave trade, which seemed anathema to the country's status as an enlightened bastion of personal freedom and respectability. Othello's past primes him to take the side of official justice in fights against the vices and vulgarity of the St. Giles underworld, and to adopt its "culture of justice" and commitment to freedom and liberty.

The question that Westmacott posits to us, though, is whether a black man and former slave can take on this identity. As we see, Othello's adoption of middle-class mores and a centralized paradigm of justice proves tenuous at best, a point Iago cunningly makes use of. Iago's mode of manipulating Othello hinges on undercutting his fidelity to these supposedly refined or evolved ideals, ones bolstering his theories of justice and moral behavior. What becomes apparent over the course of the play, and what Iago's machinations reveal, is that Othello only superficially adopts the respectable code of ethics undergirding the City's self-styled culture of justice. Indeed, we already know he's willing to take advantage of the Lord Mayor's patronage to avoid punishment: "[Brabantio] shall not frighten me: I know the Lord mayor" (2.7). Even further, though, his previous ties to a brutal, irrational system of justice—this related to lower-class culture and, more implicitly, an African past linked symbolically with the high court's Bloody Code—all work to compound his racial otherness and unfit him for the society in which he operates.

Not only does Iago convince Othello of Desdemona's unfaithfulness, but he also alters Othello's perspective on how best to address her crimes, pushing Othello to take individual punitive action rather than leave her fate to the decisions of an unbiased, rational justice system. Iago's success, combined with other details of Othello's past, illustrates the extent to which Othello's adoption of a centralized paradigm of justice is incomplete. Shakespeare's Iago strikes at similar ideals, specifically Othello's commitment to fairness and honor, which stems from and

is evidenced in his military career. Iago drives him to distraction through jealousy and brings out the ferocity that, based on Shakespeare's depiction, might have lain dormant all along, as a characteristic of his blackness. Westmacott's Iago instead also compounds the otherness of blackness with Othello's ties to uncivilized, undemocratic behavior. The ferocity of Othello's African past remains a constant, by virtue of his blackness, but Iago adds to this the ills of working-class culture.

Holder's interpretation of this play comes closest to my own in its discussion of Othello's social standing. Although she likely mislabels Mathews as playwright, she highlights the trend in earlier and contemporaneous depictions, such as those of Mathews, that "rely for comic effect on black characters with pretensions to a higher social standing" (34). She explores Mathews's impersonation of black servants and their "utter failure...to step out of their proscribed roles," noting that such portrayals present a "fantasy, a reassuring picture of the absurdity of attempts to cross racial and class boundaries." She notes that "the emphasis on race can be used to reinscribe social limitations," here in a way that "specifically suggests something innate and inviolable in class distinctions....Adding race to the picture seems to strengthen the idea that lower-class characters cannot transcend social boundaries" (35). I build upon and refine Holder's assertion here, pointing to the particular ways issues of class manifested in the play.

A key point of conflict illustrating this tension involves Desdemona's lost love-token, an embroidered handkerchief in Shakespeare's *Othello*, but here a bandana soaked in prizefighters' blood. Othello explains its origins:

That handkerchief, ma'am,
Did a gypsy endow with a wonderful charm:
It would keep woman honest, or cure the worst cold,⁴⁴
'Tis a real bandana, more precious than gold.
A Spitalfield weaver—long since no more—
Who backed the Game Chicken, had dyed it in gore

[Of] pugilists' claret from Crib to Dutch Sam.⁴⁵
I bought it at Norwood, on my soul, it's no flam.
'Twas wove from the silk of a buffalo's tail,
And the wearer could over the devil prevail.
Nay its magic was such, I believe, to bang
That a murderer wearing it never could hang. (5.50-61)

This description is shot through with ties to lower-class culture and its acceptance of a localized, brutal paradigm of justice. Early-nineteenth-century Spitalfield⁴⁶ (a center for silk weavers⁴⁷) and Norwood both had reputations as hotbeds of filth and crime. Likewise, as I have illustrated, boxing and other forms of the “fair fight” had ties to lower-class entertainment, as well as to a localized code of ethics where conflict between individuals was settled with fists rather than judges, and in the open air rather than within a court or magistrates' hall.⁴⁸ Indeed, Crone reminds us that “customary prizefighting” was one of those activities indicative of a “brutal past” (74), which moral and judicial reform had supposedly swept away. In addition to the associations of these locales with working-class communities and crime, the fabric adds to the bandana's wild origins. It contains buffalo hair and is thus representative of an animal native to untamed plains. And, finally, the bandana serves as a talisman against, and is even inimical to, official forms of justice. Its “magic”—this decidedly irrational—lies in its ability to thwart the official punishment of the most heinous of criminals: the hanging of murderers found guilty at the City Assizes. This description does not present hanging itself as refined or respectable but instead uses the punishment as a symbol of the state's ability to mete out absolute justice, which the bandana obstructs. We can view this early gift as symptomatic and symbolic of the tenuousness of Othello's commitment to the City's justice system and its middle-class morals.

After Iago has worked his will, convincing Othello of Desdemona's guilt, he also draws out the vestiges of this latent past, which informs how Othello deals with the people he believes have wronged him. The culmination of Iago's efforts elicits the brutality of Othello's African

heritage. The only time Othello breaks into stereotypical black dialect—the lone example referenced in the previous chapter as evidence against Mathews’s authorship—is after Iago provides what Othello perceives to be foolproof evidence of Desdemona’s deceit. In his frenzied state, Othello proclaims, “[F]or woman’s flaw [adultery] / De African have speedy law” (7.25-6). The “speedy law” referenced here points to Othello’s former status as an African prince. As the Lord Mayor tells us, commenting on Othello’s good reputation,

... certain I have heard it long time since
That, when in Africa, he was a prince
And, ere a slave, governed a territory. (3. 32-4)⁴⁹

The course of action Othello takes when evoking this past actually works against the City’s “culture of justice” and the due process supposedly granted to all English subjects when accused of a crime. Othello’s behavior is linked not only to racial otherness but also to past tyranny and a heathen judicial paradigm unconcerned with legality or community sanction. Othello indicates initially that he’d seek out legitimate punishment for Desdemona’s crimes; for instance, when castigating her for losing the bandana, he proclaims, “Go find it, or faith, the police shall enforce ye, / Nay more, if you don’t, by the gods, I’ll divorce ye” (5. 66-7). Yet, Othello goes beyond even these remedies and metes out justice on his own terms, attempting to poison her:

Here’s liquid madam! (*produces phial*) See you this phial?
‘Tis Prussic acid - ... nay, there’s no denial.
It is the shortest method of divorce. (7.37-9)

Furthermore, Othello flouts the fact that he’s punished Cassio himself: “Cassio’s safe—Iago had him taken; Nor love, nor law, can save his bacon [help him escape]” (7.29-30; definition Draudt’s). Othello specifically forgoes the unbiased and rational process of redressing wrong within the justice system and becomes a tyrant, violent and unconcerned with the will of the people or the courts’ ruling.

Or, rather, we could say that he's moved beyond even the brutal, "speedy law" of his African past and taken on Iago's deceptive brand of justice, using stealth rather than force to punish Desdemona. Othello's African heritage relates imaginatively to various loci of brutality in London culture, from working-class communities to the seemingly irrational violence of Tyburn hangings. Yet, Othello's mode of retribution—murder—distances him from even these venues of violence, especially since his victim is female. As J. Carter Wood explains, "One of the most important messages implied in the performative use of violence [in lower-class culture] is the assertion that the act is appropriate, legitimate or 'fair'" (123). Even further, "explicitly homicidal violence was not a performative strategy of legitimate violence" (135), and so the murder of a defenseless woman by her husband proved roundly illegitimate, even in the realm of the Holy Land.

What's more, Othello's weapon of choice—poison—emasculates him due to the association of poison with female murderers and physical weakness, and it is the opposite of both an official trial and a working-class fair-fight. Elizabeth Foyster tells us of poisoning, "This was violence that did not rely on physical strength or direct confrontation, but instead depended upon trickery and stealth" (106). Othello acts in a cowardly, unmanly manner by not physically confronting Desdemona, and he does so in a way that is anathema to official justice due to poisoning's association with "stealth." Poisoners often seek to leave no trace of their actions and thus to confound investigation. Although Holder presents Othello's weapon of choice here as further aligning blackness and the working class—" [This] Othello bears a close resemblance to the emerging stereotype of the violent working-class husband...: he tries to murder his wife " (36)—her link between poison and the working class is off-base, given working-class ties to overt violence. On all counts, then, and in all social sections of Westmacott's community,

Othello's actions are illegitimate and unmanly; they exist outside the bounds of acceptable action for all of the play's paradigms of justice.

Othello's interactions with the police in the final scene illustrate definitively the extent to which he has abandoned his former association with legitimate justice. No shrinking violet, upon learning of Othello's plans to kill her, Desdemona claims she'll "scream till [she's] hoarse—/ Fire, murder, thieves! Friends, watch, police!" (7.41-2). She calls on the whole of local and central justice to aid her, from those people nearby to policemen. Yet, even after the interference of these individuals, Othello attempts to mete out his own punishment by throwing Iago out the window: "Liar, all thy bones / I'll break from yonder window on the stones!" (7.53-4). As the play's stage directions indicate, though, central justice prevails in this instance: "*Othello drags [Iago] towards the window. Police interfere*" (page 77).

Should we take from this ending that official justice wins out? The play's conclusion hardly settles matters. In true burlesque fashion, all characters are restored to health and good grace. Furthermore, Westmacott brings back the Chorus, which, in the sort of Puck-like, meta-theatrical move common in Shakespeare's comedies, curries favor with the audience and asks for their applause:

Then grant a smile and lend a hand
And fill our hearts with glee,
And many a night here in the Strand
Othello come to see. (7.78-81)

Within the context of this particular play, and given the earlier role of the Chorus in the opening scene—involved in redressing justice and assessing guilt—this usage again calls on the audience, the people, to help judge the characters, both as in-text figures and as actors. Iago, directly addressing the audience, asks us to decide Othello's/*Othello's* fate:

Kind patrons, ere the curtain falls
A word or two from Yates,
Who comes where fame and duty calls
But to consult the Fates:
Is't your decree the Moor should live?
If so, we're happy men,
And, giving all we have to give,
Cry thank you and amen. (7.91-8)

“Yates” here refers to Frederick Henry Yates, the actor playing Iago (Draudt page 79). Yet, given that Yates remains in character, what should we make of the fact that Iago gets the play’s last word, and on Othello’s fate no less? How are we to interpret his invocation of the audience as “the Fates,” those three weird sisters of mythology who assure justice runs its course? Given their characterization as unbiased and all-seeing, perhaps we become a sort of grand jury, adjudicating on behalf of our representative government and acting as a collective body. Or, does the inscrutability of these figures, their small number, or the personal manner in which Iago addresses them/us signify a return to communal justice based upon particularity and discretion?

We cannot expect any clear-cut avowals of truth in the world of burlesque. As I have discussed, the genre does not so much establish norms as it critiques presumptuous ideals, persons, and viewpoints. Clearly, we are intended to laugh at or make light of the pretensions of government officials and the respectable middle class, the sort that Robert Waithman and his ilk exemplified.⁵⁰ Yet, the other representatives of the justice system and the members of the working class meet with harsh treatment as well. Othello most clearly betrays his adopted ethical code, but so too do the Lord Mayor, Roderigo, and Cassio,⁵¹ to varying degrees. Rather, Westmacott establishes the Lord Mayor and his justice system as the accepted and legitimate rule within the City, but he does so to illustrate the ways in which all the supposedly respectable characters exhibit hypocrisy and inconsistency, with Othello as the most extreme example. Westmacott does not ask us to denigrate official justice in general, but instead provides a

complex critique of the reformers who were supposedly advocating changes regarding traditional hierarchies of race and class within a newly reformed Parliament as of 1832. Thus, under their watch, and as a result of their efforts, the more unrefined, brutal, or discretionary tendencies of older or more uncivilized paradigms of justice are allowed to continue and flourish, despite efforts to vanquish them. Westmacott seems to suggest that such representatives' ties to middle-class consumer culture detrimentally affects the community's ability to address crime and foster honorable and respectable behavior.

An End to Justice?

Indeed, upon looking back over the ways each of these characters fails to live up to the City's moral and judicial ideals, we can discern an even broader critique connecting these cases, one that proves to be the impetus to each of the character's aberrant behavior: unrestrained individualism, which belies the adoption or avowal of any paradigm of justice or accepted code of conduct. Iago most clearly exhibits this trait, and his machinations prompt the other characters to abandon their accepted mode of morality for one benefitting themselves alone. In a way, Westmacott presents us with another judicial paradigm here, one that operates outside the purview of communal and centralized sanctions alike, and that undercuts each. Just as Iago's hate is the central impetus for Shakespeare's tragedy in *Othello*—"Hate for hate's sake," explains Garber (606)—here, Iago is propelled by greed. We can see this inclusion as indicative of the dark underbelly of an English commercial society, one that, without the counterweights of morality and respectability, threatens the ties that bind together a community.

We learn Iago's motivations early in the play. Along with fearing (somewhat halfheartedly) that Emilia has been unfaithful with Othello, Iago concocts a scheme that will play each character off the other and bring about everyone's downfall but his own:

I am [Othello's] deputy—he is mine. [Here implying that Othello has done his job in bed.]
 But he shall pay for it with a heavy fine.
 Roderigo is a cur—I'll settle him
 By moving Cassio to nettle him;
 Then peach 'em both, and make the black believe
 His wife as faulty as her grandam Eve.
 This done, he'll die for a drink or foul disgrace,
 And I shall get his crossing and his place.
 'Tis worth at least a dozen bob a day
 So hell assist me with this foulest play. (3.105-114)

Iago's use of the technical, legal rhetoric of the official justice system—"deputy," "heavy fine," "settle," and "peach," here meaning to "impeach" (*OED*)—indicates his ability to play the system, to use its figures and sanctions for his own purposes, which definitively work against the public good as a whole. The logic of this individualistic paradigm of justice equates fairness and justice with personal gain—here presented as revenge and the wish for Othello's post, one "worth at least a dozen bob a day." As discussed previously, crossing-sweeper positions functioned as a sort of property, one cultivated through years of consistent service and admirable behavior. Rather than go about securing a similar position through honest effort, Iago seeks to advance through crime and craft. That Iago so baldly calculates the advantages of eliminating his professional rival indicates the extent of his selfish individualism. To be sure, Shakespeare's Iago, like many of the playwright's villains, is disturbing in his manipulative capabilities and calculated destruction. Yet, Shakespeare's Iago frames his wish for revenge in relation to a more intangible slight to personal worth, complaining that Michael Cassio, whose lack of military background unfits him for the role of Othello's lieutenant, has beat him out for the job. Iago states of the personal prejudice inherent in such promotions,

'Tis the curse of service;
 Preferment goes by letter and affection,
 Not by the old graduation. (1.1.35-7)

Iago accuses Othello of participating in the sort of personal patronage that would later be known as “Old Corruption,” where high-ranking positions went to those individuals with the best personal connections. If judged by merit and service alone, the position, according to Iago’s estimation, should go to himself: “I know my price, I am worth no worse a place” (1.1.11). Westmacott takes up Shakespeare’s usage of monetary symbolism—with Iago’s “price” signaling his personal worth—and substitutes it with literal monetary interest. He is a financially motivated villain, and Othello’s better-paying post is his prize.

Indeed, this focus on individual, financial gain runs throughout the plot of Westmacott’s play. Nancy Armstrong uses the notion of the “rhetorical additive” to describe a personal compulsion, be it “restlessness, ambition, or eroticism” that “effectively dislodges the protagonist from an assigned position, pitching him or her into a field of possibilities” (4). In the nineteenth century, such an additive was figured as socially destructive, and so the act of “turning against expressive individualism” became a “mandatory component of the subject’s growth and development” (8). Ultimately, to be incorporated within a society, characters who might initially challenge the status quo must “channel the energy of individualism,” and specifically that of “asocial desire,” into “socially productive ends.” Those characters who can’t or don’t subdue their desires in this manner become what “...Althusser calls ‘bad subjects,’” or “individuals who take the ideology of free subjectivity too much to heart and do not freely consent to their subjection” (qtd. in Armstrong 29). Bad subjects do not universally represent negative potential. Othello’s flight to England in search of “freedom” makes him a bad subject, but, within the world of the play, his actions align with accepted City ideology. Iago’s attempts to unseat Othello from his lucrative crossing-post, however, point instead to an “asocial desire” motivated by greed and lust for personal gain. His actions and perspicacity prove highly

destructive. He is able to see the fault lines and limitations of official and unofficial paradigms of justice and use this knowledge for personal gain, to the detriment of the surrounding community.

In light of the City's status as England's financial center and home to a thriving community of bankers, merchants, and traders (like Waithman), Iago's central flaw—blatant greed—is illustrative, drawing our attention to the other ways the play positions commerce at the heart of its community. In addition to transforming the ruling elite into a handful of traders and shop owners, the entire cast seems enmeshed in a world of trade and commerce, with references to buying, selling, and business running throughout. As we have seen, Othello purchases his love token, the bandana, rather than inherit it from his mother: "I bought it at Norwood, on my soul, it's no flam" (5.57). Desdemona claims that she'd "cry 'Buy my matches' from door unto door" as a way to prove herself "useful and kind" to her husband (5.76-7). Furthermore, "Chirruping Joe," the supposed "Chairman" and bard of the St. Giles Beggars Club, values wealthy patrons more than those of lesser means, thus exclaiming, "The Moor Othello...the wealthiest of our tribe,⁵² / Is newly married and intends most largely to subscribe [buy food and drink]" (4. 3-4). Later, he mirthfully advises drinkers, "Come pass pass your bobs and tizzies [pence and sixpence]" at the bar (4.15; definition Draudt's). The Chairman, and thus the community he represents, values Othello for his prosperity, and monetary gain undergirds the socializing and camaraderie presented here. Through these examples, Westmacott pinpoints the financial bottom-line as affecting and dictating personal relationships. Indeed, in labeling "Chirruping Joe" as "Chairman," or head of a committee (such as Waithman's position within the Friends of the Press and Trial by Jury), Westmacott casts our glance upward and outward again, to the representatives of justice and concerned citizens supposedly working for the community's good,

but who might just as likely line their pockets at the community's expense or whose vulgar desire for profit unsuits them for the task of running government.

These examples do not challenge the City's "culture of justice" or its social cohesion to the same extent as Iago's financially driven deception. Yet, the financial imperative to buy, sell, and ultimately amass wealth proves problematic, and it becomes imaginatively linked to the other negative traits, such as jealousy, that motivate characters like Roderigo and Othello to behave in ways that undercut community ties and undermine the established justice system. What is perhaps most troubling about these figures is the extent to which they operate within, and align with, the City's culture of justice, even serving as personnel. I don't suggest that Westmacott uses this play to attack the City's ties to consumerism and trade as a whole. Indeed, he reveled in his own humble beginnings and personally profited in London's publishing industry, and his career represents the personal work ethic and aspirations of many other upwardly mobile residents. What seems apparent here is that Westmacott calls out the pretentious moral superiority exhibited by many of the upwardly mobile middle class, those shop owners and traders like Alderman Waithman who often supported the City's various reforms and lobbied for a more equal civic presence. Westmacott's critique of such reforms involves scrutinizing, through the lens of burlesque, the extent to which such efforts are incomplete or misguided, as well as critiquing how the middle-class's participation in commercial and mercantile activity might complicate or invalidate their attempts to reform the morals and judicial process of the City. He takes aim at the men who would undermine the country's established hierarchies of race and class through legislation and philanthropy, those people who would nurture the ambition of populations whose race and social standing supposedly unfit them for the responsibilities of a more prominent place within the community. Ultimately, Westmacott

begs the following question: What does the City's acquisitional drive mean for its "culture of justice"? Brabantio predicts an "end of justice" and "the City" if Othello's supposed crimes go unpunished, but it is perhaps this combination of misguided reform and consumerism that Westmacott presents as undercutting and impeding the City's complex culture of justice.

Notes

¹ Draudt's edition is culled from the play manuscript on file at the British Library (BL Add 42920, sel. fols. 77-95). As he explains, "No printed edition of the play exists" (81). Indeed, Schoch tells us that Draudt's edition is the "only full-scale critical edition of a nineteenth-century burlesque" (16, n. 34).

² Hornback, Holder, and Glavin all shape their readings around Mathews's supposed authorship. Indeed, Hornback goes so far as to explain how the play was "previously misattributed on dubious authority to Charles Westmacott" (140), even though the opposite seems more likely.

³ Lindfors includes this discussion as a footnote in his exploration of Ira Aldridge's life and career in *Ira Aldridge, Vol. 1*. Along with questioning the generic similarities Draudt finds between Mathews's acknowledged work and this *Othello* burlesque, Lindfors provides convincing proof that Charles Peake did not co-author the play with Mathews, this a hypothesis Draudt briefly mentions in his introduction. As Lindfors explains,

Draudt may err in crediting Mathews and Peake as co-authors of this piece, for it lacks the wit and punning characteristic of their earlier collaborations....Peake is known to have written Mathews's *Comic Annuals* for 1831, 1832, and 1833, but no correspondence between them has survived that suggests they collaborated on other projects as well during these years. (350, n. 17).

Furthermore, Lindfors points to Mrs. Mathews's *Memoirs*, where she states that her husband's plays "*had never been published*" in the manner he presented" (italics in original). I am unclear as to what "manner" of publication Lindfors suggests here, but I interpret the statement as meaning Mathews had not filed manuscripts of his performances with the Lord Chamberlain, which is the source type from which Draudt transposes his edition.

⁴ *Spectacular* calls the play a "course parody of Shakespeare"; the *Morning Adviser* labels it "contemptible"; the *Court Journal* concludes that it is "so gross an offense against good taste, as that of travestyng our immortal Bard"; and the *Morning Advertiser* ends with the resoundingly negative assertion that the play "was deservedly pretty generally hissed" (qtd. in Draudt 1).

⁵ See Latané for a nuanced exploration of this history. He presents Westmacott as acting like more of a broker between involved parties, and he indicates that accepting money for the suppression of publication was not illegal at this time. Furthermore, he presents Westmacott's posthumous reputation as the result of several influential public figures' derision, whose viewpoints of the man have colored later accounts of his life (51-7).

⁶ Indeed, I find the similarities in dash usage between *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* and *Nettlewig Hall* far more convincing support for Westmacott's authorship than the similarities between the examples Draudt provides of Mathews's other dash usage. Here is part of the example Draudt provides, from Mathews's song "Memoranda in Confusion,"

First, there's the great Mr. Kean—whose like in tragedy was never seen—then Mr. Charles Kemble—who makes you both admire and tremble—then the famous Mr. Macready—who too is also celebrated in tra-ge-dy. (13)

We can compare this usage to passages from *Othello* and *Nettlewig Hall*. The following lines come from throughout *Othello*: "A dreadful deed—upon my creed—as ne'er occurred before" (1.2); "Get away from my door—you are muzzy, you sot"(1.16); "But you're an honest fellow— / Get your lunch and send in black Othello" (3.13-4); "I am his deputy—and he is mine....Roderigo is a cur—I'll settle him..." (3.105-7). Such lines as these actually appear relatively sparsely throughout the text. We can compare them to those from Westmacott's *Nettlewig Hall*, where the play's prose actually uses dashes more frequently. The following examples appear in the first page of Act 1, scene 1: "I know I am a bad master and an ill-tempered old man, and the best proof of it is—that I have put with that perpetual motion of yours these three and thirty years"; "Why—why—Sir John!"; "What, old Thomas the coachman and William the butler, that have been in your service these twenty years, and the old gardener too, I suppose, that has grown crooked in your employ—all must turn out!"; "Ay, Sir John, and when you've got a fit of gout, no Coachee or William, to lift you in or out of bed, and wheel you about from room to room—nor old Deborah either to flannel you up like a new born babe—" In general, then, the *Othello* text uses dashes far less frequently than Draudt implies, and we can see similar usage in Westmacott's other works, that seem to share more stylistic similarities regarding dash usage than in the Mathews passage.

⁷ On one occasion, in 1830, Westmacott published a humorous "squib" about Fanny Kemble in *The Age*, to which Charles Kemble took offense. Thus, when the father "spotted Westmacott in the Covent Garden lobby," he "thrashed him with a stick, to the general approval of the bystanders and the next day's papers." Yet, rather than lead to Westmacott's theatrical exile, as Draudt suggests, Westmacott actually provided his own report of the incident in *The Age*, and, a year later, "Kemble and Westmacott inserted an advertisement in *The Times* offering mutual apologies" (Latané 55). Several other instances of either threatened or actual violence crop up in Westmacott's history (see Latané 55 and Draudt 4), and he was certainly a polarizing figure within the London theatrical and political milieu. This status does not, however, indicate his estrangement from the culture as a whole but rather places him squarely within it.

⁸ The University of Rochester holds five letters from Moncrieff to Westmacott, all of which are dated between November 1831 to January 1832.

⁹ Latané also details specifics of another of Westmacott's West-End theater connections, this time regarding Madame Vestries, a performer-turned-manager, with a reputation for romantic liaisons, who ran the Olympic in the early 1830s (54).

¹⁰ Oddly, as Latané tells us, Draudt has apparently sought to discredit Westmacott's authorship of his most famous work, *The English Spy* (1825-6), described as "an illustrated periodical/book in the mode of Pierce Egan's *Life in London*" (47). Apparently, Draudt "questions whether the entire work is by Westmacott. He argues that the poetic parts relating to Eton and Oxford seem to have been written from personal experience, which of course Westmacott did not have." As Latané points out, though, "Robert Cruikshank [who provided illustrations]...had never been at Eton, and he indubitably did the illustrations, which include portraits of Westmacott" (65, n. 16). I find it curious that Draudt would seek to discount Westmacott's authorship in more than one instance, on such slim findings. Latané labels Draudt's recent entry on Westmacott in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* on Westmacott as "brief and unreflective" (45), which is an apt description of his criticism in general.

¹¹ Mayhew records the sweeper's name as "Romeo," but Thornbury and Walford relate his name as Charles M'Ghee, with the nicknamed "Billy Brutus" (67). The amount of money left to Miss Waithman is also a debatable point. Mayhew lists it at 800£, but Thornbury and Walford say a startling 7000£ (68).

¹² David J. Bentley provides a succinct rundown of the country's criminal court hierarchy: "The principle courts for the trial of indictments in England were the Assizes and the Old Bailey.... Between them these courts tried all capital cases, as well as a share of the non-capital felonies and misdemeanors. Below them came the courts of the Quarter-Sessions, held at least quarterly in every county and in such boroughs as had their own Sessions. In theory, Quarter Sessions had jurisdiction to try all crimes except treason. In practice, all they tried were cases of petty larceny and misdemeanor. Other courts having jurisdiction to try indictable offenses were the court of King's Bench and the House of Lords" (8).

¹³ Mayhew describes the pub's real-life model: "Two houses in St. Giles [were] frequented by from 200-300 beggars.... They had grand suppers at midnight and drank and sang songs until daybreak" (qtd. in Draudt 59). A club of this name also appears in Gay's *The Beggar's Opera*.

¹⁴ Draudt points out that the character types and situations of this section of *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* channel similar ones in such popular nineteenth-century works as Egan's *Life in London*, Moncrieff's *Tom and Jerry* and Gay's *The Beggar's Opera* (30-39).

¹⁵ Draudt indicates this introduction was sung to the tune of "Run, Neighbors, Run," by the author of "Rejected Addresses" (47).

¹⁶ Given that the City did not consolidate its forces until 1837, Westmacott most likely references the Metropolitan New Police here, established by Sir Robert Peel in 1829. Interestingly, though, the playbill only lists Roderigo as a "Sergeant of Police" (Draudt 42), which instead could indicate City forces. That Westmacott seems to specify Roderigo as belonging to the Metropolitan forces might signal his concern with jurisdictional disputes and Peel's attempts to consolidate the City forces within those of the Metropolis. Given the community's seeming acceptance of Roderigo's authority here, I interpret Westmacott's inclusion to signal the potential for corruption within reformed police forces in general, which were indicative of liberal

attempts to regularize policing and procedure and cut spending. Indeed, many of the same distrust of reform and criticism of personnel affected reformed Metropolis and City forces alike.

¹⁷ Gray explains that the City police became a model of efficient reform due to its “layered and connected system of policing” (11). Derek Keene adds to this point, asserting that the City of London was “regarded as the best policed part of the metropolis” even before the 1837 consolidation (59).

¹⁸ The official night watch came about due to medieval concerns over how best to ward off criminals after sunset. The Statute of Winchester, passed in 1285, “required that all towns and boroughs to have a body of men on the streets after dark to provide for the safety of travelers, inhabitants, and their property during the winter” (Reynolds 9). These representatives may have started out as a voluntary force of community members, but, as Lemmings points out, their numbers dwindled due to drudgery, long hours, and the inconvenience of the job. Very often, it just got in the way of one’s primary concerns and responsibilities related to work and family (108).

¹⁹ Some feared that a familiarity with one’s beat, coupled with a lack of oversight, might foster corruption in the form of payment/tipping (Reynolds 64, Emsley 226), the preferential treatment of well-off citizens (Reynolds 37, Dolin 37), or actively taking bribes.

²⁰ The writer substitutes this line for Iago’s own confession that he “[follows Othello] to serve [his] turn upon him” (1.1.42), this relating to Emelia’s supposed affair with Othello.

²¹ Dowling’s *Othello Travestie* presents becoming a “corp’ral in [the] New Police” (2) as something lowly or embarrassing, given that Iago’s friends, who are lobbying for his promotion under Othello, are “hurt” when Othello suggests this police post. Iago indicates that his ideal post would be in the “excise department,” but he is disappointed and must serve as Othello’s ensign.

²² According to Valier, “In 1786, the publication *Weekly Hue and Cry* was commenced from Bow Street, issued twice weekly, and changed its name to *The Police Gazette* in 1829. The early-nineteenth-century series of the *Hue and Cry* and *Police Gazette* continued notices of escaped prisoners, military deserters and lunatics, offenders to be apprehended, the occasional runaway apprentice, stolen items, and rewards offered (23).

²³ According to the OED, “bluebottle” relates to one who wears a blue uniform, especially regarding an “agent of the authorities.” As a term, it predates the New Police, and so Brabantio’s usage of it here signals the extent that he has accepted Roderigo as an official of public order, thinking him trustworthy.

²⁴ For instance, when leaving Desdemona in Iago’s care, Shakespeare’s Othello says that “[a] man he is of honesty and trust” (1.3.280), and on many occasions, characters refer to Iago as “honest Iago.” For other examples, see 1.3.290, 2.3.7, 2.3.158, 2.3.228, 2.3.245, 2.3.297, 2.3.302, 3.1.39, 3.3.5, 3.3.119, 3.3.244, 3.3.260, 5.1.31, 5.2.74, 5.2.147, 5.2.153.

²⁵ Although Westmacott does not specifically state that the City's statesmen would be made "Bondslaves and pagans," as in Shakespeare's rendition, the failure to capture and punish Othello indicates a failure of the very qualities that set English citizens apart from these subjugated and inferior groups. Furthermore, as we have seen, the prevalence of discourse regarding race and slavery at this time might have brought this passage to mind, even if it remains unsaid, thus creating the possible link with such racial otherness.

²⁶ Again, it is unclear whether Brabantio references the Metropolitan police here or the City of London night watch, given that they weren't labeled "Police" until 1839.

²⁷ The costermongers, or "costers"—street-sellers hawking all manner of goods—represent the quintessential lower-class community, and one that frequently found itself on the wrong side of the law. Donald Thomas explains how the nature of their work often put them at odds with the police: "The costers sold [their wares] from their street barrows. They were naturally hostile to the police, whose duty it was to clear the streets of such obstructions as market barrows, hence depriving the traders of a livelihood" (4). Furthermore, Crone describes them as an insulated group, one that "tended to socialize and form relationships with other costermongers" (22). This separation symbolically cuts them off from or pits them against mainstream society and accepted codes of behavior. The Lord Mayor's resistance to their violent entertainment signals an initial alignment with official justice. He uses his authority to oppose this brutal rabble, one in need of sanction.

²⁸ Conley provides a rundown of magistrates' duties and the theoretical limits of their jurisdiction: "[A magistrate] heard minor cases summarily (without a jury) at petty sessions and was empowered to sentence offenders to prison terms of up to six months depending on the offense. In more serious cases the [magistrate] had three choices: he could commit the accused for trial, discharge him for lack of evidence, or hold him in prison on remand for up to eight days while the investigation continued" (12-3).

²⁹ Bentley describes summary cases and those bound over to higher courts as representing "two modes of trial": "[A]ll serious crime was tried on indictment. But there were many petty offenses which by statute were triable summarily by magistrates" (xii). Magistrates ultimately had control over the definition and categorization of offense at summary hearings, so some indictable offenses might be dealt with summarily due to the magistrates' tweaking of description of altering the value of stolen goods. They might even simply throw out cases for lack of evidence regarding more serious crimes, even though they were technically required to pass such cases on to higher courts with more oversight and to judges with more legal training. See Emsley 193-200.

³⁰ Conley explains how some people thought magistrates were "more knowledgeable about local concerns and more apt to have an accurate reading of the character of local suspects" (18).

³¹ This assumes that magistrates heard cases at all, let alone stuck to a set schedule, and many rural citizens experienced great difficulty seeking out justice. As Landau states, "[N]either the

central government, nor Parliament told them what to do, closely supervised their activity, or even insured that they acted at all” (qtd. in Conley 17).

³² Spurred on by an increase in numbers of patrons (Keene 70), in 1737, all aldermen were sworn in as justices and served as magistrates on a “rotating system....Thus the City had a semi-compulsory system for the discharge of magisterial duties that was essentially different from the rest of England” (Gray 7).

³³ Stone discusses incidents of forcible abduction, usually conducted by “ruthless and scheming adventurers who had either kidnapped or obtained the love of rich heiresses” (*Road* 99), and he explains that the “forcible abduction of heiresses had long been a penal offense, and ambiguous episodes involving half-willing, half-drugged victims, mostly women but occasionally men, were more common” (100). Stone here references statute 3 Hen. VII, c. 2, first enacted in 1487, which, according to B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, “made a felony of ‘taking away of women against their Wills.’ Women included by the Act were ‘maidens, widows and wives’ who had been stolen by ‘Misdoers, contrary to their will’ for their ‘lucre’ and forced into marriage” (109).

³⁴ One of the most popular crossing-sweepers in drama was Jack Ragg, from Richard Peake’s 1832 play *The Climbing Boy*, first performed at the Royal Olympic Theater. This character is the best friend and only companion to the play’s eponymous sweeper-boy, who describes Ragg as having “the kindest heart” (30) and being a “true-hearted friend” (40). Ragg also provides descriptions of several other kindnesses for which the man is known. John Reeve played this character as well as Westmacott’s Othello, and *The Town* review indicates that the latter wore the same costume of similar characters, such as in *The Climbing Boy*: “Othello, the Moor of Fleet-Street, a Negro sweeper of dirty crossings, is represented by Mr. Reeve, who appears with his face blackened, an old soldier’s jacket on his back, and the little other clothing usually borne by the Jack-rag fraternity” (2). Unfortunately, this review is a bit unclear as to whether the customary clothing of this character type included all of the clothing listed above or points to the deficiency of other clothing as characterizing the norm.

³⁵ Mayhew’s section on crossing-sweepers (465-507) provides numerous accounts of such charity.

³⁶ Interestingly, the era of Waithman’s sweeper was a sort of golden age of professional crossing-sweepers, where passersby gave more generously, and surrounding wealthy families took care of those who manned their streets. Mayhew lists Waithman’s sweeper as “almost...the last of the class whose earnings were above his necessities” (466). The 1852 magazine article “London Crossing-Sweepers” indicates as much: “Time was...when the profession of a street-sweeper in London was a certain road to competence and fortune—when the men of the brooms were men of capital; when they lived well, and died rich, and left legacies behind them to their regular patrons” (437). Although obviously exaggerating the conditions of most sweepers—with the supposed exception of Waithman’s sweeper, referenced here and earlier (see n. 11)—this passage captures the viewpoint that crossing-sweepers suffered a decline in stature as the nineteenth century progressed. The reason for this decline might stem from the rise of

professional City cleaners, these a part of public health initiatives aimed at cleaning up the City. Since at least medieval times, as Lewis Herbert explains, City residents had paid for the removal of mud and waste from the streets, with parishes privately employing “waste-buyers” and “street finders” who searched through the “capital’s waste mounds” for “saleable items” (6-7). Such “informal” waste collecting (Herbert 6) functioned alongside the crossing-sweepers’ efforts, both of which operated at the local level, and the later representative of the sort of paternalistic relationships associated with rural manors. Yet, after the 1830s, parishes increasingly appointed “scavengers” and “rakers,” who were official City employees and cleared the City streets of all manner of waste and disposed of it (Cockayne 184). Herbert explains that the rise of such posts coincided with “the sanitation movement” (7), which essentially cut back on the work of traditional crossing-sweepers. The *Chambers*’ article insists similarly,

The labor of the modern sweeper [of the 1850s] is nothing compared with his of half a century ago. The channel of viscous mud, a foot deep, through which, so late as the time when George the Third was king, the carts and carriages had literally to plough their way, no longer exists, and the labor of the sweeper is reduced to a tithe of what it was....The city scavengers have reduced his work to a minimum, and his pay has dwindled proportionately. (437)

Mayhew’s sweepers indicate that they might still rely on individual families to help subsidize their wages, but even this sort of kindness had dwindled.

³⁷ According to Bentley, whereas the Crown appointed judges, recorders were part-time borough employees who acted as judges, and they were hired by corporations or, in the case of the City of London, by the Alderman. After the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, recorders became Crown appointments, but the City was exempt from this statute. Thus, City recorders remained an elected position, but one, given the makeup of Alderman, prone to favoritism and corruption in the case of appointees (67-8).

³⁸ Myers points out that, because black men greatly outnumbered black women in England, many men married or formed relationships with white women (124-30).

³⁹ As Draudt indicates, Desdemona sings this speech to the tune of “Wapping Old Stairs,” by John Percy (69)

⁴⁰ I am intrigued by the possible imagined location of this dwelling, and its significance in how we are to conceptualize Iago’s social standing. The scene description indicates, ambiguously, that Iago and Desdemona live “*in the Old Bailey*” (65; italics mine), or London’s central criminal court, named for the street on which it is located. As I have noted, many of London’s poor populations lived in this area, but, the designation that Iago lives “in” the Old Bailey perhaps indicates his status as a debtor. The Fleet Prison, a short distance to the West of the sessions courts, was surrounded by an area known as the Rules. In 1824, this area expanded, “so as to include the churches of St. Bride’s and St. Martin’s, Ludgate;...and part of Fleet Street, Ludgate Hill, and Ludgate Street, to the entrance of St. Paul’s Churchyard, the Old Bailey, and the lanes, courts, etc, in the vicinity above; the extreme circumference of the liberty being about a miles and a half” (Thornbury and Walford 410). While we must note that people other than debtors

lived in these areas, it is evocative that Iago and Emilia are portrayed as residing here as well, as “in” rather than near it.

⁴¹ According to Bentley, the coroner, after surveying the literal body of evidence, had the power to indict suspects: “It was his duty to hold an inquest into all suspicious deaths occurring in his district. When inquiring into a death the coroner sat with a jury of between twelve and twenty three. All witnesses whom it was thought could throw light on the circumstances of the death would be summoned to give evidence, and their evidence was taken down in the form of written depositions. At the conclusion of the evidence, the coroner would sum up the case to the jury. Their verdict was recorded in a written inquisition signed by the coroner and the jurors. Where it charged murder or manslaughter against a named person, it was equivalent to an indictment. In such a case it was the duty of the coroner forthwith to commit the person accused for trial in custody, binding over the witnesses to attend the trial” (8).

⁴² According to the *OED*, “traps” is slang for “a thief-taker,” “detective,” or “policeman.”

⁴³ Westmacott’s incorporation of this song lends itself to his focus on questions of justice and English liberty by subtly aligning Othello with a supposedly more volatile, unruly paradigm of justice. A white cockade made of part of Jacobin uniforms, and many songs listed under this title relate to or hint at Scottish Jacobinism.

⁴⁴ Othello’s language here relates to nineteenth-century discourse on medical quackery, where an increasingly professionalized medical profession fought to suppress traditional herbalists/apothecaries and their supposedly dubious cures. For more information on this subject, see Roy Porter’s *Health For Sale: Quackery in England 1660-1850*.

⁴⁵ Draudt provides information on the specific prizefighters named here (68), but these references might have additional racial implications than he indicates. For instance, as Adam Chill discusses, Tom Cribb fought several high-profile fights with Tom Molineaux, a African-American immigrant, and, upon roundly defeating the man, was “hailed as a symbol of the Superiority of British manhood” (101). Westmacott does not specifically reference Molineaux, but audiences may have remembered him in reference to Cribb. Indeed, prize-fighting had a long and complicated history with racial others, from black citizens to Jews. We can see interplay, then, between prize-fighting’s association with the working class—thus tying Othello to London’s socially inferior populations—and his adoption of a love-token that implicitly evokes the supremacy of Cribb’s white Englishness. See Chill for more information regarding this issue.

⁴⁶ White points out that the particular housing demands of the silk-weaving industry established a colony of French weavers there in the eighteenth century, a culture that stayed alive into the nineteenth (109). Yet, the general reputation of the area remained bad. As one commentator noted, “the whole route is inhabited by an exceedingly immoral population; women of the lowest character; receivers of stolen goods; thieves; and the most atrocious offenders, find in these obscure haunts concealment from the hand of justice...” (qtd. in White 33; ellipses White’s).

⁴⁷ Waithman was politically connected to this locale. For instance, he presented parliamentary petitions from the Spitalfield Weavers, among others, to better protect them from foreign competition and free trade. See “Silk-Trade Petitions.”

⁴⁸ John E. Archer explains, in relation to Liverpool violence, that the “ritual of the fair fight to settle personal scores was likewise increasingly condemned by magistrates....The issue of a challenge and then a public fight between two combatants in the street was becoming unusual by 1900” (220).

⁴⁹ Draudt indicates this section was sung to the tune of “I am a Brisk and Sprightly Lad” (76).

⁵⁰ Indeed, Waithman’s final, but unsuccessful, bid for office was in 1831, when he sought to be Chamberlain of the City, and so the play, perhaps written around this time, might critique Waithman’s zealous patriotism, one also guided by his status as wealthy trader. The timing of this critique could also relate to passage of the 1832 Reform Act, which actualized the sort of franchise reform Waithman consistently promoted. Another factor in this equation, but one I’m not certain how to interpret, is Waithman’s connection to John Reeve, the actor who played Othello in this production. Waithman was Reeve’s maternal uncle, and he’s even described as having an affinity for the stage. Indeed, according to his obituary in *The Mirror of Literature*, he “represented himself in early life to have possessed some inclination for theatrical pursuits; and we once heard him state, in private company, that he had often been solicited by his friends to play the character of Macbeth, which he had studied” (“Waithman Obelisk” 425). Waithman does not seem to have been inimical to the stage, and even supported minor stages. Indeed, he served on the 1832 Select Committee examining the propriety of loosening the hold of patent theaters on “legitimate” drama; although his particular viewpoint on the issue is unrecorded, the actual committee voted in favor of this change. Finally, would Reeve have acted in a production that purposefully ridiculed or, at the least, made light of, a family member? Would he have considered this production offensive? Answering these questions proves difficult without solid knowledge regarding the sort of relationship Reeve had with his uncle, or how such a relationship would have dictated what parts he played.

⁵¹ Cassio, a City Marshalman, is listed as “one of the Lord Mayor’s Bill-dogs,” a designation that perhaps points to both the Lord Mayor’s questionable judgment and to Cassio’s untrustworthiness as truly embodying centralized, official justice. As Gray indicates, City marshalmen served under the marshals (who were directly responsible to the Lord Mayor for the operations of City government and the functioning of the Watch), and they aided marshals in their duties and “served warrants across the City’s jurisdiction” (38). Yet, these individuals were often suspected of acting as thief-takers—mercenary individuals who caught criminals for a reward—and they developed the reputation for being corrupt or ineffective in their line of work (123). That Cassio frequents The Beggar’s Club, and that he runs afoul of the law he supposedly upholds, marks him as a questionable representative of legitimate justice.

⁵² Westmacott’s use of “tribe” here perhaps signals the extent to which social class, like race, was inherent or a definitive delineator of subject positioning.

Chapter Four

Rise of the Gretna Green Marriage Plot: Historical and Literary Contexts

Whereas the previous two chapters explored how ideology regarding behavior and paradigms of justice might or might not allow for social mobility (Westmacott seems to indicate that they do not), this chapter considers the historical and literary contexts of the Gretna Green elopement plot, the prominence of which signals related concerns regarding how inter-rank marriages—or *mésalliance*—proved one contentious mode of altering one’s social standing. Clandestine marriages are probably one of the most ubiquitous plot features in nineteenth-century literature. Whether as a central component of a text or at the fringes of its storyline, such stories reveal issues of love and marriage to be a recurrent theme nineteenth-century literature. As we know, though, a marriage between two people represents more than their shared love; it involves families, lineage, and communities, laws, religion, and money. As such, that elopement plots feature so frequently in nineteenth-century literature signals the unsettled nature of these imbedded concerns in the nineteenth-century cultural imagination. As we have seen, legislation such as the 1832 Reform Act attests to the prominence of questions concerning the nature of what criteria constitute social standing and one’s place in the community. Discourse regarding marriage, and specifically clandestine marriage, dovetails thematically with such discussion.

Such contexts lay the groundwork for the particular way in which Maurice Dowling’s *Othello Travestie* (1834) compounds issues of race and class to further invalidate Othello’s respected place within the play’s community. In this instance, not only is Othello black, but he’s also a social climber, embroiled in a Gretna Green elopement with Brabantio’s underage daughter. As we will see, this detail, and Dowling’s portrayal of the Gretna elopement business, imaginatively undermines Othello’s marriage (even if it held water legally) and, in the process, disparages the consumer culture that would greedily facilitate such socially detrimental unions.

This chapter is divided into two main sections, which combine to illustrate the historical, social, and literary contexts of the Gretna Green topos. I first establish how class-based concerns over the prevalence of clandestine marriage factored into the 1753 Marriage Act. In general, this Act attempted to better regulate clandestine unions, especially regarding underage couples. It regularized the marriage process and centralized which institutions oversaw governing it, essentially migrating control from the Church to the State. I then draw on this history to explore the Gretna plot as it appeared in early nineteenth-century literature, which will provide the basis for my discussion of Dowling's *Othello Travestie* in the next chapter.

A current of tension between Enlightenment ideology regarding individual autonomy and conservative social hierarchy ultimately undergirds the 1753 Marriage Act and related legislation. What factors dictated whom a person could marry, or when a person might marry without parental consent? What qualities should an appropriate marriage partner possess? As we will see, shifting conceptions of the development of reason motivated efforts to raise the age at which a son or daughter might marry without parental consent. We can also see in such debates growing anxiety over England's commercial culture. At a time when England's economy batted on expanding global trade and commerce, many people feared that an influx of new wealth, and its representatives, into the social milieu would destabilize and ultimately topple England's social hierarchy, which was often viewed as essential to national stability. An investigation of the discourse surrounding the passage of the 1753 Act presents clandestine, inter-rank marriage as directly affecting its edicts, especially within the House of Lords. As we will see, such unions became the imaginative manifestation of concern over social instability at a time when commercial expansion and Enlightenment ideology were on the rise. It implicitly aligns itself with an endogamous social model where, in relation to social standing, like marries like.

Part two of this chapter transitions into the Gretna topos, which is the literary progeny of the 1753 Marriage Act and its continued underlying concerns. Couples could still form legally binding clandestine marriages in Scotland—and most popularly in Gretna Green—after legislation invalidated such unions in England. Thus, the locale became a microcosm for the exploration of continuing social concerns represented in the 1753 Act, which were still highly resonant. Gretna Green became one of the imaginative homes of England’s economic and mercantile growth, as well as the social, moral, and aesthetic upheaval accompanying it. Furthermore, representations of eloping couples invariably show some degree of *mésalliance*, with particular character types becoming common place: the romance-frenzied and foolish heiress; the fortune-hunting social climber; the enraged parent, seeking to stop a poor social match; and, the real McCoy of eloping couples, those whose unions are founded upon love and affection and who brave both parental anger and the inimical Gretna locale to marry their chosen spouse. As these types indicate, the ideals of affectionate individualism became increasingly important into the nineteenth-century, with such foundations potentially neutralizing a difference in social rank.

The Limits of Enlightenment Ideology and Social Contract Theory

Any understanding of the Gretna Green topos must begin with an investigation of the 1753 Marriage Act. A central feature of this piece of legislation, which spurred many couples to elope to Scotland, was the requirement that children under the age of twenty-one get parental consent, with the penalty of nullification for couples married by license but without consent. While the act introduced and better enforced additional stipulations, this one proved a particularly hard won effort by the House of Lords. Upon examination, it also illustrates how concerns over inter-rank marriage motivated changes to marriage procedure. Until 1856, when

the implementation of residency limits on Gretna marriages greatly slowed business, underage couples marrying without parental consent could travel to Scotland (or the Continent), marry by verbal contract, and then return to England, legally married.

The Gretna plot must also be understood in relation to discourse on the limitations of Enlightenment ideology and individual rights, especially concerning property and inheritance. As Brewer has shown, minors occupied a similarly circumscribed position as other disenfranchised groups regarding individuals rights and civic participation, and the spread of Enlightenment thought did not signal the universal freedom to chose a spouse, especially concerning members of the social elite. Within this demographic, intense prejudice still existed against inter-rank matches, especially in relation to the gendered economic and social underpinnings of marriage. As cultural anthropologists and feminists have made clear, marriage signifies a symbolic, and often economic, exchange between families. Lawrence Stone explains the dynamics of such exchange: “After inheritance, marriage was probably the single most important method for the transmission of property” (*Road* 15). This transmission, however, shifted in different directions depending on from whom the property originated, the bride or groom. Under the strictures of coverture, women in patriarchal societies passed between families upon marriage, from the father to the husband, along with whatever goods or riches were provided as dowry. Wives were legally subsumed by their husbands’ identities and familial heritage, as was any property not specifically settled upon them for their own personal use. This is not to say that husbands necessarily viewed their wives as property but that the legal realities of marriage law created this symbolic connection.

The joining of families in marriage also functioned as a social bond, and so a favorable or vulgar connection had the potential to affect familial social standing. These more symbolic or

ideological functions of marriage complicated the extent to which rich or noble children could marry for love. Using the language of anthropology, Randolph Trumbach points out that “romantic love was expected to operate within the bounds of class endogamy” (109), that is, within one’s kin or social group, and “even in the generation after 1750, [it was expected] that aristocrats would marry within their own social class” (97). Joan Perkin supports this assertion, telling us that, even into the twentieth century, “it remained normal for the aristocracy to marry within their own circle, choosing children of landed families or allied groups” (63). A socially disadvantageous marriage often drew critique, here both regarding sons and daughters, but the gradations of disapproval were gendered. Sons, and especially elder sons, could more freely choose a marriage partner; an heir’s property and family lineage remained intact regardless of whom he married. Younger sons, however, whose financial futures were often insecure, experienced greater pressures to marry up. Ultimately, though, making unfortunate matches did not jeopardize their overall social standing since rank was imagined as hereditary and thus followed analogous rules to property inheritance.

The plight of daughters proved more difficult, though, especially if they wanted to marry down. As Trumbach explains, “The battle over romance was waged over the marriage of daughters rather than sons, for a woman had more to lose since she took her husband’s social standing” (71). She also transferred any unprotected property to her husband’s control, thus enriching his coffers and his family’s social status, to the detriment of her own. Trumbach presents us with an imagined scenario, between a brother and sister, which serves to illustrate this difference in expectation: the brother explains “why he might marry his mother’s maid but why she [the sister] had to avoid the footmen” (131), noting, “[A] man ennobles the woman he

takes, be she *who* she will, and adopts her into his *own* rank: but a women, though ever so nobly born, debases herself by a mean marriage” (qtd. in Trumbach 131).

To be sure, marriages between social classes did occur, sometimes even with parental blessing. As Stephen Parker tells us, such “inter-class bargain[s]” (33) helped the *nouveau riche* gain social clout and provided new life to landed aristocratic families lacking liquid property. Perkin also explains that into the twentieth century, alliances between the social elite and “wealthy new families, English or foreign, [were] increasingly common” (63), though not standard practice. The heightened ideological importance of love matches and free choice in partners helped expand acceptance of socially disparate unions. In general, though, continued separation of the classes through marriage bespeaks strong deterrents—parental and ideological—to these socially unequal marriages. We can read in such fears the extent to which marriage ties helped demarcate the imagined boundaries between social ranks.

Upbringing and education naturalized the practice of endogamy. Women of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century elite families would have been raised to consider social rank as a defining characteristic in both themselves and potential spouses. Indeed, as Perkin tells us, “Most girls had the same criteria of suitability as their parents anyway, hoping through marriage to maintain the social status to which they were accustomed, to enjoy a life of comfort, and to remain on close terms with their friends and relatives in London and/or country Society” (60). The powerful sway of familiarity and family support limited the extent to which many women would even consider or be attracted to someone perceived as socially beneath them. Henry Stebbing’s 1755 *A Dissertation on the Power of States to Deny Civil Protection to the Marriages of Minors* points to education as providing the best deterrent to what he perceives as unnatural unions. He opines to parents:

Nature hath placed your children under your inspection and care, ... [T]his authority should be employed in giving them a sober and virtuous education suitable to their rank and quality, which will naturally dispose them to set a just value on themselves and to think themselves disgraced when offers of marriage are made to them by persons of inferior condition. [... The poor marry] among the poor, the middle rank among the middle rank, and the rich and noble among the rich and noble. The world naturally runs this way without the help of laws. The lower classes of men have it not in their *power* to marry above their rank, or very rarely. The rich and great have as rarely so little pride as to permit them to marry below theirs. (qtd. in Trumbach 107-8)

Using the language and reasoning of social hierarchy here, Stebbing presents people's rank, and thus their marriage prospects, as fixed. Yet, this reasoning raises an inherent flaw: if such separation is natural, then why would parents need to educate their children as to the dangers of a socially disparate match? How does education "naturally dispose" someone to behave appropriately?

Furthermore, this passage points to a logical grey area concerning the difference between wealth and status, as well as the marriage prospects of the middle ranks. The influx of moveable wealth through industry, business, and trade meant that those people who were rich and those who were noble might not be one in the same. Stebbing published this text a few decades before what is considered the start of the Industrial Revolution, but shifts in who could make money and how they made it had already begun. At the least, his seemingly natural coupling of "rich and noble" became harder to imagine into the nineteenth century, as delineators of social standing occupied separate categories. Furthermore, as I have shown, marriages between the *nouveau riche* and the landed elite proved a knotty subject even as they became more prevalent. Stebbing elides the possibility of marriages between individuals of the "middle rank" to others outside it. While he points to the naturalness of like marrying like, to the inherent impediments between the rich and the poor, he tellingly omits discussion of this middle demographic, of their own

limitations and aspirations, leading me to believe that their social mobility through marriage particularly challenged the naturalness of such separation.

This insistence that children required instruction to know their social place gives the lie to a natural or innate social hierarchy. It also, however, points to another fear: the social implications concerning youth's folly. Indeed, we can see a point of connection between notions of social fixity and Enlightenment ideology that touted the innate rights of individuals within affective individualism and social contract, in that both had difficulty conceptualizing the place of children (and their potential for transgressive behavior) within their competing paradigms. While social contract theory helped develop a new concept of the individual—unloosing a person's social potential from his or her hierarchical birth status—many thinkers in favor of it were just as interested in limiting franchise and civic engagement as representatives of landed wealth. The implementation of tougher regulations regarding children's participation in social and civic duties—the domain of individuals and citizens—serves as an example of this overlap. A person's ability to give consent and illustrate reason, explains Brewer, lies at the heart of social contract theory. We often forget that prior to the eighteenth century, a person's social rank was often more important than his or her age when entering into contracts of all kinds and participating in politics and society. Ideological change regarding the importance of reason greatly curtailed children's ability to operate as social and civic individuals. Only as the qualifications for participation changed did children, and indeed childhood, become uniformly disqualified and rendered dependent. This demographic became politicized and brought within legal bounds through their social exclusion. Brewer suggests that the limitation of children's consent in everything from holding political office, to exacting trade, to marrying, sits at the heart of social contract theory:

We cannot understand the Age of Reason—the transformations in power and justice that emerged from its 'democraticall' revolutions—unless we pay attention to the changing status of children. Grasping the differences in how childhood was understood and how children were treated yields us much greater insight, above all, into the struggles over consent and equality during this era of upheaval. 'Consent' has not had an unchanged meaning. The new principle that consent must be 'informed,' and reasonable, which led to the exclusion of children, was part of what made democratic political ideology viable, acceptable, and, above all, legitimate. It became the marrow of the law. (341)

Whereas Stebbing insists that children will act appropriately (at least regarding *mésalliance*) so long as their parents provide proper education, the ideological grounds for social contract assume the inchoate or untutored state of the juvenile mind, which proves more important than social status in limiting their participation in the rights/rites of individuals.

The emotional volatility of youth contributed to children's exclusion from full social and political personhood. Armstrong highlights the extent to which emotional restraint and the quality of genuineness served as a central facet of the enlightened mind and was essential to the health of the community. Instances of excess that “sprang straight from the heart,” without the mediation of reason, warranted censure. Indeed, this lack of emotional inhibition ranked just as socially dangerous as duplicitous “feelings crafted to flatter, cajole, coerce, or corrupt” (33). Thus, the unrestrained emotion of childhood becomes imaginatively aligned with, for instance, Iago's greed and his selfish attempts at advancement, which I discussed in the previous chapter. While Enlightenment thought stressed the rights of individuals, Armstrong explains that “unrestrained individuality” acted outside the accepted realm of behavior and required censure (56). The eighteenth-century figure of the striving individual whose “supplement” desires spurred the beneficial quest for social advancement and overall betterment becomes increasingly circumscribed by the start nineteenth century, a shift that bespeaks fears of revolution and a greater ideological emphasis on personal restraint and social stability.

The disassociation of childhood with the capacity to reason essentially helped establish the cognitive phase known as adolescence. This liminal developmental stage came to represent a time when children exhibit emotional excesses and a lack of rational thought. Furthermore, discourse regarding this lack often presents it as femininely gendered, especially with regards to susceptibility to romance. Boys and girls might both experience romantic awakenings during adolescence, but teenaged girls received the most criticism for their behavior. As I will show, the emotional volatility of daughters endangered more than her person and reputation; if she were an heiress, rash, romantic action threatened social stability as well, through unsanctioned, exogamous *mésalliance*:

It was ... the theft of a daughter [via elopement] that was the real nightmare. For a woman's property became her husband's, and she took his social standing. And a woman, being an irrational creature, was likelier to yield to the blandishments of love. To steal an heiress was therefore the quickest way to make a man's fortune. (Trumbach 101)

While fortune-hunters might be aristocratic younger sons without estates, whose families were of similar social rank as heiresses, those of lower social ranks serve as the embodiment of class instability, and even insurrection. Furthermore, while the insistence on marrying for love increased, as I have shown, the rules of class endogamy still applied. And while daughters may be convinced that their frenzied passions indicated love, the unnaturalness of exogamy negates this possibility. Such girls are dupes of their own emotions as well as the conniving mercenariness of social inferiors.

Indeed, the dual deceit at play here indicates Amrstrong's notion of "excessive individuality," of uncontrolled emotion and duplicitous action, both of which must be controlled for the good of the community. The complexity of this threat perhaps explains why examples of it so frequently crop up in literature. Michie positions adult heiresses in literature as embodying nineteenth-century concerns over the moral and cultural implications of England's expanding

economy, especially with regards to the liquid assets and consumerism of the newly rich. In depictions of *mésalliance*, however, similar concerns manifest the coupling of the young heiress and her socially inferior beau. But instead of standing in for shifting *types* of wealth (with issues of the representatives of those types a tangential topic), depictions of such *mésalliance* prompt questions of how the ideals regarding social contract theory and the Enlightenment, if unrestrained, might destabilize the foundations of England's social system. The root cause of such social instability stems from the unsanctioned union of the *representatives* of new and old wealth, both symbolically in marriage but more broadly as wealth became unhinged from social standing, and as new groups of individuals were perceived as demanding great political and social influence.

As my next section will show, concern regarding *mésalliance* motivated the 1753 Marriage Act. This act provides an example of how the same ideology advocating the expansion of some people's personal freedoms could be engineered to restrict those of others. Age-specific limitations to consent reveal the contradictory impulses of contract-based ideology: "The separate space allocated to children—indeed, the extension of that space—reveals the tensions within modern political theory. To explore this theoretical space is to encounter the underlying inequalities within a theory of equality" (Brewer 2-3). As my previous chapters have shown, age-specific limitations to consent are one of several interrelated variables, such as gender, rank, and race, which played a part in forming an individual's social positioning and range of expectations within a community. The ideal of social contract theory, notes Brewer, when harnessed by traditional authority figures, had the potential to limit rather than expand personal freedoms: the "egalitarian message" of "consent-based theory" might become "a powerful weapon in the hands of those who sought to limit the radical implications of equality within the new ideology, either

to maintain older exclusions or to create new ones" (8). In this way, new notions of consent, which emphasized reason and prudence, could be harnessed to refashion and police old social boundaries. Under the auspices of enlightened thought, actions and populations that threatened to unhinge traditional social distinctions are interpreted as immature and irrational, and are thus excluded from participating in social and political realms for this reason.

This re-conceptualized notion of rational consent directly enters into the Gretna Green marriage topos and Dowling's incorporation of it within his *Othello Travesty*. It is one of the grounds upon which, as Schoch explains, burlesques concern themselves with "issues of inclusion and exclusion" (151). The next section, which explores discourse surrounding the 1753 Marriage Act and class-based motivations for its passage, more fully illustrates the historical lineage of the Gretna topos's within the nineteenth-century cultural imagination.

Mésalliance, Clandestine Marriage, and the Effects of the 1753 Marriage Market

The 1753 Marriage Act represents one of most important legislative attempts to legally codify the ideological grounds for controlling marriage between intra-rank minors. To date, though, most discussion regarding the Act relates to how it affected relations between Church and State, and between local and centralized government, as well as how previous marriage procedure proved legally problematic. As Lawrence Stone puts it, marriage customs prior to the Act were "a mess," and he links "the root cause of trouble" to the fact that "there was no consensus within the society at large about how a legally binding marriage should be carried out" (*Road* 31), with ecclesiastical standards clashing with secular. Thirteenth-century canon law validated "a mere verbal contract, performed by an exchange of vows to this effect between a man and a woman over the age of consent (14 and 12, respectively), witnessed by two persons, and expressed in the present tense" (17). Secular law, however, as represented by the common

law courts and Chancery, did not recognize such unions regarding questions of property and inheritance, instead insisting on proof, in the form of a public church ceremony. Widespread attempts to reconcile the disparity between religious and secular marriage occurred in the centuries leading up to the 1753 Act, but functioned as loosely followed recommendations rather than hard-and-fast rules. As R. B. Outhwaite tells us, couples that ignored new regulations might face ecclesiastical sanction, “via an act of penance,” but their marriages “if adequately witnessed, nevertheless created an indissoluble bond” (20). As the high number of clandestine marriages in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries attest, such sanctions proved ineffectual.

Many irregular marriages involved no purposeful evasion.¹ Concerning unions displaying purposeful secrecy, Outhwaite makes the point that “[e]very couple who chose to marry in irregular fashion, rather than to tread the canonically-approved path, must have had their own personal reasons for doing so. Without these personal impulses—this demand for private marriage—there would have been no such problem” (54).² While many such couples knowingly sought secrecy in transgressing official marriage procedure, they did not necessarily harbor nefarious or scandalous intentions in doing so. Others, however, had more to hide. Bigamous unions involving remarriage before the death of a previous spouse and criminal cases relating to abduction and drugging gained much notoriety in the popular press. Interestingly, the elopement of underage heirs and heiresses, usually with a social inferior, also occupied this last grouping, a point I will examine later in this chapter.

Couples had several modes and locales for marrying clandestinely before the 1753 Act, but the most notorious involved London’s Fleet Street prison and its surrounding Rules, which, as my previous chapters indicate, were home to much of the City’s urban poor. The Fleet marriage market became the symbol of unchecked clandestine unions due to the sheer diversity

and number of shops and couples who married there, as well as the legal dubiousness of subsequent unions. Stone explains that parsons incarcerated for debt “were able to set up in the business of marrying all comers in the chapel of the prison, no questions asked” (*Road* 107). When a 1712 Act of Parliament made performing marriage ceremonies inside the prison illegal, parsons simply moved their business to the Rules, the area immediately surrounding the prison where those imprisoned for debt could appeal to live (111). They provided “a license of some sort [and...] official-looking certificates” (111). Such legally suspect documentation was frequently made more so by fraud: “For a fee, false entries could be inserted in the registers, genuine ones erased, and entries back-dated to cover a pregnancy....If it came to proving a marriage, perjured witnesses were easy to come by” (112). Indeed, an entire cottage industry sprung up around the Rules to support its marriage business:

There were the ‘plyers’ or ‘runners’—touts who hung around the street urging passers-by to patronize their employers....There were the keepers of the marriage houses, most of them inns, brandy-shops, alehouses, or coffee-houses....Their owners were the entrepreneurs of the whole business, and they made a handsome profit from the subsequent, often very riotous feasts. (111)

To be sure, the seediness and volatility of some shops drew many unscrupulous patrons: “It must have appealed to the feckless and improvident, the dissolute and irreligious, and, last but not least, to the drunk” (Outhwaite 63). We might add to this list those needing privacy, such as bigamists, or poorer London couples who married here for pecuniary reasons.³ Furthermore, a looseness of protocol concerning length of residence made Fleet marriage shops practical options for people who moved frequently, such as “soldiers, sailors, itinerant workmen and peddlers” (61). Apropos to my discussion, even some couples of higher social rank made use of these establishments, especially “a few children of the elite” who needed to evade parental sanction” (Stone, *Road* 113).

We can see, then, that a wide range of patrons married at the Fleet, some for practical concerns and some for secrecy. Lisa O’Connell suggests “the term ‘clandestine’ is an egregious misnomer for a marriage practice [i.e. Fleet marriage] that was very much a part of London’s public culture” (“Marriage Acts” 70). In one sense, O’Connell’s statement is correct, in that a good portion of couples married at the Fleet for some other cause than need of secrecy. As she also notes, the range of marriage services openly advertised hardly illustrates secrecy and instead highlights the theatrical performativity of all marriage ceremonies. Yet, I argue that the scale of the Fleet market, the complicity of Fleet parsons to evade detection, and, ultimately, the anonymity provided by the roiling London metropolis made it an ideal location for those couples seeking anonymity.

All a couple had to do was show up to whichever establishment befitted their particular need and marry with relatively little hassle and even less questioning. The sheer number of such establishments, O’Connell suggests, worked as “a highly visible and systemized market infrastructure” (“Marriage Acts” 76), a point Outhwaite furthers: “It was a competitive institution, with competition expressing itself through variations in the degree of solemnity offered, the variety and scale of associated entertainment facilities, and, perhaps ultimately, through price differentials” (62-3). Such businesses existed within England’s changing market economy, with the needs of clients shaping the sorts of services provided by these savvy entrepreneurs. Indeed, prejudices against such shops highlighted this connection, condemning them as unscrupulous and greedy, as willing to transcend moral and legal boundaries for monetary gain. In this way, the Fleet market can be socially aligned with upwardly mobile populations and the negative depictions associated with this demographic. Critiques of their attempts to use marriage as a mode of generating personal financial gain illustrate the perceived

dangers of unregulated or excessive individualism within societies based on social contract theory. Furthermore, the social positioning of the Fleet marriage market becomes further apparent in relation to how it directly challenged traditional, patriarchal social dominance. It essentially sidestepped the church—a regulatory figure—and facilitated marriages deemed unscrupulous due to *mésalliance*. Attempts to regulate such practice amount to the representatives of traditional, landed wealth hindering an upstart market and, by bringing marriage back within the Church, reestablishing marriage as a sacred tradition and bolster to social hierarchy rather than a market commodity.⁴

Attempts to dismantle the Fleet market and abolish clandestine marriage in general hinged on this classification of Fleet merchants as vulgarly mercenary and the market in general as socially dangerous. In order to regulate this threat, parliament sought to delegitimize clandestine unions as a whole. A significant thread of debate, however, dealt specifically with the subtopic of how to hinder *mésalliance*, and these debates touch on some of the knottier social concerns related to the limits of social contract theory and the regulation of consent. Based on the ideal of the social contract, adults had the right to marry whomever they pleased, and so wealthy families could not, strictly speaking, hinder a son or daughter from taking a socially detrimental partner after he or she came of age (in the same way that race was no legal bar to marriage). Minors, however, occupied a socially and legally liminal space where, especially after the 1753 Marriage Act, parents had greater power over their children's choice of marriage partner. A gap existed between the time at which a minor could marry—twelve for girls and fourteen for boys—and the time at which they could freely marry *without parental consent*—which was set at twenty-one. Thus, children were deemed eligible to marry but not reasonable or mature enough to choose wisely or to give their independent consent in the matter, a stipulation

necessitating parental oversight. This legal window allowed for parliament, and specifically the House of Lords, to add within the 1753 Act a condition that would limit *mésalliance*.

Parker labels Fleet marriages the “trigger” (37) finally spurring marriage legislation, which had proved elusive previously due to intra-house conflict. Both houses of Parliament had already forwarded bills attempting to better regulate marriage procedure. Yet, the majority originated in the upper house and failed in the lower. Indeed, Outhwaite characterizes many of these pre-1753 attempts as “clearly patrician” (xxi), noting that “[t]hey were almost always sectional measures, designed to protect the interests of the wealthy” (94). Many of the “sectional measures” voted down by the lower house⁵ dealt with how best to police underage unions through parental consent, rather than end clandestine marriage in general.⁶ As I discussed earlier, this push for age-specific limitations to consent existed within a broader ideological context regarding qualifications for consent in social contracts. It is tied to the expanding of individual rights for some, and, in the case of children, curtailing it for others. In this case, distinctly upper-class worries over the transmission of property, and thus the maintenance of patriarchal, familial rank largely guided efforts to curtail children’s rights to marry whom they pleased. Brewer explains the rationale behind such fears: “Controlling marriages was important to stabilizing a patriarchal system of allocating power by making sure that lineage was not corrupted and that social relations remained consistent and boundaries between ranks respected” (296). Children’s supposed immaturity and lack of reason made them particularly vulnerable to their emotions and thus, in the case of wealthy children, to the mercenary attempts of fortune hunters, who would falsely beguile them of their affections and then their money.

The preamble to the 1685 Bill, one of the earlier, unsuccessful attempts at reform, illustrates this point, discussing “[m]inors, having or expecting considerable estates, real or

personal, [who] are daily subjected to be inveighed or forced away from their fathers or guardians” (qtd. in Outhwaite 70). This preamble does not distinguish between forced elopements and those achieved through inveighment, which at this point meant to “carry” as well as to “draw mentally by influence or allurements” (*OED*). A child’s consent, then, represents the spurious and immature result of enticement or cajolery rather than a valid agreement. We also can see distinctly landed interests at issue here, signaling the extent that concern over protecting wealth and status necessitated special legal protection.

Anxiety over the elopement of minors, and especially wealthy minors to socially inferior partners, continued as a key topic of debate leading into the 1753 Marriage Act, also termed Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act for his instrumental efforts in its passage. Very often, illustrative examples presented by those in favor of reform involve a disparity in rank, with menial servants often making off with the children of their employers. For instance, Attorney-General Dudley Rydner insists that the Bill would put “an end to an evil which has been long and grievously complained of...an evil by which many of our best families have often suffered,” and he continues, “How often...have we known the heir of a good family seduced, and engaged in a clandestine marriage, perhaps with a common strumpet?” Here, “allusions to ‘rich heiresses’ and ‘best families’ contrast with references to ‘low birth’ and ‘infamous sharpers’” (qtd. in Outhwaite 86). A pamphlet published during these debates—entitled *A Letter to the Public for the Better Preventing Clandestine Marriages*—provides a similar characterization of dangerous unions, from “a young Girl of fifteen, for instance, one of the Daughters of a gentleman, happening to fall in love with her Father’s butler,” to “a boy of sixteen, heir apparent to an Estate, whose Fancy is captivated with his Mother’s Maid,” highlighting the extent that differences in rank remained the imaginative hallmark of unsuitable unions (qtd. in Brewer 318).

The force of these examples resides in the difference in rank combined with the breach of trust within the extended household.⁷ Their actions represented a violation of the supposedly fixed positions within social hierarchy.

Furthermore, this pamphlet positions children as particularly vulnerable due to their immaturity, which necessitates parental involvement and intervention:

Men and Women grown to Maturity, must be left to judge in this Matter for themselves; because nobody can, in common Sense, be appointed by Law to think for the rest of the Nation. But Infants or Minors, may and ought to be restrained, as wanting the degree of Judgment necessary to discern the Consequences of their Actions. (qtd. in Brewer 318)

Part of reaching the age of maturity, then, involved being able to distinguish the natural unsuitability of inter-rank matches. The statement implies that if children *did* have the same maturity as adults, they would understand the inherent separation of social strata and avoid dangerous unequal marriages. Tobias Smollet, writing in 1830, ruminates on the causes and consequences of the Act with regards to clandestine marriage:

The practice of solemnizing clandestine marriages, so prejudicial to the peace of families and so often productive of misery to the parties themselves thus united, was an evil that prevailed to such a degree as claimed the attention of legislature. The sons and daughters of great and opulent families, before they had acquired knowledge and experience, or attained to the years of discretion, were everyday seduced in their affections, and inveigled into matches big with infamy and ruin; and these were greatly facilitated by the ceremony of marriage, in the first transport of passion, before the destined victim had time to cool or deliberate on the subject. (qtd. in Parker 35)

Here, Smolett links the Enlightenment focus on the need for maturity and reason with the patriarchal fear of unsuitable matches, and he singles out adolescence as a period characterized by unwieldy passion, one that will lead to an action “big with infamy,” this perhaps a subtle allusion to inter-rank pregnancy imagined as illegitimate due to social miscegenation. This emotional instability justified parental censure, since they had already attained the discretion and ability to reason and to act as protectionist figures for their children. Because, according to this

logic, legitimate love matches between such couples were impossible and children not only demonstrated a lack of judgment by proving themselves vulnerable to manipulation but also were at risk of being taken advantage of. They are “inveigled,” here meaning “[t]o blind in mind or judgment; to deceive; To gain over or take captive by deceitful allurements” (*OED*). They are the “destined victim[s]” of their lower-rank lovers, whose only motivation based on this reading is money and status rather than love. Smolett begins his commentary with a general statement on the harmfulness of clandestine marriage to families, but he ultimately narrows his scope to its effects on the social elite. While debates concerning clandestine marriage were multifaceted and dealt with more than runaway heirs and heiresses,⁸ Smolett’s interpretation illustrates how nineteenth-century hindsight crystalized the issue of eloping children as the central topic motivating reform.

Whereas these examples highlight the supposed emotional and intellectual handicaps under which children operated, making them particularly susceptible to fortune hunters and necessitating parental oversight, some legislators (usually of the Commons) argued against the Bill and accused landed-noblemen of selfish and mercenary aims: “A point made by speaker after speaker [in the Commons] was that the measure was a Lords’ bill, a selfish measure, one designed to further the interests of the great by preserving aristocratic patrimonies and preventing the dispersal of landed wealth via parentally uncontrolled marriages” (Outhwaite 88). Indeed, given the rhetoric used to support the measure, one could hardly argue against such accusations. A main difference in opposition, however, relates to the supposed motivation guiding those who supported the bill. Whereas many proponents of the bill rationalized the need for protections against *mésalliance*—couplings which were naturalized as irrational and insidious—opponents attacked the motivations behind these claims, insisting, as Stone discusses,

that the Act represented an attempt for landed noblemen to maintain wealth and prestige, and a bid to consolidate the nation's wealth and political clout within the upper class (*Road* 127).

Such concerns do not so much focus on the legitimacy of the children's affections or their right to pick a spouse but instead highlight the aristocracy's increased political, social, and economic hegemony through control of marriage. Outhwaite insists that "it is a mistake to identify either side with any particular form of wealth" (93), and he goes on to provide a detailed list of other factors (family animosity; personal friendship; experience with clandestine unions, for good or bad) that may have influenced votes. As we say now, party lines did not necessarily guide the Lords' and MPs's votes.

Ultimately, whether or not members of Parliament specifically *intended* to provide more reliable legal recourse to wealthy parents in cases of unsuitable elopement (and I do believe this is so for many votes), the 1753 Act's final outcome did so regardless. Furthermore, this facet of debate becomes positioned in nineteenth-century discourse as a, if not *the*, defining characteristic of the bill. We have already seen how Smollett, in 1830, points to "clandestine unions" as "prejudicial to the peace of families and so often productive of misery" to married couples and acting as the impetus for legislative action (qtd. in Parker 35). Other nineteenth-century discourse furthers this view. Robert Elliot's *The Gretna Green Memoirs* (1842) attests,

It is quite apparent, from the speeches of Lord Chancellor Hardwicke, the originator of the so-called 'Marriage Act in Churches,' passed in 1753, by which these clandestine marriages were entirely suppressed in England, that a principal, if not the leading motive of the government, was to prevent the commonality from marrying into the aristocratic classes (unless in the case of heiresses and of these to create a monopoly in their favor) which, in those days of profligacy and unbridled passion among the higher classes, was but too common to please the leaders of the titled order. (xii-xiii)

Common thought held that the 1753 Act was largely an elitist bill meant to protect landed interest. And, ultimately, whether or not Parliamentary members passed the act due to a greedy

and snobbish wish to prevent of *mésalliance*, later generations interpreted their behavior as such. The tautological power of hindsight makes it so.

After much squabbling between Parliamentary houses and numerous drafts, Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act finally passed in 1753 and came into effect in 1754. This final attempt was more finely attuned to the concerns of both houses, regulating both the marriage of minors and clandestine marriage in general. Outhwaite provides the most nuanced summary of its changes, many of which built upon earlier efforts to regulate marriage, which is worth quoting at length:

First, by insisting on the officially preferred clerical route to matrimony, it effectively ended the process whereby a lawful marriage could be established by the mere rendering of consent. The ecclesiastical courts were ordered not to uphold future mere verbal contracts, no matter whether *de future* or *de presenti*. Couples had now either to have banns called in the parish churches where they dwelt on three Sundays before the ceremony, with a further week's notice to the incumbents being obligatory, or they had to obtain a lawful ecclesiastical license to dispense with banns. Except in the case of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Special License, the marriage had to occur either in one of the churches where banns had been called or, in the case of the ordinary ecclesiastical license, in the church of the parish where one party had dwelt for at least four weeks before the license was granted. The ceremony itself had to take place in canonical hours and had to be conducted according to the form laid down in the Book of Common Prayer. Secondly, punishments for clerical transgressions were greatly stiffened. Persons solemnizing marriages in places other than those specified, or solemnizing marriages without banns or licenses were, if found guilty of knowingly committing an offense, no longer simply to be deprived of their benefices; they were to be judged as felons and were liable to transportation to America for fourteen years. Thirdly, marriages that infringed the rules were deemed to be void *ab initio*, as also were those of minors who had married by obtaining licenses without the consent of their parents or legal guardians. Finally, the established church was given a virtual monopoly over the making of marriage: only Quakers, Jews and the royal family were excluded from its provisions, though the Act did not extend to Scotland or to marriages conducted overseas. (84-5)

These new measures greatly narrowed the means for entering into a valid marriage, one recognized by church, state, and community. Penalties for clergyman proved much harsher than previously and greatly limited the extent that couples could find someone willing to officiate at an irregular or clandestine ceremony. Furthermore, the act required a more stringent verification

process concerning information provided by couples, with the ultimate goal of transparency concerning the legality or aberration of proposed unions. As Outhwaite tells us, “[A]rguments for publicity [concerning marriage procedure] were designed...to maintain the principles of eligibility” (55). In order for officials to better ascertain such qualifications, couples were induced to marry in the same community in which one of them lived, with the rationale that community oversight would help limit illegitimate unions. The possibility that their marriage would be made “null and void” if proved irregular or criminal helped dissuade many ineligible couples from attempting to marry, especially since the publicity of their marriage might elicit objection. Most important to my study, earlier attempts to impose parental restrictions on underage marriage coalesced with this measure, designating minors under twenty-one as one key group of ineligibles, at least until they had acquired parental consent via the calling of banns or, in the case of licenses, proof of parental consent. Failure to abide by this particular requirement resulted in the complete nullification of the marriage from the start.⁹

The overall structure and content of this document illustrates the extent to which specific fear of minors making improvident matches shaped legislation. Outhwaite provides an excellent play-by-play of the Act’s drafting process as it passed between the upper and lower houses. In particular, he analyzes the order of the Act elements as they were presented. As a first draft in the House of Lords, the very first article necessitated that “all marriages of those under the age of twenty-one, made without the written and witnessed consent of parents or guardians, should be null and void” (78), and the positioning of this clause indicates its priority to the Lords in relation to clandestine marriage as a whole. When the draft made its way to the Commons, however, the first article of consideration dealt with the calling of banns, revealing revision concerning topical order that subtly deemphasizes concern over clandestine unions. I read this change as an effort to

make the Bill more palatable to the MPs, who had previously voted down attempts to specifically implement increased parental control over children's marriages.

Furthermore, it is significant that the Act differentiates between the treatment of clandestine marriages by banns and by license in the case of underage couples. In its ratified form, only underage marriages made by *license* without parental consent were deemed "null and void," with parental oversight in the case of banns determined by whether or not parents interceded after hearing the banns and before the marriage took place. If a marriage by banns went forward successfully without parental knowledge, and thus without an opposition to the banns, it was deemed valid and parents had no legal recourse to dissolve it. Consent was assumed if they did not initially object. This difference reveals parliament's vested interest in protecting the families of children who married by license. In fact, legislators took note of this differentiation when they added a clause protecting clerics who had "married minors after banns had been properly called and no parental opposition had been registered" (Outhwaite 82). This inclusion signals an awareness that some underage couples might seek to avoid detection and parental sanction, and that in doing so their marriages would stand as valid. It essentially places on parents' shoulders the bulk of the responsibility for detecting their children's clandestine unions and provides no legal recourse if they fail to do so.

Interestingly, many modern studies do not mention this distinction, simply stating that the 1753 Act necessitated parental consent for all marriages of children under the age of twenty-one, as it was proposed in the first draft of the Act.¹⁰ While this statement is technically accurate, it does not take into account the differences in parental recourse when weddings by banns and by license proceeded without parental approval. Outhwaite reports the difference but does not explain what motivated it. Parker conjectures that this stipulation might have been a "drafting

error,” but notes, more plausibly, that “[if] it was intended, the reason may have been that banns gave greater publicity, and therefore warning to parents, than the issue of a license” (29). Indeed, William Blackstone’s interpretation of the law in *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1766), which became the standard textbook for lawyers (Perkin 18), follows this line of thinking. He lists “want of consent of parents or guardians” as one of the conditions making a marriage “void *ab initio*, and not merely voidable,” but he further specifies that the calling of the banns acts as consent, since they “may give notice to parents or guardians” (56). In the case of marriages by license, he clarifies that after the 1753 Act “all marriages celebrated by license (for banns suppose notice) where either of the parties is under twenty-one...without the consent of the father, or he be not living, of the mother or guardians, shall be absolutely void” (57). Rebecca Probert, however, provides the most thorough explanation of this difference: “It can be argued that this differential effect was not accidental. By this means the Act managed to address both the desire of wealthy parents to control the marriages of their offspring, and the concern that strict regulation would discourage the poor from wedlock” (431).

This differentiation illustrates the legal actualization of earlier attempts to limit the marriage of minors lacking parental consent, a stipulation that had been embroiled in status-based conflict. The act’s decree rendering such marriages by license “null and void” points to the degree that landed interest guided key facets of parliamentary legislation. Indeed, Probert tells us that the “use of banns and licenses did...stratify along class lines” (426). Thus, marriage by license proved the mode of choice for noble and wealthy families, since it did not require the sort of publicity and potential embarrassment associated with banns. The Archbishop’s Special License in particular, which allowed couples to marry anywhere they liked, was “supposed to be reserved to those of the highest social standing” (Outhwaite 130). Both this form and the more

general and less exclusive regular license cost more than marriage by banns, and so they came to be associated with the social elite (Stone, *Road* 100, 102). Despite licenses being cost-prohibitive, the general public's fascination with the social elite and their privileges resulted in this mode "[becoming] a fashion" in the eighteenth century due to its association with the advantages of privacy, wealth, and prestige (Perkin 21).

Indeed, debate over increased requests for Special Licenses in the 1850s reveals the social underpinnings (and tensions) that guided marriage procedure. The social rise of non-aristocratic, mercantile families created a troubling situation for officials who dispensed the Archbishop's Special Licenses. The terminology pertaining to who could obtain one ran thusly: "[C]andidates should be *stirpe vel opibus insignes*," or "distinguished by birth and wealth" (Outhwaite 130). As I have noted, England's changing economy disjoined the link between these two signifiers, and those with the funds to purchase a license might not have the correlative station. In 1758, Archbishop Secker explains what he sees as the practical limitations of allowing personal wealth to become the only stipulation in obtaining a Special License,

[T]his Description is not very determinate... especially since the wider Distribution of property, and the Increase of personal Estates. For where, and on what grounds, shall we fix the Competency? Or if we could, how shall we know, in the multitude of Cases whether the Person is possessed of it? And refusing People, for not being sufficiently wealthy, would both create more perplexity, & disoblige greater numbers, than refusing to let mere Wealth be a Qualification. (qtd. in Outhwaite 130)

Without the additive of personal title, which he figures as a more definitive distinction, where should officials draw the line limiting poorer citizens from acquiring a Special license? This particular concern resulted in a protocol change, which stipulated that

Special Licenses to Marry at any convenient time and place may be grated to Peers and Peeresses in their own right of Great Britain and Ireland, to their Sons and Daughters, to Dowager Peeresses in their own right...to their Sons and Daughters...to Privy Councilors, to Judges of his Majesty's Courts in Westminster Hall, to Baronets and Knights and to Members of the House of Commons.

As for the rest of the population, it was deemed that

no Special License be granted to any Person unless they allege very strong and weighty reasons for such Indulgence as arising from the particular circumstance of their Case, and prove the truth of the same to the satisfaction of the Archbishop or...his Commissary of the Faculties. (qtd. in Outhwaite 131)

Such changes in qualification occurred five years after the passage of Lord Hardwicke's Act, but the concerns regarding what social status to afford the country's merchants and businessmen are evident throughout this timeframe. The amendment presents us with a hybrid two-class hierarchical system separating those who can obtain a Special License and those who would have great difficulty doing so. Importantly, the different ranks and files of the upper-gentry constitute one category, the members of which can obtain a license "in their own right," by virtue of their family heritage. All others, including non-aristocratic wealthy members of society, are figured here as inherently under qualified, as needing to be indulged, since personal wealth no longer served as a valid criterion. This change figuratively strips the *nouveau riche* of their social prominence, lumping them together with everyone else beyond the pale of aristocratic distinction, rich and poor alike. This shift, as well as the general view that marriage by license was a luxury of wealthy individuals, creates a direct imaginative parallel between marriage by license and the upper-reaches of society. By virtue of this alignment, any law singling out marriage by license similarly targets the social upper class.

This examination of the 1753 Marriage Act illustrates a vested interest in hindering, indeed obviating, such clandestine unions and the legal and familial woes attributed to them. While the immaturity of youth and the danger of inveiglement became the stock justification for increasing parental oversight, the underlying motivation clearly involved closing ranks against *mésalliance*, the figurative boogeyman of earlier legislative attempts. This legal point gave

parents the ability to dissolve their children's marriage bonds—whether or not they were already solemnized and consummated—and essentially pull them back under the cloak of familial, patriarchal control. Given the rhetorical trends associated with such justifications, the 1753 Marriage Act was as much a site of social struggle as it was legal. David Cannadine has argued that eighteenth-century English society was devoid of class struggle in the sense that the middle- and lower-ranks had no organized sense of solidarity against the upper crust. While this assertion may be true, a point he misses is that very often the social elite identified themselves as a united front against *mésalliance*. Social gradations subtly differentiated between the upper and lower gentry, and MPs in the Commons frequently opposed increased parental controls, but ultimately a significant portion of these factions was united against marriages with social inferiors. In this way, we can read the stipulations regarding the marriage of minors as a status-based initiative to help increase and maintain the social elite's hegemony.

If, as Outhwaite tells us, marriage reform had much to do with proving the eligibility of couples, in the case of parental oversight with regards to minors, the object of inquiry, of potential eligibility, is social status rather than an actual legal impediment. Differing social ranks between spouses often signaled the only transgression to the limits of eligibility, and parental veto of such unions safeguarded family status as well as the well being of involved children. This is a safeguard missing from marriages by banns, which stood as legal if initially uncontested, perhaps because lawmakers viewed these families as having less at stake, as less likely to involve the loss of wealth and prestige. Parker contends that the broader subject of clandestine marriage “with the implications of seduction and fraud which it acquired was hardly the issue for the vast majority of women and men in the eighteenth century who had little or no property,” continuing that the “panic was therefore within a particular class and then, to a certain extent, generalized”

(36). He goes on to argue, however, that legislators probably knew little and cared less about the marriage customs of the poor, concluding: “They would certainly not to be factors in decisions which affected the transmission of property and social mobility amongst the elite” (46). Yet, my analysis of the Act’s particulars illustrates a *conscious differentiation* between the perceived needs of different social ranks rather than a lack of knowledge or disregard for couples and families of lower social status. Parliamentary legislators prioritized the problems of wealthy parents, whose money and status clandestine unions threatened, to the detriment of families whose only grievances were perceived as personal or familial. The presumptions of the ruling elite were codified as a subtle difference in marriage law.

Stone tells us that “clandestine marriage served as a safety-valve in the pressure-cooker system of legalized official church marriage” (*Uncertain Unions* 26), but the 1753 Marriage Act put a significant kink in that valve. Ultimately, “the powerful motives that fed clandestinity throughout England as a whole were not to be thwarted. They simply developed new modes of expression” (Outhwaite 133). The next section details how elopements to Gretna Green, Scotland, became a popular means by which some underage couples married post-1753, and this route particularly captured the late-eighteenth- and nineteenth-century public imagination. Why, however, did this form of elopement gain such notoriety when others (for instance, clandestinity via uncontested banns) occurred as frequently, if not more so? I suggest fascination with Gretna Green relates to its importance as a locus of continued literal and figurative struggle between social/economic groupings and contradictory modes of theorizing the root of individual rights and social legitimacy, here expressed as the freedom to marry for love.

Rise of the Gretna Green Marriage Plot

While the 1753 Act did much to lessen the number of clandestine marriages occurring in England, loopholes in the law made it possible abroad, especially in Scotland, where the Scottish Court of Sessions refused to invalidate contract and private marriages. If they had the money and inclination, couples could elope to Gretna Green, a Scottish border town, where mere consent made before witnesses constituted a legally binding marriage both in Scotland and England, regardless of age or parental consent. Outhwaite tells us that the number of Gretna marriages never rivaled those of the Fleet market (134), and, in fact, an easier and less cost-prohibitive way that many couples married clandestinely after 1753 was, as one official reported in 1760, to “do it by Bans [sic] in some of the large parishes in the outparts of London...where no Inquiry is made (save of themselves) as to their Residency or any Affidavit necessary to prove it” (qtd. in Outhwaite 137). Yet, these sorts of couplings did not cause the stir that Gretna elopements did within the literary world.¹¹ Most actual couples marrying at Gretna were of low social station and/or lived close to the border, but some members of the elite made their way as well, and inter-rank and underage couples constituted the main demographic represented in much Gretna Green literature (Stone, *Road* 130). “[T]he seduction and elopement of heirs and heiresses” (134) at Gretna made it a particular concern for landed families and lawmakers and captured the public’s interest with reported tales of high speed coach chases and aristocratic scandal.

Yet the taste for scandal does not entirely account for the genre’s ubiquity. Such representations’ imaginative potential relates to their role as a vehicle for exploring unresolved facets of earlier parliamentary debates, as well as of the limits of Enlightenment ideology as it functioned in English society. Writers and playwrights use the Gretna Green topos to explore these unresolved issues, especially concerning the role love and romance play in validating or

invalidating *mésalliance* and parental objection to it. Even further, such portrayals provide an avenue for exploring the social and economic changes many believed were occurring as a result of new ideology and expansion in trade and commerce. The ideals encapsulated within social contract theory are played out in both types of exchange, and they test what were perceived as the dangers of unchecked or unregulated transactions or “contracts.”

Whereas my discussion regarding Westmacott’s *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* focuses on the extent to which one might achieve a more prominent social position through the adoption of respectable codes of conduct and belief systems (specifically regarding the City’s “culture of justice”), here, and in Dowling’s *Othello Travestie*, we see social mobility achieved through clandestine marriage. Importantly, both modes of advancement prove illegitimate in their respective burlesques and were achieved through indirect, intangible, and/or dubious means. What’s more, both signal the fixity of social class, which, as I have discussed, became a central motif used to compound racial otherness.

The Gretna Green plotline integrally concerns itself with how England’s rising consumer culture had a hand in altering social hierarchy. Both marriage and commerce represent modes of achieving upward social mobility, of breaking out of one’s inherited social position. Yet, not all people viewed such mobility in a positive light, and some feared that if unchecked, it could threaten the entire English social structure, causing collapse. The Gretna Green topos, then, proves the ideal plot for exploring the boundaries of such change, with varied portrayals of *mésalliance*—specifically related to heiresses and their social inferiors—providing an avenue for investigating the causes and effects of legitimate and illegitimate social mobility within the expanding market economy of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. Specific legal changes related to the 1753 Marriage Act helped engender the Gretna Green marriage market

and the subsequent literary topos. More specifically, parental power over the marriages of underage children serves as the immediate impetus to this rise. The durability and ubiquity of the Gretna topos is the imaginative offshoot of the act's ideological concerns.

The geographical and figurative positioning of Scotland adds to this impression. Physically joined with England and a part of the United Kingdom since the Act of Union in 1707, Scotland, at times known as the "Celtic fringe," in many ways represents England's shadow, the elements of its own identity it seeks to isolate and ignore. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century discourse characterizes the country as backwards, Catholic, unsophisticated, vulgar, and volatile—in short, the Other to England's more advanced, sophisticated, and steady Self. Indeed, although Africa might have registered as the region and racial identity most anathema to Englishness, as the works of Sir Walter Scott and Maria Edgeworth illustrate, Scottish citizens might also figure as racially or nationally disparate (and inferior to) their English counterparts and culture. Indeed, threats of Jacobin insurrection had established Scotland as a volatile and potentially hostile locale, representing a weakness (both geographically and ideologically) to the English nation and its identity, especially after the 1745 uprising that paired French/Jacobin invasion with the help Scottish highland chieftains. Thus, its position in the English cultural imagination made it a prime locale for exploring questions of Englishness and social identity.

Its marriage laws, which differed from those of England, contributed to this dichotomy, and English attempts to rectify these differences reveal the unwieldy inconsistencies between English marriage law and the ideologies driving economic growth and calls for social reform. As I have noted, England's attempts to limit the marriages of minors represent their struggle to reconcile Enlightenment ideals—those of social contract theory and affective individualism—

with the need to counteract the danger of socially unsuitable unions. Yet, Scottish Parliament steadfastly defended its position that verbal contract—i.e. consent between two individuals alone—constituted the core of a legally binding marriage, with official, paternal sanction unnecessary for legitimation. Indeed, the “Scottish attachment to that principle of consent” (Outhwaite 134) flies in the face of English attempts to regularize marriage procedure and control clandestine unions, especially those of minors. As the locale most associated with eloping English minors, Gretna Green became a contested site in literature, where the triumphs and shortcomings of both legal modes (loosely figured as freedom and restriction) are explored and played out in print.

For many people, Scotland embodied Armstrong’s notion of “excessive individualism” because those people involved in maintaining Scottish freedoms of marriage procedure, in running the Gretna marriage market, and in making the trek to wed without parental consent, all behave in ways that placed personal desires and wishes for advancement above the supposed collective social good. In particular, unsanctioned, inter-rank matches posed a key threat to social stability because couples could bypass England’s newly-enacted marriage laws to indulge their desires and simply elope. After the passage of the 1753 Marriage Act, with its glaring holes regarding Scotland, England’s Parliament attempted to hinder such unions through reform, for instance, in 1754, 1765, and 1772, but such efforts were not successful until 1949. The 1754 attempt specifically highlights *mésalliance* as a main concern, since the legal gap between English and Scottish marriage law fostered the “seducing of Persons into improper [i.e. socially unequal] Marriages during their tender years” (qtd. in Outhwaite 134), years when reason does not temper the sway of romance and passion.

Like the Fleet marriage market, Gretna Green created a sort of cottage industry, which revolved around satisfying the needs of potential clients. According to O'Connell, technically speaking, anyone could perform such ceremonies, as they only required two witnesses to hear the couple's affirmation of intent to marry. Poplar thought held that blacksmiths performed wedding ceremonies—this a false assumption—even though many depictions include this detail, and a handful of men became famous for their roles as Gretna 'blacksmiths' or 'parsons.' Such men often worked out of inns set up to accommodate the needs of marrying couples. These establishments might employ post boys who manned horses and carriages, a 'priest' or 'parson' to perform the ceremony, accommodations for reception refreshments, and a room for consummation following the ceremony. Some, but not all, venues kept their own records, but verifying unions for legal reasons often proved challenging.

The Gretna topos included a regular cast of players and occurrences, consisting of the eloping underage couple, running to Scotland to avoid parental disapproval and even direct violent intervention due to unequal social status; a break-neck coach chase, with the enraged parental figure or other representative of authority, in hot pursuit of the couple; and finally, the Gretna parson and supporting cast of vulgar employees and bystanders of the marriage market, willing to join whomever for a fee. Yet, as I will later explore, while the practitioners of Gretna marriages and the majority of Gretna couples universally take the brunt of negative description, not all representative couples act upon mistaken impulse or greed. Instead, some elope due to unfair and elitist parental meddling rather than unrestrained passion. Such descriptive differences speak to the ideals at issue in England's shifts in marriage law, with individual freedoms and commercial expansion at odds with the traditional notions of patriarchy, social hierarchy, and landed wealth. If England was a country committed to liberty and equality, how could it justify

such limitations to personal choice? These cases ask readers to question what factors, exactly, give parents the right to interfere in their children's marriages. When genuine affections are at issue, parental involvement figures as unwarranted and reveals the possibility that English attempts to safeguard social stability might allow for unjust sanction. On a broad scale, though, this distinction figures as the tension between the sanctity of individual rights and fears of social change.

While many portrayals of Scotland in general point to its inhospitable wildness, literary accounts of the Gretna Green marriage market and its workers figure as decidedly urban, as mercenary and opportunist in willfully ignoring the morally questionable aspects of clandestine marriage and the negative consequences for many couples subsequent to their elopement. The unrefined roughness of the highlands instead transforms into the vulgar urban wilderness of commerce, which, if unrestrained proved unwieldy and dangerous, and that acted as an imaginative substitute for concerns over England's own economic and social expansion. Oddly, whereas early church doctrine maintained a similar stance on marriage as that of the Scottish Parliament, within Gretna literature the freedom from official sanction only opens the door for gross materialism and social collapse. Marriage becomes a commodity to be bought and sold, that is degraded through unrestrained trade. For instance, Peter Orlando Hutchinson, in his 1844 *Chronicles of Gretna Green*, asserts that the innkeepers and their employees—"those who trade for lucre"—cannot have the couples' best interests in mind. They have "no feeling—no sympathy—no consideration—self is the only thing cared for" (vol. 2, 111). The need to haggle or barter with Gretna parsons and shopkeepers proves a common feature in Gretna portrayals. The title of the 1823 poem "Gretna Green, or Marriage Fees," published in *The Literary Chronicle*, makes this issue explicit. The prospective husband in this poem

wonder'd what the blacksmith might require,
For he had heard of fifty or a hundred
Given to make two,—*one*—both sums most dire. (lines 33-5)

Indeed, the groom's fears seem justified based on the blacksmith's demeanor:

[The blacksmith], eyeing him from top to toe,
Declares he cannot splice them under fifty.
The bridegroom haggles, and the parson drops
To forty, thirty, twenty,—by degrees,—
But at *ten pounds* he very firmly stops,
For blacksmiths, as black gownsmen, like
their fees! (lines 47-52)

This passage highlights Gretna's troubling commodification of marriage. Here, a legally binding union represents the desired product, and the two men haggle over it with the alacrity of any other good sold at market. The poem switches from past to present tense mid-way through the poem, specifically at line 44 where the groom sends for the blacksmith, and this shift provides a heated immediacy to the exchange. The quickened pace of these particular lines as the price drops can be likened to the staccato of auction and barter, with only savvy buyers arriving at a fair price. The blacksmith's manner indicates his guile and greed. He bases his asking price on what he thinks the couple can pay him, rather than on any set monetary value regarding marriage in general. The supposedly sacred and religious rite of marriage is reduced to a common good, a service performed by a swindling businessman for a negotiable and often-inflated price. To be sure, representatives of church marriages do not fare better in this portrayal, with "black gownsmen" depicted as similarly motivated by money, and this exchange suggests a vulgarization of marriage when commodified in this manner. The marriage trade figures as the greedy and dangerous counterpart to holy matrimony that, if not necessarily performed in a church, at least involves those people who supposedly had the couples' best interest in mind.

Disparate social status functions as a defining feature of all Gretna couples represented in popular literature. Yet, several other factors influence whether or not readers are supposed to pity such couples or be repelled by them. Love and affection represent one category, the presence or absence of which colors portrayals of parental intervention. The 1753 Parliamentary debates did not include discourse regarding personal affections, but later Gretna plots take up this question in conjunction with continued concerns over inter-rank matches and the bounds of suitability between spouses. Gretna stories take as their subject the increased influence of affective individualism on legal and ideological issues, as well as its troubled interaction with social contract theory.

In Gretna plots, *mésalliance* instigated by excessive romanticism and/or avarice warrants parental intervention. Very often these two qualities go hand in hand, with the uncontrolled emotion of one spouse blinding them to the avarice of the other. Much of the advice regarding Gretna Green, however, pertains directly to the lack of forethought and good judgment evidenced by elopement. Depictions of such couples and their failure to reason directly stems from earlier discourse regarding the 1753 Marriage Act, with its implicit argument that minors are often too immature and impressionable to pick suitable marriage partners. Criticizers of Scotch weddings, then, often portray Gretna Green as a harbor for foolish, rash action. Hutchinson, for instance, contemplates the satisfaction of couples that wed after much forethought, a sentiment lacking for Gretna spouses:

It is an after-satisfaction to reflect that we took the step to the best of our reason, and with the best concurrence of our relations: but such after-satisfaction cannot alleviate those who have to remember that they ran away to Gretna Green against the wishes, counsel, or consent of their parents, guardians, or whomsoever it might have been. (vol. 2, 14)

Instead, such couples' only reward is "remorse" and "anger...for having done a foolish thing," which could have been avoided had they not given in to hasty passion and had sought counsel

from their more reasonable elders. Indeed, Hutchinson presents children as having an underdeveloped portion of the necessary reasoning capability—they act “to the best of [their] reason—and must supplement this lack with parental “concurrence.” Only then can a couple be sure they’re making the right choice and only then can they look back on their actions with satisfaction.

While this particular critique focuses on the couples’ thoughtlessness and immaturity, much discourse regarding Gretna marriages is tailored to a more specific population—daughters—whereas earlier parliamentary debates concerned both sexes.¹² Indeed, Gretna literature almost exclusively focuses on the elopement of daughters, indicating the common perception that women operated under a greater intellectual and moral handicap than men and were thus more susceptible to romance and passion. A fashionable education and frequent reading of romance novels supposedly exacerbated the potential for danger. Indeed, the romance novel, which was maligned as a superficial, feminine, and pernicious genre, took root in the second half of the eighteenth century and frequently included depictions of Scottish weddings and elopement. Such texts, as many contemporaries portrayed them, often present the pretense of being morally instructive, providing cautionary tales, but often display a mode of storytelling too tantalizing to be considered suitable for female readers. William Whitehead’s farce *A Trip to Scotland* (1770) emphasizes the perceived causal tie between this sort of fiction and Gretna elopement. Readers are introduced to Miss Flack through Mr. Griskin, who considers her a well-educated and respectable woman. Yet, a key facet of Miss Flack’s education includes having “read through a whole circulating library once in half a year” (115), and this intellectual and emotional foundation proves inimical to female honor. After eloping with a roving player, Miss Flack laments the extent to which her reading habits motivated such a drastic step:

Talk not of education; my education has undone me. Alas, Sir! from all *my* reading I drew but one idea; 'twas that of love. Not formal mercenary love, which comes attended with settlements, and all the odious encumbrances of jointures and pin-money; but that resistless passion, that instantaneous emotion, that fascination of eyes which kindles into rapture even at the first approach—Such I thought this gentleman's affection for *me*. Can it be wondered at then, that I should consent to elope with him?" (132-3)

The moral here illustrates what Clive Probyn tells us about eighteenth-century prejudices against romance reading: it is “educationally dangerous, psychologically risky, and socially disabling” (259). Furthermore, O’Connell provides a more nuanced look at the mimetic dangers of romance, explaining how novels could incite dangerous passions and unrealistic views of romance within female readers, making them more likely to imitate the depicted transgressive acts such as Scotch weddings (“Dislocating Literature” 8).¹³ Miss Flack’s story, much like that of Arabella’s in Charlotte Lennox’s earlier novel *The Female Quixote* (1752) and Jane Austen’s later *Northanger Abbey* (1818), illustrates the premise that “the woman reader is...a quixotic figure unable to distinguish between fantasy and desire, and fact” (O’Connell 7-8).

Similar representations linking the moral dangers of female novel reading, romance, and Gretna elopement crop up well into the nineteenth century, indicating the stability of this topos. Thus, an 1832 article in the *Chambers’ Edinburgh Journal*, titled “Gretna Green,” decries “boarding-school misses, who devour novels until their heads are turned, and with their feelings wound up to the highest pitch, are ready to fly into the arms of the first man they meet” (213). This example points to the enticing and performative qualities of novel reading. To figuratively imbibe or glut oneself on such literature had the potential to literally change one’s behavior. Hutchinson extends this view, pointing out that *any* reading involving romance and Gretna elopement has the potential to *turn* young women, his target audience, even if such portrayals are negative and intended to serve as warnings against that which they might incite. Indeed, he

points to this danger in his own descriptions, and urges his readers to correctly ascertain his informative, cautionary intent:

Yet, oh dread lady-patronesses! we beseech ye to understand aright the true reading of these facts, and not to be readily enamored with the narrative of deeds which are too inconsiderately done at Gretna—deeds which, to say the best of them, are assuredly wrong and very indiscreet. They are not exhibited to your view that you should be predisposed in their favour; but that the contemplation of evil ways, and the sight of the hideous form of sin, may rather make ye eschew inequity than follow it. (vol. 2, 43-4)

While this passage doesn't directly address the dangers of novel reading, per se, it warns of the seductive draw of narrative, which has the potential to elicit performative response. Hutchinson distinguishes between reading and "contemplation," which involves studied, reasoned examination. In doing so, he acknowledges women's ability to behave as rational individuals, but he presents fiction as a particular bane to their maturation.¹⁴

The dangers of romance move beyond fears of mimesis, though. As a genre, it was thought to represent the commercialization of literature in its lowest and most insidious form, which is indicative of its supposed social and moral dubiousness. In her exploration of the Gretna topos, O'Connell rightly links critiques of uncontrolled romantic emotion—and the romance genre as a whole—to concerns over the "atmosphere of excess and contagion" related to the broader commercial culture (8). As Lee Erickson makes clear, by the beginning of the nineteenth-century, advances in the publishing industry ushered in an influx of more affordable literature. Yet, as the quantity of literature increased, many people argued that the quality decreased in response. Publishers like those at the Minerva Press—which made its name for providing gothic, romance fiction—stocked local circulating libraries with the latest books, and, for the most part, critics tie such literature to a predominantly female reading audience (138). Unlike our modern libraries, which house mainly books, circulating libraries also "usually sold a supplementary line of luxury items or offered some other form of entertainment in addition to

their reading rooms” (136). Erickson points to Thomas Wilson’s *The Use of Circulating Libraries* for a list of such goods: “Haberdashery, Hosiery, Hats, Tea, Tobacco and Snuffs; or Perfumery, and the Sale of Patent Medicines,” or, in the words of Hannah More, “every thing in the world that’s genteel and of no use” (qtd. in Erickson 137). Romance novels can be grouped in the same category as these luxuries because they represent advancements in England’s trade and manufacturing, as well as the purchases or pastimes of newly wealthy families.

They also align with the morally corrosive effects of such niceties and of the atmosphere created by increased trade. As Michie points out, many people worried that the penchant for buying luxuries indicated the sort of “material engrossment” (*Vulgar* 16) that threatened to confuse or corrode England’s moral and aesthetic codes. England’s economic expansion, much like the romance genre, “[aroused] appetites or cravings that seem[ed] potentially insatiable” (65) and that might have “rendered insignificant” (69) the nobler and more refined virtues. Just as romance readers are at risk of mistakenly choosing, or becoming engrossed with, a marriage partner based on romantic principles, consumers might become so overcome with acquiring new things that they lose the ability to behave morally or make aesthetically-wise choices. While Michie does not explicitly link romance literature of this sort with engrossment, the genre clearly fits within her investigative parameters.

The Gretna topos uniquely aligns its critique of romance (along with the genre’s ties to the limits of Enlightenment thought and participation in social contract theory) with concurrent fears of economic and social change. Rebecca Probert tells us that “[o]verall, it was aristocratic females who were most likely to be subject to legal controls of any kind: they married earlier, had fewer opportunities for marrying without their parents’ knowledge, and provision for them was more likely to be contingent on an approved marriage” (449). In variations of the Gretna

topos I have been discussing, the heiresses' mis-education via romance prompts them to elope with social inferiors who seek to gain wealth and social status through marriage. False suitors draw on the ideals of affective individualism and on social contract theory's emphasis on individual choice by aping the behaviors of passion and love, but such actions only fool those young women already undone by romance reading. Many examples of this variant exaggerate the degree of social difference between husband and wife, with the beguiled heiress eloping with, for instance, a menial servant or its equivalent. This difference heightens the unsuitableness of the match because, as I have shown, many people considered unnatural or impossible true affection between representatives of different social classes. This difference illustrates a key feature of what makes such marriages ineligible, in addition to age and lack of parental support.

In a similar manner as how Westmacott critiques the reformist impulses of the City's respectable middle class, many Gretna plot lines take aim at middle-class commercialism. More specifically, though, representatives of the lower class in Gretna literature ultimately stand in for the actual social strata causing most concern: the *nouveau riche* of the increasingly prosperous middle classes and its ties to England's changing social structure and economy. As my earlier investigation of Special Licenses indicates, the possession of wealth alone did not necessarily elevate an individual's social station, and his or her attempts to join the upper-reaches of society through Gretna elopements signal the illegitimacy of such aspirations. As such, a key trend in Gretna characterization portrays representatives of new money (or those seeking money) as morally dubious and mercenary in their 'courtship' of the social elite, as expressive of the dangers of individualism taken too far. That the couples elope to Gretna Green—this a bastion of selfish consumerism—signals the husbands' alignment with industrial and commercial wealth, the sort threatening to dismantle the social hierarchy and lower the morals and ideals of the

general population. That the couples are portrayed as not actually loving each other, as instead tricking themselves into doing so or seeking social and financial gain in marrying, speaks to the illegitimacy of such unions and the analogous problematic expansion of England's economy. The Gretna trope figuratively connects the dots between these concerns.

Ultimately, evaluation of a marriage's legitimacy, including those solemnized at Gretna Green, hinged on whether or not disinterested love and affection occupied its core. While Gretna Green still represents a center of moral and economic corruption, these couples are driven to elope by parental prejudice and meddling. Elliot, a Gretna Green 'parson' who supposedly inherited his post from the famed 'blacksmith' Joseph Paisley,¹⁵ provides myriad examples of elopements in his *The Gretna Green Memoirs*. Unlike Hutchinson, he presents many instances where couples in love elope due to fear of parental intervention, usually because of *mésalliance*. Thus, we learn of an "old Baronet" who informs his daughter that she must "think no more of her first lover," a gentleman without financial means, and instead "be prepared to receive one of his choosing" (5). Similarly, an "English clergyman" elopes with "one of his father's farmer's daughters" because he "[knows] he could not get the consent of his father, from the disparity of their fortunes" (24). In a similar case, Mr. C elopes because his wife's father did not like "his acquaintance," for "although a respectable tradesman[he] was poor" (36). One example involves a father's threat to disinherit his daughter upon her elopement, only to be appeased after realizing the depth of the couple's feelings, and the lack of mercenary motive on the husband's part, who declares, "Do what you will to me, your money and lands I value not" (39). Another example reveals a father's injunction that his son not marry a "paur lassie [...] no his equal," but Elliot comments that the son, "wise in his generation, was determined to be happy by marrying the girl he loved despite of worldly gear" (51). These and other examples show how Elliot

positions elite families, and particularly father figures, as mercenary and meddling, as willing to sacrifice their children's legitimate bonds due to fear of social or monetary debasement. Clearly, Elliot's perspective is biased since he has a vested interest in counteracting the negative stereotypes associated with the Gretna marriage market. However, the numerous examples he discusses illustrate the extent to which such critiques of parental meddling frequently entered the nineteenth-century cultural imagination. Even Hutchinson makes the following dogged half-concession for love-matches: "When young persons are urged thitherward by the uncontrollability of an intense, *generous, disinterested affection*, some excuses may be pleaded for the step, although, of course, it cannot be strictly justified" (vol. 2, 81; italics mine). In this valuation, hastiness is the hallmark of youth, but at least some such unions are founded upon love.

While these examples clearly present the increasing importance of personal affection and free choice in marriage, a stance that challenges traditional, patriarchal notions of marriage as maintaining social and familial status, we can further extend this critique to the realm of social and economic change. Negative portrayals of Gretna couples highlight mercenary and uncouth aspects of the social strivers, as well as the dangers of daughters whose overwrought passions incapacitate their ability to detect such qualities. These more positive examples, however, point to the possibility of successful inter-class unions founded upon legitimate, deep emotion, albeit the degree of social difference between spouses is usually less extreme than in negative portrayals. Parental prejudice here aligns with the stubborn and misguided resistance of the social elite to economic and social change in all forms. Importantly, the legitimate couples in these examples are forced to elope to Gretna Green—the center of corrupt business—because their own pocket of society provides no legitimate alternative. Analogously, these portrayals

represent a blending of wealth and social strata that could prove beneficial to English society, if the ruling elite would only recognize it as valid. In essence, those resistant to socially mixed unions drive these would-be exemplars of legitimate financial diversification to the realm of mercenary trade and commerce when they could retain their social holding and dominance by allowing the incorporation of worthy examples of trade and commerce to comingle and join with landed wealth.¹⁶

The Gretna topos became a complex and enduring facet of the nineteenth-century cultural imagination, but its durability is actually somewhat of an enigma. In 1823, Parliament passed an amendment to the 1753 Marriage Act that should have altered the plot's cultural currency.

Probert explains that

the eventual solution...was to retrain the basic structure of the 1753 Act, but to provide that a marriage would only be void if the parties 'knowingly and willfully' failed to comply with certain provisions.' The purpose of this was to invalidate only those marriages that involved a deliberate flouting of the rules. In addition, in an apparently radical change of policy, lack of parental consent to marriages by license no longer rendered such marriages void. (445-6)

This last stipulation did not completely shut down parental control. Instead, eloping minors ran the risk of being disinherited, because parents could still "sue for a forfeiture of all Estate, Right, Title and Interest in Any Property which hath accrued or shall accrue to the Party so offending by force of such a marriage" (qtd. in Probert 447). This change sought to deter would-be fortune hunters from perpetuating fraudulent elopements, but it also acted as a warning to unthinking or romantic minors who flouted parental wishes and married unsuitable partners. The courts "had the power to order that the property that would have accrued for the benefit of the offending party should be settled for the benefit of the innocent party and any children of the marriage (or, if both parties were equally guilty of flouting the law, for the benefit of the children)." In this context, the unsuitability of a match pertained to disparate social station more than any other

impediment, and Probert suggests that the change “made explicit what under the 1753 Act had been implicit: it was the marriages of those with property who made *mésalliances* that were the main concern” (447).

For this reason, then, the Grenta plotline should have lost its cultural relevancy. Couples did not have to travel to Scotland to legally elope, and any such couple ran the risk of being disinherited. The mythic reputation that Grenta Green established over the previous seventy years perhaps still lent the locale an aura of romance and excitement, which perhaps extended the plot’s imaginative lifespan. Furthermore, I view the social subtext of the Grenta plot—which the 1823 Act retained—as the key to its continued relevancy. Threat of *mésalliance*, represented in the Grenta topos, became a vehicle for exploring the era’s concern over and hostility to reformist tendencies. While Grenta no longer specifically and exclusively figured as a locale for social insurrection within families, it clearly still reflected broader social concerns, which only increased into the 1830s due to numerous successful reform initiatives. The imaginatively annexed Grenta Green stands in for nineteenth-century England and its changing economic and commercial climate. Though the primary focus of literary representations is *mésalliance* and the need for parental controls in the marriage of minors, this topos and the centrality of the joining of social unequals helps better explore the implications of England’s economic growth and its concerns over who was driving such growth and how it would affect overall social stability. As we will see, these are the broad concerns Dowling’s *Othello Travesie* takes up by incorporating the Grenta topos within his adaptation of Shakespeare’s *Othello*, and, as with Westmacott’s burlesque, fears of social upheaval combine with those of racial otherness, with Othello becoming the embodiment of both.

Notes

¹ Technically speaking, any marriage that “failed to conform to the canon law as to place, time and procedure” was clandestine (Outhwaite xiv). Yet, we can differentiate between clandestine and irregular unions, in that irregular ones stray from approved marriage procedure but are not necessarily secret or done for the specific sake of eluding authorities (Outhwaite 20). A wide range of people married irregularly, and for various reasons. Adherence to local folk custom accounts for many of these marriages, which were recognized as binding by the surrounding community. Parker contends that “local normative orders” frequently proved more influential than the Church in determining the legitimacy of popular marriage custom (14-20). Thus, certain communities might not have recognized irregular unions as cause for alarm.

² To marry outside the bounds of the Church frequently demonstrated a need weightier than possible punishment. Some couples were motivated by pecuniary concerns, both for the cost of a ceremony and an accompanying celebration. Some feared ridicule due to embarrassing features or the possibility of ribald commentary. Some people, such as apprentices and maidservants, married secretly in order to maintain their positions. Furthermore, particular religious sects frequently avoided the charade of an Anglican ceremony, instead choosing to marry in their own fashion. A good many brides were pregnant and sought to legitimate their children (Outhwaite 59-61).

³ Stone indicates that a Fleet marriage probably cost a third the price of a church ceremony (*Road* 102).

⁴ This is not to say that church regulators didn’t stand to profit from increases in church weddings, but that the dichotomy created by those people denigrating the Fleet market cast the church in a positive, disinterested light.

⁵ For example, Bills forwarded and struck down in 1670, 1677, 1678, 1679, 1685, 1689, 1691-2, and 1697 all shared the common goal of “[preventing] minors ... from marrying without the testified consent of parents or guardians” (69).

⁶ A 1588 abduction statute works as a precedent to later attempts, giving parents “power over the marriages of daughters who would inherit property: men who ‘abducted’ heiresses under sixteen and then married them without their parents’ consent would be punished by five years’ imprisonment and withholding the girls’ fortune during his lifetime.... This law explicitly connected, for the first time, parental consent to the marriage of girls” (Brewer 306). This specific legislation highlights the extent to which the girls of wealthy families occupied a specifically crucial role in maintaining family social standing. They were the symbolic vessels of family wealth, living moveable property that could be stolen by those of inferior ranks.

⁷ Trumbach discusses the aristocratic “great family,” which encompassed household servants over which patriarchs acted as “master” and “father” (129). A son or daughter’s elopement with an employee of the house figured as a breach in family trust as well as an employee’s betrayal. Furthermore, the inclusion of servants within the “great family” acted as a limitation to sexual

relationships, which would be tabooed as a form of incest (148). Trumbach suggests, however, that by the latter half of the eighteenth century, this view of extended family diminished with the rise of the nuclear, or “small” family. Servants and other workers became viewed as increasingly threatening to the wellbeing of children (129) and as sexually threatening figures (147-150).

⁸ For instance, some legislators feared that additional impediments would increase levels of bastardry and thus the need for parish poor relief, as well as reduce the overall population by hindering access to legitimate intercourse (Outhwaite 87-9)

⁹ Eve Tavor Bannet argues that by failing to acknowledge as binding all *de future* marriages (meaning contracted but not yet having gone through with the church ceremony), legislators worsened the sexual “inequality of power” within courtship because women who got pregnant no longer had recourse to legitimize their union or their children since their betrothed husbands could abandon them at will (237). Instead, they had recourse to a ‘Breach of Promise’ suit, which was a civil suit awarding property damages, which supposedly helped ease such women’s financial burden and acted as a dowry making them more attractive as marriage partners. See Stone, *Road to Divorce* 87-8. See also Outhwaite 108.

¹⁰ Stone asserts that Hardwicke “bought the support of the squires by offering them the one thing they really wanted, which was a legal veto power over the marriages of their children up to the age of 21” (*Road* 123), here indicating which strata of society most wanted and would benefit from the change but not differentiating the treatment of license from that of banns. He later indicates that “[after] 1753, the easiest way for a poor young couple to get married legally while evading the new system and thwarting the wishes of their parents was by visiting a crowded city parish and asking for the banns to be called” (129), with clerks unlikely to check the validity of all facts. This statement points to the difference but is not specifically defined in other areas of his text. Brewer states that the act “not only enabled parents actually to void the marriage of children if they were under the age of twenty-one when they promised to marry, but invalidated all clandestine marriages” (316). This statement is essentially incorrect, in that clandestine unions by banns that took place where parents couldn’t intervene were deemed legally binding.

¹¹ Lawmakers did worry about the ability of children to evade parental oversight by eloping to an unknown parish or by giving a different name than that by which they were known. Thus, Probert looks at how the 1823 Marriage Act attempted to reconcile remaining legal issues pertaining to both marriage by banns and by license. In the case of banns, Parliament attempted to impose residency requirements that would limit such cases of clandestinity where evasion of the law was intended (445-6).

¹² I found only one source—an 1827 poem titled “Gretna Green,” published in *The Literary Chronicle*—that positions a woman as the aggressor, here an older woman seducing and marrying an underage boy. Portrayals center generally on girls as the objects of elopement plots. In the poem “Gretna Green,” from George Crabbe’s *Tales From the Hall*, a girl’s business-minded parents seek to prompt her elopement with their upper-class boarder in order to gain social prestige.

¹³ O’Connell interprets this denouncement as representative of an eighteenth-century generic “rivalry” between the novel and theater (“Dislocating Literature” 6), with stage renditions attempting to cast novels as morally reprehensible. While this characterization of such attempts may be accurate, non-patent, non-Shakespearean theater fought its own battles for respectability and legitimacy. Very often, they co-opt the plots of popular novels, including their scandal.

¹⁴ Hutchinson emphasizes his instructive intent through shifts in rhetoric. Most of his writing reads like prose, but the lofty, antiquated diction evident in this passage perhaps evokes the language of chivalry. He draws on the literary heritage of romance, but forwards a version where the relationships between men and women, between knights and the women they worship and serve, are chastely noble. While this homology positions Hutchinson as his readers’ champion, it also establishes an idealized relationship between men and women in general, one where secret elopement, perhaps spurred on by narratives of such deeds, represents the height of ignoble foolishness.

¹⁵ Elliot’s inheritance here represents an interesting example of status exchange through the marriage of daughters. Elliot writes, “About this time, the old man’s [Paisley’s] grand-daughter, Ann Graham, was the belle of the little villages of Gretna and Springfield, and it was generally understood, that the old man would appoint as the successor to his office, as marriage minister, the lad who might win the hand of the lassie, and enterprise in which I was luckily successful” (3). As Paisley’s granddaughter, but exhibiting the name Anna Graham, we can assume that she is the daughter of Paisley’s daughter, and so the position passes through two generations of women, to Elliot. This is not a marriage made strictly for status advancement, however, as Elliot must “win the hand” of his wife, meaning he must gain her affections.

¹⁶ This correlative positioning becomes more apparent when examined in two comic plays, Charles Stuart’s *Gretna Green, A Comic Opera, in Two Acts* (1783) and William Collier’s *The Blacksmith, or, A Day at Gretna Green! A Musical Farce* (1834). Collier’s play is essentially a rewrite of Stuart’s, exhibiting fewer songs and instead updating the language. His play also alters the portrayal of the Gretna topos to more clearly interact with issues of class and social contract theory. For instance, both plays present the reader with two pairs of Gretna lovers, which act as foils to each other, even though both display *mésalliance*. One set (Captain Tipperary / Miss Plumb and Captain O’Callaghan / Miss Primrose, respectively) provides the negative characteristics associated with rash action and mercenariness, and the other (Captain Gorget / Maria and Captain Darlington / Maria) represents the ideal love match, which is sustained by legitimate affection but must elope due to unfounded elitist prejudice against the match.

Chapter Five

The Gretna Green Topos in Dowling's *Othello Travestie: 'According to Act of Parliament'*

Maurice M. G. Dowling is not your average burlesque writer (if such a thing exists). As a military man and later member of both the Metropolitan London and Liverpool Police forces, Dowling spent most of his formative years and adult life working in decidedly un-literary conditions. Yet, in his time off, he wrote poems and burlesques, and his Shakespeare burlesques influenced the course of nineteenth-century theater by helping establish burlesque as a popular comic genre. Although little is known of his actual life, on the surface, what information we have seems to align him with the Robert Waithmans of the world rather than the Charles M. Westmacotts. Yet, his plays, which were first performed at The Liver Theater in Liverpool, eventually made their way to London's West-Side minors and serve as the dramatic peers of the likes of Mathews's *At Home* sketches, Westmacott's *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street*, and Rice's "Jim Crow" performances. By investigating his burlesque portrayals of both working-class populations and black characters, we can see an overarching conservatism that pairs together these forms of otherness in mutual and co-intensifying inferiority. This chapter builds upon the contextual information provided in the previous chapter to illustrate how Dowling's two Shakespeare burlesques—*Romeo and Juliet Travestie: 'As the Law Directs'* (1837) and *Othello Travestie: 'According to Act of Parliament'* (1834)—incorporate the Gretna Green plotline. In doing so, Dowling contributes to debates of the 1830s regarding the legitimacy of clandestine marriage and the ills of commercialism in particular, and questions of race, social belonging, and Englishness in general.

This chapter first attempts to discern Dowling's social positioning, or rather, what his own conception of self might have been regarding social and political ideology, given the spotty

information available on his life. I also situate Dowling within Liverpool's social scene, a city in many ways very like London and one that was acutely aware of otherness, whether that be racial, social, national, or religious. Liverpool remained haunted by its participation in the slave trade, given its role as England's most active slaving port. It was home to a diverse, multicultural population, but its position in relation to Ireland made it the first destination, and often the last, of Irish immigrants seeking refuge and work in England. What's more, many of these Irish immigrants were Catholic, and so religious tensions ran high, especially surrounding the 1829 Catholic Relief Act. Where many of England's northern industrial cities became the sites of much social upheaval, Liverpool experienced its own sort of unrest, particularly relating to Orangeist backlash against the supposed threat of Irish Catholicism. As I will show, this religio-political organization shaped Liverpool's political and religious landscape, with the lines of demarcation between social groupings often drawn between English/Irish and Anglican/Catholic populations. Add to this context the utter poverty of Liverpool's slums, which contrasted to the new money of its merchants, grown rich through slavery, and we can see how the city became known for its rough-and-tumble, volatile culture.

Dowling's position with the Liverpool Dock Police gave him access to the various facets of this culture, which subtly shaped the direction of his Shakespeare burlesques. In particular, Dowling's humor often draws on his vivid depictions of working-class culture, as well as his overtly racialized portrayal of blackness. He highlights these elements through his incorporation of the Gretna Green plotline. Although my discussion of Shakespeare burlesques up until this point has solely focused on *Othello*, I draw in Dowling's *Romeo and Juliet Travestie* as well to supplement my discussion regarding his *Othello Travestie* and to point out particular descriptive trends found in both works. His *Romeo and Juliet Travestie* makes the pretensions of the

nouveau riche and mercantilism its prime focus of critique. It transforms the Montague/Capulet family feud into a business rivalry between basket makers, and the subsequent interactions and scuffles between (and even within) these factions, draw on 1830s debates regarding Enlightenment ideals, franchise, and industrial/mercantile concerns over workers' rights. Dowling's depictions belittle and look askance at proponents of reform, shading his characterizations so as to represent them as ridiculous or overblown. His transformation of Romeo and Juliet's elopement into a Gretna Green marriage plot draws directly from Gretna literature and its social contexts discussed in the previous chapter. Mr. and Mrs. Capulet's vulgar wish for Juliet to make a wealthy match spurs on the couple's elopement, and instead of seeking out Friar Lawrence's assistance, the couple visits Lawrence the Blacksmith's shop at Gretna Green, where his greedy and business-minded pragmatism serves as the perfect corollary to Verona's own culture of commerce.

I provide this exploration of Dowling's *Romeo and Juliet* to serve as an introduction to Dowling's more complex usage of the Gretna topos in his 1834 *Othello Travestie*. Here, he draws on critiques of the pretensions of vulgar social climbers to intensify his denigration of newly freed former slaves, these harboring their own racial and social pretensions. His transformation of Othello and Desdemona's elopement into a Gretna plot enhances this critique through a layering of hierarchies. The burlesque illustrates tensions between calls for extended individual freedoms and fears of resultant social collapse. Dowling unites and more forcefully conceptualizes these fears through his incorporation of the Gretna Green topos, which augments and intensifies his demeaning portrayal of Othello's race. Othello's low status on the social hierarchy (as a Gretna husband and implied partner in *mésalliance*) combines with blackness, creating a figure exponentially lower than Desdemona, whose association with a particular

iteration of the Gretna wife (that of an overly romantic, rash girl) also casts doubt on the strength or validity of her affection. In this way, Dowling's burlesques become sites of discursive exchange, where debates over slavery and social hierarchy speak to each other, in a sense, as a means of further expressing or wrestling with the complexities and ambiguities of each context, ultimately asserting the illegitimacy or inferiority of each.

Maurice M. G. Dowling and Nineteenth-Century Liverpool

Little is known of Dowling's life, and only the scantest of records remain of his personal correspondence. Yet, from accounts of his employment, a few newspaper articles, and the small corpus of his works, readers can place him within his social contexts and potentially gain insight into his political, social, and ideological leanings. Establishing such positioning is important because it helps us better understand Dowling's decision-making process as he adapted Shakespeare's *Othello* for the burlesque stage. Most biographical information comes from two sources: an obituary appearing in the *Liverpool Mercury* in 1853, and the short article "The Rise and Fall of Maurice Dowling" by ex-Liverpool policeman Norman Fairfax, which appears on the Liverpool Police historical website. Online databases of digitalized public records have also proved useful for gaining access to overseas records, and I incorporate these materials to corroborate existing details and as distinct historical artifacts that can be analyzed with an eye towards discerning Dowling's social and ideological positioning.

Born in London in 1795, Dowling probably descended from a middle-class family with little actual wealth. According to Fairfax, he was the oldest son of Maurice William Keating Dowling, of Fulham, London. In *Fulham Old and New* (1900), Charles James Féret characterizes this area as "an agricultural district, devoted mainly to the cultivation of vegetables, fruit and flowers," even until the end of the nineteenth century (24). Because we do not know Dowling's

father's occupation, it is hard to ascertain the family's social standing within this London community. A marriage registry originating in the St. Marylebone Parish, Westminster, lists the marriage of Maurice Dowling to Mary George in May 1791, by church banns (*London, England*). As the previous chapter indicates, marriage by banns can be aligned as a specifically lower-class to middle-class nuptial mode, with marriage by license becoming more popular by the end of the eighteenth century due to its associations with the upper class. Later, Maurice M. G. Dowling married Mary Ann Hook in May 1820, with their marriage license recorded in the St. Marylebone Parish. This particular parish had become one of London's wealthiest and most fashionable by the nineteenth century, although Dowling's marriage there does not necessarily signal his own wealth.¹⁰⁷

Dowling's entrance into military service as a boy perhaps provided a path for upward mobility. According to his obituary, Dowling entered into "governmental service" and later served in the navy. That Dowling, an oldest son, entered into military service at such a young age perhaps points to his family's lack of wealth, since Dowling spent most of his formative years at sea rather than at school, training for a career rather than learning how to be a gentleman. His obituary indicates that he began his

governmental service, on board on of Her Majesty's gun-boats, and was employed for some time in Gibraltar. In 1803 he was at the taking of Bastia in Sicily under Admiral NELSON, and discharged his duties in a manner to call forth the commendations of his superior officers. The siege was considered one of the most important events in the life of the immortal NELSON, being the only occasion in which he conducted hostilities on shore. Mr. DOWLING was afterwards engaged in naval service on the coast of Sicily and Calabria, and was present at the siege of Gaeta. He subsequently served in Spain, where he was employed in the Commissariat department, and on his return to England was appointed in an official capacity to assist in paying the Chelsea Hospital pensioners.

Although some of these details prove inaccurate,¹⁰⁸ Dowling's experiences helped establish a solid military reputation, one that would spur on his later career within the public sector of

policing. According to Robert Bucholz's *Database of Court Officers 1660-1837*, Dowling began serving as one of the royal family's Gentleman Pensioners (or Yeoman of the Guard) in November 1825, and his obituary indicates that he specifically attended to George IV and William IV ("Births" 7). Dowling earned the title "Esquire" for this service, indicative of greater social distinction than his lineage provided, and Dowling includes this appellation on both his marriage license from 1820 (*London, England*) and in an 1826 Poll Book (*A List of the Freemen* 60). Even before his service with the Pensioners, however, Dowling seems to have placed himself in the upper-echelons of society. Thus, the baptism registry for his daughter Georgiana, born in 1821, lists "Gent." in the box designating the father's "Quality, Trade, or Profession," which tells us more about Dowling's perceptions than actual rank, given the little amount of information available on this time in his life.

Dowling's military career, which helped establish his good reputation, transitioned into one within the private, civic sphere. In 1829, he left the Gentleman Pensioners to work as a clerk in Peel's New Metropolitan Police, discussed in Chapter 3. Fairfax reports that Sir Richard Mayne, one of Peel's commissioners, "began selecting a small number of young gentlemen to be responsible for clerical and executive matters." Dowling transferred to the Liverpool Dock Police in 1833, after which he became Head Constable of the Liverpool Police in 1844 when the two departments merged. These details indicate that Dowling was respected for his military service and high intellect. Dowling's record of occupation strikes me as evocative. The first half of his career is firmly entrenched in nationalistic and monarchical defense, but he later transitions to the heart of mercantile middle-class policing. Yet, as my later discussion of his burlesques indicates, he seems to have personally and artistically aligned himself with the upper

reaches of society and its support of social hierarchy, even if his latter career physically rooted him in Liverpool's thriving mercantile center and its importance to England's expanding economy.

We must better understand Liverpool's nineteenth-century reputation—its ties to slavery and England's growing economy—if we are to accurately assess Dowling's place within it. Until the expansion of Liverpool's dock system in the mid-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, Liverpool was little more than a fishing town. After the expansion of its docks, though, Liverpool became England's largest port, with ties to trade in commercial goods and human slaves, and Irish immigration. Such elements shaped its reputation for years to come. Although we often compare Liverpool to London, with the former serving as the latter's less-sophisticated sibling, we might more accurately list New York City as Liverpool's sister-city. Just as its American counterpart became known as a melting pot, so too can Liverpool be imagined in this light; indeed, New York's Ellis Island received many of the immigrants who set off from the Liverpool ports. Our modern understanding of Liverpool fixates on its dynamism. As M. J. Power states, "It was the fulcrum between England and Ireland, and, increasingly, between industrializing England and the world" (21). Eric Midwinter describes Liverpool as a "bubbling, fluid, dynamic city" (11), and Graeme J. Milne similarly captures the muddle of ingredients making up its unique admixture: "England's leading Atlantic port city was a cauldron of growth and diversity, providing its traders with a complex and challenging environment in which to make and lose money" (1). As Milne suggests, this brew often gave rise to sundry things, both beneficial and troubling.

Liverpool's dockland facilitated this mix; it was the heart of Liverpool's economy and helped shape its national and global reputation. As Milne states, "Shipping was an industry—perhaps

the industry—of global importance in the period” (21), and so Liverpool’s innovative dock expansions in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries put it at the forefront of England’s national and economic power, as well as provided the impetus for the town’s rapid expansion. Midwinter tells us that by the start of the nineteenth century, Liverpool represented “England’s best dockland provision” (14), with the next fifty years of expansion cementing this status.¹⁰⁹ These docks proved to be, according to Archer, Liverpool’s “life force” (16) and shaped the character of its society, “raising the profile of merchants, shipowners and ports relative to that of manufacturers and industrial cities” (4). Indeed, Liverpool’s relative lack of industry makes it unique with regards to the growth of northern towns and cities. Yet, its ports proved important to the shipping of materials necessary for industrial goods, especially after 1830, when “the Liverpool Manchester railway ushered in the bewildering mosaic of Mersey-side railways” (Midwinter 15). Thus, Liverpool’s ports proved just as essential to England’s industrial and commercial expansion as actual factories.

“Commerce, directly and indirectly, gave Liverpool a particular character” (Milne 3), but not everyone viewed this dominant quality in a positive light. Although commerce and mercantile trade helped expand England’s economy and bolster its national status, its connections to money made it unsavory or somehow inimical to moral fitness. Thus, Liverpool merchants figured in outsider accounts as greedy, conniving businessmen who placed financial gain above all other motives. *The London Times*, “fond of playing the moral arbiter of the nation’s commercial classes and confident in their metropolitan superiority,” often reported on questionable practices of Liverpool businesses and faulted the secrecy of its traders (Milne 4). In other accounts, “Visitors to Liverpool were struck by the way commercial attitudes seemed to color the thinking of all sections of the community—even the clergymen drove hard bargains

over funeral costs.” The taint of financial gain supposedly clung to even the most sacred of offices and stifled the spread of the related realm of art. As one writer noted at the time, “Arts and sciences are inimical to the spot; absorbed in the nautical vortex the only pursuits of the inhabitants is commerce” (qtd. in Longmore 228). While clearly an exaggeration—especially given the town’s theater history—this statement does represent the pervading impression of many people concerning England’s largest port city. If, as I discussed in the last chapter, the upwardly mobile middle class occupied a fraught imaginative positioning, as both the main figures driving England’s economic growth and, conversely, as representatives of the vulgarizing influence of money, then Liverpool, metaphorically speaking, was their city.

Some historians have linked Liverpool’s early mercantile roots with some of its more unsavory or negative qualities. Power discusses how, from the renewal of its town charter in 1695, Liverpool’s government was “extremely narrowly based. About forty councilors controlled much of the town and exercised the power of electing their successors.” Thus, at “the time of the reform of municipal corporations in 1835 Liverpool was recognized to be one of the least democratic of town governments” (Power 25). That these councilors had roots within the town’s existing mercantile ventures shaped its future endeavors. Milne discusses how “Liverpool’s pioneering efforts in dock building during the eighteenth century were driven by the port’s traders, who used their influence on the Town Council” to forward projects beneficial to their businesses (199). Furthermore, the nature of the trade and commerce often carried out in Liverpool supposedly indicates its consumerist underpinnings. Power characterizes these early entrepreneurs as follows:

They were men of action, adept at speculating and adapting, not men of theory or principle....[T]heir following commercial advantage at the expense of principle is perhaps most clearly shown in the later years of the slave trade, and their continuing to

trade directly between Ireland and English colonies after this had been forbidden by statute. Not surprisingly some proved skilled at privateering. (27)

Privateers functioned as a sort of sanctioned piracy, where merchant ships confiscated the ships and goods of enemies during wartime. They enacted a sort of commercial warfare, which Macilwee points to as indicative of “the brutality, boisterousness and vulgarity of Liverpool's early inhabitants”: “[I]t is important to understand how the town once made its money. In the eighteenth century, Liverpool maritime industry was split between Greenland whaling ventures, slavery and privateering” (1). These ventures, as well as those people participating in them, were seen to place financial gain over other worthier principles. Liverpool’s complicity in slavery became the central feature illustrating the town’s mercenariness, to the detriment of human life. By “the 1740s Liverpool had overtaken Bristol and London as the nation's most important slave trade port” (Power 23), and, as Macilwee states, in 1800, “five-sixths of Britain’s slave trade was based in the town” (1-2). Such exploits supposedly left a taint, or at the least set the precedent for the town’s predominant qualities for years to come.

The extent to which mercantile, financial concerns occupied Liverpool townspeople might be overstated in these accounts, but its civic life was clearly intermingled with its commercial. As already mentioned, the town council functioned as a self-perpetuating institution, in that it “controlled much of the town and exercised the power of electing their successors.” This form of control limited the extent to which others could shape the town’s identity. The civic limitation helps account for why, at “the time of the reform of municipal corporations in 1835,” many pointed to Liverpool as “one of the least democratic of town governments” (25), in the sense that breaking into positions of influence proved difficult. Except for directly following the 1832 Reform Act, when voters elect Whig politicians, the town featured a largely Tory, protectionist local government.

This defining feature might seem odd, given the fact that many of the wealthy merchants were not aristocratic and represented the power of new money. The alignment of many of these businessmen, merchants, and artisans with Tory politics has to do with the nature of the shipping industry and the degree to which they made decisions based on financial, commercial factors. It might also have to do with its ties to Orangeism, a religio-political organization committed to promoting and defending English Anglicanism from Catholicism. The roots of this group relate to the Glorious Revolution of 1688, when William of Orange secured the English throne—and, thus, English Protestantism—from the Catholic James II. To be an Orangeman, then, was to support the religious and political ideals bound up in that historical moment, and that had been tested ever since through Jacobin threats.

As John Belchum indicates, although Orangeism was, at its core, based on religious principles, it became “[i]ncorporated into the Tory narrative of religious and constitutional freedom.” He continues, “In exposing the threat to freedom—to the liberty and property of the Anglican establishment in church and state—[Orangeist leaders] condemned tyrannical Catholicism and its misguided ally, radical Dissent, with its dangerous manifesto to 'liberal' reform and free trade” (10-11). Thus, as Macilwee baldly states, “Politics and religion were inseparable in Liverpool where sectarian animosities were related to party affiliation. The Anglicans were Conservatives and the Catholics Radicals” (74). Even further, the impact of Orangeism may have grown in response to electoral reform (here regarding the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, which opened up corporation elections to the public). Macilwee tells us that “Orangemism became a formidable political force in Liverpool” specifically in the 1830s as a result of such political pressure. For instance, when Liberals took control of the Corporation after Liverpool’s first open election, “Tories began to exploit anti-Catholic feeling” to regain control

(77). Indeed, the presence of Orange influence in Liverpool, and the city's high percentage of Irish immigrants, have been explained as hindering the sort of political/social radicalism—such as Chartism—that manifested in other northern industrial towns. As Kevin Moore explains,

[Chartism's] weakness was not so much a reflection of a general lack of involvement in politics by the working class, as it faced strong competition from other political forces for their support. There were other flourishing forms of working-class politics—partisan and nationalist—as significant locally as the Chartist movement itself. (39)

We can see, then, that religious faction and nationality played particularly important roles in determining Liverpool citizens' social subjectivity and political affiliation, given the city's particularities.

Dowling's role as commander of the Liverpool dock police in the 1830s physically positions him and his work along side much social and economic bustle. He worked amidst industry and mercantilism, quite literally overseeing the goods and services that were fuelling England's economic growth and social change. He was also bound up in its charged religio-political atmosphere. From what information we have, Dowling seems to have favored Tory politics, and he attended an Anglican church. While we cannot go so far as to say he favored Orangeist beliefs, his eventual resignation from the Liverpool Police Department suggests at least a tolerance for their practices. Several high profile incidents illustrate, if not commiseration with Orangemen, then a laxness regarding their operations. Indeed, he later resigned amid scandal regarding his handling of police affairs with regards to Orangeist / Catholic conflict.¹¹⁰

Importantly, Dowling composed his Shakespeare burlesques during the start of his career in Liverpool, when he worked as head of the Dockland Police, and amidst the heady times of parliamentary and electoral reform that prompted an increase in sectarian schism. What's more, given Liverpool's ties to the English slave trade, concerns over race and blackness within discourse surrounding the 1833 Slave Emancipation Act would have been particularly resonant.

Liverpool was home to a large population of black citizens due to its status as a port city, so, combined with related issues of Irish citizens, the city as a whole had a complicated relationship with questions of race and nationality. We must keep these contexts in mind, when examining Dowling's Shakespeare burlesques, especially with regards to the way he depicts both working-class citizens and Othello's blackness.

Romeo and Juliet Travestie: A Tale of Two Merchants

Even though Dowling's *Romeo and Juliet Travestie: 'As the Law Directs'* (1837) appeared in London three years after his *Othello Travestie* (1834) premiered in Liverpool, I start my discussion here because it represents the more overt usage of the two with regards to the Gretna Green topos and the social concerns shaping Liverpool society, and England in general. It helps illustrate how Dowling's first usage of the Gretna topos functioned with regards to Othello and Desdemona's relationship and in relation to more general claims of issues of race and social equality. Furthermore, the Gretna plot plays a more direct role in this later play, clearly heightening Dowling's critique of vulgar mercantilism and the social pretensions of people made wealthy through trade.

Dowling's decision to write his *Romeo and Juliet* burlesque at this point correlates to Covent Garden's production of the play in 1836-37, with Helen Faucit making her acting debut as Juliet. I will forgo discussion of this 'patent' performance and the critical reactions it raised,¹¹¹ even though Dowling lampooned the couple's intensely romantic devotion. As the play's comic, illegitimate corollary, *Romeo and Juliet: 'As the Law Directs'* first appeared at the Strand theater, a West-End minor made popular, in part, by the success of Dowling's *Othello Travestie*, which Lindfors tells us ran there for more than 600 nights after its London debut in 1836 (191, n. 42).¹¹² I approach his critique through the lens of social hierarchy, in that the Gretna topos

simultaneously discredits the couple's affections and casts a highly critical eye on vulgar mercantilism manifested in Verona's (i.e. Liverpool's, or even London's) social milieu. Dowling's Verona is a locale steeped in the mire of trade and working-class angst. This atmosphere makes up the backdrop and motivation for Romeo and Juliet's elopement. The adaptation transforms the couple's clandestine marriage into a straightforward Gretna elopement plot, especially regarding his portrayal of the Gretna parson within the topos's social contexts. Thus, their marriage takes place in the Gretna Green foundry of Lawrence the Blacksmith. We can see in such portrayals concurrent fears of England's changing social structure, especially concerning what the play presents as the ills of vulgar mercantilism.

In Shakespeare's play, the origins of the Montague/Capulet feud exist, embedded and unnamed, somewhere in the hazy past, thus providing a mythic quality to the story. Their deadly rivalry has been passed down to their children, making it a sort of inherited birthright, much like entailed land or property. Yet, Dowling lampoons this original facet through the Gretna topos by incorporating its implied social contexts. The family feud deflates into a professional rivalry between basket-makers, thoroughly entrenching all of the play's characters in the lower- to lower-middle-class social milieu. The opening scene transforms a scuffle between Capulet and Montague factions into one about the tension between workers and masters, as well as between rival businesses looking to gain the upper hand in Verona's market economy. Dowling's *Dramatis Personae* lists Balthazar and Abraham as "Basket-men of the firm of Montague" and Sampson and Gregory as "Basket-men of the firm of Old Capulet" (49). Characterizing these men as workers rather than family servants, Dowling substitutes the familial hierarchy for one of business and transfers their role from within the family economy—one supportive of landed wealth and estate—to that of trade.

His burlesque accomplishes this shift by incorporating reformist social and political contexts related to England's expanding economy. Dowling's situates his feud within a common Liverpool trade: that of basket making. Marc W. Steinberg provides a rundown of the work-culture of many artisan weavers: "In the early nineteenth century, many organized workers, in general terms, were male artisans, generally workshop-based, with some claim to skill. Artisans were typically journeymen who were destined to ply their trade for the profit of others" (24). Workers increasingly fought against demands for increasing productivity and control over their products and work conditions, with the 1820s and 30s as active years for such negotiation (25). Although the basket-weaving trade might have displayed its own particular dynamics between laborers, we can situate Dowling's rival shops within a general artisan culture such as the sort Steinberg describes. According to UNESCO, the art of basket-making expanded in Liverpool in relation to the port: "The development of the sea trade led inevitably to the expansion of associated trades such as sail-makers, blacksmiths, riggers and basket-makers." By transforming *Romeo and Juliet's* ancient feud into a rivalry of basket-makers, Dowling specifically embeds the plot within the context of nineteenth-century Liverpool's port industries, a context with which Dowling would have been intimately familiar as head of the dock police. Furthermore, the city was also home to the Royal School for the Blind, which, according to the school website, was the first of these in England, and second in the world only to Paris ("History"). Basket-weaving became a key trade taught to students, and, given the school's prominence within England and Dowling's familiarity with Liverpool, his incorporation of basket-making as a central detail might imply a figurative lack of sight—here in its metaphorical sense with regards to knowledge or reason—subtly likening the play's artisans to individuals who are literally unable to see.

The initial street brawl of Shakespeare's Act 1, Scene 1—this carried on between servants of the rival houses—gets a commercial makeover, instead relating to professional rivalry:

SAMPSON: They call that thing a basket. Lud, how queer!

[*Pointing to basket in Balthazar's hand*]

BALTHAZAR: And such a basket, show me in the trade.

SAMPSON: There's one as good—(*Pointing to one.*)

GREGORY: Say, better—

SAMPSON: Better made! (52)

Conflict over rival products and businesses sets the Montagues and Capulets at odds, along with their employees. Dowling's juxtaposition of Shakespeare's mythic feud with two rival basket-makers works on the assumption that the latter's fears are somehow insignificant or ridiculous. Indeed, this designation adds to the physical humor of the scene, and we are told in the stage directions how this scuffle might have played out: "*The parties arm themselves with sticks and baskets, and attack each other...*" (52), these the swords and shields of trade. To be sure, merchants worked to protect their livelihood and those of their employees; the encroachment of rival shops, then, proved truly troubling. Dowling treats this pressing concern with contempt, however, and we are not meant to sympathize or worry over the families' conflict but instead laugh at its ridiculousness: these rival shops revile each other with just as much vehemence as if they were involved in a deadly feud.

Dowling also establishes a workplace hierarchy within each shop, which breeds malcontent as workers seek to maintain their positions, or jockey for better ones. Mr. Ben Volio figures as "a steady basket man" from "Covent Garden," "in the employ of Old Montague," instead of Shakespeare's designation of him as Montague's nephew. Rather than promoting peace between the families, as in Shakespeare's play, Ben Volio cares more about productivity, which has been halted by the brawl. He works as a "foreman," or a sort of overseer, and instead

of attempting to “keep the peace” (1.1. 59), admonishes, “Give o’er, you fools, and go and mind your work” (52). Indeed, he berates Tybalt, a fellow foreman¹¹³ and “rat-catcher”¹¹⁴ (48), for not similarly carrying out his duty: “[Y]ou should try with me / to make all friends, and go off quietly” (53). Maintaining productivity is Ben Volio’s bottom line, which he considers even more important than upholding the business’s reputation. That Dowling presents Ben Volio as from “Covent Garden” clearly takes a jab at the Macready, who actually played the venue’s Romeo at this time and was faulted for his temperate, lack-luster acting style. This characterization serves a double purpose, then; its criticism of Macready clues us in to how we should view Ben Volio’s attempts to maintain worker productivity. In a word, he is ineffectual. His workers’ squabbling over the quality of their product actually threatens to undercut its value. Furthermore, his reaction seems petty or peevish in light of Shakespeare’s correlative scene, which readers and audience members would have known. He does not attempt to save lives or stop the progression of a feud most menacing to its society. Instead, he fears a loss of production, which, while detrimental to business, here comes across as petty by comparison.

This early scene also includes an instance of inter-shop conflict, this time involving a different stratum of worker. The play’s opening lines establish a culture of barter between bosses and their workers, presenting the following exchange between Sampson and Gregory:

SAMPSON: Did you, when ‘prentice, black your master’s shoes?

GREGORY: No, Sampson—that I always did refuse.
Black shoes, indeed? that were,
methinks, too bad.
I should have been a shoe-black if I had!

SAMPSON: Gad! now, that’s true—I never thought of that.
I’ll black no more. I’ll
strike—for I’m not flat! (51)

This exchange hinges on what tasks an employer rightly can expect his workers/apprentices to perform beyond their initial duties, as well as what rights workers have to deny or challenge such demands. Apprenticeships provided young men with training and education necessary to perform a trade, as well as acted as a sort of right of passage through which workers gained official status as members of a profession and workers' guild. Indeed, before the 1832 Reform Act, many freeman became enfranchised upon completing their apprenticeship. Sampson fears that his rights, even as a underling, have been infringed by being asked to perform what he and Gregory deem a menial and degrading task, and one that falls within the purview of another, lower skill, that of polishing Capulet's shoes. He does not submit to his servitude, and instead claims the right to strike, a loaded word for Dowling's 1830s social and political context. As Iorwerth Prothero indicates of certain types of weavers, "With a pride in their skill and feeling of superiority, they were less deferential than other workmen, were better educated, belonged to occupational communities, and had long traditions of organization. They thus had the necessary individual and collective resources for collective action" (13). We can see such assertiveness and a willingness to demand particular treatment in Gregory and Sampson's exchange. As with his representation of mercantile concerns as a whole, Dowling's depiction does not garner sympathy for Sampson's plight. The supposed offending task—boot blacking—seems a ridiculous reason to strike, thus casting a tint of the ridiculous over all workers' strikes and issues of workers rights. He delegitimizes Sampson's claim and correspondingly belittles those of actual workers.¹¹⁵

That these specific instances occur in the first moments of the play signals the extent to which Romeo and Juliet's union springs up and is carried out within a thoroughly mercantile context, one that registers the fears of how subsequent societal and economic changes will affect

England as a whole. Indeed, that the couple needs to elope at all relates in part to Mr. and Mrs. Capulets' wish for Juliet to raise the family's social status through an advantageous marriage. Their successes in business have made them rich, but, as social climbers, they seek additional social clout and look to capitalize on their recent commercial wealth by joining it with a representative of the established elite. Shakespeare's County (or Count) Paris, whom the Capulets intend Juliet to marry, makes a noble match for Juliet's own high-ranking social status; indeed, he's related to the Prince of Verona. Lady Capulet remarks that in marrying Paris, Juliet will "share all that he doth possess, / By having him, making [herself] no less" (1.4.94-5). While this advantageous match would bolster the family's reputation, it doesn't necessarily represent social striving on their part. Rather, Shakespeare presents the families as occupying the same social sphere.

Dowling instead vulgarizes Paris's many admirable qualities by aligning him with superficial markers of social status. In doing so, we are meant to view the Montagues' interest in him as equally superficial. The *Dramatis Personae* describes Paris as "translated from the Theatre Francais" and wearing a "dandy's dress" (48-9). Mrs. Montague raves about how he is "drest so smart, in Fashion's very pink" (58), but such praise tells nothing of Paris's honor or nobility. Dowling clearly makes an implied pun through his name, and in doing so calls on nineteenth-century negative conceptions of French morality and masculinity. Paris is effeminate and showy, which at this point signaled the diametric opposite to staid, practical English masculinity. Indeed, Dowling represents him as completely lacking in ennobling qualities, or personhood, even. The parvenu Capulets misread or vulgarly interpret Paris's outward show of finery as inherent worth, and Mr. Capulet berates Juliet for refusing such a "famous match" (74), this a colloquialism of Shakespeare's version of him as a

gentleman of noble parentage,
Of fair demesnes, youthful and nobly ligned,
Stuffed, as they say with nobler parts. (3.5.179-81)

While such changes accomplish the lowering work of burlesque, significantly, Dowling aligns the manner of lowering with stereotypically vulgar qualities. The Capulets represent one of the “mushroom classes” Michie discusses (*Vulgar* 64), which value and indulge in the material pleasure provided by commercial culture, to the extent that “it will be increasingly hard [for them] to discern the attractions of virtue” (40) and aesthetic value. They do not recognize that Paris’s finery has no intrinsic value, that the man is literally a “man of wax” (48), as the *Dramatis Personae* terms him, a moldable representative of beauty but empty like his material finery. What’s more, by drawing together mentions of France with that of mercantilism and worker unrest, Dowling evokes the specter of Revolution and the dangers of uncontrolled individualism, which adds another negative association to Juliet’s family.

Thus, Romeo’s lack of the superficial finery motivates his exclusion as a potential match for Juliet, in addition to their families’ mercantile rivalry. It is this social/monetary deficiency that necessitates the couple’s elopement to Gretna Green. Dowling’s Romeo loves Juliet from the start of the play, which aligns with plot changes initiated in patent productions.¹¹⁶ In the burlesque equivalent of Shakespeare’s balcony scene, we learn that Romeo is poor, a trait he thinks Juliet dislikes. Indeed, hiding below Juliet’s balcony, Romeo specifically laments this quality instead of wondering at Juliet’s beauty:

I’ve no money, so, d’ye see
Juliet never thinks of me;
No you never thinks of me,
But lets me pine away in sorrow.
Oh, if I had got some pelf.
Was in business for myself,
Shouldn’t I be a happy elf?

You'd marry me, you'd marry me,
You'd marry me tomorrow. (62)¹¹⁷

Hailing from mercantile roots, Romeo seeks to gain social standing the only way he knows how: through “business.” Yet, such self-employed artisans were rare in nineteenth-century England. As Steinberg tells us of silk-weavers, “only 5 to 6 percent of all [London] artisans could be classified as self-employed” (24). Most instead worked within an apprenticeship system earning a portion of their products’ overall profit. That Romeo is the heir to the Montague basket-weaving business improves his chances, but such independence was often elusive. Furthermore, Romeo’s reference to “pelf” adds a vulgar tinge to this description. The *OED* lists “money, riches” as the term’s most common definition, but makes the stipulations that some people considered it as having “a corrupting influence,” which, as I discussed earlier, commonly aligned with critiques of consumerism and trade.

Juliet doesn’t let this lack of social status and wealth impede their love, though, but her parents (as we know) strive for a more socially impressive match for their daughter. The couple must elope to legitimize their union. That Dowling sends Romeo and Juliet to Gretna Green, and to Lawrence the Blacksmith rather than Friar Lawrence, thematically aligns with the vulgarizing work of burlesque, given the locale’s negative reputation. What’s more, it also signals the extent to which social issues remain at the burlesque’s imaginative core. Per Gretna stereotype, Juliet’s parents concern themselves more with a suitor’s social prestige than his ability to make Juliet happy, a depiction that might typically elicit sympathy. Yet, such sympathy is incongruous with the work of burlesque, and so Dowling uses the Gretna elopement scene to undercut the seriousness of their relationship. Romeo informs the Nurse,

If she be on the wall, just after dark,
I’ll bring a ladder—won’t it be a lark?

'Twill then be night, you know we shan't be seen,
We'll take a cab, and go to Gretna Green. (66)¹¹⁸

The Nurse similarly characterizes the trip to Juliet:

If you'll be on the wall
This evening, something after night does fall,
Just tell your father and mother you're going to church,
then scamper off, and leave 'em in the lurch!
He bring the ladder—*hie* thee, there's a queen—
Hie thee to Gretna Green—*hie* to Gretna Green. (68)

Dowling incorporates colloquial language when representing the elopement as a “lark,” with the couple “scamper[ing] off” and leaving parents “in the lurch”; such rhetoric undercuts the solemnity or sincerity with which Shakespeare’s characters approach their union. This general elopement scene—with its nighttime ladder escape—would have been familiar to audiences of the minor theaters. Furthermore, the lack of frivolity and forethought here reads like one of the many popular portrayals of Gretna elopement. For instance, the prospective bride in the periodical poem “Gretna Green, or Marriage Fees” thinks of how Gretna represents unrestrained freedom from any impediment:

Parsons are laugh'd at; parents not much fear'd
.....
And thus:—you love a man, I care not whom—
Parents don't like it, therefore wish to spite you;
No matter, bid them both a kind adieu,
The blacksmith to your dear shall soon unite you. (lines 15-20)

Gretna Green’s influence negates that of any authority figure, one that might provide moral guidance and necessary control. Such figures literally become comical in their ineffectualness; they should be “laughed at,” with their cautions presented as “no matter.” Hutchinson provides a similar description of a “bold” woman, who, when her more timid sister and she elope with their lovers, belittles the other’s regret:

Her sister...laughed heartily at her fears,—thought it was one of the best jokes in the world...declared it would be mighty fun, so it would be, when they [their parents] discovered at home, that the cage was open, and the birds had flown. (264-5)

The “bold” sister characteristically downplays the situation’s severity, as well as misconstrues her parents’ response to their disappearance. This sort of flighty brashness aligns with how Dowling presents Romeo and Juliet’s attitude concerning their elopement. The trip to Gretna is a jaunt, a merry ride, and the familial and social consequences of their “lark” fail to register.

Romeo and Juliet’s trip to Gretna’s Lawrence the Blacksmith does little to provide a solemn or sacred foundation for their union. Shakespeare’s Friar Laurence represents Verona’s moral/community core, the neutral, if flawed, center in relation to the Capulet/Montague feud. As a man of God, he seeks to heal this rupture. Indeed, he agrees to marry Romeo and Juliet so that their “alliance may so happy prove / To turn [their] households’ rancor to pure love” (2.3.91-2). Dowling’s transformation of the Friar into a blacksmith borrows from popular Gretna lore, and in doing so, he critiques the sort of mercantile culture driving the basket-makers’ attempts to earn wealth and social status. The topos implies that Romeo and Juliet must go to some distant location in order to marry without parental approval—to the commercial wilds of Scotland, a place devoid of morals and ripe for insurrection. Yet, by transforming Friar Laurence into the colloquial Lawrence, the blacksmith, Dowling subtly shifts our critical gaze back to the Verona/Liverpool of this play, and its mercantile greed. He creates this alignment through an implied familiarity with Shakespeare’s original text. This connection pulls back into England’s center the blacksmith’s stereotypical vulgarity and greed. Dowling’s depiction draws directly from concurrent portrayals of the Gretna locale and those people employed by its marriage shops, aligning it specifically with their related critiques of the commodification of the marriage process.

We meet Lawrence busy with his actual blacksmith trade: “Of horse-shoes I must make two sets / For ‘squire’s ponies—pretty pets! / And then the cash I gets.” Upon the heels of this statement enters Romeo, seeking Lawrence’s marriage services. The blacksmith proceeds to parody Shakespeare’s “grey-eye’d morn” speech, where the Friar contemplates the Janus-like quality of poisonous plants (and, implicitly, all things): “Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied, / And vice sometimes by action dignified” (2.3.21-2). Rather than debating the medicinal or deadly powers of poison, contemplation thematically linked to the Friar’s later role in marrying the couple, Lawrence the Blacksmith directly considers his own role in the marriage business:

Although a smith my trade is,
I know that naught so vile doth live,
But to the earth some good doth give,
If it be strained through a sieve.
I splice young gents, and ladies.
And makes them virtuous by my vice.
My medicine is seldom taken twice,
Once will a life suffice. (69)

This rendition aligns Gretna marriage (as well as the splicing of couples) with the poisonous plants of Friar Lawrence’s speech. We may consider his actions “vice,” but they are instrumental in legitimating and legalizing couples’ unions that would otherwise remain invalid. The blacksmith does not specify what, exactly, he considers vice-like about his trade, whether it’s his role in marrying underage couples without parental permission or the act of earning money by it. He ultimately continues regardless of impediment, moral or otherwise.

From the opening scene, then, Dowling embeds the tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet* within a thoroughly nineteenth-century mercantile context, first establishing a social milieu both externally and internally divided over commercial rivalry and struggles over workers’ rights, and then drawing on the Gretna Green topos to illuminate the vulgar mercenariness of Juliet’s family,

a critique which reflects back on Verona (and English) society as a whole. These were perhaps the sort of artisans Dowling encountered while traveling between the docks, where the world's wares made their way to and from their destinations. While *Romeo and Juliet Travestie* appeared three years after *Othello Travestie*, these productions are still, for all practical purposes, social and cultural contemporaries. Although one could argue that Dowling's conception of the social issues underlying the Gretna Green plot evolved in the years between productions, we may still reasonably conclude that they both rest upon similar principles, given their temporal proximity to each other and to other examples of Gretna Green literature I discuss here and in the previous chapter.

Othello Travestie and Racial Mésalliance

An examination of Dowling's *Othello Travestie* illustrates this thematic similarity. Issues of racial identity and slavery obviously figure more prominently in *Othello*'s imaginative landscape, but related and contemporaneous social concerns interact with and illuminate this focus in a similar fashion as in *Romeo and Juliet Travestie*. They all share the same underlying concern over individual rights and social identity. Rather than making concerns over social stability, economic expansion, and the pretension of upwardly populations the central reason for incorporating the Gretna topos, Dowling's usage of it in *Othello Travestie* functions as a catalyst, an additive that increases the potency of his main racial critique. The Gretna topos most clearly relates to issues of consent and reason, but, as I have shown, it was also implicitly about social class and the ability of individuals to raise their social positioning, not through their own efforts, but indirectly through marriage. In *Othello Travestie*, Dowling makes use of this trope to instead comment on the place of blackness and racial otherness in English culture. The remaining section of this chapter will further explore this connection, first pointing out areas of

minstralization not fully discussed in previous studies and then mapping out the function of the Gretna topos in Dowling's critique of racial pretension. The interplay between these contexts makes for an even more pointed and damning critique, not just of the pretensions of blacks but of the attempts of many groups to occupy a more prominent or civically active place in England's social framework.

First performed at the Liver Theater¹¹⁹ in Liverpool in 1834, *Othello Travestie* is a contemporary of both the 1833 Slavery Act and Ira Aldridge's performance of *Othello* at Covent Garden. Dowling's portrayal of Othello illustrates the extent to which nineteenth-century theaters had attempted to divest black characters of their nobility and fearsomeness. As MacDonald explains, "Dowling's 'travestie' of *Othello*...operated in its turn as a reinscription of the white production of black people, in this case particularly black men, on English stages and within English culture at large" (232). Furthermore, she establishes race and slavery as the play's immediate context. Premiering in a city

which was home to Britain's oldest anti-slavery society but also one of the primary ports through which African slaves entered Britain and were shipped to the new world, Dowling's travestie was made possible by the racism and class anxieties stimulated by Caribbean emancipation. (233)

What MacDonald terms the "Aldridge phenomenon" "is contextualized by abolition and its aftermaths." It is shortsighted, though, to contain examinations of *Othello Travestie* to the contexts of slavery, abolition, and racial hierarchy; or rather, to not explore how the play's social contexts compounded Dowling's portrayal of blackness, even though MacDonald gives a nod here to issues of "class." This broader social and cultural arena is within the imaginative perimeter Dowling draws on to enact his burlesque.

Whereas actors on the 'legitimate' stage had ushered in an era of light-skinned Othellos in order to tend with his blackness,¹²⁰ Dowling makes blackness Othello's most prominent

feature. He draws on the historical context of slavery from the get-go, with his *Dramatis Personae* listing Othello as a “formerly an independent Nigger, from the Republic of Hayti” (1). This designation is evocative on several levels. It places Othello within the earlier context of the Haitian Revolution and the subsequent formation of the free Republic of Haiti in 1804. Dowling’s characterization of Othello in relation to rebellion, revolution, and black freedom might seem an odd choice for someone performing “the act of ‘othering’ blackness and reproducing it as a proper colonial subject” (MacDonald 233). As I will discuss, however, this initial portrayal establishes the subject position that Dowling’s subsequent characterizations will re-inscribe and contain. He doesn’t elide the contentious history of slavery and rebellion but instead changes its meaning and legacy to fit within nineteenth-century English conceptions of race. Dowling’s characterization allows for the imaginative creation of white supremacy within a post-slavery society, thus reinforcing conservative notions of a polygenetic racial hierarchy. Although Lorimer has urged us to consider depictions of blackness before midcentury as often ethnocentric rather than strictly racist (16), Dowling’s depictions clearly cross over into racist territory.

What’s more, the contexts of Haitian rebellion and slave emancipation cannot be viewed in isolation, but instead represent a Caribbean iteration of earlier American and French Revolutions, as well as reform movements more contemporaneous to *Othello Travestie*’s publication date, specifically regarding the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act. Indeed, Dowling’s *Dramatis Personae* lists Iago as “once a native of the Gaultee [or Galtee] Mountains, County Tipperary, Province of Munster, and Kingdome of Ireland.”¹²¹ This characterization functions as a distancing mechanism of what is threatening in Shakespeare’s original text. Dowling provides an exaggeratedly exact geographical positioning of Iago’s home, ending with an assertion of

Ireland's separation from England, as its own "Kingdome," despite the 1801 act of Union.

What's more, not only is this location a Catholic stronghold, but its nearby mountainous terrain further separates it from civilized England. Thomas Crofton Croker provides the following description of the Galtee Mountain in his *Researches in the South of Ireland* (1824):

Many of their glens and passes possess a sublime sterility that inspires feelings of awe and reverence. Masses of rock are heaped together in unprofitable bareness, clothed only with the humble lichen, and unyielding to vegetation, receive from year to year in vain the alternate changes of rain and sunshine. A stream, broken into several little falls, often foams along the center of these rugged defiles, or tumbles precipitately over a steep crag with ceaseless splash. (20)

Although Croker's intent here is to capture the sublime beauty of these mountains, their harshness, which proves unfriendly to vegetation, signals how we might interpret Dowling's depiction of Iago, who is from this specific area. Nature's inhospitality here perhaps ties into the tense political climate in England regarding its Irish citizenry. As we have seen, English/Irish relations had been strained in the years following the Irish Rebellion of 1798 and the 1801 Act of Union. Dowling's work on Liverpool's docks would have brought him in direct contact with the shiploads of Irish immigrants seeking work and refuge in Liverpool, or passage to somewhere else. Given the role of Orangeism in Liverpool society and politics, the Catholicism of many immigrants also might have prompted this association, exacerbating Iago's destructive potential.

Contemporary English politics, especially regarding questions of franchise and national identity, might have also played a role in this depiction. Only a minority of the Anglican Irish elite could enter Parliament as MPs, even though England granted Ireland nearly 130 Parliamentary seats after the 1801 Act. Only after the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act could Catholics officially hold parliamentary seats, and even after, the British government significantly increased the monetary minimum necessary to qualify for Irish Catholic franchise—from 40 shillings to 10£—a financial burden maintained until the 1832 Reform Act made this change

across the board. Dowling's transformation of Iago into an Irishman, then, in 1834 carries with it this context of civic exclusion and Parliamentary reform.

Even further, Dowling may have specifically objected to the 1829 Act, as evidenced by the 1826 Poll Book logging his vote in the parliamentary election of representatives for the Borough of Leicester, of which Dowling is listed as a "Non-Resident" (*London* 61). Dowling cast his vote for the eventual winners—Sir Charles Abney Hastings and Robert Otway Cave—the two Tory corporation appointees. Simon Harratt reports that Hastings remained staunchly opposed to Catholic relief throughout his career, and voted against any measure allowing them expanded Parliamentary rights ("Abney Hastings"). Yet, his running mate Robert Otway Cave, a native Irishman, only tempered his more liberal views on the Catholic Question for his 1826 nomination, taking an "intermediate course" in order to "avoid defeat." In 1829, Cave finally reversed his neutral stance, instead pledging to support the broad issue of Catholic emancipation and specifically taking up the cause of Daniel O'Connell, a key figure in Irish emancipation efforts. He also refused a bid for re-election in Leicester. After passage of the 1832 Reform Bill, Cave became representative for Tipperary and remained a staunch advocate of Catholic and Irish rights until his death in 1844 (Harratt, "Otway Cave"). That Dowling, who had voted for Otway in 1826 and would surely have been aware of his parliamentary record, should represent Iago as hailing from the same County as Cave's most recent parliamentary seat perhaps points to a denouncement of the Catholic/Irish cause and all who supported it. Dowling might align Cave's legislative and ideological changes with Iago's malevolent machinations, which send Othello's immediate community into violent chaos. This move also reveals Dowling's interest in parliamentary debates regarding social issues, which existed in the same temporal and discursive space as those of slavery, a trend he continues in the body of his text.

Indeed, Dowling's portrayal of Othello helped establish the English minstrel and blackface tradition previously discussed. As Lindfors explains, the play's run at the Liver lasted for fifty nights, this "an usually long run." Even further, the Strand Theater in London produced it in 1836, a year before *Romeo and Juliet Travestie* appeared there in 1837, and it played for 107 nights, and an astonishing six-hundred nights over the next twenty years (191, n. 12). *The Era Almanac's* "History of the Strand Theater" (1871) concludes, "The success of *Othello Travestie* gave the Strand a reputation for this kind of entertainment which it has never since maintained" (10), thus indicating that Dowling's *Othello* represents a pinnacle in the theater's production history. Given the popularity of this play, then, we can look to its depictions of blackness as influential to nineteenth-century conceptions of racial otherness as a whole, especially regarding the genre of blackface minstrelsy.

Instead of the well-spoken and respected military hero, Dowling's Othello speaks the language of minstrelsy, a move that connects him to the racist associations of that theatrical tradition. Lindfors provides an example of such Negro patois in his discussion of Charles Mathews, whose impression of the "African Tragedian" is a "bumbling performer," a buffoon who spoke in dialect, mixed and mangled famous lines...and incorporated a negro folk song...into his rendition of Shakespeare" ("Ira" 145). Thus, in the hands of the "African Tragedian," Hamlet's ubiquitous "To be" soliloquy, for instance, morphs into the following: "To be or not to be, dat is him question, whether him nobler in dem mind to suffer or life up him arms against one sea of hubble bubble and by opossum (oppose' em) end em" (qtd. in MacDonald 235). This mode of minstrelization represents the "spectacle of race" (Ziter 609) typified by such performance, which "reveals mass culture in the act of 'othering' blackness and reproducing it as a proper colonial subject" (Macdonald 233). It bespeaks low intelligence and a

lack of theatrical skill, characteristics that Dowling clearly integrates into his own *Othello* adaptation. Thus, when Othello explains to the Duke how his marriage to Desdemona came about, he sings to the tune of “Very noble Massa”:

’Tis true she lub him werry much
‘Tis true dat off him carry her,
And dat him for her is such ,
‘Tis werry true him marry her. (8)

This transformation in language alone ties Othello to the ridiculous, inept, and uneducated figure of blacks popularized in minstrelsy. One of Shakespeare’s Othello’s most impressive qualities is his rhetorical skill, the finesse with which he apprises the Senate of his marriage, for instance. In this scene, Iago robs Othello of this capacity by inciting his jealousy, and his fluid capacity for self-expression breaks down, for example, when he falls into a sort of trance or epileptic fit in 4.1:

Lie with her? Lie on her when they belie
her. Lie with her! Zounds, that’s fulsome. Handkerchief—
confessions—handkerchief! To confess and be hanged for his
labour. First be hanged and then to confess. I tremble at it.
Nature would not invest herself in such shadowing of passion without
some instruction. It is not words that shake me thus. Pish! Noses,
ears, and lips. Is’t possible—Confess? Handkerchief? O devil! (lines 35-41)
[He] falls in a trance

Othello’s pain, passion, and jealousy become so intense here that he loses the capacity for self-control and self-expression. His language becomes unhinged and stilted, as evidenced by the use of dashes. He recovers from this initial fit but at times of great stress continues to regress, culminating in his famous and enigmatic proclamation of “Goats and Monkeys!” to Desdemona while standing amidst friends (line 251). Shakespeare represents Othello’s linguistic and emotional breakdown as tied to his loss of faith in Desdemona and the possibility of her infidelity. As Garber explains, “Loss of language here, as elsewhere in Shakespeare, is

emblematic of loss of humanity” (612), and Iago’s machinations prime Othello for the violence he must later enact against Desdemona. This verbal regression is brief, however, only foreshadowing the brutality Othello later commits.

Dowling’s linguistic changes affect the entirety of Othello’s role and signify the hero’s natural mental capacity. As MacDonald tells us, “Dowling’s changes work to forestall every opportunity for his Othello to display discursive power within its sharpened vocabulary of black and white, bound and free” (246). These changes create a purposeful contrast between Britishness/whiteness/Shakespeare and blackness/otherness. As Hornback notes, “That this ‘Shakespearean English’ was depicted as essentially in opposition to ‘Negro English,’ so that a Shakespearean burlesque in blackface—or a performance by black actors—was constructed as an absurd amalgamation of extremes: eloquence and ineloquence, the beautiful and the grotesque” (153). Othello is not the only character whose language is lowered, but he is, however, the only one racialized as a result. Such examples do not just contemporize Shakespeare’s play through slang and topicalities but degrade and inscribe blackness as a racially inferior object of white creation.

Indeed, Dowling’s pointed and systematic lowering of Othello and, by proxy, black populations, actually goes so far as to imaginatively reinstitute black enslavement. His initial description of Othello locates the play at least after Haiti’s fight for independence, and it was performed directly after England abolished slavery in most of its own colonies in 1833. Yet Dowling transforms the world of Shakespeare’s Venice, and the Turkish threat that motivates calls for Othello’s military powers, into one in which slavery is still very much alive, and where Othello is actually a willing participant. “What Dowling alters, and must alter most radically,” insists MacDonald, “is...the character and motivations of the Moor himself” (246), and this

transformation represents an even greater change than the minstrelization of his language. Rather than employ Othello to help stave off Turkish invaders, the Duke engages Othello as a sort of slave driver, sent in to quell an uprising, even though he had indeed been “sold for slavery” (8) earlier in life. Cassio summons Othello to the Senate in scene II: “They told me to tell you the enemy is near” (5). Upon arrival, though, the Duke reveals the foe’s identity:

Would you believe it, sirs, the galley slaves
Are playing mags diversion on the waves—
Here’s one good gentleman—defend us heaven!
Says there’s a hundred and twenty seven.
And my letter says—the slaves that’s naughty
Amounts to full one hundred and forty. (7)

The use of galley slaves here is evocative. In general, it refers to the hard labor of manning the oars of a galley boat, a task often imposed as criminal punishment or, in this case, delegated to slaves. Many European countries made use of galley slaves—specifically France and those in the Mediterranean—but we also see a long history of North African countries capturing white, Christian slaves. While this reference most clearly relates to England’s most recent involvement in slavery, it might also hint at Shakespeare’s Othello’s Barbary past, and his potential status as non-Christian.¹²² Regardless, the work presented in this passage was “grueling and painful” (*OED*), and that Othello forces others to enact it shapes our perception of him.

By construing Othello as a slave master, a hired thug inflicting violent punishment on other enslaved populations, Dowling presents an even more vicious lowering than previously discussed.¹²³ The Duke’s instructions to Othello reveal this degradation:

What’s to be done, Othello? Try and whack ‘em,
Take all the troops—soldiers, you shall not lack ‘em.
Haste then away! Commence your work of slaughter. (7)

To be sure, Shakespeare’s Othello is a hired soldier, but he is also a war hero defending others against an invading foe. Here, Othello plays the hired brute, only necessary to his peers for

physical strength and a willingness to commit “slaughter” at another’s behest. Waters, in her discussion of Thomas Morton’s *The Slave*, explains that in some plays the “greatest condemnation is reserved for those Africans who have indulged in supplying the slave trade; it is made quite clear that a state of unbridled liberty [as a slave master] is considerably worse than existence under slavery” (49). Such productions call attention to the unnaturalness of natives who are compliant with and even a party to slavery. They perform an act that can be likened to some other lewd or perverse crime against one’s people or kin group, such as cannibalism or incest. Even further, Dowling’s re-inscription essentially requires that Othello reenact a former trauma, resulting in an almost complete evacuation of self. As the white ruler’s bully, he loses access to his own narrative of enslavement and freedom. Dowling purposefully draws attention to Othello’s Haitian past in the *Dramatis Personae* in order to neutralize its representative freedom and re-inscript black subjection onto its participants. Given Dowling’s temporal and contextual proximity to the 1833 Slavery Act and its surrounding discourse, the resultant populations of freed blacks become Dowling’s target of lampoon. By law, they may be free, but Dowling denies them equal status within England’s racial hierarchy. Indeed, for practical purposes, slaves weren’t actually freed until 1838, after the end of a failed apprenticeship system that Carl Campbell describes as “neither full slavery nor full freedom” (55), so the question of black subjection was still very much a part of the English cultural imagination.

Dowling continues this pattern of evocation and dismissal through his description of the slave revolt necessitating Othello’s help. Readers and audiences would have been well acquainted with the dangers of slave rebellion. Indeed, the Jamaican Christmas Rebellion occurred in 1831, which served as an impetus to the 1833 Act.¹²⁴ Knowledge of the plantocracy’s brutality became one of the main legacies of this rebellion, and Dowling’s

representation of the Duke is hardly favorable. This authority figure sends Othello to discipline and bring to order the galley slaves because of his own personal fears: “I shall be robbed and murdered by these chaps / If you don’t go and whack ‘em for me, p’rhaps” (10). He is cowardly in the face of danger and over-zealous with this violence when compared to his description of the revolt. As reported, the slaves play “mag’s diversion on the waves” (7). This phrase—“mag’s diversion” or “meg’s diversion”—connotes “boisterous behavior.” The name “Meg” also denotes a “course, unsophisticated, or unattractive woman” (*OED*). Dowling’s usage aligns the rebels with a humorously course female stereotype, thus degrading and feminizing them. If minstrelization appropriates the descriptive creation of black characters, thus emptying them of their unnerving or dangerous potential, then Dowling’s account of the revolt and Othello’s response works in a similar manner. Dowling’s reinscription of black revolt—transforming it into an easily subdued foolish game—divests it of its rhetorical and real-life potency. And on an analogous level, this treatment also tends to fears of a post-slavery English society concerned with where black individuals (and their disenfranchised corollaries) fit within it. Dowling’s depiction leaves no room for pathos or sympathy. All the subjugated individuals—from the slaves to Othello—are reduced in a way that negates the possibility of evoking pity or similarity. They are manifestly different and inferior.

In light of these elements, Dowling’s *Othello Travestie* provides a more layered minstrelization of race than previous studies indicate. Importantly, Dowling also supplements or compounds his degradation of blackness with that of the Gretna Green elopement plot, which aligns Othello’s racial status with social lowliness. From a theatrical standpoint, integrating the topos makes sense because of its place within the cultural imagination at this point. These two descriptive facets—discourse on blackness and Gretna Green—are not disjointed or separate but

work in tandem with each other, synergistically enhancing Othello's overall degradation. The Gretna topos's underlying concerns with England's social and economic change provide its discursive edge. Dowling melds two familiar plots—Shakespeare's *Othello* and Gretna Green elopements—with concurrent conceptions of blackness, enacting a nuanced and potent lowering of Othello and other individuals guilty of racial and social pretension.

When Brabantio seeks information on his daughter's whereabouts, Roderigo informs him, "Last, on their road, I'm told, to Gretna Green" (5). This direct reference marks only the start of Dowling's usage. He also includes the implicit subject positions and social implications of the Gretna topos, overlapping the burlesque's racial hierarchy with the social hierarchy associated with the Gretna elopement. Dowling includes the characteristic Gretna Green chase scene, with Brabantio spurring on a group of friends and police to apprehend the couple:

Rascals, bestir ye—see you overtake her,
Before the filthy black his wife can make her.
Follow—follow—that's good creatures,
Look in ev'ry coach you see.
For my daughter's beauteous features—
.....
Make her do whate'er you bid her,
Spite of all his spells and charms,
Whether maiden, wife, or widow,
Bring, oh, bring her to these arms. (5)¹²⁵

Shakespeare's play includes an analogous instance in Act 1, scene 1, with Brabantio inquiring if the couple is married, and he similarly spurs efforts to find them (lines 158-82). Both versions operate under the impression that Othello has used charms of magic on her, this supposedly the only justification, at least in Brabantio's mind, for Desdemona's behavior. Yet, Dowling winnows down the emotional complexity of Brabantio's original reaction, where the father vacillates between confusion and pity—"O unhappy girl!" (1.1.163)—and ire at Desdemona's deception:

O treason of the blood!
Fathers, trust not your daughters' minds
By what you see them act. (1.1.168-70)

In Dowling's version, Othello becomes the sole object of ridicule; he is the "filthy black" who has run off with a white man's daughter, and, at this point, Desdemona shares no part in the blame.

What's more, Dowling alters Brabantio's implied motive for seeking out the couple, not just wishing to find them, but also to stop the marriage, even if they must kill Othello in the process. In Shakespeare's play, the father hopes to apprehend the couple, perhaps even to have Othello charged with forcible abduction, but he operates under the impression that the couple is married, per Roderigo's information: "Truly I think they are" (1.1.167). Dowling's version leaves the couple as yet unwed. He draws on England's complex legal history regarding marriage and roots the play in its post-1753 English circumstances, even if the play's action remains in Italy. He implies that Desdemona is underage, thus preventing her from marrying at home without parental approval, a detail necessitating the trip to Scotland.

The incorporation of the Gretna topos also undercuts the legitimacy of the couple's affections. In Act 1, scene 3 of Shakespeare's play, Othello's recounts his courtship of Desdemona, explaining how the development of their romance took a winding path, evolved over afternoons of recounting his past travels and tribulations, with Desdemona as the sometimes-listener. The courtship culminates in her request to hear the stories in their entirety and her admission that these tales had the capacity to "woo her" (1.3.165). Desdemona tacitly admits to affection here; she is clearly not a passive, impassionate woman, and so she "with a greedy ear / devour[ed] up" Othello's stories, a description indicative of keen interest and active sexual appetite. She provides the "hint" (1.3.165) that prompts Othello to confess his love. If not

“half the wooer” (1.3.174), she is at least a ready participant. Othello and Desdemona apparently so deftly and affectingly recount the evolution of their love that listeners, comprised of respected Senate members, readily accept it as legitimate. Only Brabantio and those individuals with some ulterior motive (Iago and Roderigo) find it faulty.

As a Gretna husband, though, Dowling’s Othello comes under immediate scrutiny concerning his motivations for wooing Desdemona. Indeed, he seems to directly provoke suspicion, admitting to embellishing particular areas of his tales, spicing them up “sometimes [with] lilly lie” (8), or little/white lies. Given that Shakespeare’s Desdemona loved Othello “for the dangers [he] had passed” (1.3.166), an admission that some of these incidents might be false undercuts the foundations of her attraction. Othello is not steadfastly trustworthy, and Desdemona bases her attraction on mistaken or fallacious information.

Furthermore, Dowling accelerates the evolution of the couple’s relationship, depicting it as incredibly hasty. No solemn, serious occasion, the two simply run off together, a rash and ill-advised move. As Othello tells it, adapting the song “Yankee Doodle,” “Misse ask him all alone,” or asks to see him all alone, after which

him ask her wedder,
Him make de both two hearts in one,
Den off dem run together. (8)

Just as in Dowling’s *Romeo and Juliet Travestie*, the language here implies frivolity and lightness, presenting their relationship as built upon flimsy foundations. Desdemona’s version of events compounds this impression, thoroughly entrenching herself in the role of the unthinking, romantic, even forward girl of Gretna romance. Dowling actually grants Desdemona a certain measure of rhetorical agency, allowing her to tell her version of events rather than simply explain

potentially dangerous to romantic young girls. Othello's tale is so effective that Desdemona quite literally loses her senses, leaving her in a vulnerable state both physically and morally. *This* is Othello's magic: the lure of seductive narrative. Just missing falling into the fireplace, Desdemona wakes "sitting on [Othello's] knee," which, unless referencing a small child, connotes sexually charged physical proximity. Indeed, that Desdemona wakes in this position represents a sort of physical liberty that Othello takes with the unconscious and vulnerable girl. The situation's "MORAL" implies as much, warning female readers against "[sitting] on young men's knees," even if she did gain a husband by it (10). This final section reads like the sort of mildly didactic Gretna literature that provides tales of titillating action only to warn against those very actions. This moral also lends a meta quality to Desdemona's confession, in that she seems conscious of playing a particular role. She acts the part of the Gretna heroine (and wife) after these earlier physical encounters but warns that allowing such physical intimacy may lead to ruin instead, may force women into narratives with less pleasing outcomes usually amounting to shame and desertion. Desdemona's overall demeanor, however, and the fact that she *does* get her husband, ultimately empties this moral of its efficacy and potency. It feels forced, as if she provides it to suit the genre's requirements rather than because she truly cautions against such actions.

The foundation for Othello and Desdemona's relationship, then, rests on unstable or superficial ground. While Shakespeare emphasizes the power of mutual passion to overcome obstacles (the separation of war and social / racial prejudice, for instance), as MacDonald tells us, Dowling "concentrates on belittling the nature of the bond's power." Referencing Desdemona's courtship narrative, MacDonald explains how Dowling highlights Desdemona's admission of physical attraction in Shakespeare's original play but denies it the ability to stand in for or

accompanying any meaningful relationship. Thus, instead of having Desdemona proudly assert her passion for her husband, “Dowling's heroine sheepishly admits a helpless sexual attraction.” MacDonald’s point is that by belittling the relationship in this manner, Dowling rejects the possibility of its emotional and physical potency, aligning Desdemona’s attraction with a feminine weakness for mere physicality alone (247).

This evaluation of the scene is accurate, but I would add that Dowling uses the Gretna topos as his *mode* of critique, as an overlay that heightens the degree to which Desdemona’s affections prove superficial. A disparity in social rank, however, is the one thing needful to complete Dowling’s transmuted Gretna plot. Neither Shakespeare nor Dowling present a great economic or social disparity between the two lovers. Shakespeare’s Othello holds a revered military position, and all but a few characters view the match as admirable, even if the couple’s means of contracting it were not ideal. Although Dowling transforms Othello into a mercenary, he also lowers Desdemona’s social standing, her courtship narrative reveals her to be forward and vulgar. Dowling particularizes the woman’s “house affairs” (1.3.146), these of Shakespeare’s text, to the extent that she might be a servant rather than the Senator’s daughter. Indeed, Dowling’s Othello finds her in the kitchen, curling her hair, and the sheer physicality of the exchange forestalls any sort of idealization on the part of readers or audience members. It firmly entrenches Desdemona within the realm of real life and moves her closer to Othello’s own diminished social standing. Instead, Dowling presents the disparity between Dowling’s Othello and Desdemona as race and not class, implying a substitute deficiency—that of whiteness. In a sort of racial *mésalliance*, Othello’s blackness makes him an unsuitable match for Desdemona rather than low birth.

Scholars rightly attribute the subtitles of Dowling's Shakespeare burlesques—"as the law directs" and "According to Act of Parliament"—as taking jabs at the patent theaters' monopoly on spoken drama, and specifically Shakespeare. Yet, his works, as well as much of the Gretna Green literature of the time, came about in the wake of sweeping societal change, which Parliament often codified. After spending many months examining these burlesques and the social issues undercutting their Shakespearean plots, I find myself wanting to read the subtitles in another light. They could just as clearly reference the era's many legislative attempts to better accommodate ideals of equality, to varying degrees of success. We can view Dowling's plays as specifically interacting with the questions of identity and belonging undergirding such legislation as the 1829 Catholic Emancipation Act, the 1832 Reform Bill, and the 1833 Slavery Act, to name a few. His incorporation of the Gretna topos intertextually responds to them, ultimately questioning and rejecting the impulse of social reform occupying much of England at this time.

Notes

¹⁰⁷ Dowling's relations may have been better off. His obituary in the *Liverpool Mercury* lists Sir James Dowling as a cousin, who was knighted in 1837 and later became chief judge in colonial Sydney ("Births" 7). This branch of the family had numerous ties to the London newspaper and periodical world and was thus moderately well off, if not wealthy. According to the *Dictionary of National Biography*, Sir James Dowling's eldest son, Vincent George Dowling, worked as a journalist for the *Star*, the *Day*, and the *Observer* newspapers, and later served as an editor for *Bell's Life* and *Fistiana*. His son, Frank Lewis Dowling, also edited these last two publications (359).

¹⁰⁸ This account contains several inconsistencies. Nelson's onshore activity at Bastia occurred in 1795, the same year of Dowling's birth, making his participation impossible. Dowling more likely took part in the blockade of Toulon. According to *The National Archives* exhibition regarding the event, Nelson had been appointed Mediterranean commander-in-chief in 1803, where he was "tasked with defending Malta, Gibraltar and the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, and to prevent, and destroy it if it escaped, the French fleet at Toulon joining the French fleet at Brest," which was essential to Napoleon's forces and plans to invade England. The blockade lasted eighteen months. Nelson commanded the HMS *Victory*, but he also had ten "ships of the line and three frigates" at his disposal ("Battle"). I have been unable to discern on which ship, if at all, Dowling worked. One of Nelson's auxiliary ships, the HMS *Superb*, under the control of

Admiral Sir Richard Goodwin Keats, records a “George Dowling” on its list of medal awardees, and lists “Ordy” in the “Quality or Rank at the Time of Battle” section. Dowling, only eight at this point, may very well have gone by one of his middle names to avoid confusion with his father, Maurice, Sr. Furthermore, the station of “Ordy,” or Ordinary Seaman, refers to “a sailor of the lowest grade, ranking below an able seaman” (*OED*), a rank representing less than two years experience at sea. Dowling may have held such a position at this point, but making a more definitive conclusion proves impossible given the resources available.

¹⁰⁹ Milne breaks down its additions,

Back in 1821, when Prince's Dock was opened, Liverpool had nine docks with a total of just over 46 acres of enclosed water. This was almost four times the accommodation available half a century earlier, but was still dwarfed by developments in the next three decades. Through a combination of major new building and a number of reconstruction and modernizing projects on the existing estate, Liverpool opened about 4 acres of dock space in the 1830s, 50 acres in the 1840s and 72 in the 1850s. (67)

¹¹⁰ Several incidents late in Dowling’s career have been viewed as a tolerance of Orangeist activity, or at the least an inability to control them. On several occasions, Dowling failed to show adequate concern over annual Orangeist and Catholic demonstrations and meetings. In 1851, his apparent cover up of police brutality against Catholics (he retroactively changed accounts of what happened on official forms) prompted his resignation. Although members of the police were forbidden from being Orangemen, common thought held that a good portion of the Liverpool police at this time were sympathizers, and even Waithman’s name was listed as a member in an anonymous letter regarding the issue. Nead provides the most thorough account of these events and concludes that that work-related stress regarding the massive influx of Irish immigrants to his port exacerbated his already-deteriorating health, leading to a loss of control over the force rather than commiseration with them (129-49). Given the information available, his theory is likely correct, at least in part. Yet, Dowling’s earlier Shakespeare burlesques indicate, at the least, demeaning description regarding black and Irish citizens, as well as the working class. The truth of the matter is perhaps somewhere in between.

¹¹¹ James N. Loehlin discusses such reaction in the Introduction to the *Shakespeare in Production* edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, where he describes the perceived failings of the era’s Romeos, these too stately, mature, and brooding for the role (20-22), and the successes of its Juliet’s (22-31), whose womanliness and imaginative capacity wooed audience approval in an age when femininity and domesticity gained cultural and ideological currency.

¹¹² “History of the Strand Theater,” an article published in *The Era Almanac* in 1872, details the many legal troubles of the theater due to its lack of license from the Lord Chamberlain. Only in 1836 did this dispute finally get resolved, although the theater had intermittently, and often illegally, put on shows up until this point (9).

¹¹³ Dowling’s *Dramatic Personae* actually lists Tybalt as a “fireman,” which could relate to Benvolio’s description of him as “fiery Tybalt” (1.1.100). Later on, though, Ben Volio refers to

him as Capulet's foreman, Juliet later refers to Tybalt as "our surly foreman" (62), and Romeo calls him a "gruff foreman" (71), incidents which lead me to believe "fireman" is a typo.

¹¹⁴ Shakespeare's Mercutio insults Tybalt's name by calling him "Rat-catcher" and "Good King of Cats" (3.1.68, 70).

¹¹⁵ In Dowling also might subtly draw our attention to the controversial system of apprenticeship instituted in England's former slave colonies in 1833, which sought to transition former-slaves into productive citizens but essentially set up a continued system of exploitation under the same masters as before. See Kenneth Morgan's *Slavery and the British Empire* (194-8) for an overview.

¹¹⁶ By the mid-eighteenth century, productions of *Romeo and Juliet* had excised Rosaline from the plot, thus eliminating details that contradicted the depth of his affection toward Juliet. See Halio's "*Romeo and Juliet* in Performance" (58).

¹¹⁷ Dowling's text indicates Romeo sang his speech to the tune of "I've No Money" (62).

¹¹⁸ Dowling's text indicates that Romeo and Juliet sing a duet to the tune of "All's Well" (66).

¹¹⁹ Thomas Kaye provides the following description of this theater in *The Stranger in Liverpool* (1812): "This establishment is open during the winter months, and the representations are such as are given in the metropolitan minor theaters" (183). In *Memorials of Liverpool*, James Allanson Picton explains the effects of the pre-1843 patent laws on the venue. He mentions that this theater

was erected in 1829 by a Mr. Wilson, and leased by Messrs. Raymond and Hammond, two actors formerly connected with the Theatre Royal. Their proceedings were interfered with by the proprietors of the old theater, who under the old law [regarding patent] prosecuted their rivals, and convicted them in heavy penalties for the infringement of their monopoly. (166)

¹²⁰ Both Diane Henderson and John Glavin have written on fictional appropriations of *Othello* that actually whitewash Othello, here specifically in relation to Scott's *Kenilworth* and Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right*, respectively. In both, the emptying of Othello's blackness does not forgo the incorporation of Otherness into characters aligned with Othello. Thus, Henderson discusses how Scott creates a Scottish Othello, whose Highland heritage makes him literally and socially "peripheral" (18). Glavin takes up this point and illustrates how a whitewashed Othello, here specifically in Trollope's *He Knew He Was Right*, allows the writer to "reclaim [the original's] subtle psychological analysis and its rich social layering. The only thing missing is race, apparently the price to be paid for retrieving the rest" ("To Make" 36). These studies present a starting point for how to conceptualize Dowling's incorporation of the Gretna plot. Instead of casting Othello in a Gretna elopement by whitewashing him, Dowling uses a plot generally including white characters to actually heighten his critique of blackness, while also subtly exploring the social issues responsible for this more intense minstrelization.

¹²¹ “Captain Tipperary” is also the assumed name of the fortune-hunter in Stuart’s *Gretna Green* (1783). Here, Tipperary assumes the identity (and thus the social status) of his master, Captain Gorget, in order to woo an heiress and thus make his fortune. While I am not certain how well known this play and its characters would have been by 1834, Collier’s *The Blacksmith* was published this same year and directly borrows from Stuart’s earlier plot. Regardless, “Tipperary” has multiple negative associations by this point for individuals supporting social hierarchy, all of which relate to illegitimate social pretension or malicious intent. We can relate such portrayals back to debates over Catholic Emancipation, franchise reform, and O’Connell’s bids for Irish independence.

¹²² For more information, see Linda Colley’s *Captives: Britain, Empire, and the World 1600-1850*; Gibson et al.’s *Mysticism, Myth, and Celtic Identity*; Alan Jamieson’s *Lords of the Sea: A History of the Barbary Corsairs*.

¹²³ Dowling does not specifically critique nineteenth-century mercantile society in this section, as he does in his later discussion of Juliet’s family. However, as Waters notes, slavery represents its own sort of commercial instinct (35), with slave owners embroiled in human trade, and, through the work of slavery, helped supply England with the goods and material possessions spurring its economic growth. In this sense, then, the connection to the Gretna topos is subtle but appropriate.

¹²⁴ Also known as The Christmas Rebellion and the Great Jamaican Slave Revolt, this mobilization of slaves was only intended to be a strike, with slaves walking out in demand of better conditions and wages. Yet, after the refusal of their demands, a full-scale riot ensued, becoming the largest uprising in the British West Indies. British forces and the plantocracy easily subdued these efforts, and the death toll for the slave population was immense. The brutality used against the agitators prompted more serious abolition efforts. See Gelien Mathews’s *Caribbean Slave Revolts and the British Abolitionist Movement* for a detailed account of this revolt.

¹²⁵ Dowling’s text indicates these lines are sung to the Air of “Follow, Follow” (6).

¹²⁶ Dowling’s text indicates Desdemona sings here to the tune of sung to “Bonnie Laddie” (10).

¹²⁷ Mary Cowden Clarke’s version of Desdemona’s adolescence, in *The Girlhood of Shakespeare’s Heroines* (1850), also depicts Desdemona as susceptible to intrigue and romance. In this version, the character’s mother had frequently visited many of the poorer parts of town, in disguise, to administer charity. She kept these trips secret from her husband because he wouldn’t approve, but she did take Desdemona with her. From a young age, then, Desdemona developed a love of intrigue and secrecy. When she meets Othello, we are told that his stories are one of the main reasons she is attracted to him, but the surrounding circumstances tie her love to nineteenth-century fears concerning women’s reading and love of romance.

Conclusion

Reconsidering the Role of West-End Burlesques in the Evolution of Nineteenth-Century Conceptions of Blackness

In 1883, Orientalist Robert Cust, as quoted in Michael Pickering, was able to characterize blackness as follows: “The common form description of an African is that he is cruel, dirty, superstitious, selfish, a cannibal, and addicted to fetishism, human sacrifices, sorcery, and slave-dealing, besides being a drunkard, polygamist, a neglector of domestic ties, a liar, and a cheat.” Commenting on this laundry list of negative traits, Pickering muses,

The excessiveness of the denunciation here, the way it piles up, layer upon layer, racially designated negatives without seeming to topple over into nonsense, is a measure of the extent to which these congenially conceived characteristics had entered into common sense, had become accepted as “a common form description” of the African. (171)

The roots of such a description can be found, among many places, in 1830s *Othello* burlesques. By the 1880s, scientific racism had become entrenched within English conceptions of identity and social belonging, thus rejecting the place of colonial black subjects within the English nation. Included in the second half of Cust’s list, however, after “besides,” is the “common form” description of a working-class male, as it was stereotypically conceived, in addition to that of an African. Written on the eve of universal male franchise—awarded in 1884—perhaps Cust’s list doesn’t “topple over into nonsense” because it is essentially an amalgamation of two stereotypes, the alignment of which had yet to lose its imaginative potency because the issues that engendered it were still evolving. To be sure, Cust doesn’t specifically mention the working class in this instance, perhaps because the link between it and racial otherness had loosened after the rise of popular Americanized minstrel productions. Yet, this imaginative connection remained, here perhaps cropping up in relation to discussion of blackness within the discursive timeframe of universal male franchise reform.

When we consider 1830s *Othello* burlesques in their immediate contexts, their contribution to concurrent discourses of race and class becomes apparent. Indeed, as Cust's statement indicates, this pairing retained its cultural relevancy because issues of class and race—of inclusion and exclusion—still held sway in the cultural imagination, especially in attempts to shore up the seemingly weakened structures of social and racial hierarchy. To be sure, such burlesques had much to do with lampooning and critiquing the theatrical and moral pretensions of the patent theaters; the bombastic, dull, or stylized acting of the likes of Macready, Kean, and Siddons, for instance, as well as the managers' increasing interest in historical accuracy, made them the oft-deserving targets of ridicule. Yet, my investigation also reveals a marked conservatism in both Westmacott's and Dowling's burlesques regarding the breakdown of established hierarchies and the extent that the English national identity could accommodate demands for the legitimation and enfranchisement of repressed or discriminated against populations. Enlightenment thought, revolutions abroad, industrial/commercial growth, and colonial expansion all played a part in testing the boundaries of Englishness and the extent that individuals could take on this identity and occupy a legitimate place within its social and civic spheres. I see my examinations of *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* and *Othello Travestie* as case studies in how the burlesque genre imaginatively tended with these ontological and epistemological questions of inclusion and exclusion.

What I take away from this study is that the 1830s was a pivotal, heady, and dynamic time in English history, and, in many ways, the burlesque genre is perfect for studying it. Issues of race and class are just two of many nineteenth-century concerns imbedded in productions. Yet, since the 1832 Reform Act and the 1833 Slave Emancipation loomed so large within the

English cultural imagination, examination of how *Othello* burlesques interact with concurrent discourses regarding these issues is especially important.

As I have mentioned, most scholars present T. D. Rice's "Jim Crow" sketches as some of the first to incite racially separatist portrayals of blackness within the English cultural imagination, sparking an evolution in conceptions of polygenetic racial otherness as a whole. For the most part, such conclusions are correct because no other blackface minstrel act attained such widespread popularity with so many people from different pockets of society. Such success, in part, relates to Jim Crow's catchy song and dance, which became a national phenomenon in much the same manner as the more recent song and dance Gangnam Style, by Kpop star Psy, which spawned innumerable parodies and impersonations. According to Waters, the "Jim Crow" act's success also relates to its portrayals of blackness and the reflexive superiority of whiteness/Englishness implicit in such representation. I also tentatively suggest that another reason for Jim Crow's widespread popularity, and for the more focused, elite appeal of other similar performances of blackness—such as *Othello, the Moor of Fleet Street* and *Othello Travestie*—has to do with the intersections of race and class apparent in the latter group.

As we have seen, the manner in which these *Othello* burlesques presents blackness and the working class, or upwardly mobile populations, would have appealed to the general target audience of West-End minors, which as a group held conservative, traditionalist notions of social and racial hierarchy. And, the majority of these productions appeared on West-End minor stages, where as Rice achieved more widespread success. Thus, productions that figuratively contain the threat of populations seeking greater social and cultural legitimacy would and did meet with success at these venues. In the burlesques I study, the Not Only / But Also construction, which

renders both blackness and the working-class as mutually inferior, is in part responsible for its their appeal.

In other quadrants of the London theater scene, we don't see this same sort of racial characterization or a similar compounding of race and class. Indeed, the East-End and Surrey-Side minors would have been home to the exact populations on the receiving end of the West-End's biting comedy: the working class and middle-class reformers. I hypothesize that one of the central factors in the rise of Jim Crow mania across the board in English theater is that it provided a more clearly Americanized version of blackness that could be split off from England's own complex relationship with blackness, slavery, and poverty. English audiences of all classes could perhaps unite in a shared comic experience, one set in a slave-society in which they were not implicated and that lampooned racially other populations not caught up in debates regarding English identity and social belonging.

The *Othello* burlesques explored in this study would not have provided this same experience, and so we see performances of them generally contained within the West-End, even regarding the long-runs of Dowling's *Othello Travestie*. Although T. D. Rice had been performing his Jim Crow routine for many years in America before coming to London and touring the provinces, his audiences in the influential and fashionable West-End had been primed by earlier and contemporaneous productions of similarly racialized characters. Indeed, Dowling's incorporation of Negro dialect and other stereotypes of black populations within his *Othello Travestie* serves as an important corollary to T. D. Rice's own "Jim Crow" performances. Rice attended a production of Dowling's burlesque in Liverpool and used its plot as the foundation for his own *Otello*, produced in 1844 (Hornback 142), which transformed the basic social scene into an American one by "inserting blackface plantation elements and topical

issues” (Knowles 230, n. 12). Yet, his general conceptions of race prove more palatable to English sensibilities. Jim Crow’s broad appeal, in part, relates to its ability to attract (and not offend) a wide range of audiences.

Perhaps the exoticism and racial otherness of some black characters played a part in their success, or distracted audiences from the social critique presented in some performances. A look at the *The Era Almanac*’s “History of the Strand Theater” (1872) helps us explore this point:

The first great hit of the [1836] season was the burlesque of *Othello!* (*according to an Act of Parliament*), which, reflecting the struggles of the management to meet the requisitions of the law, tickled the humor of the playgoing public of that day amazingly. A previous travesty of the tragedy written by Colley [Charles] Molloy Westmacott, had been produced two years before at the Adelphi, and condemned. That brought out at the Strand, May 16th, 1836, was written by Dowling, the Superintendent of Police at Liverpool, where it had been produced by Hammond at his own theater there, and acted for fifty nights. (9)

I am interested in determining why Dowling’s play was popular, while Westmacott’s was “condemned,” but I have made little headway into the matter. Clearly the actors’ skill might have something to do with it, but I also theorize that Dowling’s extended use of Negro dialect played a role as well. Lindfors provides excerpts from several newspaper articles praising Hammond’s depiction of Othello. For instance, the *Athenaeum* concludes that the actor’s “burlesque acting in [the part] is one of the richest bits of fun which has shaken our sides for many a day.... Those who *don’t* wish to have a hearty laugh, had better not see this piece” (66; ellipses Lindfors’s). Not surprisingly, Gilbert á Beckett, referenced in the Introduction of this study for his harsh review of Aldridge’s Othello, roundly approved the piece: “For point, puns, and parodies it is unequalled, and nightly send home the audience with aching sides. Hammond, as the Nigger [note, not Othello], has added to the high reputation he has previous enjoyed” (qtd. in Lindfors 66-7). Whereas Westmacott’s burlesque only sparingly incorporates aspects of minstrel Negro dialect, Dowling’s portrayal is steeped in these elements, which seem to have greatly pleased

audiences and reviewers. Thus, although both plays remained generally within the West-End, perhaps Dowling's *Othello Travestie* found greater success due to its more racialized lampoon of Othello. Perhaps Rice's Jim Crow performances found popularity for similar reasons but earned even greater acclaim by dissociating issues of race from issues of class.

Clearly, this dissertation has explored only a small portion of West-End productions in the 1830s, and a much broader base of material needs to be considered to make a more definitive claim about the evolution of conceptions of blackness and the role of burlesques and West-End productions in affecting change. Yet, what is clear is that productions prior to Jim Crow display a similarly separatist, demeaning portrayal of black characters, but they perhaps lacked a wide appeal because of their similarly demeaning renderings of the working class and middle-class reformers who sought to make English society more respectable and equal. In this way, I hypothesize that issues of class were central to how people understood those of race, and that this connection requires further study if we are to better understand both.

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Vita

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