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SHAKESPEARE, RACE AND MINSTRELSY IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

Submitted to Swansea University in fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Shakespeare, Race and Minstrelsy in Nineteenth Century America

Abstract

This thesis explores the interface between Shakespeare and Blackface Minstrelsy in Nineteenth-Century America. Critics such as Eric Lott have noted the often mutually contradictory intentions and effects of blackface minstrelsy. For some it offered a racist lampooning of African Americans, while for others it broke the boundaries between black and white and could even be embraced as part of the anti-slavery cause. The myriad minstrel performances of Shakespeare's plays seem to intensify this tension. Some felt that Shakespeare - a symbol of 'Anglo-Saxon' superiority – was debased when performed in a 'Black' voice. Others welcomed the ways in which minstrel performances undermined English hegemony at a time when America was declaring its cultural independence. Thus, a 'highbrow' attempt to adopt and adapt Shakespeare as part of a project to define the parameters of a white American cultural identity in the antebellum era was countered on the minstrel stage by the blackface burlesques which were immensely popular across the whole social spectrum.

Drawing on commentaries by an array of writers, from the anti-slavery orator Frederick Douglass to the author and essayist Ralph Ellison, this thesis argues that a common cultural nationalist patriotism was shared by both the minstrel stage and the literary elite. Beginning with an analysis of the legitimate stage and minstrel adaptations of Shakespeare in nineteenth century America, the thesis proceeds to explore the presence and influence of Shakespeare and blackface minstrelsy in the works of canonical American authors. A series of distinct, by thematically related chapters, discuss the ways in which Harriet Beecher Stowe, Herman Melville and Mark Twain can be read in terms of this tension between highbrow and lowbrow articulations of an 'Americanness' in formation. The thesis foregrounds the ways in which these authors drew on Shakespeare and on minstrel conventions of masking and subversion in their novels. It is suggested that a study of the clash of the disparate and disguised voices within Shakespeare's plays and the melodramatic excess of the blackface minstrel shows allows us to explore the contested political forces at work in nineteenth century United States in new and revealing ways.

Declarations and Statements

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

Signed…….Oona M Crawford…… (candidate)

Date………31/07/2023…………………………..

STATEMENT 1

This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used, the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in footnote(s).

Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

Signed……..Oona M Crawford………………..(candidate)

Date………..31/07/2023……………………….

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1. Introduction

This is a journey to discover attempts to create a national cultural identity in nineteenth century America influenced by, but distinct from, its European, Anglo-Saxon parent from whom the nation had recently, in historical terms, won a War of Independence. Despite the political separation of the ways, Shakespeare was regarded as part of a common heritage to which America claimed ownership as an essential element of the nation's cultural identity. The early American writer Peter Markoe envisions such a universal entitlement to Shakespeare that became vital to later American appropriations:

> Monopolizing Britain! Boast no more
> His genius to your narrow bounds confin'd;
> Shakespeare's bold spirit seeks our Western shores,
> And gen'ral blessing for the world design'd,
> And, emulous to from the rising age,
> The noblest Bard demands the noblest stage.[1]

The nineteenth century legitimate stage in America leaned heavily on the works of Shakespeare to confer literary authority to the white cultural mainstream, an attempt at literary exclusion that was disrupted with burlesque irreverence on the minstrel stage. The wide-ranging genre of the plays that combined an array of verse, prose, songs, aphorisms, prayers and church and legal codes provided scope for alternative versions that

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[1] Peter Markoe, 'The Tragic Genius of Shakespeare; an Ode' in Peter Markoe, *Miscellaneous Poems* (Philadelphia, W. Pritchard & P. Hall, 1787), pp. 23-27, quoted in Kim C Sturgess, *Shakespeare and the American Nation*, (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 134.

rendered the plays relevant to culturally diverse audiences. When Shakespeare's plays moved from the page to the stage, his works became more accessible to a semi-literate population who, as in Shakespeare's time, could experience the energy and participate in the spontaneity of live performances. The bawdy and subversive genie that Shakespeare released out of the Puritan bottle meant that his plays could be adapted and made relevant to the citizens of an emergent nation. The elements of misrule also provided a mask for subversive political comment with the potential to shift and reconfigure traditional social values. Thus, in the light of the role of Shakespeare in the formation of an American cultural identity, it is necessary to understand why, and how, the most famous English playwright and poet had such a cross-cultural influence on the soul of the nation.

The works of Shakespeare arrived in the New World alongside the Bible brought in by the first wave of European immigrants, parallel texts deemed essential for the secular and spiritual guidance of the new colonists. Because of the penetration of the Bible through enforced Church attendance during the Reformation, the language of Shakespeare's plays would have a ring of familiarity from borrowings from the scriptures which added moral and emotional significance to his works. For instance, in *Othello*, Shakespeare references the Bible twenty-three times including "Keep up your bright swords." (*Othello*, I.1 .65), which closely matches "Put up the sworde into his place, (Matthew 26. 52) and "Put up they sworde into its sheath." (John 18. 11). This has led some critics to interpret *Othello* as a religious play, however, most of the Biblical references are spoken by the

villainous Iago which undermines a moral intent to the borrowings.[2] It is more likely that the resonances of the language conferred a richness and greater depth of meaning to Shakespeare's plays, a reverberation that contributed to their recognition and renown beyond the shores of England.

Initial Puritan resistance to the performance of Shakespeare's plays on the grounds of the scurrilous reputation of theatres was overcome however, when the plays were presented as of didactic and religious worth. For instance, *Othello* was first performed as a series of moral dialogues in Newport, Rhode Island in June 1761.[3] The significance of Shakespeare's drama in reaching out to, and enriching, the lives of a semi-literate population from the Court to the courtyard was also noted by the transcendental philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson in his essay "Shakespeare; or, the Poet" (1850).[4] However, while Emerson recognised that the people craved the joy of drama, he had a disdainful attitude to the theatre, so that while lauding Shakespeare as a philosopher and poet, he considered the dramatic merit as secondary. In his Journals and in a speech to the Saturday Club, Emerson is critical of Shakespeare's master of revels role, which he

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[2] Naseeb Shaheen, 'The Use of Scripture in *Othello*', Studies in English, New Series, 6. 11(1988), 48-62 (p. 50 and pp. 60-61) < https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol6/iss1/11>.

[3] 'Theatricals in Old Times', a bill reprinted from 'Mr Clapp's Record of the Boston Stage', *The Daily Dispatch,* Richmond VA. 22 Nov. 1852. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024738/1852-11-22/ed-1/seq-1/>.

[4]Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Shakespeare; or, The Poet' in *Representative Men: seven lectures* (Boston, Phillips Samson, 1850), pp. 187-216 (p. 189) <https://archive.org/details/representativeme00eme/page/188/mode/2up>.

considered shared “the halfness and imperfection of humanity.” [5]

Shakespeare was not in accord with Emerson’s philosophical dualism of nature and spirit, as he believed that the world still wants its poet-priest.[6] Ideologically hesitant regarding the genius of Shakespeare, Emerson aspires to carve a path of poetic independence from European influence in an oration entitled “The American Scholar” (1837) considered to be America’s Declaration of Intellectual Independence:

> Our day of dependence, our long apprenticeship to the learning of other lands, draws to a close the millions that are around us rushing into life, cannot always be fed on the sere remains of foreign harvests. Events, actions arise, that must be sung, that will sing themselves. Who can doubt, that poetry will revive and lead in a new age, as the star in the constellation Harp, which now flames in our zenith, astronomers announce, shall one day be the pole-star for a thousand years?[7]

Initially, Herman Melville also did not specifically seek literary inspiration from Europe either, stating that “Shakespeares are this day being born on the banks of the Ohio.”[8] However, in a moment of insight, two years

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[5] Quoted in Robert P Falk, ‘Emerson and Shakespeare’, *PMLA*, 56. 2 (1941), 532–43 (p. 542-43).
[6] Emerson, ‘Shakespeare: or, the Poet’, p. 216
< https://doi.org/10.2307/458965>.
(Emerson’s speech to the Saturday Club in celebration of the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare’s birth in 1864 is reproduced in *The Atlantic* September 1904).
[7] Ralph Waldo Emerson, ‘The American Scholar’, speech delivered at Cambridge, MA. before the Harvard Chapter of the Phi Beta Kappa Society, August 31,1837.
<https://la.utexas.edu/users/hcleaver/330T/350kPEEEmersonAmerSchTable.pdf>.
[8] *Herman Melville, Hawthorne and his Mosses by a Virginian Spending July in Vermont* ed. by Harrison Hayford (New York: The Library of America, 1984) pp. 1154-1171.
<https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf-library/Melville_Hawthorne.pdf>.

before writing *Moby Dick*, Melville unexpectedly became aware of the genius of Shakespeare as a universal literary ancestor relevant to all mankind:

> "Dolt and ass that I am, I have lived more than twenty-nine years, and until a few days ago never made acquaintance with the divine William. Ah, he's full of sermons-on-the-mount, and gentle age, almost as Jesus. I take such men to be inspired. If another Messiah ever comes, he will be in the likeness of Shakespeare. [9]

In a twentieth century echo of such a moment of divine revelation, author, poet, and cultural critic James Baldwin (1924-1987), having previously dismissed Shakespeare's works as irrelevant to the lives and experiences of African Americans, also had cause to reflect on the timeless, cross-cultural significance of Shakespeare's genius, in his essay "Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare". Baldwin explains why he had previously reviled the works of America's adopted literary hero: "I condemned him as chauvinist […] His great gallery of people, whose reality was as contradictory as it was unanswerable, unspeakably oppressed me."[10] Baldwin initially perceived Shakespeare's language as an alien instrument of black cultural oppression, until he went beyond the words and the diction and actually heard what was being spoken. While Baldwin may initially have found Othello a bit dubious: "what did he see in Desdemona?", he came to understand that Shakespeare's language and philosophy, with its unashamed mingling of high poetic lyricism and low life vulgarity, represents a new discourse within a hostile environment, and that it spoke

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[9] R G Hughes, 'Melville and Shakespeare', *The Shakespeare Association Bulletin,* 7. 3 (1932),103-112 (p. 103). < http://www.jstor.org/stable/23675773>.

[10] James Baldwin, 'Why I stopped hating Shakespeare' in *The Cross of Redemption, Uncollected Writings* (New York: Vintage, 2010), pp. 68-69.

to all people from all ages and backgrounds with the open-mindedness to listen without prejudice.

The works of Shakespeare were adaptable, lyrical, memorable and through the fusion of universal themes, historical borrowings, and topical allusions, they provided cultural cohesion for an evolving and diverse American population in search of a national identity. Shakespeare's influence permeated every level of society in nineteenth century, America made accessible mainly through performances of the dramas in the theatres of the major cities, peripatetic troupes crossing the nation, and the burlesque minstrel parodies, but also from printed texts, recitals, newspaper, and periodical reviews and from pulpits and political pronouncements. The quote "Othello's occupation gone" was employed ubiquitously in newspaper reports, advertisements, police cases and tall tales to denote any loss of possession, personal, political or economic. Historic American Newspapers carry regular notices for upcoming theatre productions and reviews of Shakespeare plays which were very popular in the 1840s and 1850s as part of a mixed bill of entertainment, with the minstrel burlesques, which include parodies of the better-known Shakespeare plays, so much in demand that the Christy Minstrels played every night in New York for over five years, with reports of houses crammed to suffocation.[11]

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[11] 'Theatrical and Musical', *The New York Herald.* 27 March 1850. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1850-03-27/ed-1/seq-2/>.

1.1. Shakespeare and The Legitimate Stage

During the nineteenth the legitimate stage in America appropriated Shakespeare plays to promote white patriarchal values, to assert American nationalism and to create an elevated cultural identity. Ironically, this involved inviting well-known British actors over to America to attract audiences and raise the status of theatre productions. Initially, the plays were part of a protracted night of entertainment which included farces performed by the same company. The mixed bill included dances, songs and interludes intended to appeal to wide cross-section of the population, with audience participation a contributory factor in shaping the performances. In a reciprocal theatrical exchange, Edwin Forrest America's most prominent actor set sail for England in September 1836 to perform a range of leading Shakespearian roles on the English stage. Although initially well received by English audiences, his loud, bombastic style of acting lost favour, at odds with the refined, classical performances of his British counterpart William Charles Macready. Their different styles of acting symbolised a growing transatlantic divide that symbolised a theatrical war of cultural independence. The theatre war exploded on the streets of New York on May 10, 1849, in the Astor Place riot, focused on rival performances of *Macbeth* by Forrest and Macready on the same night. The theatrical grudge was stoked by Forrest's hypermasculine patriotism, which acted as a catalyst for civil unrest battling for the cultural and democratic soul of the nation. As a result, the classical English Actor William Macready was hounded off the

recently renovated Astor Opera House stage and forced to cut short his American tour and return to England.

The legitimate stage then became the domain of American actors who, led by Forrest, appropriated Shakespeare plays to reflect American national pride and independence, which paradoxically, split the nation along class, race, and ethnic lines. This separation gave rise to dedicated theatres in the 1850s, and a rise in the number of minstrel troupes, who established their own venues in New York, while also touring their shows extensively, and to great acclaim, around the country.[12]

Newly refurbished theatre venues targeted more refined audiences, to which the legitimate stage responded through edited versions of Shakespeare's plays. Based on rehearsal copies and prompt books inherited from the English stage, Shakespeare plays were appropriated to uphold white patriarchal values, achieved through focus on the famous speeches and the dramatic action that spotlighted the leading male actors of the day. The role of women and minor characters were cut down or erased, as well as the subtext of misrule, alterations which, according to Herman Melville sacrifice "those occasional flashings forth of the intuitive Truth that make Shakespeare, Shakespeare.[13] Such slanted interpretations detached the plays from a contextual and historical significance, which reduced the

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[12] See *From Travelling Show to Vaudeville Theatrical Spectacle in America 1830-1910* ed. by Robert M Lewis (Baltimore & London, John Hopkins University Press, 2007), Introduction, pp. 13-14.

[13] Hayford, ed. *Herman Melville, Hawthorne and his Mosses.* (Melville's appreciation of the dark side of Nathaniel Hawthorne's writing first appeared in *The New York Literary World*, August 1850, which Melville compared to the insinuations within Shakespeare's plays that gave meaning to the darker characters).

relevance of the plays to dramatic presentations. The modifications of the legitimate stage productions of Shakespeare's plays amounted to a form of social propaganda to reinforce the dominant cultural narrative at the expense of the socially excluded, a theft more often assigned to the minstrel stage masquerades to demean their cultural significance and political impact.

The influence of the prompt books affecting the way Shakespeare plays were performed is discussed in more detail in part 1 of chapter 1, which indicates how the plays were edited and censored to create versions that would project an idealised, but unrepresentative, image of American cultural identity. The elasticity of Shakespeare's works, which allowed them to be manipulated for propaganda purposes, was also demonstrated through performances of *The Merchant of Venice* during the Nazi era. In a version at Vienna's Burgtheater in 1943, the Jewish moneylender Shylock was portrayed as a contemptible clown, stripped of all humanitarian traits, which encouraged audience sympathy for the Nazi anti-Semitic progrom.[14] Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels favoured an uncritical aesthetic appreciation of works of art removed from controversial political interpretation. Similarly, nineteenth century productions of *Othello* in America were slanted because of the propaganda potential of the play to promote an anti-miscegenation message which, as in the case of the Nazi version of *The Merchant of Venice*, conformed to the racist doctrine of the

[14] Ludwig Schnauder, 'The most infamous Shakespeare Production in History? *The Merchant of Venice* at Vienna's Burgtheater in 1943', *Shakespeare en devenir*, 9 (2019). <https://shakespeare.edel.univ-poitiers.fr:443/shakespeare/index.php?id=865.>.

dominant political order. According to Charles B Lower, theatre audiences in the American South had no problem with *Othello* because they regarded plays as enchantment distanced from reality. Thus, *Othello* suited this call for the dramatic and the exotic which highlighted the charisma of the leading actor, and the eloquent verse, disconnected from allusions to contentious racial politics.[15]

However, nineteenth century appropriations of *Othello* on the legitimate stage reveal the ultimate dilemma for white patriarchy of trying to merge sympathy for white patriotic values through the character of Othello, while constrained to play down his vulnerability to the forces of white racial oppression, characterised by the malevolence of Iago. The paradox is satirised in *Huckleberry Finn* through the imitation of the bombast of Edwin Forrest by the theatrical counterfeit the Duke of Bilgewater in his minstrel-style travesty of a soliloquy that misquotes lines from *Hamle*t muddled with *Macbeth* and *Richard III.* [16]

As the century progressed the portrayal of *Othello* on the legitimate stage became a barometer of perceptions of white identity. The bullish masculinity and intense passion of Edwin Forrest's portrayal of Othello, which reflected the assertion of American cultural independence, was superseded by the brooding, introspective interpretation of Edwin Booth later in the nineteenth century. The performative shift suited the cooler

[15] Charles B Lower, 'Othello as Black on Southern Stages, Then and Now', in *Shakespeare in the South: Essays in Performance,* ed. by P C Kolin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983), pp. 199-228.
[16] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (London: Penguin, 2003), chapter 21.

aspirations of refined audiences, but it also illuminated a society polarised by bitter class and cultural animosity.

As the century progressed, Othello's costume, the stage direction, and light makeup, and the aesthetic eloquence of the actors were employed to increase Othello's distance from his African ancestry and skin colour. The 'whitening' process was partly a response to new theories of scientific racism, that claimed to prove the hereditary inferiority of the African race, which was used to justify slavery and racial segregation.[17] According to Michael D Bristol, during the postbellum period, without such whitewashing employed by Booth and other leading actors "a performance of *Othello* would have been not so much tragic as simply unbearable, part farce, part lynch mob." [18] The performative imperative has parallels with the impossibility of an interpretation of *The Merchant of Venice* that showed sympathy for Shylock during the Nazi era, which would also have been suicidal rather than imprudent.

Edwin Booth's Othello was more refined than any other theatrical version, to the extent that Othello's blackness was imitated and objectified. Avoiding controversy over race in legitimate stage performances of *Othello* implicitly sanctioned the continuation of slavery and racial segregation, which aligns such 'whitened' versions of *Othello* with Charles Grayson's long

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[17] Maurius Turda, 'Race, Science, and Eugenics in the Twentieth Century' in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics,* ed. by Alison Bashford & Phillippa Levine (Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 62-79.
[18] Michael D Bristol, 'Charivari and the Comedy of Abjection in "Othello"', *Renaissance Drama,* 21(1990), 3-21 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41917258>.

poem *The Hireling and the Slave* (1855).[19] To illustrate the literary exploitation of blackness in Grayson's poem, an article in the *New York Tribune* carries a review from *The Charleston Courier,* which claims that "a bright illustrious age of glorious sunlight is about to dawn upon the intellectual twilight of the United States, where the poor and despised race is to furnish both material and inspiration, inaugurated by the South, rescuing literature from the fanatical inspiration of a Whittier, a Sumner, a Seward, and the rabid outpourings of *Tribune* editor Horace Greeley." [20] The sardonic tone of *The Tribune* article mocks this new literary art of pro-slavery paternalism from the South which objectified "the poor and despised race to furnish both material and inspiration." While echoing the satirical style and social relevance of blackface minstrelsy, the didactic political message of Grayson's *The Hireling and the Slave* lacks the opposing forces of transgression and compliance intrinsic to the comic subversion of the minstrel burlesques and the Jim Crow songs and verses.[21]

The reason I include this scathing *Tribune* critique is because it illuminates an eagerness by Southern authors to assert a distinctive literary voice that attempts to intellectually justify pro-slavery attitudes. On a national scale America was always conscious of its lack of a distinct literary

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[19] William J Grayson, *The Hireling and the Slave* (Charleston: John Russell, 1855). <https://archive.org/details/cu31924021989607>.

[20] 'Dawn of a New Literature', *New-York Daily Tribune*, 25 June 1855. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1855-06-25/ed-1/seq-4/>.

[21] W T Lhamon Jr, *Jump Jim Crow, Lost Plays, Lyrics and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2003).

identity, the South, not only wounded by Northern condescension, but also conscious of the Rev. Sydney Smith's comments in the *Edinburgh Review* (1820) "In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book?" [22]

William Grayson's epic 1576-line poem *The Hireling and the Slave* demonstrates a patronising attitude to cultural inclusion by ventriloquising African American voices, a literary style aligned to the 'lightly tanned' versions of *Othello* on the legitimate stage, which performed an artistic impersonation of blackness where Othello's African roots were diluted or eradicated by the rehearsal copies and prompt books. It was left to more radical American writers and performers to pick up the cultural baton of folk art to create a progressive and representative cross-cultural genre which, through interaction with the same elements within Shakespeare's plays, carved an innovative path to American cultural distinction and literary acclaim.

1.2. Shakespeare and The Minstrel Stage

While the legitimate stage appropriations of Shakespeare's limited their social relevance, the minstrel burlesques extended cultural

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[22] Sydney Smith review of '*Statistical Annals of the United States of America*' by Adam Seybert, *Edinburgh Review*, 33 (1820), 69-80, quoted in Robert E Spiller, 'The Verdict of Sydney Smith', *American Literature,* 1.1 (1929), 1- 13 (p. 6).
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2919726.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A30fd389d0185cd99f23d7c9045c516fd&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1>

inclusiveness through the creation of a hybrid performative style that involved borrowings and exchanges from the African American and European folk traditions to street art, Shakespeare, and the elite literature of the cultural mainstream The minstrel stage responded to the legitimate stage's hijacking of Shakespeare in the interests of the dominant cultural narrative by performing travesties that blurred social divisions, controlled and contained political unease, and tapped into political contradictions and strange alliances. The inclusive style, comic wit and irreverence proved a huge success across the whole social spectrum and across the whole nation. On 10 July 1848 *The New York Herald* reported that The Christy Minstrels ended a "triumphant and unexampled career" playing every night for ten months with no falling off of audiences before setting off on a national tour.[23]

According to the folklore historian William J Mahar of the 25,000 burlesques of all types published between 1850 to 1900, between two hundred and five hundred are thought to be blackface "Ethiopian" ones, which included many parodies of Shakespeare plays.[24] The great tragedies

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[23] Theatrical and Musical – The Christy Minstrels, *The New York Herald,* 10 July 1848. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1848-07-10/ed-1/seq-3/>.

[24] William J Mahar, 'Ethiopian Skits and Sketches: Contents and Contexts of Blackface Minstrelsy, 1840-1890' *Prosects*, 16 (1991), 241-279 (p. 248) (As much as being the object of discussion and debate, Shakespeare was also a site of contention with the very status and reception of his plays connected to debates regarding the very nature of America's emerging culture and society).
<doi: 10.1017/S0361233300004543>.

including *Hamlet, Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Richard lll* were muddled together and compressed into comic sketches, songs and dances to satirise social anxieties, especially race and ethnic tensions, but also temperance, politics, women's rights and scientific invention. As Lawrence Levine states in the prologue to his book on the emergence of a cultural hierarchy in America, it is a mistake to assume through a twenty-first century lens that Shakespeare is all about his poetry, his philosophy, and his wisdom. A modern perspective of Shakespeare's plays could discount the disruptive role of the clowning, spectacle, and vulgarity which, as in the minstrel burlesques covertly perpetuated folk traditions of concern to the socially marginalised. The blackface burlesques provided an alternative platform for ownership of Shakespeare's cultural authority, for factions whose representation was being eroded by legitimate stage versions of Shakespeare's plays and by the disdain of the literary elite.[25]

As much as being the object of discussion and debate, Shakespeare was also a site of contention with the very status and reception of his plays connected to debates regarding the nature of America's emerging culture and society. It is therefore not surprising that Shakespeare's plays, especially *Othello,* were drawn into debates about race, one of the most contentious subjects during the era as discussed in this thesis.

Thomas D Rice's *Otello – A Burlesque Opera* (1853) was one of the most popular blackface burlesques of *Othello* providing a starring role for Rice's

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[25] Lawrence W Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow, The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 11-82.

iconic blackface character Jim Crow. Others included G W H Griffin's *Othello Travestie,* (late 1860s), and *Dar's de Money* or *Desdemonum.* The *Othello* burlesques follow in the footsteps of Maurice Dowling's *Othello Travestie, An Operatic Burlesque Burletta,* which T D Rice first saw performed in London in the 1830s. Dowling's travesty satirised race and class anxieties connected to the industrial revolution and the abolition of slavery in the colonies, which continued a tradition of cultural resistance and political comment through masked satire. Rice transferred Dowling's burlesque format to the American stage changing the emphasis of *Otello* to focus on American anxieties related to highly contentious issues of racial equality and cultural amalgamation.

The minstrel stage disorder continues a long tradition of resistance that speaks to the culturally marginalised, and which resonates with misrule enacted by the bawdy elements within Shakespeare's plays. The minstrelsy cross-fertilisation with Shakespeare indicated that there was more wit and wisdom in blackface burlesques, and more farce in Shakespeare, even in the tragedies, which also distorted and blurred class and race divisions. Stephen Johnson in the introduction to *Burnt Cork* notes a deliberate intent of flexibility in minstrel performances aimed at provoking divergent audience responses to race, from fascination to repugnance, or more likely, he suggests, an overlapping amalgamation of the two.[26] Such repulsion to racial amalgamation is satirised graphically in T D Rice's *Otello – a Burlesque*

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[26] *Burnt Cork -Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy* ed. by Stephen Johnson (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), p. 3.

Opera, where Otello and Desdemona's bifurcated baby has one side of his face painted black and the other side painted white.[27]

Blackface minstrelsy, through exchange with African American indigenous and European cultural traditions, incorporated marginalised voices into the American cultural fold, the exception being African Americans, against which white Americanness was defined. Thus, theatre historian Hazel Waters is critical of minstrelsy counterfeit condemning Ethiopian impersonators such as T D Rice and Charles Mathews for what she considers their unnuanced mimicry of African Americans. [28] However, in defence of minstrelsy, Bayard Taylor argues that the contribution of minstrel devices of social inversion and vernacular language is culturally progressive because, rather than looking to the mainstream to establish a cultural identity, the marginalised areas inhabited by the socially subordinated are mining richer and more original seams.[29] Ralph Ellison also argues that the accuracy of the vernacular speech patterns is a positive factor because it infiltrates the dominant culture, even if it also exploits blackness for comically detrimental purposes.[30]

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[27] Thomas Dartmouth Rice, 'Otello – A Burlesque Opera' in W T Lhamon, Jr, *Jump Jim Crow, Lost Plays, Lyrics and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 343-383.
[28] Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage – Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[29] Bayard Taylor, *Eldorado or Adventures in Path of Empire*, (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1949), p. 206. <https://archive.org/details/eldoradooradvent008605mbp/page/n9/mode/2up>.
[30] Ralph Ellison, 'What Would America Be Like Without Blacks', Essay, April 6, 1970, from Teaching American History <https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/what-america-would-be-like-without-blacks/>.

The black response to the appropriation of Shakespeare by the legitimate stage, which was designed to reinforce white patriarchy and cultural privilege, was led by the African American actor Ira Aldridge. In 1820, while performing burlesque versions of *Hamlet* and *Richard III*, Aldridge was hounded off the stage of the Grove Theatre in New York by angry white mobs unable to tolerate black theatrical equivalence, which was perceived to be a threat to assumptions of white racial hierarchy. Aldridge left America for Europe where he achieved success both as a serious Shakespearian actor, and as a performer of minstrel parodies. The African Roscius, as he was known, engaged with the hugely successful minstrel format in sketches such as "Liberty and Equality or The American Slave Market".[31] The black stage burlesques of *Othello* and other Ethiopian skits added another layer of racial ambiguity, where Aldridge, because of his African heritage, was able to doubly subvert white mechanisms of racial representation projected onto the mask for purposes of blurring cultural boundaries. Aldridge's double masked blackface minstrel performances enacted a form of reverse passing to assert agency over his racial identity. In effect, Aldridge stages a robbing of the robbers, to which, following a performance by his troupe in Franklin Hall in Philadelphia, a reporter from the *New York Clipper* remarked "We should like our white minstrel friends to see one of these performances, they would profit it by it." - which of

[31]Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage – Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 65 (See also chapter 3, 'Ira Aldridge and the Battlefield of Race' and chapter 4 'The Comic and the Grotesque: The American Influence').

course they did! [32] However, the exchange was not all one-way traffic, as the blackface minstrels perform traces of a journey of cultural resistance linked to the rituals and pageants of our ancient forebears, folklore myths and ballads, also embedded within the subtext of misrule in Shakespeare's plays.

The wit and vitality of the burlesques was also an intentionally irreverent response to the conceit of American literature produced during this period, described by Edgar Allan Poe as "one vast perambulating humbug", comprised of imitations, deception, and plagiarism. For Poe, this was a failed attempt to establish a national literary identity founded on the premise that it was good because it was American.[33] Such pride in the prosaic created an obvious opportunity for the mocking satire of blackface masquerade. Racist caricatures were grotesquely exaggerated and then undermined to disrupt white patriarchal control of American identity. Cross-cultural exchanges embraced the polyphonic format of Shakespeare plays in the cultural melting-pot to breakdown and reshape gender, race, and class divisions.

As in the novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain and Herman Melville, self-conscious awareness of the satirical mask is vital to the

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[32] 'Negro Minstrelsy' in *New York Clipper*, June 13, 1863, quoted in Jack Shalom, 'The Ira Aldridge Troupe: Early Black Minstrelsy in Philadelphia', *African American Review*, 28. 4 (1994), 653–658 (p. 657). <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/3042230.pdf>.

[33] Edgar Allan Poe review of L A Wilmer, *The Quacks of Helicon,* in *Graham's Magazine,* August 19,1841, quoted in Lara L Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature: Fraudulence and Antebellum Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
Proquest ebook.

cultural significance of the of the minstrel burlesques, which if responded to at face value, and through a racially conscious, twenty-first century lens, would rightly be considered shocking and offensive.

1.3. Shakespeare and Minstrelsy Influence on American Literature

1.3.1. Harriet Beecher Stowe

Uncle Tom's Cabin is an ironic satire that was influenced by the performance and masking devices employed by the minstrel stage. Aligned to the minstrel stage burlesques, Stowe's novel engages with melodrama and caricature to imitate, but also to mock the chauvinistic principles upon which racial and gender identity are built. The novel also embraces Shakespeare's wisdom and wit in farcical episodes that parody the mainstream culture's appropriation of the Bard to assert cultural authority. The clash of dialects and incongruous religious and literary sources in *Uncle Tom* alludes to a fluctuating and divisive political context over which the socially marginalised have no voice and little control. [34]

Stowe constructs stereotypes that conform to white racist assumptions only to demolish and subvert them. Stock characters range from happy-go-lucky plantation slaves such as Andy and Sam, to the clown-like Topsy, and the affected Zip Coon posturing of Adolphe, Augustine St Clare's valet, all of whom comically conform to, but also usurp, assigned racial expectations. The range of interwoven perspectives, which combined with the ironic voice of the unreliable narrator, challenge and transform gender and racial hierarchy in the interests of humanity and social equality.

[34] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, (Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Classics, 1995).

Stowe wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in response to the sin and inhumanity of slavery, but also because of what she perceived to be the inadequate response of the Church. She was motivated by a heartfelt empathy for the pain and suffering endured by families torn apart by a legally sanctioned system, which at best, the Church only tacitly opposed. The satirical narrative style of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* through its focus on strong-minded women and the direct action of the enslaved, overturns gender and racial expectations to attack the abuses and cruelty of slavery condoned by the Church and the State to maintain political, economic, and religious hegemony. The forthright perspectives of Mrs Shelby, Mrs Bird and the Quaker Rachel Halliday are thus given respect and prominence to indicate the neglected significance of women's role in society. Also, through Eliza's dramatic runaway, and Cassy and Emmeline's daring escape from Legree's plantation, women are depicted as courageous and defiant in their resistance to gender and racial oppression. Stowe's championing of the role of women indicates that, as well as the anti-slavery objective of her novel, there was a parallel imperative to promote the cause of women's rights.

Stowe is also particularly disparaging towards the hesitancy of the Church, which she felt had a moral obligation to oppose slavery. In *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe includes Church Conference debates on slavery, which remained largely unresolved because of fears of alienating Southern church goers, and because of a reluctance to engage with political controversy. While passing resolutions that opposed slavery in principle, in practice the Church was pusillanimous. Stowe's outrage at the Church's lack

of leadership is addressed obliquely in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through opposing and contradictory perspectives on religion in the discourses between the cynical plantation owner Augustine St Clare, his puritanical Northerner cousin Ophelia, and his pampered church-going wife, even though all their lives are comfortably cushioned by slaves. While satirising religious double-standards on slavery, Stowe does not wish to undermine the authority of the Church, which she perceives as fundamental to the Christian identity of the nation. Thus, Uncle Tom and little Eva are entwined in the narrative as central, positive role models in support of Christian values to counterbalance Stowe's fears of a secularised nation corrupted by slavery and commerce. [35]

The novel acknowledges inconsistent attitudes to slavery that do not conform to political, religious, or geographical divides. In the South there existed an interdependence between masters and slaves despite slavery, while in the North there existed a repulsion towards the enslaved, despite political support for the abolition cause. The polyphonic exchanges in *Uncle Tom* depict the racial contradictions and complexities, which resonate with the ambiguous portrayal of race and gender on the minstrel stage. The disorder continues a tradition of folk resistance that aligns with the misrule in Shakespeare's plays that mirror and mock the social anxieties and foibles of the main protagonists.

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[35]Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'The Influence of the American Church on Slavery', in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: Jewett, Proctor & Worthington, 1853), Part lV <https://archive.org/details/DKC0201/page/n204/mode/1up?view=theater>.

As was initially the case with his criticism of Shakespeare, James Baldwin was also unable to grasp the underlying satire and medley of incongruous and unreliable voices in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* In 'Everybody's Protest Novel' Baldwin dismisses *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as sentimental and self-righteous, describing Stowe as an impassioned pamphleteer who says little more than that slavery was wrong. Baldwin then accuses Stowe of leaving unanswered, and unnoticed, the only important question, "what it was, after all, that moved *her* people to such deeds"'. [36] My italics here shows how Baldwin assumes that Stowe identifies with, and even supports, white male patriarchy, from which she is also an impotent outsider as a disenfranchised woman. However, as an author, she, like Mark Twain and Herman Melville, embraced minstrel farce and Shakespeare's subtext of dissenting misrule to expose the inequities and abuses of a racially prejudiced, misogynistic, patriarchal caste system.

A mark of the cultural success of satirical novels such as Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and Stowe's *Uncle Tom*, is that they hit a white racist nerve. This was particularly the case for *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* which caused outrage in the South where Stowe's novel was not only banned but instigated a flood of anti-*Uncle Tom* plantation literature. [37] It is significant that of the pro-slavery novels written between 1850 and 1860, sixteen of the twenty-six

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[36] James Baldwin, 'Everybody's Protest Novel', in *Notes of a Native Son,* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1955), pp.13-23 <https://eng794spring2010.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/baldwinprotest.pdf>.

[37] Jennifer Jordan-Lake, *Whitewashing Uncle Tom's Cabin*: *Nineteenth-Century Women Novelists Respond to Stowe*. (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2005), introduction.

known novels were written between 1852 and 1854, most of which were attempts to repudiate *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* In this tide of Southern literary outrage, blackness is objectified and framed through a lens of assumed white superiority, where the enslaved are patronised, and caricatured to endorse a caste system deemed essential to the plantation economy of the South. William Grayling's *The Hireling and the Slave* (1856) is a long verse version, with Stowe the subject of several barbed stanzas. Southern novels, and Grayson's verse, glorify an agrarian arcadia and the idyllic of the slave, with his simple joys, and happy relations with his master. Such a scene of plantation contentment is also set up in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* only to be emphatically torn down when Tom is sold away from his family and eventually auctioned off to the brutal slave driving Legree. Unlike the literature emanating from the South in defence of slavery, *Uncle Tom* lays bare the inhumanity of the chattel system concealed beneath a façade of picturesque landscapes, patronising sentimentality, and polite manners.[38]

The blackface burlesques, along with Stowe's innovative, multi-vocal satire became subject to a process of whitewashing by the dominant culture in the postbellum era, their political significance diluted into vaudeville acts and sentimental 'Tom shows' devoid of immediate and historical relevance. Considering the global reach and success of Stowe's novel, it is ironic that Southern pro-slavery literature has been so effective in distorting the anti-

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[38] Thomas D Jarrett, 'The Literary Significance of William J. Grayson's 'The Hireling and the Slave'', *The Georgia Review*, 5. 4 (1951),487–494 (pp. 489-490)
<www.jstor.org/stable/41395073.>.

slavery intent of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* to the extent that the pejorative jibe 'Uncle Tom' is an accepted term for passive subservience to white authority accepted across the racial divide, with the character of Topsy reduced to an amusing clown, stripped of her guileless insight and racially disruptive significance. Such a biased misrepresentation, which disregards Tom's indomitable courage and integrity, reflects the successful resurgence of Southern white patriarchy that followed the end of the period of Reconstruction. (1865-1877). This involved rewriting the narrative of the Confederate War as an affirmation of the South's culture of pseudo-chivalry and honour, while discounting the significance of emancipation and the abolition of slavery. [39] The romanticised version of Southern history known as 'The Lost Cause' is satirised in the burlesque endings of Mark Twain's novels, through the racial tyranny of Tom Sawyer in *Huckleberry Finn*, and the courtroom defeat of Roxy's cradle-switch plan in *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* Twain's literary denouements portray the collapse of a viable alternative to white racial hegemony in a world institutionally polluted by the toxic effects of slavery and social inequality.

Not only did Stowe's novel provoke a response from Southern pro-slavers, it also inspired a riposte from anti-slavery campaigner Frederick Douglass. In the chapter on *Uncle Tom's Cabin* a comparison is made between Stowe's novel and Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* to

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[39] G W Gallagher, & A T Nolan, *The Myth of the Lost Cause and Civil War* History (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010) Michael Paradis, 'The Lost Cause's Long Legacy' *The Atlantic*, June 26, 2020 <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2020/06/the-lost-causes-long-legacy/613288/>.

illuminate the impact of the different narrative styles on issues of race and gender politics, and how the social position, race and gender of the authors affected the reception of their works. Compared to Stowe, Douglass engages less with minstrel devices of ironic satire and hierarchy inversion. Douglass instead employs a vary-perspective narrative style that gives egalitarian agency to the slave mutineer Madison Washington, who is portrayed as an unsung founding father of the American Republic. His bid for freedom against the oppressive force of slavery is perceived in the same light as the struggle for American liberty in the War of Independence. As an ex-fugitive slave and orator of great renown, who advocated immediate abolition and racial equality, Douglass was determined to assert racial autonomy, which is reflected in the democratic narrative style of his literary response to *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. The erudite language of the heroic slave Madison Washington aligns with that of his sympathetic white compatriot Mr Listwell, who becomes an abolitionist after overhearing Madison's poetic cry against bondage.

Douglass was in favour of achieving equality through interracial integration and co-operation, but without conceding racial independence, as demonstrated in his collaboration with the Hutchinson Family Singers with whom Douglass toured in England in 1845. Unfortunately, this interracial alliance did not meet with success for the abolition cause, as the American press reviews praised the singing, while condemning, or ignoring, the anti-slavery content of the song choices.

While Douglass acknowledges the social impact of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for its "liberating spirit of humanism [which] ideally subsumed and eventually overrode the stifling spirit of race" he came under critical attack from the African American soldier and journalist Martin Delany for depending on the support of philanthropic abolitionists to achieve black emancipation.[40] Stowe's contribution to the anti-slavery cause was scornfully dismissed by Delany who wrote "I beg leave to say that she *knows nothing about us*…neither does any other white person – and, consequently, can contrive no successful scheme for our elevation." [41] Civil rights campaigner Martin Delany favoured achieving racial progress independent of white participation, a form of reverse segregation, where he also endorsed black emigration to Central America and the West Indies.[42] In an example of cross-racial irony, this was also a view proffered by Stowe in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a positive option to racial self-determination and renaissance for Topsy and the fugitive slave George Harris and his family. Douglass was more conciliatory than Delany however, through pursuing a path that aspired to the dominant culture's view of manliness and literary refinement, Douglass was accused of colluding with those responsible for racial oppression.

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[40] W E Martin, Jr, *The Mind of Frederick Douglass* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1984), p. 96.
[41] Quoted in ibid, p. 80.
[42] *Frederick Douglass Paper*, April 1,1853, cited in Robert S Levine, '"Uncle Tom's Cabin" in Frederick Douglass' Paper: An Analysis of Reception', *American Literature*, 64. 1(1992), 71-93 <www.jstor.org/stable/2927489>.

Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* is also highly critical of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on the grounds of the appropriation of black cultural identity, an accusation of cultural theft that was also aimed at the minstrel shows. For Morrison, Stowe's novel amounts to a theft of Africanness where she acts as an enabler by speaking for Africans in a way that revealed more about the fears and anxieties of the author than the slavery experiences of the black population.[43] This argument of borrowed Africaness could also be applied to Shakespeare through his depiction of Othello, as a blackface representative of racial otherness. However, that does not take count of Othello's role as a cypher for a range of excluded Tudor age minority factions, such as witches, Catholics, Ethiopian gypsies, and vagrants, whose demonisation by the white Protestant oligarchy allied them to Othello's racial otherness. Stowe also deployed a satirical mask of narrative detachment to target religion as well as social injustice that included gender and racial inequality. Because attitudes to slavery and abolition were so contentious and divisive when Stowe wrote her novel, the racial issues swamped her allied concern for women's rights as integral to an ethical and Christian social democracy.

On the surface, it is paradoxical that a white, middle-class, female author, by taking on the ironic mantle of the blackface mask, should have a greater impact on the anti-slavery cause than an African American ex-fugitive slave with direct experience of slavery. The reason for this may lie in Stowe's deployment of popular minstrel conventions, which I will discuss in the body of the thesis.

[43] Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Others* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2017), pp. 14-15.

1.3.2. Mark Twain

The novels of Mark Twain and Harriet Becher Stowe also challenge cultural elitism through entanglement with minstrel stage burlesque strategies that resonate with Shakespeare's social commentary subtext. Mark Twain's vernacular narrative and burlesque patterns are employed as weapons to disrupt the elite complacency of the literary establishment, from whom he felt alienated as a Southern migrant, but whose respect he also courted. The dichotomy created a literary tension reflected in Twain's writing, his sincere attachment to Southern life as indicated in *Huckleberry Finn*, *Life on the Mississippi* and through his letters, vying with his ambition to be taken seriously by the literary elite. Twain was sympathetic to enslaved African Americans with whom he was raised, and whom he respected and regarded as friends. He was familiar with, and influenced by their storytelling, drawing on this experience in *Huckleberry Finn,* to challenge racial assumptions and religious teachings. Twain was also influenced by the comic repartee and sketches performed by travelling minstrel troupes who used exaggerated vernacular and caricature as a mask to ridicule and undermine entrenched attitudes to race, gender, and class.

Mark Twain was an enthusiastic fan of the early minstrel shows famously declaring in his autobiography "If I could have the nigger show back again in its pristine purity and perfection, I should have but little further use for opera." The narrative style of *Huckleberry Finn* comically

juxtaposes standard and colloquial dialects which identifies, inverts, and confuses class and racial hierarchy. Farcical burlesque sketches that imitate minstrel repartee, also hijack the highbrow authority of Shakespeare to debunk the class and racist assumptions of white patriarchy. The critic Eric Lott notes that "[f]or the rest of his life, Twain's imaginative encounters with race would be unavoidably bound up with blackface minstrelsy." [44]

Re-claiming the authority of Shakespeare is also integral to Twain's semi-autobiographical novella *Is Shakespeare Dead*?, a convoluted text that examines allegations regarding Shakespeare's authorship in order to suggest an authenticity to creative counterfeit. [45] The novella is also a challenge to the literary elite who define cultural worth based on reputation, even when there is uncertainty over authenticity, as Twain implies is the case with Shakespeare.

Issues of ambiguous and dual identity are of concern to Twain, which relates to his love of the antebellum minstrel shows, whose comic routines illuminate the arbitrary nature of race and class divisions. In his later novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), Twain examines the nature and construction of identity through more complex class, race, and gender inversions. Originally an investigation into the effects of nature and nurture on the formation of

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[44] Eric Lott, 'Mr. Clemens and Jim Crow: Twain, Race and Blackface' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. by F G Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 129-152.
[45] Mark Twain, *Is Shakespeare Dead? From my Autobiography* (New York: Harper, 1999) <https://archive.org/details/isshakespearedea00twaiuoft>.

identity based on the near identical, dark twins, Angelo and Luigi, the novel morphed into a more complex arena of the effects of class, race, and gender stereotyping on the formation of identity. Through the cradle swap, which switches the racial identities of the babies, Twain examines the cultural and psychological tragedy of masked identity, afflicted by a repressive slave holding system, which contaminates both sides of the racial divide. The fate of Tom Driscoll, who passes as the white son and heir, but who is black on the inside, is entwined with the fate of the socially ostracised Northern lawyer Pudd'nhead Wilson. Tom's courtroom downfall, when he is unmasked by Wilson as both a murderer and a racial fraud, coincides with Wilson's acceptance into the higher echelons of Dawson's Landing white society. Pudd'nhead's role in exposing Roxy's attempt to usurp the racial hierarchy, makes him complicit in perpetuating a social order underpinned by the system of slavery. Twain's eventual capitulation to the racial hierarchy in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* reflected a pessimistic view of American life in the *fin de siècle* period, a disenchantment that coincided with the post bellum political context of the Black Codes and legally enforced racial segregation. During this era the minstrel shows were reinvented as sentimental family entertainment, with contentious political subjects watered down or removed, a theatrical reflection of the way in which Jim Crow became re-defined from the epitome of comic rascality to the emblem of reactionary racial segregation. Pudd'nhead's tragedy mirrors Twain's own dilemma of courting acceptance by the cultural elite, but at the expense of masking a socially unacceptable inner soul behind a screen of comic satire.

Disguised, and distorted by masquerade in his earlier novels, Twain reveals sympathy for duality, in *The War Prayer* (1905), a satirical attack on blind American patriotism and religious fervour used to justify American imperialism and military intervention. Considered by his family to be sacrilegious and damaging to his reputation, the prose poem was published posthumously in *Harper's Magazine* in 1916. Twain wrote that he had told the whole truth in *The War Prayer*, and that only dead men can tell the truth in this world.[46] Twain's semi-autobiographical *No. 44 The Mysterious Stranger* (1902-1908) was also published posthumously. Twain made several attempts to write *No. 44* which deals with the duality of the 'self', where the role of Satan is re-evaluated and amalgamated with an angel. The lifting of the satirical mask in *No. 44* reveals Twain's disdain for religious hypocrisy and racial hierarchy, which during his lifetime, could only be safely attacked through burlesque aligned to the ambiguity, comic disorder and disguise performed by the antebellum minstrels.

Not surprisingly, within a politically unstable context of racial conflict, controversy surrounds Twain's identification with the antebellum minstrels shows. Shelley Fisher-Fishkin in *Was Huck Black*? finds Twain's attitude towards minstrel shows difficult because, while he recognised that the rude caricatures were a misrepresentation of plantation life and the slaves that he grew up with, Twain still admired the crude humour and impudence of

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[46] Albert Bigelow Paine, *Mark Twain, A Biography: The Personal and Literary Life of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, vol. 3* (New York: Harper, 1912), p. 1234. <https://archive.org/details/marktwainabiogr02paingoog/page/n448/mode/2up>.

the blackface burlesques he recalled from his youth.[47] However, the authenticity gap is integral to the blackface minstrel delineators who "are apt to overdo the ebony" [48], where the focus on the mask acts as a means of drawing attention to a counter culture of authentic counterfeit. Twain's attitude to minstrel shows may be viewed as difficult and complex, as suggested by Fisher-Fishkin, but this is when the postbellum minstrel incarnations are regarded in the same light as the ambiguous, politically contentious, antebellum burlesques. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Twain was also critical of the vaudeville exploitation of minstrel shows regarding them as a poor imitation of a once great tradition of cultural resistance and irreverence perpetuating the folk memories and oral traditions that reach back in time to Shakespeare's age and beyond.

1.3.3. Herman Melville

Masking and disguise are central themes, and narrative strategies in works of Herman Melville. The chapter on Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* sees him direct his satirical pen to the confusing and creative art of disguise aimed at challenging class and racial hierarchies in order to create a more comprehensive and realistic American cultural identity. Although American blackface minstrelsy has been denigrated as cultural theft, in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Mosses,* Melville pays tribute to such

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[47] Shelley Fisher-Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press,1993).
[48] In *The Confidence Man*, 'the man with the limp' describes the minstrels in this way to indicate that they are not what they appear to be.

mimetic parody as paving the way to genuine creativity, "For mark it well, imitation is often the first charge brought against real originality." To add literary weight to his comments on the mimetic art in the Hawthorne review, Melville identifies Shakespeare as a prime exponent of the art of creative borrowing, hooted at in his day by contemporary playwright Robert Greene as that "upstart crow beautified with other bird's feathers." Undaunted by Greene's vicious criticism, Shakespeare, as well as borrowing from the works of Ovid, Chaucer, Holinshed's *Chronicles* and other playwrights, also re-worked Robert Greene's prose tale *Pandosto*, (the source material for *The Winter's Tale*). Shakespeare employed Greene's condescending insult as a creative incentive embodied by the invention of Autolycus, the irreverent minstrel charlatan in *The Winter's Tale.* Was Shakespeare then an Elizabethan Jim Crow, concealing a burlesque subtext of social comment beneath a mask of poetic verse and philosophical insight? Greene's accusation of artistic theft against Shakespeare suggests such an alliance with the minstrel tradition of irreverence, disguise, and imitation to mock the pretentions of the cultural elite.[49]

In the overlapping territory occupied by minstrelsy and American literature, the American cultural historian Robert Nowatzki identifies a national, masculine swagger in the works of Melville, which he claims is

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[49] Robert Greene, *Groatsworth of Wit Bought With a Million Repentance,* ed. by George B Harrison (London: J Lane, 1923), pp. 7-51 <https://archive.org/details/groatsvvorthofwi00greeuoft/page/50/mode/2up>.
(Greene's pamphlet was written on his deathbed where he accused Shakespeare of plagiarism, and a jack of all trades as Shakespeare was an actor, as well as a playwright).

echoed by minstrel performances. [50] This national pride is persistently exaggerated and mocked through the posturing of Jim Crow and Zip Coon, as well as in the complex and ambiguous exchanges depicted in Melville's satirical masquerade *The Confidence Man.*

The Confidence Man and his Masquerade (1857) was Melville's last novel. Rather than merely engaging with minstrel devices of satire and caricature, *The Confidence Man* is a collection of staged performances which masquerade as a novel. The exchanges feature the multi-disguised confidence man and convoluted role play, under the direction of the reflective cosmopolitan. To signal the masquerade, the first performance of the confidence man is enacted by the blackface avatar Black Guinea. In the double masking of blackface disguise and conman, one form of masquerade dissolves into another to enact the paradox of the alternative authenticity of counterfeit. In a later exchange the conman, now disguised as another stock character of aspiring American opportunism (a collector for Widows and Orphans), defends his earlier disguise as Black Guinea against accusations of counterfeit made by a limping man. The wry allusion to the hunched form of Jim Crow infers that everyone is an actor, where some openly exaggerate the deceit through focus on the mask, while others try to disguise the fact. The paradox topically invokes diverse reactions to William Thompson, America's

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[50]Robert C Nowatzki, 'Our only Truly National Poets: Blackface Minstrelsy and Cultural Nationalism', *American Transcendental Quarterly,* 20. 1 (2006), 361-378 <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/our-only-truly-national-poets-blackface-minstelsy/docview/222378057/se-2?accountid=14680>.

‘original conman’. [51] While some commentators believed that trust in fellow man should not be undermined by the actions of rogue operators, others were less forgiving, urging punishment for the likes of Thompson. Ironically, while Thompson suffered opprobrium, the unfettered capitalism on Wall Street was encouraged, and even admired. Melville blurs and satirises different aspects of counterfeit acts in the exchanges between the ‘soldier of fortune’ Thomas Fry and the quack herb-doctor pedalling his omni-balsamic cure-all. The contradictory motives and intersection between those who perform acts and those who act in performances resonates with Shakespeare’s “all the world’s stage.”, the implication being that everyone is a player, and that minstrel caricature draws attention to counterfeit as an authentic form of reality.

In Melville’s masquerade, the conman’s various incarnations employ complex layers of role play, disguise, satire, and ambiguity to unmask spurious claims of political, literary, and ideological authenticity by the dominant culture. Melville’s echoing of Shakespeare’s engagement with performed disguise in *Hamlet*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter’s Tale* as a means of individual and social transformation imparts significance to counterfeit as a unique hybrid art form, where “counterfeit presentment” paradoxically takes on the role of genuine literary currency. The enigma of performed authenticity also imparts credibility and significance by association to the socially disruptive role of the antebellum minstrel burlesques, which also

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[51] Johannes Dietrich Bergmann, ‘The Original Confidence Man’ *American Quarterly*, 21.3 (1969), 560–577
< www.jstor.org/stable/2711934>.

blur and realign constructed categories of race and cultural identity. The complexity and uncertainty of the exchanges on board the steamboat *Fidele* satirise a strange, fluctuating, and counterfeit social context, which depicts and deconstructs the paradox of freedom and democracy as defined by an oppressive social hierarchy which condones slavery and restricts the rights of minorities.

The novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain and Herman Melville are a testament to the culturally transformative power of engagement with the devices of blackface minstrel misrule which invoked an anachronous blend of incongruous source material that ranged from Shakespeare to tall tales, melodrama, old English ballads, African American songs and dances, European folk traditions and blackface burlesques. The disordered, disguised, and contradictory class and racial representations disrupted and reconfigured repressive gender, ethnic, race and class divisions that threatened to constrain and misrepresent an emerging American national cultural identity.

This process of disruption and reconfiguration of social order can be seen in heightened form in the debates surrounding nineteenth century performances of Shakespeare's *Othello*. With debates around slavery and abolition threatening to split the Union, the evolution of different performances of *Othello* during the nineteenth century seems a good place to begin exploring 'Shakespeare, Race and Minstrelsy in Nineteenth Century America'.

2. Shakespeare and Performances of *Othello* in Nineteenth Century America: Racial Implications

> He, in our ranks of patient-hearted men,
> Wrought with the boundless forces of his fame,
> Victorious, and became
> The Master of our thought, the land's first Citizen!
>
> Bayard Taylor [1]

> He wrote the airs for all our modern music: he wrote the text of modern life; the text of manners: he drew the man of England and Europe; the father of the man in America.
>
> 'Shakespeare; or The Poet', Ralph Waldo Emerson[2]

2.1. History – part 1

This chapter is divided into two parts. Part One looks at performances of Shakespeare on the legitimate stage, which evolved during the nineteenth century from popular mass entertainment into the realms of polite erudite dramas for selective audiences. Part Two explores the minstrel stage response, the cross-genre burlesque versions re-claiming Shakespeare as a dynamic aspect of an integrated American culture.

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[1] Bayard Taylor, 'Shakespeare's Statue, Central Park New York', *Classic and Contemporary Poetry,* Poetry Explorer.net <https://www.poetryexplorer.net/poem.php?id=10133079>.

[2] Ralph Waldo Emerson, 'Shakespeare; or, The Poet' in *Representative Men - Seven Lectures* (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, 1894), pp. 191-224. <https://archive.org/details/representativeme00emer/page/n11/mode/2up>.

Despite Shakespeare's association with the Old World, - he also played a central role in debates around race and culture in nineteenth century America. Indeed, it could be argued that the first performance of *Othello* in 1604 shares some parallels with performances in nineteenth century America relating in particular to the depiction of social alienation in an evolving political context, focused on Othello's blackface mask. In Shakespeare's time, Othello's mask of colour was employed cryptically to represent religious and social alterity, which included Catholics, witches and sorcerers and vagabonds who were demonised and excluded from the cultural mainstream. Outcast factions also included itinerant Egyptians (gypsies) who migrated to European cities, including London, during the reign of James I. In Shakespeare's play, Othello's blackface mask acted as a focus for anxieties connected to immigration and racial mixing that influenced attitudes to the gypsies who, like Othello, were initially perceived as exotic strangers.[3] The cultural demonisation that led to the downfall of the Ethiopian gypsies from noble outsiders to pariah status resonates with Othello's similar fate as the victim of discriminatory political and social scheming. The forces driving the creation of a racial underclass in seventeenth century England, as in nineteenth century America, were

[3] David Cressy, 'Trouble with Gypsies in Early Modern England', *The Historical Journal*, 59. 1 (2016), 45-70 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24809837>.

primarily economic connected to human trafficking feeding the burgeoning slave trade.[4]

The works of Shakespeare and The Bible were brought over to America by the first settlers, considered to be essential texts for spiritual and secular guidance. Initial Quaker opposition to the theatre was overcome when Shakespeare's plays were presented as morally instructive, a move which opened the floodgates to the accessibility of the plays. *The Daily Dispatch*, Richmond VA, November 22,1852 carries an old theatrical bill for such a recitation of *Othello.* This stated that on Monday evening, June 10,1761 at the King's Arms Tavern in Newport, Rhode Island will be delivered a series of 'Moral Dialogues' in five parts "depicting the evils of jealousy and other bad passions and proving that happiness can only spring from the pursuit of virtue." The article also notes that other dialogues will also be delivered "all adapted to the improvement of the mind and manners." Interestingly, one of the aphorisms associates blackness with crime, and not with colour, a moral message that blurs the racial divide and undermines the justification of slavery based on racial difference:

> Fathers beware what sense and love ye lack
> 'Tis crime, not color, makes the being black.[5]

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[4] James Walvin, *The Black Presence – A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555-1860* (London: Orbach & Chambers, 1971).
[5] 'Theatricals in Old Times', a bill reprinted from 'Mr Clapp's Record of the Boston Stage', *The Daily Dispatch,* Richmond VA, 22 Nov. 1852. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024738/1852-11-22/ed-1/seq-1/>.

The appropriation of Shakespeare's plays for a specific didactic agenda would always pose problems however, as the range of ambiguous and unreliable perspectives in the text allows for different interpretations. Thus, the spiritual hopes of the Puritans, which rested to some degree on Shakespeare's high poetic verse, were thwarted by the prosaic demands of the non-conformist immigrant population, who embraced Shakespeare enthusiastically for entertainment, as much as for enlightenment. Mixed audiences across the nation were gripped as much by the dramatic spectacles and bawdy subtext, as they were captivated by the flowing rhythms of the stirring orations. Consequently, the works of Shakespeare became integral to the cultural identity of the nation penetrating every level of the social spectrum, from the intellectual elite to the mass market. Engagement with knowledge of Shakespeare's plays acted as a ticket to American cultural assimilation, because as Lawrence Levine notes, "Shakespeare *was* popular entertainment in nineteenth century America" and "wherever there was an audience for the theatre, there Shakespeare plays were performed, prominently and frequently." [6] The coast-to-coast familiarity of Shakespeare plays on the stage, and on the page also provided ammunition for burlesque appropriations, which burst forth to amuse, outrage, and challenge traditional values that the edited and condensed legitimate stage versions promulgated.

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[6] Lawrence W Levine 'William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation', *The American Historical Review* 89. 1 (1984), 34-66 (p. 40) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1855917>.

The appropriation of Shakespeare plays on the legitimate, minstrel and the black stages acted as touchstone for political and cultural changes in America before, but particularly during, the rapid urban expansion of the nineteenth century. During the early colonial era, performances of the plays were popular because they made a strong visual and aural impression at a time when literacy levels were low. Theatrical presentations initially were unrefined, communal events on makeshift stages to socially diverse audiences, a nineteenth century echo of itinerant performances of morality plays and seasonal pageants that were a familiar feature of rural life during Shakespeare's time. Records show that Bath paid for at least four town plays each year from 1577-1598, and that from 1590 to 1603 Leicester had up to six companies each season, with Stratford-upon Avon visited by four companies in 1587.[7] One description of such an event, notes that as soon as the players arrived in a market-place of a small town, a crowd gathered, whereupon one of the actors "steppes on the crosse and cryes":

> All they that can sing and say
> Come to the Towne-house and see a play,
> At three o'clock it shall beginne-
> The finest play that ere was seene[8]

The Irish actor Tyrone Power, while performing in Natchez, Mississippi in 1835, observed people hurrying to the theatre on fine horses, wearing elaborate clothes that for him conjured up images of "the palmy days of The Globe and Bear-garden." The comparison aligns with a contemporary

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[7] Quoted in Alwin Thaler, 'The Travelling Players in Shakspere's England,' *Modern Philology*, 17. 9 (1920), pp. 489–514 (p. 514) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/433014>.
[8]Ibid, p. 505.

description of Elizabethan theatre attendance as “frequented by all sorts of people old and younge, rich and poore, masters and servants […] churchmen and statesmen.”.[9] The similarity between the mass-market, bear-pit, Globe audiences and the raucous early nineteenth century American versions suggests that Shakespeare’s spectators also participated vociferously with the performances. As originally performed, the burlesque elements would have been part of a culturally inclusive, multivocal, intertextual representation that democratic audiences could relate to on different levels.

The American stage developed rapidly during the nineteenth century responding to the demands of an expanding immigrant population, with many British actors travelling to America to take advantage of the theatrical explosion taking place in the urban centres across the nation. Theatre companies invited star performers from the British stage including the great acting dynasties such as the Kembles and the Booths, father and son Edmund and Charles Kean, as well as the renowned tragedian William Charles Macready, in order to establish an elevated theatrical tradition that would still appeal to mixed audiences.

Theatres survived by public demand because they served a need for entertainment and social interaction, which overruled the qualms of moral guardians and the educated elite. This included opposition from the transcendental philosopher and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson who, while idolising Shakespeare in print, regretted that his most acclaimed writings

[9] Quoted in Lawrence W. Levine, ‘William Shakespeare and the American People: A Study in Cultural Transformation’, p. 42.

were dramas “there was never anything more excellent come from a human brain than the plays of Shakespeare, bating only that they were plays.”[10] Henry Ward Beecher, ironically known as “the Shakespeare of the Pulpit”, and brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe, also preached against the theatre despite his sermons being compared to stage performances.[11] However, despite the misgivings of Emerson, Beecher and the American literary elite, which included John Quincy Adams, Walt Whitman and David Henry Thoreau, Shakespeare was embraced as a literary founding father:

> True, we have gained our independence, and gained our liberty, but we have dissolved only the political bonds, which connected us with Great Britain; though we have rejected her tea she still supplies us with food for the mind. Milton and Shakespeare [...] with their kindred spirits, have done and are still doing as much for the advancement of literature, and the establishment of a pure and nervous language, on this as on the other side of the water.[12]

Herman Melville, however, was less indulgent towards American dependence on English and European literature for cultural authority:

> But what sort of belief is this for an American, a man who is bound to carry republican progressiveness into Literature as well as Life?

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[10] *The Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson Vol. 8, 1820-1872,* ed, by Edward Waldo Emerson & Waldo Emerson Forbes (London: Constable, 1915) <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.95490/page/n11/mode/2up?view=theater>.
See also Lucille Gafford, ‘Transcendentalist Attitudes toward Drama and the Theatre’, *The New England Quarterly*, 13. 3 (1940), 442–466 <www.jstor.org/stable/360193.> .

[11] Ray B Browne, ‘Shakespeare in American Vaudeville and Negro Minstrelsy’,
American Quarterly, 12.3 (1960), 374-391 (p. 390, note 71) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2710096>.

[12] Henry David Thoreau, unpublished essay, 1836, in *Early Essays and Miscellanies*, ed. by Joseph J Modenhauer, Edwin Moser and Alexander C Kern (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1975) <https://archive.org/details/earlyessaysmisce0000thor/page/n5/mode/2up?view=theater>.

> Believe me that men, not very much inferior to Shakespeare are this day being born on the banks of the Ohio.[13]

American cultural historian Robert Nowatzki suggests that Melville's comment implies a nationalist swagger.[14] However, Melville's recognition of indigenous literary talent, as indicated by his effusive praise for Nathaniel Hawthorne in 'Hawthorne and his Mosses', does not decry his fulsome endorsement of Shakespeare's unbounded genius. In a later epiphany regarding Shakespeare, Melville states that "until a few days ago I never made acquaintance with the divine William […] if another Messiah ever comes he will be in the likeness of Shakespeare."[15]

While Melville transcends national borders in his literary allegiance, Emerson's inability to fit Shakespeare's worldliness into his transcendental ideology, is satirised through layers of role play in Melville's burlesque novel *The Confidence Man*. Through the masking devices deployed in his novel, Melville parodies Emerson's 'heads in the clouds' philosophy as detached from practical application, which he claims denies democracy by sustaining

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[13] Melville, Herman, 'Hawthorne and his Mosses by a Virginian Spending July in Vermont' in *Herman Melville*, ed. by Harrison Heyford (New York: Library of America, 1984), pp. 1154-1171 (p. 1161). <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/~cavitch/pdf library/Melville_Hawthorne.pdf>.

[14] Robert C Nowatzki, 'Our only truly national poets': Blackface Minstrelsy and cultural nationalism', *American Transcendental Quarterly,* 20. 1 (2006), 361-378. <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/our-only-truly-national-poets-blackface-minstelsy/docview/222378057/se-2?accountid=14680>.

[15] Quoted in Raymond M Weaver, *Herman Melville Mariner and Mystic* (New York, George H Doran, 1921), p. 121. <https://archive.org/details/HermanMelvilleMarinerAndMystic/page/n5/mode/2up>.

the privileged position and language of the dominant culture.[16] Thinly disguised in Melville's novel as the mystic master Mark Winsome, Emerson is depicted as aloof from the instinctive expression of all life that makes Shakespeare a universal literary icon relevant across time, from the pit to the parlour, and by all who care to listen, as acknowledged by the black American author James Baldwin, going against his initial better judgement and racially influenced prejudice.

James Baldwin (1924-1987), having previously dismissed Shakespeare's works as irrelevant to the lives and experiences of African Americans, had cause to reflect on the timeless, cross-cultural significance of Shakespeare's genius in his essay 'Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare', where he explains why he had previously reviled the works of America's adopted literary hero:

> I condemned him as chauvinist ("this England" indeed!) […] Again, in the way that some Jews bitterly and mistakenly resent Shylock, I was dubious about Othello (what did he see in Desdemona?) and bitter about Caliban. His great gallery of people, whose reality was as contradictory as it was unanswerable, unspeakably oppressed me.[17]

Baldwin initially perceived Shakespeare's language as an alien instrument of black cultural oppression, until he went beyond the words and the diction, and heard what was being said:

> The authority of this language was in its candour, its irony, its density and its beat, this was the authority of the language which produced me,

[16] Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man*, (Simon & Brown: www.simonand brown.com, 2012), chapter 39, 'The Hypothetical Friends'.
[17] James Baldwin, 'Why I stopped hating Shakespeare' in *The Cross of Redemption, Uncollected Writings* (New York: Vintage International, 2010), pp. 68-69.

> and it was also the authority of Shakespeare… And his responsibility which is also his joy and his strength and his life, is to defeat all labels and complicate all battles by insisting on the human riddle…so that when the breath has left him, the people – *all people!* - who search in the rubble for a sign or a witness will be able to find him there.[18]

Baldwin recalls how shocked he was when he truly opened his ears to the words in a scene from *Julius Caesar,* hearing a lonely human voice driven by personal ambition and deluded idealism:

> Stoop then and wash, - How many ages hence
> Shall this our lofty scene be acted over,
> In states unborn and accents yet unknown![19]

A political act of assassination is conflated with a performance, the association conferring a timeless significance to the action. However, the theatrical allusion also draws attention to the conceit of political idealism destabilising concepts of good and evil that that lie beyond the dominion of human control. Reading Shakespeare literally, Baldwin initially found the character of Othello a bit dubious "what did he see in Desdemona?". However, attuned to the linguistic ambiguity, Baldwin came to understand that Shakespeare's language and philosophy, with its blend of incongruous source material and subtext of political comment reflected the conflicting interests of a diverse and evolving political landscape. The ambiguities provided scope for different interpretations that resounded across borders, and which reached out to all people, from all ages and backgrounds, able to listen and hear. What Baldwin came to appreciate in Shakespeare accounts for the meaning and significance of the plays to the emergent nineteenth

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[18] Ibid, pp. 68-69.
[19] William Shakespeare 'Julius Caesar' in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1997), Act III. 1, quoted in ibid, p. 69.

century American nation in need of a cultural anchor. In 'Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare' Baldwin explains that in Shakespeare he heard the poetry that is found in the lives of the people:

> Shakespeare's bawdiness became very important to me, since bawdiness was one of the elements of jazz and revealed a tremendous, loving, and realistic respect for the body […] which Americans have mostly lost, which I experienced only among Negroes, and of which I had then been taught to be ashamed.[20]

The prolific staging of the plays and their burlesque parodies in America meant that Shakespeare became a unifying cultural force across the nation where, according to Constance Rourke, as far west as the mining camps of California many could recite large parts of the plays by heart.[21] Initially theatres were mass entertainment venues where Shakespeare plays shared the stage with farces, songs, dances, and burlesque afterpieces. For instance, on April 19, 1837, *Othello* was performed at the Bowery Theatre in New York, followed by a burlesque version of *Othello* with Mr Blakeley in the lead role, and finally the melodrama "The Golden Farmer", all on the same bill.[22] During the 1850s, this gave way to more specialised theatres which catered to the tastes of ethnically diverse and increasingly class-conscious audiences. Separate venues, such as the Mechanics Hall in New York, were established as a permanent home for minstrel performances,

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[20] James, Baldwin, 'Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare', p. 69.
[21] Constance Rourke, *Troupers of the Gold Coast* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1928), pp. 149-50.
[22] 'Amusements' *Morning Herald*, New York, April 19, 1837. *The Herald.* 14 April 1837. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030311/1837-04-14/ed-1/seq-3/>.

with Thomas Dartmouth Rice, G W H Griffin and other playwrights capitalising on the craze by staging complete burlesque parodies of Shakespeare plays.[23] The theatrical schism reflected cultural diversity and political change, but also a growing confidence in the authentic artifice of the blackface minstrel shows. By some, this was viewed as caricatured versions of African Americans and other ethnic groups, while others felt that an increasingly inclusive American cultural identity was being depicted.[24]

By contrast the legitimate stage appropriations of Shakespeare plays became more contrived through a selective editing process. The texts were slanted to assert the pre-eminence of white male authority, which was under pressure due to political and racial unrest that threatened to divide the Union. The theatrical manoeuvring echoed the political scheming that passed laws such as the Fugitive Slave Act (1850), and the even more contentious Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854).[25] The political compromises between free and slave States gave precedence to maintaining the Union at the expense of progress on racial and gender equality. However, the legislation only succeeded in uniting disparate political factions and

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[23] The Christy Minstrels were resident at the Mechanics Hall from 1847-1854, followed by Bryant's Minstrels from 1857-1866.

[24] *The New York Herald*, March 27, 1850, reports that the Christy Minstrels played continuously for over four years with houses crammed to suffocation.

[25] The Fugitive Slave Act was passed in Congress on Sept. 18,1850. The political compromise forced Northern complicity in the South's support for slavery. Instead of uniting North and South, the law backfired resulting in increased support for the anti-slavery movement.
The Kansas Nebraska Act of 1854 led to violent clashes between North and South over the banning of slavery.

escalating the opposition to slavery. The fallout also provided the incentive for Harriet Beecher Stowe’s anti-slavery novel, *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852).[26]

Because Othello’s ethnicity symbolised alienation from the dominant cultural mainstream, legitimate stage productions of *Othello* adjusted the play’s emphasis to claim Othello as a raceless protagonist of American masculinity. Selective edits to the text implied that Desdemona’s behaviour in transgressing patriarchal values and racial boundaries was the cause of Othello’s downfall. The slanted interpretation is performed as a morality play to reinforce white hegemony by warning of the fatal consequences of miscegenation. Also, focus on a higher moral message and the aesthetic style of the performances served to obscure Othello’s African heritage and avoid direct confrontation with contentious issues of race and slavery. The cuts and omissions even enabled *Othello* to be performed in the South where racial difference was used to justify slavery. The irony of praising Macready’s blackface performance of Othello in New Orleans as a theatrical sensation was not lost on the report in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle* however, which condemned the double standards of the review in the New Orleans *Picayune,* which advertised “blacks” for sale, on the same page as eulogising “blacks” on the stage.[27]

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[26] James Kinney, *Amalgamation! Race, Sex and Rhetoric in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood Press, 1985), p. 51.
[27] Othellos in New Orleans’, *The Anti -Slavery Bugle,* May 4, 1849. *Anti-slavery Bugle.* 4 May 1849. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035487/1849-05-04/ed-1/seq-2/>.

However, there is uncertainty about audience composition in the South due to conflicting reports. British travel writer John Lambert (*Travels*, 1810) was appalled at the appropriation of canonical British plays that are "converted wholly in an *American scene"*. He claimed that blackface was prohibited, and that no black people were allowed into the theatre in Charleston in case "negroes" should conceive that being imitated by white people on stage meant that they were important personages. Thus *Othello* was not allowed to be performed, nor any "negro" allowed to visit the theatre.[28] However, this account was contradicted by the description of a fire in a theatre in Richmond, Virginia in 1811, where it was reported that most of the "colored" audience survived as they were seated in the gallery and had a clearer escape route compared to the ground floor where the white people were trapped.[29] The report indicates that, in some theatres at least, audiences were mixed, although segregated. Theatre reviews also reveal that *Othello* was performed in the South at least until 1860.[30] To corroborate this assertion of multi-racial audiences, newspaper bills advertising performances of *Othello* in New Orleans declare seats at various prices as well as ones reserved for "colored" patrons.[31] Also, the

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[28] Quoted in Sean X. Goudie, 'The West Indies, Commerce, and a Play for U.S. Empire: Recovering J. Robinson's "The Yorker's Stratagem"' (1792), *Early American Literature,* 40. 1(2005),1-35 (pp. 11-12) < http://www.jstor.org/stable/25057379>.
[29] David Worrall, *Harlequin Empire: Race Ethnicity and the Drama of the Popular Enlightenment* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2007), p. 29.
[30] W L Holbein, 'Shakespeare in Charleston 1800-1860', in *Shakespeare in the South: Essays in Performance,* ed. by Philip C Kolin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983), pp. 88-111.
[31] 'American Theatre', *The Daily Crescent,* New Orleans, LA. 1 Feb. 1849. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress

Philadelphia *Public Ledger* (28 October 1844 to 7 November 1844) reported that Thomas D Rice's burlesque *Otello* and his other plays particularly attracted black audiences, even in the deep South where William Johnson, a free black man wrote in his diary, Rice "had a very good House…", after seeing him perform in Natchez, Mississippi on 12 April 1836. The implication is that black audiences were not necessarily offended by the minstrel caricatures, with Johnson also claiming in his diary to own a copy of *The Life of Gim [sic] Crow.* [32]

Initially, English actors were invited to play the leading Shakespearian roles in America, which resulted in a transatlantic exchange that saw American actor Edwin Forrest make his London debut in September 1836. Originally treated like theatrical royalty, English actors later became the butt of anti-colonial resentment in a rising tide of American democratic fervour fuelled by animosity between leading American actor Edwin Forrest and his English nemesis William Charles Macready. In a letter to the *New York Herald* in April 1849, Forrest accuses Macready of having the English press write him down claiming that a prejudiced Englishman would never

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<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015378/1849-02-01/ed-1/seq-3/>.
(The Amusement section of the *Daily Crescent,* 1 Feb 1849 advertises a performance of *Othello* and the farce *Othello and Mose in New Orleans.* The advert specifies seating that includes 'Colored Boxes', indicating that audiences were racially mixed.)

[32] William Johnson, *Natchez: The Ante-Bellum Diary of a Free Negro* ed. by William Ransom Hogan and Edwin Adams Davis (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1951), p. 114, quoted in Lhamon Jr, *Jump Jim Crow*, p. 420, note 139.

admit anything good can come from America.[33] Class resentment, as much as national pride, was at the root of Forrest's theatrical antipathy towards Macready whose performance of *Othello* in New York in October 1848 was reported to be playing to very fashionable audiences and at such vast expense that "all privileges must be suspended." [34] Forrest's hostility eventually culminated in the Astor Place riot (1849), which the British Press perceived in terms of class warfare between Forrest's 'agrarian spirit' and the wealthy American elite.[35] Whether class based, or driven by nationalist pride, or both, the New York riot proved to be a cultural watershed for a new age of theatrical presentations where control was removed from the actor-directors, and where audiences became passive spectators constrained by the commercial interests of the theatre managers.[36] According to the environmental psychologist Robert Sommer "society compensates for blurred social distinctions by clear spatial ones", and thus new purpose-built theatres separated audiences to accommodate an

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[33] 'Another Letter from Mr Forrest' *The New York Herald,* 10 April 1849. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1849-04-10/ed-1/seq-7/>.

[34] 'Niblo's, Astor Place, Broadway – Mr Macready's Second Night', *The New York Herald.* 6 Oct. 1848. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1848-10-06/ed-1/seq-3/>

[35] *London Times*, May 29, 1849, reported in the *New York Herald*, June 16, 1849.
'The English View of the Astor Place Riot'*, The New York Herald.* 16 June 1849. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1849-06-16/ed-1/seq-1/>.

[36] Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder*, pp. 31-2.

evolving social and ethnic hierarchy that had previously rubbed shoulders in the levelling arenas of the urban playhouses.[37]

As performances of *Othello* became more refined throughout the century audience numbers dwindled, the idealism of a republican democracy replaced by a defined hierarchical social system. The political evolution corresponded with the development of dedicated theatres that targeted audiences along ethnic, class and racial lines defining social boundaries, which the minstrel burlesques reflected, but which they also grossly parodied.

Figure 1: *William Macready 1793-1873 (painting by John Jackson)*

[37] Robert Sommer, *Street Art* (New York & London: Links, 1975). (Sommer deals with connection between social imperatives and the role of the artist, not just to reflect, but also to prescribe, and interpret).

Figure 2 *Edwin Forrest 1806-1872 (from a daguerreotype by Mathew Brady)*

2.1.1. History of Representations of *Othello* on the Legitimate Stage in Nineteenth Century America

Shakespeare's plays resonated with the people of America because they provided linguistic and cultural familiarity that matched the needs of displaced people in unfamiliar surroundings. In search of conditions that unite as well as divide contending groups, James Fennimore Cooper considered Shakespeare to be "the great author of America" claiming American entitlement to Shakespeare as a fellow countryman.[38] While the history of performances of Shakespeare in America during this period reflected the political and cultural history of America, the history of performances of *Othello* reflected changing cultural and political attitudes to race.

[38] Quoted in Lawrence Levine, 'William Shakespeare and the American People', p. 40, note 14, as quoted in James H Dorman, *Theater in the Ante-bellum South*, *1815-1861*(Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1967), note 257 in relation to James Fenimore Cooper's *Notions of the American People* (1828).

To gauge the prevalence of Shakespeare performances of *Othello* during this period, theatre records show that there were forty-one performances of the play in Mobile, Alabama between 1832 and 1860; twenty in Memphis between 1837 and 1858; twenty-two in Louisville between 1846 and 1860, and fifty-seven *Othellos* in Philadelphia between 1835 and 1841. In some cities there was even more than one production of *Othello* playing at the same time.[39] In 1843, the English actor William Charles Macready records that he played Othello in New York on October 18, and again on November 1, noting in his diary "Acted Othello in a very grand and impassioned manner, never better". He also performed Othello and Iago in New Orleans (February 24 and 29, 1844) and St Louis (April 15, 1844).[40]

As the American legitimate stage became more established, due mainly to the influence and popularity of British theatre companies, a reciprocal cultural exchange took place, with the prominent American actor Edwin Forrest invited to perform in Britain. Forrest returned to the Park Theatre in New York on September 18, 1837, the exchange establishing Forrest as a star actor, which helped to boost the confidence of the American stage.[41] During the 1840s, Forrest continued to consolidate his theatrical fame and

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[39] Kim C Sturgess, *Shakespeare and the American Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p. 15.
[40] *Macready Reminiscences Vol 2,* ed. by F. Pollock (London: Macmillan, 1875), pp. 219…245
< https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.30985>.
[41] *The Drama, Its History Literature and Influence on Civilisation*, Vol 20, ed. by Alfred Bates (London: Smart and Stanley,1903), pp. 26-29 (Edwin Forrest in London)
<https://archive.org/details/dramaitshistoryl20lond/page/n15/mode/2up>.
See also Richard Moody, *Edwin Forrest: First Star of the American Stage* (New York: Knopf, 1960).

fortune, while the leading English actor William Macready also toured in America, in both the North and South where he played a variety of Shakespearian roles, which included Othello in blackface.

Charles B. Lower argues that Southern audiences accepted and identified with a black (not near white, tawny or bronzed) Othello, and did not concern themselves with underlying implications associated with social alienation and racial prejudice, since according to Philip Kolin, "their emotional experiences were aesthetic, not sociological." According to Lower, Southern audiences had no issue with a black Othello, able to view Art as distanced from life, where performance is all about the show, melodramatic, democratic, and a theatre of 'the star' as in the years before the Civil War.[42] The interpretation of performances of *Othello* is fraught with inconsistencies however, where according to James Dorman in *Theater in the Ante Bellum South 1815-1861* (1967), *Othello* was only tolerated in the South if presented through an anti-miscegenation lens, where "Othello had to be played as near-white or not at all."[43] This view was endorsed by American abolitionist President, John Quincey Adams, whose didactic interpretation of *Othello* concluded that "the moral precept resulting from the story is a salutary admonition against all ill-assorted, clandestine and unnatural marriages."[44]

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[42] C B Lower, 'Othello as Black on Southern Stages, Then and Now' in *Shakespeare in the South: Essays in Performance,* ed. by Philip C Kolin (Jackson: University of Mississippi Press, 1983), pp. 199-228.
[43] Quoted in C B Lower, 'Othello as Black on Southern Stages', in *Shakespeare in the South: Essays in Performance,* ed. by P C Kolin (Jackson: Mississippi University Press, 1983), pp.199-228, (p. 201).
[44] John Q Adams, 'The Character of Desdemona' in *Shakespeare in America*, ed by James Shapiro (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, 2014), pp. 42-53 (p. 53).

Adam's racially prejudiced response is also endorsed by a critical review of Edwin Forrest's performance of Othello in *The Native American* (March 1838), which states that:

> *Othello* should never be played in a southern city. There is something revolting to southern minds to see a sweating negro sighing on the shoulder of a white heroine […] there is a nausea that rises up at the degrading spectacle and we verily agree that if the immortal Shakespeare was alive, (Is he dead?) and among us, we would lynch him for this said amalgamation play. [45]

However, the British actress Fanny Kemble (1809-1893) took offence at anti-amalgamation interpretations of *Othello*, writing in her diary "if some anti-abolitionist Americans produced the play, they might well change Iago's first soliloquy from "I hate the Moor", to "I hate the nigger".[46] The revision would more accurately depict the South's biased interpretation of *Othello*, in which Desdemona gets her just deserts for betraying her racial heritage and violating the patriarchal social order.

Other contradictions surface regarding the racial implications of performing *Othello* in the South, as indicated by the attitude of the English actor William Macready. When confronted by the reality of slavery following a visit to Charleston in 1844, Macready was shocked, as he noted in his diary:

> January 12th. – We went to the goal […] some Negroes below who were kept in the premises of the goal till they could be sold! Good God! Is this right? They are an inferior class of man, but still they are man.[47]

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[45] 'Theatrical New Season at the National', *The Native American,* Washington DC, 10 March 1838, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86053569/1838-03-10/ed-1/seq-3/>.

[46] Clifford Ashby and Fanny Kemble, 'Fanny Kemble's 'Vulgar' Journal', *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 98. 1 (1974), 58–66. <www.jstor.org/stable/20090814>.

[47] Pollock, *Macready's Reminiscences, Vol.2,* p. 226.

Although horrified at the treatment of "Negroes", Macready betrays his racist conditioning through an unquestioning acceptance of the inferiority of African Americans, an inconsistency that makes the portrayal of Othello as a hero of high noble standing an act of blinkered cultural whitewashing, disassociated from a political context of racial injustice.

Legitimate stage versions of *Othello* during this period, which focus on the dramatic prowess of the star performer, and which disregard underlying aspects of alienation and injustice based on Othello's racial difference, collude with the political imperative of Southern States to repress dissent over the continuation of the system of slavery. To endorse this slanted appropriation of the play as a warning against racial amalgamation, *Othello* is invoked in a debate on abolition reported in the *Richmond Enquirer* (Feb. 4,1836). The article asks rhetorically would they want an Othello grasping at the Presidential Chair? - making the point that abolition must be prevented at all costs, and that aggressive Northern anti-slavery literature swamping the debate on slavery in the Chamber must be stopped.[48] To suit their political objectives, Othello is no longer the unfortunate noble Moor, but

[48]'House of Representatives, 1 Feb', *Richmond Enquirer* (Richmond, VA.), 4 Feb. 1836. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024735/1836-02-04/ed-1/seq-2/>.
(The American Anti-Slavery Society was established in 1833 with over 130,000 petitions sent to the US Senate and Congress. The pro-slavery lobby responded with 'gag rules' that prevented discussion or debate on abolition on the grounds that States were responsible for their own slavery legislation, and that it was not an issue for national debate).

ridiculed as unsuitable for political office because of his colour and abolition sympathies.

During the late 1840s and 1850s, as a result of the refinements to *Othello* and other Shakespeare plays, the legitimate theatre became increasingly culturally divisive, with William Macready capitalising on this rising class and racial consciousness. *The New York Herald* (15 Dec 1843) reported that the English actor was now playing to four-hundred-dollar houses, invoking Shakespeare's noble Moor to capture the cultural high ground of America. However, this led to limited success in New York with the boxes at the Park Theatre left "cold and cheerless":

> The temple of Shakespeare is deserted for the gay, enchanting soul thrilling concert room […] The high anticipations of Mr Macready have received a bitter blighting, which may, in a great measure, be attributable to his own want of tact, and to the distaste which an illiberal management has given to this drama in this city.[49]

The article goes on to puncture the pretensions by adding, with a note of irony, that the array of empty benches that stare at him night after night must convince him [Macready] that "Othello's occupation's gone". In the 1840s, the bid to raise the reputation of the legitimate stage as the cultural heart of the nation became the focus of personal and national antagonism, which descended into a bitter theatrical war between Edwin Forrest and William Macready, with Shakespeare the weapon used to establish cultural autonomy on behalf of the American nation. Ultra-patriotic actor, Edwin

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[49] 'Movements in the Theatrical and Musical World', *The New York Herald.* 15 Dec. 1843, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1843-12-15/ed-1/seq-2/>.

Forrest was pivotal in stirring this nationalistic enmity, accusing Macready of criticising his brash acting style in the English Press, the ongoing feud covered in an article in *The New York Herald* (April 10,1849).[50] The battle lines were drawn, with the anti-British cultural hostility finally erupting on May 7, 1849, at the Astor Place Opera House, which disrupted Macready's performance of *Macbeth*. Fans loyal to Forrest were bent on driving the English tragedian off the stage and claiming the theatre back for the people of the pits. A report the next day in *The New York Herald* describes a scene of complete mayhem where not a word of the play could be heard above the roaring in the aisles. An avalanche of asafoetida, chairs and other missiles was aimed at Macready accompanied by shouts of "Three groans for the codfish aristocracy'' and "Down with the English hog." The xenophobic taunts were also accompanied by racist slurs "three cheers for Macready, nigger Douglass and Pete Williams." To balance the explosive reaction of the mob, *The Herald* article also noted that many who were in favour of Macready were American citizens resistant to using the theatre to express nationalist sympathies. [51] The mayhem that descended on Macready's performance of *Macbeth* at the Astor Place Opera House on May 7 proved the tipping point that led him to end his tour early and return to England.

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[50]'Forrest and Macready Again', *The New York Herald.* 10 April 1849, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1849-04-10/ed-1/seq-4/>.

[51]'Astor Place Opera House – Mr Macready Driven off the Stage', *The New York Herald.* 8 May 1849. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1849-05-08/ed-1/seq-4/>.

The so called 'Macready Riots' served as the focus for escalating class, nationalistic and racial resentments, which crystallised into the growing separation of high and low culture, with performances of Shakespeare plays, and the rise of upmarket theatres used to draw class lines.[52]

The departure of Macready back to England paved the way for Forrest and other prominent American actors, including Junius Booth's son Edwin, to make the legitimate stage their own, and to carve out careers as respected Shakespearian actors in the place of their scorned English counterparts.[53] Despite this, Edwin Forrest, the white working man's cheerleader, reacted against what *The Home Journal* termed "aristocratizing the pit", which he claimed was unpatriotic.[54] Regardless of the class unrest fomented by the 'theatre wars' in the antebellum era, Americans prided themselves on their egalitarian culture. However, Fanny Trollope recounting her experiences of travelling through America in the 1830s, was sceptical of American attitudes to egalitarianism. She claimed that equality of opportunity was mistaken by Americans for equality for all, a mob mentality that denied the ascendancy of talent:

> Hollow and unsound as his doctrines are, they are but too palatable to a people, each individual of whom would rather derive his importance

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[52] Lawrence W Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow, The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in* America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 68.
[53] William Rounseville Alger, *Life of Edwin Forrest, the American Tragedian* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1877), pp. 140-155.
Chapter 7 – includes Kean as Othello*,* Forrest as Iago at the Albany Theatre and Forrest's first performance as Othello at the Park Theatre, New York). <http://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000322285>.
[54] Ibid, pp. 65-66.

> from believing that none are above him, than from the consciousness that in his station he makes part of a noble whole.[55]

Gradually during the 1840s and 50s the mass participation that shaped performances of Shakespeare plays was replaced by clearly defined lines of separation between actors and audiences, with theatres under the control of managers and proprietors. This change of emphasis in theatre productions reflected a competitive market that defined and catered to specific audiences. The Amusements section of the *New York Herald* indicates the array of entertainment, which at one time would have been performed on the same stage to mass audiences. On January 13, 1855, the paper carries listings of forthcoming attractions, which includes opera at Her Majesty's Theatre, a horse display and several farces at The Broadway, Wood's Minstrels at Wood's Minstrel Building, and readings from *Othello* and *Henry VIII* at Dodworth's Salon, Broadway, amongst many other shows and events.[56]

The rising career of the American actor Edwin Forrest coincided with the establishment of the legitimate stage in America. The robust physicality of his performances of Shakespeare's plays personified a national cultural identity that contrasted with the more restrained performances of the English stage. However, by the mid-1850s Forrest's brash representations

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[55] Fanny Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, (London: Penguin Classics, 1997) p. 246.

[56] 'Amusements', *The New York Herald.* 13 Jan. 1859. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1859-01-13/ed-1/seq-7/>.

were losing favour, to the extent that when he played Othello in New York's Bowery Theatre in March 1855, a review from an 'Oyster House Fourierite' in the *New York Herald* tore into Forrest's pugilist acting style claiming that The Bowery had demeaned legitimate drama. The tirade declared that Forrest was "a brute…not competent to act the genteel negro".[57] During the 1850s, the loud bombast of Forrest once employed to define a vigorous national identity, had now become an instrument of a 'theatrical civil war' that divided the nation along partisan political lines. Forest's style of acting was a reflection of a robust American identity which, according to the *New York Herald,* was supported by the honest masses of the people. On the other side of the cultural divide were the mixed aristocracy of Fifth Avenue and the genteel section of the Opera House, broadly English in taste and sympathetic to the abolitionist stripe of the Oyster house corps.[58]

In the post-Civil War period Forrest's stage role as the epitome of American masculinity gave way to the more reflective style of Edwin Booth. During the post-Civil War period prompt books indicate that Shakespeare's plays were edited and refined to reflect the cultural aspirations of middle-

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[57] 'More Oyster House Criticism – Getting Hotter and Hotter', *New York Herald*. 23 March 1855. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1855-03-23/ed-1/seq-6/>.

[58] The Fourierites were followers of the socialism of French philosopher Charles Fourier (1772 -1837) whose work was was introduced to America by Albert Brisbane in his *Social Destiny of Man* (1840). Leading supporters of the movement included the editor of the *New York Tribune* Horace Greeley and Parke Godwin who also associated with the Transcendentalist Circle. A biography of the utopian socialist Charles Fourier, *The Visionary and his World* (1987), was written by Jonathan Beecher, great-great nephew of abolitionist author Harriet Beecher Stowe.

class audiences. In a review of Booth's performance in *Othello* on January 20,1876, *The Daily Dispatch*, (Richmond, VA) describes the audience in terms of "the beauty and the brilliancy of the city – including members of the Legislature and other strangers within our gates."[59] The review of *Othello* describes the play as a work of art and amusement which:

> Has chased dull care from the legislative mind, and driven into temporary oblivion dog laws, funding bills, contested elections and tobacco inspections. He [Booth] has given the ladies opportunity to display their elegant dresses, costly laces and pretty faces…[60]

In other words, the theatre was an arena that reinforced social order, while offering an escape from tedious political matters. The rowdy participating egalitarian audiences of Edwin Forrest's heyday were replaced by sober, refined, spectators who wished to be identified with the literary authority and highbrow status promulgated by the legitimate stage versions of Shakespeare's plays. Through a process of refinement that focused on the great speeches and the melodramatic spectacle at the expense of marginal voices, and the disorderly subtext, the legitimate stage reduced the appeal and relevance of *Othello* to the aesthetic demands of an elite social faction. This process of refinement on the legitimate stage was achieved through the use of Prompt books and rehearsal copies of *Othello* which favoured the political and racial values of the dominant culture.

[59]'Edwin Booth's engagement – Othello – Richard II', *Daily Dispatch.* January 20,1876. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024738/1876-01-20/ed-1/seq-1/>.

[60] Ibid.

2.1.2. The Creation of a White Cultural Hierarchy: Methods and Purpose of Adaptations of Shakespeare's *Othello* on the Legitimate Stage

Shakespeare's plays were appropriated by the legitimate stage to consolidate white American cultural values. Based on prompt books and rehearsal copies used by the British theatre, versions of Shakespeare's plays were abridged and censored with up to a thousand lines removed for reasons of religious propriety and sexual decorum, and to bolster white patriarchal values. The omissions stymied alternative interpretations, which compromised the socially transformative dimension of the plays. Compared to British audiences, Americans were less concerned about suggestive language in the plays, as indicated by the poor sales of Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare* in America. Even so, the legitimate stage used the British theatre promptbooks as an official guide as to how Shakespeare should be performed.[61] Through the editing process, Shakespeare plays, which were once a cohesive element of American popular culture, became refined and redefined to constitute high culture. In the antebellum period British actors and companies led the way in performing Shakespeare in America until usurped by Edwin Forrest who was intent on owning Shakespeare to assert cultural independence and American theatrical autonomy. The hubris was mocked by minstrel burlesques of popular Shakespeare plays, which

[61] William Shakespeare and Thomas Bowdler, *The Family Shakespeare in One Volume* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1847), *Othello, The Moor of Venice*, pp. 880-910. <https://archive.org/details/familyshakespear00shakuoft>.

included *Julius Sneezer*, *Hamlet the Dainty* and Thomas Dartmouth Rice's *Otello*. In *Huckleberry Finn,* Mark Twain perpetuated the minstrels' satire by mocking Forrest's melodramatic style in a ramshackle performance of a Shakespeare soliloquy by the fake English thespian the Duke of Bilgewater, which Huck then tries to imitate. (This parodic appropriation of Shakespeare refinement will be discussed in a later chapter)[62]

In America, legitimate stage performances of *Othello* and other Shakespeare plays were originally based on English actor William Charles Macready's promptbook version and several other rehearsal copies and modified texts. The adaptations were made to dramatise, elevate, and educate, but more importantly, to emphasise the roles of the leading male actors to reinforce white patriarchy. Initially, a lack of stage experience meant that legitimate stage productions of Shakespeare in America could not afford to renounce England's theatrical heritage, and thus Edwin Forrest, Edwin Booth, James Hewlett, Lester Wallack, and other tragedians were dependent on the promptbook and rehearsal adaptations used by Macready, Kean, and Irving on the London stage. Accordingly, the rehearsal copy of *Othello* (Folger *Othell*o 42) used at Drury Lane, London, was also used to perform *Othello* at the Park Theatre, New York 1823-1845. Also, J P Kemble's 1804 Covent Garden promptbook copy (Folger *Othello* 20), which was revised in 1814 (Folger *Othello* 5) was still the standard version for Edwin Forrest in his portrayal of Othello at the Tremont Theatre, Boston, on

[62] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (London: Penguin, 2003), chapter 21.

May 8, 1842.[63] Consequently, the sensational debut of the American actor Edwin Forrest playing Othello at the Bowery Theatre in New York in 1826 was based on Macready's edited version. However, by the middle of the nineteenth century, Forrest also appropriated the plays to rouse patriotic zeal, and in the case of *Othello*, to elicit sympathy for personal grievances.

For eighteen years Forrest was involved in a court battle with his English wife, accusing her of adultery, a case which he eventually lost, and was forced to pay alimony. Forrest exploits Shakespeare to express his sense of outrage as indicated by his prosaic adaptation of Othello's soliloquy "it is the cause, it is the cause, my soul, -" (*Othello,* V. 2. 1).[64] Forrest's personal version of Othello's speech was a ploy to win sympathy for his case, but also to sanction patriarchal rights and values:

> I submit my cause to you; my cause did I say? – no, not *my* cause alone, but yours; the cause of every man in this community [...] the cause of everyone who cherishes a home and the pure spirit which should abide there.[65]

The rhetoric reveals Forrest's manipulation of Shakespeare's text to construct nationalist values in his own image. Forrest projected himself as the common man's hero, and champion of American Democratic Party principles, a stance substantiated by the raucous reception upon his return

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[63] *Shakespeare Prompt Books*, Folger Library Collection (online access made available August 2016).
[64] William Shakespeare, 'Othello' in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1997), pp. 2100-2172 (p. 2163).
[65] Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Othello - The Search for the Identity of Othello, Iago and Desdemona by Three centuries of Actors and Critics,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), p. 92 <http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.32106006269325;view=2up;seq=302>.

to the New York stage in February 1852 following his bitter divorce trial from his English wife. A report of the event in *The Richmond Enquirer,* reprinted from the *New York Herald,* gave a graphic account of the scene:

> Calls for Forrest were vehement and were kept up till he came on stage when a shower of bouquets fell at his feet, and a number of little flags of the Union, and the scene of cheering and waving of hats and handkerchiefs […] baffles description. In the meantime, Captain Rynders ascended the stage […] and displayed a white banner, bearing the inscription - "This is the people's verdict."[66]

Forrest's physical dramatics contributed to a polarisation between his fans and critics who were split largely along class lines. The division contributed to an uprising of nationalistic fervour, which was exacerbated by Forrest's rivalry with the English actor William Macready. In the aftermath of the xenophobic animosity stirred up by the Astor Place riot of 1849, Forrest used the stage as a platform from which to assert American patriotic and patriarchal values.

The political turmoil affecting perceptions of national identity were reflected on the legitimate stage by the evolving performances of the leading Othellos. The prompt book edits indicate that Othello should not be characterised as threatening or deranged, and that Iago should not be too crude in his vindictive scheming as this would cause offense to family values prescribed by the Church and State law. Thus, in nineteenth century America, the Moor's nobility had to be emphasised to maintain a grip on

[66] 'Forrest's Re-appearance on the Stage', *Richmond Enquirer,* VA, 13 Feb 1852. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024735/1852-02-13/ed-1/seq-2/>.

white cultural hegemony under threat from abolitionists and civil rights campaigners who were accused of undermining the preservation of the Union.

The amended and abridged promptbooks gave prominence to the leading male protagonists, to slant the interpretation of the play in favour of a patriarchal social order, a distortion which removed the ambiguous and culturally subversive intention of the original text. Bawdy innuendos were erased or softened with euphemisms, a form of moral censorship under the guise of respecting religious and family feelings. Provocative slurs such as 'whore' were slashed and replaced with the less offensive 'bawd' and 'strumpet'. Also bestial references, including "an old black ram is tupping your white ewe' and Iago's lewdly suggestive "Yet again your fingers to your lips?/ Would that they were clyster-pipes for your sake!" (*Othello* II. 1.170-171), were cut from the Booth and Winter prompt book, as well as the other edited stage texts, for the sake of modesty and taste. [67] This demand for greater propriety coincided with the rise of theatres which catered to specific patrons, such as respectable middle-aged women and families, who were averse to the coarseness, rowdiness and other forms of emotional displays that characterised the lower classes.[68] Thus, the way in which Shakespeare's plays were adapted on the legitimate stage, and the theatres in which they were performed, acted in tandem to reinforce the construction of a defined social hierarchy.

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[67] William Shakespeare, William Winter, & Edwin Booth, *Prompt book of Shakespeare's Tragedy of Othello* (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2012), p. 36.
[68] R Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences – From Stage to Television, 1750 – 1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p. 72.

Other cuts and revisions were made to *Othello* by Charles Kemble in 1804, and again in 1814, and performed from 1820-1843 in England and America by all the leading actors, primarily to emphasise Othello's noble features and dignity, to make him appear exotic rather than African, and thus, avoid any connotations with contentious issues of race and slavery. Consequently, any mention of slavery and animalistic references to "cannibals" and "Anthropophagi" "and men whose heads do grow beneath their shoulders "(*Othello* I .3. 142-144), were erased from Othello's life story in all the promptbooks, except that of Edwin Booth and William Winter (1878). They decided that the text to be used by Booth would differ from other stage-copies believing that "even for the impatient and decorous stage of today, but little of its text needs to be cut, rather to accelerate its movement or to soften its grossness." This intention to remain close to Shakespeare's "magnificent work" did not however exclude removing most of Othello's scene when he is overcome with jealous rage (*Othello* IV. 1), deemed to be a shameful excess of mental hysteria, an interpretation that did not comply with American perceptions of a noble, but flawed hero.[69]

On the grounds of modesty, the promptbooks also erased or tempered Iago's crude sexual insinuations concerning the honeymoon of Othello and Desdemona. "He hath not made wanton the night with her" and "she is sport for Jove" (*Othello* II .3. 15-16) are crossed out in the manuscript of Kemble's text, and "Well, happiness to their sheets!" *(Othello* II .3. 25) changed to

[69] William Shakespeare, William Winter & Edwin Booth, *Prompt book of Shakespeare's Tragedy of Othello* (Charleston, SC: Nabu Press, 2012), preface pp. 4-5.

"happiness to them." Religious concern was also invoked to justify further cuts of a sacrilegious and bestial nature deemed to be shocking and immoral to public taste. Thus, coming under the excision of the editor's censorious pen were the lines "your daughter and the Moor are making the beast with two backs" (*Oth* I .1. 115-6), and "you'll have your daughter covered with a Barbary horse" (*Oth* I .1. 111-2). Mention of pagan superstitions and foul charms were also deleted, as was the line "Awake the snorting citizens with the bell, Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you" (*Oth* I .1. 91-2). In legitimate stage performances of *Othello,* the range and agreement over the omissions infers a consensus to focus on the melodramatic conflict between the two male protagonists, who often exchanged roles during a run of performances to showcase their acting skills. However, despite the cuts and edits *Othello* still involved walking a tricky tightrope that involved misogyny, mental breakdown, and murder, while attempting to promote the ideals of a Christian, patriarchal social order. Ironically, the editing process emasculated the dramatic impact of the language. The cuts also placed more emphasis on the relationship between Othello and his nemesis Iago, which shifted their conflict to a psychological battle, the reduction of marginal voices and the bawdy subtext also disconnected the play from universal themes of class and racial representation which limited the play's immediate dramatic impact and relevance.

Despite the individuality and elasticity brought to the leading roles by Forrest, Macready, Charles Kean, Edmund Kean, Junius Booth, Edwin Booth, and others, there was general agreement that despite his mental collapse,

Othello should maintain the nobility of a tragic hero with whom the emerging American middle-class could identify. Thus, the scenes in which Othello breaks down in a frenzy convinced of Desdemona's infidelity (Act IV. 1) are cut, or severely condensed from 274 to 83 lines or less, in every prompt book. In Kemble's rehearsal copy (Folger, *Othello* 42) performed from 1832-1845 in Drury Lane and at the Park Theatre New York, the first 191 lines of Act VI were erased completely. As a result, Othello's verse of anguished torment "Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?/ It is hypocritical against the devil" (*Othello* IV .1. 5-6) is expunged, along with fragmented, broken lines and digressive thoughts that express his inner turmoil:

> Thou said'st - O it comes o'er my memory,
> As doth the raven o'er the infected house,
> Boding to all! - he had my handkerchief (*Othello* IV. 1 .20-23)

Othello's poetic verse then disintegrates further to rambling prose, the staccato questions and exclamations as he falls into an agonised trance which characterises his hysteria:

> 'Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her when they belie her. Lie with her! Zounds that's fulsome! Handkerchief – confessions – handkerchief! ......' (*Oth* IV .1. 35-37)

The intention of Othello's rambling prose, the puns and wordplay on lying and lies in the original text, implies that the manipulation of the truth is responsible for his mental breakdown. The culling process in Act IV. 1 also removes the eavesdropping scene, where Othello is misled into a false conclusion regarding Desdemona's alleged infidelity, because it would make Othello look degraded and unmanly. The deception involving the

handkerchief, a false flag of Desdemona's supposed betrayal, is also erased, along with Othello's anguished wavering over Desdemona's punishment "but yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago, the pity of it, Iago!" (*Oth* IV. 1.184-5), which is followed by the enraged "I will chop her into messes. Cuckold me!" (*Oth* IV.1.188). The cuts to a significant section of Act IV, scene 1 were aimed at preserving Othello's dignity, however, the contradictory emotions were designed to make Othello appear unbalanced, which was the point in the original text. The erasure of the visual proof Othello demands to ascertain Desdemona alleged adultery thus placed more emphasis on the oratorial sparring between Iago and Otello to justify Othello's certainty of Desdemona's guilt. The editing process gave undue prominence to the leading male protagonists to reinforce culturally dominant voices, even though it undermined the complexity and credibility of the plot.

Act IV lines 1-191 were also deleted from Kemble's revised edition (Folger *Othello* 20) performed at Covent Garden 1820-1843, and from Hinds English Stage version – "*Othello the Moor of Venice*, acting edition with accurate stage directions" (1838) (Folger *Othello* 24). Charles Kean's prompt copy (Folger *Othello* 13), performed at Covent Garden 1838, with William Macready as Othello, and at Drury Lane 1846, with George Ellis as prompter, also crossed out Act IV. 1 .1-191, opening the scene with Othello and Iago plotting to kill Desdemona and Cassio (IV.1. 192 -202). In a 1766 prompt book (Folger *Othello* 27), Act IV, scene 1 is condensed, with lines 35-41, where Othello raves about lying, reduced to only one line, which minimises

his hysteria without excluding it totally. [70] The inference is that in this earlier period Othello's character had not become so identified with national pride and class consciousness as it was in the nineteenth century when the stage was being used as echo chamber to reflect a male dominated and respectable cultural identity.

As the century progressed, more and more references to Othello's mental derangement were removed, perceived as unseemly to his noble demeanour in order to depict an American ideal of manhood that the legitimate stage performances wished to promote.[71] The disturbing passages of Act IV came under attack particularly from William Winter who wrote in the preface to his prompt book that he thought his version an improvement on Shakespeare's through loping away "those portions of the text that should not, or could not, be spoken".[72] The modified version suited the introspective focus of Edwin Booth's interpretation which relied on psychological soul-searching rather than asserting masculine prowess. The aesthetic portrayal expunged threatening social undercurrents implied by the ambiguity of the language and the subversive perspectives of minor characters such as Iago's wife Emilia. With *Othello's* teeth extracted, one

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[70] Hinds, *Othello The Moor of Venice* as acted at the Theatre Royal Covent Garden, (London: Hitch & Hawes, Crowder, Dod, Rivington, Longman, Caslon Lownds & Corbett, 1761).

[71] The Folger *Othello* 5 promptbook 1824-1842, which Forrest used in Boston's Tremont Theatre on the 8 May 1842; a later rehearsal copy (Folger *Othello* 46) used from 1880 to 1890; and the Winter and Booth prompt-book copy, all omitted the whole of *Othello* Act IV, scene 1, which included Othello's abusive dismissal of Desdemona, which caused Lodovico (a noble Venetian) to question Othello's sanity "Are his wits safe? Is he not light of brain?" (IV. 1. 260).

[72] William Shakespeare, William Winter & Edwin Booth, *Prompt book of Shakespeare's Tragedy of Othello*, preface, p. 4.

reviewer was less than impressed with the revised version “the play has been much refined since its masterful creator breathed into [it] the immortality of genius, and there is left to the theatre-goer only the nobility and purity that give romantic and poetic charm to the Moor.”[73] The unnerving complexity and ambiguity of the play regarding attitudes to race, class, misogyny, and social alienation were sacrificed on the altar of appealing to the refined tastes and social aspirations of class conscious audiences. Consequently, Shakespeare’s popularity waned, his works perceived as high culture and the preserve of an exclusive educated elite.

The contortions of the legitimate stage performances of *Othello*, while skirting controversial political and racial themes, paradoxically did relate to an era of reactionary compromises by the ruling class, which included the Gag Law (1836-1844). The legislation suppressed dissenting voices tabling petitions opposing slavery in the House of Representatives, with attitudes to the legislation split along a North South axis. Southern congressmen took a hard-line approach only prepared to move from ‘*very* fanatical and extreme’ to ‘fanatical and extreme’, dismissing wishy-washy concepts like moderation and compromise proposed by congressmen from Massachusetts and Vermont. [74] The law was repealed in 1844 following a sustained campaign led John Quincy Adams, part of a continuing government struggle to find a

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[73] *The Inter Ocean*, Chicago, October 9, 1888, quoted in Lois Potter, *Shakespeare in Performance – Othello* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 86.
[74] ‘Am I Gagged or Not?’ in William Lee Miller, *Arguing about Slavery* (New York: AA Knopf, 1996), pp. 139-149 (p. 140) <https://archive.org/details/arguingaboutslav00mill/page/140/mode/2up>.

coalition solution to the issue of slavery. However, the passage of more draconian compromise laws in the 1850s resulted in political deadlock that would lead eventually to Civil War.[75] As with the backlash to political manipulation by the ruling elite, so there was a response by the minstrel stage burlesques to undermine the legitimate stage's attempt to appropriate Shakespeare to define American cultural identity, a subject which is covered in Part 2 – Shakespeare on the Minstrel Stage.

Methods of refinement of Shakespeare in the nineteenth century were not restricted to the American legitimate stage but followed a practice of censorship instigated by the English editor Thomas Bowdler. The first edition of Bowdler's *The Family Shakespeare* was published in 1807 with twenty four of the thirty-seven plays made 'family-friendly' through alterations to the plot and the removal of offensive words and expressions. In the preface to *The Family Shakespeare,* Bowdler explains his motives for the censorship as follows:

> The language is not always faultless. Many words and expressions occur which are of so indecent Nature as to render it highly desirable that they should be erased. Of these the greater part were evidently introduced to gratify the bad taste of the age in which he lived, and the rest may perhaps be ascribed to his own unbridled fancy. But neither the vicious taste of the age not the most brilliant effusions of wit can afford an excuse for profaneness or obscenity; and if these can be obliterated the transcendent genius of the poet would undoubtedly shine with more unclouded lustre. [76]

[75] James M McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom, The American Civil War*, (London: Penguin in association with Oxford University Press, 1988), pp. 121-126.
[76] William Shakespeare & Thomas Bowdler, *The Family Shakespeare in One Volume* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longmans, 1847), preface. <https://archive.org/details/familyshakespear00shakuoft>.

Bowdler's aim extended beyond concerns for social propriety, his criticism of the 'vicious taste' of Shakespeare's age also revealed the patronising role of patriarchy in the construction of Victorian gender identity. Despite Bowdler's claims of making Shakespeare's works morally palatable and thus available to wider audiences, strangely this did not find favour with the British Establishment. Most notably, the Church was highly critical of Bowdler expurgated text *Shakespeare for Family Reading* (1818) for making Shakespeare available to the masses. This view was supported by the conservative journal *The British Critic,* which railed against alterations and cuts to Shakespeare's works for purposes of wider accessibility remonstrating that "they have purged and castrated Shakespeare, tattooed and beplaistered him, and cauterised and phlebotomised him…".[77] Bowdler was so shocked by this criticism that he felt obliged to respond "The writer had obviously […] paid but little attention to some of the words in the original which are so indecent that, if the Reviewer should dare to read them aloud in the company of virtuous women he would [...] immediately be ordered to quit the apartment."[78] Concerning Bowdler, the Victorian poet Algernon Swinburne wrote "No man ever did better service to Shakespeare than the man who made it possible to put him in the hands of intelligent and imaginative children." [79] Such a view

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[77] *The British Critic*, 1823, quoted in Marvin Rosenberg, *The Masks of Othello,* p. 247.
[78] *The British Critic*, 1823, pp. 12-13, quoted in Rosenberg, p. 247.
[79] Ricky Rooksby, Swinburne, Algernon Charles (1837-1909) in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (online ed.) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/36389>.

was disapproved of by the High Church and the upper class in Victorian Britain who wished to exert cultural control and moral authority by limiting access, fearing that making Shakespeare more accessible through censorship would lead to class levelling and free-thinking. The benign paternalism of Bowdler attuned to Victorian propriety, and the slanted vision provided by the prompt books, was countered by the autocratic attitude of the Church and State in Britain determined to retain their undisputed right to rule by controlling the availability of Shakespeare's plays.

In mitigation of Bowdler's self-appointed role as moral guardian, his sense of propriety did not extend to editing *Othello,* which he felt would have damaged the dramatic genius of the play "I cannot erase all the bitter terms of reproach and execration with which the transports of jealousy and revenge are expressed by the Moor without altering his character, losing sight of the horrors of those passions, and in fact destroying the tragedy."[80] While most of the text remained unchanged, some lines were felt to be beyond the pale of even Bowdler's literary tolerance. As in practically every prompt book and edited version, Bowdler also deemed Act IV. 1 too shocking, with lines IV. 1. 3-9, which includes "Or to be naked with her friend in bed", expunged, as well as, parts of Othello's frenzied discourse on lying: "Lie with her? Lie on her? We say lie on her when they belie her. Lie with her!..." (*Oth* IV.1.34-41), which was condensed, but not completely

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[80] Shakespeare, and Bowdler, *The Family Shakespeare,* preface to *Othello*, p. 880.

erased.[81] *Othello* proved a test for Bowdler's principles with its sexual jealousy, adultery, a prostitute (Bianca), Emilia's cynical views on fidelity and Iago's innuendos. However, while he removed or cleaned up crude expressions spoken by the minor characters, the extremity of Othello's passion remained, on the grounds of artistic integrity.[82]

In America, Bowdler's *Family Shakespeare* did not sell so well as in Britain, with Americans less disturbed by the suggestive language and the need to protect female sensibilities. The prompt book deletions and stage directions, which regulated American performances of Shakespeare plays, were more concerned with theatrical spectacle and the memorable orations that reinforced a sense of national identity. Othello was thus portrayed as the embodiment of tormented masculinity, where racial contradictions were obscured through modifications to the text, light makeup, costume and focus on the leading actors and the great speeches. While Bowdler's name is synonymous with the tempering of Shakespeare, the legitimate stage versions of *Othello* were far more cavalier. The editing process shifted the emphasis of the play to a moral warning of the dire moral consequences of interracial union in order to promote a white cultural hierarchy.

2.1.3. Method and Purpose of Limiting the Role of Women in Legitimate Stage Performances of *Othello*

[81] Ibid, p. 899.
[82] For further reading on this subject see Rosenberg, *Masks of Othello,* appendix 'A Kind Word for Bowdler', pp. 244-256.

The actors and theatre managers, Kemble, Edwin Booth, Kean, Macready, and Forrest produced and revised the prompt copies so that the female voices became subordinate thus losing alternative perspectives of dissent. This made the plausibility of the plot of secondary importance to the dramatic spectacle and the great orations that promoted the careers of the leading actors of the day. This conclusion is corroborated in a review in *The Daily Evening Star* of Edwin Forrest's performance of Othello in Washington D C which focuses its attention on the linguistic duel between the male protagonists, with barely a mention of any of the female roles.[83]

Consequently, in the nineteenth century prompt book versions of *Othello* the voices of the three female characters, Desdemona (Othello's wife and daughter of Brabantio), Emilia (Iago's wife, and Desdemona's maid) and Bianca (Cassio's mistress), were condensed, distorted, or even eliminated, which diminished their vital role in challenging patriarchal assumptions of social order. The shift in the balance of power through the subjugation of women's voices in the revised versions of Othello renders women invisible in the public sphere, which reflected the underlying chauvinism of the era that also denied women's rights.

The edits also blurred sexually ambiguous perceptions of women. Thus, in the Rehearsal copy, (Folger *Othello* 42) and in Winter and Booth's promptbook, many of Iago's sexist insinuations that cast aspersions on the

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[83] 'Peregrina on Theatricals', *Daily Evening Star,* Washington D C. 24 Feb. 1854. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045461/1854-02-24/ed-1/seq-1/>.

role of women are softened or cut, including “You rise to play, and you go to bed to work” (II. 3. 113); as well as his long speech to Roderigo suggesting that Desdemona is a wanton wife:

> Her eye must be fed. And what delight shall she have to look on the devil? When the blood is made dull with the act of sport, there should be again to inflame it and to give satiety a fresh appetite.
> (II .1. 246-250)

Due to suggestions of female promiscuity, morally insupportable to paternalistic ideals of womanhood, parts of this speech were also expunged by Bowdler who, as has been noted, was much more faithful to Shakespeare’s *Othello* than the nineteenth century promptbooks. [84] Iago’s prosaic rant is reduced from its original forty lines to seventeen in the Winter and Booth version, with most of the sexual innuendoes removed. The cuts disconnect the play from an earthy and socially progressive interpretation regarding alternative perceptions of gender roles and race aimed at contesting patriarchal hegemony and conceit.[85]

Further edits which delete references to Desdemona’s influential gender role occur in Iago’s rhetorical soliloquy that questions the definition of evil. Iago’s speech justifying his plot to mislead Othello, which begins “And what’s he then that says that I play the villain?/ When this advice is free I give and honest” (II .3. 310-336), edits out ten lines that refer to Desdemona’s power over Othello. The abridged version of Iago’s speech shifts the focus to his own reflections on the definition of evil to justify his action, rhetorically concluding with “How am I then a villain…” (II. 3. 322).

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[84] Bowdler & Shakespeare, The Family Shakespeare, pp. 888-889.
[85] Winter & Booth, *Prompt Book of Shakespeare’s Tragedy of Othello*, p. 39.

By cutting Iago's reference to Desdemona's influence over Othello, which begins "For tis most easy/ Th'inclining Desdemona to subdue/ In any honest suit…" (II .3. 313-315), his scheming to get her to plead Cassio's case to Othello is removed. The edit also erases reference to Desdemona's unwitting role in arousing Othello's suspicions regarding her fidelity. In a further move to boost Iago's prominence, his soliloquy concludes Act II in the prompt book copies, a change that keeps the dramatic attention unduly focused on the dominant male roles.

Further undermining the significance of Desdemona's role, her assertive discourse with Othello, where she intervenes on behalf of Cassio, (III. 3. 45-90) is cut completely in Kemble's 1820-1849 copy (Folger, *Othello* 20), Hind's 1838 copy, and Winter and Booth's version.[86] The effect of this editing was to place more emphasis on the exchange between Othello and Iago in the temptation scene as responsible for persuading Othello of Desdemona's infidelity (Act III, scene 3). The relegation of Desdemona's voice within the play was an act of gender oppression aligned with the position of women in nineteenth century American society, where they were regarded as minor participants in the public sphere, or even unmentionable, as in the case of Bianca, who is erased completely from all the prompt books, her role described by William Winter as "needless and tedious to the representation." [87]

The omission of Bianca also removed the eavesdropping scene (IV. 1. 142-160), vital to Othello's mistaken assumption of Desdemona's infidelity,

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[86] Ibid, p. 58.
[87] Ibid, p. 5.

a scene fundamental to rousing Othello's jealousy and driving him to seek vengeance. Otherwise, Othello orders Cassio to be killed, murders his wife, and commits suicide, based on his susceptibility to the power of Iago's rhetoric. This would have tested the acting ability of the two male leads to convince audiences, a feat relished by the celebrity actors to increase their prominence and elevate their social standing. To emphasise this stage hogging, when William Macready played the role of Othello, he was the *sole* consideration, the all-engrossing object to the eye and heart of the audience, but when he took the part of Iago the next night, "lo! Pesto! Othello was to become a puppet for Iago to play with."[88] Thus, *Othello* became a vehicle to showcase the leading actors of the day removed from Shakespeare's multi-vocal intent to challenge oppressive class, racial and gender boundaries.

Appropriations of *Othello* were crafted to reflect a political system opposed to interracial amalgamation, even if, as in the case of John Quincey Adams, they were opposed to slavery. Thus, to preserve white social hierarchy and traditional family values, Desdemona was made a scapegoat for Othello's actions because of her wanton betrayal of the patriarchal and racial social order:

> The lady is little less than a wanton…who can sympathise with Desdemona… her conversations with Emilia indicate unsettled principles, even with regard to the obligations of the nuptial tie…when Othello smoothers her in her bed the terror and pity subside immediately into the sentiment that she has her deserts.[89]

[88] George Vandenhoff, *Leaves from an Actor's Notebook*, 1860, quoted in Rosenberg, *Masks of Othello*, pp. 40-41.
[89] John Quincey Adams quoted in Rosenberg, *The Masks of Othello* pp. 207-208.

The chauvinistic interpretation which paints Desdemona as deserving of her fate is a consequence of biased appropriations which do not allow Desdemona any defence. Adams' misogynistic focus is influenced by the prompt book versions, which disregard ambiguous gender perspectives and the subversive subtext that allow alternative interpretations of the play. For instance, Desdemona's response to the death of Cassio (her alleged lover) "Alas, he is betrayed, and I am undone." (*Oth* V. 2. 7) could be construed as an admission of guilt, or alternatively the realisation that she is also a victim of Iago's corrupt insinuations. The uncertainty is deliberate, designed to unsettle traditional moral codes and gender assumptions, but it only makes sense if women's voices and contradictory gender perspectives are included in the performances of the play. Also victim of the prompt book edits, (Folger *Othello* 42, Folger *Othello* 20 and the 1766 copy) is Desdemona's voice of rhetorical indignation at the injustice of her fate based on false allegations:

> DESDEMONA
> Tis meet I should be used so, very meet!
> How have I behaved that he might stick
> The smallest opinion on my least misuse? (*Oth* IV. 2. 106-108)

The erasure of her outrage leaves her no defence against misogynistic interpretations of her submission to her fate as the guilty party. Emilia, Desdemona's maid and Iago's wife, fares little better, mentioned by name only a few times in the edited copies, and then only by Desdemona, an indication of her perceived irrelevance, but also her threat, to a male dominated social hierarchy. Emilia is cynical about men and marriage, while Desdemona initially voices a high moral stance against infidelity "Beshrew

me, if I would do such a wrong for the whole world." (*Oth* IV. 3. 76-7).

Desdemona's compliant voice of female obedience contrasts with Emilia's voice of resistance to the injustice of male tyranny:

> Let husbands know
> Their wives have sense like them: they see, and smell,
> And have their palates both for sweet and sour
> As husbands have. What is it that they do
> When they change us for others? Is it sport?
> I think it is;
> [...]
> And have not we affections,
> Desires for sport, and frailty, as men have?
> Then let them use us well; else let them know
> The ills we do, their ills instruct us so. (*Oth* IV. 3. 89...99)

Emilia's rhetoric poses a threat to male power and thus, the exchange with Desdemona, which is interwoven with the anguish of the 'Willow song' was expunged from all the nineteenth century stage productions, deemed to be of little narrative worth in the power struggle between the male protagonists vying for status and narrative control.

However, this discourse is only slightly modified by Bowdler, with "desires for sport" replaced by "desires like them", which softens the sexual implications, but which retains a progressive female perspective that makes his *Family Shakespeare* more aligned to Shakespeare's original intent of disrupting gender assumptions.[90] The Winter and Booth prompt book also retained "The Willow Song" except for the final line "If I court more women, you'll couch with more men." (*Oth* IV. 3. 55), its radical assertion of sexual freedom across gender lines deemed a step too far for a culture constrained by male dominance. The "Willow Song" is an Elizabethan or earlier lament,

[90] Shakespeare and Bowdler, *The Family Shakespeare*, *Othello*, p. 905.

first noted in a book of lute music from1853, that links Desdemona's plight to Shakespeare's *A Lover's Complaint* and Ophelia's suicide in *Hamlet.* The mournful refrain- "Sing willow, willow, willow" - symbolises the despair of a woman caused by man's cruelty. By expunging the "Willow Song" the play, not only dismisses a history of women fatally betrayed in love, but also casts the play adrift from traditional ballads and verses which orally transmit an alternative cultural narrative to posterity. The omission of "The Willow Song" by the nineteenth century prompt book editors rendered the role of folk history and women as culturally peripheral to the construction of American identity.

However, a shift in gender representation in Winter and Booth's later 1878 prompt book, which also restored Desdemona's speech 'Tis meet I should be used so, very meet!" (*Oth* IV. 2. 106-108), coincided with a post-Civil War movement that saw women's rights organisations become more involved with the political parties in the struggle for gender equality. As a result, political, racial and gender divides became less distinct, especially as not all men were unsympathetic to equality of the sexes.[91] As far back as 1764 political activist James Otis (1725-1783) argued "Are not women born as free as men?", a point of view shared by Thomas Paine who wrote in 1775 that women were "constrained in their desires, in the disposal of their goods, robbed of freedom and will by the laws, the slaves of opinion."[92]

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[91] Judith Wellman, 'Women's Rights, Republicanism, and Revolutionary Rhetoric in Antebellum New York State', *New York History*, 69. 3 (1988), 352–84 (pp. 370-71).
[92] Quoted in Wellman, p. 360.

The gender and racial distortion promulgated by the legitimate stage was reflected by a debate in Boston on the 6 February 1841, where more than a thousand women signed a petition to repeal the law against racial intermarriage (Mr Bradburn's Bill), which was rejected by the all-male legislature by 204 votes against, with 140 votes for the motion, with noble Othello and Desdemona cited as an example of the pointlessness of such a proposition.[93] Such a patronising attitude to "fair Desdemonas", who were told to confine their interests to the domestic domain, was unacceptable to the nineteenth century instigators of "The Declaration of Sentiments" drawn up in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. The convention marked a watershed for women's rights in America, which with support from Frederick Douglass, contested conventional attitudes to gender and racial injustice. The proclamation's style of address draws attention to gender injustice through its parody of the American "Declaration of Independence" with its demands for the inalienable rights of man to be extended to women:

> "We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men and women are created equal. [...] The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man against women, having in direct object the establishment of a tyranny over her..." [94]

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[93] 'Boston Correspondent, February 6, 1841' in *The Madisonian,* Washington DC, 09 Feb. 1841. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015015/1841-02-09/ed-1/seq-3/>.

[94] John Dick, 'Proceedings and Declaration of Sentiments' in Report of the Woman's Rights Convention, held at Seneca Falls, New York, July 19th and 20th, 1848. (Rochester, NY: North Star, 1848). <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbcmil.scrp4006702>.
(This was a document signed by 68 women, and 32 men, including Frederick Douglass who declared it a grand moment for attaining civil, social, political and religious rights for women. The Declaration caused much controversy

The legal formality of the language in the "Women's Declaration" satirises the conceit of Congressional debates, a posturing of male self-importance mirrored in legitimate stage versions of *Othello* by highlighting the great speeches, where oratory is used as a tool to emphasise the unassailable rights of men to rule the nation.

Reinforcing this message of male entitlement through the power of oratory, Othello's lyrical soliloquy justifying his right to murder Desdemona is placed at the beginning of Act V in every prompt book:

> It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul,-
> Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars.
> It is the cause.
> [...]
> Put out the light, and then put out the light:
> If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
> I can again thy flaming light restore,
> Should I repent me; (*Othello* V. 2. 1...10)

Whereas in Shakespeare's original text, this oration is less prominently positioned (opening scene 2 of Act V), which follows on from the spectacle of Iago's orchestrated street brawl, a juxtaposition that draws a comparison, with, but which also blurs the distinction, between pragmatic and sacrificial reasons for murder and death. Perverse motives behind the bloodshed in the final scenes of the play allow sympathy for Othello through the anguish of his poetic voice when he finally realises that he has been made the stooge of malicious forces bent on the elimination of those who challenge the precepts of white social hierarchy.

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however, an article produced in the *Oneida Whig* in 1848 declaring it a most shocking and unnatural event in the history of womanhood).

The great speeches in the English rehearsal copies were overly emphasised through the editing process to serve a nationalist purpose, a focus which was also adopted by the legitimate stage to endorse a patriarchal culture. Kim Sturgess explains the role of oratory in the nineteenth century and why it held such significance for American audiences in that era:

> The orations of the nineteenth century were part of a process by which Americans learned the collective tradition and myth that […] the United States was created through heroic struggle against a tyrannous enemy. The orations while apparently a celebration of American achievement, they were through necessity in part anti-English. [95]

The distorted emphasis, however, did not reflect Shakespeare's multi-vocal, socially transformative intent, which was coded through the ambiguity and exchanges between a range of minor voices and the transmission of folklore sources. The result of the abridgements was magnificently staged melodramas which side-lined the role of women and evaded the political and racial anxieties of the day, which to quote appositely from *Hamlet* (Act I.4), were disclosed more in the breach than in the observance.

One of the obvious consequences of the attempt to 'refine' Shakespeare was a backlash from the minstrel stage, a multi-perspective alternative that grossly caricatured and contested the values of a racist, class-ridden, misogynistic society intent on preserving the Union at the expense of racial freedom and gender equality. The irreverent attitude of the minstrel burlesques, skits and parodies resonated with a cacophony of charivari

[95] Kim C Sturgess, *Shakespeare and the American Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p 30.

misrule in Shakespeare's plays designed to mock through caricature the counterfeit nature of white American cultural identity that the legitimate stage versions were trying desperately through omission to mask.

2.1.4. The Performance of Race in *Othello* on the Legitimate Stage - Implications for the Formation of American Cultural Identity

There was general unanimity regarding editing in the Kemble version, the Rehearsal copy and the post-bellum Winter and Booth prompt books of *Othello,* all of which drastically cut the minor comic roles, with Bianca (Cassio's jealous mistress) and the Clown significantly pared down or erased completely to give precedence to male authority. In addition, the editing out of the discourse between the Duke of Venice and Desdemona's father Brabantio discounts the richness of racial and cultural diversity which is indicated by the shift in vocal style to rhyming couplets. The exchange makes references to recurring themes of revenge and the devastating power of words, hints that forewarn and encourage audience engagement:

> DUKE
> To mourn a mischief that is past and gone
> Is the next way to draw a mischief on.
> What cannot be preserved when fortune takes,
> Patience her injury a mock'ry makes.
> The robbed that smiles steals something from the thief;
> He robs himself that sends a bootless grief.
> [...]
> BRABANTIO
> These sentences to sugar or to gall,
> Being strong on both sides, are equivocal.
> But words are words; I never did hear

That the bruised heart was pierced through the ear.

(*Oth* I. 3. 202…219)

The Duke mentions patience in his verse remarking on the folly of revenge, the word warning audiences of impending disaster when Iago perceives patience as vital to his mischief "How poor are they that have not patience!/ What wound did ever heal but by degrees?" (II. 3. 330-1) and when Othello says "I will be most cunning in my patience" (IV.1) when he plots against Cassio and Desdemona. Brabantio's response to the Duke invokes words "But words are words; I never did hear" which presages Othello's ruin through words he overhears, but which he tragically misconstrues. Racial diversity was also edited out by distancing Othello from association with African imagery and animalistic passions which included striking out 'Anthropophagi' (I. 3. 143); 'foul toads' (IV. 2. 60); '…the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor' (I. 1. 125); also references to fits of madness (IV. 1. 34-41); and softening or eliminating hot-blooded language such as "Naked in bed, Iago, and not mean harm?/It is hypocrisy against the devil." (IV. 1 .5-6).

As well as through linguistic revisions, white hegemony on the legitimate stage was also achieved through changes in the physical portrayal of Othello. In the antebellum period Othello was played in blackface makeup with stress placed on his noble demeanour rather than his African heritage. This involved costume and props designed to emphasis Othello's masculinity and military background with the actor John Kemble playing Othello in soldierly regalia in the early part of the century. However, due to a context of racial conflict and civil unrest, Othello's costume was changed to

eccentrically oriental by Edmund Kean, Edwin Booth, and Henry Irving, and to just plain eccentric by Junius Booth, who played Othello in a dishevelled dressing gown, to accentuate Othello's exotic individuality rather than his African descent.[96] For the New York premier of Edwin Forrest's Othello in 1826, his skin colour was near black, with his costume designed to convey fierce warrior splendour of imagined Oriental nobility:

> He wore as Othello a tunic cut low in the neck, dark-coloured tights, shoes fastened with straps and buckles…an ample silk mantle spotted with large gilt leaves, a turban-like hat resembling an inverted saucepan, and a dress sword.[97]

All actors prior to the great English actor Charles Kean (1811-1868) played Othello as black, taking cues from phrases such as "sooty bosom"; "thick lips" and "Old Barbary horse" but these were spoken by Othello's enemies and meant to be demeaning, and thus not a characteristic to be emphasised as an accurate depiction of Othello's cultural difference.

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[96] William Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage* (New York: Moffat, Yard, 1911), pp. 258-262 <https://archive.org/stream/shakespeareonthe003239mbp#page/n7/mode/2up>.
[97] Ibid, p. 261.

Figure 3: *Edmund Kean in his role as Othello wearing blackface makeup and an Aladinesque costume (Folger Shakespeare Library)*

Through the decades Othello's makeup became lighter, instigated by Edmund Kean in what became known as the 'bronze age' of Othello. Lighter makeup was used to infer an exotic rather than an African heritage, while claiming that this move was to allow for greater facial expressions.[98] However, within the context of escalating racial discontent related to the 1850 Fugitive Slave Compromise and the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act, it is more likely Othello's bronze age was a pragmatic response, as opposed to an artistic measure.[99] With class, rather than race, a more significant factor in the creation of a white cultural hierarchy in Britain, Othello was played by William Macready as a Venetian officer, with Sir Henry Irving choosing to play Othello as practically black, wearing a capacious cloak with hood and a

[98] Ibid, p. 252.
[99] For background on the 1850 Compromise legislation see Stephen E Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies* (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 2010), p.104 and pp.123-124.

neat turban, reminiscent of the Elizabethan Moorish diplomat Abd ben Mohammed Anoun, Ambassador to Elizabeth l.[100]

Figure 4: *Portrait of Abd ben Mohammed Anoun, Barbary Ambassador to Elizabeth l in 1600 thought to have been the inspiration for Othello*[101]

The intention was that Othello's alterity should be portrayed with respect and authority, consequently prompt book edits removed demeaning references to race, religion, and any untoward behaviour that would make him look dishonourable or weak. As in American productions of the play, Othello's sudden capitulation to despair and violent retribution becomes overly dependent on the rhetorical exchange in the temptation scene, rather than related to Iago's linguistic masking and Machiavellian manipulation to re-establish white racial hierarchy.

The history of legitimate stage performances of *Othello* in America traces a context of class, race, gender, and ethnic shifts which influenced the

[100] William Winter, *Shakespeare on the Stage,* p. 260.
[101] *William Shakespeare Othello*, ed. by Jonathan Bate, & Eric Rasmussen (London, Macmillan, 2009), p. 3.

portrayal of *Othello*. Through the 1850s, the loud bombastic style of Edwin Forrest, so suited to the patriotic zeal of an emerging Republic in the 1840s heyday of communal theatre entertainment, gradually lost favour, his performance described by one Southern reviewer as a virtual travesty: [Forrest] "tears Shakespeare to pieces […] his burly figure makes a burlesque." [102] Supporting this descent into farce, *The Ashland Union* critic reports boatmen in the pit heckling Othello, telling him to blow his nose with his fingers and stop pestering Desdemona for the handkerchief. [103] During later decades the American actor Edwin Booth used makeup and costume to depict a light-skinned, oriental Othello projecting the introspective anguish of a noble and tormented poet. The Winter and Booth edited version of the play toned down the physical savagery of the Salvini and Forrest Othellos, honing the text to suit refined and educated audiences whose values were reflected by Booth's aesthetically restrained performance. Many more words were removed by Booth compared to any other prompt book version. This included "sheets", "bed" and "body", with "whore", "bawdy" and "strumpet" considered to be indelicate, and where sexual relations were only hinted at. [104] In the latter part of the nineteenth

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[102] 'Forrest the Actor', *The Daily Comet,* Baton Rouge, LA. 9 Nov. 1855. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83016548/1855-11-09/ed-1/seq-2/>.

[103] 'Humorous' *The Ashland union*, Ohio. 19 March 1856. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83035173/1856-03-19/ed-1/seq-4/>.

[104] Marvin, Rosenberg, *The Masks of Othello - The Search for the Identity of Othello, Iago and Desdemona by Three centuries of Actors and Critics,* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), p. 87

century Othello's passion was conveyed by Booth's euphemisms of implied passion and sensuality, which defined a façade of white cultural refinement segregated from the rowdiness of the mixed audiences of the Forrest era.

Othello's "haply for I am black" is retained in the surviving promptbooks used on Southern stages by Macready, Booth, and others, as is Brabantio's line about Desdemona "To fall in love with what she feared to look on?" (*Oth* I. 3. 98), which implies that that Othello was played as black. However, an article entitled "Dignity of the Stage" in *The Daily Crescent*, written in response to the 1849 New York riot endorses the South's wish to disassociate *Othello* from immediate political concerns. The reviewer claims that such an uproar stifles Art and degrades the imagination, while praising actors for determining the course which the mind of his age shall take.[105] Thus, while Macready played Othello in black makeup in New Orleans in 1849 to great acclaim, audiences were only able to accept Othello as a Moor in Turkish costume, but not as a negro. [106] This indicated a desire to place Othello among the ranks of "whites" rather than "blacks", a paradox of racial rule bending which may be seen in retrospect to anticipate Nazi Germany's policy of creating Honorary Aryans to define those people valuable to the

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<http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.32106006269325;view=2up;seq=302>.

[105] 'Dignity on the Stage, *The Daily Crescent,* New Orleans, LA, 26 May 1849. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82015378/1849-05-26/ed-1/seq-2/>.

[106] C B Lower, 'Othello as Black on Southern Stages', in *Shakespeare in the South: Essays in Performance,* p. 215.

nation for propaganda purposes.[107] In this same manner, Othello's race was overlooked on the legitimate stage, with the noble qualities of his character foregrounded to enhance the image of the nation's cultural identity. According to W L Holbein, no reference was made to race in an early performance of *Othello* reviewed in the *Southern Patriot* in 1819, where presumably it was not considered to be of concern. However, due to Civil War enmity, Holbein suggests it is likely that later in the century Othello "had no more than a good suntan, when he ceased coming alive on the stage in Charleston in 1860."[108]

Escalating racial tension in the 1850s brought about by contentious political legislation produced strange political alliances where Western expansion, sectional economic interests, and the phenomenal success of Stowe's anti-slavery novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, meant that *Othello* was not presented in a consistent way on the legitimate stage. The presence of blackness on the stage in the South however, did not equate to tolerance of black equality, as indicated by a headline in *Mobile Register* for 4 February 1860 "The highest court in the Union has affirmed its principles, and decreed that negroes are not citizens, but property."[109] While a black Othello and white cultural hierarchy could be depicted on the stage in the North and

[107] 'In the Wind' reports that teachers in an all-Jewish girls' school in Vienna are outspoken Nazis who sing the psalm 'God Save Israel' in *The Nation*, 1938, 147. 3821 (1938), p. 298 < https://archive.org/details/sim_nation_1938-09-24_147_3821/page/n19/mode/2up>.
[108] W L Holbein, 'Shakespeare in Charleston 1800-1860', in *Shakespeare in the South: Essays in Performance,* ed. by P C Kolin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1983), pp. 88-111 (p. 101).
[109] Ibid, p. 102.

the South, it was a paradox that was reflected in the late nineteenth century Jim Crow 'separate but equal' legislation which, in reality, advocated racial segregation while reinforcing white hegemony.

2.1.5. Seriously Folks! – The Effect of Side-lining Carnival Elements of *Othello* on the Legitimate Stage

Just as the actors and theatre managers revised the prompt and rehearsal copies so that the female voices became subordinate, so other minor characters, who contributed to the underlying misrule, were also cut, also deemed irrelevant to the high art promoted on the legitimate stage.

The opening of *Othello* presents an unsettling backdrop, the coded charivari elements of street disruption clashing with the rivalling torchlit parade of the militia in search of Othello, which blurs the comedic genre of twelfth night masquerade with the looming tragedy threatening Venice from news of Turkish hostility. Iago's ominous remark "I am not what I am" (*Othello* I.1) alerts audiences to the impending cultural disorder also signalled by the juxtaposition of disparate and disguised voices. The Clown in *Othello* who appears twice briefly in Shakespeare's original performs a similar symbolic role, his suggestive pun on the word "lies" foreshadowing interwoven themes of deception and sexual transgression in the drama masked by his playful demeanour:

> DESDEMONA: Do you know, sirrah, where Lieutenant Cassio lies?
> Clown: I dare not say he lies anywhere.
> DESDEMONA: Why, man?

Clown: He's a soldier, and for one to say a soldier lies,
is stabbing. (*Oth*, III.4.1-5)

The Clown also muddles tail and tale linking the themes of sexual transgression with the tradition of storytelling linked to the re-enactments of ancient myths and legends connected to pagan rituals that provided moral security and guidance:

> CLOWN: O, thereby hangs a tail.
> MUSICIAN: Whereby hangs a tale sir?
> CLOWN: Marry sir, by many a wind instrument […]
> Then put up your pipes in your bag, for I'll away…
> (*Oth* III.1. 8…18)

The Clown's earthy discourse and innuendoes relate to Bakhtin's validation of a gross and subversive realism aimed at reclaiming a more representative ownership of the cultural narrative that sustained links to folklore traditions and myths., The carnivalesque theatre of the absurd appearances of the Clown paradoxically also indicate a shift towards tragedy. These scenes are erased without comment from every surviving prompt book copy of *Othello*, the unruly Clown perceived as a throwback to political and religious nonconformity, of no relevance to the legitimate stage's depiction of a tragic hero assailed by a vengeful subordinate, or in the South, seduced by a wanton Desdemona, who deserves the punishment meted out to her for transgressing patriarchal authority.

As the tragedy unfolds Othello's role transforms from comedic folklore fool to Iago's abject fool of Act IV, scene 1. The comedic expectations of the drama in the first two Acts, which challenge convention through social and racial inversion implies that the deceptive cunning of Iago is the representation of the dominant social order. Alignment with the comedic

misrule therefore invokes compassion for alternative social values of racial amalgamation, a respect for diversity endorsed by Othello's eloquent discourse. As the play, under the direction of Iago, proceeds from misrule into conventional comedy through misconceptions, revelry, mistaken identities, and disguise, social convention is revealed as tragedy characterised by the traditional unhappy ending. The paradox of comedy as tragedy disguised beneath a mask of misrule is also fundamental to blackface burlesque performances of Shakespeare, a continuation of a cultural legacy rooted in folklore pageantry transmitted across the ages from the commedia dell'arte via Shakespeare's stage to sustain a history of subversion under the nose of the dominant culture.

Thus, to summarise, in the prompt books and rehearsal copies of *Othello,* race is played down, with Othello's nobility highlighted at the expense of his alterity, in order to recast him as an honorary white man of high social standing. Women's voices are suppressed or removed, with focus on Desdemona's transgressive behaviour signalling anxieties related to miscegenation. The nineteenth century focus on leading male performers, grand orations and great melodrama reinforced the cultural values of a patriarchal social order, a system built on racial discrimination, misogyny, ethnic denigration, and class division. The limited social representation in the legitimate stage versions of *Othello* was pounced on with parodic glee by the antebellum blackface minstrels, who satirised the social anxieties of the ruling class identified through the omissions, edits, erased voices and slanted focus of the legitimate stage *Othellos*.

However, the most significant aspect of the promptbook edits was disregard for the subtext of misrule and non-conformity, a dialogic resonance that widened the social and cultural relevance of *Othello* beyond a contemporary context of contentious issues of race. Consequently, by the end of the nineteenth century legitimate stage Shakespeare productions had become so refined through the editing process that in effect performances of Shakespeare's plays had become, literally and metaphorically, a thing of the past. [110]

[110] Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow,* p. 78.

2.2. Part 2- The Response of the Minstrel Stage to the Performance of *Othello* on the Legitimate Stage: Racial Implications

> There is a relation between discipline and the theatrical sense. If we cannot imagine ourselves as different from what we are and assume the second self, we cannot impose a discipline upon ourselves, though we may accept one from others. Active virtue, as distinct from the passive acceptance of current code, is the wearing of a mask. It is the condition of an arduous full life.
>
> W. B. Yeats.[111]

2.2.1. History of Representations of *Othello* on the Minstrel Stage in Nineteenth Century America

> "Parody can be a weird act of homage"
>
> Robert McCrum[112]

Carnival and burlesque have a long history, and a rich tradition, which reaches back to a mythical age of storytelling and acted out rituals and legends sustaining a folk culture which permeates and subverts Church and State authority. Through the centuries, the baton of misrule was taken up by the Italian Commedia dell'arte, a performance of comic disorder also embedded within Shakespeare's plays to disrupt and reshape political and cultural boundaries. Moving on to nineteenth century America, the blackface

[111] W B Yeats quoted in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature,* ed, by Henry Louis Gates & N Y McKay (New York and London: W W Norton, 1997).
[112] Robert McCrum, Shakespearean (London: Picador, 2020).

minstrel tradition became the torch bearer for carnivalesque disruption of the social order, the burlesque in Shakespeare's plays a borrowing that resonates with, and also transmits, a folkloric heritage. Shakespeare's plays were especially apposite as a target of minstrel parody, as has already been noted, because the plays were being hijacked by the legitimate stage, where even *Othello* was slanted to reinforce highbrow white social and racial values.

By the mid-nineteenth century Shakespeare plays had become an established component of American cultural identity, so familiar that they lent themselves to lampooning riddles and verses, such as the one in the Washington *Evening Star* (8 Dec 1856):

> Othello was a captain bould,
> Though black as coal by nature,
> To Desdemona he was bound,
> A beautiful young craythure.
>
> With her he led a happy life,
> For she was no virago,
> Until one day he chanc'd to meet
> A villain, named Iago.[113]

The wordplay blends Irish brogue with race and gender slurs, the sharp topicality a reference to a charged period of social unrest. Through memorable ditties and witty banter, the minstrel shows took delight in puncturing the literary authority of Shakespeare to poke fun at the cultural pretensions of an emerging middle-class, but also to retain popular

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[113] 'The Tragedy of "Othello" by an Irish acquaintance', *Evening Star,* Washington, DC, 8 Dec. 1856. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1856-12-08/ed-1/seq-4/>.

ownership of a cultural icon, under threat of enclosure by the highbrow aspirations of the legitimate stage. The significance of a folk sub-culture, as was played out on the minstrel stage, is acknowledged by Walter Benjamin, in his theory on folk art, as part of an overlooked contribution to civilisation:

> Folk art and kitsch ought for once to be regarded as a single great movement that passes certain themes from hand to hand, like batons, behind the back of what is known as great art.[114]

The irreverence, vitality, and wit of the minstrels targeted issues of topical concern interwoven with universal themes that mass audiences could identify with. This included class and racial tension, ethnic rivalry, philosophy, politics, religion, city corruption, domestic violence, temperance, quack medicine, and scientific innovations, which represented a range of competing forces shaping a rapidly expanding nation. Eric Lott however, views blackface minstrelsy in a more didactic light as playing a role in raising class and racial consciousness by disseminating knowledge to immigrants and urban migrants:

> "Minstrel darkies" were conned and swindled, run down by trolleys, shocked by batteries, and jailed for violating laws they did not understand." (quoted from G. Rehin- 'The Darker Image'). They ultimately assuaged an acute sense of class insecurity by indulging feelings of racial superiority.[115]

This interpretation however, would seem to diminish minstrelsy's wider ability to adopt and adapt the mask as a satirical screen to blur and subvert

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[114] Walter Benjamin, 'Some Remarks on Folk Art' in *Selected Writings* Vol 2, ed by Michael W Jennings, Howard Eiland & Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 278 <http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/PROUST2021INCOMPLETENOVEL/walter-benjamin-selected-writings-volume-2-part-1.pdf>.

[115] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft, Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 64.

class, race and ethnic categories constructed by the cultural mainstream to establish a socio-economic hierarchy that denied fair representation of marginalised social factions.

Because of contradictory, prejudiced, and politically contentious attitudes to emancipation, racial equality and miscegenation, *Othello* was one of the most frequently parodied Shakespeare plays performed on the minstrel stage in the antebellum era. Thomas Dartmouth Rice's burlesque operetta *Otello* (1844) was one of the most influential and successful, providing a platform for Rice's signature blackface character, Jim Crow. Thomas Dartmouth Rice (1808-1860), considered the "father of American minstrelsy", was the original Jim Crow, a frontier reincarnation of a folk trickster whose roots delve into carnival and religious rites associated with an oral tradition perpetuated across time and space by the socially marginalised. T D Rice was born in Manhattan in 1808 and worked as an apprentice in local theatres. By the age of nineteen, he was a travelling actor honing his performing skills on frontier stages and in the backwoods of the American South. During the 1830s while in Louisville, Kentucky he studied black culture closely, his emulation of the dances, songs and vernacular so precise that audiences North and South were convinced that the minstrels were actually black.[116] With burnt cork mask, dressed in rags, battered hat and shoes, Rice introduced Jim Crow to the Park Theatre, New York during

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[116] Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow*, p. 30.
See also Matthew Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012) and Robert Toll, *Blacking Up, The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press,1974), p. 45.

the1830s, initially playing sketches and entr'actes in variety shows, which eventually led to the full-blown blackface minstrel burlesque *Otello*.

Jim Crow was also a transatlantic sensation, as reported by the *Maumee Express*, Ohio 15 April, 1837, in an article entitled "American Literature in England", which stated: "National pride that has prevented England from reading and appreciating the works of American authors, has at length been broken through, and the works of Jim Crow, the great 'nigger', buffo singer have been […] applauded to the skies in the metropolis of Great Britain." [117] It was while on a trip to London in 1836 that T D Rice was inspired to write a Shakespeare burlesque for Jim Crow after witnessing the success of Maurice Dowling's *Othello Travestie* at the Strand Theatre in London.[118] Initially resistant to casting his Jim Crow in the role of Otello on the grounds that it would constrain the anarchic dissent of his scarecrow commentator, the mass appeal of Dowling's *Othello* parody persuaded Rice to take the risk. Dowling's travesty is part of a long tradition of satirical dissent that followed in the footsteps of English playwright John Poole (1786-1871), whose own *Othello Travestie* (1813) is also a continuation of the same cycle of folk resistance to cultural repression. The tradition harks back to the burlesque within Shakespeare's plays, the masked carnival genre of the Italian commedia dell'arte, and the storytelling folklore embedded in the medieval mummers and miracle plays. Echoing this tradition of masked

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[117] 'American Literature in America', *Maumee Express,* OH, 15 April 1837. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85026142/1837-04-15/ed-1/seq-3/>.
[118]Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow,* p. 73.

social criticism, Shakespeare's *Othello* opens by signaling the charivari folk custom of a world turned upside down, a carnivalesque practice that tested social justice. Thus, *Othello* begins with a raucous street pageant, news of an irregular elopement and marriage, mock processions to track down the miscreants, and invocations to witchcraft to fend off evil spirits and cause mayhem, led disingenuously by the devilish Iago:

> IAGO
> Arise, arise;
> Awake the snorting citizens with the bell
> Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you,
> Arise I say! (*Othello*, I.1.90-94)

In *Othello* the suggested pageantry of holiday misrule is compromised by Iago's dark scheming and the collision of the torch-lit search for the runaways with another parade of Venetian officers who require Othello to attend the Senate. The clashing parades symbolise a muddle of the tragi-comic genre with classical tragedy invoked to characterise a context of political and religious turmoil related to the imposition of Puritan repression during the Elizabethan era.[119] As in Shakespeare's *Othello*, Rice's burlesque version *Otello* touched a universal nerve of folk resistance that dated back to a colourful age of myths and legends, jesters, fools and rituals at risk of erasure by the dominant cultural narrative.

While Rice's parody *Otello* was influenced by the British burlesque tradition of including bawdy songs and comic verse that targeted social and religious oppression, significant changes were made by Rice in his own

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[119] *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism,* ed. by John Coffey & Paul C H Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), introduction. (The Introduction gives a background into Anti-popery during the Elizabethan Protestant Reformation).

blackface parody – *Otello, A Burlesque Opera* that were relevant to contentious nineteenth century racial issues of emancipation and amalgamation.[120] The title alludes to Shakespeare's play, as well as to Rossini's opera *Otello* (1816), intended to satirise the cultural aspirations of the bourgeoisie and immigrant population flooding the urban centres of America at that time.

Following in the eminent footsteps of Shakespeare's practice of borrowing, Rice uses earlier sources as a palimpsest upon which to graft an alternative version, where changes, additions and omissions act as a code to signify the spirit of the times. Dowling's *Othello* burletta (1834), on which Rice's *Otello* was loosely based, satirically comments on the social fragmentation caused by the industrial revolution, with Othello and Brabantio's contrasting dialects an allusion to class and racial divisions associated with British industrial and colonial expansion.[121] The social turmoil is depicted through the incongruous blend of jumbled Shakespeare with folk ballads sung to inappropriate tunes.[122] In Dowling's travesty, the juxtaposition of Othello's vernacular and mock subservience in "Massa

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[120] Thomas Dartmouth Rice, 'Otello – A Burlesque Opera' in *Jump Jim Crow Lost Plays, Lyrics and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* ed. by W T Lhamon Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 343-383. *(Otello* has never been published but a copy was made from a manuscript written by T D Rice Esq., born in Newburyport, MA, 1 Oct. 1814. The first production was at the Philadelphia Chesnut Theatre on 28 Oct 1844, with Rice playing Otello. See Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, p. 441, note 1).

[121] M Paterson, *A Brief History of Victorian Britain* (London: Constable & Robinson, 2008), Introduction, pp. xi-xxvi.

[122] Maurice G Dowling, *Othello Travestie, An Operatic Burlesque Burletta*, (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1834), p. 8. <https://archive.org/details/othellotravestie0000dowl/page/32/mode/2up>.

Policeman, please let go him hand - Him want him purse" (p. 8), with Iago's air sung to Charles Dorn's barcarolle from 'Masaniello' (p. 6), followed by Othello's vernacular address to the Senate (sung to the tune of *Yankee Doodle* (p. 9), and which concludes with the old English ballad 'Giles Scroggin's Ghost' (p. 33), depicts the cultural disruption of the times. Rice recognised the potential for political comment and cultural insubordination in Dowling's travesty through the inclusion of a carnival subculture with roots in Celtic and European mediaeval folklore. However, Rice's burlesque puts greater emphasis on racial tension dramatically symbolised by Otello's pronounced vernacular, the taboo of Otello's mixed race child, and the assertive role of women as Rice recognised that America needed an art form that would represent and confront the complex problems of identity, democracy, gender and race in nineteenth century America.

To achieve this, Rice blended Dowling's polyphonic format with African American source material and frontier humour to create his own *Othello* travesty, creating a unique, indigenous American minstrelsy phenomenon that took the American stage by storm. Rice's burlesque of Shakespeare's Moor satirised attempts by the legitimate stage to own Shakespeare as the symbol of high art and, ironically in the case of *Othello*, of refined white cultural identity. Audiences responded with great enthusiasm to the theatrical innovation as indicated by the Amusements Section of the New York papers which indicated an explosion in venues for minstrel performances, with troupes playing night after night for four years and more, as well as touring the country. Out of fourteen venues listed, four

were dedicated exclusively to minstrel burlesque performances inspired by the success of Rice's Jim Crow *Otello*. The mass appeal of the new art form across the whole social spectrum was also noted by *The New York Herald*, September 19, 1845, which reported that the Ethiopian Serenaders continue to attract large crowds where they have audiences every night of the most fashionable people in the city. [123]

The popularity of Rice's *Otello* spawned other skits and travesties of *Othello*, which include *'Desdemonum'* (1854/5), '*Bones plays O'Feller'* (no date), with Bones in the title role, G W H Griffin's '*Othello; A Burlesque'* (late 1860s) and *'Dars- de-Money'*(1880).[124] The sophisticated use of couplets in the dialogue of Griffin's skit suggests that he saw the literary potential of the burlesques influenced by American humorous poetry.[125] In the period following the Civil War, ethnic caricatures became more prevalent in the burlesques, which saw blackface Irishmen, Germans, Chinese and Jews added to the shows. The various dialects and cultural clashes in the skits reflected the impact of immigration and rising ethnic tension in the postbellum urban population. In Griffin's *Othello* burlesque, Iago is Irish, and Othello speaks in exaggerated vernacular, linguistic stereotyping that

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[123] 'Ethiopian Serenaders', *The New York Herald.* 19 Sept. 1845. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1845-09-19/ed-1/seq-2/>.

[124] Ray B Browne, 'Shakespeare in American Vaudeville and Negro Minstrelsy', *American Quarterly*, 12.3 (1960), 374-391 (pp. 387-88) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2710096>.

[125] G D Engle, *This Grotesque Essence, Plays from the American Minstrel Stage* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), p. 68. 'Desdemonum' and 'Othello; A Burlesque' in G D Engle, *This Grotesque Essence, Plays from the American Minstrel Stage*, pp. 62- 67 and pp. 68-77.

alludes to the hostile race riots between free blacks and Irish immigrants in the mid nineteenth century.[126] Through the burlesque irreverence for social order, the denigrated subculture of blackface minstrelsy echoed but also emphasised the underlying subtext of misrule and dissent in Shakespeare's *Othello* that legitimate stage versions chose to erase or diminish.

Shakespeare, in his day, was known as the 'Upstart Crow', a soubriquet that links the mimetic minstrel tradition of Jim Crow with the bawdy antics within Shakespeare's plays. In the case of *Othello*, this connection is signalled through Iago's stooge Roderigo who describes Othello as "an extravagant and wheeling stranger/ Of here and everywhere" (*Othello* I.1. 137-8).[127] This allusion is too much of a coincidence to deny a connection to the blackface figure of Jim Crow and his hallmark refrain "Weel about, and turn about and do jis so, Eb'ry time I weel about and jump Jim Crow."[128] The carnival characters embedded in *Othello* and Rice's Jim Crow constitute direct descendants of the disruptive figure of the harlequin clown of the Italian stage buried, but not lost, in the folk memories of displaced populations.

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[126] A graphic account of the racial hostility that erupted during this period is depicted in Anne E Dickinson's novel *What Answer?* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 2003).
Originally published in1869, Dickinson's novel is centred on interracial marriage doomed to disaster within a Northern society that could not accept racial equality. Set during the violent times of the New York race riots, *What Answer?* was, to Oliver Johnson, a "powerful blow against the Satanic spirit of caste." (Introduction, p. 22).
[127] William, Shakespeare, 'Othello' in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1997), pp. 2100-2172.
[128] 'Songs – The Original Jim Crow' in Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, p. 96.

The intertextuality with carnivalesque traditions suggests that Shakespeare's *Othello* is a re-imagined 'black' comedy, but twisted out of shape by the dark ending, that blends the tragi-comic contradictions of the burlesque versions with the classical tragedy of the nineteenth century legitimate stage adaptations. Shakespeare's *Othello* contains all the stock characters of the Italian comedic tradition, with Othello cast as the foolish Capitano associated with outsiders, degradation and transgression. His character is always assumed to come to a sticky end, a template which Shakespeare modifies to invoke sympathy for Othello as a symbol of racial

Figure 5: *Konstantin Andreevich Somov – Italian Comedy, 1914*

and religious oppression.[129] Similarly, Iago in the role of the artful interlocutor who colludes with the audience through his asides and self-

[129] Richard F Whalen, 'Commedia dell'arte in *Othello*, a Satiric Comedy Ending in Tragedy', *Brief Chronicles,* 3 (2011), 71-107 <https://shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/wp-content/uploads/Whalen.Othello.pdf>.

reflection, makes more sense if the play is linked to the dissenting tradition of the Italian commedia dell'arte, with which Shakespeare's audience would have been familiar.[130] Such an alternative interpretation of *Othello* as originally a masquerade with a tragic ending that blends comic repartee with tragedy to expose the hubris of mankind, would explain the necessary contortions practised by the legitimate stage to depict Othello as the vanquished, yet dignified embodiment of white masculine nobility.

Shakespeare's *Othello* was first performed in 1604, coinciding with the expansion of the Atlantic slave trade when it was first felt necessary by the British colonialists to identify themselves separately as white, achieved by constructing what the eminent American historian Edmund Morgan terms "a screen of racial contempt".[131] Previously, xenophobia was aligned along a religious axis but as the African slaves became Christians, differentiation on the grounds of colour was instituted as a powerful device for asserting white pre-dominance. This was not a new phenomenon, as suggested by W E B Du Bois in his essay *The Souls of White Folk* but echoed an identical process which took place in Elizabethan times.[132] This is characterised in Shakespeare's play where hostility to the non-white race is conflated with a Protestant agenda of demonising ancient superstitions associated with pagan legends and Catholicism. However, the anti-Catholic vilification does

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[130] Professional Italian *commedia* troupes and individuals toured the court capitals of Europe during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, see Winifred Smith, *The Commedia Dell'arte: A Study in Italian Popular Comedy,* reprint (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018) pp. 170-200.
[131]Quoted in Robert P Baird, 'The Invention of Whiteness: The Long History of a Dangerous Idea, *Guardian,* 20 April 20, 2021.
[132] W E B Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk, Essays and Sketches* (Chicago: A. C. McClure, 1903).

resonate with Du Bois' theory, which implies a racial category of whiteness as a new religious dogma, rather than a biological fact upon which to define human identity.[133] Othello points out that initially he was respected by Desdemona's father Brabantio, who "lov'd me; oft invited me" (I.3.128). However, Brabantio resorts to racist invective when the social order is disrupted by the taboo of the interracial marriage of his daughter with Othello, "Run from her guardage to a sooty bosom/Of such a thing as thou, to fear, not to delight." (I .2. 72-73).

The process of denigration to establish racial hierarchy in order to create an exploitable sub-class is explored by James Walvin in *The Black Presence* which documents the history of African people in England:

> Planters and their propagandists searched for evidence which both justified their involvement with slavery and placed the African beyond the pale of English comprehension [...] The major themes, occurring again and again in their caricatures of the Negro were the African's blackness and 'animal' features, his alleged indolence and untrustworthiness, and his unusual sexual powers.[134]

As observed by Eric Williams, the first Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago, "slavery was not born of racism: rather racism was the consequence of slavery", a situation true in Elizabethan times, while also applicable to nineteenth century, and present-day America.

Satirising the creation of these social and racial divisions in *Othello* through the inverted racial hierarchy, the prominence of women's voices and a carnivalesque subtext transmits an enduring cultural legacy

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[133] W E B du Bois, *Darkwater Voices from within the Veil* (London & New York: Verso, 2016).
[134] James Walvin, *The Black Presence – A Documentary History of the Negro in England*, 1555-1860, London: Orbach & Chambers, 1971), p. 22.

significant to the penetration and impact of the minstrelsy tradition into the cultural consciousness of the nation. The novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain and Herman Melville then picked up the minstrel baton of disrupted class, gender and racial disorder, and ran with it to help construct a counter-hegemonic American cultural identity.

2.2.2. The Racial Significance of Burlesque Versions of *Othello* in Nineteenth Century America

The aim of the legitimate stage productions of *Othello* was to claim ownership of the literary authority of Shakespeare to reinforce the ideals of white patriarchy as the arbiter of American cultural identity. The aim of the minstrel stage burlesques was to challenge the assumptions of the dominant culture through the appropriation of a diverse range of source material, which included the works of Shakespeare, to reclaim possession of the most revered literary icon for the politically voiceless and culturally marginalised. The burlesques focused on and satirised, the anxieties of the dominant white culture, identified by the cuts and omissions made to the prompt book versions of *Othello* used by the legitimate stage to impart a selective vision of American cultural identity. The blackface parodies of Shakespeare's *Othello* were amongst the most popular because of their relevance to highly contentious issues of race. One of the most popular was Thomas Dartmouth Rice's *Otello – A Burlesque Opera,* first performed in the Chesnut Theatre,

Boston in 1844. It follows the usual pattern of the blackface travesties of comically rehashed and embellished Shakespeare plays, interwoven with over-sentimental ballads sung to familiar tunes with suggestive lyrics. In Rice's version, Otello is a Moor from the Deep South who elopes to Gretna Green with Desdemona, Iago is a scheming citizen of Venice, and Cassio is an Irish drunkard, an incongruous jumble of comic ethnic stereotypes that pander to the prejudices of unruly, lower class European immigrants.[135]

The most glaring white anxiety that the legitimate stage edits were concerned with was Othello's African racial heritage and how to avoid or smooth over mention of it. Consequently, on the minstrel stage references to Othello's colour and broad vernacular are greatly exaggerated. In T D Rice's *Otello – A Burlesque Opera*, Otello's address to the Senate, a comic parody of his status, is delivered in extravagant patois:

> Most potent, grabe and reberand Signiors, my bery noble and approbed good Massas: Dat I hab tuck away dis old man's darter – is true and no mistake […] I cannot chat like some folks for, since a piccanniny two years old, I'b always been in rows and spreezes, Yet, by your gracious patience, I'll tell you how I won his darter. [136]

G W H Griffin's *Othello*, *A Burlesque, as Performed by Griffin & Christie Minstrels* (1866) was a later nineteenth century appropriation that also uses comic satire to draw attention to social exclusion related to the construction of a class and racial hierarchy. Griffin's burlesque moved away from the traditional minstrel format however, to a vaudeville style parody of ethnic

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[135] Thomas Dartmouth Rice, *Otello,* in Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow,* pp. 343-383, (p. 346).
(Hereafter *Otello* is cited parenthetically by page numbers).
[136] Rice, *Otello*, p. 350.

and racial conflict.[137] The different characters speak in a range of European dialects, in fast-paced rhyming couplets that signify the ethnic clashes within a riotous urban landscape:

> BRA. Ter dyvel! You're von humbug! It can't be!
> IAG. A humbug am I? Go yourself and see;
> I've told you the truth, and think you might be civil –
> BRA. Here, sthop a minit –
> IAG. Oh go to the divil.[138]

Brabantio's German accent interweaves with Iago's Irish brogue, the common language marking ethnic divisions, but also, integration into the family of white American cultural identity. To imply racial and gender equality, Othello and Desdemona speak in the same idiom as other characters, the interwoven verses a parody of cultural and racial levelling. The linguistic sparring is more hostile in this later blackface version of *Othello*, a cynically comic vehicle that depicts rising racial tension, a presage of the civil unrest that erupted into incidents such as the New York City draft riots in July 1863. [139] While ostensibly a class riot connected to wealthy citizens who paid to dodge the Civil War draft, the street battles were also racially motivated. The *New York Herald*, for instance, claimed that angry mobs were determined that "Negroes should be attacked wherever found",

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[137] G W H Griffin, *Othello Burlesque,* in Engle, *This Grotesque Essence,* pp. 68-77.

[138] Ibid, p. 70.

[139] The four-day riot (July 13-16, 1863) was a protest over the Union's Conscription Act, which drafted men in to fight in The Civil War. Those who could pay 300 dollars were granted exemption from the draft. The clause caused anger and bitter class resentment, which erupted into violent street confrontations that turned into a race riot, with African Americans targeted by the mostly Irish protesters. See Iver Bernstein, *The New York City Riots* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

which amounted to a form of ethnic cleansing under the cover of rivalling class warfare.[140] Such seething racial animosity between European immigrants and the previously enslaved population is depicted in Iago's song of unrequited love sung in brogue to the tune of the Irish ballad 'Low-Backed Car', in which he swears revenge against Desdemona for racial betrayal:

> But she's cleared out and left me now, with a nasty, dirty fellar,
> As black as mud – a white washer – a nagur called Othello.
> But I'll kick up the devil's own spree with her for the way she served me,
> And the way I'll plague her for marrying that nagur, will be something amazing to see. [141]

The well-loved Irish folk song, on which this is based, is also included in James Joyce's *Ulysses,* the folk language and bawdy double entendre, a cross-cultural intertextuality that blurs high and low culture through the inclusion of distant voices that dislocate, but also enrich, the dominant cultural narrative by stealth.[142]

The anonymously written *Desdemonum*, *An Ethiopian Burlesque in Three Scenes* (1874) goes even further in exaggerating race through Oteller's extreme street vernacular which mocks attitudes to class and race:

> OTEL. 'Tel my duck, I hear you; daddy's gone to bed.
> DES. Fotch along your ladderum, I'm de gal to wed!
> Since burnt cork am de fashion, I'll not be behind –

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[140] 'A Negro Hanged – Excitement at Clarkson Street' *The New York Herald.*14 July 1863. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1863-07-14/ed-1/seq-8/>.

[141] Griffin, *Othello Burlesque,* p. 70.

[142] James Joyce, *Ulysses* (London: Wordsworth Classics, 2010), Eumaeus, chapter 16.

I'll see Oteller's visage in his highfalutin' mind.
BOTH. De hour am propitious – come, my darling flame!
Dey say dat in de dark, all cullers am de same. [143]

In contrast to the burlesques of Rice and Dowling, all the characters in *Desdemonum* speak in the same African American idiom, including the Judge, whose hexameter, the standard epic meter of classical Greek and Latin literature, adds an ironic note of mock Greek tragedy to the façade of a republican democracy that denies equal rights to its citizens:

JUDGE: Brabantium, what's de matter, dat you look so blue?
BRA: Dat darky's stole my darter, but de act I'll make him rue. [144]

The focus on colour - "dat you look so blue?"; "dat darkey stole my darter" and "in de dark, all cullers look de same" – farcically draws attention to white fears related to class and racial equality and amalgamation. The trial scene in *Desdemonum* is held at The Tombs, a reference to the infamous New York City prison, which also alludes to a context of racial conflict that culminated in violent street riots.

In T D Rice's burlesque, language sets the character of Otello apart, with the "blackman" or "Master Blackey" of Maurice Dowling's version replaced by "nigger". The derogatory invective draws attention to racial denigration that was designed to create a socially excluded economic underclass:

Brabantio
There's no mistake, the nigger's back I'll fleece.
Give notice, do, good Sir – to the Police. [145]

143 Griffin, *Othello Burlesque,* p. 63.
144 Ibid, p. 65.
145 Rice, *Otello*, p. 346.

Similarly, Shakespeare's exotic Moor was the target of racist slurs by his enemies. However, his eloquent discourse elevated him above Iago and Brabantio's attempts to demean his racial difference.

According to Shelly Fisher Fishkin, author of *Was Huck Black*?, recent language studies have now recognised that dialect in the hands of sly and talented artists do cultural work more complicated than originally thought, and that English continues to be a dynamic amalgam of a variety of speeches in which vernacular forms have played a vital part.[146] As part of their act, minstrel troupes played up to assumptions of an Ethiopian authenticity heralded by critics who were impressed by their incredible mimetic skills and musical accomplishments.[147] However, the gross caricatures, raggedy costumes and exaggerated vernacular would also have cast doubt on claims to Ethiopian veracity. The counterfeit paradoxically conferred an alternative American cultural authenticity through the amalgamation of European, African, and American frontier material, transported from the rural South by Northern songwriter Stephen Foster and white minstrel troubadours such as T D Rice, who visited New Orleans in 1835, 1836 and 1838.[148] The

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[146] Shelley Fisher Fishkin, 'Dialects', in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, ed by B Burdett & G Hendler (New York & London: New York University Press, 2007), p. 20.
[147] *The New York Herald* reports on The Christy Opera House as a new venue for the minstrel shows, describing the minstrel show as "a representation of the peculiar characteristics of the Southern Negroes."
'The Christie Opera House' *The New York Herald.* 23 March 1850. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1850-03-23/ed-1/seq-2/>.
See also George Odell, *Annals of the New York Stage, 15 Vols*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927) vols 4 and 5.
[148] Toll, *Blacking Up,* p. 45.

material found its way to city stages, to the delight of urban audiences who gained confidence through identification with the accomplishments of the self-conscious artifice of the minstrel performers.

In Rice's *Otello*, language was also employed as a tool to parody white cultural pretentions through songs such as *Merry Swiss Boy*, a duet between Iago and his sidekick Roderigo. The song was adapted from a stage musical *The Bold Dragoons* (1833), an ethnic cross-over that blends Tyrolean source material with an old English ballad "The Dragoon and the Lady", an incongruity that comically stirs up ethnic and class conflicts:

> *Roderigo*
> Come rouse thee; arouse thee; Brabantio arise
> And look to your daughter and your bags.
> *Iago*
> What ho, there Brabantio, Old Signor arise!
> Or you'll not have a stiver or a rag.
> There's thieves on your premises, so look to your life-
> Your daughter's 'squatulated and become a nigger's wife.[149]

The inclusion of the strange word 'squatulated', derived from absquatulated meaning to run off with someone or something, mocked an American fad for word invention designed to establish a unique literary identity. The literary conceit is parodied on the minstrel stage, demolished through the vulgarity of Iago's racial invective.

The gender and race inversions of the minstrel burlesques resonate historically with the ambiguities in Shakespeare's *Othello* whose male and female characters blur and contradict gender expectations in response to

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See also Matthew Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[149] Rice's *Otello*, p. 344.

conflicting social pressures. The fluidity is depicted by the defiance of Desdemona's elopement, which is countered by her passive submission to her husband's murderous will. The moment in Othello's narrative where he relates Desdemona's active consent to their union is the point that most offended influential critics such as American senator John Quincey Adams:

> OTHELLO: She thanked me,
> And bade me, if I had a friend that loved her,
> I should but teach him how to tell my story,
> And that would woo her. Upon this hint I spake:
> She loved me for the dangers I had passed,
> And I loved her that she pitied them. (*Othello* I. 3. 162-8)

Adams described Desdemona's passion for Othello as "unnatural" describing her as a "wanton trollop", and thus, despite being a vocal campaigner in favour of emancipation, and professing a belief in American moral values of freedom and equality, his criticism of *Othello* implied that he could not countenance racial equality or the thought of miscegenation. Adams was accused of perceiving a racist theme, which the cross-genre, multi-vocal style of Shakespeare's play clearly did not intend.[150]

Not surprisingly, the horror of a racially hybrid nation in the eyes of the dominant white culture provided a rich source of parody for the minstrel stage which, in Rice's *Otello,* is relished through the interracial union between Otello and Desdemona. *Otello*'s air *The Girl I left Behind Me,* originally a colonial fife song of Irish origin about separation, is sung by Otello to welcome Desdemona to Cyprus. The incongruous sentiment exaggerates and ridicules contradictory attitudes to race that supported

[150] William Jerry MacLean, 'Othello Scorned: The Racial Thought of John Quincy Adams', *Journal of the Early Republic*, 4. 2 (1984,) 143–60 (p. 148) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3122719>.

emancipation and racial equality, based on the concept of a 'Higher Law', while negotiating a compromise to appease slaveholders in order to keep the Union intact.[151] Rice's parody of the Irish ballad blurs and conflates political and racial amalgamation with marriage and family union. The reversal of the ballad's sentimentality creates a sense of unease which related to a context of uncertainty over 'Union' with its implications for national identity, racial equality, and gender roles:

> OTH: I've lived on land; and I've libed on sea,
> In ebery clime and station.
> And dere no station in all de world
> Like de state of annexation
> Kase if you like me, and I like you
> And our lubs are in communion,
> De longer den de family grows,
> More stronger am de Union.[152]

The unsettling contradictions of the revised lyrics of *The Girl I left Behind Me* embrace the charivari rituals of topsy turvy rule, a comic disorder also echoed in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* in the form of the wild child Topsy, whose comic antics expose Miss Ophelia's Northern Christian racial prejudices.

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[151] William H Seward 'Freedom in the New Territories (Appeal to a Higher Law)', Senate Speech, March 11, 1850 (U.S. Congress, Senate, *Congressional Record,* 31st Congress., 1st session, Appendix, pp. 260-69), pp. 308-310 <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/resources/pdf/SewardNewTerritories.pdf>.
Regarding compromised political alliances, the *Southern Press* (Washington DC) 29 Oct. 1851 criticises feeble-minded members of the Union Party of Alabama, Mississippi and Georgia who sided with the Whigs to save the Union in the 1850 Compromise Act in terms of "will not Othello's occupation be gone?" See, 'The Union Party of the South', The *Southern Press,* Washington, D.C. 29 Oct. 1851. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014763/1851-10-29/ed-1/seq-4/>.
[152] Rice, Otello, p. 363.

Ambiguity related to Union on the minstrel stage would have been intentionally provocative, intended to arouse and mock white fears of a racially mixed nation when, ironically, the country could never be certain of a pure white racial identity because of interbreeding between Southern plantation masters and their slaves. The exchanges between Otello and Desdemona, which alternates street vernacular with standard English, symbolise an alternative alignment of racial and gender equality, their union a marriage that alludes to political and personal spheres of amalgamation. The blurring of class, racial and gender boundaries is glossed over in the legitimate stage versions of Othello, through cuts and edits that reduce the significance of Desdemona's role.

The most outrageous aspect of Rice's blackface burlesque, however, is Desdemona and Otello's mixed-race progeny, a blatantly provocative racial addition that draws attention to white fears of a racially hybrid nation:

> Behold this pledge – your image here is seen.
> Not this side love, the other side I mean.
> [*points to child's face*] [153]

The hybrid offspring of miscegenation does not appear in Shakespeare's original play, Cinthio's source material for *Othello*, or in Dowling's travesty. The bifurcated mask, indicated by Desdemona's entreaty for Othello to kiss the child on a particular cheek, is a visual symbol of the paradox of a divided Union. According to W T Lhamon, the divided mask in Rice's *Otello* alludes to the role of the trickster, part of a self-aware ensemble ritual that alerts audiences to core contextual issues, which is also a function of the burlesque

[153] Ibid, p. 362.

subtext of comic disorder which underpins Shakespeare's plays.[154] While Rice's stage direction for Otello to kiss his child refers to racial union as well as gender equality, by contrast the reverse racism expressed in Otello's air *Lucy Long* alludes to a complex context of racial discord that crosses the racial divide:

> *Otello*
> Black folks from sheer vexation
> Will grumble at me a few;
> And call dis 'malgamation
> Well, I don't care if they do [*pause*]
> If I hab no objection,
> What de debil's dat to dem?
> You can't help your complexion;
> Nature made you as well as dem. [155]

The cross-racial amalgamation in the air *Lucy Long* invokes nature as a universal trait that "made you as well as dem", which subtly alludes to a nineteenth century context of scientific racism that used racial difference as a tool to justify slavery and racial segregation in the postbellum era.[156] However, in Rice's *Otello* and in Shakespeare's original, the literal and figurative meaning of black and white is complex and ambiguous, where 'black' is an aspect of nature, and not confined to skin tone. In Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* hierarchy based on skin colour is inverted, with greater value placed on blackness because it cannot be adulterated:

> Coal black is better than another hue
> In that it scorns to bear another hue
> For all the water in the ocean
> Can never turn the swan's legs to white

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[154] Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, p. 83.
[155] Ibid, p. 357.
[156] John P Jackson & Nadine M Weidman & Gretchen Rubin, 'The Origins of Scientific Racism', *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*, 5. 50 (2005-2006), 66-79.

Although she lave them hourly in the flood.

(*Titus Andronicus* IV. 2. 99-105)[157]

T D Rice also invoked colour as a metaphor in *The Virginia Mummy* (1837) to blur the line dividing whiteness from racial "otherness". In the farce, Captain Rifle is just returned from two years campaign on the western frontier, where he explains how, like a chameleon, it changes a man's colour. The blend of dialects amplifies the interracial amalgamation, exaggerated by Ginger Blue who is painted in a variety of colours to disguise him as a mummy. Ginger asks for plenty of turpentine to be used because as he says, "I like to make 'em believe I'm a white man too."[158] Blue's comment satirises the colour coded racial hierarchy of the dominant culture to signify that whiteness is not pure but is made up from a blend of other colours. Matthew Rebhorn attributes T D Rice's farce *The Virginia Mummy* as indebted to a history of frontier performance arguing that Rice's Jim Crow character does not exploit or expropriate black culture. Rather Rebhorn suggests, that by lampooning the tall tales and the boastful lore of Davy Crockett, Rice sharpened his racial satire.[159]

The struggle for political and racial justice was a complex and discordant aspect of nineteenth century American life, with the contradictions amplified and parodied through minstrel stage disorder.

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[157] William Shakespeare, 'Titus Andronicus' in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1997).
[158] T D Rice, '*The Virginia Mummy, A Farce in One* Act' in Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, pp. 159-177 (p. 165).
[159] Matthew Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

Abolitionists Martin Delany and Frederick Douglass, although united in their opposition to racial discrimination and slavery, were divided on how to achieve it. For instance, Frederick Douglass was appalled by Gavitt's black Ethiopian Serenaders who toured in Britain in the 1840s while he was on a lecture tour there. However, in a review of one of their performances Douglass admits that there is something to be gained in removing racial prejudice when a coloured troupe plays for white audiences, but only if they represent the coloured man faithfully and with taste, and not as an Ethiopian style caricature.[160]

Douglass countered the masked revelry of the minstrel burlesques through the elevated and egalitarian narrative style of his heroic slave Madison Washington, in his short novel *The Heroic Slave.* However, through his involvement with white abolitionists, including Harriet Beecher Stowe, Douglass clashed with civil rights campaigner Martin Delany, author of one of the most significant black nationalist texts of the nineteenth century, over cooperation with those Delany held responsible for racial oppression.[161] Thus, Douglass fell between two stools of anti-slavery activism, the separatist stance of African American autonomy, and engagement with the

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[160] Frederick Douglass, 'On an All Black Company', *The North Star,* NY*,* 29 June 1849 <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/minstrel/miar03at.html>.

[161] Frederick Douglass refused to review Martin Delany's *The Condition, Elevation and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852), with Delany critical of Mrs Stowe whom he claimed, "*knows nothing about us*". Quoted in Robert S Levine, '"Uncle Tom's Cabin" in Frederick Douglass' Paper: An Analysis of Reception', *American Literature*, 64. 1 (1992), 71–93 (p. 80) <www.jstor.org/stable/2927489>.

minstrelsy-inspired ironic satire of the novels of Harriet Beecher Stowe, Mark Twain and Herman Melville, which blurred social boundaries in order to contest and transform attitudes to race and inequality. (These works will be the subjects of later chapters in this thesis).

The incongruous alliances and discords within the anti-slavery movement were highlighted on the minstrel stage through the interracial polyphony of the multiple rhythm and rhyme schemes of the verse, songs, duets, prose, and choral refrains. The juxtaposed exchanges reflected a cosmopolitan society striving to be accommodated within a complex, disingenuous and racially divided cultural landscape. Thus, blackface satire not only targeted the legislators, but also the influential abolitionist Arthur Tappan (1786-1865) who became the butt of minstrelsy's irreverent satire in Jim Crow's 1830s rap verse 'Da New York Nigga':

> He walk a little furder an tink he die a laffin,
> His Dinah walkin' wid Massa Alfy Tappan.
> Old Bobolition Glory, he live an' die in story,
> De black man's friend, wid de black man's houru.[162]

A business leader and philanthropist Tappan found himself caught in the crossfire between rival moral and economic factions, his compromised motives the subject of lewd speculation on the minstrel stage, which provoked contradictory responses to the abolition debate in the antebellum era. While a committed opponent of slavery founding the American and Foreign Anti- Slavery Society (1840), and the American Missionary Society (1846), Tappan was party to a petition at the time of the 1834 anti-abolition

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[162] Quoted in W T Lhamon Jr, *Raising Cain, Black Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), p. 48.

riots in New York, which disclaimed support for interracial marriage. The petition also urged Congress not to violate their constitutional powers, which the abolition of slavery would bring about. The 1834 riot was in part caused by rising opposition to anti-abolitionist control of public opinion and social values, an influential faction who were also accused of taking inappropriate and unfair advantage of their position. The New York anti-abolition riot, while clearly racist, was also class based, a reflection of the complex crosscurrents of political conflict surrounding antebellum issues of race and Union, a volcanic eruption satirised under the cover of the minstrel mask and by the gross innuendo of Jim Crow's cheeky verse.[163]

The racial inconsistency is also illustrated by Virginia Minstrel Dan Emmett, composer of the Confederate anthem *Dixie* (1859), who condoned slavery, but deplored the South's anti-Union belligerence. Irish born Emmett characterises non-conformist loyalties that saw abolitionists united with anti-Catholics in opposition to slavery. For instance, the Baltimore newspaper *The Catholic Mirror* pointed out with pride the fact that there was not a single priest amongst 3,500 signers of a petition opposing the 1854 Kansas-Nebraska bill that granted States the right to decide on the status of slavery in the Western territories.[164] The passing of this bill united disparate political, ethnic, and religious factions under an anti-slavery umbrella, a radical coalition that increased class and racial tension, which

[163] Dale Cockrell, *Demons of Disorder, Early Blackface Minstrels and their World* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 101.
[164] Seymour Stark, *Men in Blackface, True Stories of the Minstrel Show* (Library of Congress: Xlibris Corporation, 2000), p. 31.

culminated in Civil War.[165] Characteristic of this confusing cross-cultural battle for the heart of the nation, Dan Emmett's air *Dixie* was adopted as an anthem of the Southern Confederate cause, with the North producing its own version twisting the lyrics in support of the Union side.

The popularity and contested political ownership of Emmett's song *Dixie,* of course, made it ripe for minstrel parody. It was appropriated in G W H Griffin's travesty *Othello* to mock the economic imperative of Southern opposition to abolition:

> (to the tune of -*Dixie*)
>
> OTH. I love my Desdemona, away, away,
> And hand in hand we'll make a stand,
> To spend Brabantio's money – Away, away, etc.
> …
>
> DES. With you I'll sport my figure, away, away-
> I'll love you dearly all my life,
> Although you are a nigger, -Away, away, etc.[166]

The conflation of 'figure' with 'money' draws attention to the conceit, with the dialect parity of the mixed-race voices suggesting racial equality that would undermine a market economy based on the creation of an underclass of slave labour. Gender roles also come under scrutiny, with Desdemona dehumanised as an economic asset, which implies that the denial of women's rights is another form of human bondage which is brought to light

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[165] John Minor Botts, *Letters - John Minor Botts of Virginia - The Nebraska Question* (Washington DC: John T and Lem Towers, 1853) p. 7 < https://archive.org/details/lettersofjohnbot00bott/page/6/mode/2up>. (Botts was deemed a traitor to the South because he opposed the bill on the grounds that it would increase sectional tension.)

[166] Griffin, *Othello Burlesque*, p. 71.

through minstrel satire. While the legitimate stage versions of *Othello* suppressed and distorted the role of women and erased the carnival subtext to uphold white male privilege, the minstrel burlesques responded by empowering the women's voices and exaggerating carnival irreverence.

T D Rice's *Otello* also includes familiar songs with adapted lyrics that challenge gender expectations. Desdemona's air *Down Fly Market* comically inverts patriarchal straight-jacketing through her role as the driving force of her union with Otello, where her voice is interwoven with the mock horror exclamations of the Chorus:

(to the tune of - *Bonnie Laddie,* also known as *If Thou'lt Play Me Fair*)[167]

Des
Once while darning father's sock
Chorus
Recreation – recreation…
[…]
Des
Then he told a tale so shocking,
Chorus
Execration, execration!
Des
That I fell across a fender.
Chorus
What a pity, what a pity…
Des
When I came about - ah me!
Chorus
Rather supple, rather supple…
Des
I was sitting on his knee –
Chorus
Loving couple – loving couple!
[….] (*Otello* 353-4)

[167] *Poems, Songs and Letters Being the Complete Works of Robert Burns*, ed. by Alexander Smith (London: Macmillan, 1896), p. 215 <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hwjnz9&view=2up&seq=258>.

The song title *Down Fly Market* with its call and response style intentionally references well-known slave auctions that took place in New York in the 1800s, a site of racial and gender subjugation which provides an ironic backdrop for Desdemona's assertion of female potency. Michael Bristol, discussing the role of women in comic mayhem argues that "foregrounding the artifice of the gender role through the device of charivari misrule infers that women were to be feared and that gender was a patriarchal projection sustained by ritual affirmation" [168] In Rice's *Otello* the inverted gender role resonates with carnival subversion to expose the political anxieties responsible for the construction of racial, class and gender divides as a means of preserving white male privilege.

Desdemonum also engages with gender oppression, which is linked to domestic violence, the comic farce undermining the portrayal of tragic masculinity promoted by the legitimate stage versions of *Othello*. In *Desdemonum*, the banter between Otellum and Desdemonum over the 'han'kerchum' comically alludes to racial and gender disparity that ends in disaster:

SONG - Desdemonum

Goodbye husband: goodbye dad,
To go off this way's quite too bad.
Let's have one squall before I slide,
And den to go I'm satisfied.[169]

[168] Michael D Bristol, 'Charivari and the Comedy of Abjection, "Othello"' *Renaissance Drama,* 21 (1990), 3-21 (p. 11) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41917258>.
[169] Desdemonum, p. 66.

It all ends in epic farce with the hero falling stabbed on top of Desdemonum's smothered body. But then everyone gets up in a rebirth, with dancing to wild Irish jigs "Fiddlers scrape and fifers play!" and a Jim Crow fury of wheel about an' turn about, an' do just so. [170] The ending perpetuates the cycle of pagan myths rooted in seasonal folklore, traditions subtly embedded within Shakespeare's *Othello,* covertly symbolised by the handkerchief inherited from Othello's mother. Its loss and misuse are a forewarning of the violence and racial breakdown at the ending of Shakespeare's play, a social dissonance transmitted across time to a context of racial turmoil in nineteenth century America. The divisive cultural tensions are embellished and satirised in the minstrel burlesques under the cover of the blackface mask.

Also highlighted in the minstrel burlesques of *Othello* through innuendo and wordplay is an underground world of multi-ethnic, gender-alternative, socially marginalised itinerants who populate the commercial seaport of New York. For instance, in Griffin's *Othello Burlesque*, Cassio's use of the word 'euchered', which refers to a card game, can also mean being tricked or out witted, its similarity to the word eunuch a linguistic mask that covertly implies sexual ambivalence:

> CASS: By gosh, I'm euchered! Isn't it a shame?
> I'm so unlucky, I can't win a game.
> Do what I will, I'm always getting stuck –
> DES: Try again, you'll perhaps have better luck.
> Here comes Othello – stop and play with him –
> CAS: No, if I should play, all day, I'd never win.[171]

[170] Ibid, p. 67.
[171] Griffin, *Othello*, p. 72.

Culturally taboo subjects such as homosexuality, domestic violence and racial injustice can be brought to light through focus on the racialised mask, which acts as safety valve, exaggerating and then satirising tensions between ethnic factions, religious groups, and other socially marginalised groups. The bawdy subversion resonates with the role of the Clown in Shakespeare's *Othello* with his suggestive wordplay and double entendres focused on "lies" and "tails" (*Othello*, III. 1. 8-18). The double meaning alerts audiences to deceit, as well as to illicit sexual behaviour lurking furtively beneath the mask of comic relief. The carnival elements frustrate attempts to control the cultural narrative by the forces of white hegemony demonstrated on the legitimate stage where scenes with the Clown are erased from every authorised prompt book copy of *Othello*.

2.2.3. The Enduring Legacy of Minstrelsy

The ending of T D Rice's *Otello* recreates enduring cyclical pageants of death and re-birth, folklore traditions which are symbolically alluded to in Shakespeare's *Othello* through the oscillating meaning of good and evil, honesty and falsehood, and white and blackness. According to the English folk drama historian T. Fairman Ordish (1855-1924), this is seen overtly in *A Midsummers Night Dream* and *Hamlet* but is more masked in *Othello.* Through allusions to elements of pagan pageantry of re-birth such as the black devil, superstition, animalism, and to Bianca's hobbyhorse, which was

associated with witchcraft, and the crusader myths of St. George and the Dragon defeating the dark spirits of winter gloom to welcome in the birth of a new spring, Shakespeare's *Othello* subtly relays an alternative folklore narrative.[172] Parodying this tradition, in Rice's burlesque operetta, Desdemona and Otello pop back up at the end of the performance, ironically to the song *The Fifth of July*, the re-birth mocking the sham American liberty celebrated by the nation on the Fourth of July. (*Otell*o p.383). The simple rhythm and rhyme of the song performed by the Chorus alludes to communal pageantry celebrations of renewal, a cycle of seasonal change from winter darkness to summer light, and for *Otello* to be repeated the following night:

> And never more his wife he'll smother,
> And, if all right tomorrow night,
> We'll have the wedding over. [173]

In keeping with the traditions of misrule, Otello justifies the murder of his wife in operatic style in his *Alma Opera* song. His dialect mocks highbrow pretensions while making the point that skin colour matters when it comes to defining whether murder is right or wrong, an allusion to the South's attitude to black lives:

> Noten extenuate
> But merely say, Good lack,
> If his wife hab but been black,
> Instead of white, all had been right
> And she wouldn't hab got de sack. [174]

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[172] T. Fairman Ordish, 'Folk-Drama' *Folklore*, 2. 3 (1891), 314–335. <www.jstor.org/stable/1253078.>.
[173] Rice, *Otello*, p. 383.
[174] Ibid, p. 383.

Included in their pastiche of diverse source material, minstrel troupes embraced the alternative 5 July Independence Day black parade tradition, which satirised the 'shopkeeper colonels' of the official 4 July celebrations. The carnivalesque parody was scorned by some white observers, who only perceived the outer mask of black caricature, oblivious to the underlying historical and moral rituals of cultural resistance, invoked and distorted in the opening scenes of Shakespeare's *Othello*. Rice's *Otello* echoes an enduring alternative history of myths and legends which characterise the racial double consciousness performed in the blackface burlesques.[175]

In Shakespeare's *Othello* the subtle carnival allusions to an alternative cultural history are overtaken by the tragedy of the dominant narrative, with the murder of Desdemona and Othello's suicide the result of Iago's intrigues to construct a rigid, white social hierarchy. The uneven rhythm of Lodovicio's final speech reflects the social upheaval, which concludes with a rhyming couplet to denote a return to the prospect of social stability :

> Gratiano, keep the house
> And seize upon the fortunes of the Moor,
> For they succeed on you. To you, lord governor,
> Remains the censure of this hellish villain:
> The time, the place, the torture, O enforce it!
> Myself will straight abroad, and to the state
> This heavy act with heavy heart relate. (*Othello,* V. 2. 361-367)

In *Otello,* and the other burlesque versions, the voice of authority is undermined through the irreverent vernacular and the allusions to an

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175 Shane White, ''It Was a Proud Day': African Americans, Festivals, and Parades in the North, 1741-1834', *The Journal of American History*, 81.1 (1994), 13–50 (p. 44-45) <www.jstor.org/stable/2080992>.

alternative folklore history which restages constructed racial stereotypes to acknowledge the diversity of a more authentic and representative national identity. The minstrel burlesques challenged the system from the lowest, most irreverent level, which combined grass roots sources from across nation in a ‘no holds barred’ caricatured blend of topical political, religious and cultural material. Amid the clash of dialects, social inversions and grotesque stereotyping, the appropriation of Shakespeare added another seemingly tasteless element to the process of social transformation which disrupted class, gender and racial lines, as part of the minstrel stage’s act of performing a cultural landscape beyond white politically prescribed confines.

2.2.4. The Response of the Black Stage to Appropriations of Shakespeare’s *Othello* and the Career of the Black Roscius Ira Aldridge

In the antebellum era, the black stage was also ruthlessly eradicated, with the black actor Ira Aldridge forced into exile in Europe, where he played a range of classical and minstrel roles in white and blackface disguises to subvert the concept of white cultural hierarchy. Establishing white cultural hierarchy through performances of Shakespeare on the legitimate stage, meant that the black stage could not be tolerated, as any success would place black performers on an equal racial footing with their white (or even blackface) counterparts. However, the black actor Ira

Aldridge (1807-1867) managed to survive for a few years during the 1820s performing Shakespeare burlesques with the African Grove Company in New York. Theatregoer Simon Snipe witnessed a performance of *Othello* at the Grove in1822 where he described an orchestra of two white men and one black, set in a dirty kitchen, with Desdemona reading from the script, Iago struck in a 'tender area', crazy costumes, and a rowdy, a mixed-race audience. The Shakespeare farce was followed by a hornpipe, a shower of peas from the gallery and hissing from the pit.[176]

During this period, blackface minstrelsy was enjoying unprecedented success, as indicated in the famous photograph of Jim Crow performing in the Bowery Theatre New York (where the auditorium and the stage are packed to capacity). [177] However, Aldridge was hounded off the Grove stage by rioting mobs who paradoxically, could identify with the self-conscious satire of blackface minstrelsy as part of a highly contrived projection of white unity and resilience.[178] The racial contradiction was amplified by the hiring of the black break-down dancer William Henry Lane, known as Juba, by the circus impresario P T Barnum in 1841 who, according to Thomas Low Nichols in order to comply with the blackface convention, was made up like a minstrel with a woolly wig and thick vermillion lips where "Had it been

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[176] Jonathan Dewberry, 'The African Grove Theatre and Company', *Black American Literature Forum,* 16. 4 (1982), pp. 128-131 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2904218>.
[177] Eric Lott, '"The Seeming Counterfeit": Racial Politics and Early Blackface Minstrelsy' *American Quarterly*, 43. 2 (1991), 223-254 (p. 239) <https://doi.org/10.2307/2712925>.
[178] Jonathan Dewberry, 'The African Grove Theatre and Company', *Black American Literature Forum,* 16. 4 (1982), 128-131 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2904218>.
see also Rourke, *American Humor*, p. 87.

suspected that the seeming counterfeit was the genuine article, the New York Vauxhall would have blazed with indignation."[179] While Juba danced in double disguise on the New York stage as a blackface white minstrel, Aldridge was forced abroad to make a living. His varied career blurred the colour line through performances of black, whiteface and blackface roles on the classical and minstrel stages where he satirised his own race, ironically at a time of anti-slavery agitation that coincided with the World Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840 held in London.

Aldridge's initial success in London, where he was the first black actor to play Othello on the legitimate stage (1825) was a theatrical innovation, which symbolically undermined the efforts of white actors to erase or minimise Othello's connection to blackness. For instance, the celebrated English actor Edmund Kean (1787-1833) in his 'tawny' portrayal of Othello (1814) imagined blackness in terms of white culture through his focus on "those minute difference and delicate shades which constitute the very essence of character", a performance which amounted to racial impersonation.[180] Kean's erasure of the ironic façade of alterity distorted the meaning of the play, reinforcing the cultural authority of the legitimate stage as a reflection of white patriarchal social dominance.

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[179] Thomas Low Nichols, *Forty Years of American Life*, 1821-1861 (New York: Stackpole Sons, London 1937), p. 337 <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.60079/page/n5/mode/2up?q=minstrel>.

[180] F W Hawkins, *The Life of Edmund Kean from Published and Original Sources* (London: Tinsley, 1869), quoted in Joyce G MacDonald, 'Acting Black: "Othello," "Othello" Burlesques, and the Performance of Blackness', *Theatre Journal*, 46. 2 (1994), 231–249 (pp. 231-2) <http://doi.org/10.2307/3208453>.

To create appeal and drum up interest in London theatres for Aldridge's London debut playing Othello, he was advertised as the African Roscius, designated exotically as "A Native of Senegal." Aldridge honed his acting talent in the English provinces experimenting with a range of roles, which included non-African roles such as Richard III, as well as Mungo, Gambia, Othello and Oroonoko. He played the lead in *Revolt of Surinam* in London in 1825, an adaptation of *Oroonoko* by the Irish dramatist Thomas Southerne (1660- 1746), itself an adaptation of the Restoration novel by the English playwright Aphra Behn (1640-1689). The play's hero is an African prince from Senegal tricked into slavery, the implication that, through the play, Aldridge was dismantling perceptions of racial identity, especially as he performed under the name of "Mr Keene", easily confused with the celebrated Shakespearian actor Edmund Kean (1787-1833). [181] Unsettling racial divisions, Aldridge played white roles such as Aboan in whiteface, ironically opposite Charles Kean (1811- 1868) playing Oroonoko in blackface. In 1849 Aldridge adapted *Titus Andronicus*, reversing the roles by playing the black villain Aaron as a hero, an inversion to challenge and transform attitudes to racial hierarchy.

His debut as Othello in Covent Garden in 1833 was not well received however, as it coincided with the abolition of slavery from British colonies, when audiences still perceived 'a man of colour' as a servant or a slave. As a

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[181] Sarah Hovde, 'Ira Aldridge takes the Stage', *Folger Shakespeare Library: Shakespeare & Beyond*, Feb.17 2017. <https://shakespeareandbeyond.folger.edu/2017/02/17/ira-aldridge/> See also Bernth Lindfors, *Ira Aldridge – The Early Years 1807-1833* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2011).

result of such lingering discrimination Aldridge, with understandable exasperation, embarked on a European tour in 1852 as reported in *The Weekly Times*, 5 December 1852:

> From the exclusiveness of the London theatres, and the prejudices of certain managers, I saw that there was no prospect of exercising my humble talents […] and though dissuaded, I embarked on my present undertaking […] with the most brilliant success."[182]

There he played a range of Shakespeare roles in makeup designed ironically to make him look white, where he was a theatrical sensation. In countries not involved with an economy dependent on slave labour, Aldridge discovered that audiences were much more hospitable and accepting to his performances. *The New York Tribune*, 5 February 1853 reported on Aldridge's performance of Othello in Berlin writing that "he is favourably criticised in the Augsburg *Allgemeine Zeitung" where* "his acting is highly praised […] It is the true African he depicts, not more imitation […] and clap-trap which he, by his birth, can appreciate better than any white man." [183]

In response to the patronising racism he encountered in Britain, Aldridge takes narrative control of his identity writing that he was the son of a clergyman and that his grandfather was an African prince of the tribe of Foolah, in Senegal. In his autobiographical narrative, which also claims an exotic heritage and noble birth, Aldridge even re-invents himself as a real-

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[182] Quoted in Lois Potter, *Shakespeare in Performance – Othello* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 113.
[183] 'Items from Foreign Journals', *New York Daily Tribune,* 5 Feb. 1853. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030213/1853-02-05/ed-1/seq-6/>.

life version of Othello, a racial disguise allied to minstrel style performances of counterfeit authenticity.[184]

Deliberately blurring racial boundaries, Aldridge also played minstrel roles, where there is no evidence that he felt humiliated by performing comic black caricatures such as T D Rice's Ginger Blue in *The Virginia Mummy*. Aldridge even exploited the presumption that he was the inspiration for British actor Charles Mathews' *Mr. Mathews' Trip to America,* which imitated a black actor in New York performing Hamlet's minstrel burlesque soliloquy 'Oppssum up a Gum Tree', even though Aldridge admitted that he had never played Hamlet in New York.[185] Paradoxically, Aldridge claimed agency by allowing himself to be defined by others, so that one of Charles Mathews most successful caricatures, also became one of Aldridge's most profitable performances. [186] Thus, Aldridge took ownership of the mask to maintain to control of his cultural identity in order to transcend the racial barriers imposed by the dominant cultural narrative.[187] In performing minstrel skits, Ira Aldridge found himself in the position of enacting authenticity while passing as a minstrel impersonator, his wit and ability praised by *The London Illustrated News* as "different to the Ethiopian

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[184] Potter, *Shakespeare in Performance – Othello,* pp. 109-111.
[185] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft,* p. 46.
[186] Potter, *Shakespeare in Performance – Othello,* p. 113.
[187] Fionnghuala Sweeney, *"Mask in Motion" Dialect Spaces and Class Representation in Frederick Douglass' Atlantic Rhetoric* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2007), pp. 94-137 (p. 131).
'Opposum up a gum tree' is a comic vernacular allusion to "And by opposing end them.", Hamlet's deliberation on whether to fight back against the slings and arrows of adversity.

absurdities we have been taught to look upon as correct portraitures". [188] The London critic's sincere response does not take account of Aldridge's ironic double masking that imitated the performance of a white minstrel in blackface skits, thus passing as white actor to satirise and expose the performed nature of racial difference.

Lois Potter in *Shakespeare in Performance - Othello* is critical of Aldridge's compromised racial roles in the theatre as appearing to be more like 'Uncle Tom' than a pioneer of racial progress for African Americans.[189] However the comparison undermines her charge against Aldridge as a white apologist because it relies on perceiving Uncle Tom as a simple racial stereotype, which overlooks his role in defying white authority to save the lives of his fellow slaves from the slave owner Legree. While there is a comparison to be made between Stowe's Uncle Tom and Ira Aldridge, rather than in the negative sense suggested by Potter, it could be argued that it is in relation to the assertion of agency to achieve social change, with Uncle Tom driven by religious and humanitarian principles, whereas Aldridge seems to have been motivated by artistic ambition and self-autonomy.

Potter also finds it incredible that Aldridge, at this time of abolitionist agitation, would be willing to indulge in minstrel imitation. However, Aldridge was aware of the hybrid racial role he played, as demonstrated by a speech he performed at the end of many of his shows:

Swarthy race, late known

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[188] Quoted in Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage – Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 65.
[189] Potter, *Shakespeare in Performance – Othello*, p. 114.

> For naught but bloodshed and the murderous groan;
> Mark'd by the God of Havoc and of strife
> To raise the war-whoop, wield the murderous knife,
> To roam unfettered, void of reason's light,
> Lone tribe of mankind in chaotic night.[190]

The passionate lyricism evokes the poetic soul of Othello that ended in chaos and bloodshed for the 'swarthy' hero, an inferred identification with Aldridge's own struggle for artistic respect in the face of systematic racial discrimination. It seems that Aldridge both embraces and distances himself from an African American identity, where he claims aristocratic heritage, performs black roles, whiteface roles, sends himself up in minstrel farces and makes heartfelt speeches that empathise with the alterity of blackness. The apparent vacillation clouded lines of racial difference, synonymous with passing or miscegenation, aligned to theatrical devices of masking that disrupted the creation of a white cultural hierarchy.

Aldridge was obviously ambitious to play classical roles, but he was also quite provocative in creating parts that went against the grain of racial expectations. When playing Othello, he chose the fairest Desdemona to emphasise contrasting skin colours, which incensed audiences who had to be shielded from the physicality of a black Othello lying with his white wife. Such racial confrontation contrasts with the actor William Macready who thrusts his head through the curtains of the bed in the murder scene, conscious of white sensibilities unable to endure intimate interracial contact. Such reticence is mocked in the minstrel burlesque *Desdemonum* (1874)

[190] *Era*, 25 November 1860, 'Folger Scrapbook: Aldridge', quoted in Potter, *Shakespeare in Performance*, p. 117.

indicated by the front cover of the playbook which shows a huge black face peering from beneath a stage curtain (see figure below).[191]

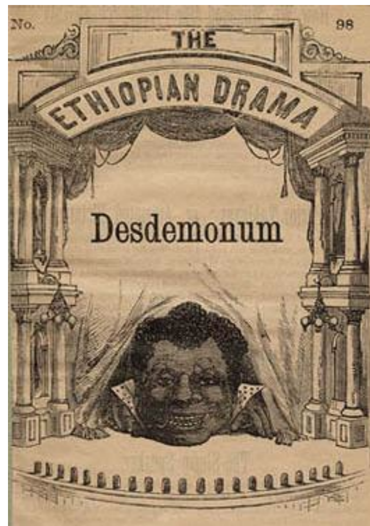

Figure 6: *Front cover from Desdemonum: an Ethiopian Burlesque in Three Scenes*

While Aldridge and the minstrels reveled in the performance of fake authenticity to mock the motives and mechanisms of constructing racial identity, Frederick Douglass' sense of racial pride on behalf of the black race could not countenance such artifice. Engaged in oratory as an alternative performance of racial politics, Douglass was urged by the abolitionists to tell his story of slavery, and to appear 'more black', because his eloquence worked against the anti-slavery cause, as audiences could not believe that he was once a slave.[192] Douglass was also urged by William Lloyd Garrison, editor of *The Liberator* to limit his speeches to facts. However, Douglass,

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[191] Joyce Green MacDonald, 'Acting Black: "Othello," "Othello" Burlesques, and the Performance of Blackness', *Theatre Journal*, 46. 2 (1994), 23-249 (p. 243-4)
<http://doi.org/10.2307/3208453>.
[192] Potter, *Shakespeare in Performance – Othello,* p. 111.

confident in his intellectual ability as a respected black abolitionist, chose political activism and self-help in the belief that "the free colored man's elevation is essential to the slave colored man's emancipation."[193]

While theatre historian Hazel Waters gives credit to Aldridge for appropriating the hugely successful minstrel format through performances of contentious sketches such as "Liberty and Equality or the American Slave Market"[194], she is not so favourable inclined towards Ethiopian impersonators such as T D Rice, aka Jim Crow, and the English comic actor Charles Mathews (1776-1835) for what she terms their unnuanced mimicry of African Americans. Undoubtedly, the black stage burlesques of *Othello* and Ethiopian skits add additional elements of oppositional gaze designed to endorse white mechanisms of racial identification, but this does not deny the deliberate intention of the minstrel burlesques to mimic and mock fictive elements of racial and ethnic classification politically constructed to define and demonise an outcast underclass.

I would agree that Charles Mathews exploited minstrelsy vernacular and style passing it off as an entertaining imitation of black authenticity in his one man show "A Trip to America", where he wrote to his friend James Smith that he had found some good "specimens" of black gentry during his

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[193] *Frederick Douglass Paper,* 2 January 1854, quoted in Robert S Levine, ''Uncle Tom's Cabin' in *Frederick Douglass Paper*: An Analysis of Reception', *American Literature*, 64. 1(1992), 71–93 (p. 78).
[194] Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage – Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 65.

travels.[195] During his trip to America, Mathews visited the 'Niggers Theatre' where he claims he saw a performance of *Hamlet* that included the song 'Opossum up a Gum Tree', which he replicated for his London audience as if it were a genuine negro melody, rather than part of a satirical minstrel travesty of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.[196] Thus, Mathews' exploitation of the blackface and black stage performances does not compare with T D Rice's *Otello* burlesque, which was an ambiguous, intertextual, polyphonic satire that commented on and blurred attitudes to social discrimination, women's rights, racial injustice and patriarchal oppression via the racialised mask. To lump these two performers together because they engage with the minstrelsy format ignores differences in intention, practice, and perceived target audiences, which Ayanna Thompson discusses in her article 'The Blackfaced Bard: Returning to Shakespeare or Leaving Him?' [197] While Mathews ridiculed black American culture for white British audiences, as indicated in his letter to his friend James Smith "I shall be rich in black fun", T D Rice's *Otello* engaged with the polarising issue of race which juxtaposed an array of diverse source materials, which followed in the footsteps of Shakespeare borrowing in order to portray a more representative, progressive and fluid national cultural identity.

[195] Charles Mathews letter to James Smith, 23 February 1823, quoted in Ayanna Thompson, *Blackface*, (New York & London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2021), p. 24.
[196] Ibid, pp. 26-27.
[197] Ayanna Thompson, The Blackfaced Bard: Returning to Shakespeare or Leaving Him?', *Shakespeare Bulletin,* 27. 3 (2009), 437-456 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26347787>.

The minstrel and black stage subversion of the dominant culture's authority invokes the interactive role of parody as an antagonistic form of discourse that can include, but which also exceeds racist ridicule. The blackface travesties are both acted, and acted upon, the conflicted intercourse described by Jacqueline Wood as "the weight of the mask" in her article on M. M. Bakhtin's theories of double-voiced narrative discourse as a form of social disruption.[198] The whole charade and confusion of white blackface minstrels and black blackface minstrels undermines elite control of racial identity, the paradox summed up by the black writer and poet Amiri Baraka:

> "If the Cakewalk is a negro dance caricaturing certain white customs, what is that dance when say a white theatre company attempts to satirise it? I find the idea of white minstrels in blackface satirising a dance satirising themselves a remarkable kind of irony, which I suppose is the whole point of minstrel shows."[199]

Such multi-layered performances of racial identity underpin the political and cultural significance of blackface minstrelsy as an inauthentic enactment of an alternative authenticity, with focus on burlesques of *Othello* revelling in, and challenging, ambiguous, and hypocritical attitudes to racial equality and emancipation promulgated by the white hegemonic ideology. Because the antebellum blackface burlesques did not share the awe attributed to Shakespeare bardolatry, the play makes more sense if

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[198] J Wood, 'Weight of the Mask: Parody and the Heritage of Minstrelsy in Adrienne Kennedy's "Funnyhouse of a Negro"' in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*, (2003), 5-24.
[199] Quoted in Ingrid Monson, 'Blues People: Amiri Bakara as Social Theorist', presented at Blues People: 40 Years Later, A Symposium February 6-7, 2004 <https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/imonson/files/2004barakabluespeoplex.pdf>.

performed as a cross-genre blackface farce with a tragi-comic ending that mocked the contradictions of legitimate stage portrayals of *Othello* as a black tragic hero who is stripped of all bawdy wordplay and double-entendres so as not to offend highbrow white sensibilities.

2.2.5. Blackface Minstrel Performances of *Othello* - Twenty-first Century Repercussions

Blackface minstrelsy scholar Robert Nowatzki notes the enduring influence of minstrelsy on hip-hop and television sitcoms where he argues that, rather than making a comeback, "acting black" has never really gone away.[200] The impact is related to the ideological ambiguity and complexity of the minstrel stage format, a cross-fertilisation of incongruous sources perpetuating universal themes and cultural continuity, and which also inspired and underpinned the novels of Stowe, Mark Twain and Herman Melville. Shakespeare scholar Coppelia Kahn also argues in favour of the contribution of the minstrel burlesques to social inclusion, where the success of Shakespeare burlesque as a genre does more than simply parody highbrow pretensions. Rather, it also shows respect for the master work,

[200] Robert C Nowatzki, 'Blackin' up is us Doin' White Folks Doin' Us: Blackface Minstrelsy and Racial Performance in Contemporary American Fiction and Film', *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 18:2 (2007),115-136 (p. 115).

such that "*Otello* can show us something about *Othello.*" [201] Equally, James Baldwin was able to tune into the universal relevance of Shakespeare's subversive undercurrents, which through masquerade were reincarnated on the minstrel stage. However other critics are more sceptical. These include Shakespeare scholar Ayanna Thompson, who argues in her recent book *Blackface* that blacking up is either imitation of blackness or a form of exhibition of black bodies.[202] While undoubtedly this is an accurate criticism of the degraded form of minstrelsy and vaudeville of the postbellum era that corrupted and redefined Jim Crow as the representation of racial segregation, it does not reflect the unique contribution of the authentic artifice of the antebellum minstrel masqueraders in challenging the construction of the cultural identity of the nation. Ironically, the legitimate stage performances of *Othello* such as that of Edmund Kean in1814, which diluted Othello's African heritage, were more akin to racial theft than the minstrel burlesques, which employed caricatures of blackness to satirise and draw attention to the counterfeit culture of white patriarchy.

As *Othello* was originally written to be performed by a white man in black makeup, an alternative interpretation of *Othello* as 'black' farce with a tragic ending, also has implications for twenty first century productions of the play with a black actor in the leading role. It has even been suggested that *Othello* should only be played in blackface in line with the original performance, where the mask acts as a focus for a range of experiences of

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[201] Coppelia Kahn, 'Forbidden Mixtures: Shakespeare: Blackface Minstrelsy, 1844', in *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, ed by Paul Yachnin & Patricia Badir (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), pp. 121-144.
[202] Ayanna Thompson, *Blackface*, p. 36.

social and cultural alienation to which diverse audiences could relate to and identify with. In an informative article on blackface performance history Ayanna Thompson turns her attention to the relationship between intention, practice, and reception, which she claims is affected when blackface is involved. For example, the intention of The Wooster Group when they performed Eugene O'Neill's *Emperor Jones* in blackface in New York in 1998 and 2006 was to highlight the "performative nature of race", with the audience aware that through the gap in perception provided by the mask, the character in blackface is a white man's perception of a "Negro".[203] Thus, as in the antebellum minstrel shows, the mask acts as an instrument of detachment which allows audience insight into the experience of racial otherness, as well as enabling sympathy for a range of other types of social alienation.

2.3. Conclusion

So, could, or should, *Othello* be performed in blackface today to comply with Shakespeare's metadramatic intention of evoking sympathy for socially alienated factions through the masked performance of race? In conversation with Ayanna Thompson, the black actor Adrian Lester expresses concern for his racial integrity in playing the role of Othello as a respected military commander whose identity is compromised by false suspicions and

[203] Ayanna Thompson, The Blackfaced Bard: Returning to Shakespeare or Leaving Him?', *Shakespeare Bulletin,* 27. 3 (2009), 437-456 (p. 450) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26347787>.

mistaken judgement (Act III, scene 3. 'Othello's occupation gone'). Lester felt that this could be interpreted as reinforcing a racial stereotype of being overpowered by ungovernable passions.[204]

In her article 'The Blackfaced Bard', Ayanna Thompson suggests that *Othello* is not suitable for a blackface performance today because Shakespeare bardolatry is too strong a force to be discussed without a type of fictive intention that limits the range of reception which is too inherent in the text. [205] However, if *Othello* is performed through the lens of a comedic masquerade where Othello is the dupe to Iago's harlequin-style slipperiness, which then dramatically switches from farce to tragedy following the temptation scene, (Act III. 3), sympathy is aroused for Othello as the victim of the corrupt forces of racial prejudice. Thus, the only way *Othello* could work today performed in blackface would be as a burlesque that draws attention to the mask as a metadramatic device to allow a detached oppositional view of social alienation. The catastrophe of the final Act would then reflect the triumph of white cultural hegemony in which audiences could identify as being complicit in, while also be horrified by the violent consequences of such racial oppression.

Political inconsistency and inequality were built into the social fabric of the nation, which was echoed by the racial contradictions enacted on the minstrel stage. This signified a counterfeit reality that was closer to the truth

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[204] Adrian Lester, in 'In Dialogue with Ayanna Thompson', *Shakespeare Survey 70: Creating Shakespeare*, ed. by Peter Holland (Cambridge University Press, 2017), pp. 10-18.
[205] Ayanna Thompson, The Blackfaced Bard', p. 453.

than whitewashed versions of *Othello* performed on the legitimate stage. The caricatured mask in T D Rice's *Otello* enacts reversed racial and class hierarchies that illuminate the fallacy of an American democratic republic, an assumed cultural aspiration that was disputed by the English travel writer Frances Trollope as an example of levelling down rather than creating an egalitarian alternative to the European class system:

> The assumption of equality, however empty, is sufficient to tincture the manners of the poor with brutal insolence and subjects the rich to the paltry expediency of sanctioning the falsehood, however deep their conviction that it is such. It cannot, I think, be denied that the great men of America attain to power and to fame, by eternally uttering what they know to be untrue.[206]

Such a culture of delusion informs the class and racial ambiguity and disorder performed on the minstrel stages which, with the inclusion of vernacular voices, was instrumental in the creation of the culturally progressive American novel as epitomised by Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and Melville's *The Confidence Man.*

[206] Trollope, *Domestic Manners,* p. 246.

3. The Impact of Minstrelsy Burlesque and Shakespeare in Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*

I wrote what I did because as a woman, as a mother, I was oppressed and broken-hearted with the sorrows and injustice I saw, because as a Christian I felt the dishonor to Christianity – because as a lover of my country, I trembled at the coming day of wrath [...] I *must* speak for the oppressed – who cannot speak for themselves.

Harriet Beecher Stowe, 1853
(in a letter to Lord Thomas Denman of London, England)

"When the true history of the antislavery cause shall be written, women will occupy a large space in its pages, for the cause of the slave has been peculiarly woman's cause [...] her deep moral convictions, and her tender human sensibilities, found convincing and persuasive expression by her pen and voice."

Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, 1881[1]

3.1. Introduction

In her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Harriet Beecher Stowe employs the ironic satire and exaggerated melodrama that characterised blackface minstrelsy to challenge and expose the contradictions of racial discrimination and the injustice of slavery. This narrative ploy was used by Stowe as a means of targeting audiences otherwise unaware of, or resistant

[1] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Hartford, CT: Park, 1881), p. 570 <https://archive.org/details/lifetimesoffrede1881doug/page/570/mode/2up>.

to acknowledging complicity in, the abuses and cruelty of human bondage.[2] The performative aspects of the novels of Stowe, Twain and Melville relay the influence of blackface burlesque, a masking technique that I will demonstrate resonates with the bawdy subtext of Shakespeare plays designed to mirror and mock the authoritarian assumptions of the dominant social narrative. Like the blackface minstrels of the antebellum era, Stowe's aim was both controversial and commercial, mingling satire with burlesque melodrama and realism to expose the paradox of benign slavery promulgated on political and domestic fronts to sustain white male hegemony. While Stowe always supported abolition, regarding slavery as a sin, her engagement with the cause was galvanised by the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850 indicated by her letter on 9th March 1851 to Gamaliel Bailey, editor of the *National Era:*

> Up to this year I have always felt that I had no particular call to meddle with this subject, and I dreaded to expose even my own mind to the full force of its exciting power. But I feel now that the time has come when even a woman or a child who can speak a word for freedom and humanity is bound to speak. The Carthagenian women in the last peril of their state cut off their hair for bow strings to give to the defenders of their country, and such peril and shame as now hangs over this country is worse than Roman slavery, and I hope every woman who can write will not be silent.[3]

Allied to the unsettling racial contradictions performed on the minstrel stage, Stowe accepts that good and evil regarding slavery crossed class, race, gender and sectional divides where Christian Miss Ophelia is a Northern

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[2] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, (Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Classics, 1995). (Further quotes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will be included parenthetically with page numbers).
[3] Quoted in Joan D Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe – A Life* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 208.

Christian who abhors Topsy, and angelic little Eva is a pure-bred Southerner who loves everyone equally. When first published in 1852, Stowe's novel was a literary sensation selling 310,000 thousand copies by the Spring of 1853 generating a wide range of responses. This ranged from enthusiastic praise from the abolition lobby, muted support from some sections of the press in England and in America who feared civil unrest, to downright condemnation from white Southerners who resented the attack on their established way of life from an outsider, and even worse, from a woman outsider. [4] George F Holmes accused Stowe's novel of stirring up war writing in *The Southern Literary* Messenger "which if we do not put down with the pen, we may be compelled one day [...] to repel with the bayonet"[5] So great was Southern outrage that it resulted in a frenzy of 'anti-Tom' novels, the defensive reaction an indication that Stowe had struck a racially sensitive nerve. In response to *Uncle Tom*, these books, which include *Aunt Phillis's Cabin, The Lofty and the Lowly, Life at the South, Uncle Robin in his Cabin, The Cabin and the Parlour* and many more all portrayed slavery as a benign institution that served the interests of slaves and slaveholders alike.[6]

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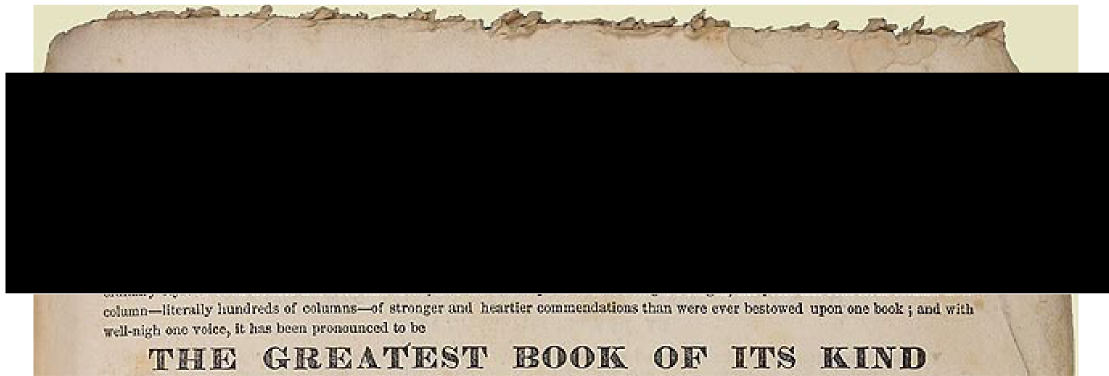
[4] Michael Winship, '*Uncle Tom's Cabin*: History of the Book in the 19th Century United States' (2007) <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/exhibits/winship/winship.html>.

[5] George F Holmes, 'Notice of New Works' (*The Southern Messenger*, Vol 18. 10 (1852), 630- 631 <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/moajrnl/>.

[6] Steven Kellman, 'Waging War over Stowe and Shakespeare', review of *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Harriet Beecher Stowe and *The Shakespeare Wars* by Ron Rosenbaum, Michigan Quarterly Review, 46. 2 (2007) <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.act2080.0046.226>.



column—literally hundreds of columns—of stronger and heartier commendations than were ever bestowed upon one book ; and with well-nigh one voice, it has been pronounced to be

THE GREATEST BOOK OF ITS KIND

Figure 7: *Newspaper Advertisement for Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Frederick Douglass novella *The Heroic Slave* was a black response to the anti-slavery success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with Douglass convinced that 'whites have the power "to do us good"…a power very much dependent on the ability of blacks to put that "good" to use.'[7] However, while Stowe's novel was a runaway success, *The Heroic Slave*, which was clearly aimed at a white readership, was virtually disregarded at the time of its publication in 1853. While both works made significant contributions to the most volatile and politically controversial issue of the era, the reason for Stowe's much greater popularity and influence, I would argue, is connected to her interaction with the hybrid genre of minstrel burlesque with its signified language and carnivalesque tradition of comic disorder, which transmits traces of folk resistance that are also embedded within Shakespeare plays linked to earlier medieval myths and legends.

Because of his first-hand experience of bondage and life as a fugitive slave, Douglass' novella focuses on the active role of the hero Madison

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[7] Quoted in Robert S. Levine, '"Uncle Tom's Cabin" in "Frederick Douglass' Paper": An Analysis of Reception', *American Literature*, 64. 1(1992), 71–93 (p. 83).

Washington emphasising his equality and nobility through language and a physicality that emulated Stowe's runaway mulatto George Harris, with Washington's mutiny portrayed as an act of instinctive human resistance that transcends race. Dissimilar literary approaches to confronting racial attitudes to white manhood by Stowe and Douglass is illustrated by the portrait of General Washington in Tom's Cabin 'drawn and coloured in a manner which would certainly have astonished that hero, if ever he happened to meet its like' (UTC 21). This infers a black portrait of the President that comically mocks reverence for white manhood, a status which Douglass's aspires to in the portrait of his own hero Madison Washington through his emulation of the revolutionary spirit of the Founding Fathers of the Republic.

Despite the cross-genre, multi-vocal style of the novel, Douglass's literary levelling up process is interpreted by Richard Yarborough as merely a stereotypical embodiment of black manhood and questions whether Douglass's hero challenges white expectations or merely reproduces them.[8] By contrast Stowe, who is equally criticised by Yarborough for reinforcing racial stereotypes, through a cross-genre approach that embraces minstrel masking, the incongruous multi-source blend of voices, and fictionalised fact

[8] Richard Yarborough, 'Race, Violence and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass's "The Heroic Slave"' in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays*, ed by Eric J Sandquist (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), pp.166-188.

contests and destabilises a racial landscape constructed in the interests of white male hegemony.[9]

Stowe was encouraged to write her novel by her sister-in-law Mrs Edward Beecher who was outraged at the imposition of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, imploring her to write something in protest:

> [Stowe] "I will" she had said, clenching her hands – "if I live" she added, with her perennial sense of existing on the brink of eternity. [10]

This law was a measure of political appeasement designed to dissuade Southern States from seceding from the Union due to fears of being outvoted by the Free-soilers who opposed the expansion of slavery into the Western territories. Also nick-named the Bloodhound Law, Northern States were compelled to become agents in support of Southern slavery by returning runaway slaves to the South. Rather than consolidating the Union, as was the Law's intention, this measure of enforced collaboration with slave catchers galvanised Northern opposition to the ruling, which led to increased sympathy for the anti-slavery cause and abolition movement. Stowe's intention in writing her novel was to encourage citizens to disobey what she considered to be an unchristian law, and to cajole white parents who had lost a child to sympathise with the feelings of a slave parent suffering the same loss. The divisive legislation not only served to increase support for abolition, it also highlighted the contradiction of slavery as

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[9] Richard Yarborough 'Strategies of Black Characterization in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Early Afro-American Novel' in *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin* ed. by Eric J Sandquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993) pp.45-84.

[10] Constance M Rourke, 'Remarks from *Trumpets of Jubilee*', in *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. by Elizabeth Ammons (Boston, MA: G K Hall, 1980), p. 77.

compatible with the principles of a democratic republic. This paradox was reflected in the satirical structure and ambiguity of Stowe's novel that sought to condemn human bondage with a burning rage directed at racial oppression, but which also chimed with the subjugated role of women marginalised within a white patriarchal society. For research purposes Stowe also referred to *American Slavery As It Is: Testimony of a Thousand Witnesses* (1839), co-written by Theodore Weld, and Sarah and Angelina Grimke, famous nineteenth century women's rights campaigners and abolitionists. Her novel was also inspired by the slave narrative *The Life of Josiah Henson* (1849) who worked on a plantation in Maryland, escaping to Canada in 1830 where he helped other fugitive slaves across the border.[11] However, the intertextual borrowing of the satirical masking devices of the minstrel stage also contributed to the enduring cultural significance and racial impact of Stowe's novel.

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the brutal inhumanity of slavery is masked by satire, disguise, melodrama, exaggerated sentimentality and comic vernacular, the witty wordplay and mixed dialects aligned with Shakespeare's inclusion of burlesque episodes transmitting a counter cultural history designed to blur and destabilise social injustice from within the system. Many stock minstrel characters appear in the novel, with Tambo and Bones enacted by Mrs Shelby's mischievous slaves Andy and Sam, a

[11] Josiah Henson, *Father Henson's Story of his Own Life* (Boston, John P Jewett, 1858) <https://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/henson58/henson58.html#henso4>.

classic case of playing the fool to dupe the slave trader Haley, with Mrs Shelby taking on the role of the interlocutor. Andy and Sam's banter recounting Eliza's dramatic dash for freedom enacted for the benefit of a rapt kitchen audience satirises pump speeches and pompous church sermons, their muddled echoing of Shakespeare's idiom mocking a cultural hierarchy based on the appropriation of high literary material. (UTC 71-2) Eliza's son Harry dances and mimics Jim Crow for the entertainment of Haley and Mr Shelby, with the anarchic Topsy, also playing the Jim Crow role the artifice of her comic banter unmasking Miss Ophelia's racist Christian hypocrisy. The black caricature of the smooth talking, well-dressed city slicker Zip Coon is played by Adolphus, Augustine St Clare's valet, a mask of affectation that mocks and destabilises white condescension.

Andy and Sam's telling the tale of Eliza's escape is replayed several times from different perspectives in the novel, the voices creating layers of shared experiences that defy a definitive interpretation, but which unite through a deeply embedded folkloric tradition, in what Walter Benjamin describes as a reactivation of orality, a positive act that provides contextual insight through language and gesture, rather than reviving romantic nostalgia for its own sake.[12] Thus, the engagement with oral repetitions, burlesque caricatures and satire saturating the novel transcends the mimicry into the more perceptive regions of searching parody linking the

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[12] Walter Benjamin, 'Some Remarks on Folk Art' in *Selected Writings* Vol 2, ed by Michael W Jennings, Howard Eiland & Gary Smith (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), pp. 278-279. <http://users.clas.ufl.edu/burt/PROUST2021INCOMPLETENOVEL/walter-benjamin-selected-writings-volume-2-part-1.pdf>

past with the present with a self-conscious vision that provides not only cultural insight, but widens the relevance of the novel beyond its immediate significance.

Although not so obviously infused with references to Shakespeare compared to the novels of Melville and Twain, there are underlying allusions to the "band of brothers' speech in *Henry V*, which are blurred with references to Marc Antony's "Friends, Romans, Countrymen" oration from *Julius Caesar* in Sam and Andy's highly embellished recreation of Eliza's escape, in which they of course play leading roles. The black comics embrace the inherent burlesque within Shakespeare's plays, which they appropriate to construct an alternative and memorable folk history, their visibility and comic authority reconfiguring American cultural identity to include marginalised and previously derided voices. Stowe's engagement with a range of disparaged voices was a deliberate ploy to bring neglected factions into the political mainstream in order to represent and enrich the cultural identity of the Nation. Stowe's lowly style invoking the inversions, vernacular and misrule of minstrel ambiguity aligns with her attitude to the excesses of Shakespeare which she compares to the force and vulgarity of Reubens artistic power, noted following a visit to the Louvre in Paris in 1853:

> Like Shakespeare, he forces you to accept and to forgive a thousand excesses and uses his own faults as musicians use discords, only to enhance the perfection of harmony. There certainly is some use even in defects. A faultless style sends you to sleep. Defects rouse and excite the sensibility to seek and appreciate excellences. Some of

> Shakespeare's finest passages explode all grammar and rhetoric like skyrockets.[13]

Read in this light, the defects in terms of polish and solecism, of which Stowe was criticised, were in effect the strengths of her novel, demonstrated by its capacity to engage the public imagination, not just in America, but right across the world. [14]

As well as owing a debt to Shakespeare and the contrived racial ambiguity of the antebellum blackface stage, Stowe's novel came to wider audiences through interaction with the minstrel songs of Stephen Foster when "Poor Uncle Tom" was performed by Wood's Minstrels in New York in 1852.[15] By the 1850s Foster's songs had progressed from humorous caricatures to compositions such as "Nelly was a Lady", which blended Irish ballads with African American influences to create cross-racial sympathy for the culturally dispossessed, which included the enslaved. These were some of the most memorable and enduring compositions of the era creating racial

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[13] 'The Grand Tour Harriet Beecher Stowe appreciates the defects of the masters' from Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Sunny Memories of a Foreign Land* (Boston: Phillips, Sampson & Co., 1854) in *Lapham's Quarterly,* 1853. <https://www.laphamsquarterly.org/arts-letters/grand-tour>

[14] *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appeared on March 20,1852 selling three hundred thousand copies by the end of the year and has been translated into almost every language in the world, including Welsh.
See Francis A, Shoup, '*Uncle Tom's Cabin* Forty Years After' in *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. by Elizabeth Ammons (Boston, MA: G K Hall, 1980), pp. 49-59. Also, Daniel G Williams, *Black Skin Blue Books*, *African Americans and Wales 1845-1945* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2012).

[15] 'Wood's Minstrels' *The Sunday Dispatch*, 8 August,1852.
Sunday Dispatch, 8 Aug. 1852. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030362/1852-08-08/ed-1/seq-2/>.
(The article reports that the house was crowded with the most fashionable and wealthy citizens with the 'Uncle Tom' song greatly admired).

confusion through lyrical incongruity and innuendo, a cross-cultural appropriation that influenced both Stowe and the burlesque style within Twain's *Huckleberry Finn.* Foster's iconic song "Oh! Susannah" employs vernacular to highlight the scale of a steamboat disaster, the mismatch of the jaunty rhythm satirising biased racial attitudes to human tragedy:

> I jumped aboard the telegraph
> And trabbled down de ribber,
> De lecktric fluid magnified,
> And killed five hundred Nigga.[16]

This steamboat incident is replayed in *Huckleberry Finn* with Twain similarly using satire to draw attention to the racist inhumanity in Tom Sawyer's response to Aunt Sally's enquiry about the steamboat accident

> [Tom] "We blowed out a cylinder head."
> [Aunt Sally] Good gracious! Anybody hurt?"
> [Tom] No'm. Killed a nigger.
> [Aunt Sally] Well it's lucky; because sometimes people do get hurt."[17]

This echoing of stories is another illustration of what Walter Benjamin describes as repeated orality that cross over from songs and skits into novels, and which provide cultural insights that reach beyond the realm of sentimental storytelling, while also ensuring the preservation of a counter-cultural folklore narrative.[18]

The anti-slavery imperative in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* which was triggered by the passing of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, swamped Stowe's other

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[16] *Oh! Susannah* by Stephen Foster quoted in Ken Emerson, *Doo-Dah! Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular* Culture (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p. 14.

[17] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, London: Penguin Classics, 1966), chapter 32.

[18] See Walter Benjamin, 'Some Remarks on Folk Art' in *Selected Writings* Vol 2.

religious and feminist concerns, which are depicted by the inverted race, class and gender hierarchies in the novel.[19] Women take the initiative by breaking the law for what they deem to be the right reasons. The Quaker community, led by Rachel Halliday, plays an active role in helping the fugitive slaves George and Eliza escape, while Mrs Bird's adamant moral stance persuades her Senator husband to help Eliza on humanitarian grounds, in contravention of the Fugitive Slave Law:

> It's a shameful, wicked, abominable law, and I'll break it, for one, the first time I get a chance; and I hope I *shall* get a chance, I do! Things have got to a pretty pass, if a woman can't give a warm supper and a bed to poor, starving creatures just because they are slaves, and have been abused and oppressed all their lives, poor things! [20]

Mrs Bird's domestic rebellion engages with the political debate with Senator Bird, who justifies the law on the basis of cooling the excitement over abolition. However, Mrs Bird cites a higher law than politics to overrule her husband: "Now John, I don't know anything about politics, but I can read my Bible; and there I see that I must feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and comfort the desolate; and the Bible I mean to follow." (UTC 75) Mrs Bird's action makes her an outlaw, intent on following the radical path urged by the Grimke sisters, where, referring to the Fugitive Slave Law, Mrs Bird avows: "I'll break it […] the first time I get a chance; and I hope I *shall* get a chance" (UTC 75). Stowe aligns religious and gender alienation with racial

[19] The Fugitive Slave Act was part of the 1850 Compromise. It meant that free states were legally obliged to return fugitives to slave states. This forced marriage between bitterly opposed factions was more honoured in the breach than the observance, a temporary truce that delayed rather than resolved the issue of slavery.
[20] UTC, p. 75.

oppression as all victims of a discriminatory patriarchal system. [21] Gender reversals that unsettle white patriarchy are also displaced through the apparent religious emasculation of Uncle Tom who is unjustly perceived by critics of the novel as a by-word for racial subservience, undermined when he finally rebels, his allegiance subject to a higher law than that of his egregious slave master Legree.

While Stowe is furious at the attitudes to slavery by mealy-mouthed clergymen who hemmed and hawed trying as she says to: "hush up and salve over such an outrage on common humanity", she is also unable to support immediate emancipation for fear of widespread rejection of Christian values that might lead to a secular, egalitarian social order. [22] Nevertheless, despite Stowe's inchoate politics and compromised loyalties, her hybrid narrative style interwoven with the ambiguous comic satire, disorder and range of disparate cultural voices aligned to the minstrel burlesques contributed to the cross-racial struggle for freedom and racial equality challenging racial, class, gender and religious injustice and hypocrisy.

Despite, or maybe because of, the immense popularity of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the novel aroused intense criticism that divided the nation along intersecting political, religious and sectional lines. It would be assumed that Southern slaveholders would be defensive towards Stowe's anti-slavery

[21] Jean Fagan Yellin, 'Doing It Herself: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and Women's Role in the Slavery Crisis' in *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. by Eric J Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 85-106.
[22] Stowe in a letter to her sister Catherine Beecher 1850 or 1851, *Beecher Family Papers*, quoted in Joan D Hedrick, Joan D., *Harriet Beecher Stowe – A Life*, p. 202.

novel with the *North Carolina Standard* describing Mrs Stowe as a "libeller of her country" jeopardising the cotton trade and for advocating the emigration of freed slaves to Liberia.[23] By contrast, Northern abolitionists such as Arthur Tappan and Dr McCune Smith expressed warm thanks to Stowe for *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* urging women to follow the path of Stowe, Grace Greenwood, and Lydia Childs.[24] However, the *London Times* review was more reticent, welcoming gradual emancipation, but fearing that the novel would engender ill-will and bad blood.[25] Also, Stowe was viewed less favourable across the nation during her trip to Europe where she aroused accusations of "anti-Americanism" from the *New York Herald* because of her association with the English aristocracy. Stowe's *The True Story of Lady Byron* published in the *Atlantic Monthly* in September 1869 where she reveals that Lord Byron 'fell into the depths of a secret adulterous intrigue with a blood relation, so near in consanguinity that discovery must have been utter ruin and expulsion from civilised society', heaped further opprobrium upon her head. [26] Her work was derided on both sides of the

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[23] 'A Masked British Slave Trade' *North Carolina Standard* 18 June 1853. *Semi-weekly North-Carolina standard,* 18 June 1853. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84024518/1853-06-18/ed-1/seq-2/>.

[24] 'Central Agitation – From a Report of the Proceedings of the Anti-Slavery Society held in New York in the past week'
The Southern Press, Washington DC, 19 May 1852. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn82014764/1852-05-19/ed-1/seq-2/>.

[25] 'Uncle Tom in England', *London Times,* 3 Sept 1852, p. 5 <https://lccn.loc.gov/06035767>.

[26] Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'The True Story of Lady Byron's Life', *The Atlantic Monthly*, (1869), Sept issue, p. 302

Atlantic for daring to defile the reputation of the renowned poet Lord Byron. Stowe responded by publishing *Lady Byron Vindicated* in 1870, which unfortunately, did not vindicate Stowe's reputation. While intending to illuminate sexual subjugation linking it to the institution of slavery as another aspect of political oppression in America, Stowe's inflammatory language and the scandalous impropriety of the material obscured her argument, which was used to undermine her standing as a voice for gender and racial justice.[27]

In response to criticism on all sides of the pro and anti-slavery lobby, Stowe defended her abolitionist novel against accusations of exaggerating the horrors of slavery, with the publication of *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 1853. Based on documentary evidence of slavery in the South, Stowe discovered a far worse picture than she had previously imagined, despite bitterly denouncing the practice in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when little Harry and Uncle Tom are sold to the slave trader. Stowe knows that there is no such thing as a benign form of slavery when families can be ripped apart and people treated as economic assets to be bought and sold like cattle. The outrage is voiced ironically by the compassionate plantation owner Mrs Shelby:

<https://cdn.theatlantic.com/media/archives/1869/09/24-143/131867362.pdf>.

[27] T Austin Graham, 'The Slaveries of Sex Race and Mind: Harriet Beecher Stowe's "Lady Byron Vindicated"', *New Literary History*, 41. 1 (2010), 173-90 (p. 176)
< http://www.jstor.org/stable/40666490>.
(Stowe's biographer Joan Hedrick suggests that Stowe intended Lady Byron vindicated to be "the *Uncle Tom's Cabin* of sexual slavery", quoted in Graham, 'The Slaveries of Sex Race and Mind', p. 175)
<www.jstor.org/stable/364818.>.

> A bitter, bitter, most accursed thing! – a curse to the master and a curse to the slave! I was a fool to think I could make anything good out of such a deadly evil. It is a sin [...] I thought I could gild it over. I thought that by kindness, and care, and instruction, I could make the condition of mine better than freedom. Fool that I was! [28]

Making strange bedfellows with Southern critics of her novel, Stowe also came under attack from twentieth century authors such as James Baldwin, Toni Morrison and Harryette Mullen who charged Stowe with evasion and blindness to racial abuse based on the comic stereotyping, the sentimentality, and the passivity of Uncle Tom to racial oppression. [29] However, this literal interpretation of *Uncle Tom* fails to recognise the irony of the constructed stereotypes that pander to white expectations, but which are ultimately disrupted and overturned, the caricatures a mask employed to veil subversive political comment. The range and significance of responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will be covered in more depth later in this chapter.

The revolution in form and style of Stowe's novel, while not meeting with universal acclaim, nevertheless had an impact on black author and abolitionist campaigner Frederick Douglass who wrote his own anti-slavery novel *The Heroic Slave* based on the true story of a successful slave revolt in

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[28] UTC, p. 33.
[29] James Baldwin "Everybody's Protest Novel," in James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002) Part 1, pp. 13-25.
Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Others* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017); also, Harryette Mullen, 'The Runaway Tongue - Resistant Orality in "Uncle Tom's Cabin", "Our Nig", "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl", and "Beloved"', in *The Cracks Between What We Are and What We Are Supposed To Be* ed. by H Mullen & H Lazer (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), pp. 102-125.

November 1841 led by Madison Washington. The interwoven narrative voices employed by Douglass claim cultural authority for the black voice portraying the slave hero in mythical terms aligned with the freedom fighters in the American War of Independence. The novella was commissioned by the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Society for their collection *Autographs for Freedom* and was written at a time when Douglass was a fugitive slave in Boston. Just as Douglass claimed racial autonomy as an orator refusing to allow himself to be presented as a victim of slavery, he also wished to claim literary agency by elevating his slave hero through language and self-determination.

Douglass's account of the slave rebellion differs from William Wells Brown's *The Heroic Slave* (1863) and Pauline E Hopkins *A Dash for Freedom* (1901) in that Douglass introduces the character of Mr Listwell, a white abolitionist who sympathises with and helps Madison Washington during his escape. The implication is that Douglass recognised the positive contribution made by Stowe and other white campaigners to the emancipation of coloured people, which contributed to an on-going dialogue that kept the anti-slavery and abolition debates to the forefront of American consciousness. In this light, Frederick Douglass gave *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the minstrel burlesques and songs a seal of approval based on the perception that they awaken sympathies for the slave, claiming in an address to the Rochester Ladies Anti-Slavery Society in 1855: "we have allies in the Ethiopian songs […] *Lucy Neal, Old Kentucky Home* and *Uncle Ned* that can make the heart sad as well as merry, and can call forth a tear as

well as a smile." [30] This was not a view shared by Douglass' *North Star* co-publisher Martin Delany (1812-1885) who advocated that the elevation of black people should be by their own efforts, and not dependent on whites.[31]

Despite Douglass's respect for Stowe, a comparison between the narrative styles of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Heroic Slave* illuminates the different racial impact that the novels had in affecting attitudes to abolition and emancipation. Because Douglass shies away from employing the distancing provided by the satirical mask, he is unable to give his hero Madison Washington a vernacular voice, as this would reinforce assumptions of white hierarchy. Unlike Stowe's novel where vernacular is employed by black characters such as Andy and Sam, Adolphus, and Topsy as a double mask to satirise white racial arrogance, in *The Heroic Slave* vernacular voices are the preserve of money-grubbing slave traders and innkeepers. Thus, Douglass uses language as a tool to link and invert class and racial conventions in a direct attack that confronts rather than satirises the inequities of racial injustice, whereas the vernacular in *Uncle Tom* acts as a screen for the subversion of racial bigotry. Douglass also emphasises the dynamic role of his black hero, his physical attributes conforming to an ideal vision of masculinity that endorses rather than undercuts white racial hierarchy, thus condoning the values of a system responsible for racial oppression.

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[30] Quoted in Robert S Levine, '"Uncle Tom's Cabin" in "Frederick Douglass' Paper": An Analysis of Reception', p. 81.
[31] Ibid, p. 81.

The various narrative perspectives in *The Heroic Slave* do not recount different versions of the same story as they do in *Uncle Tom,* but rather interweave individual experiences and are thus unable to deliver the contextual insights produced by what Walter Benjamin terms "a reactivation of orality." The way in which Shakespeare is appropriated within the novels also varies affecting the potential for cultural transformation and social relevance. While Shakespeare is employed by Stowe as a radical device to satirise white authority, in *The Heroic Slave* Shakespeare's *Henry Vl*, Part ll is invoked to provide a historical backdrop of Civil War, where Madison Washington is identified with the rebel liberator of his people from a corrupt regime to legitimise black violent insurrection when the cause is justified.

Analysing the different narrative styles in Stowe and Douglass's anti-slavery novels provides an interesting insight into why *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with its dependence on minstrelsy and Shakespeare burlesque strategies in controlling perceptions of racial stereotypes was more effective in stirring the hearts and minds of a nation struggling with the divisive issue of racial injustice despite Douglass's shifting the focus of self-hood to redress the bias of anti-slavery texts by white authors where African American voices were either erased or objectified.

3.2. The Role of Blackface Minstrelsy in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Regarding Attitudes to Race

> Folk art and kitch ought for once to be regarded as a single great movement that passes certain themes from hand to hand, like batons, behind the back of what is known as great art.
>
> Walter Benjamin[32]

Uncle Tom's Cabin demonstrates strong links with the ante-bellum minstrel tradition with its burlesque skits, disguises, theatrical settings, colloquial speech and Shakespeare's burlesque distortion of mainstream cultural attitudes, an indication of the deep social penetration of blackface minstrelsy within American culture.

In borrowing from blackface burlesque, Stowe sets her novel in an absurdly idealised arcadia, a satirical mask for the underlying horrors of slavery, finally exposed by Tom's resistance to the degradation and cruelty inflicted by the Southern plantation owner Legree. Stowe's spirit of defiance is captured by the inventive intertextual narrative structure and multi-vocal discourse, which gives authority to women's voices and black voices, the reversals of gender and racial hierarchy forging an alliance of the politically marginalised to blur and challenge oppressive and unjust social divisions. While there is no evidence that Stowe saw a minstrel show clearly, she was aware of blackface performance based on little Harry's Jim Crow pulpit parody of a church elder for the entertainment of the slave trader Haley:

[32] 'Benjamin, Some Remarks on Folk Art' *Selected Writings*, Vol 2, p. 278.

> Now, Jim, said his master, 'Show us how old Elder Robbins leads the psalm.'
> The boy drew up his chubby face down to a formidable length and commenced toning a psalm tune through his nose with imperturbable gravity.
> "Hurrah! bravo! what a young 'un!' said Haley […]'fling in that chap, and I'll settle the business – I will. Come, now, if that ain't doing the thing up about the rightest!' [33]

Little Harry's Jim Crow imitation demonstrates the mimetic skill of the enslaved population appropriated by white troubadours such as T D Rice, Dan Emmett, and Stephen Foster in a cultural cross-over of double masking of whites imitating blacks imitating whites, which laid the authentic counterfeit foundations of the blackface minstrel shows.[34] It is interesting to note that that while performing in the Ohio valley in 1832, T D Rice (aka Jim Crow) was accompanied by a comic four year old, Joseph Jefferson lll, an act that Stowe, who was travelling to Cincinnati at the time, was very likely aware of from reviews in newspaper articles and by word of mouth.[35] In the performance, Rice and his 'mini-me' were both attired in patriotic Uncle Sam costumes with the name of the young boy making reference to the mixed race children of Senator Thomas Jefferson, Rice's blackface act making an ironic claim to American cultural identity while mocking claims of racial purity. This act, along with an astounding talent for impersonation, undoubtedly provided the inspiration for Stowe's little Harry skit. [36] The narrator in *Uncle Tom* also notes that Harry is a quadroon emphasising the

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[33] UTC, p. 5.
[34] In Matthew Rebhorn, *Pioneer Performances: Staging the Frontier* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).
Matthew Rebhorn traces T D Rice's Jim Crow to the shifting terrain of the frontier where he came into contact with outback and indigenous cultures).
[35] Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe – A Life*, pp. 68-69.
[36] Rourke, *American Humor,* p. 73.

boy's engaging beauty and style of dress, a celebration of racial amalgamation allied to Rice's interaction with black culture as integral to a more representative and unique American national identity. The blackface connection is accentuated again when Mr Shelby refers to Harry several times as Jim (UTC 5), a blurring of identities that signals an ambiguous masquerade subtext, which destabilises attitudes to racial difference. Thus, while little Harry is applauded for his minstrelsy antics in mocking religious pomposity, he is also demeaned by being made to perform for the benefit of his master, which reinforces the racial stereotype:

> Halloa, Jim Crow said Mr Selby, whistling and snapping a bunch of raisins towards him; "pick that up now!"
> The child scampered with all his strength after the prize, while his master laughed. [37]

Harry's imitation of the evangelical preachers alludes to a time of heightened national awareness of slavery issues and the religious contradictions it stirred up. Camp meetings were held in frontier locations during the nineteenth century, the second revival beginning in Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1798, with gatherings attended by over 20,000 black, white, free, and bonded slaves, and which included several days of fiery, emotional religious celebration. The leaders of these campsite congregations associated religion with patriotism, where the saving of souls amounted to saving the Republic in the absence of moral guidance from the government. Charles F Finney (1792-1875) led a surge in this evangelical awakening of the Nation serving as President of Oberlin College, Cincinnati from 1851-1866, in opposition to Lynam Beecher's cautious religious teachings on race

[37] UTC, p. 5.

in the Lane Theological Seminary, also in Cincinnati. Finney's anti-Calvin doctrine advocated that the doctrine of "perfection" could be worked on in life, a philosophy that chimed with Harriet Beecher Stowe's Christian rebirth in the 1850s. For Stowe the Calvinistic damnation due to original sin was replaced by a more realistic gospel of suffering that united her experience as a woman with that of an oppressed slave, and which put the burden of salvation on human effort. Finney's tenure at Oberlin College coincided with the period when Harriet Beecher Stowe was writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, her "baptism of the spirit" aligned to salvation rooted in an intensified moral struggle to oppose outrages such as the institution of slavery.[38] Stowe turned her "perfection" religious efforts outwards combining her evangelical zeal with a literary performance of harsh realism which was tempered by the comic satire of minstrel mask. As with the controversy surrounding minstrelsy, Stowe's *Uncle Tom* has been accused of both racism because of its deployment of racial stereotypes, and anti-racism because of the outrage the novel caused in the slave-holding Southern States. However, focus on racial burlesque and satirical asides interwoven into the text also reflects a highly charged racially ambivalent antebellum period, echoed by the pervasive threats of social upheaval and violence depicted in *Uncle Tom*.[39]

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[38] Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe – A Life,* p. 145.
For background on political and social role of religion in nineteenth century America see Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, 'How the Upstart Sects Won America: 1776-1850,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 28. 1 (1989), pp. 27–44.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/1387250.>.
[39] Northern abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison describes this period of racial turmoil as "the Reign of Terror' with the beginnings of the Gag Rule in

As well as the scene with little Harry performing Jim Crow, other interactions are depicted in *Uncle Tom* that also blur and destabilise black racial caricatures. By presenting the Shelby's slaves Andy and Sam as contented and lazy Stowe conforms to black stereotypes on one level but this perception is dispelled by involving the plantation comics in a cunning scheme with Mrs Selby to dupe the slave driver Haley. The repartee between Mrs Shelby and Sam echoes a minstrel routine with the comic vernacular a mask of feigned innocence and the exaggeration (indicated by the italics), designed to disguise the real meaning of the discourse which is to delay Haley:

> [Mrs Selby] "Sam you know Jerry was a little lame last week; *don't ride him too fast"*
> "Let dis child alone for dat! said Sam, rolling his eyes to heaven with a volume of meaning. Lord knows! High! Didn't say dat! said he…You see Andy, missus wants to make time – dat ar's clar to der most or'nary 'beserver." [40]

In a re-enactment of a minstrel stage farce Andy and Sam take on the madcap roles of Sambo and Bones wildly shouting and chasing after the horses with Sam to be seen wherever there was that least chance of a horse being caught, and Mrs Shelby descending from the veranda to play the directing role of the interlocutor, insisting that Haley must now stay to dinner.

However, Black Sam reinforces the racial stereotype by appearing to be foolish, a veneer that lets him take advantage of Haley, but he also characterises the self-conscious ambiguity of the minstrel stage in cunningly

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Congress, the suppression of abolitionist mail documents, and major riots in Washington, Baltimore, and other cities. See Hedrick, p. 104.
[40] UTC, p. 43.

looking to benefit from Tom being sold down the river. Sam's self-interested ambition to succeed Tom in the plantation hierarchy aligns him with the scheming ways of corrupt politicians:

> Black Sam […] was revolving the matter profoundly in all its phases and bearings, with a comprehensiveness of vision and a strict look-out to his own personal well-being, that would have done credit to any white patriot in Washington. [41]

Through Black Sam the ironic voice of the narrator expresses minstrelsy's contradictions, which blur and confound racial assumptions symbolising the pervasive, corrupting influence of the system of slavery.

Sam's comical playacting obscures the guile beneath the mask of farce, displayed in his kitchen sink oration of the day's events where our burlesque hero depicts himself as a true patriot and defender of his people in accord with the liberating sons of the revolution. Thus, armed with the spoils of the larder, Sam directs his political rhetoric to a captive kitchen audience:

> "Yer see fellow-countrymen" said Sam, elevating a turkey's leg, with energy, "yer see, now what dis yer chile's up ter, for 'fendin' t yer all – yes, all on yer." [42]

To give mock authority to his speech Sam appropriates traces of Mark Antony's famous eulogy from *Julius Caesar* "Friends romans countrymen, lend me your ears;" However, he also reveals the artifice of his intent through alliance with Mark Antony's disguised ambitions in *Julius Caesar*,

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[41] UTC, p. 41.
[42] UTC, p. 71.

where he plays a double role of people's hero and self-interested mischief-maker.[43]

Sam attempts to fill the gap left by Uncle Tom by holding forth in Aunt Chloe's kitchen, his political swagger a farcical recreation of Uncle Sam, the symbol of the American Constitution. His performance resonates with minstrel stage travesties of *Julius Caesar*, such as Charles White's *Julius the Snoozer,* which continues an enduring tradition of using parody to expose political corruption. The travesty mocks hypocritical attitudes to race and class through the clash between the despotic Julius and the republican Brutus, invoking the authority of Shakespeare to illuminate universal themes of social injustice up against the determined sense of entitlement of the ruling class:

> BRUTUS. The law annexing South Fifth Avenue with Murray Hill
> Is much against the colored people's will.[44]
> They hope through me your clemency will yield
> And have at once the law repealed
> JULIUS. Give me the paper (*tears it in pieces and throws it in* Brutus' *face*). Take a back seat I'll see you later.
> PINCHBACK. (*kneeling*)[45]
> Most noble Snoozer, grant me I pray, a seat;
> I'm tired all but to death standing on my feet.
> JULIUS. You're Pinchback?
> PINCHBACK. Yes.
> JULIUS. What's the matter with your legs?
> PINCHBACK. My feet I said
> JULIUS. Well, if your feet are played out, stand on your head.[46]

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[43] William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* in *The Norton Shakespeare* ed by Greenblatt, Act III, scene 2.
[44] This was the area where the social elite lived in 1850s New York.
[45] The character of Pinchback alludes to Pinkney Benton Stewart Pinchback (1837-1921) the mulatto son of a Mississippi plantation owner. He was elected as a US Senator for Louisiana in 1873 but he was refused permission to take his seat in Congress. Amid great political controversy his election was nullified in 1877.

With ironic satire, Sam's banter sheds a light on duplicitous political practices that traverse race and class boundaries in a bid for social advantage.

In a further parody of political chicanery Sam's politicking ties issues of racial equality and slavery to economics and expediency disguised as altruistic concern for his brothers. Continuing his kitchen account of Eliza's daring escape, Sam attempts to exalt his own role through allusion to Shakespeare's "band of brothers" call to arms speech from *Henry V.* The stirring melodrama of the St Crispin's Day oration puts honour and glory above considerations for the lives of England's vastly outnumbered army:

> The fewer men, the greater share of honour.
> God's will! I pray thee, wish not one man more.
> […]
> We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
> For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
> Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
> This day shall gentle his condition; (*Henry V*, IV. 3.18… 67)[47]

Sam's vernacular allusion in prose to King Henry's rousing speech appeals to brotherhood and to union that transcends racial lines, but which also intimates violent rebellion:

> For him who tries to get one o' our people is as god as tryin' to get all – yes, all on yer […] Im the feller for yer all to come to, brethren – I'll stand up for yer rights – I'll 'fend 'em to the last breath." [48]

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[46] Add Ryman and Charles White, 'Julius the Snoozer' in *This Grotesque Essence – Plays from the American Minstrel Stage* ed. by G Engle (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), pp. 162 -172 (p. 169).
[47]Shakespeare, *Henry V* in *The Norton Shakespeare* ed. by Greenblatt, Act IV. 3.
[48] UTC, p. 71.

Sam is Stowe's parodic 'heroic slave' with his claim to "fendin' t yer all", until unmasked by his sidekick Andy "Why but Sam, yer telled me only this mornin' that you'd help this yer man to cotch Lizzy; seem to me yer talk don't hang together." (UTC 71). In the comic exchange, Andy's disclosure is swept aside by Sam's pretentious language, employed as a political tool to demean his opponent, and to mislead his audience "Andy means well but they can't be 'spected to collusitate the great principles of action." (UTC 71) Sam's inclusion of the neologism 'collusitate' mimics high blown political jargon designed to exclude and intimidate those outside of the political arena in the creation of a social hierarchy. Sam's vulgarity and compromised principles satirise the counterfeit sincerity of politicians, who will do, or say, whatever is necessary to achieve their aims of ensuring the continuation of white hegemony.

The bragging humour of Sam's St Crispin's Day parody, while it comically arouses sympathy for the enslaved underdogs, also refers covertly to white anxieties related to the threat of violent confrontation such as the slave uprising led by Nat Turner in Virginia in 1831, and John Brown's raid in Harper's Ferry in 1859. The contradictions and undercurrents of racial conflict performed on the minstrel stage, emulated by Sam's kitchen dramatics, reflect the unease of abolitionists constrained by fears of exacerbating violent secessional division.

William Lloyd Garrison used his position as editor of *The Liberator* to campaign against the moral outrage of human bondage much to the shock of many of his Northern comrades. However, following the Nat Turner slave

rebellion, Garrison repudiated accusations that his editorials had incited the violent uprising. Nevertheless, Garrison modified his anti-slavery rhetoric, disavowing rebellion in favour on non-violent resistance. Garrison's equivocation regarding direct action meant that he also opposed John Brown's violent anti-slavery revolt, until Brown became valorised as a martyr to the abolition cause. Garrison finally endorsed violence to defeat slavery, a change of heart that reflected irreconcilable sectional divisions over race that led inevitably to Civil War.[49]

Garrison was equivocal in his reaction to direct action, however, Stowe tackles contentious issues of race indirectly through ironic satire and ambiguous perspectives, which resonate with the destabilising subtext woven into Shakespeare plays, and on the minstrel stage. Thus, while Sam's comic turn enacts the ambiguous trickster role of Jim Crow's socially aspiring Uncle Sam, the role of another minstrel caricature, the black dandy Long-Tail Blue, is played by Augustine St Clare's affected valet Adolphus. His imitation of the blackface urban dandy is a double masked theatrical imitation of real black dandies who impersonate the aristocratic style of urban whites in a cross-fertilisation of class and race performances that inspired the dandy characters of the mid-nineteenth century minstrel stage. Adolphus is the embodiment of Long Tail Blue, a social climber aspiring to the heights of whiteness through imitation of his master's mannerisms. Through his performance of white racial hierarchy, Adolphus inverts and

[49] Franco A, Paz, 'The Uprisings of Nat Turner and John Brown: Response and Treatment from the Abolitionist Movement and the Press.' *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse* 8. 5 (2016), 1-3 (p. 3) <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=1409>.

doubly confuses racial boundaries, his act making him complicit in racial oppression, rather than an ambiguous minstrel figure of racial resistance.

The minstrel song "My Long Tail Blue" (first published in New York in 1827) tells the story of a presumptuous black dandy who chases women and flouts authority in his attempt to climb the social ladder, the effete yet menacing posturing of Adolphus, is reflected in the unsettling sexual swagger of Blue:

> Some N****rs they have but one coat,
> But you see I've got two;
> I wears a jacket all the week,
> And Sunday my long tail blue
> [...]
> Jim Crow is courting a white gall,
> And yaller folks call her Sue;
> I guess she back'd a n****r out,
> And swung my long tail blue...
> [...]
> If you want to win the Ladies hearts,
> I'll tell you what to do;
> Go to a tip-top tailor's shop,
> And buy a long tail blue.[50]

Tensions created by Blue's anti-authoritarian pose and suggestions of amalgamation are countered by threats of Jim Crow violence hostile to Blue's class and racial arrogance. Well-dressed blacks were subject to intimidation in Northern cities such as Boston, Philadelphia, and New York, a cross-racial affectation caricatured on the minstrel stage, which doubly blurred both class and racial boundaries. Expressing anxiety regarding this social confusion, a writer in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1828 wrote "how

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[50] *Master Book of American Folk Song*, Vol 7, p. 3471 <https://archive.org/details/masterbookofamericanfolksong00shep/Master%20Book%20of%20American%20Folk%20Song%20Vol.%207/page/n11/mode/2up>.

long will it be before servants and masters change places?" [51] The facetious question raised by the *Gazette* correspondent has relevance for the relationship between Augustine St Clare and the liberties assumed by his dandified valet Adolphus in his attempt to emulate his master:

> [St. Clare]: "Puh! You puppy" said his master striking down the opera glass; […] Seems to me Dolph' he added, laying a finger on the elegant-figured satin vest that Adolph was sporting, "seems to me that's *my* vest."
> [Adolphus]: "Oh! Master, this vest all stained with wine […] I understood I was to take it. It does for a poor nigger-fellow like me." [52]

The clash between Augustine's irritated tone and Adolphus's flippant riposte reflects a tension that resonated with a context of political transition from the John Quincey Adams presidency to that of Andrew Jackson in 1828. The era of first publication of "Long Tail Blue" (1827) coincided with Jacksonian egalitarianism, a laissez faire style of government, which expanded suffrage but only to white men. The new spirit of supposed equality was a euphemism intent on, as Barbara Lewis puts it, "laundering the immigrant middle and determined to exclude the darker and the higher reaches of the citizenry". Such a climate did not bode well for smart, well-dressed blacks aspiring to the style of white success and wealth but finding themselves vulnerable to the callous attitude of the new Democratic regime.[53] Adolphus discovers this to his cost when he is taken to the slave

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[51] Barbara L. Webb, 'The Black Dandyism of George Walker: A Case Study in Genealogical Method,' *TDR,* 45. 4 (2001), 7–24, (p. 12) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1146926>.

[52] UTC 154.

[53] Barbara Lewis, 'Daddy Blue: The Evolution of the Dark Dandy,' in *Inside the Minstrel Mask, Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy* ed. by A Bean, J V Hatch & McNamara (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), pp. 257-272 (p. 259).

warehouse following the death of Augustine St. Clare. Adolphus picks a fight with Sambo when it is suggested he will be sold off with a load of cracked teapots, considered to be property like all the other slaves, his dandy airs and graces counting for nothing in terms of white racial economy. (UTC 304) The destructive rivalry and moral ambiguity of this racial confusion is inferred in the boastful lyrics of "Long Tail Blue". Tavia Nyong'o however, argues that the ambiguities of the cross-racial inferences in songs such as "Long Tail Blue", and echoed by Adolphus's masquerade of white self-assurance, were significant to debates on racial equality, abolition, and amalgamation. During the 1830s there was violent opposition to abolition in major towns and cities, particularly inflamed by fears of amalgamation, when paradoxically, it was white slaveholders who were responsible for the social and racial fluidity that they claimed to abhor.[54] Blurring the racial boundaries further, abolitionists who perceived themselves as moral reformists did not necessarily advocate amalgamation, an ambivalence characterised in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by Ophelia, Augustine's evangelical cousin from Vermont, who admits that she always had a prejudice against negroes and could never bear them to touch her. (UTC 262)

Adolphus's roleplay satirises the ambiguities inherent in this class and racial confusion, which crosses racial lines, his aspiration to a higher social standing dependent on white indulgence, rather than black achievement. His minstrel-like performance of whiteness is characterised by affected speech,

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[54] Nyong'o, Tavia, *The Amalgamation Waltz: Race, Performance, and the Ruses of Memory* (University of Minnesota Press, 2009), p. 72
ProQuest ebook Central.

foppish mannerisms, and by filching his master's clothes and perfume, a borrowing which parodies the constructed nature of racial hierarchy:

> Adolph poured forth, with great fluency, an extemporary speech, which he had been preparing with great care, for a fortnight before. [55]

The blurring of racial division is compounded through Augustine St. Clare's mask of insouciance, which enables him to be mastered by his wife and slaves, an inverted gender and racial hierarchy that reveals collusion in the system of white patriarchal oppression for immediate and self-serving purposes, even by those who are victims of the tyranny. Thus, Adolphus's hyper-imitation of whiteness makes him disgusted by blackness and thus bereft of sympathy for the unfortunate alcoholic slave Prue:

> Disgusting old beast!" said Adolph […] "if I was her master, I would cut her up worse than she is. [56]

Adolphus and Miss Jane, a mulatto maid, then engage in minstrel-like repartee emulating the class and racial bigotry of plantation owner Marie St Clare, the self-conscious mocking tone blurring gender and racial assumptions of a caste system based on skin colour:

> I think such low creatures ought not to be allowed to go round to genteel families," said Miss Jane. What do you think Mr St. Clare? She said coquettishly tossing her head at Adolph…I'm certainly of your opinion, Miss Benoir," said Adolph. [57]

Adolphus's camp affectation is portrayed with the comic farce of minstrelsy, unsettled by an edge of cruelty, an ambiguity which unmasks a surface façade of plantation family life and racial order promoted by Southern slaveholders as a counterforce to calls for the abolition of slavery.

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[55] UTC, p, 153.
[56] Ibid, p. 199.
[57] Ibid, p. 199-200.

However, Stowe's religious and gender rebellion, by writing against literary convention through alliance with the masked satire of minstrelsy, does not wholly convince author Sarah Meer because she suggests that certain characters, such as Adolphus and the maid Rosa, evoke darker elements of fear and disgust.[58] Adolphus who claims that in dealing with Prue he would "cut her up worse than she is" (UTC 199) associates himself with white slave practices of using the whip to enforce racial dominance. Similarly, the mulatto maid Rosa, who is not fooled by Topsy's playacting, advocates white methods of racial control in urging that Topsy be whipped:

> La there ain't such a thing as truth in that limb…I'd whip her until the blood run, I would. I'd let her catch it. [59]

Meer suggests that these violent depictions play across the conventions of the blackface tradition of empathy and amusement as depicted in the more farcical masquerades involving Sam and Topsy. However, blackface minstrelsy in the antebellum period was self-consciously ambiguous, disguised, disingenuous, and disordered, performing a range of incongruous and conflicting class, gender and racial perspectives, which represented the fluctuations and contradictions of cultural identity, intended to challenge the authority of the Church and State. Thus, the portrayal of Adolphus as a camp caricature of racial cruelty, who inverts and twists racial boundaries, mirrors a dark underbelly of plantation tyranny. The racial oppression is also embodied by Marie St Clare, Arthur St Clare, Adolphus, Rosa, and even cousin Ophelia, in an alliance that spans colour and class divides. The less

[58] Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania – Slavery, Minstrelsy & Transatlantic Culture* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2005), p. 41.
[59] UTC, p. 228.

sympathetic depiction of Adolph and Rosa reflects a more complex strategy of racial masking than Stowe is given credit for. Meer, contends however, that the minstrelsy connection was responsible for vicious slurs in later pro-slavery novels, where even Topsy's character was manipulated by Southern propaganda as childishly comic to undermine the racial contradictions of her performance:

> Like many blackface figures, Topsy was a fantasy projection for those afflicted by bourgeois repressions, but although this role complicated her relation to race, it did not negate it.[60]

Rather than shedding a negative light on her black characters, Stowe's appropriation of minstrelsy disorder illuminated an ambiguous picture of plantation life that allowed for diverse interpretations, slanted by some to include a pro-slavery twisting of the dandy. Such a distortion for reasons of racist propaganda aligns with the postbellum re-definition of Jim Crow by Southern patriots from masked social commentator to the adopted symbol of racial segregation. It is also worth noting that T D Rice, the original blackface Jim Crow, whose last great role was playing the role of Uncle Tom, managed to perform in keeping with the "deep sentiment of human brotherhood" that Jim Crow conjured up when he first performed his blackface routine. It was a force that influenced Stowe's multi-vocal anti-slavery novel as noted by W T Lhamon Jr:

> He and other performers had communicated those impulses so powerfully that Harriet Beecher Stowe could sense and formulize them without ever seeing a blackface performance.[61]

Stowe's aim in burlesquing conflicted racial perspectives was to

[60] Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*, p. 40-41.
[61] Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, p. 91.

creatively imagine a more inclusive and democratic solution to social and political reform while also conceding the flaws, inconsistencies and prejudices of the Church and the anti-slavery activists.[62] This dichotomy in the Church satirised through different perspectives in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Adolphus's borrowed white identity is a reversal of the blackface trope complying with, rather than challenging racial hierarchy, his mimetic decadence a performance of patronising patriarchy that sustains a caste system upheld across the colour line. His indulged masquerade of whiteness is stripped away when Augustine dies, revealing a lack of self-identity when he is sold off along with all the other slaves. Adolphus's dependency on white largesse thus contrasts with the self-determination of Stowe's light skinned fugitive slave George Harris's engagement with minstrelsy which tells a different story. This conflict is reflected by Werner Sollers's argument that the difference between Adolphus's inherited identity and George's self-made one is central to American culture and is the root of the sectional tensions dividing the North and the South.[63] Thus George, rather than borrowing white identity, takes control of the narrative, using blackface disguise and role play to blur and reconstruct racial categories to highlight the arbitrary nature of identity based on race. In his escape, George

[62] See Theodore R. Hovet, 'The Church Diseased: Harriet Beecher Stowe's Attack on the Presbyterian Church', *Journal of Presbyterian History (1962-1985)*, 52. 2 (1974), pp. 167–87.
This will be discussed in more detail in the next section on race and religion.
[63]Werner Sollors, *Beyond Ethnicity: Consent and Descent in American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 5-6.

masquerades as a Spaniard, dying his hair and darkening his skin because the reward poster for his capture describes him as very light-skinned implying that he may use whiteface to pass. George also has a manservant with him called Jim, an allusion to Jim Crow which, along with his own 'Long Tail Blue' impersonation of white confidence and respectability, emphasises a debt to minstrelsy charade in destabilising racial boundaries. George's roleplay demonstrates that identity is fluid and reversible, blacking up to pass for white in a reversal of blackface that purposefully complies with notions of racial hierarchy in order to subvert the system.[64] According to Jason Richards, Stowe models George Harris on Frederick Douglass in his journey of self-improvement to construct a personal identity of autonomy and equality. [65] George's rebellion also resonates with the mutiny of Douglass's heroic slave Madison Washington in what Eric Sundquist refers to as a crusade against slavery where the rebels become the true Americans, not by eroding an ideology of freedom and democracy, but by transferring it across the colour line.[66] Although it could be argued through his imitation of

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[64] Robert C Nowatzki, *Representing African Americans in Transatlantic Abolitionism and Blackface Minstrelsy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), pp. 156-157 <http://www.ebrary.com http://site.ebrary.com/lib/swansea/reader.action?docID=10408480&ppg=25>.

[65] Jason Richards, 'Imitation Nation: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Making of African American Selfhood in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*', *A Forum on Fiction*, 39. 2 (2006), 204-220 (p. 214) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267653>.
On Frederick Douglass as a model of African American self-construction see Daniel Howe, *Making the American Self*: *Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), chapter 5, pp. 136-156.

[66] Eric J Sunquist, *To Wake the Nations: Race in the Making of American Literature* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1993), p. 36.

colonial rebellion George conforms to a heroic Euro-American identity, such a concept is renounced when as a free man he declares:

> "I have no wish to pass for an American, or to identity with them. It is with the oppressed, enslaved African race that I cast in my lot; and if I wished to say anything, I would wish myself two shades darker, rather than one lighter." [67]

Interestingly, the use of the word "pass" in his speech is an indication that George rejects an inauthentic identity, but instead yearns for an African nationality in a place where an individual can raise himself above the condition of slavery through energy and self-education.

Stowe's aim for achieving freedom and equality for George contrasts with Frederick Douglass's approach in *The Heroic Slave* where Madison Washington emulates the erudite voice and heroic traits of the those who rebelled against colonial rule in the War of Independence, in order to attain a racially equal American national identity. To illustrate this point, Douglass describes Madison's physical appearance through a Euro-American lens to signify superhuman strength and stature:

> Madison was of a manly form. […] His torn sleeves disclosed arms like polished iron. His face was black, but comely. His eye lit with emotion, kept guard under a brow as dark as the raven's wing. His whole appearance betokened Herculean strength.[68]

This description of Madison differs radically from Douglass's original incarnation of his hero delivered in a speech in April 1849 where he paints Madison as "a black man, with wooly head, high cheek bones, protruding lip

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[67] UTC, p. 400.
[68] Frederick Douglass, *Autographs for Freedom* (Boston: John P Jewett, 1853) (Includes Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*, (pp. 174-239), 179 <http://docsouth.unc.edu/neh/douglass1853/douglass1853.html>.

distending nostril, and retreating forehead…"[69] The re-drawing of Madison from Douglass's original incarnation removes the possibility of satirical masking to indicate the ambiguous and constructed nature of cultural identity. Instead, Madison conforms to an idealised version of pre-eminence promoted by the white cultural mainstream with its roots in classical Greece mythology.

This inference is reinforced from Douglass's depiction of Irish peasants as ignorant and degraded, whom he says compare in form and feature to the plantation negro, whereas the educated Irishman he describes as a model gentleman.[70] Douglass would seem to be endorsing the pro-slavery position that appearance indicates psychological development, and thus, he could not portray his hero with the traits of an African slave as this would reinforce such preconceptions. Consequently, to bridge the racial gap it was necessary for Madison Washington to be educated and to conform to Euro-American ideals of manliness and erudition. Because Douglass rejects the ironic approach to the depiction of racial identity as a social construct, I would argue that Stowe's George Harris, by distancing himself from whiteness through his blackface disguise in a form of reversed rebellious mimicry, is

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[69] "Anti-Colonization Meeting" *North Star*, 2, quoted in Richard Yarborough, 'Race, Violence and Manhood: The Masculine Ideal in Frederick Douglass's "The Heroic Slave"' in *Frederick Douglass: New Literary and Historical Essays,* ed. by Eric J Sundquist (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2011), pp. 166-188 (p. 173).

[70] Frederick Douglass, 'The Claims of the Negro, Ethnologically Considered' An Address before the Literary Societies of Western Reserve College, July 12, 1854 (Rochester: Lee Man, 1854), pp. 30-31 <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.69015000002739&view=2up&seq=33&skin=2021&size=125>.

more aligned with the racial autonomy enacted by the black American actor Ira Aldridge. Like George, Aldridge takes control by embracing minstrelsy tropes to perform passing in a range of blackface and whiteface roles on legitimate and burlesque stages which erode racial boundaries and allow the construction of an alternative autonomous racial identity.

Evidence suggests that blackface minstrels did not assume the inferiority of African Americans, but instead used the racialised mask and caricature to destabilise and challenge white preconceptions.[71] Stowe infers this social awareness through the minstrel type encounters between Northern cousin Ophelia and her impish black protégé Topsy. Contradictory attitudes to religion, slavery and the law imitate verbal sparring matches between a clownish endman (Topsy) and a condescending interlocutor (Miss Ophelia) in order to hold a mirror up to white racial values. Despite the superiority of the interlocutor, he is inevitably upstaged by the end man, where according to Sarah Meer "the weight of the comedy varied in different performances, but often the jibes were not only directed at 'black' misuse of language but also worked to undercut the genteel airs of the interlocutor".[72] Echoing this performance of racial disorder, Topsy playing the endman unmasks Miss Ophelia's unchristian and hypocritical attitude to slavery by suggesting that she should be whipped, claiming disingenuously "I 'spects it's good for me." Ophelia goes along with the punishment, which infers compliance with Southern slave practices, despite previously berating Marie

[71] Lott, *Love and Theft*, p. 234.
[72] Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania*, pp. 30-31.

St Clare for sending her slaves to the calaboose to be flogged (UTC 163). Ophelia's use of the whip to punish Topsy "for her own good" reveals an underlying assumption of white authority that undermines Northern liberal claims to support racial equality and emancipation. Adding to the disorder, Topsy reacts to her punishment with exaggerated histrionics, screaming and wailing for the benefit of Ophelia, while later, on a balcony performing before an audience of her cohorts, the cunning endman enacts the utmost contempt for the feeble punishment meted out to her:

> Law, Miss Feely whip! – wouldn't kill a skeeter, her whippin's." Oughter see how old mas'r made the flesh fly; old mas'r know'd how! [73]

Topsy continues with her sermon in a parody of Miss Ophelia's religious teaching, her exaggerated vernacular mocking her assertion that no one is as wicked as she is:

> "Law, you niggers"… does you know you's all sinners? Well you is, everybody is. White folks is sinners too – Miss Feely says so; but I 'spects niggers is the biggest ones; but lor! Ye an't any on ye up to me. I's so awful wicked there can't nobody do nothin' with me." [74]

Topsy's exaggerated dialect amplifies the satirical effect, but it is also a masked performance of racial inversion that paradoxically reveals the underlying pathos of laws that sanction racial division and slavery.

The gap in perceptions of the law between Ophelia and Topsy baffles Ophelia's rigid adherence to truth when her disingenuous pupil is caught stealing items, and then confesses to crimes she didn't commit because she claims that this is what she thought she was supposed to do "Why missis

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[73] UTC, p. 232.
[74] Ibid, p. 232.

said I must ‘fess and I couldn’t think of nothin’ else to ’fess”. (UTC 227) Topsy’s courtroom style defence of her innocence is a performance that satirises the credibility of the legal system and definitions of the truth:

> “I never tell no lies Miss Feely…it’s just the truth I been a tellin’ now, and an’t nothin’ else.” [75]

For Ophelia, as the authoritative voice of the interlocutor, one type of lie is always as bad as another, whatever the reason for it. Topsy’s apparent obliviousness to such concepts of truth is beyond Ophelia’s comprehension, as Topsy takes no account of religious and State laws imposed by the white ruling class for the benefit of social order. However, Topsy is not represented by that system, and thus her unruliness demonstrates her exclusion and alienation, but always screened by a façade of affected innocence that resonates with the faux naiveite of the plantation sketches in minstrel shows. By lifting the veil of caricature, Stowe reveals Topsy as a child defined and degraded by the corrupting effect of slavery who merited sympathy rather than denigration as merely a figure of comic fun.

Similarly, this burlesque ploy of elevating lying to an art as a means of confusing and challenging the hypocrisy of white rule was exaggerated satirically in Mark Twain’s tale *My First Lie and how I got Out of It:*

> There is a prejudice against the spoken lie, but none against any other, and by examination and mathematical computation I find that the proportion of the spoken lie to the other varieties is 1 to 22,894. Therefore the spoken lie is of no consequence, and it is not worthwhile to go around fussing about it and trying to make believe that it is an important matter. The silent colossal National Lie that is the support and confederate of all the tyrannies and shams and inequalities and unfairnesses that afflict the peoples - that is the one to throw bricks

[75] UTC, p. 226.

and sermons at.[76]

Ohio Senator Bird's wife, outraged by the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, also affiliates herself with Topsy in a shared contempt for the law, which she refused to obey on humanitarian grounds. Mrs Bird's vehement condemnation "And what is the law? It don't forbid us to shelter those poor creatures a night does it, and give them something comfortable to eat? "(UTC 74) voices domestic and female opposition in unison with the abolition cause. Mrs Bird's offended sense of social impotence also resonates with Frederick Douglass's speech "What to the American slave is your 4th July?" , which was delivered to the 'Rochester Anti-Slavery Sewing Society', in 1852. As in Shakespeare's plays, the hierarchy inversions and juxtaposition of incongruous sources in Stowe's novel suggests an alternative cultural realm, which comments on the inequities of a corrupt and oppressive political system from which many voices were marginalised, demonised and ignored.

Topsy's casual disrespect for official precepts of truth is also echoed by blackface sketches and songs such as *Jim Crack Corn,* or *The Blue Tail Fly,* in the word "lie" arouses suspicion as to the cause of Massa's death. Was the horse deliberately provoked to run and pitch, or were the flies at fault?:

> Dey laid 'im under a 'simmon tree,
> His epitaph am dar to see:
> 'Beneath dis stone I'm forced to lie,
> All by de means ob de blue tail fly.[77]

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[76] *Mark Twain: Collected Tales, Sketches Speeches and Essays Vols.1 & 2*, ed. by Louis J Budd (New York: Library of America, 1992).
[77] W T Lhamon, Jr, *Jump Jim Crow – Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press,

The narrator's ambiguous comment "Dey say all tings am for de best" on one level suggests a fateful event, while on another level hints at connivance in the death of the master, the uncertainty creating doubt central to the intent of minstrel travesty to disrupt racial order. Topsy in her melodramatic antics emulated the blackface style of exaggerated tragi-comedy tailored to her various audiences in a way that resonated with the riotous excesses of the Bowery stage in New York, in both its entertaining disorder, and cynical distortion of class and race presumptions.

The satirical façade of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* interweaves a range of conflicting and unreliable attitudes to slavery illuminating the compromised positions of the Church and State in their support for slavery justified by theological manoeuvring and practical concerns aimed at defusing conflict and supporting the Union. Blame is laid at the door of the despicable slave traders through the ironic voice of the narrator. However, in *Uncle Tom* neither North nor South, master nor slave, male nor female escape the disdain of Stowe's satirical pen, the barbed rhetoric holding responsible those who, if not directly involved in the business of slavery, are guilty through collusion or denial:

> But who, sir, makes the trader? Who is most to blame? The enlightened cultivated, intelligent man, who supports the system of which the trader is the inevitable result, or the poor trader himself? You make the public sentiment that calls for his trade, that debauches and depraves him, till he feels no shame in it; and in what are you better than he? [78]

2003), p. 144.

[78] UTC, p. 124.

The polemic editorial voice in *Uncle Tom* is commonly found in slave narratives which, combined with the fictional realism and masked political satire, was a deliberate ploy to smooth over the most heinous aspects of slavery so that people would be more likely to read her book. Through her literary subterfuge Stowe successfully provoked outrage at the self-interested political and religious obsequiousness that sacrificed racial justice and social equality on the altar of maintaining white privilege and National unity.

3.3. Minstrel Stage versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Influence of Shakespeare: Impact on Attitudes to Race and Slavery in Nineteenth Century America

The popularity, familiarity and racial controversy stirred up by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* made it a shoe in for minstrel stage burlesques to provoke and then mock hypocritical attitudes to race, class, and religion. *Uncle Tom* characters, particularly Topsy, Uncle Tom, Little Eva and the evil slave driver Simon Legree became stars of the minstrel stage in a cultural crossover that widened the reach of *Uncle Tom's* racially disruptive power in the ante-bellum era. One of the best-known versions, upon which many others were based, was George Aiken's *Uncle Tom Cabin - A Domestic Drama in Six Acts.* First performed in the National Museum in the Bowery section of New York in 1852, Aiken's drama, including its many revised adaptations, became the most frequently produced American drama ever written. Aiken's dramatised adaptation consisted of an olio of sentimentalised melodrama

interspersed with songs, slapstick, and improvised skits commenting on contentious social and racial issues of the day through the ambiguous mask of comic misrule. Topsy's role was expanded to include several minstrel routines including one with vagabond trickster Gumption Cute, a vaudeville reincarnation of Jim Crow:

> *Cute*. Don't you be too severe, now, Charcoal; I'm a man of genius. Did you ever hear of Barnum?
> *Topsy.* Barnum, Barnum, does he live out South?
> *Cute*. No he lives in New York. Do you know how he made his fortin?
> *Topsy*. What is him fortin hey? Is it something he wears?
> *Cute*. Chowder how green you are.
> *Topsy*. [*Indignantly*] Sar I hab you know I's not green, I's brack.
> *Cute*. To be sure you are Day & Martin. I calculate when a person says another has a fortune, he's got plenty of money Charcoal.
> *Topsy*. And did he make the money?
> *Cute.* Sartin sure and no mistake.
> *Topsy*. Golly! Now I thought money always growed.
> *Cute*. Oh git out! You are too cute - [79]

The cross-cultural repartee juxtaposing literal and figurative references to colour, comically referencing Day & Martin's boot blacking polish, alludes to the hybrid style and counterfeit of blacking up. The banter blurs and mocks constructed racial boundaries while also giving visibility to a cosmopolitan, commercially vibrant street life shaping and transforming the cultural identity of the nation. Unregulated commercial expansion is referred to in connection with the money-making vulgarity of Barnum's circus shows, with Topsy's comment that she always thought that money "growed" echoing her ironic reply to Miss Ophelia about her identity and where she came from:

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[79] G L Aiken, *Uncle Tom's Cabin or Life among the Lowly - A Domestic Drama in Six Acts,* (New York: S French, 1858?), pp. 45-46 <https://archive.org/stream/uncletomscabinor00aikeuoft#page/60/mode/2up>.

> "I was raised by a speculator, with lots of others…I 'spect I grow'd. Don't think nobody never made me." [80]

Linking the minstrel banter on making "his fortin" with Topsy's assumption in *Uncle Tom* that she was raised by a speculator satirically draws attention to the interconnected commercial and dehumanising nature of slavery.

Aiken's version remained the basic text for other productions from 1852 to the 1920s. According to John Frick, there were more than four hundred separate companies travelling the country performing "Tom shows". The first stage version of Stowe's serialisation of *Uncle Tom*'s *Cabin* appeared in The Baltimore Museum in March 1852 before the novel was even published, the severely edited version criticised for mocking Southern institutions, and for its alarming promotion of abolition. Aiken's later dramatised stage adaptation was however, a huge success, part of a genre of moral reform dramas, attracting family audiences, which the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison described as "the strongest anti-slavery impression […] a sight worth seeing those ragged, coatless men and boys in the pit cheering the strongest anti-slavery sentiments." [81] *Uncle Tom* and minstrelsy became united on stage when T D Rice (the original Jim Crow) played the title role opening on January 16,1854 at the Bowery in New York, a theatrical performance that included brass bands and pyrotechnic displays,

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[80] UTC, p. 224.
[81] Quoted in John W Frick, *Uncle Tom's Cabin on the American Stage and Screen* (New York: Palgrave, 2012), p. 18.
See also John Frick, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin on the Antebellum Stage' an essay presented at the June 2007 *Uncle Tom's Cabin in the Web of Culture* conference, Hartford, CT <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/interpret/exhibits/frick/frick.html>

where the spectacle and melodrama simplified the forces of good and evil on slavery rather than social inequality the political struggle between the North and South.[82]

In the anti-bellum South however, it would have been dangerous for the shows to remain true to Stowe's anti-slavery intent, denounced by the Sons of the Confederate Veterans in Charlottesville, Virginia. As the century progressed there was less depiction of the slavery issue in the 'Tom shows', replaced by plantation spirituals performed by black musicians, and comic turns, which presented demeaning stereotypes of African Americans, with the result that the shows became racist and anti-black by default.[83] In effect, Stowe's protest novel became racist 'anti-Tom' propaganda emasculated into minstrel slapstick and vaudeville entertainment with the underlying abolitionist controversy erased.[84]

H L Newton's 1903 burlesque version continued the tradition of witty irreverence for authority by comically creating class and racial tension through the Irish brogue of Degree, alluding to Stowe's brutal slave master Legree, his name also because he commits murder in the third degree. Using Irish brogue to comically allude to ethnic tension, this is undercut by threats of violence, with Uncle Tom getting a beating, a dark inference to the brutal

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[82] A M Drummond and Richard Moody, The Hit of the Century: Uncle Tom's Cabin: 1852-1952, *Educational Theatre Journal*, 4. 4 (1952), 315-322, (p. 319) <https://doi.org/10.2307/3204014>.
[83] Jane Ford "The Story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Spread from Novel to Theatre and Screen", *UVA Today*, Nov 12, 2012 <https://news.virginia.edu/content/story-uncle-tom-s-cabin-spread-novel-theater-and-screen>.
[84] Thomas L Riis, 'The Music and Musicians in Nineteenth-Century Productions of "Uncle Tom's Cabin"', *American Music*, 4. 3 (1986), 268–86 (pp. 280-2). < https://doi.org/10.2307/3051610>.

reality of slavery:

> Degree: (*advancing down stage, slap-stick in hand*)
>
> B'gorry! 'tis a foine job I do be havin'. I have nothin' to do at all but lick the stuffin' out of Uncle Tom. (*Calls.*) Uncle Tom! Come out here; I want to beat ye up a bit.
> (*Strikes floor with stick.*)[85]

Absurdly, a large man plays Little Eva in a blonde wig, wearing a ballet costume, the masquerade mocking the tearful sentimentality of Eva's death, but also through the melodramatic excess, hinting at the unspoken tragedy of slavery lurking beneath the comic façade. Added to this, Topsy and Eva engage in irreverent banter that disrupts the race and class roles in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and which cynically draws attention to corporate corruption:

> Topsy:
> Gee! I feel lonesome. I haven't stolen a thing in five minutes. I'm gettin' too good. I'll have to get elected alderman, so I can steal all I want to and not feel lonesome.
> […]
>
> Eva:
> (*grabs Topsy's hand, takes handkerchief from her and slaps her on the wrist*)
> There! take that, you cheap grafter! When you steal, steal something worth stealing.
> Topsy:
> O, Eva, don't scold me! I have only one father and one mother and seven big brothers to protect and provide for me
> Eva:
> (*feelingly*)
> Poor little Topsy! (*Then sarcastically.*) O, you make me sick! Go and steal a couple of railroads and a ship-yard. Organize a trust and be a *real* thief, and don't go around swiping handkerchiefs. On your way! [86]

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[85] Harry L Newton, *A Burlesque on Uncle Tom's* Cabin (Chicago: Will Rossiter, 1903)
<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/onstage/scripts/osplhlnat.html>
[86]Ibid.

Newton's farcical parody of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* had direct social relevance, the comic mask alluding to the violence and instability associated with unregulated commercial expansion, ethnic rivalry and racial tensions fomenting the political unrest that led to Civil War. During the 1830s, on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line, the country was in a state of turmoil, which undermined national stability and the future of the Union. *The Richmond Whig* (Virginia) lamented that "The whole country… seems ready to take fire on the most trivial occasion." To describe the unrest, *Niles' Register* (Baltimore, NJ) editor Hezekiah Niles, a peacemaker and one of the most influential journalists of the times, evoked the shadow of *Hamlet* with his comment "Many of the people of the United States are 'out of joint." [87] David Grimsted asserts that political debates in the North revolved around the problem of slavery, where in a democratic nation Northerners came increasingly to see that it was their problem too.[88] By 1852 with the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, slavery was the central issue in a national debate about liberty, citizenship, and the very meaning of American democracy.

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[87] Quoted in David Grimsted, *American Mobbing 1828-1861: Toward Civil War (United States)* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 3.
See also Bill Kovarik, 'To Avoid the Coming Storm: Hezekiah Niles' *Weekly Register* as a Voice of North-South Moderation, 1811-1836', *American Journalism*, 9. 2 (1992), 20-43.
<https://archive.org/details/americanjournali09amer/page/20/mode/2up>
[88] Grimsted, Part 1 'The North: Fleeing Slavery, Trying Violence' in *American Mobbing,* pp 3-84.

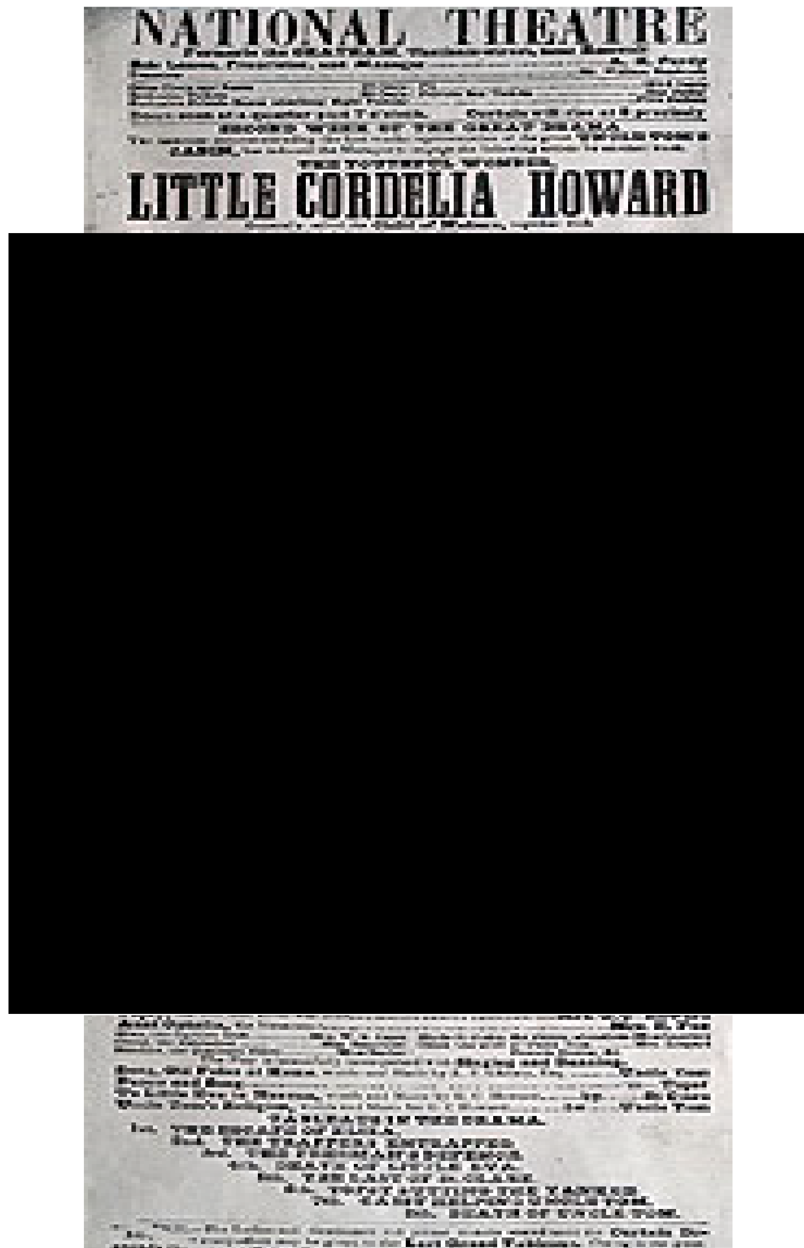

Figure 8: *Poster for performance of Uncle Tom's Cabin*

From contemporary reviews of *Uncle Tom* shows, it is evident that the *Boston Messenger* critic did not appreciate the dramatic overkill of the stage versions, the comic interludes dominating the sentimental melodrama of the main plot, while vulgar and profane language was deemed offensive, detracting from the anti-slavery message of Stowe's novel:

> We observed that where the book is followed most literally, both in plot and language, the deepest effect was produced upon the audience. The slang conversation of the negroes and the Ethiopian "break-downs," seemed to seriously mar the otherwise favorable impression the drama was producing. [89]

However, the New York Correspondence section of the *National Era,* praised the stage version of *Uncle Tom,* particularly the angelic choirs when Tom, Eva and Augustine ascend into the clouds, approving the sentiment as more acceptable to the tastes of family audiences than the final death scene.[90] This review implies that the underlying satire had been lost, and that the sectional divide and controversial racial content had been toned down, or removed.

While Eric Lott acknowledges minstrelsy's parodying of racial tension, he does not credit the pivotal role of masked burlesque in social transformation through its connection with an historic legacy of dissent through the performance of misrule. Lott contends:

> The fact is the Tom plays fully revealed this decade's social and racial contradictions and thus finished off what the minstrel show had *unintentionally* begun.[91] (my italics)

While accepting that the Tom plays twisted back the racial contradictions of the age with a vengeance, I would also argue that there was intention to

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[89]Anonymous, review of 'Boston Museum – "Uncle Tom's Cabin"' in *Frederick Douglass' Pape*r, 3 December 1852
(Reprinted in *Boston Commonwealth* 1852, 'Uncle Tom's Cabin' at the Boston Museum)
<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/onstage/revus/osre03at.html>.

[90] 'New York Correspondence – *Uncle Tom's Cabin* drama.'
The National Era, Washington DC, 3 Nov. 1853. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress
<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026752/1853-11-03/ed-1/seq-3/>.

[91] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 219.

expose racial paradoxes and hypocrisy in the blackface minstrel shows through interaction with the African American oral traditions, songs, dance, and colloquial dialect, which perpetuated by stealth a folk heritage of misrule, echoing the bawdy elements within Shakespeare's plays.

According to literary critic David S. Reynolds, America's burgeoning democratic culture had an impact on literary language, a process which linguistic theorist M M Bakhtin calls a relitivisation of literary-language consciousness [92] where a re-accentuation takes place in an atmosphere of playful deception:

> Satiric humour, in Bakhtin's view, is one example of carnival life in which inequality or distance between people is suspended and a special carnival category goes into effect, whereby the sacred is united with the profane, and the lofty with the lowly, the great with the insignificant.[93]

Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and blackface minstrelsy were cousins in that they deployed racial inversion, satire, incongruous source material and multiple perspectives to depict the racial ambivalence of the antebellum era.

The hybrid style resonates with the burlesque misrule underpinning Shakespeare's plays, as indicated by the satirised mask of the ostensible philosopher Jaques in *As You Like It,* which illuminates the gap between ideology and practice in order to expose hypocritical attitudes regarding the definition of sin and evil. Jaques's libertine conceit is mocked by Duke Senior:

> DUKE SENIOR
> Most mischievous foul sin, in chiding sin;

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[92] M M Bakhtin*, The Dialogic Imagination,* ed. by M Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), p. 408.
[93] D S Reynolds, *Beneath the American Renaissance – The Subversive Imagination in the Age of Emerson and Melville* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 444.

For thou thyself has been a libertine,
As sensual as the brutish sting itself
And all th'embossed sores and headed evils?
(*As You Like It*, II .7. 65-69)[94]

However, in his defence Jaques' ambiguous attitude to vice, both practising it and condemning it, targets the perversion of the system, rather than the individual, while holding a mirror up to his audience to provoke self-recognition of their own failings and complicity in support of a corrupt society:

JAQUES
Why, who cries out on pride
That can therein tax any private party?
Doth it not flow as hugely as the sea,
Till that the wearer's very means do ebb?
What woman in the city do I name
When that I say the city-woman bears
The cost of princes on unworthy shoulders?
Who can come in and say that I mean her,
When such a one as she such is her neighbour?
Or what is he of basest function
That says his bravery is not on my cost,
Thinking that I mean him, but therein suits
His folly to the mettle of my speech?
There then! how then? what then? Let me see wherein
My tongue hath wrong'd him: if it do him right,
Then he hath wrong'd himself; if he be free
Why then my taxing like a wild-goose flies,
Unclaim'd of any man. (*As You Like It* II. 7. 70-97)[95]

Jaques's philosophising is focused on the sin, rather than the sinner, a rhetorical device of abnegation, which is parodied in minstrel stage stump speeches such as "Rev. Snowball's Sermon on Millerism" entitled "The Millennium at the Five Points":

Belubbed Bruddren –

[94] William Shakespeare, 'As You Like It' in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1997).
[95] Ibid.

> […]
> We take de text for dis ebening at de sebenty-leben chapter ob de gospel ob de apostle Judas:—'The proof ob de puddin' is eating it up.' Dis 'lude to de fack dat you must sarch de scriptur to find out 'bout de eend ob de world.
> […]
> Now I go for to prove dat de world is destroyed in 1843, and dat is de odder end ob de world. In de fust place, Eve says to Adam, 'if you eat dis apple you surely die.' Now I 'speck dat apple was a punkin, accordin to scriptur language—bekaze you all knows dat de scripture always mean different from what it sez. [96]

The exaggerated vernacular comically mocks the compromised authority of the Church regarding its pragmatic approach to slavery in nineteenth century America, which absolved itself of the responsibility of condemning slavery by claiming no judiciary power. In *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin,* Stowe's documentary companion to *Uncle Tom*, she claims that the Church elders feared that the unity and influence of the Church would be damaged if slaveholding members were denounced as sinners.[97]

Stowe's response to the ideological Christian pronouncements of the Church on slavery, but which did not address the immediate dehumanising tragedy of the situation, was her novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Her incorporation of minstrelsy and Shakespearian satire and misrule within the multi-vocal style of the novel juxtaposes a range of contradictory and unreliable perspectives from a range of sources to contest racial iniquities, but also to reflect the conflict of supporting a Christian doctrine reluctant to practice

[96]'The Millennium at Five Points', *The New York Herald,* 11 Nov. 1842. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1842-11-11/ed-1/seq-2/>.

[97]Harriet Beecher Stowe, *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: Jewett, Proctor & Worthington, 1853), part IV, chapter 1, pp. 194-205 <https://archive.org/details/DKC0201/page/n204/mode/1up?view=theat>.

what it preaches. Stowe's weaponised satirical style centred around the exaggerated religious integrity of Uncle Tom and the overstated innocence of little Eva, which dramatised an idealised vision to highlight the hypocrisy of the law, Church doctrine, and unrepresentative political compromises, a rebellious cry for class, gender, and racial freedom and equality.

3.4. Religious Controversy over Slavery – The Impact on Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*

Stowe employs an amalgam of cross-genre source material, which includes minstrel style disorder and banter in *Uncle Tom* to illuminate the political, humanitarian, and also the heated religious controversy associated with slavery. Despite denouncing slavery as a sin, there was disagreement in the Church centred on the judgement as to whether slavery should be immediately abolished or condemned as a system and abolished gradually by carrying public opinion through political persuasion. The radical anti-slavery minister Amos Phelps, an advocate of immediate abolition, regarded slavery as a sinful practice in the same sense as adultery, theft, falsehood, idolatry, and drunkenness, claiming that the Bible did not make distinctions between different kinds of sin. The controversy raged as to whether action to abolish slavery was the responsibility of the State, with Professor Stowe and more moderate church elders arguing that, even if slavery was considered to be an oppressive system, the Church did not have the power

to condemn individual practitioners who were merely innocent parties in a bad system.[98]

During the 1840s Stowe became disillusioned with the Church's emphasis on its organisational role as insufficient for dealing with inward spiritual problems, a shortcoming which she addresses in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through focus on the dehumanising effects of slavery. From behind a mask of satire, *Uncle Tom* condemns religious support for slavery when a woman's young child is taken from her to increase her market value. The ingenuous Tom perceives the event as something unutterably cruel, his perception both corroborated and subverted by the double masked irony of the narrator "if only he [Tom] had been instructed by certain ministers of Christianity, he might have thought better of it, and seen it as an everyday incident of lawful trade […] which an American divine tells us has '*no evils but such as are inseparable from any other relations in social and domestic life*.'" (UTC 122) (Stowe's italics draw attention to her outrage at the Church's attitude to slavery of putting commerce above human compassion.) Through depicting the harsh reality of slavery, the narrator's sardonic voice mocks the way in which the Church's concern with its own authority and expansion fails to address the immediate immoral and degrading consequences of the sin of slavery. (UTC 122) [99] However, while rejecting

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[98] Amos A Phelps, *Letters to Professor Stowe and Dr Bacon: On God's Real Method with Great Social Wrongs in which the Bible is Vindicated from Grossly Erroneous Interpretations* (New York: William Harned, 1848) <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.ah54y8&view=2up&seq=7&skin=2021>.
[99] Stowe attributed this quote to Presbyterian minister Dr Joel Parker who threatened to sue her. Stowe withdrew the citation, but instead wrote *The*

what she believed to be the misguided sincerity of the Presbyterian church, Stowe undermined her argument by disagreeing with the immediate abolitionist policy of the Reverend Amos Phelps (1805-1847), who argued for complete and universal emancipation as a Christian duty. He believed that to delay emancipation would not only condone the sin of slavery, but would also exacerbate the rage of the oppressed:

> Immediate emancipation is the duty of the master and the right of the slave, whereas the gradualist approach does not teach the *vital power* of the mischief. This means that instant emancipation is not seen as duty, which therefore asserts that slavery is duty, and therefore not a sin.[100]

Countering this view, Stowe contended that the government and the Church rule by consent, and that to expel the majority who tolerate or support slavery and racial prejudice from one's fellowship is nothing but self-exile. Undoubtedly slavery should be condemned, but not the sinful brethren whose opinions are necessary to remove slavery:

> In undertaking this work, we must love both the slaveholder and the slave…This holy controversy must be one of principle, and not of sectional bitterness […] It is a melancholy consideration that there is almost no absurdity, and no injustice that has not, at some period in the world's history, had the advantage of some good man's virtue.[101]

The quote from chapter ten of the *Key* entitled 'What is to be Done?' urges both North and South to discuss the matter of slavery arguing rhetorically if

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*Key t*which demonstrated clerical support for the gradual abolition of slavery by encouraging its slaveholding members to end the practice. See Part 4 *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

[100] Amos A Phelps, *Lectures on slavery, and its remedy* (Boston: New-England Anti-Slavery Society, 1834), pp.154–159 <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/008637128>.

[101] Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'The Influence of the American Church on Slavery' in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Part lV, Chapter 10 <https://archive.org/details/DKC0201/page/n204/mode/1up?view=theater>.

slavery be "divine and God appointed, why does she [the South] so tremble to have it touched? If it be God all the free inquiry in the world cannot overthrow it. Discussion must and will come."[102] In support of Stowe's conciliatory attitude to ending slavery, Jason Richards in his article 'Imitation Nation', argues that *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is not a polarising text but through interweaving conflicting opinions on slavery, Stowe's ambivalence, much like purposeful minstrel stage contradictions, encourages debate as the means to achieving racial progress.[103]

Such a God-given imperative of seeking a means to achieve abolition induces Stowe to write a polyphonic, satirical anti-slavery novel, and to organise a series of lectures due to her concern over the Church's equivocal role and failure to take the moral lead. Writing to William Garrison she noted that, "I am extremely anxious that all who hate slavery be united if *not,* in form then at least *in fact*, - Unity in difference. Our field lies in the church as yet." [104] In the 1830s Stowe became suspicious of the Calvinist attitude of her father, his fear of controversy acting as an obstacle to anti-slavery action within the Church. However, she also feared the social disorder that would erupt and divide the nation if all supporters of slavery were denied fellowship of the Church, where in effect, one form of intransigence would replace another. In part four of *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe states that

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[102] Ibid, p. 502.
[103] Jason Richards, 'Imitation Nation: Blackface Minstrelsy and the Making of African American Selfhood in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*: *A Forum on Fiction*, 39. 2 (2006), 204–20 (pp. 204-5) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267653.> .
[104] Letter from Harriet Beecher Stowe to William Lloyd Garrison, Feb 18, 1854, quoted in Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe- A Life*, p. 252.

there is no country in the world where religious influence is greater than in America, and where the clergy are more powerful, while also divorced from political pressure. And yet in The General Assembly of 1846 the Church equivocates, condemning slavery as intrinsically unrighteous and oppressive (*A Key*, 231.1) while recommending that the practice be abolished only if it does not disturb the peace and the unity of the Church. Determined to tread a different path to that adopted by the church elders to confront the sin of slavery, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* highlights the sympathetic and dynamic role of women, juxtaposing contentious political and religious viewpoints, including the ironic voice of a capricious narrator, convinced that indirect, non-confrontational means would be more effective in achieving shifts in attitudes in an emergent democratic system which, with proper legislation and leadership, had the potential to be just and fair.

Ambiguous religious and moral attitudes to slavery are juxtaposed in the exchanges between Augustine St Clare and his Christian cousin Ophelia. Augustine's benign attitude towards his slaves, which is used to endorse the case made by Southern apologists for slavery, comes under fire from his Northern cousin Ophelia on the grounds of humanitarian neglect:

> You ought to educate your slaves, and treat them like reasonable creatures, like immortal creatures that you've got to stand before the bar of God with. [105]

However, her altruistic sympathy is undermined by her shocked reaction to the friendship between Tom and Eva, where she berates Augustine for

[105] UTC, p. 164.

letting Eva play with Uncle Tom (UTC 165), her horror revealing her racial bigotry concealed beneath a mask of moral superiority. Augustine mocks the gap between religious theory and practice, which mirrors the contentious evangelical debates on dealing with the sin of slavery:

> You loathe them as you would a snake or a toad, yet you are indignant at their wrongs. You would not have them abused; but you would not have anything to do with them yourself. [106]

In her *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism* (1837) addressed to Angelina Grimke, Stowe's sister, Catherine Beecher addresses Northern hypocrisy over abolition and amalgamation, criticising those who condemn the practices of others, without admitting their own sins. In her letter, Beecher also commends the humility of William Wilberforce who advocated reform from within the system as opposed to judging others:

> His extreme benevolence contributed largely to his success. I have heard him say, that it was one of his constant rules, and on the question of slavery especially, never to provoke an adversary—to allow him credit fully for sincerity and purity of motive…[107]

Wilberforce's doctrine of leading by example in opposing slavery without accusing others, conforms with Stowe's own philosophy, illustrated in *Uncle Tom* through the coverage given to a range of alternative perspectives on slavery. For Stowe, it also meant opposition to the ruling of the Church's General Conference in Cincinnati in1836, which formed an abolition society in principle, but then reneged on the motion that slaves

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[106] Ibid, p. 166.

[107] Catherine E Beecher, *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism*, (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1837), paragraph 18 <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abesceba2t.html>.

could be sold without consent, and that slaves could be educated.[108] In *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* Stowe writes that according to the Natchez Courier, 40,000 slaves were exported from Virginia in 1836, and that Alabama, Missouri and Arkansas received 250, 000 slaves through the domestic slave trade.[109]

Echoing the inchoate ambivalence of the minstrel stage, *Uncle Tom* similarly disrupts racial assumptions concerning sectional, religious and gender support for slavery with the irreligious Augustine St Clare, and not his Northern cousin Ophelia, professing support for racial equality through his sympathetic attitude to Tom and Eva's friendship:

> Your little child is your only true democrat…Tom now is a hero to Eva, his stories are wonders in her eyes, his songs and Methodist hymns are better than an opera, […] and he the most wonderful Tom that ever wore a black skin. [110]

Through his air of nonchalance and feigned lack of moral integrity, Augustine deliberately blurs and inverts the expectations of his race and class regarding slavery, holding contradictory attitudes by accepting that he is as equally complicit in the sinful system as the evangelicals he professes to despise "We're in for it; we've got 'em and mean to keep 'em - it's for our convenience and out interest." (UTC 170) While Ophelia is shocked by Augustine's profane attitude to religion (UTC 170), she is also bemused by her cousin's racial tolerance "one might almost think you were a *professor*, to hear you talk […] a professor of religion." This remark is dismissed by Augustine as devoid of practical purpose: "nothing is easier than talking",

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[108] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Key*, p. 208.
[109] Idid, p. 210.
[110] UTC, p. 166.

snidely referring to the lecturing of politicians and priests, casually invoking Shakespeare to confer a veneer of authority to his case by citing Portia's speech from *The Merchant of Venice:*

> [St. Clare]: "I believe Shakespeare makes somebody say. "I could sooner show twenty that were good to be done, than be one of the twenty to follow my own teaching." [111]

Augustine's disdain for the Church's preaching is illuminated by comparing its sanctioning of the system of slavery with its lack of support for other ungodly practices such as drinking too much wine or excessive gambling. But then, Augustine refuses to condemn slavery outright as either right or wrong "I am one of the sorts that lives by throwing stones at other people's glass houses; but I never mean to put up one for them to stone." (UTC 171) his obfuscation a ploy to defuse what could lead to divisive and potentially violent confrontation.

In another scene, the Church's ambiguous moral stance on slavery is satirised through Marie St Clare's ostentatious display of going to Church each Sunday dressed in her finest outfit and jewelry, praising the sermon because it exactly aligns with her own views:

> He showed how all orders and distinctions came from God […] the some should be high and some low […] and he applied it so well to all this ridiculous fuss about slavery, and he proved distinctly that the Bible was on our side…[112]

As Augustine's wife is the epitome of the spoilt and entitled Southern belle, is oblivious to the suffering of others, and considers herself to be the victim of slavery, complaining to her husband "I wish you *would* have some kind of

[111] UTC, p.166 (an appropriation of Portia's words from *The Merchant of Venice,* Act 1.2.15).
[112] UTC, p. 170

sympathy for my trials." (UTC 165), her support for the Church is an ironic reflection of the pragmatic nature of religious teaching. Taking an opposing stance Augustine's rhetorical outburst is critical of religion's manipulation of the Bible to justify what is socially and commercially expedient:

> Religion! Is what you hear at church religion? Is that which can bend and turn, and descend and ascend, to fit every crooked phase of selfish, worldly society, religion? Is that religion which is less scrupulous, less generous, less just, less considerate for man than even my own ungodly, worldly, blinded nature? [113]

The tension between Augustine's acceptance of the system of slavery as a custom and a convenience (UTC 170), combined with his outburst against the Church's scriptural justification of the institution, characterizes the contradictions in the Church's attitude to slavery of denouncing the practice, while condoning the perpetrators. In its General Assembly in 1840, despite the repeated petitions of abolitionists, it was declared inexpedient to take any further action because it would cause alienation and division, and so the matter was postponed indefinitely. However, the following resolution was passed: that the fashionable amusement of promiscuous dancing was unscriptural and improper for Christians to partake in as so wholly inconsistent with the spirit of Christ. [114]

The religious conflict over slavery satirised in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* through juxtaposed perspectives and sympathy for inconsistent attitudes betrays Stowe's search for a means to oppose slavery without condemning

[113]Ibid, p. 171.
[114] Stowe, *The Key*, p. 212.

individuals, and without conceding the economic necessity of slavery.[115] Increased Southern resistance to abolition from the mid 1830s and 1840s onwards caused major splits within the Church hierarchy. One of the leading anti-slavery radicals, Rev Amos Phelps, who advocated immediate abolition, declared slaveholding, in all senses, to be a sin, stating that "It is falsehood in theory; tyranny in practice; a violation of God's law and apparent of abominations." [116] Stowe responded to Phelps's statement in Part Four of *A Key* with a more moderate approach of revised anti-slavery theology, which involved patient persuasion dependent on the redeeming power of women. She believed that it would be injudicious to "reject the good there is in any, because of the remaining defect." [117] However, Stowe became more militant following the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which forced free States to treat fugitive slaves as property to be returned to their Southern masters. Thus, she became more sympathetic to Phelps' anti-slavery arguments for immediate abolition. Stowe's short story *The Two Altars* is a parable critical of the tacit pro-slavery complicity of the Fugitive Slave Act, which was expediently endorsed by Whig abolitionists, thus enabling freed slaves to become "sacrificed on the altar of Union!" [118] In *The Two Altars* (1847) Stowe's compares the heroic sacrifice of sons who fought in the War of Independence with the unwillingness of those who will not fight for racial justice, calling it a betrayal of the sacrifices of the Mothers of the Nation on

[115] W B Allen, *Rethinking Uncle Tom – The Political Philosophy of Harriet Beecher* Stowe (Lanham MD: Lexington Books, 2009) p. 203.
[116] Phelps, *Lectures on Anti-Slavery and its Remedy* p. 58.
[117] Harriet Beecher Stowe, quoted in Allen, *Rethinking Uncle Tom,* p. 208.
[118] Stowe, quoted in ibid, p. 210.

the altar of Liberty.[119] Her disdain for such expediency is developed more fully in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* where political and religious ideologies on slavery are addressed in a less confrontational manner, and where emphasis is placed on the persuasive voices of women and the agency of the socially marginalised. Stowe's domestic style of ministry through her writing is compared to her husband's more direct intellectual approach to religious controversy as:

> My old rabbi and I here set up our tent, he with German, and Greek, and Hebrew, devouring all sorts of leather books, and I spinning ideal webs out of bits that he lets fall here and there.[120]

Based on his research from Stowe papers in the Woman's Archive at Radcliffe College, Edward Wagenknecht contends that Stowe put her family first, then her art, with her work as a reformer coming a bad third. This diffused approach to social rebuilding is hinted at by historian James F Rhodes who notes Stowe's vivid characterisation of the proslavery senator Stephen A Douglass, where he describes her as much an artist with her pen as an abolitionist. [121] The observation provides an insight into Stowe's approach to fighting the evil of slavery where she uses her art to focus on the role of the family in the service of the cause.

While acknowledging *Uncle Tom's Cabin* as a subtle didactic, domestic-

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[119] Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'The Two Altars; or Two Pictures in One' originally published in two parts in *The New York Evangelist*, June 12 & 19, 1851. Reprinted in *Autographs for Freedom* ed, by Julia Griffiths (Boston, J P Jewett 1853), p. 592 <https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Stowe_Two_Altars.pdf,>.

[120] Edward Wagenknecht, *Harriet Beecher Stowe – The Known and the Unknown,* New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 51.

[121] Quoted in *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* ed. by Annie Fields (Boston & New York: The Riverside Press, 1897), p. 213 <https://archive.org/details/cu31924079589283/page/n227/mode/2up>.

centric alternative to the teachings of her husband Calvin's theories related to differentiating between institutional and individual evil, W B Allen does not credit the underlying satire in *Uncle Tom* as the driving force of the novel. He contends that entrenched assumptions confined Stowe's novel to the realm of sentimental women's writing leading to an incomplete understanding of her work, which he attributes to Stowe's immersion in a religious ideology aimed at defeating atheistic liberty. [122] By contrast, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* is described by Stephen Koch as: "by far the most influential piece of writing against slavery of the entire century."[123] Despite this endorsement of *Uncle Tom's* political role, Koch still defines Stowe as a romantic moralist, suggesting that he is not tuned to the layers of irony and satirical skill in blending social comment with wit and humour as a force, not just for condemnation of an evil system, but for social transformation and reform.[124]

Stowe's hybrid literary style broadened by allusions to the ambiguous conceits in Shakespeare and the inversion and double masked satire of the minstrel stage burlesques, aimed not just to call to account the Church and State in their attitude to slavery, but to an inspire an individual moral response led by the actions of those sidelined by the cultural mainstream. Aware that direct criticism of the inherent gap between the Church's

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[122] Allen, *Rethinking Uncle Tom*, p. 210.
[123] Stephen Koch, Introduction to *American Satire: An Anthology of Writings from Colonial Times to the Present* ed. by Nicholas Bakalar (New York: Penguin - Meridian Books, 1997), pp. xiii-xiv.
[124] Jennifer Reisch, '"He Hath Wrong'd Himself ": Satire as the Driving Force in Stowe's '"Uncle Tom's Cabin'', The Journal of Undergraduate Research, 3. 11(2004), 65-80 (p. 66)
<http://openprairie.sdstate.edu/jur/vol2/iss1/11>.

theoretical abhorrence of slavery and practical application of that belief would lead to a defensive reaction that would be counterproductive to racial reform, Stowe cloaks her critical purpose in layers of ironic satire. This is illustrated by Henrique's learned attitude to religious teaching, which is challenged by his cousin little Eva:

> [Eva] "Don't the Bible say we must love everybody?"
> [Henrique] "Oh the Bible! To be sure it says a great many things, but, then nobody ever thinks of doing them – you know, Eva, nobody does."[125]

The irony in Henrique's response to Eva's innocent interpretation of the Bible subtly targets the Church's attitude in condoning the system of slavery, with Henrique's cruelty to his servant Dodo extending to individual, self-serving collusion in the injustice (UTC 251).

Stowe's commitment to the moral righteousness of the Church is focused on the exaggerated, cross-racial sentimentality of the relationship between Uncle Tom and little Eva:

> There Tom sat on a little mossy seat in the court, every one of his buttonholes struck full of jessamines, and Eva […] was hanging a wreath of roses around his neck, and then she sat down on his knee, like a chip sparrow, still laughing.[126]

The sight provokes opposing reactions, indulgence from Augustine, and horror from Ophelia. The divergent views indicate that Stowe is aware that there is no simplistic moral solution to achieving racial harmony and goodness, a position that distances her from Amos Phelps's radical policy of immediate abolition. Rather, Stowe advocated racial reform through persuasion and patience as indicated in her short story *Uncle Sam's*

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[125] UTC p. 251.
[126] UTC p 165.

Emancipation (1853). Sam's master acknowledges that despite their benign relationship, Sam takes the opportunity to escape when they visit a free State, a decision that his owner is persuaded to accept. As a result of Sam's decision, the narrator concludes that:

> If the system alone is attacked, such minds will be the first to perceive its evils, and to turn against it; but if the system be attacked through individuals, self-love, wounded pride, and a thousand natural feelings, will be at once enlisted for its preservation.[127]

However, despite Stowe's commitment to racial freedom, she was conflicted by her fears of a post-emancipation, secularised nation because of the Church's hesitancy to support abolition, as indicated in an exchange of letters with the editor of *The Liberator* William Lloyd Garrison. Stowe writes that she is concerned that radical material about ending slavery should not fall into the hands of the lowly, considering it to be too dangerous for the masses. Garrison is critical of Stowe's apparent discrimination, describing her attitude as betraying a lack of faith in religion to survive free discussion.[128] Her fear, however was always that people would turn away from the Church as the bedrock of the nation's salvation, replying to Lloyd Garrison "What I fear is that *The Liberator* will take from poor Uncle Tom his Bible and give him nothing in its place." [129]

Stowe's concerns for religion were not unfounded, based on the abstract theological approach to slavery taken by the Church, which

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[127] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Sam's Emancipation: Earthly Care a Heavenly Discipline and Other Tales and Sketches* (London: T. Nelson, 1853) <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=osu.32435073947020&seq=2>.
[128] Letter from Stowe to Garrison, November 1853, held in Boston Public Library, quoted in Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe – A Life*, p. 251.
[129] Ibid, p. 212 (*The Liberator* was an anti-slavery newspaper edited by William Lloyd Garrison).

culminated in a heated dispute between her husband and Rev Amos Phelps. While the Church was prepared to denounce slave trading, it recommended a more conciliatory approach to slaveholding members who can be urged to reform by the clergy.[130] Such ambivalence regarding attitudes to slavery is satirised by the ironic voice of the narrator in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which cynically justifies home-grown slavery on the basis that some forms of bondage can be tolerated as less sinful than others:

> In concluding these little incidents of lawful trade, we must beg the world not to think that American legislators are entirely destitute of humanity, as might, perhaps be unfairly inferred from the great efforts made…to protect and perpetuate this species of traffic.
> Who does not know how our great men are outdoing themselves, in declaiming against the *foreign* slave trade… Trading negroes from Africa, dear reader, is so horrid! It is not to be thought of! But trading them from Kentucky - that's quite another thing! [131]

In an open letter to Scotland following her return from Europe, Stowe lamented that the abolition cause was not being directed by the Church "I regret to say that the movements of Christian denominations on this subject are yet greatly behind what they should be."[132] Instead the Church was being urged to do its duty by the action of others spanning the religious and political divides to include women, fugitive slaves and even Southern plantation owners, as depicted in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

In a later novel, *Dred: A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (1858), Stowe

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[130] Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'The Influence of the American Church on Slavery' in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Boston: Jewett, Proctor & Worthington, 1853), Part lV, pp. 198-99
<https://archive.org/details/DKC0201>.
[131] UTC, p. 124.
[132] *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe* ed. by Annie Fields (Boston & New York: The Riverside Press, 1898), p. 209
<https://archive.org/details/lifelettersofhar00stow>.

takes a more direct and militant approach to the evils of slavery, which she depicts as part of a capitalist system that valued property over people. [133] In *Dred* the veil of ironic satire is lifted, replaced by open rebellion against racial oppression, a response to the violent conflict in Kansas between pro and anti-slavery forces that was at its height between 1854 and 1858 when Stowe was writing her novel.[134] During this period she was in constant correspondence with the anti-slavery Senator Charles Sumner (1811-1874) and also via a sent broadcast appeal, where in keeping with the more openly radical stance depicted in *Dred,* she exhorted women to take action:

> Women of the free States! the question is not Shall we remonstrate with slavery on its own soil, but Are we willing to receive slavery into the free States and Territories of the Union? […] O women of the free States! What did your brave mothers do in the days of the Revolution?[135]

Stowe urged women to use their influence, to spread information by organising lectures, and to circulate government speeches, but also to make the topic a matter of prayer. Her appeal to the hearts of women to oppose racial injustice is also the concern of her short story *The Two Altars*. [136]

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[133] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Dred - A Tale of the Great Dismal Swamp* (Boston & New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1856) <https://archive.org/details/dredtaleofgreatd01stowrich>.

[134] See Thomas Goodrich, *War to The Knife: Bleeding Kansas, 1854-1861,* (New York & London: Stackpole Books, 1998).

[135] Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'An Appeal to the Women of the Free States of America on the Present Crisis in Our Country' in *Provincial Freeman*, Toronto, 25 March 1854 <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/saxon/servlet/SaxonServlet?source=utc/xml/responses/africam/afar64b.xml&style=utc/xsl/utc.xsl&clear-stylesheet-cache=yes>.

[136] Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'The Two Altars; or Two Pictures in One', *The New York Evangelist*, June 12 and 19 1851.
Reprinted in *Autographs for Freedom* ed. by Julia Griffiths (Boston, J P Jewett 1853)

Stowe was anxious to make the portrayal of slavery as realistic as possible in response to censure of *Uncle Tom* as abolitionist propaganda, and an exaggeration of the truth, criticism which Stowe vigorously repudiates in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin.* The evidence she collected for the *Key* was then used in her novel *Dred* to convey a more graphic depiction of slavery. [137] However, because the resistance culture of *Dred* became mired in confusing cross-plots of romance and insurrection, the abolitionist argument became swamped, and thus, despite the novel's radical possibilities, it was described by Stowe's biographer Joan Hedrick as "neither incendiary tract nor a good novel." [138] While a more open attack on the pro and anti-slavery struggle than *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and particularly the male culture of Calvanist theologians (all the villains in *Dred* are churchmen), its invective had less impact on the religious and political debate on slavery compared to the blend of ironic pathos and parody, which masked the didactic religious intent of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. [139]

In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* the most culpable protagonists are male rather than ministers of the Church, with contradictory perspectives allowing sympathy for pragmatic characters such as Augustine St Clare, Mr Shelby and Senator Bird. This is particularly focused on the character of Augustine St Clare characterised as the Southern beau ideal, a benign slave holder, a kind and generous father, and with a sceptical attitude to religion's complicity with the South's support for the institution of slavery (UTC 170-

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<https://loa-shared.s3.amazonaws.com/static/pdf/Stowe_Two_Altars.pdf>.
[137] *Life and Letters of Harriet Beecher Stowe*, p. 213.
[138] Hedrick, p. 259.
[139] Stowe, Harriet Beecher, *Dred*.

171). As well as religious persuasion, Stowe also regarded knowledge and education as one of the keys to social change, which is depicted in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by the gradual conversion of Topsy from unruly imp to Christian missionary under the tutelage of Miss Ophelia. [140]

Stowe's support for gradual emancipation, which although aimed at creating a fair and equal Christian society, delayed the process of full legislative participation for freed slaves, which played into the hands of the defeated Confederacy, who were desperate to retain political and economic control in the South. This imperative resulted in a series of discriminatory laws known as the Black Codes, implemented during the early post-bellum period by Presidents Lincoln and Johnson to resolve the labour problem in the South. The Codes restricted movement and denied political and legal rights to the previously enslaved population, and in some States introduced segregation in public facilities. Poor "blacks" and poor "whites" were both economically dependent on the plantation owners, who took advantage of this situation by aggravating class and racial tension as a means of protecting their own partisan interests.[141] According to Theodore Hovet "Mrs Stowe does more than provide insights into the formation of a radical

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[140] Stowe, *The Key*, Part 4, chapter 10, p. 497.
[141] William J Wilson, 'Class Conflict and Jim Crow Segregation in the Postbellum South', The *jPacific Sociological Review*,19. 4 (1976), 431–446 (pp. 435-436).
<www.jstor.org/stable/1388831.>.

philosophy; she also describes the process by which the revolutionary spirit decays and dies. [142]

Thus, in the era following the Civil War, Stowe takes a more pragmatic stance, praising the institutions she had previously condemned, satirically in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, and through the depiction of violent rebellion in *Dred,* in the belief that the Civil War had solved the most serious evil of ending slavery, and this, despite acknowledging in a speech in 1882 that freed slaves in America still suffered from social injustice. Rather than being outraged, she concluded "Let us never doubt. Everything that ought to happen is going to happen."[143] Stowe's new dawn of religious optimism was rooted in liberal evangelical theology that would establish a truly Christian society superseding the tyrannical social order of the old world of the South that endorsed slavery. However, because slavery was the symbol of an unjust society, radical Christians were forced to compromise their full emancipation ideals to ensure the success of the revolutionary aims of the Union. [144] In a later novel *Oldtown Folks* (1869) Stowe retreats to the "seed-bed of New England" depicting a community of her youth, extolling the virtues of Northern efficiency, deemed in large part to have won the war and responsible for new heights of industrial productivity. [145] Joan Hedrick's

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[142] Theodore R Hovet, 'Christian Revolution: Harriet Beecher Stowe's Response to Slavery and the Civil War', *The New England Quarterly*, 47. 4 (1974), 535–49 (p.536) < https://doi.org/10.2307/364449>.
[143] R F Wilson, *Crusader in Crinoline: The Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe* (New York: J B Lippincott, 1941), p.618.
[144] Hovet, Christian Revolution' pp. 548-9.
[145] Harriet Beecher Stowe, (1869) *Oldtown Folks* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1869)

biography of Stowe states that she was never as bitter and dark about the industrial future as Mark Twain would be (particularly in his *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889)), with *Oldtown Folks* turning a blind eye to the corruption, greed and reneged promises of the Reconstruction era.[146]

Stowe's providential resignation, revealed in her desire to see the alliances between government and Church institutions, was connected to optimism for social reform and the spread of a Christian nation. However, dependence on changes in the political order that fell foul of the gap between State and Federal legislation, such as the Plessy-Fergusson 'divided but equal' case of 1896 that legalised segregation, still has repercussions for racial equality and social justice that remain unresolved to the present day.

3.5. Critical Responses to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Related to Issues of Race

> What runs counter to the revolutionary convention is, in revolutionary histories, suppressed more imperiously than embarrassing episodes in private memoirs, and by the same obscure forces…
>
> Andre Malraux

> Northern women know nothing at all about slavery […] they have no conception of the depth of degradation involved in that word,

<https://digital.library.upenn.edu/women/stowe/folks/folks.html#I>.

[146] Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe – A Life*, pp, 343-4.

> SLAVERY; if they had, they would never cease their efforts until so horrible a system was overthrown.
>
> A woman of North Carolina[147]

3.5.1. Nineteenth Century Criticism

Many critics did not grasp the ironic satire embedded in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and so criticised the novel on a literal level, which revealed their own concerns, and prejudices. Criticism of the novel traversed the racial divide uniting the misogyny of Southern critic George Holmes with the gender and racial antagonism of Martin Delany, while Frederick Douglass was more supportive. This mixed reception of Stowe's novel continued into the twentieth century dividing opinion in some cases against the racial grain, with Ralph Ellison, Henry Louis Gates and Gerald Early focused on the cross-racial significance of Stowe's novel that spanned social divides.

When first published in 1852, a range of distinguished writers commented favourably on *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, including members of the African American community of Northern free blacks and former slaves, who having direct experience of slavery, formed an influential critical lobby.[148] Frederick Douglass was a major promoter of Stowe's work in the 1850s in his own newspaper where he welcomed an on-going and

[147] Quoted in Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* ed. by Lydia Maria Child (Boston: Harriet Jacobs,1861), introduction <https://archive.org/details/incidentsinlifeo1861jaco/page/6/mode/2up>.
[148] Brian Yothers, *Reading Abolition – The Critical Reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2016), p. 11.

constructive discussion of views from across the racial divide. This ranged from praise for *Uncle Tom* which first appeared as an inhouse review in *Frederick Douglass's Paper* on 8 April 1852, which stated that the friends of freedom owed a debt of gratitude to the authoress for this essential service which he asseted would "raise up a host of enemies against the fearful system of slavery."[149] This was countered by the dismissive criticism by black nationalist Martin Delany who worried that African American praise, particularly from Douglass, had given to Mrs Stowe what should be the prerogative of the intelligent and experienced among ourselves, and which prompted him to write "she *knows nothing about us*."[150] To create a balance of opinions Douglass printed Delany's criticism of *Uncle Tom* in his *Paper,* also because he agreed that "whites" should only have a limited role in the elevation of African Americans, a racial perspective he adopts in his own anti-slavery novella *The Heroic Slave*.[151]

Despite the world-wide acclaim for her anti-slavery novel, Stowe was aware of the criticism levelled at *Uncle Tom's Cabin* for appearing to mitigate the horrors of slavery through the comic, polyphonic style of the novel, a stance she justified on artistic grounds in chapter one of *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin:*

> The writer acknowledges that the book is a very inadequate representation of slavery; and it is so necessarily, for this reason – that slavery in some of its workings, is too dreadful for the purposes of art.

[149] Quoted in Robert S Levine, '"Uncle Tom's Cabin" in "Frederick Douglass' Paper": An Analysis of Reception', *American Literature*, 64. 1 (1992), 71–93 (p. 73).
<www.jstor.org/stable/2927489>.
[150] Quoted in ibid, p. 80.
[151] Quoted in ibid, p. 80.

> A work which should represent it strictly as it is would be a work which could not be read; and all works which ever mean to give pleasure must draw a veil somewhere, or they cannot succeed.[152]

While Delany objected to her novel on the grounds of her ignorance of slavery and the African American experience, she was able to defend the depiction of all her characters in Part 1 of the *Key* based on documented sources, which included the intelligence of fugitive slave George Harris, criticised as overdrawn and distorted. For instance, *The Chattanooga Gazette* (Tennessee) Oct 5 1852 contained an advertisement offering a $500 reward for a runaway on the 25 May which read: "A VERY BRIGHT MULATTO BOY about 21 or 22 years old"; also the *South Carolinian* (Columbia) Dec 4 1852 runs an item: "George 22 years of age, one of the best barbers in the State, and James 19 an excellent painter, boys raised in Columbia, are described as valuable negroes available to buy in the upcoming auction." Many people did not believe that such advertisements appeared in the Southern States until Stowe showed evidence in the *Key,* which were gleaned from articles in North Carolina and Georgia newspapers.

In part one of chapter four of *A Key*, Stowe aligns the plight of other mulatto slaves to the degrading experience of Frederick Douglass described in *The Life of Frederick Douglass,* where he relates an account of learning to read and write.[153] In addition, George's narrative in *Uncle Tom* concerning the sale of his mother and her children is echoed by an account of Josiah Henson, when after the death of his master all the slaves of the plantation were put up at auction splitting up families who were agonisingly sold in

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[152] Stowe, *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, part 1, chapter 1, p. 5.
[153] Ibid, Part 1, chapter 4 'George Harris', pp. 13-21.

turn to the highest bidder. Josiah describes how his mother, like George's, begged for her child at the feet of her new master, but was kicked away with a heavy boot in the same way as George's mother was (UTC 105).[154] And on and on the evidence is gathered in *A Key* documenting an endless catalogue of inhumanity focused on racist abuse, which through the double masked ironic satire in *Uncle Tom* has universal relevance that can be applied to all forms of class, gender, ethnic and racial oppression. Thus, Stowe records in *A Key* that the entitled selfishness of the slave-owning Southern belle Marie St Clare represents a type of a class of woman familiar to any society, at any level. The type that denies privileges to others which she demands as a right for herself, and who rules with despotic power, oblivious to the needs of others.[155] This is reflected in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in the caricatured racist arrogance of Marie St Clare which mocks white Southern attitudes to claims of contented plantation life.

The exchange of several letters between newspaper correspondents supports the contention that Stowe's aim was not to inflame the sectional divide or to directly attack individuals over slavery, the mask of ironic satire an alternative to direct confrontation designed to circumvent defensive hostility from apologists for slavery. A correspondent from Washington DC, writing to the *Southern Free Press* Dec 6 1852 asks whether Stowe's depiction of slavery in the South is accurate or just a caricature, to which a North Carolina resident replies that he cannot deny that families of slaves are often separated "The victims may writhe in agony, and the tender-

[154]Ibid, p. 19.
[155] Ibid chapter 8, p. 33.

hearted spectator may look on with gloomy sorrow and indignation, but it is to no purpose."[156] Adding to the defence of the accuracy of Stowe's multi-vocal literary representation of slavery, the editor of a Southern paper in Charleston, 25 July 1852 admits that the book is a truthful picture of life including the dark outlines, which only a person living in the South could fully know. Consequently, he credits Stowe's book, considering that it must have been written by someone with a thorough acquaintance with the character of the slave dealer, the bankrupt owner in Kentucky, and the New Orleans merchant, which he affirms, are everyday occurrences in these parts.[157] The Charleston paper's editor concludes by berating Mrs Eastman's riposte to *Uncle Tom*, "Aunt Phillis' Cabin" printed in *the Southern Press*, calling the paper's editor an ass, and pitying Eastman's attempt and challenging her claim to be an author.

Echoing the contradictory blurring methods of the minstrel stage burlesques, *S*towe reverses racial expectations in *Uncle Tom* with Southerners such as Augustine and Mrs Selby inspiring humanity and admiration, with the most brutal characters Haley and Legree both coming from the North. However, despite Stowe's valiant literary effort to attack the institution across race, class, gender, religious and sectional divides, this did not prevent a vicious defensive reaction from the South, its efforts to present slavery as a benign institution, in denial of testimony to the contrary, precipitating a spate of anti-Tom literature. Southern critics were blind to the ironic satire of Stowe's anti-slavery novel, indicated by the unbalanced

[156] Ibid, p. 64.
[157] Ibid, p. 66.

misogynistic attack on *Uncle Tom*, a hostile reaction to what they claimed could be justified in the Bible. Accordingly, *Uncle Tom* was banned in the South in the pre-Civil War era as pro-abolitionist, and for arousing 'needless debates' on slavery. In a letter to Stowe, William Lloyd Garrison acknowledges this pro-slavery anxiety created by the publication of *Uncle Tom* "I estimate the value of anti-slavery writing by the abuse it brings. Now all the defenders of slavery have let me alone and are abusing you."[158]

While Stowe writes that she wrote *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in simplicity and in the love of Christ, stating that "I had a true heart of love for the Southern people [...] and a sincere admiration for their many traits", anticipating that her novel would appear in that way to all impartial readers. However, because the novel awakened conscience in the Southern slave holding States, it led to fears of emancipation, where all the force of the lynch law was employed to stifle discussion and soothe the conscience on the question.[159] Southern scholar and author George F. Holmes (1820-1897) was particularly personal and vitriolic in his criticism of Stowe, the misogyny betraying his impotence against the effectiveness of Stowe's ironic style:

> We know that among other novel doctrines in [...] the pleasant land of New England [...] is one which would place woman on a political state of equality with man, and [...] would engage her in the administration of public affairs; thus handing over the State to the perilous protection of diaper diplomatists and wet-nurse politicians. Mrs Stowe [...] belongs to the school of Women's Rights, and on this ground she may

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[158] Quoted in Charles E Stowe *Life of Harriet Beecher Stowe,* (Detroit: Gale Research, 1967), p. 161.
<https://archive.org/details/lifeofharrietbee0000stow/page/n195/mode/2up>
[159] Ibid, pp. 171-2.

> assert her prerogative to teach us how wicked we are ourselves and the Constitution under which we live.[160]

To deflect attention away from the perceptive satire of Stowe's novel, Holmes's literal criticism also tore into Stowe's lack of understanding of the history of the South accusing her of being ignorant of the laws of Kentucky. Holmes also mocks her depiction of George's disguise, darkening his skin to enact the confident manner of a European traveller in order to pass as a Spanish man:

> …the pistols and the bowie-knife, the easy *nonchalance* of the principal performer, *et cetera*, they would not go down as part and parcel of the burnt cork melodrama of the Bowery.[161]

However, Stowe's intention is a double masked disguise, which echoes the racial inversion of the minstrel stage, blurring the colour line in a parody of racial subjugation to undermine white hegemony. George Harris' escape plan is a conscious interaction with blackface disorder which involves a black servant named Jim (alluding to Jim Crow), cross racial disguise including white minstrel gloves to hide the branding on his hand, with Harris adopting the insouciant air of an urban Zip Coon. (UTC 102-103). Thus Holmes, while trying to be disparaging by associating Stowe with the rowdy irreverence of blackface minstrels, was actually percipient, as the masked satire and social disorder was fundamental to the inverted racial impwrative of the novel's progressive anti-slavery intent.

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160 George F Holmes, 'Review of "Uncle Tom's Cabin"' in *Critical Essays on Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. by Elizabeth Ammons (Boston, Mass: G K Hall, 1980) p. 8.
161 Ibid, p. 12.

Other critics, including George F. Whicher (1889-1954) in *The Literary History of the United States*, was also at a loss as to explain how *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, so lacking in apparent literary talent was able to "convulse a mighty nation." Mystified, Whicher concurred with Stowe's own explanation for the novel's far-reaching impact, which was that "God wrote it".[162] In other words, neither he nor Stowe seemed consciously aware of the pervasive influence of the blackface minstrel tradition of irreverence and its subliminal contribution to antebellum American cultural consciousness. Even though Stowe had minimal contact with plantation life, which combined with the improbability of her witnessing a live minstrel show, this did not preclude her from absorbing and borrowing burnt cork conventions linked to a folk culture of masked dissent which conferred insight and relevance to social injustice on a wider scale than the depiction of racial oppression in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*[163]

Henry James's surreal comments however, indicate that there was some awareness of the innovative achievement and radical scope of Stowe's novel:

> Appreciation and judgment, the whole impression, were thus an effect for which there had been no process…nothing in the guise of a written book…had ever reached its mark, the mark of inciting interest, without having at least groped for that goal *as* a book or by the exposure of some literary side…Uncle Tom instead of making one of the cheap short cuts through the medium in which books breathe, even as fishes in water, went gaily roundabout it altogether, as if a fish, a wonderful

[162] Quoted in Jane Tompkins, 'Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History', in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp. 122-146.
[163] W T Lhamon Jr, *Raising Cain* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1998), p. 96.

"leaping" fish, had simply flown through the air.[164]

Despite James's enigmatic response and acclaim from African American poet Paul Dunbar (1872-1906), who also applauded Stowe's work on moral and aesthetic ground, attitudes to Stowe shifted in the later nineteenth century when *Uncle Tom's Cabin* suffered from racist appropriation, with characters such as Topsy suffering the same fate as Jim Crow in being re-defined as a crude racist caricature manipulated to validate segregation. The racial inversion in *Uncle Tom* aligns with the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* when Jim's fugitive voice of freedom is vanquished as the narrative becomes dominated by Tom Sawyer's burlesque reconstruction of Southern chivalry, again reflecting the reaffirmation of post-Civil War white cultural domination.

Ironically, misogyny was used as a weapon to promote the view that Stowe created racial stereotypes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* blind to Stowe's satirical attack on both misogyny and racism in her novel, which were linked as alternative forms pf patriarchal oppression.[165] *Uncle Tom* became a victim of its popularity, with the sentimentality and the voices of women devalued due to theatrical re-workings and the vast array of cheap of memorabilia that appeared to exploit the novel's widespread appeal. Consequently, the racial prejudice Stowe sought to challenge became, like

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[164] Henry James, *A Small Boy and Others* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1913), pp. 159-160.
[165] Brian Yothers, *Reading Abolition – The Critical Reception of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Frederick Douglass* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2016) p. 15.

Jim Crow, converted into racist propaganda by the dominant social hierarchy, which shaped culture to its own advantage.

Travelling *Uncle Tom* shows were also very popular across the nation in the post bellum era, playing twice a year in Lexington, Kentucky to packed houses of mixed-race theatregoers. However, the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) objected to the shows considering them detrimental to the community because it would give African Americans "false conceptions of their fathers and grandfathers when they were slaves." The UDC action prompted a battle over historical memory that led to a spate of publications, pamphlets, memorial statues to fallen heroes, and claims to ownership of public spaces in a show of white power designed to take control of the historical narrative and re-assert racial hierarchy. This era of the UDC protest coincided with a period of national post-Civil War fatigue, where productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were modified and twisted into vaudeville entertainment, with grossly exaggerated racist caricatures played for laughs at the expense of the ironic masking and abolitionist sympathies of Stowe's novel.[166] Thus, rather than challenging a cultural narrative of racial oppression, the 'Tom shows' were re-imagined to smooth over racial controversy.

[166] See Anne E Marshall, 'The 1906 *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Law and the Politics of Race and Memory in Early-Twentieth-Century Kentucky', *Journal of the Civil War Era*, 1. 3 (2011), 368–93 (p, 369 and p. 374) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41641440>.

The familiarity and social relevance of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* made it an obvious choice for minstrel burlesque which included Christy and Woods Minstrels one act version in 1853 entitled "Life Among the Happy", an ironic reference to Stowe's original subtitle 'Life Among the Lowly.' The intercultural disorder performed on the blackface stage is echoed in *Uncle Tom* through the template of the unstable endman and interlocutor roles. Mrs Shelby plays a sympathetic interlocutor to the comic playacting of Sam and Andy as end men Tambo and Bones, while Miss Ophelia plays the pompous interlocutor role, upstaged by Topsy's comically subversive exposure of the degrading consequences of slavery. Later postbellum Tom shows were a mixture of pro-slavery and anti-slavery versions, driven by the entertainment potential rather than the intended depiction of contradictions underpinning the ironic satire of Stowe's novel.[167]

While reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* fluctuated in America connected to conflicting economic and religious attitudes to abolition, Stowe also came under attack on her European tour for exposing America to foreign criticism. The resentful tone of the *New York Herald*, (23 July 1853) paradoxically compared her to the ultra-atheist Voltaire in basing her social reforms on glorifying of Man above God.[168] European reception was generally united in its positive attitude towards *Uncle Tom*, including Charles Dickens who

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[167] Sarah Meer, 'Minstrelsy and Uncle Tom' in *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama*, ed. by J H Richards & H S Nathans (Oxford: Oxford University Press Handbooks, 2014), pp. 81-97.
[168] Mrs Uncle Tom Beecher Stowe', *The New York Herald,* 23 July 1853. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1853-07-23/ed-1/seq-2/>.

"admired […] both the generous feeling which inspired [*Uncle Tom's Cabin*] and the admirable power with which it [was] executed."[169] Also Leo Tolstoy described *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in 'What is Art?' as an "example […] of the highest art, flowing from the love of God and man." The moving qualities of her work were also revered by the French novelist George Sand. Putting paid to any notion that Stowe was merely a religious writer, Sand argues that she was a writer of genius, rather than of talent, where genius is something that transcends mere conformity to literary expectations, with an ability to move readers and to 'paint' scenes that linger in the consciousness and the imagination:

> We feel that genius is heart, that power is faith, that talent is sincerity, and, finally, success is sympathy, since the book overcomes us…with a strange sentiment of mingled tenderness and admiration for a poor negro…[170]

Thus, for some of her contemporary critics Stowe was a literary pioneer and an artist, the wide-ranging significance of *Uncle Tom* beyond its immediate concern for the abolition of slavery measured by the book's translation into many languages, including Welsh, and the intensity of resistance it provoked from the pro-slavery apologists. In addition, from across the racial divide, the African American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872-1906), in his sonnet "Harriet Beecher Stowe", adopts a classical literary form to pay tribute to Stowe's work of art as integral to the overall antislavery struggle:

> She told the story, and the whole world wept

[169] Charles Dickens, *Selected Letters* 244, quoted in Yothers, *Reading Abolition*, p. 11.
[170] George Sands, quoted in Yothers*, Reading Abolition*, p.10.

At wrongs and cruelties it had not known
But for this fearless woman's voice alone.
She spoke to consciences that long had slept;
Her message, Freedom's clear reveille, swept
From heedless hovel to complacent throne.[171]

Despite this cross-racial tribute, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* suffered from neglect and misinterpretation, Stowe's reputation blighted by adaptations that favoured masculine realism, her voice devalued and marginalised partly due to her highly criticised support for Lady Byron in *Lady Byron Vindicated*,[172] in an 1869 article in *The Atlantic Monthly*. [173] The post bellum touring shows and stage appropriations also contributed to the loss of the abolitionist intent of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* by focusing on unnuanced sentimentality and melodrama, which exaggerated gender and racist stereotypes that pandered to white racial hierarchy.

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[171] Paul Dunbar, 'Harriet Beecher Stowe', *The Century Magazine*, November 1898
<http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/africam/afpo33at.html>.
[172] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Lady Byron Vindicated* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, 1870), eBook.
<https://books.google.com>.
[173] Harriet Beecher Stowe, 'The True Story of Lady Byron's Life', *The Atlantic Monthly,* September (1869), 295-313
<https://cdn.theatlantic.com/media/archives/1869/09/24-143/131867362.pdf>.

3.5.2. Twentieth Century Criticism

> "Rise up ye women that are at ease! Hear my voice, ye careless daughters! Give ear unto my speech."
>
> *Isaiah*, 32. 9

Despite the defence of her novel in *The Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe came in for criticism of her novel from across the political and racial spectrum, a controversy that continued unabated into the next century despite President Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, and the defeat of the South in the Civil War.

Stowe's position was complex, as while passionately committed to ending the sin of slavery and frustrated by the church's lack of leadership over ending the evil institution, she also supported a reticent approach to immediate abolition, related to fears that the Church would lose its organisation's role of moral persuasion. While Stowe's agenda to uphold a Christian nation in *Uncle Tom* became overwhelmed by the anti-slavery sympathy generated by the plight of her spiritual hero Uncle Tom, Stowe's vision for a tolerant, interracial Christian nation was projected into an over-sentimental depiction of Africa and the nature of African Americans:

> If ever Africa shall show an elevated and cultivated race - and come it must, [...] - life will awake there with a gorgeousness and splendour of which our cold western tribes faintly have conceived. In that far-off mystic land of gold, and gems, and spices, and waving palms, and wondrous flowers, and miraculous fertility, will awake new forms of art, new styles of splendour; and the negro race, no longer despised and trodden down, will, perhaps, show forth some of the latest and most magnificent revelations of human life. Certainly, they will, in their gentleness, their lowly docility of heart, their aptitude to repose on a

> superior mind and rest on a higher power, their childlike simplicity of affection, and facility of forgiveness. […] In all of these they will exhibit the highest form of the peculiarly *Christian life* [174]

The romanticising of African Americans laid Stowe's novel open to criticism of racial offensiveness, which aligned Margaret Mitchell, the pro-Southern author of *Gone with the Wind* (1936) with African American authors such as Richard Wright and James Baldwin, who were equally critical of Stowe's novel, but for different reasons·.[175] For Mitchell, the success of her own novel made her extremely happy as it helped refute the impression of the South that people abroad gained from *Uncle Tom*.[176] Richard Wright, while at first sympathetic to Stowe's protest novel in his collection of short stories *Uncle Tom's Children,* later condemns his naivete in the novel *Native Son* (1940), the depiction of racial stereotypes and threat of violence in the absence of social reform, a rejection of what he perceived as Stowe's appeal for white sympathy in *Uncle Tom*. [177] James Baldwin's *Everybody's Protest Novel* (1949) continued the *Uncle Tom* criticism based on perceptions of Stowe's sentimental black characterisation.[178] It is interesting to note that

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[174] UTC p. 167.
[175] Richard Yarborough, 'Strategies of Black Characterization', in *New Essays on Uncle Tom's Cabin*, ed. by Eric J Sundquist (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 2-84, (p. 67-8) <https://archive.org/details/newessaysonuncle0000unse/page/n7/mode/2up?view=theater>.
[176] Margaret Mitchell to Alexander L May, July 22, 1938, quoted in Richard Yarborough, 'Strategies of Black Characterization', p. 67 (See also note 26, p. 83)
[177] Richard Wright, *Native Son* (Calcutta, Sri Kamud Nath Dutta, 1940). <https://archive.org/details/in.ernet.dli.2015.149739/page/n15/mode/2up>.
[178] James Baldwin, 'Everybody's Protest Novel', in *Notes of a Native Son*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002) Part 1, pp. 13-25

Baldwin, in ‘Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare’, was able to appreciate the universal appeal of Shakespeare plays because they transgress injustice and oppression through a mask of misrule, while Stowe’s *Uncle Tom* is dismissed as unable escape the cage of a constructed social order.[179] While Wright and Baldwin confront violent aspects of racism directly, their interpretations of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* do not concede the role of the mask of ironic satire in Stowe’s novel as a cover for social dissent and rebellion, where ambiguous inversion of both black and white racial stereotypes blur and contradict class, gender, and racial hierarchies, which imagine an alternative colour-blind, gender-equal social order within a spiritually awakened nation.

The complexity of the racial, gender and religious agenda entangled with the disruptive traditions of performance and disguise in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, created the potential for diverse interpretations of the novel. Harryette Mullen, while acknowledging a debt to Stowe for “an enabling textural model”, is also critical of her appropriation of the slave narrative genre:

> Stowe uses the slave narrative as a reservoir of fact, experience and realism while constructing black characters as objects of sentimentality in order to augment the emotive power and political significance of her text.[180]

<https://eng794spring2010.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/baldwinprotest.pdf>.

179 Ibid, p. 21.

180 Harryette Mullen, ‘The Runaway Tongue’ in *The Cracks between What We Are and What We Are Supposed to Be: Essays and Interviews,* ed. by H R Mullen, & H Lazer, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012) pp. 102-129, (p. 102)
Proquest ebook.

Mullen describes slave narratives of black women, as a form of resistant orality, or verbal self-defence, a device for countering the institutionalised illiteracy of the black population passing on the verbal skills of runaway tongues. In the case of *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth – A Bondwoman of Olden Time* (1875), Mullen states that "her power is built upon the paradox of a black woman's voice, a self-authorisation enabling inclusion in a literary discourse from which she has been excluded."[181] Consequently, the sentimental woman's novel is dismissed as reactionary, concerned to preserve a woman's proper place, in contrast to the African American oral tradition, which uses forthright speech as a means of defending her body against abuse.

Truth's narrative is a harrowing depiction of slavery, and of great importance to the historical record, as noted by William Lloyd Garrison's in the novel's preface, in which he states:

> The following is the unpretending narrative of the life of a remarkable and meritorious woman a life which has been checkered by strange vicissitudes, severe hardships, and singular adventures […] It is hoped that the following Narrative may increase the sympathy that is felt for the suffering colored population of this country, and inspire to renewed efforts for the liberation of all who are pinning in bondage on American soil.[182]

While Sojourner Truth's power of resistance is enabled by the possession of a public voice and the ability to define her own identity, her narrative was published in the post bellum era and thus, was swimming against the tide of Civil War fatigue, and the South's determination to re-write the history

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[181] Ibid, p. 104.
[182] William Lloyd Garrison, preface to Sojourner Truth, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth – A Bondwoman of Olden Time* (Boston: Sojourner Truth, 1875), v-xi.

through legislation, which aimed to make American democracy as white as possible.[183]

Sojourner Truth power of resistance is enabled by the possession of a public voice and the ability to define her own identity, which differs from the literary style of Harriet Jacob's earlier slave narrative, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (1861), which challenges and revises the confining domestic role assigned to women. By blurring the home as a place of refuge and a prison, her novel is a literary self-affirmation of woman's self-confinement that unites across gender and racial lines.[184] Jacobs purposely appropriates the techniques of sentimental novels to appeal to the shared humanity of Northern white women, while simultaneously lifting the veil of decorum to reveal the levels of sexual violation and female vulnerability endured under the system of slavery. Mullen suggests that author Lydia Maria Child's sponsoring of Jacobs's revelatory narrative of sexual exploitation, in which Child's wrote an explicit introduction concerning the "monstrous features" of slavery, may be read as a challenge to Stowe's assertion that the successful artist must deliberately "draw a veil" over the horrors of slavery for the purposes of art.[185] Stowe however argues in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin,* that slavery represented strictly as it was found would be a work which could not be read, with her husband Calvin Stowe also

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[183] Richard M Valelly, 'The Making of Disenfranchisement' in *The Two Reconstructions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), pp.123-131. <https://archive.org/details/tworeconstructio0000vale/page/n7/mode/2up?view=theater>.

[184] Harriet Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, 1861 edition https://archive.org/details/incidentsinlifeo1861jaco/page/6/mode/2up>. (Jacob's slave narrative was self-published in 1861, ed. by L Maria Child).

[185] Mullen, 'The Runaway Tongue', p.105.

convinced that poetic charm had to be the medium of addressing the many, acknowledging his wife's capacity to "clothe naked ideas in the bright garb of poetry."[186] Mullen dismisses Stowe's artistic justification, which she suggests grafts the sentimental novel, a genre associated with the ideology of female domestication, onto the slave narrative constructing black characters as objects of sentimentality "to augment the emotive power and political significance of her text." Consequently, Mullen is critical of the domestic depiction of the black voice through the jocular banter of Aunt Chloe in her kitchen confrontation with Mrs Shelby, citing it as an example of Stowe's complicity in the objectification of black characters and supposedly sentimental approach to slavery:

> "Yer mind dat ar great chicken-pie I made when we guv de dinner to General Knox? I and missus we come pretty near quarrelling about dat ar crust. What does get into ladies sometimes I don't know; but sometimes when a body has de heaviest kind o' 'sponsibility on 'em …and is all kinder *"seris"* and taken up, dey takes dat ar time to be hangin' round and kinder interferin'! Now Missus, she wanted me to do dis way, and she wanted me to do dat way; and finally I got kinder sarcy, and says I, "Now Missis, do jest look at dem beautiful white hands o' yourn […] like my white lillies when dem dew's on 'em; and look at my great stompin' hands. Now don't ye think dat de lord must have meant me to make de pie-crust, and you to stay in de parlour?" Dar! I was so sarcy, Mas'r George.'
> […]
> She oughter cracked me over de head for bein' so sarcy, but dar's what 'tis – I can't do nothin' with ladies in de kitchen!" [187]

Mullen suggests that Aunt Chloe's sassiness rings false due to its jocular vernacular that has more in common with the conventions of minstrelsy. But, to my mind, this is exactly the point. Chloe's discourse can

[186] W B Allen, *Rethinking Uncle Tom*, p. 213.
[187] UTC, pp. 24-5.

be read both literally, and as a comic burlesque, a duality that inverts and blurs the mistress, master and slave hierarchies, which destabilised class, gender and racial categorisation. Chloe holds a commanding position in the kitchen, which she controls through the power of her comic dialect and self-assertion using flattery to manipulate Mrs Shelby, consigning her to the parlour as an object of decorative triviality. Chloe's suggestion that she should be cracked over de head for "bein' so sarcy" (UTC 25) makes veiled references the violence associated with slavery. Although not the full-frontal assault on the savage reality of slavery as portrayed in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig*, or Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative, it signals racial resistance in a subtle way allied to the racial contradictions enacted in the minstrel stage burlesques. Thus, despite the high literary endorsement by Garrison, the authentic voice of Sojourner Truth's narrative, and the cross-genre style of Jacob's *Life of a Slave Girl,* while powerful contributions to the history of slavery, neither had the impact or reach of Stowe's blend of literary and folklore genres, which successfully combined the sentimental with the slave narrative behind a mask of ironic satire to challenge attitudes to racial and gender injustice and abuse.

Based on Bakhtin's studies in literary theory, Dorothy Hale contends that the blend of dialects in a novel is similar to W E B Dubois' view of the African American double consciousness, torn between the American experience and African heritage, where this is not simply a literary technique but a sign of African American linguistic identity. Also, as heteroglossia is a social construction, this offers hope for equality to African

Americans because it implies that they are different and unequal only because society defines them in that way, rather than because of any inherent cultural characteristics.[188] Thus Stowe's use of vernacular banter, described by Mullen as "a comic represent that refuses to construct a complex subjectivity for the black woman"[189], rather than reinforcing a caricature, acts as an inverted weapon of racial empowerment that raises the visibility of the culturally marginalised as significant to an emerging hybrid national cultural identity.

In contrast to the kitchen run by Aunt Chloe, the kitchen in Harriet Wilson's *Our Nig* is a site of confrontation and separation from the outer world, a space where the self-defensive resistant orality of Frado is met by the linguistic and physical violence of her white mistress unable to tolerate a challenge to her authority. Thus, for Wilson, the domestic arena becomes a battlefield where the corrupting influence of slavery is pervasive from the public through to the private sphere of the kitchen domain. The overt violence in *Our Nig* directly confronts the tyrannical relationship between white women and their servants. A different, though no less effective approach by Stowe, is disdained by Mullen, who dismisses Aunt Chloe's impertinent resistance to authority as the euphemistic language of the sentimental novel. This ignores the hints at the underlying threat of physical abuse in Chloe's discourse, which because it is comically inferred, does not

[188] Dorothy J Hale, 'Bakhtin in African American Literary Theory', *English Literary History*, 61. 2 (1994), 445–471 <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/2873276.pdf>.
[189] Mullen, 'Runaway Tongue', p. 116.

mean that its existence is unacknowledged. Besides this, in *Uncle Tom,* Northern cousin Miss Ophelia threatens to whip Topsy for wickedness, while Southerner Marie St Clare sends her slaves to the calaboose to be flogged. Neither woman is directly involved with the violence of slavery, but they are both corrupted by the system, by implication, if not by direct participation.

As well as Mullen, Stowe's biographer Joan Hedrick also takes issue with Stowe, claiming that she does not penetrate the contradictions of womanhood in her novel. This criticism is based on Stowe's insensitive attitude towards Harriet Jacobs's slave narrative *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. Jacobs wrote to Stowe asking for help to tell her story of life as a slave, relating intimate details of how slavery was far worse for women than for men. Betraying Jacob's confidence by contacting Jacob's mistress, Stowe's only concern was to confirm the authenticity of the narrative, and to seek permission to use the material as documentary evidence in *The Key to Uncle Tom.* Without permission, Stowe also appropriated Jacobs's harrowing testimony of hiding in an attic to give authenticity to her fictional account of Cassy's similar ruse to escape from the violent Southern slaveowner Legree.

Stowe's treatment of Jacobs was in marked contrast to her attitude towards the Edmonson sisters who were freed from slavery by funds raised by Henry Ward Beecher's Church in New York. [190] The sisters attended Stowe's mixed-race Oberlin College in Ohio in 1853, with Hedrick claiming

[190] Mary and Emily Edmonson became African Americans celebrities in the abolition movement following a failed attempt to escape slavery on the schooner 'The Pearl' in April 1848.

that they were treated more sympathetically by Stowe because they relinquished literary control of their narrative. This enabled Stowe to protect the impression that she "spoke for the oppressed who cannot speak for themselves". Because of her patronising behaviour, Hedrick accuses Stowe of skin and class privilege, unable to cast off the subterfuge of speaking for others, and thus to find her own voice.[191] However, there are three points to make regarding this criticism. Firstly, Stowe relished the attention that the success of *Uncle Tom* gave her as the voice of the American abolition movement, implied by the fact that she rejected the offer of Jacob's daughter to accompany her on a European tour to represent the Southern States, with Stowe claiming that it would not be good for her.[192] Secondly, Stowe's anti- slavery efforts were only modest, admitting in a letter to the Duchess of Argyll (April 2 1858) that her benevolence was shallow.[193] And thirdly, despite that sensational effect that *Uncle Tom* had on increasing support for abolition, Stowe's main aim in writing the novel was to do what she could, as a mother and a Christian, to shame the Church into acting to end the practice of slavery. The multi-vocal, cross-genre narrative style of *Uncle Tom,* depicting the horrors of slavery may be real in terms of Stowe's unique voice of masked ventriloquism, rather than representing a failed attempt to find her own womanhood.

This veiling of reality that Stowe depicts in *Uncle Tom* is exposed ironically in the real-life experience of Mary Boykin Chesnut (1823-1866)

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[191] Ibid, p. 249.
[192] Ibid, p. 250.
[193] Quoted in Hedrick, p. 250.

author of *A Diary from Dixie.* The wife of a Southern planter, Chesnut recounts the double standards of life in the South, as revealed in a diary entry that invokes *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* which refers to concealed aspects of Southern culture:

> But what do you say to this — to a magnate who runs a hideous black harem with its consequences, under the same roof with his lovely white wife and his beautiful and accomplished daughters? He holds his head high and poses as the model of all human virtues to these poor women whom God and the laws have given him. You see, Mrs. Stowe did not hit the sorest spot. She makes Legree a bachelor.[194]

That the subtle, mixed genre style of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was effective in hitting a nerve of hidden Southern shame connected to slavery can be gauged by the explosion of 'anti-Tom' literature eager to promote the façade of pure white heritage designed to shield the dark reality of hypocritical slaveholder promiscuity.

Stowe challenged this patriarchal construction of delicate womanhood from behind a satirical screen of over-sentimental melodrama and reversals of racial and gender hierarchy, giving authority to the domestic voices of Mrs Shelby, Mrs Bird, Aunt Chloe, and Eliza. This allowed women to challenge injustice and to be taken seriously beyond the domestic sphere. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Stowe blurs the boundaries between public and private domains by politicising the domestic and the sentimental because, as she states in her novel *The Minister's Wooing* (1859) "… so long as we have a body and a soul - two worlds must mingle – the great and the little, the solemn and the trivial, wreathing in and out…". To illuminate this co-

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[194] C. Clinton, 'Queen Bee of the Confederacy', *New York Times*, 26 May 2011 <https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/05/26/queen-bee-of-the-confederacy/>.

existence Stowe "consistently juxtaposes the high, disinterested theology of the Andover theologians to very concrete images of "perfection" in a woman's world with "faultless" loaves of cake and perfectly turned dresses."[195] By this incongruous comparison Stowe empowers the domestic role of Aunt Chloe through the disorder of racial, gender and class hierarchies, which both expose and ridicule patriarchal assumptions of superiority, and which resonates with the double consciousness masking devices employed by the blackface minstrels to confuse and re-configure racial boundaries.

Reading *Uncle Tom's Cabin* literally rather than through the refracted lens of ironic satire risks overlooking the disguised criticism of slavery enacted by the burlesque subtext of the novel. The hidden layers of gender and racial subversion destabilise constructed social boundaries, proposing an alternative paradigm of cultural accord rooted in Christian values. However, the reception of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* continues to be controversial as it deals with race which continues to be the most contentious issue of American cultural identity. As mentioned earlier, James Baldwin (1924-1987), denounced Stowe's novel in the 1940s as very bad in its self-righteous, virtuous sentimentality, where he also took offence at Stowe's emasculation of Uncle Tom, arguing that stereotyping people's complexity

[195] Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe – A Life*, p. 281.

diminished their humanity.[196] However, this perspective of Tom characterising him merely as a caricature of "black" compliance to white rule fails to acknowledge Tom's insurrection in disobeying Legree's order to beat a fellow slave, an act of resistance that cost Tom his life. Uncle Tom safeguards the lives of Cassy and Emmeline, saves little Eva from drowning, and stands up to Legree, his identity defined through a feminine lens of integrity and courage, rather than masculine traits of aggression and strength. Tom is depicted as subject to a higher law above human legislation, one that triumphed over the patriarchal construct of racial hierarchy. Baldwin's post second World War interpretation of *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* which focuses on the melodrama and sentiment of the work, failed to acknowledge the crosscurrents of contradictory voices challenging and transforming attitudes to slavery in Stowe's novel. His rhetorical question regarding *Uncle Tom* "what moved her people to such deeds?" upholds a racially informed view of Stowe's novel that chose to ignore the masked criticism aimed not only at white slave traders such as Legree and Loker, but Legree's enslaved overseers Quimbo and Sambo. The novel also attacks the complicit insouciance of Augustine St. Clare, as well as the appeasing attitude of the Church and politicians in the system of slavery.[197] Baldwin's excoriating polemic, published in 1947, served to reinforce assumptions that identity is defined by racial categorisation. Those who condoned

[196] James Baldwin, 'Everybody's Protest Novel' in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, ed. By H L Gates and N Y McKay (New York and London: W W Norton, 1997), pp.1654-59, (p. 1654).
(Baldwin's essay was first published in 1947)
[197]Ibid, p. 1654.

slavery were not Stowe's people as Baldwin assumes because, as a white woman she was also politically marginalised and disenfranchised by a system of sexist and racist patriarchal oppression which condoned slavery.

Baldwin, it would seem, was trapped in what Gerald Early (b.1952) describes as the dilemma of racial identity shouldering the burden of American history beyond the ability of anyone to bear by "denying any idea of human transcendence not rooted in race." [198] As a school pupil, Early was resistant to the affirmative racial concept of Negro History Week, designed to promote "negro achievements", finding the false pride based on colour demeaning and patronising. Early expressed his objection to distinction based on colour by asking "What did Phillis Wheatley or Marian Anderson or anybody else mean to me?" For Early, the myth making redemption denied that African American history was a tale of degradation and abuse, which was in danger of being evaded by spotlighting the achievements of a few notable black artists. Early identified this as a prison of race of African American's own invention, which offers no liberation or transcendence when it insists on the special destiny of a people based on race.[199] Breaking free from this invented prison of race, Baldwin in a later essay 'Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare', had a literary epiphany, courtesy of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, when he heard a universal language that spoke beyond barriers of class and race. Shakespeare, initially condemned by Baldwin as a literary architect of his oppression, was re-evaluated as a poet

[198] Gerald Early, 'Habitations of the Mask' in *The Culture of Bruising,* (Hopewell, New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1994) pp. 124-127.
[199] Gerald Early, 'Habitations of the Mask' in *The Culture of Bruising,* (Hopewell, New Jersey: The Ecco Press, 1994) pp. 124-127.

of genius who spoke to "*all the people!*" who search in the rubble for a sign, or a witness where they will be able to find him.[200]

Similarly, author Ralph Ellison (1914-1994), in response to the American writer Irving Howe, also acknowledged the dual potentiality of a black novelist as negro and American, where one's art is based on experience, but mitigated through a knowledge of self, culture and literature. While Howe argued that the negro novelist was bound to use his skill to protest, as evidenced by the works of Richard Wright, Ellison contended that it is "not what moves a man to eloquence, but what he, or she, makes of it." Ellison endorsed a cross-cultural literary exchange in order to overcome the policing of racial borders by self-appointed radicals, asserting that "novels with an impulse that celebrates humanity are ritualistic and ceremonial at their core – they preserve as they destroy – affirm as they reject."[201]

While Ellison and Baldwin's search in their different ways for an individual literary voice that was both black and American, author Toni Morrison was more concerned to promote the distinctiveness of African American experience where the work must be political to have meaning:

> It seems to me that the best art is political and you ought to make it unquestionably political and irrevocably beautiful at the same time.[202]

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[200] James Baldwin, 'Why I Stopped Hating Shakespeare' in James Baldwin, *The Cross of Redemption – Uncollected Writings* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2010).
[201] Ralph Ellison, 'The World and the Jug' in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature* ed by Henry L Gates & N Y McKay (New York and London: W W Norton, 1997), pp. 1549-1571 (p. 1554).
[202] Toni Morrison in Gates & McKay eds., *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, p. 2094.

Thus, in her collection of essays *The Origin of Others* she was less forgiving of the sentimentality within *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which echoed a twentieth century Black Power demand for a more proactive image of black resistance than that of the benign image of Uncle Tom. Morrison describes Stowe's novel as a literary attempt to "romance" slavery, to render it acceptable, even preferable by humanising, even cherishing it.[203] Also, Morrison is scornful of Stowe's naive attitude to plantation life and slavery as depicted in the effusive description of the rural surrounds of Tom's cabin:

> In front [the cabin] had a neat garden-patch, where every summer, strawberries, raspberries, and a variety of fruits and vegetables, flourished under careful tending. The whole front…was covered by a large scarlet bigonia and a native mulitiflora rose, which, entwisting and interlacing, left scarce a vestige of the rough logs to be seen. Here, also, in summer, various brilliant annuals, such as marigolds, petunias, four-o'clocks, found an indulgent corner in which to indulge their splendors… [204]

The pastoral arcadia Stowe depicts is intense, loving and harmoniously in touch with nature, the rambling sentences and many commas allowing pause for reflection of the beauty. However, Morrison's derision does not allow for the self-conscious excess of the overblown imagery, which like the 'entwisting and interlacing' native multiflora rose conceals thorns and rough logs, which hint at a cruel and darker reality lurking beneath the Edenic surface. It would appear that Morrison based her criticism of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* on a history of distortion of Stowe's novel that escalated in the postbellum era with the 'Tom shows', which played down the racial

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[203] Toni Morrison, *The Origin of Others*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2017) p. 11.
[204] UTC, p. 20.

oppression, and did not present enslaved characters as subversively comic or heroic. The re-interpretation for propaganda purposes was a distortion that Uncle Tom never recovered from. The slanted stage productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* not only served the purposes of hostile Southern audiences, but also led to a strange alliance with the mid twentieth century black consciousness movement, whose aim was to assert the autonomy and authority of the black voice. The passive integrity of Uncle Tom was not compatible with the forceful image of the Black Power movement and thus, Stowe's novel was marginalised, with the satirical content perceived as simplistic caricatures and farce. [205] The 'Tom Shows' also responded to a Northern post-bellum drive for reconciliation, which resulted in the rise of vaudeville and family entertainment, with the abolitionist intent of Stowe's novel hijacked in the interests of encouraging postbellum political stability.[206] According to *Guardian* columnist Gary Younge, 'Uncle Tom' became a racial construct, who preached racial equality instead of Black Power, and thus a term of insult from the lips of militants, which Younge describes as "a reactionary form of psychological and behavioural racial policing within black communities." Deemed a figure of black betrayal and subservience, Stowe's *Uncle Tom* became the victim of reverse racial

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[205] Albert Murray attacks black nationalism in the *Omni-Americans* (1970) which negatively reinforces racial stereotypes and perpetuates inequality and injustice.
[206] W B Allen, *Rewriting Uncle Tom*, pp. 60-75.
Albert Murray's attack on black nationalism in the *Omni-Americans* (1970) also attacks a nationalism that negatively reinforces racial stereotypes which perpetuate inequality and injustice.

discrimination propaganda that ironically united those on opposing sides of the racial divide.[207]

A literal interpretation of *Uncle Tom* also drew criticism from Jane Tompkins based on the sentimental aspects of Stowe's novel. Tompkins suggests that the sentiment plays a role of salvation, communion and reconciliation, but that the indulgence of emotion actually falls short of the experiences they express. [208] This is contested by Henry Louis Gates, who suggests that the sentimentality in Stowe's novel, rather than denying full humanity, actually enabled contentious content by providing a safety valve. Thus, in the emotionally charged deathbed reunion between Tom and Master George, rather than confronting the brutality of slavery directly, Stowe intentionally exaggerates the sentiment to imply a sense of outraged revulsion:

> "[…] the vacant eye became fixed and brightened, the whole face lighted up, the hard hands clasped, and tears ran down the cheeks" [209]

Gates contends that focus on the exterior of the body, the tears, sighs, the hands, and the blushes means that the body itself recedes from focus. Instead, the attention is fixed on the mask and what it seeks to deny, but the body is always lurking in the shadows.[210] The sentimentality is an aspect of the dual consciousness of the novel appearing to fulfil the expectations of

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[207] Gary Younge, 'Don't Blame Uncle Tom', *Guardian*, 30 March 2002 <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2002/mar/30/race.society>.
[208] Jane Tompkins, 'Sentimental Power: *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and the Politics of Literary History,' in *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), pp.122-146 (p. 132).
[209] UTC, p. 387.
[210] *The Annotated Uncle Tom's Cabin by Harriet Beecher Stowe*, ed. by Henry Louis Gates Jr & Hollis Robbins (New York, W W Norton, 2007), introduction.

Victorian woman's literature on one level, while also acting as a veil for a sardonic narrator to subvert those assumptions. The disguised perspectives interweave in a complex, disordered web of competing voices which refute the denied iniquities of the system of slavery.

In the criticism of her novel, Stowe was particularly stung by African American censure of her ending of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* connected to the colonisation aspect. Stowe and her sister Catherine Beecher favoured a gradualist approach to racial reform, with colonisation perceived as a viable settlement option for a better life. In a letter to Alice Grimke, Catherine Beecher rejected the sledgehammer approach to racial reform citing the uncharitable antagonism of supporters of colonisation as arousing an unnecessary rift with those who share the same ideology and aims.[211] However, colonisation was also perceived by its opponents as a plan for promoting the selfish interests and prejudices of the white population at the expense of freed African Americans. Reacting to the unwelcome controversy, Stowe sent a note to the New York meeting of the American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society declaring that if she were to write the novel again, she would not send George Harris and his family to Liberia.[212] Regarding himself as a racially equal American citizen, Frederick Douglass was also opposed to

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211 Catherine E Beecher, An *Essay on Slavery and Abolitionism, With Reference to the Duty of American Females,* (Philadelphia: Henry Perkins, 1837), pp. 24-26 <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/abolitn/abesceba2t.html>.

212 Josephine Donovan, 'A Source for Stowe's Ideas on Race in *'Uncle Tom's Cabin*', *NWSA Journal*, 7. 3 (1995), pp. 24–34 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4316400>.

the colonisation policy, telling Stowe "The truth is dear madam we are *here*, and we are likely to remain". However, he was also conciliatory towards Stowe, asserting that her stance does not equate to unfriendliness to coloured people.[213]

Thus, despite the controversy stirred up by *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, the novel made a vital contribution to the continuing conversation concerning the tragedy of racial identity in America in a novel described by Stephen Koch as "by far the most influential piece of writing against slavery of the entire century."[214] Through interaction with the masking devices and ambiguity of the antebellum minstrel shows, Stowe subverted expectations by appearing to conform to a domestic genre of sentimental and realist fiction, while surreptitiously confronting the most politically explosive issue in ante-bellum America that threatened to split the nation, and diminish the role of the Christian faith. Beneath the veil of satire her motives were humanitarian, as well as to propose an alternative feminist theological social order to the compromised anti-slavery policies of the Church and State.[215]

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[213] Letter from Frederick Douglass to Harriet Beecher Stowe, 8 March 1853, published in *Frederick Douglass Paper*, December 1853. Quoted in Robert S Levine, *Martin Delany, Frederick Douglass, and the Politics of Representative Identity,* (Chapel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press, 1997) pp. 82-83.
[214] Stephen Koch, Introduction to *American Satire: An Anthology of Writings from Colonial Times to the Present.* ed. by Nicholas Bakalar (New York: Meridian-Penguin Books, 1997) p. xvi.
[215] Stowe, *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

3.6. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Heroic Slave* – Comparing the Effect on the Anti-Slavery Cause related to the Influence of Shakespeare and Minstrelsy Burlesque

> "With me, socially, politically, morally, character is everything – color, nothing. The negro is no less a man, because he is black; the Anglo-American is no more a man, because he is white."
>
> Senator Francis Gillette, Connecticut. Senate speech, 23 Feb. 1855.

While the popular reception and cultural influence attached to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was widely acknowledged, it was a source of regret to some critics that it was a white woman who brought abolition and the anti-slavery cause so dramatically to the forefront of nineteenth century American consciousness. How could it be that a writer, with no direct experience of slavery, could be at the epicentre of a cultural phenomenon, with a novel that was derided as self-righteous and sentimental by a cross-section of politically motivated critics? African American publisher Martin Delany on hearing that Frederick Douglass had visited Stowe to consult with her about how she could contribute to the improvement and elevation of the free people of colour, responded angrily "that she *knows nothing about us* […] neither does any other white person." Delany's hostility towards Stowe resonates with James Baldwin's equally dismissive remark that it was 'her people' who were responsible for slavery. However, Frederick Douglass took a different view. Douglass applauded Stowe's ability to create a sympathetic understanding of the plight of the slave, which he believed was conducive to bringing about social change:

> To scornfully reject all aid from our white friends, and to denounce them as unworthy of our confidence, looks high and mighty enough on paper; but unless the back ground is filled up with facts demonstrating our independence and self- sustaining power, of what use is such display of self-consequence? [216]

Consequently, he felt that printing reviews and articles about *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in his newspaper *Frederick Douglass' Papers* repaid the debt of gratitude he felt was owed to Stowe from the 'friends of freedom', both black and white. Martin Delany admitted that he had never read *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* his wife having told him all he knows about it, inferring that his antagonism towards Stowe's successful attack against the system of slavery was a case of misplaced racial pride.[217] At the heart of the disparagement of Stowe's novel by Delany in the nineteenth, and Baldwin in the twentieth century was the enigma of how could a Northern, white woman's novel of the black experience of slavery be so phenomenally effective on behalf of the abolition cause, and on such a global scale? A comparison between the narrative style of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *The Heroic Slave*, Frederick Douglass's 1852 response to Stowe's novel, provides some of the answers.

Frederick Douglass's *The Heroic Slave* (1852) was written in response to the astounding success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* driven by an imperative to assert black autonomy and manhood in the light of the perceived

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[216] *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, 1 April 1853, p. 2.
Quoted in Robert S Levine, '*Uncle Tom's Cabin* in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*: An Analysis of Reception', *American Literature,* 64. 1(1992) ,71-93 (p. 81) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2927489>.

[217] Quoted in Richard Yarborough, 'Strategies of Black Characterization', p. 71.

emasculation of Uncle Tom. [218] Douglass appropriated the multi-vocal narrative style of *Uncle Tom* as a template, the interwoven perspectives expanding the political impact beyond the subjectivity of a single-voice slave narrative. However, while there are parallels between the two novels, the emphasis placed on the different voices signals different racial intents. Whereas Stowe foregrounds domestic settings and the role of women, the enslaved hero Madison Washington takes centre stage in *The Heroic Slave*, with Stowe's 'Uncle Tom' character diminished to that of a kindly old man. The fugitive slave George Harris is Stowe's equivalent of Madison Washington, a representation of Douglass's own experience of self-determined desperation to escape bondage, whatever the cost. The declaration "Give me liberty, or give me death", originally spoken by the revolutionary lawyer and orator Patrick Henry (1775)[219] is reiterated by George Harris's "I won't be taken, Eliza: I'll *die* first! I'll be free or I'll die!" (UTC 19), an avowal also echoed by Douglass in his slave narrative:

> In coming to a fixed determination to run away, we did more than Patrick Henry, when he resolved upon liberty or death. With us it was a doubtful liberty at most, and certain liberty if we failed. For my part I should prefer death to hopeless bondage. [220]

[218] Frederick, *The Heroic Slave* in *Frederick Douglass - The Heroic Slave – A Cultural and Critical Edition,* ed. by Robert S Levine, J. Stauffer & J R McKivigan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 3-58. (References to the text will be noted parenthetically as THS)
[219]Patrick Henry, speech delivered to the second Virginia Convention, March 23, 1775, St. John's Church, Richmond, Virginia for the purpose of supplying troops for the Revolutionary War <https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/patrick.asp>.
[220] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass an American Slave* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), chapter 10.

The Heroic Slave is based on the real-life heroism of Madison Washington who led a successful slave revolt in 1841 aboard the slave ship 'Creole'. In Douglass's novella the documentary realism is embellished by a multi-vocal narrative style which aims to expose the racial bias of white historiography. The first person narration of the event by Tom Grant, a crewman of 'The Creole', is a black writer's account of a white man describing a black hero. The racial cross-over emulates the paradox of minstrel stage borrowing intended to destabilise white political and cultural hegemony. However, by giving greater prominence to the voice of Madison Washington, Douglass signals that his main goal was to promote the role of African American agency in achieving freedom and racial equality. In *Uncle Tom's Cabin* there is a more diffuse interplay of roles which elevates socially marginalised voices to centre stage, against the backdrop of a cryptic narrator. In *Uncle Tom*, George Harris's escape is part of a mixed genre orchestration of characters that reflects racial turmoil within a hybrid social context. The story of his flight to freedom is a blend of disguise, suspense, gun fighting and sentimental romance, abetted by support from domestic and religious sympathisers. Stowe's narrative style indicates an intention to advance the cause of abolition through cooperation between victims of patriarchal oppression, characterised in *Uncle Tom* by the cross-racial alliances formed by George and the Halliday family, Mrs Shelby and Sam and Andy, Ophelia and Topsy, and by Uncle Tom and little Eva.

The different way language is deployed in *The Heroic Slave* and *Uncle Tom's Cabin* helps to explain the effectiveness of the novels in the anti-

slavery cause, while also revealing the different objectives of the authors. For Douglass, his novel was a literary means to engage politically with the abolition cause, a position denied to him as a disenfranchised member of the population of antebellum America. This was also true for Stowe, who as a woman, was also denied a voice in the organisation of the Church, and in public life. Stowe blends different dialects to raise the voices of the culturally marginalised using language in a levelling up process, whereas in *The Heroic Slave* racial equality is denoted by the standard English used by Madison Washington and Mr Listwell his white sympathiser and benefactor.

In the first part of Douglass's novella the Northern white traveller Mr Listwell overhears Madison Washington's soliloquy spoken in the classical style of an accomplished Shakespearian actor. The anguished words of Madison's soliloquy "But what is freedom to me, or I to it?" (THS 5), resonates with Douglass's rhetorical "what to an American slave is your Fourth of July?" The erudite tone identifies Douglass with Madison, and also with the elevated melancholy of Hamlet's "To be or not to be" speech. [221]As Madison claims ownership of Shakespeare from the clutches of the literary elite, Douglass equally seeks to elevate his enslaved hero through association with the father of white literary authority. Douglass's self-advancement to gain respect and recognition for the struggle for freedom on a level with the founding fathers of the American Republic is acknowledged by William Lloyd Garrison, whose speech in Boston on 1 May 1845 is included as a preface to Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of an American Slave:*

[221] William Shakespeare *Hamlet*, in Stephen Greenblatt, ed., *The Norton Shakespeare*, Act III. 1.

> – fortunate for the multitudes, in various parts of our republic, whose minds he has enlightened on the subject of slavery […] as it at once brought him into the field of public usefulness, "gave the world assurance of a MAN," quickened the slumbering energies of his soul, and consecrated him to the great work of breaking the rod of the oppressor, and letting the oppressed go free. [222]

Garrison's reference to Shakespeare's Hamlet extolling the virtues of his father "where every god did seem to set his seal/ To give the world assurance of a man." (*Hamlet* Act III. 4), confers literary authority to Douglass's racial resistance to slavery. Also, the capitalising of the word 'MAN' emphasises that there is no difference between the races, inferring that the dehumanising effects of slavery be held responsible for the inability of enslaved people to reach their full potential. In his address, Garrison also refers to Douglass's utter condemnation of the conduct of the religious profession on Southern masters "A slaveholder's profession of Christianity is a palpable imposture. He is a felon of the highest grade. He is a man stealer." [223] While Garrison and Stowe disagreed on the means of achieving abolition, they found common ground in championing the plight of the oppressed through criticism of the Church's role. However, Garrison, like Douglass, favoured immediate abolition, while Stowe's position was somewhat chaotic, as she was critical of the Church's theoretical opposition to slavery, but agreed with Church support for a gradual abolition, as she feared that 'Uncle Tom may lose his Bible' without the guidance of the

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[222] William Lloyd Garrison, *Frederick Douglass Narrative of the Life of an American Slave,* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1845) preface, pp. iii-xii (pp. iii-iv). <https://archive.org/details/narrativeoflifeo1845doug/page/n7/mode/2up>.
[223] Ibid, p. xii.

Church.[224] Thus, in Stowe's fiction, Uncle Tom remains true to his Christian beliefs, and Topsy's religious conversion is achieved gradually through Miss Ophelia's instruction. From Douglass's castigation of the hypocrisy of Christianity in his *Narrative* it would appear Stowe's fears were not unfounded. The intertextuality of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was thus not only a critical response to pro-slavery political legislation, but also to Douglass's *Narrative of an American Slave,* in order to promote a broad anti-slavery church of those actively seeking social and racial reform. Stowe formed a favourable impression of Douglass when they met following the publication of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when he convinced her that all those who oppose slavery could be united. Her efforts to achieve this end were nevertheless rooted in the Church and through her family.[225]

The intertextual conversation in *The Heroic Slave* that links Shakespeare, Douglass's own *Narrative*, Byron's *Childe Harold, Uncle Tom's Cabin,* and the true story of *The Creole* mutiny, expands the relevance of the novel across race and class divides. In relation to Douglass's borrowing from Shakespeare, Keith Botelho states that while Shakespeare remains mostly at the margins of African American texts, with the exception of William Wells Brown's play *The Escape* (1858), his cultural currency was appropriated into their own narratives to promote black moral uplift:

> While acknowledging their debt to Shakespeare black writers make him more useful to their own ends, and thus Shakespeare serves as a

[224] Hedrick, *Harriet Beecher Stowe – A Life*, p. 251.
[225] Ibid, p. 252.

vehicle that allows African-American writers to further engage with the challenges of rising in nineteenth-century America. [226]

In *The Heroic Slave,* Douglass engages with cross-party, political methods of debate and literature to reach out to the anti-slavery community. Douglass's conflation of autobiographical narrative with his novella, to inspire sympathy for the enslaved, followed in the footsteps of the Founding Fathers as espoused by Thomas Jefferson in 'The Declaration of Independence'. According to Jefferson different opinions regarding independence for the colonies could be reconciled only through discussion, where sympathy was regarded as a masculine virtue because it had the power to transform public opinion.[227]

While *The Heroic Slave* subsumed a hybrid narrative style, unlike Stowe, Twain and Melville, Douglass steers away from the comic vernacular and burlesque parody of the minstrel stage strategy of replicating and ridiculing racist values, instead choosing to distance his hero from any inference of the slave as object of ridicule. Madison's eloquent discourse reflects Douglass's efforts to be taken seriously and treated equally as an author and public speaker in promoting the abolition cause. Thus, Madison Washington and Listwell speak in a similar refined tone that establishes the theme of equality and interracial friendship. As in the case of the transformative effect of Douglass's own oratory, commended by Garrison in

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[226] Keith M Botelho, ''Look on this picture, and on this': Framing Shakespeare in William Wells Brown's *The Escape*', *Comparative Drama, 39*.2 (2005), 187-212, (p. 192).
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/41154275>.
[227] Melba P Jensen, *Frederick Douglass Text, Context and Interpretation*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2005), p.148.
Proquest, e book.

his preface to Douglass's *Narrative*, the power of Madison's soliloquy equally moves his eavesdropping listener Mr Listwell:

> Here indeed is a man of rare endowments [...] Goaded almost to madness by the sense of injustice done to him, he resorts hither to give vent to his pent up feelings, and to debate with himself the feasibility of plans, plans of his own invention, for his own deliverance. From this hour I am an abolitionist. [228]

The speech notably places emphasis on Madison's autonomy through focus on the self - 'debate with himself'; 'his own invention'; 'for his own deliverance'. Diverging from the continuity of experience of other orally transmitted slave narratives such as those of Sojourner Truth, Henry Bibb, and Harriet Jacobs, Douglass's own narrative projects a subjective consciousness of manhood tied to literacy and freedom, a style that breaks with, rather than passes on, the cultural legacy of the past. The rhetorical power of Madison Washington's soliloquy characterises the impact of Frederick Douglass's oratory in the cause of abolition and emancipation however, conservative critics such as the Unitarian clergyman Ephraim Peabody (1805-1856) was less enthusiastic about the enduring effect of such theatrical extravagance:

> Nothing is less effective for any practical end than "the withering and scorching" eloquence to be cultivated by those who are heartily in earnest in their desire to promote any great reform. We by no means think that these remarks apply particularly to Douglass. We make them, however because we think that, more often than he is probably aware, he suffers himself to fall into this mode of speech.[229]

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[228] Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* in *Frederick Douglass - The Heroic Slave – A Cultural and Critical Edition,* ed. by Robert S Levine, J. Stauffer & J R McKivigan (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), pp. 3-58 (p. 9).

[229] E. Peabody, 'Narratives of Fugitive Slaves' in *Critical Essays on Frederick Douglass*, ed. by W L Andrews (Boston, Mass: G K Hall, 1991), pp. 24-27 (p, 26).

Douglass's passionate and erudite oratory was highly respected and aroused much Northern sympathy for abolition, however, his influence did not extend beyond radical campaigners until the publication and reviews of *Uncle Tom's Cabin.* Conservatives such as the editors of the *North America Review* and *Putnam's Monthly* were then forced to concede that the reality of slavery was of national concern, rather than a problem of the South alone.[230] While the power of oratory proved an effective tool of moral suasion, it also involved collusion with the recognised political system through adopting the standard language of discourse. By correlating the voices of Listwell and Madison, and elevating both through association with Shakespeare, although a literary assertion of equality by Douglass, it also reinforced the hierarchical assumptions of the dominant cultural narrative.

Compared to *Uncle Tom's Cabin, The Heroic Slave* has a sharper emancipation focus related to its emphasis on the valour and intellect of the central black protagonist. Through the minor role given to the pious slave, a faint allusion to Stowe's Uncle Tom, Douglass indicates scepticism for the power of religion to effect social change. Madison Washington, in recounting to his benefactor Mr Listwell an incident where a simple, yet principled, old slave is caught trying to buy food for him, patronises the natural honesty of the slave, which compelled him to reveal Madison's hideout. Even so, the 'Uncle Tom' character is assigned dignity through his language:

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[230] *North America Review* LXXVII, Oct.1853 quoted in Charles H Nichols, 'Who Read the Slave Narratives?' *The Pylon Quarterly*, 20. 2 (1959), 149-162 (p. 154) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/273218.pdf?refreqid=search%3Ada724256b6e21db66b47bf9b3a63d89c>.

> "I did *not* steal the money" said the old man 'it was given to me, as I told you at the store, and if the man who gave it to me is not here, it is not my fault. [231]

However, the old man's role is side-lined, where he is portrayed as a submissive victim of the corrupt system of slavery. Douglass's use of standard English to embrace racial equality through language, as part of a process of racial resistance, resonates with the Civil War context of Shakespeare's *Henry VI Part 2*, which Douglass signals in the epigraph for part II of *The Heroic Slave.* Thus, when Lord Suffolk seeks exile by sea, he is outraged that a royal price should be executed by 'an obscure and lowly swane', (*Henry VI,* IV.1.51) however, the lyrical voice of the captain bestows an authority above his status:

> Captain:
> The gaudy, babbling and remorseful day
> Is crept into the bosom of the sea;
> And now loud howling wolves arouse the jades
> That drag the tragic melancholy night;
> Who with their drowsy, slow and flagging wings
> Clip dead man's graves, and from their misty jaws
> Breathe the foul contagions, darkness in the air.
> (*Henry VI Part II*, IV.1.1-7)[232]

Douglass invokes Shakespeare not only to extend the cultural relevance, but also to challenge the social elite's ownership of Shakespeare.

For Douglass, the use of language was a means of affirming political parity, and which signified the struggle for a fair and equal African American identity for the coloured race. This, in the *Heroic Slave* the use of dialect is restricted to the coarse vernacular and manner of the loafers from Virginia,

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[231] Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, p. 22.
[232] William Shakespeare, 'Henry VI, Part II' in *The Norton Shakespeare,* ed, by Stephen Greenblatt.

which symbolises the economic decline of the Southern States brought about by dependence on the corrupt capital of the slave trade:

> By this time the keepers arrived. A horrid trio well fitted for their demoniacal work. Their uncombed hair came down over their foreheads "*villainously low"* [...] "Hallo! hallo!" they growled out as they entered [...] "Them's a likely set of niggers in the alley there" said Wilkes. [233]

The italicised emphasis of 'villainously low' alludes to Prospero's feral slave Caliban in *The Tempest*, (IV. 1. 248), in order to stress the brutal inhumanity of Southern economic dependence on human bondage.[234] The State of Virginia once the heart of European immigrant aristocracy was now the site of American dilapidation and ruin, a situation exacerbated according to Douglass, by the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. Like Stowe, Douglass was incensed by the passage of this retrograde Act, which made Northern States complicit in protracting slavery by giving greater priority to avoiding Southern secession than to supporting racial equality. Massachusetts and New Hampshire Senator Daniel Webster (1782-1852) endorsed this policy in his 'Seventh of March' speech of 1850, his lyrical rhetoric envisioning Southern secession as a shipwreck that would be a catastrophe for the Union:

> The imprisoned winds are let loose. The East the North and the stormy South combine to throw the whole sea into commotion, to toss its billows to the skies, and disclose its profoundest depths...I am looking out for no fragment to sail away from the wreck...but for the good of the whole, and the preservation of all; and there is that which will keep

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[233] Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, p. 36.
[234] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* in *The Norton Shakespeare,* ed, by Stephen Greenblatt.

> me to my duty during the struggle, whether the sun and the stars shall appear, or shall not appear for many days.[235]

Webster claimed that he supported the 1850 Compromise Act, not as a Northerner, but as an American to prevent the disastrous economic disruption that would result from secession. Douglass engaged on equal rhetorical terms with the Senator by echoing the same metaphorical style in his speech on October 14,1852 to The Free Democratic Convention at Ithaca, New York:

> Wither are we tending? [...I] is the ship of State sound, tight and free? Or is she leaky and liable to sink? Are we out of danger? Or are we in the midst of sharp and flinty rocks? Are we advancing or are we retrograding? These questions concern every American citizen.[236]

The matched rhetorical register of the voices signals racial parity through the shared sentiments and language. Douglass also hints at underlying violence with the 'sharp flinty rocks' which combines shipwreck with the slave economy of Virginia, inferring that an uprising could reduce the land to a desolate wasteland. Following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, Douglass vents his fury at the political process, and the possible consequences, where his moral suasion gives way to justifiable violent retribution that resonates with the peasant uprising in Henry VI part 2:

> "The slaveholders not only forfeit their right to liberty, but to life itself.— […]
> The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnappers [….]

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[235] Daniel Webster, 7 *March Speech*, United States Senate Chamber, 1850, (opening paragraph) <https://www.greatamericandocuments.com/speeches/webster-7th-march/>.

[236] Frederick Douglass, *Frederick Douglass Paper*, October 22,1852. (Secession Era Editorial Project, Furman University, Nov 8, 2004).

> The man who takes the office of a bloodhound ought to be treated as a bloodhound; and I believe that the lines of eternal justice are sometimes so obliterated by a course of long continued oppression that it is necessary to revive them by deepening their traces with the blood of a tyrant…." [237]

The Heroic Slave mirrors Douglass's own heroic struggle for racial equality, reflected by Madison Washington's lyrical rhetoric, which persuades Listwell to become an abolitionist, to endorsing the uprising and violence of *The Creole* mutiny which enabled Washington and the other captive slaves to obtain their liberty.

While Douglass employed erudite inter-racial discourse to give parity to black voices in *The Heroic Slave*, by contrast, Stowe devised an exaggerated comic vernacular as a subversive and transformative linguistic device allied to the tradition of minstrel stage ambiguity and satire that juxtaposed a range of clashing perspectives. While Madison Washington and the benign 'Uncle Tom' character in *The Heroic Slave* speak in standard English, the black characters in *Uncle Tom* use broad vernacular. Sam and Andy, for all their comic playacting, are wily and clever characters whose antics help Eliza to escape the clutches of the slave trader Haley (UTC chapter 7). Their comic banter in broad vernacular represents a celebration of resistance, their voices contributing to a diverse American cultural identity:

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[237] Frederick Douglass, '*Speech to Free Soil Party Convention on the Fugitive Slave Law', Frederick Douglass's Paper*, Vol. V, No. 35, August 20,1852 <https://www.sethkaller.com/item/2174-26141-Frederick-Douglass'-Incredible-Speech-to-Free-Soil-Party-Convention-on-the-Fugitive-Slave-Law&from=6>.

> [Sam] "Yes, my feller-citizens and ladies of the other sex in general, I has principles – I'm proud to 'oon 'em – they's perquisite to dese yer times and ter *all* times." [238]

Stowe's comic burlesque parallels minstrel stage performances which also increased the visibility of the socially marginalised aspiring to be identified as American by blurring the boundaries of the cultural mainstream. Similarly, Aunt Chloe uses broad vernacular, her feisty manner, and the respect she commands in her home, and in the Shelby's kitchen, also a subversive means of inverting racial and gender hierarchies. Eric Lott suggests that what minstrel shows did, and what Stowe emulated in her staged representations in *Uncle Tom,* was to articulate racial feelings that were only vaguely coming to light in the antebellum era, which both defined and then crossed the racial divide:

> The minstrel show was less the incarnation of the age-old racism than an emergent social semantic figure highly responsive to the emotional demands and troubled fantasies of its audiences. [239]

By avoiding the use of vernacular by the slaves, which would have been a more authentic representation, Douglass's use of language reverts from function to form. Douglass uses language as a tool for elevation and equality with the white social order, whereas Stowe and Twain integrate vernacular language to create a more democratic and representative cultural playing field. In *Uncle Tom*, Stowe both embraces, and celebrates, the comic dialect as a vibrant part of the cultural landscape, while maintaining ironic links with literary tradition through allusion to the bawdy familiarity of Shakespeare. This is illustrated in Sam's mangled

[238] UTC p. 72.
[239] Lott, *Love and Theft,* p. 6.

rendering of Mark Antony's speech to his kitchen audience (UTC 71) boasting that, like Shakespeare, his principles are "perquisite to dese yer times and ter *all* times' (UTC 72).

Parody, according to Richard Schoch epitomises intertextuality by re-functioning an original text, distorting it along with reader's expectations, but also extending it into an alternative dimension of social relevance. This process of dialogism, as described by the Russian philosopher and literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), allows for fluid and ambiguous interpretation through interwoven discourse that denies authorial power, and thus destabilises constructed social boundaries. While making no claims for the enduring literary capacity of parody, its role through comic echoing, as within Shakespeare's own plays, was to extend the breadth of vision and literary genius of the core narrative, and thus to deny a fixed concept of truth.[240] Douglass's engagement with minstrel style burlesque parody is less evident in *The Heroic Slave*, its focus on Madison Washington's daring escape, recapture and mutiny keeping authorial control in sight. However, through the parodic interaction in *Uncle Tom* Stowe's authorial voice is shadowy giving rise to much debate as to the central thrust of her successful anti-slavery novel.

Opposition to slavery is an obvious theme, its abhorrence is vehemently expressed through the Christian, feminine perspective of Mrs Shelby:

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[240] Richard W Schoch, *Not Shakespeare: Bardolatry and Burlesque in the Nineteenth Century,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002) pp. 19-20.

> This is God's curse on slavery! – a bitter, bitter, most accursed thing – a curse to the master, and a curse to the slave [..] I joined the church; but I thought I could gild over it. [241]

The condemnation also signals Stowe's feminist imperative through its attack on the patriarchal institutions of the Church and State. Mrs Shelby, Mrs Bird, and Rachel Halliday's disregard of the law to help Eliza escape forges an underground resistance that allies victims of racial and gender oppression. The focus on womanhood also stresses a humanitarian response that crosses the sectional divide, and which also endorses a Christian ideology of actively seeking salvation. Much of the discourse in Stowe's novel takes place in parlours and kitchens in the homes of Aunt Chloe, Mrs Bird, Mrs Shelby, and the Quaker santuary of Rachel Halliday. This elevates the influence of the domestic sphere, which provide safe havens and interracial friendship within an outer world of planters, Senators and slave traders who exploit the lives of others for profit. Stowe also promotes the dynamic role of women, such as Eliza Harris, who makes a daring bid for freedom to prevent her son from being sold off. Eliza's agency transcends the domestic role of women, her action a direct threat to the prevailing social order representing an alternative mode of subversion to the destabilising comic misrule enacted by Sam, Andy and Topsy.

According to Jessica Lang, Eliza's escape is a communicable experience that resonates with the oral storytelling tradition building up a web of collective memory that contributed to the democratising process. Her story is repeated in several different ways, highly embellished by Sam, (UTC 71-2),

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[241] UTC p. 33.

Eliza's own narration, (UTC 78) and then passed on and retold by Senator Bird, (UTC 87), the transmission part of the myth making process which preserves the experiences of marginalised voices behind the back of the dominant culture, offering alternative perspectives to that of the official historical record.[242] The changing tenses, from active participation to passive re-telling, crosses from the immediate into the realms of legend, which connects the past and present, while also having significance for the future.

Storytelling is also an aspect of *The Heroic Slave*, with *The Creole* crew man Tom Grant's first-person account of the slave mutiny clashing with, rather than retelling, the received record of events. Grant's praise for the courage and skill of the mutineers is derided by his audience who accuse him of being an abolitionist. Grant perceives this as a gross insult "That man does not live who shall offer me an insult with impunity" (HS 45), however despite his respect for the rebels, he cannot reconcile this with his innate racial prejudice:

> The leader of the mutiny in question was just as shrewd a fellow as ever I met in my life, and was as well fitted to lead in a dangerous enterprise as any one white man in ten thousand. The name of this man strange to say, (ominous of greatness,) was MADISON WASHINGTON [...] It was a mystery to us *where* he got his knowledge of language; but as little was said to him, none of us knew the extent of his intelligence and ability until it was too late [...] it was not that his principles were wrong [...] but I could not bring myself to recognise their application to one whom I deemed my inferior.[243]

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[242] Jessica Lang, 'Retelling the Retold: Race and Orality in Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 66. 2 (2010), 35-58 <doi:10.1353/arq.0.0068>.

[243] Douglass, *The Heroic Slave*, pp. 47...50-51.

Douglass's hero is portrayed not just as the equal of, but as superior to the white characters, using the narrative voice of Grant to add credibility to this contention, while also mocking the authorial voice through the racist contradictions. By undermining Grant's account, Douglass illuminates the fiction of the official version of the *Creole* mutiny as racist whitewashing passing as historical fact. In the *Creole* archive, only pro-slavery papers and pamphlets represented the violence of the event, the propaganda countered in *The Heroic Slave* through emphasis on the justification of the mutiny as a form inverted patriotism allied to the rebellious actions of the Founding Fathers of the Republic.[244] Douglass's ironic mask does not hide his disdain for Grant's conditioned racist assumptions, which resonates with Stowe's short story *The Two Altars*, with its cynical comparison of praise for those who fought for the principles of liberty in 1776, and the racist derision shown to Northern abolitionists campaigning for racial liberty in 1850. In *The Heroic Slave* and *The Two Altars*, the open attack on racial hypocrisy proved less effective in the anti-slavery cause than the ironic satire and incongruous perspectives Stowe successfully employed in *Uncle Tom's Cabin.*

Stowe's stance on racial representation was also tied in with a romanticised vision of African American colonisation, describing Africa as "a land of gold and gems, waving palms and wonderous flowers" like a veritable Garden of Eden. (UTC 167) In her description of Africa, the gilded

[244] Maggie M Sale, *The Slumbering Volcano, American Slave Revolts and the Production of Rebellious Masculinity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997) p. 193.

mask of ironic satire is stripped away in an effusion of undisguised romantic rapture to reveal the feminist Christian imperative of Stowe's anti-slavery novel. Stowe's utopian vision of Africa was inspired by the Swedish mystic Emmanuel Swedenborg, who also proposed a feminised theological alternative to the eternal damnation of Calvinism preached by her father Lyman Beecher. [245] Stowe's attraction to Swedenborg's philosophy of love, friendship and good works also influences the domestic focus and the prominent and dynamic role of the women in *Uncle Tom.* It also suggests that Stowe is a projection somewhere between the law-breaking dissent of Mrs Bird and Rachel Halliday and the Christian didactic role of Cousin Ophelia. By uniting feminine traits with a belief in the moral superiority of the African race, Stowe creates an alliance of "her people" as a family of the socially marginalised and culturally oppressed. The cross-racial and gender empathy of her novel counters James Baldwin's racist accusation against Stowe that it was "her people" who were responsible for slavery, when such an assumption reifies difference, rather than erases racial division .[246]

The sentimental idyll Stowe paints of the African race has a feminine quality leading to the suggestion by Leslie Fielder that Stowe identified with Uncle Tom. [247] It also explains why James Baldwin felt that Stowe's hero was

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[245] Josephine Donovan, 'A Source for Stowe's Ideas on Race in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin." *NWSA Journal*, 7, 3, (1995), 24–34.
< http://www.jstor.org/stable/4316400>.
[246] James Baldwin, 'Everybody's Protest Novel', in *Notes of a Native Son*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002) Part 1, pp.13-25.
<https://eng794spring2010.files.wordpress.com/2010/03/baldwinprotest.pdf>.
[247] Leslie Fielder, *What was Literature?: Class, Culture and Mass Society* (Simon & Schuster: New York, 1982), p.173.

emasculated, a characterisation that was not necessarily unintended. Both Douglass and Stowe conform to an American idealisation of masculinity, with Madison Washington depicted as "of manly form. Tall symmetrical round and strong" (THS 7), with Stowe's George Harris described as "very tall, with a dark Spanish complexion, fine expressive black eyes, and close curling hair, also of a glossy blackness [...] the admirable contour of his finely-formed limb, impressed the whole company." (UTC 101) However, Stowe also subverts and feminises the American concept of masculinity through its application to Uncle Tom (her Christian hero), who is painted as "large, broad chested, powerfully made man, of a full glossy black, and a face whose truly African features were characterised by an expression of grave and steady good sense." (UTC 21) The emasculation implies that it is through the women's voices that Stowe looks to a future of gender and racial co-operation, but which is also essentially Christian and family centric.

The interweaving of the sentimental with a range of masked and ambiguous voices in Uncle Tom's Cabin borrows from the minstrel tradition, which itself embraced an incongruous blend of source material to reflect and re-define an ambiguous racial context. Sarah Meer acknowledges this exchange, but appears to cast doubt on Stowe's self-conscious commitment to the satirical confusion:

> The moment when Stowe's book evokes the minstrel show could indicate some ambivalence about the middle-class femininity it at other times celebrates...*Uncle Tom's* ties to minstrelsy are more comprehensible when we acknowledge the shifts in performance style in the 1850s that were bringing blackface more into line with sentimental aesthetics.[248]

[248] Sarah Meer, *Uncle Tom Mania – Slavery, Minstrelsy & Transatlantic*

This would seem to imply that it is the sentimental aspects of *Uncle Tom* that made its minstrel associations acceptable, rather than the novel's links to the burlesque traditions of minstrelsy subversion designed to disrupt and transform the boundaries of social order. Like the immensely popular blackface minstrel shows of the ante-bellum era, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was an enigma in that it was not what it appeared to be. Its black central character, domestic focus, sentimental arcadia, romanticised racism and heteroglossia provided endless scope for interpretation, parody, and racist appropriation, holding up a mirror up to repressive State and Church oppression. The inherent satire and multi-vocal style was employed less effectively in *The Heroic Slave,* as pointed out by Valerie Smith:

> Douglass […] attempts to articulate a radical position using the discourse he shares with those against whom he speaks. What begins as an indictment of mainstream practice actually authenticates one of its fundamental assumptions.[249]

Through a range of perspectives, Douglass' aim in *The Heroic Slave* was to illuminate the way in which the heroism and agency of African American slaves were erased from the mainstream cultural narrative, and to imply a subversive racist motivation for this action. By contrast, Herman Melville made no attempt to evoke sympathy for, or to justify the black uprising in *Benito Cereno*, with Captain Delano reacting without surprise to an understandable resort to savagery by the rebels against the forces of oppression. For Delano to see the actions of the mutineers as heroic self-

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Culture, (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2005) p. 24.
[249] Valerie Smith, *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987), pp. 32-46.

liberators would mean accepting responsibility for racial tyranny, an acknowledgement that would deny his inherent sense of superiority. Thus, slavery based on racial distinction, as noted by Joyce Adler "can only be supported through convoluted and incoherent reasoning."[250] Melville, unlike Douglass, does not try to counter the logic of racialism because it is contradictory, rather in *Benito Cereno* he merely attempts to demonstrate how it operates.

While Douglass' satirical strategy is an innovative literary attack on white racial discrimination, because of his lack of ironic distancing, the more didactic rhetoric of *The Heroic Slave* failed to have the same impact as Stowe's *Uncle Tom.* Also, because Stowe engaged with the minstrel stage caricatures of sentimentality and melodrama which were so contradictory, and so familiar, at a time when race was the most contentious issue of the period, Stowe's novel became associated most significantly with the abolition cause. In addition, because Stowe's novel resonates with the carnivalesque traditions of misrule, which is linked to the burlesque subtext in Shakespeare plays, and to the folklore customs of the commedia dell'arte, this propelled her novel to stratospheric levels of popularity and enduring cultural relevance beyond the focus of racial subjugation.

Stowe embraced the fame and fortune that *Uncle Tom* brought her, the implication being that her landmark novel of social and religious oppression became a sensation because it was told through the prism of slavery. While

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[250] Joyce S Adler, 'Melville's *Benito Cereno*: Slavery and Violence in the Americas', *Science & Society*, 38. 1 (1974), 19-48. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/40401758.pdf>.

Stowe wrote thirty or more other books, only *Dred* had anything to do with slavery or the problems of race. Stowe's other fiction was mostly concerned with teaching, family, and Christian concerns, with her support for Lady Byron driven by gender solidarity and moral outrage. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* was criticised firstly as anti-Southern, and then in the mid-twentieth century as racially stereotypical. However, by acknowledgement of its satirical cross-genre ambiguity, the novel has the potential to be respected as political fiction of significant relevance to the struggle for racial and gender equality.

4. Mark Twain, Minstrelsy, Race and Shakespeare

4.1. Introduction

As with Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*(1894) also engaged with the counterculture tradition of the antebellum black face minstrel shows, also embraced by Shakespeare to disrupt and re-configure hegemonic ideology.

Mark Twain began writing *Huckleberry Finn*, more than ten years after the official abolition of slavery. He was working on the novel in 1876, a year that saw the election compromise policy in which federal troops were withdrawn from the South in return for acceding to the election of the Republican Rutherford B Hayes as President. This settlement between North and South paved the way for the restoration of white supremacy in the old Confederacy, the edifice of Reconstruction already under strain due to Northern war weariness along with national unease about the consequences of a racially egalitarian society. In effect, the North allowed the gains of Reconstruction in terms of economic and political progress for African Americans to be rolled back and gradually erased by Southern State legislation, with slavery replaced by segregation.[1] *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain's

[1] M W Summers, *The Ordeal of the Reunion – A New History of Reconstruction* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014), introduction.

ironic novel of evolving American cultural identity can be read as a response to this national tragedy of lost opportunity to establish lasting racial reform and social progress. Twain's novel traces this turbulent period of social tension through the fluctuating racial dynamic in the relationship between Huck and Jim as they make a break for freedom down the Mississippi River, with Huck fleeing the white civilizin' of Aunt Polly by helping Jim to escape from slavery, even though his religious upbringing makes him fear he may go to Hell for it. The final chapters of the novel see hopes for racial reform in the South finally crumble. This is reflected by the narrative switch from the minstrelsy-inspired satire and interwoven sentiment of the early chapters that challenge religious and cultural orthodoxy, to the mock-heroic masquerade of Jim's evasion, which enacts a romanticised fantasy of a valiant past upon which the chivalric codes of the Old South were based.

In *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain recounts with dismay, Huck's, but also his own, journey from childhood innocence and social conformity, to disillusioned radical opponent of religious and political oppression responsible for racial, class, ethnic and gender exploitation. This is achieved by Twain through engagement with the irreverent caricatures and comic disorder of the minstrel stage, which mirrored and mocked white prejudices and fears related to cultural dominance. Mark Twain loved the antebellum blackface minstrel shows "If I could have the nigger show back again in its pristine purity and perfection" he states in his autobiography "I should have

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Eric Foner, 'Reconstruction Revisited', *Reviews in American History*, 10. 4 (1982), 82–100
<www.jstor.org/stable/2701820>.

but little use for opera."[2] Twain first witnessed a blackface minstrel show in the 1840s where he describes it as a new institution that burst onto the residents of Hannibal "as a glad and stunning surprise". [3] This affection for the antebellum minstrel shows arouses shock and consternation today because of the association with grotesque racist caricatures, and the casual use of the word "nigger." However, this overlooks the overstated melodrama which exaggerates, but also challenges racial assumptions, a masked satire of comic disorder that degenerated into de-contextualised variety shows and vaudeville later in the century, of which Mark Twain was also very critical. Twain regretted the demise of the original minstrel incarnation stating in 1906 "the real negro show has been stone dead for thirty years…it was a thoroughly delightful thing…and I am sorry it is gone." [4]

Twain was influenced by the vibrant energy and irreverent ingenuity of the antebellum blackface minstrel shows, which provided the template for the innovative structure of his most iconic novel. In *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn,* the stage to page interaction and vernacular idiom breaks the narrative mould of nineteenth century American literature*.* As with the minstrel burlesques, Shakespeare is also a target for parody in *Huckleberry Finn* to undermine assumptions of white racial privilege epitomised by the selective appropriations of high art, which included Shakespeare plays, on the legitimate stage.

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[2] *The Autobiography of Mark Twain,* ed.by Charles Neider (London: Chatto & Windus,1960), pp. 63-64.
[3] *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* ed. by Charles Neider (New York: Harper Collins, Perennial Classics, 1990), pp. 76-77.
[4] Ibid, p. 80.

The inversions of race, class, and gender hierarchies on the minstrel stage designed to satirise and distort the dominant racist narrative, is echoed by Twain through his focus on the voices of the socially marginalised and disregarded. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the fugitive slave Jim takes on the role of the innocently wise endman to Huck's pretentiously ignorant interlocutor, and the representative of white authority. As they journey along the Mississippi their roles become more blurred, the minstrel mask of satire giving way to more equal and open discourse. Unfortunately, they are travelling in the wrong direction along the river, which prophetically infers that hopes of freedom and equality will end in capture, and a return to the old system. Although, Jim is granted his freedom, symbolically, the racist hierarchy remains intact.

Twain goes a stage further in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* in outraging white assumptions of superiority by casting Roxy, a black, enslaved female in the central role to disrupt and challenge conformist attitudes to slavery and racial inequality. Through the racial and gender hierarchy inversions, Roxy is shown to be both corrupted by, and a victim of slavery. The implication of the racial exchange in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is that it is power that is the corrupting force, and that racial difference is a constructed means of exerting political control.

At journey's end Twain finally throws off the shackles of cultural conformity through identification as the double of the blackface incarnation of the mysterious stranger, No. 44. Twain no longer feared denunciation as a social pariah for religious blasphemy despite the horrified reaction of his

family and friends. This novel went through several drafts and was modified by his biographer Albert Bigelow Paine before a version closer to Twain's final *No 44 the Mysterious Stranger* was discovered and published in 1963.

Thus, in order to understand the significant influence of blackface minstrelsy on *Huckleberry Finn*, and in a darker way on Twain's later novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, and prophetically in *No. 44 The Mysterious Stranger,* it is important to trace the origins of Twain's developing fascination with minstrelsy's hybrid style, and its effect on his evolving racial consciousness and the emancipation of his of cultural identity.

4.2. Mark Twain and Minstrelsy – from Hannibal to *Huck Finn*

The journey begins back in Hannibal, Missouri where Sam Clemens was raised, and which provides the setting for *Huckleberry Finn*, *Tom Sawyer,* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. According to Twain's autobiography, his father owned enslaved African Americans whom he sold off, hiring others by the year from farmers, and his mother Jane Lambton's dowry included "three negroes", depicting a social context of institutionalised slavery that formed the backdrop to Sam Clemens's formative Southern upbringing. In talking about his mother, Twain describes her as a character that was of a fine, striking, and lovable sort. She claimed that even a friend to Satan had the right to every Christian's prayers. Class and race lines were clearly drawn in the Hannibal community, depicted as a little democracy full of liberty and

equality and fourth of July celebrations with no thought given to any moral or racial inconsistency. As a religious woman Mrs Clemens was not conscious that slavery was "a bald, grotesque and unwarrantable usurpation" having heard it defended and approved of in the pulpit as something right and sacred, and a condition which the enslaved should be daily thankful for. As a young boy Sam Clemens grew up seeing nothing "to rouse one's dozing humane instincts to activity." He states that cruelties were rare and frowned upon despite having a vivid recollection of seeing the sad faces of a dozen men and women chained together waiting to be sold "down the river". However, with the benefit of hindsight, Twain writes that the system of slavery dulled everybody's humanity.[5] In this antebellum period slavery was politically entrenched in the Southern states which helps account for Huck's unconditional acceptance of white superiority, and Jim's habituated subservience. These attitudes come under scrutiny as they light out together on their adventure down the mighty Mississippi. Freedom from the chains of social conformity vie with the storms and turbulent currents of the river highway, the unpredictable waters reflecting the racial tensions depicted in the ambiguous narrative style, which oscillates between satirical social criticism and sentimental longing for familiarity and family. Twain's long term literary companion William Dean Howells recognised Twain's complex position as social campaigner against slavery, and a member of the Northern middle class, praising his pioneering literary role as "…sole, incomparable,

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[5] Mark Twain*, A Biography*, 3 Vols, ed, by Albert Bigelow Paine (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1912), p. 48
<urn:oclc:record:1048776085>.

the Lincoln of our literature". In *My Mark Twain* (1911), Howells expands on the opposing political and personal forces central to the formation of Twain's unique literary identity:

> That part of him that was Western in his Southwestern origin Clemens kept to the end, but he was the most desouthernized Southerner I ever knew. No man more perfectly and entirely abhorred slavey, and no one ever pored so much scorn upon the second-hand, Walter Scotticized, pseudo-chivalry of the Southern ideal. [6]

Howells' comment indicates the cultural and political significance of the farcical conclusion to *Huckleberry Finn* where the replacement of the burlesque social satire of the earlier chapters with the chivalric Walter Scott parody reflects Twain's abhorrence of Southern redemption. The failure of Jim's evasion escapade indicates that slavery in effect was back albeit under the guise of segregation.

Huckleberry Finn, which drew inspiration from Twain's early life on the Mississippi, was written intermittently over a period of seven years, beginning in 1876. One of the most profound and earliest influences on his double-voiced, minstrel style narrative came from a forbidden source and was therefore, all the more enticing to the young Sam Clemens "I had a friend whose society was very dear to me because I was forbidden by my mother to partake of it." An enslaved black philosopher named Jerry who was master of the art of African American "signifying" introduced Sam to the double-edged sword of satire as a weapon of masked social criticism. Jerry's

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[6] William Dean Howells, *My Mark Twain*: Reminiscences and Criticisms, New York: Harper, 1910), p. 35
< urn:oclc:record:1037231247>.

sermon on the local woodpile "Corn Pone Opinions", a sketch found in Mark Twain's papers, imitates the rhetorical style of pulpit oratory, but with deliberate incongruities, which resonates with minstrel stage stump speeches whose exaggerated verbosity mocks the social values that it appears to be promoting.[7] For fifteen-year-old Sam Clemens, Jerry was the greatest orator in the United States whose verbal virtuosity, jokes and imitation made a lasting contribution to literary history through his influence on the author of *Huckleberry Finn*. Shelley Fisher-Fishkin in *Was Huck Black?* notes that Twain understood and appreciated the genius of African American "signifying" in revealing the potential for social comment in the gap between an outwardly conforming corn-pone opinion and a hidden but more honest view. Where the corn-pone identity meets with social approval, the veiled identity, if revealed, risks social exclusion or worse, as experienced by Pudd'nhead Wilson and Tom Driscoll.

From an early age Twain was attracted to the ambiguity of the minstrel stage signified by the racialised mask. Fishkin notes that "Twain claims he had the good sense to know that he was in the presence of a master - even if that master was a slave".[8] The patronising racism of Twain's aside is self-consciously satirised in *Huckleberry Finn* through Huck's praise for Jim after he selflessly helps Tom Sawyer "I knowed he was white inside, and I reckoned he'd say what he did say." (HF 303). This statement

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[7] Mark Twain, 'Corn-Pone Opinions' in Mark Twain, *Europe and Elsewhere* (New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1909), pp. 399-406 <urn:oclc:record:1042529527>.
[8] Shelley Fisher-Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press,1993), pp. 53-55.

satirically confronts the author's former racism through the mask of Huck's youthful white condescension.

Armed with the cultural education provided by Jerry, Twain left home in Hannibal when he was eighteen, dabbling in a range of careers that took him eventually to the mining camps of Nevada where he lived a bohemian life within a rough, transient community. Here Twain became immersed in Western humour and the artistic hoax which, from his time as one of the Sagebrush authors on the *Territorial Enterprise* newspaper, developed into a renowned literary form in which a connection with real events distinguished them from the tall tales.[9] Outrageous claims, intended to deceive but also to entertain and to inform, are embedded within all of Twain's fiction, an essential component of the hybrid burlesque structure and narrative signifying that underpins *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Twain claims that he had a call to literature of a low order, a penchant at odds with a desire to rub shoulders with the high echelons of society, the class cross-over reflecting Twain's conflicted social identity, pithily described by Leland Krauth in *The Proper Mark Twain* as "He slummed and he climbed."[10] From this nonconformist Western lifestyle, combined with his literary apprenticeship during his time in Nevada (1861-1864), and his debt to the signifying skills of his childhood mentor Jerry, emerged the rebel humourist and social commentator known as Mark

[9] Lawrence I. Berkove, 'Nevada Influences on Mark Twain' in *A Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. by Peter Messent, & Louis J. Budd, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp. 157-171.
ProQuest eBook Central
[10] Leland Krauth, *Proper Mark Twain* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1999), p. 27.

Twain. As his fame and reputation spread, Twain's writing style evolved moving from news reports, wild parodies, and storytelling narratives such as *The Jumping Frog of Calaveras County*, to a new tone of ironic social criticism. This more sophisticated style was not universally appreciated as indicated by the *St. Louis Globe- Democrat*, published in Missouri on December 7, 1878. An article entitled 'Mark Twain – A Well-Got-Up Biography of the Great Humorist' reads as follows:

> [Twain] wrote San Francisco letters to the *Territorial Enterprise*, and for some real or fancied cause attacked the police so persistently and fiercely that M J Burke, who was then Chief, brough a suit for libel against the paper […] He made the official equanimity of the City Hall boil like a cauldron of asphalium, the fume and stench being in proportion.[11]

While Twain stands accused of not being overly concerned with the truth, preferring the "flower of fancy"[12], this is not, for him, on the same level as corrupt, self-serving malpractice in civic life. His high moral tone, while somewhat tongue in cheek given his wayward lifestyle, is nevertheless vitriolic compared to the spirit of his hoaxes and parodies whose indirection, irony, and innuendo encode an alternative realism lying beneath the facetious surface. Also included in the above newspaper review is mention of Twain's masterful adaptation of the "Jumping Frog" yarn which is credited as having an originality and vitality that defy accusations of literary larceny, while also indicating that the line between creative appropriation and self-serving deception is fine, and sometimes blurred. As indicated in a

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[11] 'Mark Twain – A Well-Got-Up Biography of the Great Humorist', in Timothy Hughes Rare & Early Newspapers, *St. Louis Globe-Democrat*, Dec 7, 1878
<https://www.rarenewspapers.com/view/209256>.
[12] Ibid.

letter to William Dean Howells, dated 23 November 1875, Twain reveals a defensive attitude to the subject of literary borrowing having been accused of plagiarism for using Oliver Wendell Holmes' dedication to "Songs in Many Keys" in his dedication to *Innocents Abroad* without acknowledgement.[13] Holmes responded to Twain's apology for his 'unconscious plagiarism' in a letter which is summarised in Twain's autobiography, with Holmes reported as writing "all our phrasings are spiritualized shadows cast multitudinously from our readings; that no happy phrase of ours is ever quite original with us".[14] While Holmes' response must have been a relief to Twain, his dedication in *Innocents Abroad* is a direct copy of Holmes' work, not a creative re-imagining. The inclusion of this incident in Twain's autobiography indicates that it hit a nerve, an anxiety over borrowing that Twain addresses indirectly in his works through facetious humour. For instance, when Huck steals a chicken, it is justified as a good deed by Pap as someone else might need it so it would be doing a good turn. (HF 74). Twain also protests claims of imitation indirectly through his short semi-autobiographical work *Is Shakespeare Dead*?, which satirises the intertextuality of Shakespeare's works, as well as the controversy over authorship and authenticity in defence of the art of creative appropriation. Accusations of borrowing were also levelled at the blackface minstrel shows, allegations which, as in the case of Twain, undermined the cultural

[13] Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad* (Ware: Wordsworth Classics, 2010).
[14] Quoted in Michael J. Kikris, 'Unconscious Plagiarism: Samuel Clemens Writes My Past.' *The Mark Twain Annual*, 8 (2010), 33–37 (p.33) < http://www.jstor.org/stable/41582274>.

significance and political impact of the genre. Twain may be said to have adopted aesthetic borrowing and intertextuality from the minstrel shows, an aspect of his work that I will discuss in more detail later.

Twain's narrative style continued to evolve from the simple tall tale of the *Jumping Frog* to a more coherent narrative style as a newspaper correspondent in his letters from the Sandwich Islands commissioned by the respectable *Sacramento Daily Union*. Besides the travelogue, Twain incorporated a range of voices from Indigenous people to whalers but also included a comic low life invented character called Brown as part of a double-voiced narrative burlesque, which allowed scope for masked social criticism. The cross-genre style and diverse perspectives targeted mixed audiences, which coincided with Twain's aim of boosting his readership while gaining the approval of his influential associates. In a letter written from Kilauea, Hawaii in June 1866, Twain included a travesty entitled "In Distress", which described a seasick and drunken Brown who demands to be soothed by poetry. Twain obliges with alternating lines from Charles Woolfe's *The Burial of Sir John Moore* and Lord Byron's *The Destruction of Sennacherib*. The incongruity of the poems, one concerning the inappropriate burial of a hero, the other a glorious triumph against the odds through the hand of Providence, reflects a double consciousness shared by Twain and his bawdy counterpart Brown. In response to Twain's poetic

medicine, Brown throws up everything he had eaten for three days, a physical manifestation of his disdain for his author's literary efforts.[15]

The lyrical majesty of Byron's 1815 poem obscures the horror of war and death through the light upbeat tempo and epic tone of the lyrical façade, Byron's linguistic masking forging a bond with Twain's own double-voiced hybrid literary style. Relating to the duality of the poetic mind that Twain recognised in Byron's writing, Twain felt driven to respond with six unsigned editorials in the *Buffalo Express* following Harriet Beecher Stowe's revelation that Byron was guilty of incest, which Twain felt should have no bearing on Byron's status as a renowned poet:

> The fact that he was a brilliant poet does not argue that he possessed a nature too refined for this foulness of depravity. The alliance of a poetical imagination and a subtle intellect with an animal constitution grossly sensual has been no uncommon thing, and Byron furnished as conspicuous an instance of it as the world ever had for its study… If there is incredulity anywhere, it is in the supposition that any man could commit the crime in question. But it has been committed, time and again. History furnishes examples enough, to say nothing of the current experience of society, and it is quite possible that Byron may have added one to the examples of unnatural vice in history as it is that other men of noted name and distinguished position did so before him.[16]

Twain's passionate defence of Byron infers an identification with the conflict between the poet's artistic nature co-existing with a darker alter ego, a duality that Twain masks with satire in his own works. The horror and

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[15] Mark Twain and George Ezra Dane, *Letters from the Sandwich Islands: Written for the Sacramento Union* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1938), p. 195 <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/000663766>.

[16] "The Byron Scandal," August 24, 1869, *Buffalo Express* quoted in Paul Baender, 'Mark Twain and the Byron Scandal.' *American Literature*, 30. 4 (1959), 467–85 (p. 469).

repulsion expressed by the public was indicated by the loss of fifteen thousand subscribers to *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1870 following the publication of Stowe's article. Ironically, it is Stowe (rather than Byron) who was accused of committing a crime against decency, the intensity of the moral outcry unable to admit, at least not openly, that the co-existence of beauty with such bestiality was conceivable. The hypocrisy of the professed outrage is matched by the prevalence of miscegenation in the slave holding South, with Twain's scathing editorial on moral values noting "But it has been committed, time and again. History furnishes examples enough". Miscegenation makes kinship uncertain and incest a distinct possibility as satirised through the class and racial switches in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. In a later editorial on September 9, 1869, concerning General B. F. Butler's legal analysis of the scandal, Twain mocks the high moral tone on both sides of the Byron debate through a shift of language, which imitates the elaborate effusions that characterise the style of the serious press. He attempts to make light of the scandal through a "letter" addressed to Mr Twain purporting to be from Lord Byron, which comically exaggerates his crimes to create a distinction between illegal acts and violations deemed to be morally reprehensible:

> *Mr. Mark Twain – Dear Sir:*
> …I have been a good deal interested in the Byron scandal lately stirred up on earth by Mrs Harriet Beecher Stowe […] But after all, the plain truth is, I *did* do all that wickedness charged withal. I did that and more. I am the Wickedest Man…I only revealed one of my crimes […] what I need is a full expose […] I had nine children by the late Mrs. Leigh. I

> devoured them […] I committed all the crimes known to the law. I robbed and burned and betrayed and assassinated.[17]

Through his attempt to satirise the scandal, Twain concludes that some crimes, such as murder cannibalism are of a different order beyond burlesque, and which by comparison downgrades the socially transgressive act of incest. This overlap of moral and criminal misdemeanours beneath a lyrical façade echoes Byron's flippant masking of the atrocity of war in his poem *The Destruction of Sennacherib,* a poetic attack that undermines claims to moral authority by the Church and State.

Twain identifies with Byron's cavalier disregard of conventional moral codes that bend the truth to suit a disingenuous social respectability, through an appropriation of Byron's ironic attitude to truth, "Tis strange but true; For truth is always strange; Stranger than fiction".[18] The sentiment is echoed in Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar as "Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn't.". Pudd'nhead's aphorism on the paradox of truth satirises white patriarchal legislation intent on promoting racial endogamy that blatantly denies the practice of miscegenation. To overcome the contradiction affecting spurious claims of racial purity, the taboo of incest is blurred with the horror of miscegenation, which classifies both as perverted and unnatural. The way in which Stowe was vilified, and not Byron, indicates that it was not the perversion, but its exposure, that was the crime. Thus, satire is used as a tool

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[17] Ibid, p. 481. This letter was not published, marked "Written for *Buf Ex* but not used." found in 'Mark Twain Papers', (Baender, note 25).
[18] George Gordon (Lord) Byron, *Don Juan,* Canto 14, stanza 10 in *The Major Works* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 818.

to expose such white racial delusion in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* through the cradle swap, which undermines a system of inheritance based on supposedly known bloodlines, which social taboos were meant to prevent.[19]

Twain's amalgamation of allusions to highbrow art and colloquial irreverence reflects the artifice of a constructed racial reality which he reconfigures through inverted racial hierarchies and mistaken identities that indirectly expose and mock mainstream racial assumptions. The presence of minstrel tropes of indirection in Twain's works signifies by association, that the contrived performance of disorder of the blackface minstrel shows was also a ploy of social criticism and racial disruption, obscured by a veil of ambiguous racist and ethnic invective.

While dispatching letters from Hawaii, Twain was introduced to the American lawyer and diplomat Anson Burlingame, the US ambassador to China, who gave him some advice, which Twain says he never forgot "Avoid inferiors. Seek your comradeship among your superiors in intellect and character, not wealth.[20] In becoming a correspondent for the upmarket *Sacramento Daily Union*, the advice 'to climb' obviously struck a chord that would seem to conflict with his attachment to the allure of folk vernacular and Western humour, a dichotomy that reflects the tensions in his cross-genre narrative style. Twain's early western humour was always politically ambiguous, his satirical arrows targeting police discrimination towards the Chinese, while he also used racist epithets to dehumanise those he was

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[19] Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both – Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 318.
[20] Mark Twain, *A Biography*, p. 287.

defending. His biting wit shows no mercy for corruption high or low, lambasting the lower classes in his hostile description of a San Francisco police court "drunken, filthy loafers, thieves, prostitutes, and slimy guttersnipes […] a solid mass of rotting, steaming corruption."[21] Twain's editorials attack a range of social groups, his racist ambivalence masking a fluid identity, but this does not preclude an interest in the tall tales of backwoodsmen and the idiomatic language of country folk, which suggests that a tacit sympathy and respect for the culturally marginalised conflicted with his aspirations to join the ranks of the social elite. Such a paradox is reflected by Twain's ability to be both irreverently rebellious and uphold convention at the same time. This enigma of conflicting attitudes to racism, misogyny and a sense of elitism is satirised in *Huckleberry Finn* through Huck's inconsistent behaviour towards Jim, which is conditioned by his racially prejudiced upbringing.

Despite his success in making a living as a writer, Twain's mother Jane Clemens did not always approve, hoping that at some time her son would write something "that his kin will be proud of".[22] Twain's natural talent as a writer brought him quick success as a columnist and comic storyteller, his re-telling of the tale of *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County* bringing him to national attention. The story was immensely popular and reprinted in magazines and newspapers across the nation. Its success was used to promote Twain's first book, *The Celebrated Jumping Frog of*

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[21] Quoted in Krauth, p. 23.
[22] Mark Twain, *The Complete Letters of Mark Twain* (Throne Classics, 2020), p. 98
<www.throneclassics.com>.

Calaveras County and Other Sketches (1867), used as a stepping- stone to being regarded as a serious writer. His mother's wish that he should write something his family could be proud of materialised when the rough humour of Twain's early days was channelled into his semi-autobiographical novel *Roughing It* (1871).[23] Twain's travels through the wild west and his experience of silver mining are combined with tall tales, using artistic licence to dramatise and blur fact and fiction. The tapestry of anecdotes and digressions in *Roughing It* was described by William Dean Howells as "a sort of harmony of colours which is not less than triumphant."[24] The far-fetched, humorous voice in *Roughing It* sowed the seeds for the originality and authentic, cross-genre narrative style of *Life on the Mississippi,* and the later *Huckleberry Finn*.[25] The style of embellished and exaggerated reality is closely allied to minstrel stage spectacles whose extravagant burlesques also blur sentiment with satire where the performance becomes ironically a more authentic version of the truth.

Twain's return to Hannibal in1882, recounted in *Life on the Mississippi* (Chapter 53), is an emotional experience revisiting boyhood experiences, but with knowledge gained from thirty years absence. The retrospective detachment allows Huck's naïve racist perspective to be examined through the lens of ironic hindsight, tempered by nostalgia in what Leland Krauth

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[23] Mark Twain, *Roughing It* (Wallingford: Awesome Books, 2014).
[24] Howells, *My Mark Twain*, pp. 113-114.
[25] Mark Twain, *Life on the Mississippi* (Ware, Herts., Wordsworth Classics, 2012).

terms another dimension of his self-fashioning as the "confident humourist and the apologetic sentimentalist."[26]

The tension and ambivalence of Twain's divided self aligns with the cross-genre paradox of minstrel humour whose racist incongruities and vernacular language underpin the structure of *Huck Finn.* This radical literary style was recognised by Joel Chandler Harris, who was best known for his representations of plantation nostalgia and slavery, who asserted that:

> [*Huckleberry Finn*] presents an almost artistically perfect picture of life and character in the southwest, and it will be equally valuable to the historian and the student of sociology. Its humor which is genuine and never-failing, is relieved by little pathetic touches here and there that vouch for its literary value. [27]

Harris saw Twain as moving from mere burlesque to true literary art, stating that what is deemed to be vulgar is in the life that is depicted, not in Twain's depiction of it, which Harris maintains is perfect in *Huckleberry Finn*. Harris was critical of the action of Concord Library's refusal to stock *Huckleberry Finn* on the grounds of its vulgarity and broad humour, and of other perfunctory reviewers who based their criticism on this action. [28] For Harris, Twain's novel represents a literary quantum leap from other false representations of Southern life which erase and ignore the lives of the common folk:

> The results of literary effort in the South are pervaded with the most intense sectionalism. Prejudices take the shape of egotism and we

[26] Krauth, p.169.
[27] Quoted in Joseph M. Griska, 'Two New Joel Chandler Harris Reviews of Mark Twain', *American Literature*, 48. 4 (1977), 584–589 (p. 589) <www.jstor.org/stable/2925222 >.
[28] Ibid, p. 589.

> unblushingly allude to ourselves as the pinks of chivalry and our neighbours as the sons and daughters of every mean and unworthy impulse. In short, we have gushed until the general effect of so much gush has reacted upon us [....] [T]he stuff we are in the habit of calling Southern literature is not only a burlesque upon true literary art, but a humiliation and a disgrace to the people whose culture it is supposed to represent.[29]

In this criticism, Harris claims that Southern realist literature is a sham, the implication being that Twain's irreverent satire in *Huck Finn* is the true art form, which paradoxically creates a more realistic depiction of Southern life. However, African American poet and literary critic Sterling Brown later questioned Harris' racial credentials, calling Uncle Remus a defender of the Lost Cause "Uncle Remus [was] the mouthpiece for defending the orthodox Southern attitudes […] He admires his white folks, and he satirises education for Negroes."[30] This conclusion does not take account of Harris' condemnation of the partisan nature of Southern plantation literature, as well as his portrayal of interracial respect in his novel *Gabriel Tolliver: A Story of Reconstruction* (1902). This multi-vocal response to Reconstruction depicts immigrant Northerners provoking division between, and within, racial groups in the South to consolidate political power in the South. The political stirring jeopardised deep-rooted interracial intimacies that Harris draws upon in *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*, which resonate with the cross-racial relationship forged between Huck and Jim as depicted in

[29] Joel Chandler Harris, 'Literature in the South', *Atlanta Constitution*, 30 November 1879, quoted in William R. Bell, 'Southern Ambivalence: The Relationship of Mark Twain and Joel Chandler Harris' (Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects. Paper 1539625262,1984), pp. 43-44.
[30] Quoted in Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Stony the Road, Reconstruction, White Supremacy and the Rise of Jim Crow* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), p. 96.

Huckleberry Finn.[31] The dialect, folklore, and old plantation life that Harris depicts does not suggest that the system of slavery was condoned by Harris prior to emancipation, only that interracial dealings in the South were complex and blurred across the colour line in the antebellum era.

Author and journalist Joel Chandler Harris (1848-1908) was born in extreme poverty in Putnam County, Georgia. He was an illegitimate white Southerner who suffered from extreme shyness in his early life, with his biographer, R Bruce Bickley Jr suggesting that Harris's writings were a means of getting to grips with his complex and contradictory identity. Chandler Harris developed a lifelong friendship with animals, with his early life spent listening to the folk stories of the black plantation workers, which he learned and loved, and which he transmitted through his writings.[32]

For instance, The 'Brer Rabbit' tales are allegories about more than subverting authority through the power of revered hierarchies, but also tapping into timeless folk memories that resonate across the world which, according to Rev George Leonard Clancy, a Unitarian Minister from Boston ('Negro Folk Lore', *New York Times*, December 1,1880), transmit an

[31] Joel Chandler Harris, *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings* (London: Penguin Classics, 1982).
Joel Chandler Harris, *Gabriel Tolliver A Story of Reconstruction*, (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1902), chapter 13
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/33058/33058-h/33058-h.htm>.
[32] R Bruce Bickley Jr, *Joel Chandler Harris* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1987), p. 23
< urn:lcp:joelchandlerharr0000bick:lcpdf:dce47fc6-9de5-4f5d-b3ff-4d63f419679e>.

underground code of survival.[33] Chaney praised Harris for turning "a sudden side-light upon negro character which those who have to deal with it will do well to remember."[34] Harris aspired to a colour blindness vocalised by Uncle Remus who, when the little boy who asks whether the man in the story is black or white, replies "I'm des tellin' you de tale, en you kin take de man en w'itewash 'im, er you kin black 'im up des ez you please. Dat's de way I look at it."[35] In other words, for Chandler there is no normative whiteness as whites are whitewashed and blacks are 'blacked up.'

In a letter to Francis J Garrison, son of Northern abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison, Harris claims that he uses indirection in the *Uncle Remus* stories as a masking device to elude violent racist reaction from the South, a deflective framing ploy aligned with the narrative style of *Huckleberry Finn* and the minstrel stage songs and burlesques. Harris attributed the widespread popularity of the *Uncle Remus* tales to the power of the stories, regarding himself as merely the compiler. However, Twain insisted in a letter to Harris that the artistry of creating Uncle Remus as narrator and the child audience made Harris more than a chronicler:

> You […] argue *yourself* into the delusion that the principle of life is in the stories themselves and not in their setting […] In reality, the stories

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[33] Jennifer Ritterhouse, 'Reading, Intimacy, and the Role of Uncle Remus in White Southern Social Memory', *The Journal of Southern History*, 69. 3 (2003), 585–622, (p. 607) <www.jstor.org/stable/30040011>.

[34] Wallace P Reed, 'Joel Chandler Harris', *Literature: A Weekly Magazine*, October 27,1888, pp.430-431(p.431).

[35] Joel Chandler Harris, 'The Adventures of Simon and Susanna', *Complete Tales,* 459, quoted in Wayne Mixon, 'The Irrelevance of Race: Joel Chandler Harris and Uncle Remus in Their Time', *Journal of Southern History,* 56.3 (1990), 457-480 (p, 479) <https://doi.org/10.2307/2210286>.

> are only the alligator pears [avocados] – one merely eats them for the sake of the salad dressing. Uncle Remus is deftly drawn…he and the little boy, and their relations with each other, are high and fine literature and worthy to live for their own sakes […][36]

Rather than imitation and theft of African American material the framing device and masking, according to Twain, creates a work of original and humorous storytelling contributing to and enriching the mainstream cultural identity of America. Twain indulged in blackface performance himself. This is noted in a letter to his friend William Dean Howells, dated 27 February 1881, where he writes that he did a reading in Twitchell's chapel on Friday evening which included Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus's 'Tar Baby'. Twain writes that in the African Church on the 10 March, "I mean to try that on my dusky audience. They all heard that tale from childhood – at least the older members have." Presumably Twain would take on the role of Uncle Remus, effectively wearing a blackface mask to narrate the stories of the classic folklore trickster to a black audience, a tale that humorously sympathises with the wily underdog to outwit white hierarchical expectations.[37] In 1894, ten years after his last correspondence with Joel Chandler Harris, Twain was still enthralled with Uncle Remus. He attended a masked ball in Paris dressed as the black storyteller, his blackface impersonation demonstrating a kinship with Harris's original re-telling of black folk heritage through a fully-developed vernacular frame.[38] Inspired

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[36] Mark Twain letter to Joel Chandler Harris in *Atlanta*, Aug 10, 1881, quoted in G C Bellamy, *Mark Twain as a Literary Artist* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), p.149.
[37] *The Complete Letters of Mark Twain*, (Throne Classics, 2002), p. 443.
[38] A. Gribben, (1980) *Mark Twain's Library: A Reconstruction* (Boston, G K Hall,1980), p. 296, quoted in William R Bell, 'Southern Ambivalence: The

by the originality and effectiveness of the indirection and framing in *Uncle Remus*, Twain extends this minstrel style of narrative masking into *Huckleberry Finn.*

While undoubtedly reflecting the racial thought of their times, Mark Twain and Joel Chandler Harris can also be seen to unsettle racial delineations based on skin colour. Twain's enjoyment of minstrel performances did not only reiterate racial stereotyping: the ambiguity regarding racial identities in Twain's novels echoes the complex racial performances of the minstrel stage as explored by Eric Lott. According to Lott, the instability of popular culture in America was a site of conflicting interests, appropriations and impersonations that was best expressed by the minstrel shows, which offered a national stage for the conflicts and concerns of people who were affected by the industrialising metropolis.[39] Unlike Twain however, Lott was critical of minstrel commodification of African American culture, which permitted its insertion into an expanding leisure industry, and which Lott links to the economic structure of slavery.[40] Lott accuses Twain of imitating, rather than illuminating, racial ambiguities through his attachment to minstrelsy. However, Twain was drawn to the parodic deflation of an inauthentic American culture that confers an alternative cultural authenticity with which he could identify, and which he could also engage with for financial gain.

Relationship of Mark Twain and Joel Chandler Harris, Dissertations, Theses, and Masters' Projects. Paper 1539625262 (1984), p.39

[39] Eric Lott, *Love and Theft* (1993), p. 91.

[40] Ibid, p. 41.

The evolution of Twain's racial consciousness results from a literary experiment that combines satirical burlesque with heartfelt sentiment to expose the counterfeit nature of the dominant social landscape in *Huckleberry Finn*. The hybrid style resonated with the transition of the minstrel songs from simple rhymes inherited from the oral tradition to the sophisticated cross-cultural blend of folk vernacular and nostalgic melodrama that distort and confuse the borders of class, racial, gender and ethnic identity. To understand the impact of blackface minstrelsy on Twain and American cultural identity, it is necessary to trace its beginnings. Both Stephen Foster, composer of plantation melodies, and Thomas Dartmouth Rice, the original Jim Crow are known to have travelled and performed in the South, with Rice living in Kentucky for three years during the 1820s, where black culture was made available through street theatre, travelling shows, in taverns and on waterfronts.[41] Also, for Americans, the carnival culture from the 1820s meant Mardi Gras in the South, which has been identified as a cultural amalgam of elements. These include – white plantation society winter festivities, black adaptations of African customs, Caribbean revels, and European-American festivities stirred into melting pot of commercial entertainment. The result was folk theatre that was "neither black nor white, sacred nor secular".[42]

By the 1820s this was part of cross-cultural exchanges in the South that T D Rice (Jim Crow) realised he could take to the urban North to make

[41] Dale Cockrell*, Demons of Disorder, Early Blackface Minstrels and their World,* Cambridge: CUP, 1997), pp. 62-3.
[42] Samuel Kinser, *Carnival American Style: Mardi Gras at New Orleans and Mobile* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990), p. 21.

his fortune. Originally the minstrel tunes of Jim Crow were simple, memorable ditties that offered alleged imitations of African American songs and dances from the oral tradition including Jim Crow's signature tune:

> "Turn about an' wheel about an' do jis so,
> An' ebery time I tiun about I jump Jim Crow"[43]

These progressed into simple minstrel melodies in dialect that shaped and reinforced racial stereotypes playing to the preconceptions of the dominant culture, and which placed minstrelsy borrowings at the heart of the construction of racial identity in America. Early songs such as Billy Whitlock's *Miss Lucy Long* was one of the first portrayals of a black woman in a rural setting but with no mention of the plantation reality of slavery:

> Oh! Miss Lucy's teeth is grinning,
> Just like an ear ob corn,
> And her eyes they look so winning
> Oh! would I ne'er been born. [44]

During the 1840s, however, there was a shift in emphasis in the songs affected by the influx of Irish and Scottish immigrants to America, with laments such as *Mary Blane* moving on from the crude rural imagery of the early minstrel melodies to reflect a more diverse cultural environment.[45] The ballad was composed by Francis Germon of the Ethiopian Seranaders. The lyrics related to universal themes of human suffering, focusing on the pain of separation resulting from slavery, which immigrants displaced from their homeland could also identify with. In the song, the Irish sounding Mary

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[43] Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays Popular Song in America* (New York & London: W W Norton, 1983), p. 118.
[44] Ibid, p. 126.
[45] J P Ferrie, *Yankees Now: Immigrants in the Antebellum U S 1840-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

Blane comes from Louisiana but suddenly disappears one dark night:

> I often asked for Mary Blane,
> My massa he did scold,
> And said you saucy nigger boy,
> If you must know, she's sold![46]

This new type of plantation song directly confronts the inhumanity of slavery and loss of family and home, tapping into experiences of cultural displacement that are shared across racial and ethnic divides (depicted in the hugely popular songs of the American songwriter Stephen Foster). Known as "the father of American music", Foster's songs hit a nerve of longing and loss, which increased the popularity of the minstrel shows, conferring national folk-anthem status on *Old Folks at Home*, popularly known as *Swanee River*, with over 130,000 copies of the sheet music sold by November 1854. Foster realised the potential for sentimental songs of separation and loss, which had popular appeal stretching beyond the white distortions of the African American experience, providing subject matter for cultural cohesion, as well as for commercial gain. Foster's songs underwent a transition from popular airs to enduring cultural classics that took him from the minstrel stage into the refined parlours of the American middle class, mirroring Twain's own journey from newspaper reporter and storyteller to an author of literary renown with mass popular appeal.

Through the 1840s and into the 1850s Stephen Foster was a member of the blackface minstrel troupe the Christie Minstrels who played every night consecutively in New York for over five years, with matinees for children and ladies, an indication of the sensational popularity of the

[46] Hamm, *Yesterdays Popular Song in America*, p. 136.

minstrel shows.[47] During this period Foster wrote some of his best-known songs including *Uncle Ned* (1848), a plantation melody that paints an ambiguous picture of an old enslaved African American, which overturns racial preconceptions. The rough racist humour of the opening verse develops with Old Ned emerging as a gentle kind soul, the last verse inferring an interracial relationship that humanises blackness, but which also glosses over concerns related to the racial injustice of slavery:

> When Old Ned dies, Massa take it mighty bad,
> De tears run down like rain,
> Old Missus turn pale and she looked berry sad
> Kase she nebber see Old Ned again.

Foster complicates the racial ambiguity further in *Nelly Was a Lady* (1849), which humanises black experiences using vernacular to portray heartfelt sentiment. This suggests an alternative racial reality to the hackneyed log cabin myths of comical, banjo playing "darkies" promulgated in American literature:

> When I saw Nelly in de morning,
> Smile till she open'd her eyes,
> Seem'd like de light ob day a dawning,
> Just 'fore de sun begin to rise.
>
> Nelly was a lady,
> Last night she died,
> Toll de bell for lubly Nell,
> My dark Virginny bride.[48]

The poignant ballad is designed to tug at the heartstrings of European immigrants displaced from their homeland, and thus, creating sympathy for

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[47] Mechanics Hall, Broadway, *The New York Herald,* 6 April 1851. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030313/1851-04-06/ed-1/seq-3/>.
[48] Hamm, *Yesterdays*, p. 211.

the suffering of the plantation slaves. The 1852 song *Massa in de Cold Ground,* with its suggestion of strong sentimental bonds between master and slave, infers complex social relationships that crossed the racial divide, and which do not conform to simplistic racial caricatures based on skin colour:

> Massa make de darkeys love him
> Cayse he was so kind,
> Now, dey sadly weep above him
> Mourning cayse he leave dem behind.[49]

The sentiments expressed in this song while a sympathetic portrayal of the enslaved, smooths over the realities of being defined as property, which caused the song to fall into disfavour in the mid-twentieth century.[50]

Foster achieved great success by elevating simple minstrel songs into the elegant realms of the parlour, bringing the voices and hardship of the culturally marginalised and displaced to a wider audience. The anthemic fame of his songs helped Foster to become a respected musical composer as noted in a letter to George Christy dated May 25,1852:

> I find that by my best efforts I have done a great deal to build up a taste for the Ethiopian songs among refined people by making the words suitable to their taste, instead of the trashy and really offensive words which belong to some songs of that order. Therefore, I have concluded to reinstate my name on my songs and to pursue the Ethiopian business without fear or shame…[51]

However, the range of competing motives of the minstrel acts in conjunction with Foster's ambition to be taken seriously as a songwriter brushes over the harsh reality of the black slave experience of murder, rape and denial of basic human rights. In his article "Huckleberry Finn and the

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[49] Stephen Foster, 'Plantation Melodies' quoted in Hamm, *Yesterday's Popular Songs*, pp. 211- 212.
[50] Hamm, p. 214.
[51] Stephen Foster letter to George Christy, quoted in Hamm, p. 215.

Minstrel Show", Anthony J Berret contends that when slavery became an explosive issue in the pre-war era of the 1850s, minstrel songs concentrated more on the romantic view of the plantation good life to avoid inflaming sectional conflict, a view shared by Robert Toll in *Blacking Up.* Toll notes that because the minstrel shows did not require consistency, and did not call for anti-slavery action, there was no need to reconcile contradictory feelings about slavery. Thus, even at a time of racial unrest, in order for audiences to be reassured that the enslaved were not their equal, Toll states that "This adult fairy tale was too precious, too badly needed to be discarded or destroyed because of blacks." [52] Berret also claims that, post emancipation, this false image was upheld by the freed Northern dandy Zip Coon who claims he is unhappy having to "keep up de dignity" regretting the life of ease "when massa run de old plantation":

> Long time ago when we hoe de cotton
> Hunt coon and possum by de river bottom,
> Past and gone de happy days – nebber come again![53]

However, these lyrics, and songs such as "We'll All Make a Laugh" with its claims of happy slaves denied nothing except their freedom, is surely ironic:

> Some massas love dar darkies well,
> And gib 'em what dey want –
> Except it is dar freedom-
> And dat I know dey won't;
> Howeber, we am happy,
> and contented whar we am.[54]

[52] Robert C Toll, *Blacking Up, The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth-Century America* (New York: Oxford University Press,1974), p. 86.
[53] 'Old Zip Coon – An Ethiopian Eccentricity in One Scene', in *This Grotesque Essence, Plays from the American Minstrel Stage*, ed. G D Engle (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), pp.51-54 (p. 51).
[54] Stephen Foster, *Minstrel Show Songs*, no.1 *Christy and Wood's New Song Book*, p.43, quoted in Lott, *Love and* Theft (1993), p. 194.

These songs have mixed messages pandering to the fears and needs of Northern white audiences who, though repelled by slavery, are attracted to stylised images of contented banjo playing slaves lazing about on the plantation, if only to salve an uneasy conscience.[55] Even Frederick Douglass gave his blessing to such minstrel songs as "Old Kentucky Home" and "Uncle Ned", claiming in 1855 that they are a stepping stone along the path to promoting racial equality because "they awaken sympathy for the slave in which anti-slavery principles take root and flourish."[56] However, black abolitionist and author Martin Delany is contemptuous of such white representations of the crime of slavery which he holds them responsible for, parodying minstrel songs in his novel *Blake* by removing the linguistic mask of coded pathos. Delany's *Blake or The Huts of America* depicts racial reversal where the "massa" becomes the victim at the hands of the enslaved:

> He will no more tramp on the neck of the slave,
> For he's gone where the slaveholders go!
> Hang up the shovel and the hoe – o–o-o!
> I don't care whether I work or no![57]

The opening line of the verse echoes the rhythm of Shakespeare's "Fear no more the heat of the sun" from *Cymbeline,* particularly the second verse:

> Fear no more the frown o' the great;
> Thou art past the tyrant's stroke;
> Care no more to clothe and eat;

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[55] Berret, p. 47.
[56] Address to Ladies Anti-Slavery Society in 1855 in Rochester, New York quoted in Ken Emerson, *Doo-Dah! Stephen Foster and the Rise of American Popular Culture* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1998), p. 107.
[57] Martin Delany, *Blake or the Huts of America*, ed, by Floyd J Miller (Boston: Beacon Press,1970), p. 105
<urn:oclc:record:1028870512>.

To thee the reed is as the oak: (*Cymbeline*, Act IV. 2)[58]

The sentiments of Shakespeare funeral oration are inverted in *Blake* to celebrate the death of the master, an appropriation of the language of white cultural authority to confer agency and nobility to the slaves newly freed from bondage. While Delany seeks black integrity through separation, this does not preclude racial progress through cross-racial collaboration, which includes the plantation songs, burlesques and the works of Twain and Joel Chandler Harris which, in different ways, also challenge and undermine class and racial oppression of the dominant cultural ideology.

According to Sonnet Retman in the introduction to her book *Real Folks: Race and Genre in the Great Depression,* at times of instability and social crisis, there is a tenuous sense of national identity and a search for authenticity in folk realism, where she claims that clichés of real American folk became a powerful fiction of survival and fighting back.[59] The exaggerated sentiments and ambiguities expressed in the minstrel songs that reflect the impact of racial conflict, are also central to *Huckleberry Finn*. Folk realism as a coping mechanism is self-consciously 'stretched' through the sentimentality of minstrel songs such as Dan Emmet's "I Wish I was in Dixie", which is emulated in the heartfelt sentiment expressed by Jim on the loss of his family in his bid for freedom. Jim's genuine heartbreak is blurred by maudlin melodrama*,* which acts as a defence mechanism that masks, but

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[58] William Shakespeare, 'Cymbeline' in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt.
[59] Sonnet Retman, *Real Folks – Race and Genre in the Great Depression*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), introduction.

also alludes to, a disingenuous reality. However, while acknowledging the socially cohesive role of sentiment to unite disparate ethnic groups, nostalgia also risks becoming a tool for upholding the reactionary values of the cultural mainstream when the ironic mask of satire is removed.

In *Huckleberry Finn*, Jim's heartfelt sentiment over the loss of his wife and children, is recounted by Huck, the tragic repetition of "moaning" and "mourning" with "no mo', no mo' ", depicting an infinite authenticity to Jim's sorrow:

> When I waked up […] he was sitting there with his head betwixt his knees, moaning and mourning to himself […] He was often moaning and mourning that way […] saying 'Po little 'Lizabeth! po little Johnny! It's mighty hard; I spec' I ain't ever gwyne to see you no mo', no mo'![60]

Huck's sympathetic response to Jim's suffering, indicated by the mirrored vernacular, is undermined by Huck's racist assumptions ("and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their'n. It don't seem natural, but I reckon it's so." (HF 172-173)). Huck's racist attitude satirises his youthful ignorance, which assumed white superiority, where slavery was accepted as the natural course, reinforced by the teachings of the Church and State. Back in young Sam Clemens's Hannibal days slavery was acknowledged as "right and righteous" and if anyone advanced the idea of freeing the slaves they were held in abhorrence.[61]

Jim's expression of grief for his family echoes the compassionate nature of Harriet Beecher Stowe's representation of Uncle Tom, which

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[60] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (Penguin Random House UK: Penguin Classics, 2003), pp. 172-3. Future references to text noted parenthetically as HF).
[61] Mark Twain, *A Biography*, 3 vols. ed. by Albert Bigelow Paine, p. 42. <urn:oclc:record:1048776085>.

confers respect to feminine and domestic traits, while acknowledging humanity as not the prerogative of race or class. Jim's heartfelt speech represents a development in Twain's literary journey where the parodic mask slips and genuine sentiment emerges, and where, according to Leland Krauth, "Twain achieves what he sought - and missed - in *Tom Sawyer* and *The Prince and the Pauper*: an authentic language of the heart."[62] Huck's pity for Jim infers a slight awakening of racial consciousness, an interracial empathy for Jim's plight poking through the mask of racist satire.

Validating the sincerity of Jim's emotion, Twain draws a contrast with Emmeline Grangerford's gloomy versifying in her "Ode to Stephen Dowling Bots Dec'd" who died by falling down a well, a minstrel style burlesque of amateur poetry columns popular in nineteenth century American newspapers. Emmeline's verse is suitably melancholic, but the artifice of her anguish is mocked further when she pines away to an early grave because she cannot find anything to rhyme with the name Whistler. Huck in his naivete however, is easily impressed "If Emmeline Grangerford could make poetry like this before she was fourteen there ain't no telling what she could a done by-and-by". He is unable to distinguish between real emotion and contrived sentimentality. [63] In a letter to Mr Burrough an old friend from his days in St Louis, Twain is scathing about corny sentiment posing as the real thing:

> There is one thing I can't stand and won't stand, from many people. That is sham sentimentality - the kind a schoolgirl puts into her graduating composition; the sort that makes up the Original poetry

[62] Krauth, p. 23.
[63] HF, p. 116.

> column of a country newspaper; the rot that deal in the "happy days of yore the "sweet melancholy past" with its blighted hopes and its vanquished dreams" and all that sort of drivel.[64]

Informal poetry was a common feature in nineteenth century newspaper columns, with the *Helena Weekly Herald,* 18 April 1872 reporting that as S T Ringold's "Sonnit (sic) to Violet" was so good, the charge for the contribution in this case will be seven and a half dollars a line, rather than the usual eight dollars because of the unique rhyme of 'heifer' with 'zephyr'.[65] Such artless material masquerading as poetry would have been familiar to nineteenth century readers, providing a rich source for parodic imitation. The contrived rhyme scheme and sombre tone epitomised by Emmeline's ode offer a sharp contrast to Jim's vernacular lament on being separated from his family. In the same letter to Burrough, Twain also clearly associates his youthful self with Huck's contradictory voice of ignorant self-assurance:

> As you describe me I can picture myself as I was twenty years ago…You describe a callow fool, a self-sufficient ass, a mere human tumble-bug…imagining he is re-modelling the world and is entirely capable of doing it right. Ignorance, intolerance, egotism, self-assertion, opaque perception, dense and pitiful chuckle-headedness – and an almost pathetic unconsciousness of it all. That is what I was at 19 and 20; and that is what the average Southerner is at 60 today. Northerners too of a certain grade. It is of children like this that voters are made. And such is the primal source of our government! [66]

Twain's disdain for false sentiment did not apply to the original

[64] Mark Twain, letter to Mr Burrough of St. Louis, Nov. 1, 1876, in Mark Twain, *The Complete Letters of Mark Twain*, Throne Classics, pp. 334-335.
[65] 'So says the Savannah *News*', *Helena Weekly Herald,* MT, 18 April 1872. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84036143/1872-04-18/ed-1/seq-4/>.
[66] Letter to Mr Burrough of St. Louis, Nov. 1, 1876, in *The Complete Letters of Mark Twain,* pp. 333-334.

minstrel shows judging by his frequent attendance during the 1850s in San Francisco, and later in New York and St. Louis, where he reported packed houses every night. He even took his mother and Aunty Betsey to a minstrel show in St. Louis, misleading them into thinking the performers were missionaries, where he reports that there were 1600 people present:

> When the grotesque negroes came filing out on the stage in their extravagant costumes, the old ladies were almost speechless with astonishment. I explained to them that the missionaries always dressed like that in Africa.[67]

His graphic language and sardonic delight at his mother's merry response to the comic fun, in shameless contravention of her religious beliefs, reveals his disdain for his mother's racial indoctrination by the slave-supporting Church. The old ladies once comforted by seeing that the best people in St. Louis were present found that "their consciences [...] quiet now, quiet enough to be dead." [68] In his article on the racial unconscious of blackface minstrelsy Eric Lott perceives oedipal hostility in Twain's interest in minstrelsy. Twain took his mother to a minstrel show to revel in the social transgression made possible by the racialised mask, as referenced in songs such as *Lubly Fan* (1844) based on the traditional *Buffalo Gals* but with more suggestive lyrics:

> Den Lubly Fan will you cum out tonight,
> Will you cum out tonight,
> …………..
> Her lips are like de oyster plant,
> De oyster plant,
> De oyster palnt,
> I try to kiss dem but I can't,

[67] Ibid, p. 82.
[68] Quoted in Eric Lott, 'Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy', *Representations*, 39 (1992), 23–50 (p. 31).

Dey am so berry large.[69]

This minstrel song is sung by Jim in chapter two of *Tom Sawyer* as Tom paints his aunt's fence. The juxtaposition of Tom's whitewashing and Jim's song alludes to the transgressive threat to social order posed by independent women and blackness, the scene mimicking racial and gender anxieties outrageously mocked on the minstrel stage. While the minstrel shows may have roused anti-authoritarian sentiments connected to his strict religious upbringing, Twain's attraction to breaking boundaries is evident from his early experience as a newspaper sketch writer in Nevada where he indulged in caricature to provoke bourgeois outrage and attack municipal corruption. In May 1864 he took this irreverence too far in an article which suggested that the U S Sanitary Commission (the Civil War equivalent of the Red Cross) should donate funds to "aid a Miscegenation Society somewhere in the East". As a result, Twain was forced to apologise, the threat of facing a duel prompting him to hot foot to California.[70]

Twain clearly identifies with the multiple and ambiguous voices of minstrelsy. He began many of his lectures with "The Trouble begins at Eight" as a tribute to the San Francisco Minstrels who used the same catch phrase to open their own shows. The San Francisco troupe regularly ended their performance with a 'plantation' song by Frank Howard called *Pass down de Centre* (1879) that begins in the traditional manner of Southern myth

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[69] Damon S Foster, comp., *Series of Old American Songs,* (Providence, RI, 1936), no. 39, quoted in Eric Lott, 'Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy', p. 32.

[70] Arthur Pettit, 'Twain's Attitude toward the Negro in the West, 1861-1867.' *The Western Historical Quarterly*, 1.1 (1970), 51–62 (p. 57).

building “Trab’ling ‘twards de balmy skies” of “Alabam”, but strikes a darker note with times are hard for “de darkie” way down in Tennessee because of “Mister Ku-klux”, which disrupts the complacent stereotype of slave nostalgia with darker notes of Confederate violence and oppression. Careful not to let the satirical mask slip too far into the realm of racial controversy, the song continues in a haze of lost love and electioneering that precludes any partisan political interpretation, or risk of being taken too seriously. Blackface singer and songwriter Frank Howard (1823-1884) performed with several minstrel troupes including Dumbolton’s Ethiopian Seranaders and Thatcher Primrose and West’s Minstrels. He composed a range of sentimental material as well as songs about poverty, women’s rights, temperance, and slavery. The songs punctuated the raucous blend of banter and burlesques allowing brief glimpses of political comment to emerge amid the noise of cultural preconceptions and commercial interests.[71] This mix of sentiment and satirical masking is reflected in *Huckleberry Finn* where radical indictments of slavery, exposed by Jim’s heartache over the loss of his family, are also quickly defused and deflected by burlesque imitation in the form of Emmeline’s poems for dead strangers. The juxtaposition of genuine and contrived sorrow distorts conceptions of reality and performance to reveal the contrived nature of race, gender and class divisions. While blackface minstrelsy is not genuine African American

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[71] Sharon D McCoy, ‘’The Trouble Begins at Eight’: Mark Twain, the San Francisco Minstrels, and the Unsettling Legacy of Blackface Minstrelsy’, *American Literary Realism*, 41. 3 (2009), 232–48. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27747332>.

culture, it is a genuine form of counterfeit that uses the racialised mask to comment ambiguously on a range of social issues from political corruption, high and low culture, the economy, racial discrimination, and slavery. Twain acknowledges the politically motivated role of social boundaries using Huck's voice of racial conformity as a mask to probe contradictory and changing attitudes to social reform affected by Reconstruction. The changeable dynamic in the relationship between Huck and Jim, and the genuine, though inconsistent, alliance that develops between them, as well as blurring class and race lines, adds another dimension to the political and social satire through the interwoven pathos that colours the complex post-Reconstruction landscape of racially charged political and moral expediency.

The bloodshed and violence marking Huck's escape from his white racist Pap by staging his death through the gruesome slaughter of a pig symbolises his desperation to break away from the chauvinistic jurisdiction of Judge Thacker and the religious zeal of Widow Douglas and Miss Watson. The dead carcass of the pig dumped in the river symbolises the old, repressed Huck, which he knows they will get tired of searching for. (HF 39-40) Huck "lights out" down the river, his expression inferring a journey and the darkness of the unknown. The phrase "lights out" also signals the beginning of a theatrical performance where an alternative reality to the dominant cultural ideology can be re-imagined, as on the minstrel stage.

4.2.1. The Racial Significance of Blackface Minstrelsy in *Huckleberry Finn*

This next section illuminates Twain's respect for, and engagement with, blackface minstrelsy's use of satire and vernacular language to contest and re-configure the racial assumptions of white cultural hegemony. The adoption of the racialised mask to explore a range of taboo and socially disruptive issues influenced the novels of Mark Twain, particularly apparent in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* As with the minstrel shows*, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is irreverently provocative, parodying aspects of Southern American life from civilisin' religious conformity to Pap's backwoodsman bigotry, from the Shakespearian theatricals of the duke and king to the fanatical vengeance of the feuding families, and from the entitled racism of the Southern planters to Huck's evolving awareness of class and racial injustice. The first-person narrative and the shared vernacular confer prestige on marginal voices previously disregarded and unheard.

The indebtedness of *Huckleberry Finn* to blackface minstrel burlesque is evident from the three-part structure of the novel, which follows the same pattern as the minstrel shows but with some variations. According to minstrelsy scholar Anthony Berret, the first part (chapters one to eighteen) resembles the dialogue and banter between the belligerent endmen Tambo and Bones played by Huck and Jim who represent the views of the lowbrow classes. However, this gradually shifts, with the role of the interlocutor, who

acts as the balancing voice of social order, fluctuating inconclusively between Huck and Jim, which varies the degree of empathy and identification for their positions. Such instability upholds and unsettles the authority of the Church and State, emulating the comic confusion allowed free reign under the cover of the minstrel stage mask.

The Grangerford-Shepherdson feud resonates with the gang warfare between the Montagues and Capulets in *Romeo and Juliet*, the melodramatic shoot-out between the rival families a tragicomic burlesque, which the Shakespearian roleplay of the carpetbagging thespians, the Duke and the King, also engage with. The interplay of the deadly serious and the seriously pretentious through the appropriation of Shakespeare blurs the class divide satirising the fragile and fluctuating line that separates fact and fiction in life and in art. Anthony Berret suggests that the gunfight between the rivalling families acts as a tragic counterpart to the group dance that ended this part of the minstrel shows signifying a change of tone from the comic hostility of the duelling banter. [72]

The second part in chapters nineteen to thirty-one aligns with the olio of variety acts signalled by the theatrical posturing of the king and the duke, a pair of aristocratic imposters who perform novelty acts ranging from stump speeches and faith healing to motley Shakespeare orations and slapstick. Their counterfeit is a reflection of social fragmentation aligned with the rise of vaudeville acts degrading the authentic parody of the

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[72] Anthony J Berret, '*Huckleberry Finn* and the Minstrel Show.' *American Studies*, 27. 2 (1986), 37–49
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40642029>.

original minstrel shows. Chapters thirty-two onwards, which corresponds to Jim's evasion debacle, comprise a one act travesty of some popular highbrow literature or opera, set incongruously on a plantation, juxtaposed with some serious sentiment. Influenced by the irreverence of minstrel stage masquerades to disrupt and satirise complex racial and social anxieties, Twain adapts the style in *Huckleberry Finn* in response to the threat to democracy following the end of Reconstruction. The ironic wit of the final chapters, that harks back to a chivalric past based on Alexandre Dumas's *The Man in the Iron Mask* and *The Count of Monte Christo*, alludes to the resurgence of white hegemony in the South. The inferred racist brutality of the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* is obscured by theatrical clannish mythology, a presage of the newly formed post-Reconstruction Ku Klux Klan, who ironically also relied on theatrical spectacle to disguise their violent racist activities.

Tom Sawyer's appropriated masquerade in *Huckleberry Finn* symbolises the ending of the original minstrel shows bemoaned by Twain, which were replaced by spinoffs and thefts that promoted reactionary political views. This included distorted versions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, known as "Tom shows", which amounted to pro-slavery propaganda, which played down the feminist and religious aspects of Stowe's novel. [73] In a letter to his friend Rev Joe Twitchell, dated March 14, 1905, Twain attributed the cultural degradation to America's devotion to materialism:

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[73] Jane Ford, 'The Story of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* Spread from Novel to Theatre and Screen', *UVA Today*, November 12, 2012 <https://news.virginia.edu/content/story-uncle-tom-s-cabin-spread-novel-theater-and-screen>.

> All Europe and all America, are feverishly scrambling for money. Money is the supreme ideal – all others take tenth place with the great bulk of the nations named. Money lust has always existed, but not in the history of the world was it ever a craze, a madness until you time and mine. This lust has rotted these nations; it has made them hard sordid, ungentle, dishonest, oppressive. [74]

By the end of the century materialism overrides moral integrity and democratic principles, which, for Twain, was the nail in the coffin for the irreverent minstrel shows he once loved. He noted wryly in his autobiography that he would have little use for opera if the original minstrel shows came back again:

> The minstrel show was born in the early 40s, and it had a prosperous career for about thirty-five years; then it degenerated into a variety show […] The real negro show has been stone dead for thirty years. To my mind it was a thoroughly delightful thing […] and I am sorry it is gone. [75]

The corrupting influence of social status measured in terms of inherited wealth and whiteness is also depicted through masked satire in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* where it pervades and crosses class and racial boundaries leading to criminality, family breakdown and marginal voices detached from sources of wealth and power. Roxy's son Tom is sold down the river indicating a return to the inhumane abuses of slavery, while Valet de Chambre cannot adjust to his white heritage, preferring the comfort of the slave quarters, and Pudd'nhead becomes the instrument of restoration of white law and order. The confused ending infers that upbringing more than inheritance determines class and racial identity subject to the corrupting influence of money and status integral to the process of nation

[74] *The Complete Letters of Mark Twain Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 842.
[75] *The Autobiography of Mark Twain,* ed. by Charles Neider (New York: Perennial Classics, Harper Collins, 1990), p.80.

building. Twain's cynicism is captured in an aphorism that appears both in a letter that he wrote to his friend Rev Twitchell, and in the novel *Pudd'nhead Wilson*: "When a man is a pessimist before 48 he knows too much; if he is an optimist after it, he knows too little."[76]

For Twain, blackface minstrelsy - with its stock characters, stump speeches, burlesques, and sentimental songs - provides a template for social comment with the counterfeit jesters Jim Crow and Zip Coon acting as satirical delegates for the conflicting ambitions of an emerging urbanised population. The blackface disguise racialises the satirical mask targeting the most contentious aspect of American political life. However, the contradictory disorder revels in stirring up all kinds of trouble, not necessarily connected to race, offending everyone in the manner of Twain's own mischievous style. 'Pudd'nhead Wilson's New Calendar', from which a maxim appears as the epigraph to each chapter of Twain's *Following the Equator* (1897), sardonically includes the following "It could probably be shown by facts and figures that there is no distinctly native American criminal class except Congress." [77] Twain's scorn for white authority echoes the San Francisco minstrel Charley Bachus (1831-1883) who when asked if he would like to run for Congress, with cynical irreverence, replied "I only have to play the fool a few hours on the stage, at night; but in Congress, I'd

[76] *The Complete Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 840.
[77] Mark Twain, *Following the Equator* (Hartford CT, American Publishing, 1897)
<urn:oclc:record:1045529749>.

have to play that role all the time.” [78] Minstrelsy disdain for Congress was also signalled by the San Francisco troupe’s catch phrase “The Trouble starts at Eight” which resonates with Thomas Nast’s cartoon published in *Harper’s Weekly* (Feb 27, 1875) entitled “The Trouble has Commenced”. The cartoon lampoons Civil Rights legislation, a reference to Congress chicanery, the blend of sources alerting audiences to the masked social commentary obscured by the blend of satire and sentiment performed on the minstrel stage.

Disguised in blackface, it could be assumed that the ragged minstrels would support the rights of the socially oppressed, and thus side with the Whigs. However, Jim in the song “Jump Jim Crow” proves to be a poetic charlatan. In one verse he endorses the slaveholding man of the people, Southern Democrat Andrew Jackson for President:

> Wid Jackson at de head
> Dey soon dis ting may settle
> For ol Hickory is a man
> Dat’s tarnal full of mettle.[79]

Then with equal fervour, Jim wheels about, and turns about, and jumps on the Union bandwagon in favour of democracy and racial solidarity:

> I’m for freedom,
> An for Union altogeder,
> Although I’m a brack man,
> De white is called my broder.[80]

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[78] *After-Dinner Stories*, ed. by Paul E, Lowe (Philadelphia: David McKay,1916), quoted in Sharon McCoy ‘Politics, Mark Twain and Blackface’ *Humor in America*, Oct 24, 2011 <https://humorinamerica.wordpress.com/2011/10/24/politics-mark-twain-and-blackface/>.

[79] W T Lhamon, Jr., *Jump Jim Crow, Lost Plays, Lyrics and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 110.

The folk songs of Jim Crow were a tongue in cheek amalgamation of conflicting and disingenuous perspectives using gross caricature to ridicule duplicitous attitudes to cultural identity and social order. Consequently, Jim Crow even suggests that one day smooth-talking cultural renegade Zip Coon could be President and Crockett be the Vice, because after all he sings, if Ol' Hickory could get elected to the White House, then why not President "Coon"?:

> Now mind what you arter, you tarnel kritter Crockett,
> You shant go head without old Zip,
> He is de boy to block it.
> Zip shall be President, Crockett shall be vice,
> And den dey two together, will hab de things nice.[81]

The popularity and social relevance of minstrel humour raised awareness of the contribution of marginal American groups to a national cultural identity, a shift which unsettled moral and racial boundaries.

Huckleberry Finn borrows from the ambiguity of the minstrel show format to characterise the racial anxieties of a nation destabilised by competing economic and ethnic interests that threaten to divide the Union. Huck and Jim play the roles of the ragged low class endmen Tambo and Bones, but when Huck assumes the part of the interlocutor, he has neither the education nor the experience to carry off his assumed position of superiority. Huck resorts to a racist invective when Jim has the final word in their banter about speaking in a foreign language "I see it warn't no use wasting words – you can't learn a nigger to argue. So I quit." (HF 90) The

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[80] Ibid, p. 111.
[81] J W Finson, *The Voices that are Gone – Themes in Nineteenth Century Popular Song* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 171.

bitter irony of Huck's language here signals the dependence of white authority on racist abuse as a tool of social oppression.

Twain indebtedness to minstrel repartee is indicated in chapters one to nineteen of *Huckleberry Finn* where there are many examples of exchanges between Huck and Jim that have a similar rhythm and tone to "Ethiopian sketches" such as *Bones in Love* by J Harry Carleton. Audience sympathy aligns with the comic endmen when they outsmart the interlocutor. However, this switches sides to the superior social status of the middleman in order to dissociate themselves from the low-class fools, thus revealing the fickle and contradictory nature of cultural identification where upward mobility vies with an egalitarian republicanism:

> *Interlocutor.* I say, Bones, were you ever in love?
> *Bones.* I wasn't nothin' else, old hoss.
> *Interlocutor.* What kind of a girl was she?
> *Bones.* She was highly polished; yes, indeed. Her fadder was a varnish-maker, and, what's better still, she was devoted to her own sweet Pomp.
> *Interlocutor.* What do you mean by that? She must have been a spicy girl.
> *Bones.* Yes, dat's de reason she was so fond of me. She was a poickess, too.
> *Interlocutor.* A poetess, you mean.
> *Bones.* Yes, she used to write verses for de newspapers
> *Interlocutor.* Is that so, Bones?[82]

Due to the popularity of the minstrel shows, American audiences would have been familiar with this type of comic double act where the puns and quick wit of Bones casts doubt on the stereotype of the minstrel fool, while simultaneously poking fun at the airs of the superior straight man as the voice of white privilege. While there is a clear difference between the

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[82] J Harry Carleton, *Bones in Love* <http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/huckfinn/minstrl.html>.

voices of the protagonists in the minstrel stage banter, the distinction between Huck's Southern dialect and Jim's broad vernacular is not so clear-cut. Language is used to blur their class and racial differences. Nevertheless, because of racial conditioning and because he has read some books, Huck considers himself superior to Jim, but his false airs result in increased sympathy for his racial companion on the part of the novel's readers.

The repartee between Huck and Jim continues, both confirming and unsettling racial stereotypes, shifting and rebalancing their interracial relationship. Thus, in an early discourse concerning how to get rich through "'specalat'n'" Huck engages in a call and response routine with Jim, where he takes on the role of detached interlocutor, while Jim's conviction about being rich if you have hairy legs and breast perpetuates the racial stereotype of Jim as a superstitious fool:

> [Huck] "Have you got hairy arms and a hairy breast, Jim?
> [Jim] "What's de use to ax dat question? don't you see I has?"
> [Huck] "Well, are you rich?"
> [Jim] "No, but I ben rich wunst, and gwyne to be rich agin."
> Wunst I had foteen dollars, but I tuck to speclat'n', en got busted out."
> [Huck] "What did you speculate in Jim?"
> [Jim] "Well, fust I tackled stock."
> [Huck] "What kind of stock?"
> [Jim] "Why, live stock. Cattle, you know. I put ten dollars in a cow. But I ain' gwyne to resk no mo' money in stock. De cow up 'n'died on my han's." [83]

The gap between Huck's language and Jim's patois which, combined with Jim comic assumption that stock means livestock, and not business investment, draws attention to the class and race disparity between the raft companions, while also making veiled allusions to Jim's own status as

[83] HF, p. 53.

“livestock”. Jim’s ignorance of money crops up again later in the discourse when he dreams that he should give his last ten cents to another slave named Balum to invest for him. In church Balum hears the preacher say, “whoever give to de po’ len’ to de Lord, en boun’ to git his money back a hund’d times.”, so he gives the money to the poor. The disparity between the Church’s metaphorical meaning and a literal interpretation of investment invites an ambiguous response of hilarity and sympathy for Jim’s plight, especially when he pronounces himself already rich because “… I owns myself, en I’s wuth eight hundred dollars”, I wisht I had de money, I wouldn’ want no mo.’” (HF 54). The comic naivety of Jim’s rational interpretation of his monetary worth also creates sympathy for Jim’s delusion at the mercy of the united power of the Church and those who speculate in human livestock, a collusion of spiritual and secular interests involved in exploiting Jim’s status as property. Twain’s indictment of the system of slavery at its most powerful here is cloaked beneath a mask of ironic comic banter.

While at first the exchanges between Huck and Jim conform to the minstrel burlesque pattern of clearly defined interlocutor and endman, this is less evident in later interactions as their cultural and racial perspectives evolve and overlap, becoming less constrained by social convention. Consequently, in their discourse concerning King Sollermun, while they speak at cross-purposes signifying their racial and social differences, Huck is now unable to assert his civilized interlocutor authority in the face of Jim’s practical reasoning. The disparity in their views on the wisdom of Sollermun is emphasised by Jim’s dialect clashing with the weight of Huck’s Sunday

school expertise concerning the life of kings "of course they just set around. Except maybe when there's a war […] But other times they just lazy around; or go hawking […] and if everybody don't go just so he whacks their head off. But mostly they hang around the harem." (HF 87) Jim's only experience of kings is from a pack of cards, so he is unable to refute Huck's greater knowledge gained from his religious education. However, despite caricature as the uneducated fool, reader sympathy is shifted towards Jim for his humanitarian reaction to the callous way King Sollermun treats his "five million children", his experience of life associating it with the way plantation owners break up families and mistreat their slaves. Huck can only respond by putting Jim down "But hang it, Jim you've clean missed the point – blame it, you've missed it a thousand mile." But Huck's defence of school and Church indoctrination is swept aside by Jim's outraged sense of morality:

> "Doan' talk to me 'bout yo' pints… It lays in de way Sollermun was raised. You take a man dat's got on'y one er two chillen; is dat man gwyne to be wateful o' chillen? No he ain't; he can't afford it…But you take a man dat's got five million chillen runnin' roun' de house, en it's diffunt. *He* as soon chop a chile in two as a cat. Dey's plenty mo'. A chile er two, mo'er less, warn't no consekens to Sollermun, dad fetch him!"[84]

Jim's indictment of upbringing as responsible for inhumane behaviour alludes to the controversy over the role of social conditioning and training in establishing identity, as opposed to heredity. Through slanted interpretations of biblical texts, the King Sollermun discourse satires the uncertainty of establishing racial heritage upon which Southern landowners justify the perpetuation of slavery. Ironically, however, Jim does miss the point because the parable of King Solomon is not to cut the infant in half

[84] HF, p. 88.

literally, but merely to determine the parentage of the child by proposing such an outrageous solution. Huck's religious education is not sufficient to counter Jim's literal interpretation which is based on the agonising experience of children separated from their parents under the laws of slavery.[85] While Jim argues rationally and from experience, Huck falls back on religious dogma to support his case "Well, but he *was* the wisest man, anyway; because the widow she told me so, her own self." Because Jim refuses to back down, Huck again resorts to linguistic oppression in the form of a racist slur to assert his assumed pre-eminence in an ongoing battle for racial dominance "I never see such a nigger. If he got a notion in his head once, there warn't no getting it out again. He was the most down on Solomon [...] So I went to talking about other kings, and let Solomon slide."(HF 87-88) Their discourse anticipates Huck and Jim's later encounter with the pseudo-royal thespians, the king and the duke, who use their bogus and worldly experience to take advantage of the impressionable Southern outcasts, with Huck and Jim both playing the role of endmen to the imposter interlocutors who represent the artifice of the post-bellum social order.

In the same way that the unsophisticated and clownish Jim Crow caricatures black foolishness, so the naïve and inexperienced Huck voices the prejudiced values of a slave-holding nation. This does not mean that the blackface minstrels or Twain condone or endorse these attitudes, it is rather a means of playing havoc with constructed concepts of identity based on

[85] Such a situation is depicted in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* when Eliza becomes a fugitive escaping with her young son when she discovers he has been sold to the slave trader.

race, class, and ethnic difference, while also acting as a mirror for the disingenuous nature of white American attitudes to democracy and civilisation. As their river journey detached from civilisation continues, the comic nature of the repartee between the fugitives takes on a different tone when Huck's attempt to fool Jim backfires. Following a storm on the river when Huck and Jim become separated, Huck plays on Jim's gullibility and tries to fool him into thinking it was all a dream. When Jim discovers Huck's trick, racial hierarchies become blurred because comic jesting has become sullied by cruel deception, with Huck made to look foolish and mean at Jim's expense. Jim emerges from behind the minstrel mask to express his sorrow at Huck's mischief:

> "When I got all wore out wid work, en wid callin' for you enwent to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bejase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no mo' what become we me en de raf'…En all you wuz thinkin' bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie!"[86]

In a reversal of racial hierarchy Huck feels compelled to demean himself and apologise so that it "was fifteen minutes before I could work myself to go and humble myself to a nigger – but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither."(HF 97) Vestiges of Huck's assumptions of white chauvinism are signalled by the racist epithet, but his awareness of Jim's compassion begins to bridge the racial divide between the river compatriots. This process is mirrored in the following chapter when Huck tells lies again, but this time Huck's racial conditioning is conflicted by an emerging moral integrity. When asked by the slave catchers if the man on the raft is black Huck hesitates:

[86] HF, pp. 96-97.

> "I didn't answer up prompt…but I warn't man enough – hadn't the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening; so I just give up trying, and up and says –
> He's white."[87]

The whole expectation of Huck's speech is that he will buckle under the pressure of racial expectation and 'stay white', but in a coup de theatre Huck 'turns black' telling a lie to align himself with Jim and frustrate the interests of the white agents of racial oppression. In a racially corrupt landscape, the distinction between truth and lies becomes open to interpretation, a paradox exaggerated on the minstrel stage that confers authority to counterfeit performances as an alternative form of cultural authenticity. Huck's racial preconceptions are undermined through a raised awareness of character beyond colour, which opens Huck's eyes and heart to an alternative moral code to that decreed by white authority:

> I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right…then I thought a minute, and says to myself hold on, - s'pose you'd a done right and give Jim up; would you felt better than you do now? No says I, I'd feel bad…Well, then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right, when it's troublesome to do right and it ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck…but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time.[88]

The exchanges at Jim's expense both ridicule and sympathise with his racial vulnerability, an ambiguity echoed in the minstrel songs through their plaintive melodies interwoven with caricatures of happy go lucky slaves, the racialised mask of the minstrel shows providing a focus for alternative understandings and social comment.

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[87] HF, p. 101.
[88] HF, p. 103.

While critics Fredrick Woodward and Donnarae MacCann acknowledge the minstrel underpinning of Twain's novel, they see Jim typecast as the minstrel "darky", arguing that Jim's comment "I awluz liked dead people, en done all I could for 'em" (HF 48) reinforces racist caricature, a feature of the fixed agenda of the minstrel shows, which they claim is not translatable to other times:

> Even as one examines the minstrel-like scenes for evidence that Jim may be acting the role of the trickster…the lingering effect of minstrelsy provides the frame of reference through which judgement of character is made.[89]

This interpretation fails to acknowledge minstrelsy's resonance with the enduring folk tradition of carnival misrule at risk of being erased by the dominant realism of the novel form. The mask acts as a safety device where a range of perspectives can be performed to re-imagine and re-order the class and racial alliances of the dominant American cultural idiom. This strategy of a story within a story transfers the *Uncle Remus* folktales and the minstrel songs and dances beyond the realm of the plantation, a metadrama strategy also embedded within Shakespeare plays to transmit a universal relevance beyond a specific time and space, which can penetrate beyond constructed class and racial borders. The handkerchief in Shakespeare's *Othello* carries similar superstitious significance, a family heirloom from an ancient culture whose symbolic folk meaning is abused by Iago as the self-appointed enforcer of white hegemony because he feels threatened by

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[89] Fredrick Woodward & Donnarae MacCann, 'Minstrel Shackles and Nineteenth Century "Liberality" in *Huckleberry Finn'*, in *Satire and Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn,* ed. by J S Leonard, T A Tenney & T M Davis (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2007), 141-153 (p. 143).

Othello and Desdemona's interracial marriage. Thus, the classic negative stereotyping of black inferiority related to superstition, to which Jim shows a propensity, can be linked to carrying the torch for a subliminal folk heritage, its spiritual value denigrated by the religious teachings of the Bible to ensure the unrivalled authority of Church and State power.

Jim is not constrained by the role of the "minstrel darky" as suggested by Woodward and McCann, rather his double consciousness plays up to the racial role assigned to him to take advantage of white condescension. In *Huckleberry Finn* Twain acknowledges, but then subverts Jim's vulnerability to "superstitiousness" in his tales of being "bewitched by witches" where the stories are embellished for entertainment and profit:

> Niggers would come from all around there and give Jim anything they had just for a sight of that five-center piece; but they wouldn't touch it, because the devil had had his hand on it.[90]

Huck is disgusted by Jim's narrative dominance complaining that it overturns the natural social order "Jim was most ruined, for a servant, because he got so stuck up on account of having seen the devil and been rode by witches." (HF 9). Jim turns Tom and Huck's ploy to humiliate him to his own advantage, the competing economic and racial undercurrents at play resonating with the ambiguous elements in the Jim Crow's songs and the minstrel burlesques. The white pranksters become the butt of their own trick outsmarted by Jim's double consciousness, echoing the way in which minstrelsy audiences were duped by their racist preconceptions through collusion with the exaggerated performances of ethnic and racial caricatures.

[90] HF p. 9.

While there are strong indications that minstrel patterning was fundamental to the structure of *Huckleberry Finn*, in her book *Was Huck Black?,* Shelley Fisher-Fishkin suggests that there were other influences within the novel derived from the African-American oral tradition that give a different interpretation to Jim's discourse. According to Fishkin, Twain was familiar with African American tales about ghosts and witch riding, derived from the African oral tradition and used by white masters to discourage night travel and escape attempts, which influence Twain's depiction of Jim. Fishkin and author Sterling Stuckey, link Jim's assertion "I awluz liked dead people, en done all I could for 'em" (HF 48) with African religious traditions of being on good terms with the ancestral spirits, of significant concern for all African slaves everywhere.[91] However, Jim melodramatically exaggerates these tales in *Huckleberry Finn* for comic effect and commercial gain, thus in typical minstrel style, confounds racist stereotyping. Twain's satirical method of overturning racial expectations is also noted by David L Smith:

> Twain adopts a strategy of subversion in his attack on race. That is he fixes on a number of commonplaces associated with "the Negro" and then systematically dramatizes their inadequacy. He uses the term "nigger" and he shows Jim engaging in superstitious behaviour. Yet he portrays Jim as a compassionate, shrewd, thoughtful, self-sacrificing, and even wise man [...] Jim in short, exhibits all the qualities that "the Negro" lacks.[92]

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[91] Shelley Fisher-Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African-American Voices* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 85. Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) quoted in Fishkin, p. 85.

[92] David L Smith, 2007. 'Huck, Jim and American Racial Discourse' in *Satire and Evasion? Black Perspectives on Huckleberry Finn*, 102-123 (p. 105).

While Fishkin admits that Smith's argument is convincing, she takes issue with his interpretation because of *Huck Finn's* connection to familiar minstrel show traditions which she condemns based on perceptions of cultural misappropriation detached from black experiences:

> The fact that white minstrels may have gathered African-American material for their shows did not prevent them from transforming that material into productions that demeaned blacks in the nineteenth century, and whose legacy continues to plague African-Americans to this day.[93]

However, if this were the case then the denunciation of minstrels would equally apply to *Huckleberry Finn*, which also borrowed, burlesqued, and transformed black mannerisms and behaviour. While critics such as Fishkin and Sterling Stuckey acknowledge Twain's anti-racist credentials, based on his outspoken views on racial injustice, as well as from a letter to Francis Wayland, Dean of Harvard Law School (which led to Twain's sponsorship of a black student), they are not able to accept Twain's debt to the racialised signifying of the antebellum minstrel performances concealed behind the façade of the blackface mask.[94]

Author and researcher on black dialects William J Mahar also believes that blackface delineators had a negative effect on race relations. He argues that the differences between the two races and cultures were used as a means of 'injecting a vital, discordant and satirical language into popular comedy.' [95] The wavering attitudes to race in *Huckleberry Finn* does suggest

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[93] Fisher-Fishkin, p.92.
[94] Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?,* p. 92.
[95] William J Mahar, 'Black English in Early Blackface Minstrelsy: A New Interpretation of the Sources of Minstrel Show Dialect', *American Quarterly*, 37. 2 (1985), 260–285 (p. 285)

that Twain, like Huck, struggled to overcome the American racism he was brought up with, unable to resolve the injustice of slavery in *Huckleberry Finn* or *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* which reflected a context of war weary resignation to acceptance of racial inequality. However, when racial criticism of Twain's works was rife during the 1950s, Ralph Ellison noted that Twain "fitted Jim into the outlines of the minstrel tradition, and it is from behind this stereotype mask that we see Jim's dignity and human capacity – and Twain's complexity – emerge." [96]

Misunderstanding of the blackface tradition to some degree lies partly with confusing the era of ante-bellum minstrelsy, which underpins *Huckleberry Finn,* with its later vaudeville stylisation dislocated from provocative racial allusions and immediate social relevance. An analogy for this would be the way in which the wheelin', turnabout, jump Jim Crow minstrel trickster became redefined as the symbol of State enforced racial segregation when white-dominated Southern legislators instigated the Jim Crow laws.[97] However, it is through a dynamic association with the techniques of minstrel burlesque that alternatives to a monoglossic view of racism can be transferred from the stage to the page where, as David L Smith suggests racial caricatures, such as Jim's propensity to superstition are set up and then undermined to confuse and disrupt white cultural

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http://doi.org/10.2307/2712901>.

[96]Ralph Ellison, 'Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke' in *Shadow & Act*, (New York: Vintage International, 1995), p .50.

[97] David K Fremon, *Jim Crow Laws and Racism in American History* (Berkeley Heights, NJ: Enslow Publishers, 2000), pp. 27-28. <https://archive.org/details/jimcrowlawsracis00frem/page/n5/mode/2up>.

preconceptions. Consequently, Smith finds it troubling that Twain's satirical attack on racism in *Huckleberry Finn* has been misunderstood by so many readers and critics.[98]

Twain is aware that the minstrel shows are not authentic "the so-called negro minstrels simply mis-represent the thing, I do not think they ever saw a plantation or heard a slave sing."[99] But authenticity was not their purpose, which was to re-imagine black experiences using the mask to satirise and re-order attitudes to a range of social issues including racial discrimination, social injustice, slavery, and xenophobia. This distinction between the original minstrel shows and the later de-contextualised novelty acts and vaudeville shows is lamented by Twain who bemoaned the loss of the "show which has no peer" - "Where now is Billy Rice? He was a joy to me and so were the other stars who made life a pleasure to me forty years ago."[100]

In the original minstrelsy incarnations, which overlapped with later corrupted versions, the satirical reach in the blackface burlesque *Hamlet the Dainty* is an illustration of the way in which topical allusions to the ghostly spectre of the KKK, the whiskey swilling Irish, and the cheese-eating Europeans, the rhyming vernacular, Shakespeare, and superstition,

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[98] David. L Smith (1984). 'Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse', *Mark Twain Journal,* 22. 2 (1984), 4-12 (pp. 4-5).
[99] Quoted in Fisher-Fishkin, p.92 (note 65, p. 190), Samuel Clemens to Tom Hood and George Routledge and Sons, 10 March 1873, Hartford, reprinted in *Pike, The Singing Campaign for Ten Thousand Pounds*, pp. 14-15.
[100] Mark Twain, *Mark Twain in Eruption*, ed. by Bernard DeVoto (New York: Harper, 1940), p. 110
<urn:oclc:record:1150293296>.

combined to satirise cultural divisions in the re-modelling of American identity:

> He's from the South! Oh grace defend us!
> Prythee! no more such frightful specters send us!
> Be thou blacked up, or goblin damned!
> Be thou whiskey puffed, or old cheese crammed[101]

Hamlet the Dainty's parody of black 'superstitiousness' chimes with Jim's comic crowing, as bemoaned by Huck "every time he told it he spread it more and more, till by-and-by he said they [the witches] rode him all over the world." (HF 8). This reference indicates minstrelsy's cultural borrowing, which is re-transmitted by Twain in *Huckleberry Finn*, to include, but also to exceed racial stereotyping.

The key to interpretation of the relationship between Twain and blackface minstrelsy is that they both created a hyper-authenticity, exaggerating and distorting genuine aspects of black culture in songs and vernacular under the cover of a satirical mask, which used humour and irony to reconstruct an inclusive and unique American cultural identity. According to African American author Ralph Ellison "the main purpose of the minstrel show was not realistic portrayal or social humiliation of negroes, but use of the negro mask and dialogues to project in symbolic form inner fears and anxieties of the white population."[102] Twain's echoing of the minstrel formula within *Huckleberry Finn* would indicate that this

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[101] G W H Griffin, Esq., *Hamlet the Dainty, An Ethiopian Burlesque on Shakespeare's Hamlet* (Clyde, Ohio: A. D. Ames, 1875), p. 3-4 <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31175035137515;view=2up;seq=1>.

[102] Ralph Ellison, 'Change the Joke and Slip the Yoke' in *Shadow & Act*, p. 55.

novel had a similar underlying intent of pinpointing white fears of amalgamation through performing the disparity between the ideals and the artifice of social democracy and racial equality by reinforcing, and then eroding, racial caricatures.

4.2.2. The Racial Significance of Blackface Minstrelsy in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

> A book is the writer's secret life, the dark twin of the man.
>
> William Faulkner, *Mosquitoes*

Disrupting all white racist assumptions, Roxy a 'black' enslaved woman is the main protagonist of Twain's *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, her agency a counter-cultural response to white racist hegemony. The sustained irony of the novel, first published in 1894 continues Twain's engagement with the minstrel tradition of burlesque and the misrule subtext of Shakespeare to create, and then undermine, the spurious foundations of racial identity. Identity is more corrupted and confused in this novel compared to *Huckleberry Finn,* reflecting pressures connected to racial duality on a personal and national level in the post-Reconstruction era.

By this time, Twain was more despairing overcome by an ever-growing sense of public tragedy regarding the state of America. His pessimism is recorded in the unpublished papers referenced in Kenneth Lynn's *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor*:

> Twain at the close of the 1890s shared the conviction of many sensitive Americans that the *fin-de-circle* was the end of the world as they had known it. "The lust for money" Twain wrote in 1897, was now "the rule of life" in the United States. The spirit of the country he felt had become hard and cynical.[103]

This harsh analysis is reflected in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* in the undercurrents of violence in the minstrel style banter between Roxy - who looks white but is one-sixteenth black - and the dark-skinned slave Jasper. The exchange reflects Twain's glum analysis, with paradoxical social and personal attitudes to identity performed from behind the racialised minstrel mask. Racial and gender hierarchies are muddled in the repartee, with Roxy unbalancing gender expectations by taking the more assertive role of end(wo)man to Jasper's comic Bones character. Their double act is overheard by the peeping Pudd'nhead, a performance more in keeping with the vaudeville era where audiences were passive spectators and thus subject to cultural manipulation, rather than collaborators participating in the disorder of the racially ambiguous minstrel stage. Their banter recreates the rhythmic cadences of Tambo and Bones banter, but with more aggressive allusions to the racial caste system:

> "Say, Roxy , how does yo' baby come on?"
> "Fust-rate; how does *you* come on, Jasper?"
> "Oh, I's middlin'; hain't got noth'n' to complain of. I's gwine to come a-court'n' you bimeby, Roxy."
> You is, you black mudcat! Yah- yah-yah! I got somep'n' better to do den 'sociat'n' wid niggers as black as you is. Is ole Miss Cooper's Nancy done give you de mitten?"
> You's jealous, Roxy, dat's what's de matter wid *you*, you hussy – yah-yah-yah! Dat's de time I got you!"
> "Oh, yes , you got me, haint you. 'Clah to goodness if dat conceit of yo'n strikes in, Jasper, it gwine to kill you sho'. If you b'longed to me I'd sell

[103] Kenneth S Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (Boston, Toronto: Little Brown, 1959), pp. 270-271.

> you down de river 'fo' you git too fur gone. First time I runs acrost yo' master, I's gwine to tell him so."[104]

As in *Huckleberry Finn*, Twain uses blackface minstrel patterns of comic discourse and vernacular to give authority to subordinate voices. The exchange, as in the blackface tradition, alludes to topical themes including slaves as property and being sold down the river and a racial caste system based on different shades of blackness. The shared dialect unites the protagonists racially, but Roxy's white appearance and the domineering invective of her discourse clashes with Jasper's teasing misogyny, which destabilises social and racial hegemony. Roxy's use of the pejorative "nigger" to insult Jasper also imitates white racial oppression based on skin colour signalling that, despite being classed as black, she is also infected by and party to perpetuating a caste system that upholds institutionalised racial oppression. However, in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* the exchange goes beyond the burlesque mockery of the social anxieties of the times, where Roxy's comic hostility hints at racial unrest perpetrated by white Southerners in fear of black demands for emancipation and citizenship in the aftermath of the Civil War.[105] Roxy's forthright attitude disrupts the homely stereotype of the domesticated Southern mammy promulgated in Southern literature - a fallacy debunked by Albion Tourgee (1838-1905) in his essay "The South as

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[104] Mark Twain, *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1999), p. 6-7.
(Further references to *Pudd'nhead Wison* in the text abbreviated in parentheses to PHW)
[105] Jason Morgan Ward, 'Racial Violence in the United States since the Civil War', *The Cambridge World History of Violence*, *volume 4* ed. by Louise Edwards and others (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020) pp. 88-109.

a Field of Fiction" (1888). Tourgee launched a carpet-bagging crusade in the postbellum South aimed at revising the historical narrative and racial stereotypes from a bottom-up perspective using vernacular to grant respect black voices. [106] Tourgee's literary realism, with its emphasis on black agency, is echoed in Twain's novel through Roxy's cradle-swap, a bid to subvert the resurgence of white cultural dominance in the South tacitly endorsed by the North who favoured national reconciliation above racial rights. The passage of discriminatory laws known as the Black Codes when Reconstruction ended in 1877 enforced white supremacy by State controlled legislation, thus complying with Albion Tourgee's prediction that Reconstruction was "a fool's errand".[107]

The radical, ex-Union soldier, author, and lawyer Albion Tourgee warned that if the freed African American population were not given access to tools, land, education, opportunity, and the right to vote it would lead to civil unrest. Tourgee was elected as a judge in 1868 to codify and revise the constitution of North Carolina, his district covering a region where the Ku Klux Klan were most the powerful and aggressive. Vilified in the Southern press as an opportunist Northern adventurer disturbing the honourable ways of the South, Tourgee was subjected to intimidation, which included plans for his kidnap by white vigilantes, a climate of hostility at odds with

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[106] Albion W Tourgee, 'The South as a Field of Fiction' in *Undaunted Radical: The Selected Writings and Speeches of Albion W Tourgee* ed. by Mark Elliot and John David Smith (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), pp. 203-211.
[107] Pete Daniel, 'The Metamorphosis of Slavery', *Journal of American History,* 66. 1(1979) 88-99, (p. 88) <https://doi.org/10.2307/1894675>.

the benign image of plantation nostalgia and contented slaves portrayed in Southern art and culture.[108] In an informative article about the history of the Ku Klux Klan, Elaine Parsons notes that this Southern terror organisation had theatrical roots, adopting the folksy tactics of the blackface minstrels of disguising and blurring their intentions behind a mask of musical performance and costumed spectacle. The original intention of the Klan troupes was to raise money for injured Confederate veterans, but as with the blackface minstrels, they played to more than one audience. The performances were cloaked as theatrical to disguise military and political intentions to test how far white Democratic rule could be asserted without defying federal law. Republican judge Albion Tourgee observed that the Northern press participated in the 'amusement', depicting the Klan's activities as farcical performances that could be aligned with the masked antics of minstrel stage "The nation held its sides with laughter, and the Ku Klux took heart from those cheerful echoes and extended its borders without delay". [109] The Klansmen's other audience was Democratic Southerners, the violent theatricals defining an impassioned white male Southern identity that relied on the camouflaged tactics of blackface

[108] St. *Paul's Daily Globe* 25 April 1889; *Evening Star* (Washington DC), 12 April 1897; *Charlotte Democrat,* NC, 5 April 1889.
[109] Quoted in Andrew Silver, 'Making Minstrelsy of Murder: George Washington Harris, the Ku Klux Klan, and the Reconstruction Aesthetic of Black Fright', *Prospects*, 10. 25 (2000), 339-362. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0361233300000697>.

minstrelsy because they could not broadcast their extra-legal actions openly for fear of Federal repercussions.[110]

A comparison between blackface skits and the comic façade of Twain's novels with the Klansmens' derivative appropriations of the tall tales of George Washington Harris illustrates the different intentions of both. Harris' skits such as *Sut Luvingood Yarns Spun by a "Nat'ral Born Durn'd Fool" Wrapped and Wove for Public Wear* (1867) were slanted to provide a shield for the Klan's racist propaganda in plays such as "Trapping the Sheriff Almost". The Appalachian backwoods hero Wirt Staples is portrayed as a comic version of Klan terror with muscles "like rabbits under the skin", throwing a steak at a Reconstruction judge, and hurling an African American boy through a shop window to assault a Northern carpetbagger blatantly endorsing a violent and sadistic fantasy of Southern hyper-masculine superiority. Harris' tales of antebellum cheer were cleverly marketed by the Klansmen troupes as slapstick entertainment alongside minstrel shows, popular in the North and South, in order to disguise the violent reign of terror and intimidation targeting the African American community, a reaction to the Reconstruction Acts of 1865 that posed a threat to the perpetuation of white privilege.[111]

Verne S Pease's *In the Wake of War: A Tale of the South Under Carpet-Bagger Administration* (1900) is another example of Klan sympathising

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[110] Elaine Frantz Parsons, 'Midnight Rangers: Costume and Performance in the Reconstruction-Era Ku Klux Klan', *The Journal of American History,* 92. 3 (2005), 811–36
<https://doi.org/10.2307/3659969.>.
[111] Andrew Silver, 'Making Minstrelsy of Murder', pp. 339-362.

propaganda under the guise of minstrel fun. In Pease's novel his aristocratic hero Howard "plays the nigger" in a ploy to stop a strike by his black workers. To terrify his men into submission the blacked-up master appears at night on horseback cloaked in a huge white mantle from the crown of his head to the ground with devilish horns protruding, his black features twisted with agony and his great white teeth visibly shining. The horrifying spectacle claiming to be from hell appropriates minstrelsy tactics of disorder but inverts them in order to re-establish the old hierarchy, the white sheet covering the blacked-up horse rider symbolically swamping minstrelsy's disruptive Jim Crow, emasculating him to a compliant implement of the despotic interests of white power.[112] The carnival culture which the Klan sympathising skits promote as clownish fun endorsed the violent overthrow of an egalitarian system, as opposed to the disorder of the minstrel stage and the antics of the duke and the king in *Huckleberry Finn,* which satirise and undermine white bourgeois hegemony. The inclusion of popular cultural characters such as Jim Crow and Harris' ironic Sut Luvingood into the cultural mainstream through the tall tales and minstrel burlesques widens social representation irreverently displacing patriarchal control of American identity.[113]

Thus, blacking up enacts cultural displacement and control both in the interests of social inclusion but overlapping into a grey area with darker purposes intended to deceive, corrupt, and subjugate as in the Klan

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[112] Verne S Pease, *In the Wake of War: A Tale of the South Under Carpet-Bagger Administration* (Chicago: G M Hill, 1900), pp. 369-372 <urn:oclc:record:1047465247>.

[113] Andrew Silver, 'Making Minstrelsy of Murder, pp. 339-362.

enactments and spin-off novels where carnivalised terror and real terror converge and confound. This coincides with the overthrow of the original Jim Crow by ruthless white Southerners perverting his anti-authoritarian spirit of farcical irreverence and turning it against him.

This violent and corrupted political landscape infects Roxy's cross-racial and cross-gender encounter with her son Tom in St. Louis when she threatens to stab him in the back if he fails to get the money from his ostensible uncle to buy her freedom back.(PHW 91) The white looking, black slave Roxy is blacked-up and dressed as man, her double disguise blurring gender and racial boundaries, an appropriation of minstrel stage performances but degraded to represent the brutal theatricality of Klan-disguised acts of racial intimidation, theft, and murder. In contrast to Pease's celebration of white prowess written in standard prose, Roxy's narrative of her plantation experience paints an alternative picture of Southern masculine resurgence, her daring cross-dressing and the authority of her dialect speaking to the racial division that the official standard English idiom aims to overlook and repress:

> De overseer he had me out befo' dayin de mawnin's en worked me de whole long day as long as dey uz light to see by; en many's de lashin's I got 'ca'se I couldn't come up to de work…Dat overseer wuz a Yank, too, outen New Englan'…*Dey* knows how to work a nigger to death, en dey knows how to whale 'em, too – whale 'em till dey backs are welted like a washboard.[114]

Roxy emerges briefly from behind her minstrel mask, revealing the cruel reality of life in the South that the black population lived under the shadow of. Northerners were also culpable of perpetrating such atrocities

[114] PHW, pp. 92-93.

either directly, or through evasion by accepting the white Southern fiction of benign social rule for the sake of achieving national reconciliation. The threatening context of racial unease that Roxy jests about in her banter with Jasper - "If you b'longed to me I'd sell you down de river 'fo' you git too fur gone" (PHW 6-7) - masks a reality that corresponds to the era of the Compromise or Corrupt Bargain of 1877 that gave the presidency to the Republican Rutherford B Hayes in exchange for the withdrawal of federal troops from Southern States. The deal was not bought cheaply and included a tacit admission that the South alone should resolve its racial problem, with Hayes hopeful of building a Republican party in the South in return.[115] However, the road to reunion proved a fallacy as Southerners remained loyal to their Democratic ideology. Regarding the controversial compromise deal historian Eric Foner concludes:

> 1877 confirmed the growing conservatism of the Republican party [...] To be sure, neither the humanitarian impulse [...] nor the commitment to equal citizenship that evolved during the war and Reconstruction, entirely disappeared. Southern issues, however, played a steadily diminishing part in Northern Republican politics and support for the idea of federal intervention to enforce the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments continued to wane.[116]

Broken promises, Northern pragmatism and Southern States autonomy that enabled racially biased legislation to be passed led to the Jim Crow 'separate but equal' policy of enforced racial segregation which merely paid lip service to the 1868 fourteenth amendment of the Constitution

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[115] *The Reconstruction: A Documentary History of the South after the War: 1865-1877,* ed. by James P Shenton (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963), p. 7.
[116] Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), pp. 586-87.

granting citizenship to all persons born or naturalised in the United States – including enslaved people.

This corrupted social landscape infects the whitewashed complacency of *Pudd'nhead Wilson's* Dawson's Landing with its community of elder white statesmen, immigrant Italian twins, outsiders in the shape of Northern lawyer David Wilson and the subjugated enslaved population, striving to navigate the political paradox of segregation and Union, exacerbated by the creation of dual national and State identities. Such an anomaly is reflected by David Wilson's 'half a dog' joke, which resonates with the King Solomon repartee between Huck and Jim about legal intervention to establish the kinship of a child, the judgement that the baby should be chopped in half not meant to be applied literally, but a means of showing the self-destructive nature of division as a means of determining parentage. The comic exchange in *Huckleberry Finn* alludes to establishing the identity of individuals of uncertain and mixed racial heritage related to anxieties connected to miscegenation and incest, with Jim's literal interpretation disputing King Sollumun's authority by insisting the dispute is about a whole child:

> De 'spute warn't 'bout half a chile, de 'spute was 'bout a whole chile; en de man dat think he kin settle a 'spute 'bout a whole chile, doan' know enough to come in out'n de rain… He as soon chop a chile in two as a cat.[117]

The gap between Huck and Jim's perspectives concerning establishing identity through division has more direct consequences in *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* The 'half a dog' quip in the opening chapter results in David Wilson

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[117] HF, p. 88.

being socially ostracised, his solution to the problem of segregation earning him the soubriquet Pudd'nhead (PHW 4). The King Sollumun discourse and Wilson's misfired joke shed an ironic light on the limits of legal action to define identity and racial ancestry foreshadowing the 1896 Plessy versus Fergusson ruling that established dual national and State citizenship. This ruling by the federal court decreed that classification based on race or colour comes under the jurisdiction of each State, thus avoiding a divisive national confrontation over racial identity that might threaten the fragile state of the Union. The plaintiff Homer Plessy, who claimed to be "seven-eighths Caucasian and one-eighths African blood", was jailed in1892 for sitting in a white-only railcar in Louisiana, a judgement that was upheld by the landmark Plessy v Fergusson case of 1896. This legislation ratified racial discrimination by stealth, with the majority of the judges in the Supreme Court ruling that political equality did not extend to social equality, and that the case did not amount to exclusion or making distinctions based on race, but to instigating equal, but also separate facilities. Following the precedent set by the 1857 Dred Scott decision, which denied liberty to a freed slave when they returned to a slave state, race was socially, rather than biologically, determined in the American legal system. The logic of this ruling would mean that in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* Roxy's real son, who was brought up as the heir apparent Tom Driscoll, would then legally be identified as white despite his fraction of black blood, his social delineation exposing the arbitrary nature of racial boundaries.

Aware of the segregationist paradox inherent in the ruling, Judge John Marshall Harlan, the lone dissenter in the Plessy case, foresaw the racist implications of the decision and its possible violent consequences:

> Our Constitution is color-blind, and neither knows nor tolerates classes among citizens. In respect of civil rights, all citizens are equal before the law. ... The present decision, it may well be apprehended, will not only stimulate aggressions, more or less brutal and irritating, upon the admitted rights of colored citizens, but will encourage the belief that it is possible by means of state enactments to defeat the beneficent purposes that the people of the United States had in view when they adopted the recent amendments of the Constitution.[118]

Judge Harlan was a Kentucky slave holder who opposed the ruling based on the amendments to the Constitution following the Civil War fearing violent reprisals if citizens were not treated equally before the law. The Plessy ruling, upheld by the majority of the judges, only confirmed Twain's disdain for American democratic values. In an unpublished fragment, probably written about 1907, he wrote: "He would be a fool & called a fool, who should claim that when the master makes the laws that are to govern both himself & his slave, he will take as good care of his slave's interests as his own (Haw-haw!)."[119] Homer Plessy's Louisiana railcar confrontation in 1892 resulted in legislation where anyone of mixed race heritage was deemed black, a one drop racial contradiction that underlies the twisting and corruption of the racial masking enacted by Roxy and Tom's resistance

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[118] 'The Supreme Court Decision that legalised Jim Crow – Justice John Harlan in *A Guide to the Constitution That Delicate Balance* ed. by George McKenna (New York: McGraw Hill, 1984), pp. 384-386 <https://www.studythepast.com/weekly/harlanpg2.html>.

[119]Quoted in Fishkin, *Was Huck Black?,* p. 60 from 'Mark Twain Papers' (see note 20, p. 174).

to what Twain terms “the fiction of law and custom” that defines Roxy and her son Valet de Chambre as legally “black” when they are visibly white.

In *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Twain dramatises the paradox of racial identity based on kinship by tangling Roxy’s fear of being disinherited from a will that she has no legal entitlement to on account of blood. When her true son, whom she has passed off as the white heir Tom, has been disinherited for gambling by his supposed uncle Judge Driscoll, the minstrel exchange between Roxy and her presumed son Chambers comically draws attention to the enigma of establishing racial identity:

> [Roxy]“Bu’s-ted de will! He wouldn’t *ever* treat him so! Take it back, you mis’able imitation nigger dat I bore in sorrow en tribbilation.”
> […]
> [Chambers] ‘’Yah-yah-yah! Jest listen to dat! If I’s imitation, what is you? Bofe of us is imitation *white* – dat’s what we is- en pow’ful good imitation, too- yah-yah-yah!- we don’t mount to noth’n’ as imitation niggers;” [120]

While Roxy correctly defines her changeling ‘son’ as an “imitation nigger” in accordance with his supposed biological ancestry and his appearance, this is refuted by Chambers on the basis of social custom that defines him as black or “imitation white” following the Dred Scott (and the later Plessy) ruling of racial designation as the prerogative of the State, based on social custom. The discourse between Roxy and Chambers satirises the arbitrary nature of racial determination with Chambers the embodiment of the paradox as a biological white man who looks white but is legally black, and Tom a biological black man who looks white and is also legally white because of his upbringing. Through the cradle-swop of Tom and Chambers,

[120] PHW, p. 35.

Twain mirrors and inverts racial roles revealing the duality and unknowable nature of identity defined by, but also resistant to, social and legal rulings.

Roxy's subversion characterises the farcical aspect of the legal validation of kinship based on fractions of black blood as the basis for racial segregation in the pursuit of an authentic white American cultural identity. This enigma is given prominence in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* through Twain's appropriation of the old 'half a dog' joke, part of a tradition of Southwestern humour originally published in *Spirit of the Times* and *Knickerbocker.* The aim was to satirise the homespun popularism of the Jackson presidency (1829-1837), which promoted white nationalism as the dominant culture.[121] For Pudd'nhead, the quip is a dig at the sectional nostalgia of the Dawson's Landing elite, while equally alluding to Roxy's racial resistance, an ironic echo of the King Solomon parable, with Roxy prepared to relinquish the parentage of her own child to secure his survival and bloodline, while ensuring that he would never be sold down the river. Following the minstrelsy tradition of linguistic masking, the seemingly harmless little ditty carries darker connotations related to the thoughtless brutality of white oppression as symbolised in Pudd'nhead's 'half a dog' quip in response to the yelps and snarling of an out of sight dog:

> "I wish I owned half of that dog,"
> "Why?" Somebody asked,
> "Because I would kill my half."[122]

[121] Kenneth S Lynn, *Mark Twain and Southwestern Humor* (Boston, Toronto: Little Brown and Company,1959), p. 262.
[122] Ibid, pp. 3-4.

The language of ownership yokes human bondage to a climate of violent resolve to prevent racial integration, illicitly pursued by Southern slave owners and indirectly supported by war-weary Northerners. The irony of segregation as responsible for precluding North and South reconciliation is lost on the residents of Dawson's Landing who denounce David Wilson with "'Pears to be a fool,"[...] "What did he reckon would become of the other half, if he killed his half?"(HF 4).Their literalism reflects the political and cultural chasm existing between the Northern interloper and Southern white folk. David Wilson represents an immigrant carpetbagger, tolerated by Southerners as long as he does not try to change or criticise the system, a situation echoed by Comfort Servose in Albion Tourgee's novel *A Fool's Errand* (1879) who was warned of the dire consequences of voicing his opinions:

> You will find out that this pro-slavery, aristocratic element don't allow people to differ from them peaceably and quietly. If I were you I would be mighty careful who I talked to. You don't know anything about what trouble you may get into any day.[123]

Thus, Wilson's whimsical quip about the dog renders him an object of suspicion and derision, but it also serves to disturb the complacency of the citizens of Dawson's Landing who ostracise him for twenty years.[124]

As in the blackface minstrel tradition, the joke lies in the incongruity and the presentation of the absurd to reveal the hypocrisy lying beneath the surface of American civilisation. The joke also points towards the heart of

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[123] Albion W. Tourgee, *A Fool's Errand – A Novel of the South during Reconstruction* (Prospect Heights, Illinois: Waveland Press, 1991), p. 65.
[124] PHW, p. 39.

the novel, drawing attention to the system of constructed racial hierarchy controlled by partisan rules of descent. It was a system of deceptive mathematics that sought to keep the white race apart and ahead, despite based on the fiction of racially pure European white blood. However, according to Twain scholar and author Susan Gillman, the misfired irony of the 'half a dog' joke told only half the story: its ambivalence reflects Twain's own racial inconsistency and divided attitude towards the law. She asserts that, on the one hand, he was attracted to the promise of order created by fixed boundaries, and, on the other hand, he was suspicious of that promise and repelled by its violent results.[125] Twain's deep connection to his Southern reactionary upbringing vies with a Northern liberal sensibility reflecting a conflicted identity struggling for validation, with race a code for this inner confusion. This dichotomy is depicted through a preoccupation with historical incongruity, cross-dressing, disguise, exchanged roles and duality that symbolises an identity crisis created by one body or one Nation, in two halves but also united.

The interactive and fluctuating role of the interlocutor as a farcical voice of authority, which characterises the exchanges in *Huckleberry Finn,* is replaced and tainted in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* by the eavesdropping spectator Pudd'nhead Wilson who takes up a detached position to observe rather than participate in shaping the cultural landscape during an era of corrupted racial turmoil. His role corresponds to a vaudeville audience as passive voyeur rather than an active participant, the racialised ambiguity of

[125] Susan Gillman, *Dark Twins Imposture and Racial Identity in Mark Twain's America* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1989).

blackface minstrelsy modified by the fragmented style of post-bellum vaudeville, a broad mix of music, drama, the ingenuity of quasi-scientific practices such as palm reading, phrenology, parades, and peep shows, which reflected the cultural diversity of the muddled Dawson's Landing population. In a staged performance Tom uses disguise to knowingly deceive Pudd'nhead who is covertly observing a young girl framed in Tom's bedroom window:

> The girl had on a neat and trim summer dress, patterned in broad stripes of pink and white, and her bonnet was equipped with a pink veil. She was practising steps, gaits and attitudes, apparently; she was doing the thing gracefully, and was very much absorbed in her work. Who could she be, and how came she to be in young Tom Driscoll's room?
>
> Wilson had quickly chosen a position from which he could watch the girl without running much risk of being seen by her, and he remained there hoping she would raise her veil and betray her face. But she disappointed him. After a matter of twenty minutes she disappeared, and although he stayed at his post half an hour longer, she came no more.[126]

The switch from Pudd'nhead's penetrating focalisation to the omniscient narrator indicates a furtive element to Wilson's spectator role, his pleasure blurred by confusion involves him vicariously with Tom's clandestine activity. Tom realises he is being watched by Pudd'nhead, forcing him to change his costume to avoid detection, his manipulative use of disguise an assertion of power in response to a racially counterfeit reality. (PHW 49). Interestingly, a nineteenth century definition of vaudeville describes it as striking directly at the heart of interests and foibles of the day, creative and progressive with a craving for the new, and which, like all

[126] PHW, p. 32.

theatrical entertainment, involves a bitter fight against hypocrisy and cant. The gap between the progressive and the perverted aspects of the mixed vaudeville form of entertainment provided an apt backdrop to Twain's investigation of the influence of kinship and upbringing on the construction of identity in an immigrant, racially muddled-up society in denial of miscegenation and the social injustice caused by slavery and racial segregation.[127]

Through the influence of diverse immigrant traditions of vaudeville, the voices of culturally subordinate voices are given centre stage in *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* focused on the strong character and commanding manner of the light skinned slave Roxy and her callous son, the supposed Tom Driscoll. Roxy's cradle swap of her own light-skinned son with her master's child, who in Twain's original draft had a shared kinship, uses racial categorisation to examine the psychic impact of social taboos such as incest and miscegenation on an individual level, and within the community. By watering down the relationship between Tom and Chambers through the random insertion into the text of Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex as the father of Roxy's child, Twain underlines that the influence of race on the construction of identity cannot be so effectively assessed because innate disposition and upbringing are tangled up. Roxy's subversive act of baby switching aligns with the bed trick in folklore drama also included in Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure* where a duplicitous act serves a

[127] *From Travelling Show to Vaudeville Theatrical Spectacle in America 1830-1910*, ed by Robert M Lewis (Baltimore & London: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp. 319-320.

higher moral purpose to illuminate the arbitrary nature of laws determining class and gender delineation, while exposing the hypocrisy of a system constructed by the privileged for their own benefit.

With reference to the complexities of establishing racial identity in Twain's novel, Marc Shell examines the implications of kinship in his article "Those Extraordinary Twins", suggesting that parentage is unknowable, and also that kinship can range beyond biology, which is based on the fiction that we know our consanguineous kin. This unspoken uncertainty of blood resonates with Roxy's justification when contemplating the cradle switch:

> Tain't no sin – *white* folks has done it! It ain't no sin, glory to goodness it ain't no sin!...It was dat ole nigger preacher dat tole it…He said dey ain't nobody kin save his own self – can't do it by faith, can't do it by works, can't do it no way at all. Free grace is de *on'y* way, and dat don't come fum nobody but jis' de Lord; and he kin give it to anybody he please, saint or sinner – *he* don't kyer.[128]

Roxy justifies muddling biological and fictive kinship, aligning herself with, not just the common white folks, but with the "biggest quality dey is in de whole bilin'" (PHW, 14). In her vernacular soliloquy she also invokes the religious blessing of the preacher backed up by "de Lord" who "kin" give grace to anyone, not just the slaveholding class. The wordplay on 'kin', dialect for can, signals the blurred meaning of kinship eroded by Roxy's positive action in the cradle swap, which undermined class and racial boundaries defined by the law and perpetuated by familial blood ties. The fascination with the biblical judgement of King Solomon, satirised in *Huckleberry Finn,* and echoed by the half a dog discourse in *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* resonates with slaveholder anxieties over changelings and suspected

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[128] PHW, p. 13.

miscegenation where outward appearance and dress prove no guide to social or racial reality. Thus, despite the imposition of laws and taboos designed to preserve white lineage in the antebellum South, no one could be certain of their racial heritage because of miscegenation. Supporting this amalgamation denial, a French visitor to America, as early as 1795, commented that visibly 'white' people were called slaves, a paradox that made a mockery of racial hierarchy based on skin colour.[129]

Twain's novel set in the antebellum South began life originally as the story of 'The Dark Twins', which intended to investigate the effect of duality in the formation of identity. This became subsumed by the cross-genre detective, crime drama and political satire of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* which explores the roles of nature and nurture on racial identity and kinship. The exchange of Tom and Chambers mocks racial assumptions based on outward appearance and social custom. These assumptions are parodied by the inverted Zip Coon caricature of the black bellringer who imitates the dandy affectations of the supposed white heir Tom Driscoll:

> When Tom started out on his parade next morning he found the old, deformed negro bell-ringer straddling along in his wake tricked out in curtain-calico exaggeration of his finery, and imitating his fancy Eastern graces as well as he could.[130]

The bell-ringer's loud, makeshift costume and dance reprises the antebellum irreverence of Jim Crow's blackface parody of a black slave

[129] Marc Shell, 'Those Extraordinary Twins', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 47. 2 (1991), 29-75 (p. 37) <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/445226/pdf>.

[130] PHW, p. 23.

imitating white posturing, before the trickster's sequestration by Southern Democrats as the official representative of segregation. The bell ringer's burlesque resonates with Mark Twain's description of minstrel performers exaggerating the form and colour of black style by wearing "buttons as big as blacking boxes," but not the rag and patches dress, as it would not be possible to add to that.[131] Eric Lott suggests that Twain is cautious in his description of the minstrels, aware that taking pleasure in the performances amounts to being an accomplice to the commercial aspects of slavery. While this appears to be a criticism of blackface cultural appropriation based on racist caricature, it could also be interpreted as an acknowledgement of the significance of minstrel performances as part of an 'unconscious revelation' of racial commodification made visible through cracks in the mask, not through what is said, but by what is implied or left to the imagination. The minstrel patterning, which involved an amalgamation of unstable perspectives of colour, class and gender embedded within *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* suggests that Twain is aware of the role of counterfeit as an authentic element in disrupting the economic and cultural containment it is instrumental in constructing.[132]

The bell ringer's performance in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* echoed the mimetic antics of the minstrel stage, but it was also a reminder of the significant role of bell ringing in folk lore traditions. In an insightful article

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[131] *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* ed. by Charles Neider (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), p. 64.
[132] Eric Lott, 'Mr Clemens and Jim Crow: Twain, Race and Blackface', *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. by Forrest G Robinson, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp.129-152 (p. 132).

on the tradition of bell ringing in nineteenth century America, Deborah Lubken describes how the practice was intrinsic to political and social cohesion serving to build a sense of cultural identity. In the same article, Richard Cullen Rath goes even further, suggesting that bellringing as a means of aural communication created identity from the grassroots up, compared to mass print culture, which came from the top down, and which could be partisan and misleading.[133]

It is significant that Twain employs the bell ringer to mock Tom's ostentatious style of dress and pretentious posturing because he is a clownish trace figure who represents the non-literate, auditory-dependent, liminal folk culture at risk of erasure by the resurgent forces of white political oppression, embodied ironically by the racially counterfeit Tom. The tradition of bellringing gradually died out in nineteenth century America for a combination of reasons from necessity, annoyance, and harm, which coincided with the rise of newsprint and the written word. The bell ringer's carnivalesque parody chimes with the mass audience participation of the early, low brow minstrel shows which Twain attended in San Francisco in the 1850s, where visual and aural spectacle was as important as the written word to political, social, and religious interactions in the formation of a national cultural identity.

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133 Deborah Lubken, 'Joyful Ringing, Solemn Tolling: Methods and Meanings of Early American Tower Bells', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 69. 4 (2012), 823-842 (p. 824-5) <https://doi.org/10.5309/willmaryquar.69.4.0823>.

The optimism of racial integration signaled by the shared vernacular of the ante-bellum *Huckleberry Finn* died a death in *Puddn'head Wilson,* where the narrator and the white residents of Dawson's Landing, including the immigrant twins, speak in a standard English that stands in stark contrast to the dialect spoken by the African American characters, a narrative device that emphasised the post-bellum resurgence of racial segregation in the American South. Thus, cultural respect for Jim's voice through linguistic parity in *Huckleberry Finn* is markedly eroded in Twain's later novel, which reflects the gradual demise of the original minstrel shows, a cultural denigration aligned with the appropriation of the extravagant, wheelin' stranger Jim Crow as the symbol of racial segregation in the South.

Despite depicting the inhumanity and injustice of the system of slavery as inconsistent with American ideals of democracy and equality before the law, the hybrid style of Twain's novels persists in portraying an ambivalent attitude to the role of race in determining identity. While white supremacy is mocked, little attempt is made to discredit assumptions of black inferiority. In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* when Tom Driscoll is publicly humiliated by Count Luigi, rather than challenging his antagonist to a duel, as demanded by Southern codes of gentlemanly honour, he seeks redress through the legal system, defeating Pudd'nhead Wilson in his first case. For engaging with the reviled democratic process, Tom is deemed a disgrace to his supposed white patrimony and is again dispossessed from his inheritance by his 'Uncle' Judge Driscoll. (PHW 63) Roxy is equally disgusted by Tom's cowardice in

avoiding a duel. She blames his black blood for his weakness, her vernacular indicating that Tom is ostracised on both sides of the racial divide:

> "It's de nigger in you, dat's what it is. Thirty-one parts o' you is white, en on'y one part nigger, end at po'little one part is yo' *soul*…You has disgraced yo' birth. What would yo' pa think of you?"[134]

Like Judge Driscoll, Roxy cannot reconcile Tom's actions, her speech invoking a long line of both black and white noble ancestry, but finally condemning Tom's inadequacy as a consequence of his black ancestry, indicated by the racial invective "Ain't nigger enough in him to show in his finger-nails…yit dey's enough to paint his soul."(PHW 75) Tom's inability to live up to the expectations of his black or his white heritage is an indication of his lack of racial allegiance, but which is attributed by all to innate cowardice. Tom's contradictory character echoes Twain's experience as a senior reporter for *The Territorial Enterprise* in Virginia City, Nevada when, in contravention of Southern codes of honour, he absconded to San Francisco rather than fight a duel over a racially provocative lampoon that implied money raised by The Sanitary Fund was to be donated to a miscegenation society somewhere in the East.[135]

Twain's editorial misdemeanour was based on a parody of a spoof pamphlet on miscegenation written in the run up to the 1864 presidential election, which caused a sensation across the nation inflaming the racist passions of Southerners Democrats and anti-abolition Northerners alike. Written anonymously the booklet, *Miscegenation, The Theory of the Blending*

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[134] PHW, p. 75.
[135] Twain, *A Biography,* ed. by Albert Bigelow Paine, p. 249. (A Comstock Duel): see also Krauth, p. 24.

of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro (1864), was taken seriously, despite the extremity of its claims for the amalgamation of Caucasian and African blood. This was because it addressed the major social concern of the times, cleverly interweaving race with contemporary scientific, religious, and political evidence. The authors advocate not only the superiority of a hybrid, mixed-race population, but also the positive benefits of "negro" and "Anglo-Saxon" racial inter-marriage:

> All that is needed to make us the finest race on earth is to engraft upon our stock the negro element which providence has placed by our side of this continent. Of all the rich treasures of blood vouchsafed to us, that of the negro is the most precious, because it is most unlike any other that enters into the composition of our national life.[136]

To add authority to the extravagant claims for miscegenation, the title page of the booklet includes a quote from *Julius Caesar* which refers to Brutus: "The Elements/So mixed in him that nature may stand up/And say to all the world, 'This was a man'". The duality within Brutus is encompassed as support for the noble benefits of miscegenation.

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[136] David Goodman & George Wakeman, *Miscegenation, The Theory of the Blending of the Races, Applied to the American White Man and Negro*, (New York: H. Dexter, Hamilton,1864), p. 11, quoted in Julius Marcus Bloch & David G. Croly *Miscegenation: Melaleukation, And Mr. Lincoln's Dog* (New York: Schaum, 1958), p.3.
On the racial controversy stirred up by *Miscegenation,* see also George M Fredrickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914.* (New York: Harper, 1971), pp. 171-174
Fulcrum e book.
See also *Interracialism: Black-White Intermarriage in American History, Literature, and Law*, ed. by Werner Sollors (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), part 1: The History of "Miscegenation" and the Legal Construction of Race, pp. 17-204
<http://www.ebrary.com>.

Twain recognised the burlesque potential of this spoof advocacy of miscegenation, which was designed to undermine abolitionism. The exaggerated polemic, as in the minstrel burlesques, acts as a mask to allow discussion of a politically and socially sensitive subject. Twain's deliberately provocative article, which was designed to satirise white racist values, resonates in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* with Tom's disdain for the antiquated chivalric codes of Judge Driscoll, implying that Twain identifies with Tom as a cultural and racial misfit who is unable, and unwilling, to conform to societal and family pressures. This would suggest that the investigation of the role of duality and kinship in the formation of an individual identity in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is not concerned with the racially different babies Tom and Chambers, or as originally envisaged between the Italian twins, but is centered on the dichotomy between the erudite social outcast Pudd'nhead Wilson, and the pampered, entitled misfit Tom, which represents aspects of Twain's own struggle to overcome the restrictions of constructed class and racial categorisation.

While white Northerners endorsed emancipation, like their Southern compatriots, they could not countenance racial equality, retaining an aloof attitude towards African Americans that included an abhorrence of racial amalgamation.[137] Such racist hypocrisy is mocked by Twain who in his original conception of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* envisioned a common ancestry for the swapped babies, with Judge Driscoll and his brother Percy as the fathers of the swapped infants, who would be cousins. The exchange would then

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[137] George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind,* chapter six, 'Race and Reconstruction', pp. 165-197 (p. 196-7).

draw attention to the likelihood of racial amalgamation already within the white population, but never acknowledged.[138] However, the suggestion of such a close blood tie for the changelings was deemed indecent by Twain's wife Olivia Clemens. This led to the awkward insertion of Colonel Cecil Burleigh Essex as the putative father of Roxy's baby, the clumsy addition attracting attention ironically to Twain's original intention of confronting social unease connected to close, interracial kinship.[139] Susan Gillman asks what should we make of this almost impossibly thin disguise.[140] According to Gillman, Twain's reticence reflects the limits of American racial rhetoric at the time, as well a difficult relationship with his father whose coldness may have been responsible for Twain's conflicted identity. Twain's textual restraint is evident from the satirical shield that confounds explicit racial criticism and the capitulation regarding Tom's paternity in the figure of the more distant Burleigh Essex. Evidence for being influenced by a difficult relationship with his father is implied by Tom's reaction to discovering that he is black translating into a desire to search for his origins and revelation of his kinship, and his desire to kill his father. The original manuscript of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* indicates that Tom Driscoll is a "nigger with a grievance"

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[138] Lawrence Howe, 'Race, Genealogy, and Genre in Mark Twain's 'Pudd'nhead Wilson'', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 46: 4 (1992), 495-516 (p. 500) <https://doi.org/10.2307/2933804>.

[139] Christopher E Koy, 'The Misunderstood Conclusion of Mark Twain's "Pudd'nhead Wilson"', *Theory and Practice in English Studies*, 2. 1(2004), 93-100 (p. 95) <http://www.phil.muni.cz/angl/thepes/thepes_02_13.pdf>.

[140] Susan Gillman, 'Mark Twain's Travels in the Racial Occult.' in *Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. by F G Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1995), pp, 193-219 (pp. 196-7).

and that if he can get Roxy to reveal who is father is "then let him not go out at night." The original manuscript goes on to say:

> "He loathed the "nigger" in him, but got pleasure out of bringing this secret "filth" as he called it, into familiar and constant contact with the sacred whites… [And there was one thought that sang always in his heart. He called that his father's death song.]"[141]

Clearly Twain intended Tom to make his father responsible for what he perceived as an inherited social aberration, but this is heavily crossed out in the manuscript. Twain toned down Tom's burning vengeance in the final draft to "Ma, would you mind telling me who was my father?" (PHW 44).[142] The inference is that this "filth", represents a shameful part of Twain's identity coded as blackness struggling for authenticity against the crushing weight of patriarchal social conformity (represented in the novel by the austere father figure of Judge Driscoll).

The conflict between Twain's upbringing and natural inclinations or innate character informs his divided literary aspirations As a young reporter Twain claims he had a call to literature of a low order but also wanted to be taken seriously by the higher echelons of society, a mixing of the rough with the smooth. Tom's pleasure in defiling "sacred whites" with his "secret filth" thus resonates with Twain's own experience of a living a bohemian lifestyle of raucous excess in the West as a rebellion against the rigidly conformist upbringing imposed by his cold and austere father Judge Clemens:

> Throughout his life Clemens regarded his father with respect and barely controlled bitterness. Judge Clemens was an upright man of

[141]Ibid, p. 197.
[142] Susan Gillman, *Dark Twins - Imposture and Identity in Mark Twain's America*, p. 54.

> high principle, rigid discipline, impeccable honor, and irascible temper who deported himself as a Southern gentleman.[143]

When Sam Clemens escaped the confines of Hannibal he burst forth upon the world to express another side of Mark Twain but still cloaked beneath a mask of satire and ambiguous racial sympathies in the style of the minstrel burlesques, as revealed by the revisions made to the original manuscript of *Pudd'nhead Wilson.*

Following the revelation of his bifurcated racial heritage, Tom's torment is characterised by his contradictory behaviour, where he wavers between defiance and trepidation. He's afraid to sit with the dread white folk because he does not know himself anymore, but then reverts to his old feckless ways so as not to arouse suspicion that racially he is not who he appears to be. (PHW 47-48) Through the revelation, Tom has race consciousness thrust upon him, his passing as white illuminating the performative nature of race, and the inability of racial labelling to confer a definitive cultural identity. A comparable paradox is central to the significance of blackface minstrelsy with the exaggerated caricatures and melodrama satirising the nation's preoccupation with racial identity and, in T D Rice's burlesque operatta *Otello*, its abhorrence of miscegenation. Tom's ranting and raving when his identity is revealed to him is denoted by his excessive use of the word "nigger" (PHW 46-47), which suggests an inner revulsion, signified as the blackness within him, groaning to Roxy "Oh […] I more than believe it, I *know* it." This suggests that Twain's alignment of "nigger" with "a secret filth" in his early manuscript has wider symbolic

[143] Ibid, p. 21.

implications than race. Twain's conflicted attitude to race represents a struggle between the preservation of a public image, and a desire to give expression to an individual and cultural identity. In the revised text of *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* Tom tempers his bitter recriminations against blackness by acknowledging the anguish and the injustice of having a socially denigrated identity:

> "Why were niggers *and* whites made? What crime did the uncreated first nigger commit that the curse of birth was decreed for him? And why is this awful difference made between white and black?[…] How hard the niggers fate seems, this morning? – yet until last night such a thought never entered my head."[144]

Despite Tom's awakened sense of racial injustice, he remains resentful of his fraction of socially unacceptable inheritance, desperate to conceal the truth because of the consequences to his privileged social standing. Tom's situation reflects the tensions of Twain's own life, where he also felt the need to balance openly expressing sympathy for racial equality against fears of being socially shunned by members of the white New England literary establishment. Twain's concern for literary approval and cultural acceptance is evident from a letter he sent to his close friend W D Howells, editor of the influential *Atlantic Monthly* following a favorable review of *Roughing It* (1872), in which he connects fears of being rejected with the racial shame of miscegenation:

> Since penning the foregoing the "Atlantic" has come to hand with that most thoroughly and entirely satisfactory notice of "Roughing it", and I am uplifted and reassured by it as a mother who has given birth to a

[144] PHW, p. 46.

> white baby when she was awfully afraid it was going to be a mulatto.[145]

The relieved sentiments expressed in this letter could be interpreted as racist by appearing to reveal Twain's acceptance of black inferiority through its connection to the social horror of racial amalgamation, a view which, like Huck, he was indoctrinated with in his formative years. This is a position he came to regret in later years as communicated in a letter to his friend Burroughs on 1 November 1876, acknowledging what a callow, self-sufficient ass he was twenty years ago:

> Ignorance, intolerance, egotism, self-assertion, opaque perception, dense and pitiful chuckle-headedness – and an almost pathetic unconsciousness of it all. That is what I was at 19 and 20, and that is what the average Southerner is at 60 today, Northerners too, of a certain grade. [146]

In keeping with his evolving racial consciousness, Twain, as reported in *The Crisis,* May 1912, refused to alter a letter to *The Ladies' Home Journal* contending that the Virgin Mary was black, despite his daughter Jean's argument that such a claim was sacrilegious and revolting:

> "To my mind one color is just as respectable as another; there is nothing important, nothing essential about a complexion. I mean to *me*. But with God it is different. He doesn't think much of white people. He prefers the colored." [147]

The *Ladies' Home Journal* letter, and the desperate manuscript erasure, suggest Twain's uneasy identification with Tom Driscoll (the counterfeit

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[145] *Mark Twain – Howells Letters 1872-1910,* ed. by Henry Nash Smith & William M Gibson (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press, 1960), pp. 10-11 <www.jstor.org/stable/25086804>.

[146] Mark Twain, *Complete Letters*, p. 334.

[147] Quoted in Larry Marshburne, 'The NAACP and Mark Twain." *Mark Twain Journal*, 36, 1 (1998), pp. 2–7 (p. 3) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41641440>.

white with a “filthy” core) who revels in bringing his “filth”, symbolised by a tiny fraction of black blood, into contact with the “sacred white”. Twain reconciles his own sense of ‘infected’ heritage by bringing the irreverent, vernacular text of the minstrel show into “familiar and constant contact” with the more respectable idiom of the realist novel.

While the racialised mask remains largely intact in *Pudd’nhead Wilson*, Twain finally lets the mask slip in his semi-autobiographical novel *No 44 The Mysterious Stranger*, in which he identifies with his oppositional consciousness through the fusion of the sixteen year old apprentice print worker August Feldner with Satan, his dual, time-travelling, alter ego.[148] This impulse to express an authentic self, despite the social consequences, resonates with James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man*, (1912), a contemporaneous text to Twain’s *No.44.* Johnson’s unnamed narrator realises that in revealing his black heritage that he is playing with fire, nevertheless he writes “back of it all, I think I find a sort of savage and diabolical desire to gather up all the little tragedies of my life, and then turn them into a practical joke on society.”[149] This comment strikes a chord with Tom Driscoll‘s desire to be known, sullying his whiteness through reckless gambling and disrespect for white chivalric codes. Johnson’s narrator is

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[148] Mark Twain also worked as an apprentice in a printing press for his brother Orion’s *Hannibal Journal*, leaving when he was seventeen, in 1853. Thomas V Quirk, ‘Apprenticeships of Mark Twain’ <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mark-Twain/Reputation-and-legacy>.
[149] James Weldon Johnson, *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man,* (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 1. <https://archive.org/details/isbn_9780140184020/page/n1/mode/2up>.

conflicted, however, over his racial loyalty, conscious of the advantages of passing as a white man, while aware that he has sold his birthright for "a mess of potage". Attending a meeting of the Hampton Institute in Carnegie Hall, where, ironically, Mark Twain is one of the speakers, 'the ex-colored man' is most impressed by the earnestness and faith of Booker T Washington, describing him as "of men who are making history and a race", a path of racial openness that the narrator chose not to take himself.[150] Johnson's anonymously published 1912 novel, however, is fiction masked as autobiography (the novel was reprinted in 1927 under Johnson's own name). The "passing" of the novel's genre as autobiography aligns with minstrelsy masking, which also uses indirection with regard to issues of race, a ploy of racial evasion also embraced by Twain in *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* This is indicated by the conclusion of the Twain's novel when white social order is restored by the law, and David Wilson becomes a respected member of the Dawson's Landing 'First Families'.

Twain's ambivalent attitude to authority, is indicated in prologue to *Pudd'nhead Wilson* - "A Whisper to the Reader", which acts as a warning to readers, and particularly to lawmakers. By comparing such characters to an ass, a humble animal who should be complimented for his attributes, but is subject to ridicule, Twain creates confusion with regard to his attitude to the law. [151] The juxtaposition of long-winded legal and classical allusions with a more colloquial idiom in the signing off of the advice "Given under my hand

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[150] Ibid, pp. 153-154. This meeting is reported in *The New York Times*, January 23, 1906.
[151] PHW, 'A Whisper to the Reader', preface, p, v.

this second day of January 1893 at the villa Viviani […] three miles back from Florence, on the hills – the same certainly affording the most charming views […]", casts aspersions on the authority of the legal reference. The satirical prologue is invoked to subvert the legitimacy and social justice of the final courtroom denouement of the novel.[152]

Twain's psychological duality struggling for free reign is revealed more vividly however, in *No. 44 The Mysterious Stranger* where otherness is enacted as a burlesque manifestation of the original self. Twain wrote the novella towards the end of his life without intending to publish it, finally liberated from Aunt Polly's 'civilizing' by revealing socially unacceptable aspects of his identity that were racialised and obscured by the satirical mask of his earlier works. Twain's enigmatic time travelling novel *No.44 The Mysterious Stranger,* written between 1902 and 1908, went through three revisions. The original manuscript, which was only discovered by William M Gibson and John S Tuckey in the 1960s, reveals Twain's critical insights, unconscious thoughts, and their philosophical implications on the formation of identity. In *No. 44* Twain's concern regarding incongruous and ambiguous attitudes to defining identity is dramatically set up through a minstrel burlesque where the narrator August Feldner is confronted by a tall dark figure capering gaily about the room, his outlandish appearance a flashback to the 'wheel about, turn about' jump Jim Crow of minstrel fame:

> […]it was a tall man, clothed in the loudest and most clownish costume, with a vast white collar that stood above his ears, and a battered hat, tipped like a bucket gallusly to one side…and the man's mouth reached clear across his face and was unnaturally red, and had extraordinarily

[152] Ibid, p. vi.

> thick lips, and the teeth showed intensely white between them, and the face was black as midnight.[153]

The horror of "the black as midnight face" contrasting with the glowing white teeth racialises August's terror "oh dread being have pity, oh - if – if", until the apparition is gleefully revealed as an archetypal minstrel "Cunnel Bludso's nigger fum Souf C'yarlina" come to amuse with the banjo and to sing "de way de po' slave niggers sings when dey's sol' away fum dey home en is homesick en down in de mouf." The heart-breaking songs, which include Stephen Foster's nostalgic "Swanee River", evoke August's pity and sympathy for the black figure, who then magically transforms into a vision of lyrical beauty:

> that uncouth figure lost its uncouthness and became lovely like the song, because it so fitted the song…so helped to body forth the feeling of it and make it visible…whereas a silken dress and a white face and white graces would have profaned it and cheapened its noble pathos.[154]

In the mind of the narrator blackness veers between extremes of terror and loveliness, an emotional duality equally evident in *No. 44* when the comic veneer is stripped away. The passage also explains Twain's positive response to the blackface minstrel shows with their irreverent blend of outrageous caricature and sentimental melodrama reflecting a fluid carnivalesque culture that transcends time, and which disrupts the constraints of national identity and social expectations.

Sharon McCoy, in her article "The Minstrel Mask as Alter Ego" connects the dreamlike burlesque imagery of *No.44* with European charivari rituals of

[153] Mark Twain, *Huck Finn; Pudd'nhead Wilson; No 44 The Mysterious Stranger; and Other Writings* (New York: Library of America, 2000), p. 572.
[154] Ibid, p. 574.

misrule and social transgression, where she notes that the minstrel burlesque figure Cunnel Bludso's "niggger" appears following a crisis of duality when August is obliged to tell a lie to save his reputation. August blames his Duplicate rival Emil Swartz for the misdemeanour, whom he then loses out to. The resolution of the crime maintains the façade of propriety however, the socially acceptable decision achieves the wrong outcome. This is a situation that resonates with the racially pessimistic conclusion of *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* which follows the letter of the law, but which fails to secure the desirable outcome of political and racial progress.[155]

There are a range of interpretations to the ending of *No.44 The Mysterious Stranger* some of which, as in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, hold little hope for social change and racial reform. For instance, Sharon McCoy argues that because Forty-Four does not identify himself as the minstrel figure (chapter 26), the burlesque only complicates themes of cultural identity and social order. The novel thus exposes the damaging ways in which these issues are racialised in American culture, which are held responsible for the novel's despairing conclusion.[156] Literary critic Mark L Smith also perceives the final chapter of *No 44* as a denial of dual identity that marks the end of Twain's binary thinking: August without Forty-Four, and Sam Clemens without Mark Twain.[157] However, this conclusion is equally pessimistic and would also mean envisioning a future of cultural division: of Huck without

[155] Sharon D. McCoy, ''I ain't no dread being': The Minstrel Mask as Alter Ego.', in *Centenary Reflections on Mark Twain's No 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, ed. by J. Cscicsila, & C. Rohman (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2009), pp. 13-40.
[156] McCoy, pp. 13-40.
[157]Mark L. Smith, quoted in McCoy," I ain't no dread being", pp.13-40.

Jim, North without South, black without white, and Twain's duplicate August forever living in fear of the social and racial taboo that the minstrel apparition parodies.

Twain's binary thinking comes to a conclusion in *No 44* because duality evaporates once Twain abandons the racialised ambiguity provided by the satirical mask, a conclusion supported by the obvious sense of fulfilment August feels when he finally realises that Forty-Four is part of himself. This for Twain denotes the conclusion of a long journey of self-discovery, where self and Other, reality and representation are accepted as part of the unstable nature of an individual identity:

> "*Life itself is only a vision, a dream*." It was electrical…*Nothing exists;* all is a dream…*Nothing exists save empty space – and you*. And you are not you – you are but a thought."

The italics and the connection with Twain's longstanding interest in scientific discovery emphasises the visionary insight of August's reasoning. Rather than inducing despair, August's awareness of his interrelationship with his dream-self emancipates him:

> A subtle influence blew upon my spirit from his, bringing with it a vague, dim but blessed and hopeful feeling that the incredible words might be true – even *must* be true…with Forty-Four declaring "I your poor servant have revealed you to yourself and set you free. Dream other dreams and better!"[158]

For Twain this symbolises the American dream, Forty-Four and August are intertwined (the culmination of Twain's fascination with twins),

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[158] Mark Twain, John S. Tuckey, and William M. Gibson, *No. 44, The Mysterious Stranger Being an Ancient Tale Found in a Jug and Freely Translated from the Jug*, 3rd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), chapter 34, pp. 185-187 <urn:oclc:record:1150953784>.

representing a fusion of cultures, identities, and thoughts creating a self, unfettered by societal, national, and historical constraints. This interpretation is also endorsed by Henry B Wonham in "Mark Twain's Last Cakewalk", who suggests that Twain uses minstrelsy burlesque to subvert false notions of a socially constructed self and to instigate "an identity unlimited by consciousness, training or bias." [159] In *No 44* Twain acknowledges an individual identity finally liberated from the 'corn pone' opinions of social and racial conformity which cannot be adequately resolved or evaded in the endings of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. The liberating spirit of *No 44* contrasts with the tragedy of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* which, despite bringing Tom to justice for the murder of Judge Driscoll and revealing his counterfeit identity, in the end fails to reform racial inequality and the injustices of slavery. The tragedy is that the legal system of which Pudd'nhead Wilson is an agent, is weighted in favour of social determinism that maintains the privileges of the white slave holding community. Roxy's son Chambers, the false Tom, is sold down the river, and the real Tom, raised as a slave, cannot escape his imposed racial role, unable to endure the terrors of the white man's parlour. Roxy's feisty spirit is broken, and Pudd'nhead Wilson reverts back to David Wilson, a respected member of the corrupted, white establishment.

In a letter to William Dean Howells following the completion of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,* Twain writes that he left many things out that still burn inside of him and which can never be said, and

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[159] Henry B Wonham, 'Mark Twain's Last Cakewalk' in *Centenary Reflections on Mark Twain's No 44, The Mysterious Stranger*, pp.41-50 (p. 48).

which would require a "pen warmed in hell.", an observation that could be equally applied to *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.[160] Pudd'nhead's courtroom triumph, like the act of miscegenation, has ironically forced the white and black races further apart, with Roxy's failed attempt to change the racial destiny of her son, and Pudd'nhead's satirical aphorisms, unable to make a difference to, or reform, a world adulterated by the system of slavery. This is the tragedy of Mark Twain as much as David Wilson. However, Twain eventually finds release from the opposing forces of a dual identity through his semi-auto-biographical fantasy novel *No. 44 The Mysterious Stranger*, claiming a statute of limitations in his seventieth birthday speech for the moral life he has learned to abide by for at least sixty-three years. In a witty address he refers to whitewashing his moral to keep it in good shape to "see how well she will last and how long she will keep sweet, or at least inoffensive", again following the pattern of minstrel stage masking by using a racial metaphor to cloak an ambiguous and slippery identity.[161]

Twain admitted that the secret source underlying his humour is, not joy, but sorrow, entangled in the humourist's sharp perception of incongruity and the dislocation of things.[162] The anachronistic insertion of

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[160] Quoted in Stanley Brodwin, 'Blackness and the Adamic Myth in Mark Twain's "Pudd'nhead Wilson"', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language,* 15 (1973), 167-176 (p. 167) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40754250>.

[161] Mark Twain, 'Seventieth Birthday Speech' in *Mark Twain's Speeches* (New York: Harper, 1910), p. 425-434 <https://archive.org/details/marktwainsspeec01twaigoog/page/n444/mode/2up>.

[162] Quoted in Dwayne Eutsey, 'Reflections on 'No. 44.'', *Studies in American Humor*, 21 (2010), 103–12 (p. 104) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42573587>.

the blackface burlesque in chapter 26 of *No 44 The Mysterious Stranger* illuminates this enigma, which reaches beyond Eric Lott's conclusion in his article "Mr Clemens and Jim Crow" that Twain's views of blackface reiterate rather than illuminate the ambiguities of race.[163]

4.2.3. Linguistic Masking and Minstrelsy: Racial Significance in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*

Twain employs language in his novels to illuminate how it is used as a tool to assert racial dominance. In *Huckleberry Finn*, Huck and Jim speak in the same dialect to infer a cultural parity. Despite this, Huck uses a racist invective to dominate the exchanges when he fears losing out to Jim's argument. This anxiety directly corresponded to Twain's own experience when he referred to his Venice guide, as noted in *Innocents Abroad,* "I could not bear to be ignorant before a cultivated negro, the offspring of a South Carolina slave."[164] Twain acknowledges a racial prejudice which, like Huck, arose from a conditioned racist upbringing.

Twain expands on language as a tool of cultural control in his sketch *Concerning the American Language* (1882), which argues for the autonomous identity of the American language as the soul of the American

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[163] Eric Lott, 'Mr. Clemens and Jim Crow: Twain, Race and Blackface in *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain*, ed. by F G Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 129-152 (p.149).
[164] Mark Twain, *The Innocents Abroad*, Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Classics 2010), p. 153.

people, characterised by differences in the pronunciation and meaning of words. [165] Gavin Jones in his article "Twain, Language, and the Southern Humorists" asserts that Twain's *A Tramp Abroad* (1880) represents a burlesque correspondence with the guardians of American literary criticism, linguists, and historians which aligns with Twain's concern for creating a language that is uniquely American and representative. [166] His picaresque novel *Huckleberry Finn* takes this a step further providing a burlesque response that resists the hegemony of the literary language of the dominant social group largely associated with the American East Coast, and described by Alan Trachtenburg, in his book *The Incorporation of America,* as genteel and hierarchical.[167] This high-brow attitude to "proper" language is satirised in the skit between Jim and Huck concerning the case of the French "dolphin" who can't get a job in America as a king because he can't speak English. Jim is astounded that men don't all speak the same language, and Huck admits he doesn't know why it is so, his derisory vernacular a xenophobic reference to the influx of European immigrants to America during the nineteenth century:

> [Huck] "I got some of their jabber out of a book. Spose a man was to come up to you and say *Polly-voo-franzy* – what would you think?'
> [Jim] "I wouldn't think nuff'n; I'd take en bust him over he head. Dat is

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[165] This essay was originally part of Mark Twain, *A Tramp Abroad* (London: Penguin Classics, 1997).
[166]Gavin Jones, 'Twain, Language, and the Southern Humorists' in *A Companion to Mark Twain* ed. by Peter Messent & Louis J Budd (Hoboken, NJ, Blackwell, 2005), p. 125
ProQuest ebook.
[167] Quoted in Peter Messent, *New Readings of the American Novel* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), p. 210.

if he warn't white. Iwouldn't 'low no nigger to call me dat."
[Huck] "Shucks, it ain't calling you anything. It's only saying do you know how to talk French."
[Jim] "Well, den why couldn't he *say* it:"
[Huck] "Why he *is* a-saying it. That's a Frenchman's *way* of saying it."
[Jim] "Well it's a blame' ridicklous way….Dey ain' no sense in it,"
[Huck] "Looky here Jim does a cat talk like we do?"
[Jim] "No a cat don't"
Huck] "Well does a cow?"
[Jim] "No a cow don't nuther."
[Huck] "Des a cat talk like a cow, or a cow like a cat?"
[Jim] "No they don't"
[Huck] "It's natural and right for 'em to talk different from each other, ain't it?"
[Jim] "'Course"
[…]
[Huck] "Well then why ain't it natural and right for a *Frenchman* to talk different from us? You answer me that."
[Jim] "Is a cat a man, Huck?"
[Huck] "No"
[Jim] "Well, den, dey aint no sense in a cat talkin' like a man. Is a cow a man? – er is a cow a cat?"
[Huck] "No she ain't either of them."
[Jim] "Well den she ain't got no business to talk like either one er yuther of 'em. Is a Frenchman a man?"
[Huck] "Yes"
[Jim] *"Well*, den! Dad blame it, why don't he *talk* like a man? You answer me *dat*!"[168]

Despite their linguistic sparring Huck and Jim's voices are united in a similar idiomatic mould of minstrelsy repartee, establishing an amalgamated cultural identity centred on a hybrid vernacular. The performance is testimony to the contribution of the country's multi-racial inheritance to the formation of a unique American identity. Their comic discourse also reinforces the colonial hegemony associated with speaking English, with European immigrants to the United States becoming the subject of minstrel stereotyping and parody that both stoked social tension and mocked xenophobic responses as part of the process of ethnic integration enriching

[168] HF, pp. 89-90.

the cultural fabric of the nation. Dan Emmett's openly racist, *The German Farmer,* or *The Barber Shop in Uproar* (1848), also includes transracial and cross-class identification, where the German farmer pays for a shave, and is made is the object of racial mockery. In the burletta, the farmer's ethnicity is sometimes changed to French, with that dialect also the butt of the comic fun, but always at the expense of white authority.[169] Jim Crow's song *Gumbo Chaff* also indulges in ethnic stereotyping, which resonates with the banter between Huck and Jim, the vernacular excess mocking linguistic capacity as barmy. The witty verse also operates to reveal American parochialism:

> I learn'd to talk de French oh! a la mode de dancey,
> Kick him shoe, tare him wool, parle vo de Francey
> Bon jaw Madamselle, Stevedors and Riggers
> Apple jack and sassafras and little Indian Niggers;
> De natives laff'd and swore dat I was corn'd,
> For dey neber heard sich French since dey was born'd.[170]

While great linguistic diversity was propelled by nineteenth century European immigration, standard English became the dominant language, not because of compulsion, but because it was a measure of whiteness, which raised European immigrants above the lowly status of the African American population. Thus, American identity based on cultural integration and democratic levelling through a shared language, ironically resulted in greater racial division, leading eventually to the introduction of literacy tests

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[169] Dan Emmett, 'The German Farmer', or The Barber Shop in Uproar' quoted in Stephen Johnson, *Burnt Cork -Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstrelsy*, pp. 42-48.

[170] W T Lhamon, Jr, *Jump Jim Crow, Lost Plays, Lyrics and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture*, p. 141.

in the South and the disenfranchisement of black voters in the post Reconstruction period.[171]

Twain addresses this linguistic imperialism in his novel *Innocents Abroad* when the white tourists take a Turkish bath in Milan. One of his companions becomes irate because there is no soap demanding in English "oh bring some soap why don't you! That is what I want…S -o-a-p, soap; s-o-p-e, s-o-u-p, soap. Hurry up. I don't know how you Irish spell it, but I want it." Another companion offers to ask for soap in Italian however, his attempt is equally condescending "Here cospetto! ... Sacramento! Solferino! – Soap you son of a gun!" The incompetent linguist then adds to the insult with "if you would let us talk for you, you would never expose your ignorant vulgarity." The bluster signals American pride in a monolingualism that refuses to be demeaned by cultural and linguistic inadequacy, the comic invention of a hybrid American-Italian jargon masking anxieties related to intellectual self-esteem. [172] Illuminating this inadequacy, Twain writes of their Italian guide who was born a slave in South Carolina and came to Venice as a child. He is well educated, reads, writes, and speaks four languages fluently, dresses well and is daintily polite. Twain is made aware that ""negroes" are deemed as good as white people, in Venice, and so this man feels no desire to go back

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[171]Michael Lind, *The Next American Nation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), pp. 67-68.
See also Ruben G Rumbaut & Douglas S Massey, 'Immigration and Language Diversity in the United States', *Daedalus, The Journal of American Academy of Arts & Sciences*, 142. 3 (2013), 141-154 (p. 142)
 <doi: https://doi.org/10.1162/DAED_a_00224>.
[172] Twain, *Innocents Abroad*, p. 119.

to his native land. His judgement is correct."[173] Twain's experience demonstrates to him the power of education to transcend cultural and racial pigeon-holes in the formation of a non-racist egalitarian civilisation, an opportunity denied to the enslaved population in America to the detriment of cultural diversity and democracy on an individual, and on a national level.[174]

Twain's interest in language in defining American cultural identity provides comic burlesque material for Huck and Jim in their exchange about why the 'dolphin' speaks French, with voices that threaten white social hierarchy subject to racist abuse. This is indicated by Huck's dismissal of Jim's voice when he loses the argument, with Huck declaring "you can't learn a nigger to argue." (HF 90). Reference to the French dauphin and language as a tool of cultural domination resonates with Shakespeare's *Henry V* where English as the language of power and authority is central to the assertion of cultural imperialism and national union.[175]

In *Henry V*, English victory in the war against France meant that it was not only French which was under linguistic attack, but also the Celtic, Gaelic and old English languages, embodied through the rivalries between Captains Fluellin, Jamy and Macmorris. In *Henry V*, the ancient languages are insulted and mocked in order to affirm the superiority of English, the linguistic conquest aligned with the establishment of a United Kingdom, with power vested in the rule of James I. The way that King James presented himself

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[173] Ibid, pp. 153-154.
[174] Ibid, p. 154.
[175] William Shakespeare, 'Henry V', Act III, scene 2, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Greenblatt.

through his speeches, as if a performer on a stage acting as a mirror for his subjects, is reflected by the way in which Shakespeare's King Henry also controls language to exert power and influence.[176] The rhetorical style is reflected by the eloquent narrative voice of Henry's 'Band of Brothers' speech, which appeals to a brotherhood of equals to strengthen the power and influence of the Union:

> We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
> For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
> Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
> This day shall gentle his condition: (*Henry V,* Act IV, scene 3)

The strategy of linguistic imperialism depicted in *Henry V* has an obvious appeal to an American identity firmly rooted as white and English speaking.

In *Huckleberry Finn,* the linguistic battle for cultural dominance is satirised through Huck and Jim's fusion of English, pidgin French, and vernacular in order to assert the ascendancy of American power over its European rivals. Huck and Jim's banter on speaking French however, signals Huck's double-voiced dilemma of conforming to the monoglossic narrative he has been taught or adopting the hybrid language of friendship and equality he gains from his experience on the raft with Jim. Evolving from his earlier role as the self-ordained voice of white authority, Huck chooses the dialogic path doing the right thing by Jim when he denies having seen him, but the wrong thing in the eyes of the law. Huck thus resigns himself to his fate, "All right then, I'll *go* to hell." (HF 237). Even so, despite his alliance

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[176] Megan Mondi, 'The Speeches and Self-Fashioning of King James VI and I to the English Parliament, 1604-1624' (unpublished thesis, Illinois Wesleyan University, 2006) pp.23-42 <http://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/history_honproj/10>.

with Jim, Huck still judges himself by the dominant language of the Church and State, signalling his contradictory response to Tom's evasion escapade - a re-imagining of chivalric fiction allied to Southern romanticised fantasies of clan heroics. In the final chapters, Huck and Jim become actors under the direction of Tom Sawyer in his recreation of Southern glory days. However, Huck shows some resistance to Tom's literal interpretation of historic fiction calling him foolish when he suggests digging Jim out with a couple of case-knives:

> [Tom] "It don't make no difference how foolish it is, it's the *right* way…Why look at one of them prisoners in Castle Deef in the harbor of Marseilles, that dug out that way; how long was *he* at it, you reckon?
> [Huck] "I don't know. A month and a half?"
> [Tom] "Thirty-seven year – and he come out in China." That's the kind. I wish the bottom of *this* fortress was solid rock."
> [Huck] *"Jim* don't know nobody in China."
> [Tom] "What's that got to do with it? Neither did the other fellow… But you're always wandering off on a side issue. Why can't you stick to the main point?"
> [Huck] "All right…But there's one thing anyway Jim's too old to be dig out with a case-knife. He won't last."
> "[Tom] Yes he will *last,* too. You don't reckon it's going to take thirty-seven years to dig out through a dirt foundation, do you?"
> [Huck] "How long will it take, Tom?"
> [Tom] Well, we can't resk being as long as we ought to…"

Tom gets increasingly frustrated that his authority is being questioned, in his role of the minstrel-style interlocutor, attempting to dominate the discourse, even when he is forced to admit that they will have to "*let on"* that it took thirty-seven-years to dig Jim out. Huck challenges Tom's mythical view of history. Tom is eventually driven to linguistic bullying to regain his authority "It ain't no use to try to learn you nothing, Huck. Run along and smouch the knives – three of them. So I done it." Huck is now the object of the same verbal bullying that he used to assert authority over Jim. Huck

bows to Tom's voice of Southern authority, the comic exchange sucking Huck back into the realm of white privilege. Huck's ironic acceptance of Tom's absurd contradictions signals his limited 'learning' and his wavering interracial allegiance to Jim. (HF 270-71) However, despite the tension created by Huck's dithering between his conscience and an upbringing that condones slavery, his dialogic approach challenging authority attracts sympathy for his vulnerability, and his humanity, especially when confronted with a culture of unshakeable racial entitlement, characterised by the belligerent voice of Tom Sawyer.

The return to what Albion Tourgee terms 'the South as a field for fiction'[177] in the final chapters of *Huckleberry Finn* has given rise to much controversy amongst critics. Some of whom, such as Michael Egan, regard it as a collapse of Twain's double role as campaigner against slavery and spokesman for the Northern middle class, by descending into pale burlesque and satire. [178] However, Huck wears a mask in the final chapters of the novel to disguise his confused racial loyalty. While he complies with white expectations in his reply to Aunt Sally's enquiry about the steamboat accident "Good gracious! Anybody hurt?" with "No'm. Killed a nigger" (HF 245), he shows racial sympathy for Jim by opposing Tom's madcap plan to cut Jim's leg off for the sake of chivalric authenticity. Through Huck's voice Twain expresses the tensions and the expectations associated with racial allegiance in the South captured in Tourgee's novel *A Fool's Errand* (1879)

[177] See Albion Tourgee, criticism of Southern fiction, pp. 62-63 above.
[178] Michael Egan, *Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, Race, Class and Society* (London: Sussex University Press, 1977), p. 64.

through the experience of Colonel Comfort Servosse. A Union agent who buys land in the South in the aftermath of the Civil War, Servosse believes that he can contribute to unity and equality between North and South by promoting the elevation of the black community. His efforts for racial reform are dashed by the most entrenched and ruthless white opposition convinced of its right to rule, with Servose concluding that the South will prevail over the North despite being in the minority, for the following reasons:

> Because they are thoroughly united, and are instinctive, natural rulers. They are not troubled by scruples, nor do they waste their energies upon frivolous and immaterial issues. They are monarchical and kinglike…The North is disunited: a part will adhere to the South for the sake of power; and just as before the civil war, the South will again dominate and control the nation.[179]

As Tourgee observed at first hand, the determination of Southern Confederates to reverse the ignominy of Civil War defeat instigated a reign of racial intimidation that led to the disempowerment of the black population, which went largely unopposed by a lack of Federal resolve to intervene. Such a political context would make it impossible for Huck to openly resist the obduracy of Tom Sawyer, and for Jim to respond in any other way than with a mask of submission, the muzzling of his voice depicting a collapse of the tension between Twain's duelling narrative voices, that foreshadows the renaissance of postbellum Southern States autonomy.

The range of clashing and unreliable voices permeating *Huckleberry Finn* poses a threat to the unitary culture of the literary establishment through interaction with a vernacular language that is a unique part of

[179] Tourgee, *A Fool's Errand*, pp. 382-83.

American identity, but which is overlooked, ignored, or suppressed by the dominant ideology. In a letter to his publisher Charles Webster dated March 18, 1885, Twain responded to the Public Library of Concord's expulsion of *Huckleberry Finn* from its shelves, which it described as "trash and suitable only for the slums" with typical insouciance "The Committee…have given us a tip-top puff…That will sell 25,000 copies for sure." [180] Several years later Twain again picks up the baton of defending vernacular language against standard literary criticism concerned only with the intellect or the Head, with Twain, claiming that he caters for the "Belly and the Members", as well as for audiences that have no voice in print, but who are intrinsic to the cultural body. In a letter to Andrew Lang in London in 1889 Twain writes "If a critic should start a religion, it would not have any object but to convert angels and they wouldn't need it […] to be caterer to that little faction is of no very dignified or valuable occupation […] it is merely feeding the overfed."

Twain's comment here resonates with Herman Melville when he targets the philosophers Winsome and Egbert in *The Confidence Man* to satirise the works of the transcendental poets Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, whose works are directed at those who are already well represented. In accordance with Melville's cynical view of the lofty notions of high art, Twain, complaining about poor reviews, continues in his letter to Lang "I have been misjudged […] I never had any ambition in that direction, but always hunted for the bigger game – the masses […] but have been criticised from the culture-standard." He pleads with Mr. Lang to use

[180] *The Complete Letters of Mark Twain*, p. 505.

his authority to help in formulating a standard by which work done for the masses can be judged fairly, pleading "no voice can reach further than yours in a case of this kind." Lang responded with an article published on February 14, 1891 in the *Illustrated London News* entitled "The Art of Mark Twain" and while not a fan of *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court,* he was full of praise for *Huckleberry Finn* because of its authentic setting and historical significance, referring to the story as the "great American novel which had escaped the eyes of those who watched to see this new planet swim into their ken."[181] Lang's high praise of *Huckleberry Finn* conferred high literary respectability to Twain's novel ironically allowing his comic masterpiece to be taken seriously

Related to Twain's concern to establish an autonomous identity for the American language, is his engagement with the vulgar irreverence of blackface minstrel burlesques and the focus on the mask to satirise a racist landscape 'coloured' by the loaded word "nigger". Regarding the significant role that language plays in a novel, language theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (writing in the context of the Stalinist Soviet Union) states that discourse is a site of conflict where any use of language reflects a belief system and value judgements of the person using it.[182] In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* language reflects the clash between standard English and the African American dialect, which

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[181] Ibid, pp. 585-587.
See also *The Selected Writings of Andrew Lang, Volume III Literary Criticism* ed. by T. Hubbard, (Routledge: London & New York,2017), pp. 78-81.
[182] *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M M Bakhtin* ed. by Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press,1892), p. 411.

represents a context of postbellum segregation and the separation between State autonomy and Federal rule. This coding through discourse also goes to the heart of the function of non-literary language and dialects in *Huckleberry Finn* which record a diverse, and alternative historical narrative to the official version lurking beneath the picaresque frame of the novel.

The marked inclusion of the racial invective "nigger" in the ending of *Huckleberry Finn*, used eighty-seven times in the last ten chapters, signals the racial hierarchy of plantation life of incontestable authority imposed by pervasive threats of violence associated with a Southern white renaissance. David E Sloane makes a convincing case for Twain's purposeful placement of the word "nigger" connecting racism with religion through Miss Watson's evening prayer ritual "by-and by they fetched the niggers in and had prayers [….] " (HF 5); and to Pap's drunkenness, illiteracy, and bigotry where the n-word ironically satirises Pap's rant that a well-educated black man can vote but cannot be sold at auction. (HF 32) [183] The paranoia feeding this violent reaction to racial equality under threat from emancipation and suffrage is echoed with sardonic wit in Albion Tourgee's 1879 semi-autobiographical novel *A Fool's Errand – A Novel of the South During Reconstruction,* in which patronising benevolence masks racist subjugation:

> The slave is now free, but he is not white. We have no ill will towards the coloured man as such and in his place; but he is not our equal, cannot be made our equal and we will not be ruled by him, as a co-ordinate with the white race in power. We have no objection to him

[183] David E. Sloane, 'The N-Word in *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* Reconsidered', *The Mark Twain Annual*, 12. 1 (2014), 70–82 < https://doi.org/10.5325/marktwaij.12.1.0070>.

> voting, so long as he votes as his old master…but when he chooses to vote differently, he must take the consequences.[184]

Such racial anxieties are echoed in *Huckleberry Finn* in the final chapters of the novel with racial degradation focused on the word "nigger" signifying a political shift that depicts a culture of resurgent white racial hegemony.[185] The rise of brutal and inhumane acts against the black population is exemplified by the treatment of Jim, his pursuers "cussing" him, wanting to chain him up, and to give him a cuff or two on the side of the head, when he is captured. The doctor, however, asks the lynch mob not to treat Jim rougher than necessary because, instead of running off, Jim stayed to help to look after Tom Sawyer "… out crawls this nigger […] and says he'll help […] I liked the nigger for that; I tell you gentlemen, a nigger like that is worth a thousand dollars – and kind treatment too." (HF 315) The excessive use of the derogatory racist invective "nigger" in the doctor's speech codifies his concern for Jim in terms of his economic worth, rather any interest in his welfare, or civil rights. The placement of the derogatory term "nigger" has an ironic significance in *Huckleberry Finn*: it is linked with white authority, religion and the human commodification of slavery, implicitly debasing those institutions and practices by association.

In *Pudd'nhead Wilson* however, the pejorative term "nigger" is used as an instrument of self-loathing by the black characters Roxy and Tom, and by Chambers who thinks he is black. The intense vitriol, compared to the comic satire in *Huckleberry Finn*, reflects a depraved historical context of legally

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[184] Tourgee, *A Fool's Errand,* p. 139.
[185] Sloane, "The N-Word', pp. 70–82.

sanctioned discrimination responsible for racial segregation. As in *Huckleberry Finn* Twain makes use of the word "nigger" when denigrating religion. However, the comic irony is replaced by a more deadly tone when Roxy complains of God's unfairness towards the racially different babies "God was good to you; why warn't he good to him?"[…] I hate your pappy he hain't got no heart – for niggers he hain't, anyways. I hates him, en I could kill him!" (PHW 11) As with Pap in *Huckleberry Finn*, the vicious association of the n-word connects Tom's bigotry with his cruelty and cowardice through his treatment of Chambers, whom he punishes for saving him from drowning by making out that he was just fooling about to save his pride "to have to remain publicly […] under such an obligation as this to a nigger, and to this nigger of all niggers […] anybody but a block-headed nigger would have known he was funning"(PHW 19). However, the most intense use of "nigger" is associated with Tom's sense of self-loathing when made aware of his dual racial identity and its socially ordained degradation. Roxy spells it out to Tom satirising State policy attempts to define racial identity based on the law "You's a *nigger!* – *bawn* a nigger en a slave! – en you's a nigger and a *slave* dis minute ;…It's jes de truth, en nothin' *but* de truth, so he'p me"(PHW 42). Roxy threatens Tom with exposure, forcing him to make a humiliating declaration and admit that she is his mother "It cost Tom a struggle, but he got it out" (PHW 43). Tom's grudging surrender to Roxy's authority contrasts with Huck's more gracious apology to Jim "It was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go to humble myself to a nigger – but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither." (HF 97). While

Huck's apology forges an alliance with Jim that represents interracial friendship and union, Tom's capitulation to Roxy is motivated purely by self-preservation within a racially divided society. He fears the ignominy of social degradation if his secret is revealed "I am a nigger! I am a nigger! Oh I wish I was dead!" (PHW 46) Their different responses to awakened racial consciousness reflects the effects of the withdrawal of Federal protection in the post Reconstruction era when life for the black population became precarious in the face of the Ku Klux Klan and re-empowered Southern whites. Tom's racial duality is conflicted; his desperation to mask the secret side of his identity vies with a reckless arrogance that takes delight in rebelling against the conceit of his proud relatives. He thus takes some pleasure in adulterating their values as he lapses back into his dissolute ways oppressed by the dark twin concealed within himself. (PHW 48)

During the build-up to the Civil War opposition to the use of the word "nigger" by abolitionists as racially demeaning made its inclusion in Twain's text both authentic and provocative in ways that align with Bakhtin's theory of the role of language as a covert indicator of social context used to disrupt the dominant narrative of the cultural mainstream. [186]

Evidence indicates that Mark Twain did not choose words lightly as indicated by his contribution to the 1890 book of literary reminiscences *The Art of Authorship* where he claims that "the difference between the almost right word and the right word is a really large matter: 'tis the difference

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[186]David L Smith, 'Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse', *Mark Twain Journal,* 22. 2 (1984), 4-12 (p, 6)
< http://www.jstor.org/stable/41641246>.

between the lightning-bug and the lightning."[187] While the use of the offensive word "nigger" in Twain's novels has shocked some readers and led to Twain's novel being rejected as racist and damaging to the self-esteem of African American people, its placement in his novels can be seen to be both strategic and contextually significant in illuminating white linguistic imperialism.

Even so, *Huckleberry Finn* has suffered accusations of racism because of the inclusion of the 'n-word', with calls for the novel's removal from libraries and the school curriculum.[188] As a result of this cultural sensitivity, in a recent edition of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* edited by Professor Alan Gribben the word "nigger" has been replaced by "slave", which he deemed to be the closest alternative in meaning and implication. According to Gribben, "This is not to render *Tom Sawyer* and *Huckleberry Finn* colorblind […] Race matters in these books. It is a matter of how you express that in the 21st century."[189] The justification Professor Gribben gives for this change is that although some of the caustic sting of the original novel is lost, it is a price worth paying for the revolting affect that the offensive word has on contemporary readers. However, the n-word was meant to be offensive

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[187] *The Art of Authorship*, ed. by G. Bainton (New York: D Appleton, 1890), pp. 87-88 <https://archive.org/details/artofauthorshipl00bain/page/n7/mode/2up>.

[188] Raziye Akkoc, American school bans *Huckleberry Finn* from lessons because of use of "N" word, *The Telegraph*, Dec 15, 2015 <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/12058648/American-school-bans-Huckleberry-Finn-from-lessons-because-of-use-of-N-word.html>.

[189] Shani Hilton, 'A New Edition of "Huckleberry Finn" to replace the Word 'Nigger' with 'Slave'', *Generation Progress,* Jan 4, 2011 <https://genprogress.org/a-new-edition-of-huckleberry-finn-to-replace-the-word-nigger-with-slav/>.

because it shows contempt for white claims to civilisation based on the brutal oppression and denial of human rights to those they legally define as inferior. This interpretation is supported by the African American literary critic Arnold Rampersad who suggests that it should be white readers who are most offended by *Huckleberry Finn* for its attack on their unjustified racist conceit.[190] This acknowledgement of white racial dishonour is also expressed by Twain in a letter to Francis Wayland, Dean of Yale Law School, dated December 24, 1885, in which he wrote " We have ground the manhood out of them, and the shame is ours, not theirs and we should pay for it." [191] The word "nigger" however, continues to remain contentious spanning the twentieth century and the rise of the civil rights movement, and is still a cause for unrest in America's racially volatile climate. However, in more recent times, rap music and black hip-hop artists have appropriated the 'n word' as a form of tribal bonding, taking control of the term in a form of language minstrelisation that both "shocks and stuns" across the racial divide acting as a tool of racial resistance to white cultural authority, while also functioning as a barometer of the evolution of race relations in America.[192]

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[190] Arnold Rampersad, 'Adventures of "Huckleberry Finn" and Afro-American Literature', *Mark Twain Journal*, 22. 2 (1984), 47-52 (p. 50) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41641253>.

[191] Quoted in Fishkin, p 101.

[192] Edward Adoo, 'Don't fall for it. Chris Rock's use of the 'N' word on television is not OK.' *Guardian*, October 8, 2017 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/oct/08/chris-rock-n-word-television-graham-norton-black-british>.

At the beginning of the twentieth century Twain still felt weighed down by the forces of cultural conformity related to the representation of racial identity, which prompted him to dictate the prose poem "The War Prayer" (1905) to his biographer Albert Bigelow Paine. However, he was urged by friends and his daughter Jean not to print it as it would be regarded as sacrilege. Jean Clemens's misgivings believed that attacking white American imperialism, as in "The War Prayer" would be regarded as tantamount to blasphemy and social suicide [193]. In this anti-war poem Twain claims "I have told the whole truth in that, and only dead men can tell the truth in this world. It can be published after I am dead."[194] In "The Prayer" an aged stranger appears urging a congregation of religious zealots fired up by patriotic zeal of the sermon not to rush to war, but to consider those on the other side who would be killed, agonisingly injured, left roofless and widowed, and only then to seek the aid of him who is the source of Love with humble and contrite hearts. The sermon contains two lines of a hymn which, taken out of context, summon up images of a holy war:

> God the all terrible! Thou who ordainest,
> Thunder thy clarion and lightning thy sword!

However, the hymn actually continues in the opposite vein advocating peace and humility as the nobler response, which is omitted from the minister's invocation:

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[193] See Larry Marshburne, 'The NAACP and Mark Twain', pp. 2-7.

[194] Quoted in James Norwood, 'Mark Twain and "Shake-Speare" – Soul Mates', in *Brief Chronicles,* 6 (2015), 137-158 (p. 150) <https://shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/wp-content/uploads/Norwood.Twain_.Shakespeare.pdf>.
(Twain's prophetic poem concerning the American war in the Philippines was published posthumously in 1923).

Let us not thy wrath in its terror awaken;
Give to us pardon and peace, O Lord. [195]

Alas, the belligerent congregation fired up by the patriotic fervour of the preacher's rhetoric deem the stranger to be a lunatic because he made no sense. His alternative vision is lost on the congregation, their inability to "get it" reminiscent of the fate of Northern interloper Pudd'nhead Wilson and his satirical 'half a dog' joke, which consigned him to twenty years of social ostracism.

The misappropriation of the hymn contained within "The War Prayer" alludes indirectly to Twain's disparaging attitude to the hypocrisy of religion and its justification of slavery, which is coded in *Huckleberry Finn* by the invective "niggers" used by Miss Watson when fetching in everyone to have prayers. (HF 5). The double-standards also allude to the sermon on brotherly love preached the day before the Grangerfords and Sheperdsons engage in gang warfare in disregard of Christian teachings. (HF 123) Twain was always mindful that his scathing attack on the blindness of patriotism and religion in urging violent conflict would fall on stony ground and damage his public standing, of which he was always mindful. Nevertheless, he was furious that he could never express his true beliefs until after his death. Thus, Twain's constructive interaction with the racialised parody of the blackface minstrel shows was an indirect method of expressing

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[195] John Ellerton modified 1870 version of the hymn "God the Omnipotent" by H. Chorley, quoted in Alison Ensor, 'Mark Twain "The War Prayer": Its Ties to Howells and to Hymnology', *Modern Fiction Studies, 16*. 4 (1970), 535-539 (p. 537)
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/26279237>

alternative and controversial cultural perspectives. "The War Prayer", as in *No. 44 The Mysterious Stranger,* which was also published posthumously, both let down the ironic mask turning a mirror back on itself to reveal the paradox beneath the satire, disguise, and the innovative use of dialect and wordplay.[196]

4.3. Shakespeare in *Huckleberry Finn* – Minstrelsy Influences and Racial Implications

In *Huckleberry Finn*, as on the minstrel stage, revered art forms, especially the cultural authority of Shakespeare's plays, are targets of parody to undermine assumptions of white racial privilege. Such cultural affectation is remarked upon in a piece written for the *Territorial Enterprise* on June 5, 1865 entitled "Mark Twain on Operatic Music". Twain is critical of the operatic Italian caterwauling as fit to sing about dukes, duchesses, and imperial asses. However, when the Signorina broke into the English melody "The Last Rose of Summer" he reports that the audience erupted, describing the rendition as genuine music that gives you "pin-feather pimples on a picked goose." He concludes the article with "Confound it, now I have to go back to the foot of the class and start in fresh and get cultivated over

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196 Mark Twain, 'The War Prayer' in, *Europe and Elsewhere* (New York: Harpers & Brothers, 1909) pp. 394-398.
<urn:oclc:record:1042529527>.
Also at <https://warprayer.org>.

again."[197] Twain's sardonic comment alludes to what constitutes culture, and to Huck Finn "lighting out" on a journey that corresponded to Twain's affection for an alternative folk style as more representative of the culture of the masses. Ironically, this path leads him to embrace Shakespeare despite, and because of, qualms related to the highbrow appropriation of the plays to endorse a cultural hierarchy. Comic buffoons, such as the pseudo-royal thespians the duke and king, satirise the pretensions of the legitimate stage, characters who could have stepped out of *Henry lV*, *Henry V* or the streets of Shoreditch, or from the salon bars of the wild West where Twain was a prospector and newspaper reporter during the 1860s.

In nineteenth century America, Shakespeare was considered to be a literary alchemist, where according to Twain, "Shakespeare took other people's quartz and extracted gold from it – it was a nearly valueless commodity before."[198] Shakespeare was familiar and revered across the nation with English actors such as William Charles Macready and Edmund Kean welcomed from Britain with transatlantic enthusiasm to help mine the cultural lode. American actors then made their claim on the legitimate stage

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[197] This article also appeared as "Shakespeare" in *Mariposa Free Press*, 17 June 1865, p.1, quoted in Gary Scharnhorst, 'Additional Mark Twain Contributions to the Virginia City "Territorial Enterprise."' *American Literary Realism*, 47. 1(2014), 88–94 (pp. 90-91).

[198] Quoted by Walter Blair, *Mark Twain and Huckleberry Finn* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1960), p. 60.

Twain may have borrowed this description of Shakespeare's transformation of borrowed material from Goethe's "Shakespeare 'gives us golden apples in silver dishes.' By careful study we may acquire the silver dishes while discovering that we have 'only potatoes to put in them.'", quoted in James Hirsh, 'Samuel Clemens and the Ghost of Shakespeare', *Studies in the Novel*, 24. 3 (1992), 251-272 (p. 269) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29532871>.

inspiring a rush of vagabond thespian prospectors searching for economic gain beneath Shakespeare's broad literary umbrella. The duke and the king in *Huckleberry Finn* characterise this carpet-bagging exploitation, but unlike the minstrel burlesquers, who also toured the country, they attempt to pass themselves off as the genuine article.

Deflating the iconic stature of Shakespeare through burlesque was not only a means of satirising the highbrow aspirations of the legitimate stage, but also forging an alliance with Shakespeare's own restless dialogic fluidity. Twain interweaves fictional realism with burlesque versions of Shakespeare plays to expose and satirise the dodgy credentials of the duke and the king. Their pretensions to refinement imitate the cultural airs of the legitimate stage, and without the wit or artfulness of the minstrel stage burlesques. The fake thespians also exploit the minstrel tradition, passing off their tragi-comic travesty of blurred Shakespeare speeches as authentic renditions, to disguise an underlying pecuniary intention.

Carpetbagging fraudsters who ruthlessly exploited the popularity of Shakespeare's plays and the "Ethiopian" burlesque versions were a common feature in backwoods America as indicated by Charles White's *100th Night of Hamlet* (1874), a blackface sketch that parodies the antics of these pseudo-thespian performers.[199] In White's play a hopelessly confused actor combines Hamlet and Macbeth soliloquys tacked onto sketches of insulting humour that self-consciously satirise the masked incompetence of the

[199] *Inside the Minstrel Mask, Readings in Nineteenth-Century Blackface Minstrelsy*, ed. by A. Bean, J. V. Hatch & B. McNamara (Hanover and London: Wesleyan University Press, 1996), p. 189.

travelling players, piling on layers of abuse, which also allude slyly to Southern rural insecurities:

> JAKE: This is one of them places that don't grow; the people here are too mean to die. You can't see a tombstone within a hundred miles of the place; they ain't got any money to bury themselves, and all eat hay the same as cattle.[200]

Twain parodies this phenomenon of low humour in the duke and the king's "Nonesuch" play, which also exploits the popularity of Shakespeare and the minstrel burlesques, their ineptitude proving no barrier to defrauding their gullible Arkansas audiences out of four hundred and sixty-five dollars over three nights. The duke even gloats over fears of being made to look foolish because it is a way of increasing their profits through saving the pride of hoodwinked audiences.[201] It is likely that Twain was familiar with Charles White's sketch and these sham 'Shakespearians' as indicated by the duke's handbill advertising their show:

> (by special request,)
> Hamlet's immortal Soliloquy!!
> By the illustrious Kean!
> Done by him 300 consecutive nights in Paris!
> For One Night Only,
> On account of imperative European engagements!
> Admission 25 cents; children and servants 10 cents.[202]

The reference to '300 consecutive nights' echoes White's *100th Night of Hamlet* yoking the duke and the king to the counterfeit road players who take advantage of rural Southern credulity. Twain also satirises the vulgarity of the sham thespians portraying them as degraded rather than humorous

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[200] Charles White, *100th Nights of Hamlet, A Negro Sketch* (New York: Robert M De Witt, 1874) quoted in *Inside the Minstrel Mask*, p.189.
[201] HF, p. 170.
[202] HF, p. 154.

in their rehearsal of *Romeo and Juliet* through the coarse language and references to animals:

> [Duke] "you mustn't bellow out Romeo! that way, like a bull- you must say it soft, and sick, languishly, so – R –o –o-meo!; […] for Juliet's a sweet mere child of a girl, you know, and she don't bray like a jackass."[203]

Criticism of the duke and king's deceit is also signalled through their prancing about while practising the swordfight from *Richard III,* their incompetence signified when the king trips and falls overboard. The troubadours aim to exploit Southern audiences, but equally they corrupt the satirical undertones of the blackface tradition. Huck's gullible approval of Bilgewater's later imitation of the American stage actor Edwin Forrest, however, serves to expose the sham through the excessive melodrama of his perfromance:

> [Huck] Then he strikes up a most noble attitude, with one leg forwards and his arms stretched way up, and his head tilted back […] and then he begins to rip and rave and grit his teeth; and after that, all through his speech he howled and spread around, and swelled up his chest and just knocked the spots off any acting I ever seen.[204]

Forrest, ironically famous for his blackface portrayal of Othello, is linked to Bilgewater as a self-promoting fake thespian, a resemblance which also undermines the authenticity of the legitimate stage. Huck who represents the culturally unrefined and easily impressed is taken in by the duke's "sublime" rendition, memorising the soliloquy as an authentic version of Hamlet's conflicted identity. Thus, in honour of the duke, Huck performs his own version of Hamlet's soliloquy "To be or not to be; that is the bare

[203] HF, p.151.
[204] HF, p.152.

bodkin". (HF 152) The misquote signals that Twain is not contemplating life or death, as in Shakespeare's original, but the pain and anguish of disclosing an identity confined by the "bodkin" of civilisation. The soliloquy also muddles bits of *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*, "For who would the fardels bear, till Birnam Wood come to Dunsinane." The conflation implies a sense of despair and doom, with something that drives us to act recklessly, and "makes us rather sling the arrows of outrageous fortune." (HF 152). The misquotes and muddles, although appearing to be random, indirectly allude to Huck's own struggle to resolve his personal and public contradictions. The soliloquy blends lines improvised from *Hamlet, Macbeth,* and *Richard III*, plays about indecision, ambition and ruthless cunning, the textural indirection aligned to the ambiguities and disorder of minstrel stage masking.

Twain's parody of the fake thespians in his borrowed, yet original version of the duke's mangled Hamlet soliloquy acts as a play within a play, which is also a Shakespearean device used to present alternative perspectives and signal significant themes. The purposeful intent of Twain's disordered soliloquy is corroborated by E Bruce Kirkham:

> If the purpose of the composition were solely humorous, he might have merely jammed together twenty-five familiar lines. But Twain apparently had the text before him [...]. If the passage was composed with scholarly diligence, we might do well to look for some significance in both the lines chosen and the plays from which they were taken.[205]

This is not a view shared by Myra Jehlen who dismisses the burlesque in *Huckleberry Finn* as senseless pastiche designed to be irreverent, its muddle

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[205] E. Bruce Kirkham, 'Huck and "Hamlet": An Examination of Twain's Use of Shakespeare', *Mark Twain Journal*, 14. 4 (1969), 17-19 (p. 18) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41640866>.

reflecting a lack of respect that merely chimed with Twain's alternative voice of literary satire.[206] However, the creative originality within Twain's parodic travesty, identified by Kirkham, aligns with the misrule within Shakespeare's plays. This also resonates with Twain's intentionally disruptive philosophy "Irreverence is the champion of liberty and its only sure defence."[207] Twain's engagement with Shakespeare's ambiguity and bawdiness elevates his muddled *Hamlet, Macbeth, Richard III* travesty above accusations of mere buffoonery. The words of the soliloquy carefully chosen to conceal and reveal Twain's predicament of personal vindication through his literary works, but veiled because of concerns for his reputation and the misgivings of family and friends.

Shakespeare's influence on Twain, particularly *Hamlet*, is signalled by his own burlesque version of *Hamlet,* which he began writing in1881, and which pays homage, but also attempts to puncture the unconditional cultural reverence attached to Shakespeare. In his short story *What is Man?* (1880), which coincided with *Burlesque Hamlet* (but which was not published until 1906), Twain openly compares himself with Shakespeare as a claimant, but hewn from a rougher cloth.[208] During a heated exchange in *What is Man?* an older man claims that Shakespeare created nothing "He

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[206] Myra Jehlen, 'Banned in Concord: Adventures of *Huckleberry Finn* and Classic American Literature' in *The Cambridge Companion to Mark Twain,* ed. by F G Robinson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 93-115 (p. 96).
[207] Mark Twain *Notebook*, ed. by Albert Bigelow Paine (New York & London, Harper & Brothers, 1935).
< https://archive.org/details/MarkTwainsNotebook/page/n1/mode/2up>.
[208] Mark Twain, 'What is Man?' in *What is Man? and Other Essays* (New York: Harper, 1917), pp. 1- 109
<https://archive.org/details/cu31924021152321/page/n11/mode/2up>.

was machine, and machines do not create." The man admits though that Shakespeare was not an ordinary sewing machine, but a Gobelin loom, and that the gorgeous fabric that he produced came into him from external ideals, influences, and training to astonish the world. Others, however, who do not have Gobelin looms, must not fear reproach that they only have sewing machines to work with.

Thus, drawing on diverse and incongruous sources allied to Shakespeare's literary spinning methods, *Hamlet Burlesque's* book agent Basil Stockmar describes a good night out in the palace where he pulls out a couple of hundred yards of thread from his mouth from a spool he swallowed drinking Hamlet's health. The thread is an allusion to a storytelling yarn (as could be spun by Twain), his success noted by his statement "I got it off on 'is majesty the king". Then, on perceiving Hamlet and Horatio, Basil says he hopes he "ain't too late" for the ghost, asking them "How'r ye, boys – what luck? Seen him yet? Got him treed?" [209] Basil's irreverent aside jars with Hamlet and Horatio's lyrical discourse, however, as Basil does not interact directly with the characters, his comically disruptive role is unable to penetrate social barriers compared to the playful rhyming discourse of Shakespeare's unruly Autolycus. The anachronistic insertion of Basil Stockmar into the text emulates the disruptive antics of Autolycus who comically disorders and re-aligns the world of *The Winter's*

[209] Mark Twain, 'Burlesque Hamlet' in *Mark Twain Satires and Burlesques*, ed. by Franklin R. Rogers (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), pp. 49-87 (p. 79).

Tale.[210] While out of synch with life in Elsinor, Basil, as Hamlet's poor foster-brother, is an outsider, his claim to nobility, like Valet de Chambre in *Puddn'head Wilson*, negatively affected by his upbringing and social circumstances.

It could be argued that Twain's interweaving with Shakespeare was not irreverent enough, as the book agent Basil Stockmar interacts with the audience and with the ghost, but not with Shakespeare's text. In pantomime style, Twain has Basil jump out of his skin when the ghost creeps up on him from behind, kneeling and quaking holding out his book to be signed with great deference:

> "Oh don't hurt a poor devil! Upon my sacred word and honor I wish I may die if I didn't come just only to fetch your worship a presentation copy!
> (Kneels quaking before Ghost, and holds out his book.)
> (Or, let him simply exclaim "Gee-whillikins!" and skip out).[211]

Such reverence did not constrain Shakespeare who re-imagined, borrowed, and distorted material from his classical predecessors as a palimpsest for his own creations. Similarly, the minstrel delineators also revelled in cultural appropriation, also taking no hostages, with Shakespeare, and 'the segar-smoking' caricature of Twain in the Ethiopian travesty *Hamlet the Dainty*, all grist to the satirical mill of mocking the pretensions of the white cultural hierarchy.[212]

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[210] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 1998), Act IV, scene 3.
[211] Mark Twain, 'Burlesque Hamlet', p. 61.
[212] G W H Griffin, Esq., *Hamlet the Dainty, An Ethiopian Burlesque on Shakespeare's Hamlet* (Clyde, Ohio: A. D. Ames, 1875). <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31175035137515;view=2up;seq=1>.

Twain struggled with his burlesque versions of *Hamle*t stating in a letter to William Dean Howells on September 3, 1881, that he first attempted to add a country cousin to his *Hamlet* play nine years earlier, trying again in 1881.[213] He also worked in collaboration with Joseph T Goodman on a play entitled *Hamlet's Brother* which also proved unsuccessful. However, in his novels, his interaction with blackface irreverence goes beyond the clownish antics of Basil the Book Agent's adventures in Denmark, into the realms of satirically disguised dissent associated with the antebellum minstrel shows and the carnivalesque disruptions embedded within Shakespeare's plays.[214] Twain's *Hamlet Burlesque* is relevant to *Huckleberry Finn* because it was written at the same time as the novel (between 1880 and 1882). The unpublished burlesque sowed the seeds of the minstrel pattern that was much more effectively incorporated within *Huckleberry Finn,* where Shakespeare's burlesque subtext is acknowledged satirically in Huck's Hamlet soliloquy. Huck's burlesque of the American actor Edwin Forrest also forms a close alliance with the interactive role of Autolycus as Twain's minstrel-like, masked, alter ego.

As well as Huck's burlesque Hamlet soliloquy, *Huckleberry Finn* is ingeniously permeated with other borrowings from Shakespeare. Burlesque versions of his plays such as *Romeo and Juliet* are paralleled by

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[213] *Mark Twain – Howells Letters, The Correspondence of Samuel L Clemens and William D Howells 1872-1910,* pp. 369-370.
[214] Anthony J Berret, 'The Influence of 'Hamlet' on 'Huckleberry Finn.''' *American Literary Realism, 1870-1910*, 18. 1 (1985), 196–207 (p. 198) <www.jstor.org/stable/27746182>.

melodramatic real-life enactments in the Grangerford-Shepherdson feud, a duality that inverts the distinction between performance and reality. The mirroring device also brings into relief different types of borrowing, which aligns with the racial contradictions performed on the minstrel stage. For instance, the "Nonesuch" performances of the duke and the king enact corrupt appropriations of Shakespeare's plays designed to take advantage of the gullible. By contrast, Colonel Sherburn's powerful rhetoric appropriates Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* in order to demonstrate individual integrity. The Colonel delivers a scathing attack on the cowardice of mob justice "Now the thing for you to do, is to droop your tails and go home and crawl into a hole." (HF 164). This resonates with Coriolanus's contempt for the craven Roman masses "You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate […] that to the corrupt air, I banish you." (*Coriolanus* III. 3. 150-153). Reference to Shakespeare confers authority to Colonel Sherburn's call to end mob driven retribution, his speech a striking allusion to the vigilante violence driving the cowardly actions of the Southern lynch mobs:

> "Your mistake is […] that you didn't come in the dark, and fetch your masks […] The pitifulest thing out is the mob: that's what an army is – a mob; they don't fight with courage that's been born in them, but with courage that's borrowed from their mass and from their officers."[215]

Sherburn, like Coriolanus, characterises self-determination in the face of corrupt social and familial pressures, his shooting of the abusive drunk Boggs casting him as a loose cannon, and thus a threat to social hierarchy. The Colonel's action is a warning to Huck of the violent consequences of asserting individual freedom, allied to the fate of Coriolanus whose self-

[215] HF, p. 163…164.

autonomy is destroyed in the crossfire of competing loyalties between his conscience, and family and national pressures to conform. The dilemma also relates to Twain's fears of stripping away his mask of satire as in *The War Prayer* and *No. 44* (both of which were published posthumously).[216]

As well as the explicit references to Shakespeare plays, there are also implicit influences buried in *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* which speak to the conflict between personal morality and the imposed standards of a self-serving ruling class. Struggling with his conscience regarding whether to return Jim to Miss Watson, Huck is unable to pray for guidance: "I was letting *on* to give up sin, but…You can't pray a lie – and He knowed it." (HF 262) This echoes Claudius's predicament in *Hamlet*, who, like Huck, is wracked with guilt for his sins:

> [CLAUDIUS] Pray can I not
> Though inclination be as sharp as will.
> […]
> I am still possess'd
> Of those effects for which I did the murther.
>
> (*Hamlet,* III.3.38-39… 53-54)[217]

While deliberations on their transgressions are mirror images, they represent opposite extremes of the social spectrum. Huck decides to save Jim, which represents a victory for personal principle over social conditioning (HF 237), whereas Claudius, as a lawmaker, is praying for personal salvation having broken faith with his conscience. Huck's eloquent, heartfelt contemplation of life with Jim elevates his vernacular through its

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[216] William Shakespeare, 'Coriolanus', in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt (New York & London: W. W. Norton, 1997).
[217] William Shakespeare, 'Hamlet' in *The Norton Shakespeare* ed. by Stephen Greenblatt.

resonance with Claudius's lyrical soliloquy, Huck's friendship and humanity allowing real meaning to emerge from behind the mask of farce. As James Hirsh perceptively notes, there is another duality lurking within the text as Huck steals Jim, and Twain steals a passage from Shakespeare, but is either act a sin, or is it an alternative truth maligned as theft? [218] This is a pivotal moment in the novel where for Twain and Huck anxiety related to borrowing merges into racial co-dependency and self-acceptance:

> I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day, and in the night-time, sometimes moonlight, sometimes storms, and we afloating along, talking and singing, and laughing […] how glad he was when I come to him again in the swamp […] and would always call me honey, and pet me, and do everything he could think of for me […] I was the best friend old Jim ever had in the world, and the *only* one he's got now.[219]

Confusedly, Huck's perceived wickedness in stealing Jim – as expressed when he states that:

> "…and if I could think up anything worse, I would do that too; because as long as I was in, and in for good, I might as well go the whole hog."

- is aligned ominously with the blood-soaked Macbeth:

> "I am in blood/ Stepp'd in so far, that should I wade no more, / Returning were as tedious as go o'er."
>
> *(Macbeth*, III. 4. 1440-1444) [220]

The muddling of Huck's anxious rejection of cultural indoctrination with Macbeth's vaulting ambition creates an ambiguous alliance that confers a noble fatality to Huck's action, while warning of the violent consequences of

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[218] James Hirsh, 'Samuel Clemens and the Ghost of Shakespeare', *Studies in the Novel*, 24. 3 (1992), 251-272 (p. 266) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29532871>.

[219] HF, p. 237.

[220] William Shakespeare*, Macbeth* in *The Norton Shakespeare*.

asserting an independent cultural identity, with the risk of social denunciation.

The unruly rogue Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* is also aligned implicitly with Huck, who, by following an alternative moral code, does what is collectively deemed as wrong to achieve a greater right. Huck's decision not to send the letter to Miss Watson telling her that Mr Phelps has got Jim echoes Autolycus's decision not to tell King Polixenes the whereabout of his runaway son Florizel:

> If I thought it were a piece of honesty to acquaint the King withal, I would not do't. I hold it the more knavery to conceal it; and therein am I constant to my profession."
>
> *(The Winter's Tale* IV. 4. 661-664)

Unlike Huck, Autolycus revels in being disruptive, a Shakespearian minstrel irreverently flouting convention and reversing moral codes, using dishonesty to comment on, and transform the meaning of reality, where reality wears a mask of hypocrisy and deceit.

4.3.1. Shakespeare and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* – Minstrelsy Influences and Racial Implications

> "A little more than kin, and less than kind." (*Hamlet* I.2.65)

Shakespeare also plays an intrinsic role in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* in relation to contradictory aspects of kinship which blur and dissolve class, race, and gender boundaries. Consequently, Hamlet's first words in

Shakespeare's play to his Uncle Claudius, who is now his stepfather, resonate indirectly with *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* Hamlet's clever wordplay blurs 'of a type' or class, with being related, which are significant themes that underpin *Pudd'nhead Wilson*. Hamlet also infers an underlying cruelty from "less than kind", an ambiguity which alludes to confused issues of class and racial kinship in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*.

The influence of Shakespeare is more indirect in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* compared to *Huckleberry Finn*, but it is still very significant. The cradle swap of the related, but racially different babies, aligns with the disruptive purpose of interchangeable bodies in Shakespeare's play *Measure for Measure,* which disorders social and familial affiliations. The race of the babies in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is only apparent from the way they are dressed, an outward difference that can be manipulated, undermining any certainty as to cultural identity, thus making patrimony, upon which family and racial categories are based, uncertain and unknown. This practice of class and racial amalgamation is justified by Roxy when switching her son Chambers with the white heir Tom: "Taint no sin – *white* folks has done it! – It ain't no sin, glory to goodness, it ain't no sin! *Dey's* done it – yes, en dey was de biggest quality in de whole bilin', too – *kings*!" (PHW 13). Her speech with its repetition of 'sin' echoes the same practice dramatised in *Measure for Measure* by the Duke, who facilitates Isabella and Mariana trading places to expose the hypocrisy and deceit of the sanctimonious government deputy Angelo:

> "He is your husband on a precontract.
> To bring you thus together 'tis no sin,

Sith that the justice of your title to him
Doth flourish the deceit.

(*Measure for Measure*, IV.1.79-82)[221]

Marc Shell asserts that *Pudd'nhead Wilson* is based on the King Solomon trope in relation to uncertain and disputed paternity, parodied and linked to racial identity in *Huckleberry Finn* through the vernacular banter between Huck and Jim, but with darker implications, which result in murder and treachery in *Pudd'nhead Wilson.* According to Shell, other than Siamese twins, all people are changelings, as in the case of Tom and Chambers, or even Tom and Pudd'nhead, or they may as well be, with everyone interconnected as conglomerate children of the Earth.[222] Twain was enthralled by twinship and individual responsibility, dramatising it through exchanged racial identities, sidelining *Those Extraordinary Twins* to investigate the construction of class, gender, and racial divisions in the formation of identity. The concept resonates with Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* where identical twins (also under the cover of disguise and cross-dressing) explore the effect of social constraints on identity, eventually restoring socially approved class and gender relationships, while still implying the existence of alternatives:

[ORSINO] Meantime, sweet sister [Olivia]
We will not part from hence.—Cesario, come,
For so you shall be, while you are a man.
But when in other habits you are seen,
Orsino's mistress, and his fancy's queen.

(Twelfth Night, V. 1. 371-375)[223]

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[221] William Shakespeare, 'Measure for Measure' in *The Norton Shakespeare*.
[222] Marc Shell, 'Those Extraordinary Twins', *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory*, 47. 2 (1991), 29-75, (p. 39) <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/445226/pdf>.
[223] William Shakespeare, 'Twelfth Night' in *The Norton Shakespeare*.

False appearance, and the blurring of kinship in ‘sister’, ‘man’, ‘habits’, ‘mistress’ and ‘queen’ unnerves binary social and gender labels to imply fluid notions of identity. These themes of class and gender transgression in Shakespeare’s plays disrupt social order also chime with the instability of assigned class, gender, and racial identities that Twain explores in *Pudd’nhead Wilson.*

Although classed as coloured, Roxy’s loyalties are not bound by race. Her cradle-switch, as in *Measure for Measure,* is an act of political resistance by the powerless, motivated by autonomous self-interest that defy gender and racial stereotyping. Her action also has radical anti-slavery implications with the potential to dispute spurious claims of white ancestry in the South caused by a history of miscegenation, where parentage is uncertain, and incest more than a distinct possibility. Ironically, rigid laws of racial segregation, intrinsic to the construction of racial identity based on heritage, narrowed the racial gene pool which, with an unacknowledged history of miscegenation in the South, unintentionally sanctioned the taboo of incest. Thus, segregationist legislation, such as the Dred Scott decision of 1857 and the Plessy Ferguson ruling, is ironically justified by Marc Shell who describes incest as the “ineradicable ideal” where the false division between kith and kinship is replaced by a universal brotherhood, resolving the conflict between nature and culture. Justifying lifting the taboo on incest as intrinsic to a cultural levelling process, he goes on to assert:

> …universalist liberal ideology which would enlarge the particular siblinghood to include all humankind, compels all people to marry within the same siblinghood or not to marry. The liberal maxim 'All men are brothers' requires the lifting of the incest taboo in much the same way as the racialist rule 'Marry only your brother.'[224]

Werner Sollors also claims that this universalist liberal ideology that 'all men are brothers' is a position that suggests that there is no such thing as miscegenation, only a form of universal incest that is weakened by being so widespread. Sollors contends that sibling incest can thus be represented as the victory of revolutionary *fraternite* over the tyrannical father.[225]

Marc Shell investigates the ideal of 'universal siblinghood' through the interchangeable bodies in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure,* contending that the inference in the play is that all relationships have the potential to be incestuous, either indirectly as Isabella claims when pressured to succumb to Angelo to save her brother's life "Is't not a kind of incest, to take thine own sister's shame?" (Act III.1); or unknowingly, through switching bodies in the bed-trick when Mariana substitutes for Isabella to expose Lord Angelo's hypocrisy and abuse of power. In *Measure for Measure* Shakespeare departs from the ransom plot of his source material, when he shifts the focus to interchangeable aspects of brotherhood by blurring the distinction between a religious sister and a biological sister, and a masked brother (the Duke disguised as a friar) and Isabella's biological brother. The muddling of religious and social classifications of kinship confounds the hypocrisy of

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[224] Marc Shell, *Children of the Earth* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), p. 276, n. 15, quoted in Werner Sollors, *Neither Black nor White yet Both – Thematic Explorations of Interracial Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 319.
[225] Sollors, *Neither Black nor White*, p. 319.

socially constructed taboos of class and racial intermingling instituted to validate social hierarchy and political control. The burlesque subplot in *Measure for Measure* mirrors, and satirises, these themes of using the law to create distinctions based on kith and kin. The discourse between the disguised Duke and the dim-witted Constable Elbow mocks the legal process by muddling father and brother across class, religious and familial lines:

> [ELBOW] Come your way, sir – Bless you good father friar.
> [DUKE] And you good brother father. What offence has this man made you sir?
>
> (*Measure for Measure* III. 1. 268-270)[226]

Elbow explains that he has arrested Pompey for the crime of pimping, an offence contravening the strict laws of sexual conduct instigated by the State to prevent racially defiling the population:

> [ELBOW] Nay, if there be no remedy for it but that you will needs buy and sell men and women like beasts we shall have all the world drink brown and white bastard.
>
> *(Measure for Measure* III. 1. 259-261)

The play relates to laws that were passed during Tudor times to close stews and brothel-saloons in the cities, legislation that was designed to curtail sexual practices in order to establish a reputable national identity. [227] Such measures parallel the restrictive racial legislation of the post-Reconstruction period that also aimed at making liaisons across class and race lines socially repulsive to sustain the façade of an exclusive white American national identity. As the instrument of law enforcement, Elbow blames Pompey's pimping as responsible for creating a degraded population.

[226] William Shakespeare, 'Measure for Measure' in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed by Greenblatt.
[227] Sondra L Hausner, *The Spirits of Crossbones Graveyard, Time, Ritual and Sexual Commerce in London* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016).

His discourse, which invokes 'buying and selling men and women like beasts', resonates with the language of slavery, the association condemning both practices as a socially and morally corrupt.

The ending of the play is inconclusive following the revelation of the body-swap and removal of disguises. Isabella's refusal to respond to the Duke's marriage proposal leaves issues of siblinghood and kinship elucidated, but still unresolved:

> DUKE [to ISABELLA] If he be like your brother, for his sake
> Is he pardoned; and for your lovely sake
> Give me your hand and say you will be mine.
> He is my brother too.
>
> (*Measure for Measure*, V.1. 484-487)

Isabella's acquiescence to marraige would imply a return to traditional definitions of class and gender identity. Her silence provides scope for an alternative ideology of universal siblinghood where all mankind are brothers, erasing class and gender barriers that would make marriage redundant. Thus, through reference to the muddling of kith, kinship combined with the linguistic ambiguity in *Measure for Measure*, Shell argues that all human beings are siblings in a universal extended family where in effect, miscegenation would be a diluted form of incest. Despite there being only one direct reference to incest in *Measure for Measure,* Shell asserts that the wordplay is a form of disguise that jumbles family and religious affiliations. Thus, the slippage of 'friend' to mean kindly, as well as lover, Shell argues, endorses the claim for the play as implying an end to kinship:

> LUCIO [to ISABELLA] "Gentle and fair, your brother [Claudio] kindly greets you."
> [...]
> He has got his friend with child."

(Measure for Measure, I. 4 .24…28)

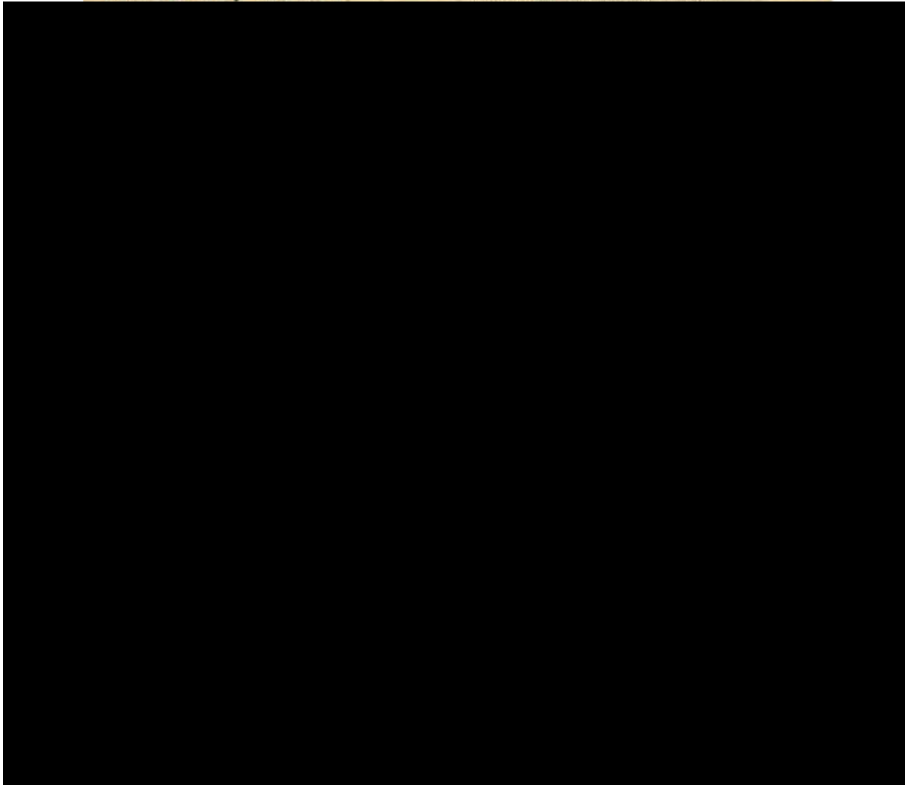
Such linguistic teasing interacts with the disguise and body exchanges drawing attention to identity as a performance, which destabilised class, race, and religious boundaries subject to the constraints of the law and the teachings of the Church[228] Wordplay as a masking device is also employed in *Twelfth Night* to reflect a fluctuating duality, a theme also intrinsic to *Pudd'nhead Wilson* aimed at diffusing cultural and racial divides.

Shell's argument concerning removing the taboo of incest as the "eradicable ideal" for achieving brotherhood and equality aligns with the philosophy of the German born political theorist Hannah Arendt, who in 1958, also argued that the best way to deal with segregation is not through integration, but by repealing the laws prohibiting miscegenation, which interfere in the private affairs of citizens.[229] Horrified reaction to this proposition was founded on the grounds that the logic of her position would mean that incest was also a purely private matter. However, she reasoned that State-engineered taboos of incest and miscegenation foster politically enforced endogamy, a paradox illustrated by Isabella's rhetorical question when asked to sacrifice her maidenhead to save her brother's life "Is't not a kind of incest?" - an act that would implicitly sanction incest and destabilise the meaning of kinship. Shell extends this argument, contending that the concept of incest covers all sexual acts where even the celibacy of religious sisters and brothers is an act of silent or non-verbal incest within the

[228] Marc Shell, *The End of Kinship – "Measure for Measure", Incest and the Ideal of Universal Siblinghood* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995).
[229] Hannah Arendt, quoted in Sollors, *Neither Black nor White*, p. 316.

compass of universal siblinghood. This alternative doctrine of eliminating the boundaries between biological kin and figurative kin collapses the defining elements of society imposed in the interests of imperialism, which applies to Tudor monarchs establishing a coherent national identity, as well as to Southern planters in post-Reconstruction America, anxious to maintain white privilege. The interchangeable bodies in Shakespeare's *Measure for Measure* resonate with Roxy's cradle-switch implying that Twain is also dabbling with a concept of all humanity as part of one extended family, deliberately muddling parentage to disrupt lines of inheritance and identity at odds with upbringing and appearance upon which social order and national identity in nineteenth century America was falsely constructed.

Interestingly, *Pudd'nhead Wilson* was successfully adapted as a stage play in 1895 by Twain's friend Frank Mayo. While slavery is romanticised and portrayed as patriarchal with slaves declaring "God bless you Marse York", the love story between the master's white relative Rowena and Chambers, on the surface, has echoes of a burlesque version of the socially transgressive relationship between Romeo and Juliet. Although Chambers is playing a slave, the audience is aware that he is really the rightful white heir Tom Driscoll. Thus, the grotesque taboo of interracial liaisons can be scrutinised through focus on the racialised masking of a white man playing a black slave who can pass as white.



Herald Square Theatre

Mr. CHARLES E. EVANS, Proprietor and Manager.

MR. WILL J. BLOCK..BUSINESS MANAGER
MR. HERMAN HAUSER..TREASURER

EVENINGS AT 8.15. MATINEE SATURDAY AT 2.

APRIL 15, 1895.

"Consider well the proportions of things.
It is better to be a young June bug
than an old bird of paradise."
—PUDD'NHEAD WILSON'S CALENDAR.

ROWY, Wilson's niece........................Miss FRANCES GRAHAM
HANNAH ....} slaves, {........................Miss EMMA BRENNAN
MELINDA....} {........................Miss ELLENA MARIS
Guests, Jurymen, Slaves, etc.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY.

PROLOGUE.—Yard of Driscoll's house, Dawson's Landing, Mo., on the Mississippi River. PERIOD, 1836.
ACT I.—Same, after lapse of twenty-three years.
ACT II.—Scene 1—Room in Wilson's house. (Dark change.)
Scene 2—Exterior of Wilson's ruined mill.
ACT III.—Wilson's law office.
ACT IV.—Same as Act III.

Figure 9: *Poster for Frank Mayo's drama of Pudd'nhead Wilson*

While the play eventually collapses the social and racial divides allowing white social order to prevail, the suggestion of a mixed-race relationship aligns Mayo's play with the ambiguous depiction of race and class in the blackface burlesques that challenge Southern claims of racial purity. Such an

affront to Southern honour was vigorously denounced by critics such as Martha McCulloch Williams who blamed Bret Harte, George Washington Cable, as well as Twain, for creating such a false impression of the South:

> In my seven years North, I have more than once been asked by people who regarded themselves as very well informed "if there were still in the South any pure blacks at all, or any pure-blooded whites?" At first such questioning made me angry. Later, I have come to recognize it as the legitimate outcome of the deliverances of Mr Cable and his school. Now that Mark Twain has come under their banner, the impression will doubtless become more than ever current.[230]

Despite McCulloch's opprobrium, Mayo's dramatisation of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* proved very popular in the North and the South. It played for over five years in over four hundred cities, including The Park Theatre in Hannibal, Missouri on January 14, 1898. Despite Mayo's modifications to Twain's text, which focused more on the love story, not surprisingly, the play was less well received in the South, with reviews pandering to the racial prejudices of its readers. While Northern reviews were enthralled by Pudd'nhead's ingenious scientific detection, in the South reviews targeted the racial connotations. *The Nashville Banner* describes Pudd'nhead as "revolting to a cavalier", adding that young ladies of the South were not in the habit, nor did they ever, make a companion of a slave man.[231] The conclusion of many of the reviews in Southern papers was that blood will tell however it is disguised, to reveal the nobility of whiteness.

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[230] Martha McCulloch Williams, 'In Re-"Pudd'nhead Wilson"', *Southern Magazine*, February, 1894 <http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/wilson/pwsouthn.html>.

[231] *Nashville Banner*, 12 Feb. 1898 in "*Pudd'nhead Wilson*: Schedule of Performances" <https://twain.lib.virginia.edu/wilson/pwplay/pwplaysched.html>.

The play came to Salt Lake City at a time when defining the position of the races in the social order was a major legal and judicial issue related to the May 18, 1896, Supreme Court 'Plessy v Fergusson 'separate but equal' decision, where it was praised enthusiastically as quite an improvement on the book. The review focuses on the humour and patience of Pudd'nhead Wilson, while reinforcing racial prejudices by claiming that the indolence, weakness, and ambition of the "Creole race" would always assert itself despite education and upbringing. By comparison, the reviewer argued, the tenderness and nobility of Chambers' whiteness would inevitably shine through to make him a fitting companion for Rowena. *The New Orleans Times-Democrat* also supports this interpretation of the play, beginning its review with the assertion that the play, as well as the novel, demonstrates whites' moral superiority:

> This is perhaps the only play that has been presented which in dealing with the question of negro character has not done more or less violence to the traditions and sentiments of southern people.[232]

While concerned with making a case for innate racial differences, the Southern reviews ignore the suggestion in the play of cross-racial attraction, thus dismissing its potential to despoil white endogamy and blur white racial identity. Southern audiences and critics clearly did not acknowledge the racial ambiguity and paradox within Twain's text, which through gender and racial inversions challenge white racial assumptions. Instead, focus was directed towards elements that would reinforce social hierarchy legitimised by the Plessy v Fergusson ruling of 1896 which authorised racial

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[232] *The New Orleans Times-Democrat*, Mon 31 Jan 1898.

segregation as part of the Constitution. A feisty black slave heroine as the central character of Mayo's dramatisation of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* would not only have been an anathema to Southern audiences and critics, but also an absurdity beyond serious contemplation. However, it is just such blind racial bigotry that Twain addresses in *Pudd'nhead Wilson* by having a black, slave, woman as the central protagonist, whose bold action and determination to achieve racial and gender equality for her mixed-race son exposes the false pride based on mythical codes of honour fabricated by white, Southern patriarchy to justify white supremacy.

4.4. *Is Shakespeare Dead?* Borrowing and Plagiarism - Interchangeable Bodies and Racial Identity

Twain followed in the illustrious footsteps of Shakespeare who amalgamated a wide range of sources, incorporated a subtext of misrule, and was accused of plagiarism (in a pamphlet written by Robert Greene in 1592, but probably forged by Henry Chettle). [233] Even today there is much controversy concerning Shakespeare's authorship, because like Twain, he borrowed and adapted of a range of source material, the dramatic licence and innovative re-imagining bringing into question issues of authenticity.

[233] Robert Greene, *Greene's Groats-worth of Witte*, ed by D Allen Carroll (Binghamton, NY: State University of New York, Press, 1994), pp. 84-85. (Based on computer aided analysis, Allen claims that Greene's pamphlet was almost certainly written by Henry Chettle) <https://shakespeareoxfordfellowship.org/wp-content/uploads/Greene.pdf>.

Thus, it is not it is not surprising that Twain should find common ground and inspiration for political comment and social transformation in the cross-genre, historically anachronistic and burlesque juxtapositions within Shakespeare's plays.

On April 23, 1864, Twain was commissioned to write a piece for the *Territorial Enterprise* to commemorate the three hundredth anniversary of Shakespeare's birth, the muted tone of the article casting a sardonic shadow over Shakespeare's standing as a cultural icon:

> This day, three hundred years ago, the greatest of modern poets, William Sha[k]speare, commenced; this day, two hundred and forty-eight years ago, the same quit again. But while we mourn his untimely end, it is satisfaction and consolation to us to know that he is not forgotten, and that the homage due to his genius will be offered at Maguire's opera House, this evening, when his disembodied spirit will have an opportunity of seeing one of his tragedies which he went most on, performed in a manner calculated to exceed the most extravagant expectations of the deceased. The tragedy is "Othello," and it will be powerfully cast and well played. The whole strength of the Opera House company will be brought to bear upon it. The management, in thus doing honor to the memory of a man so well and favorably known as Shakespeare, are doing themselves and the community honor, and we hope these facts will be duly recognized by a large and appreciate audience to-night. [234]

The facetious nature of the tribute to Shakespeare transpired because there was so little information about his life to draw on. Twain's tone intended to arouse suspicions that the great English playwright could be a claimant, is a subject he investigates in more detail in his semi-autobiographical novella *Is Shakespeare Dead?*

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[234] This article also appeared as "Shakespeare" in *Union Vadette*, Camp Douglas, Utah, May 12, 1864, p..4, quoted in Gary Scharnhorst, 'Additional Mark Twain Contributions to the Virginia City "Territorial Enterprise"' *American Literary Realism*, 47.1 (2014), 88–94 (p. 90).

Twain had an ambivalent attitude to Shakespeare however, with the words of the Bard of Avon providing inspiration, as well as arousing anxieties related to uncertainty over of Twain's own literary authenticity and cultural kinship. As well as invoking Shakespeare to mock the antics of the duke and the king as pretentious claimants to thespian royalty, Twain may also identify with these theatrical charlatans. Ignominiously chased out of town once their disguise was blown, an echo of the time when Twain hurriedly absconded to San Francisco over a spoof article he wrote that backfired when he suggested that money raised by 'The Sanitary Fund' was to be donated to a miscegenation society somewhere in the East.[235]

The wavering between open and covert allusions to Shakespeare in his novels, as well as several attempts to write literary burlesques, admits an indebtedness that Twain was reluctant to acknowledge, claiming that his works owe nothing to other writers, his capital as an author coming only from personal experience. In *Is Shakespeare Dead?* this is an argument that Twain uses to cast aspersions on Shakespeare's authorship because records of Shakespeare's experience, essential to expand and enrich his works, are so limited. However, contradicting his own assertion of literary originality, Twain also claims in an 1875 letter to his friend William Dean Howells "I would not wonder if I am not the worst literary thief in the world, without knowing it."[236] Twain's ambivalence over creative borrowing or 'unconscious plagiarism' is comically grappled with in *Huckleberry Finn* when Huck weighs up different perspectives on the issue of stealing fruit:

[235] Twain, *A Biography,* ed. by Albert Bigelow Paine, p. 249.
[236] *Mark Twain – Howells Letters*, vol.1, p. 112.

> Mornings, before daylight, I slipped into the cornfields and borrowed a watermelon, or a mushroom, or a punkin, or some new corn […] Pap always said it warn't no harm to borrow things if you meant to pay them back, sometime; but the widow said it warn't anything but a soft name for stealing, and no decent body would do it. Jim said he reckoned the widow was partly right and pap was partly right; so the best way would be for us to pick out two or three things from the list and say we wouldn't borrow them any more – then he reckoned it wouldn't be no harm to borrow the others. […] So we talked it over all one night. […] We warn't feeling just right before that, but it was all comfortable now.[237]

The inconsistencies indicate that Twain is self-conscious about his literary indebtedness, particularly as he had to apologise to Oliver Wendell Holmes for 'unconscious plagiarism' when his dedication to *Innocents Abroad* replicated Holmes' dedication in "Songs in Many Keys" (1849-1861) without citation. [238] Twain was also deeply humiliated by adverse reaction to his Whittier speech given at *The Atlantic Monthly* dinner on 17 December 17, 1877. In a vernacular burlesque, Twain comically linked his own character with that of Holmes, Emerson and Longfellow who were distinguished guests at the event, where he implies that there is a borrowed element to all authorship.[239] Twain's intent was to use irreverence to claim an American literary identity liberated from, but still influenced by European ancestry. However, the scholarly audience took offence, a response that caused Twain great pain, as he wrote to Howells on December 23, 1877:

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[237] HF, p. 74.

[238] Twain made a speech entitled 'Unconscious Plagiarism' about this incident at *The Atlantic Monthly* Dinner in honour of Wendell Holmes, 29 August 1879, see Mark Twain, *Mark Twain's Speeches* (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1923), pp. 77-79 <urn:oclc:record:1156371114>.

[239] 'Sassing such Famous Littery People", 'The Story of a Speech' in *Mark Twain's Speeches* <http://twain.lib.virginia.edu/onstage/whittier.html>.
See also 'The Story of a Speech' in *Mark Twain's Speeches,* pp. 63-76.

> I wrote that speech & saw no harm in it, no disrespect towards those men whom I revered so much […] It burns me like fire to think of it.[240]

Obviously stung by accusations of borrowing, many years later Twain argues in his short semi-autobiographical novel *Is Shakespeare Dead?* that William Shakespeare was also under suspicion as not the author of the plays attributed to him. Instead, Twain subscribes to Shakespeare scholar Delia Bacon's theory that the plays were part of a collaboration between Francis Bacon (no relation), Sir Walter Raleigh, and Edmund Spenser, which contained embedded codes that protect the true author's identity against possible accusations of sedition. Twain's conviction on this subject is recorded by James Beck (1861-1936), former Solicitor General of the United States (1921 to 1925) based on a discussion with Twain on this issue. Beck explains that Twain leans heavily on the theory proposed by author and editor William Stone Booth (1864-1926) that the acrostic name of Francis Bacon runs through many, or if not all, of the plays. Even though the task of decoding proved impossible to achieve, Twain remained a convinced Baconian according to his biographer Albert Bigelow Paine.[241] Beck's refutation of Twain's intransigence was based partly on Bacon's prose style in "Masques and Triumphs" which Beck describes as pedantic and dogmatic compared to the imagination and feeling of Hamlet's prose speech to the Mousetrap players.[242] In addition, Beck disputes Twain's arguments against Shakespeare's authorship due to the playwright's limited formal education,

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[240] *Mark Twain – Howells Letters*, p. 212.
[241] James M Beck, 'Shakespeare and the Law', *American Bar Association Journal*, 15. 3 (1929), 133–137 (p. 135) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25707594>.
[242] Ibid, pp. 136-137.

absence of legal training, and his scant experience of wars, seamanship and travel because based on this criteria, Beck questions whether Twain could be the author of his own novels. Twain, like Shakespeare, shared a similar rural upbringing, had auto-didactic roots, a limited formal education, and little direct experience of the law, and yet they both became renowned literary figures who transcended their own age and experience.

Evidence suggests that Twain's scepticism in *Is Shakespeare Dead?* also masks a more subtle attack on assigning iconic status based on conjecture which, if challenged, would be regarded as an attack on the cultural authority of the nation. Twain was aware that arguing against Shakespeare's authorship was a debate that could never be won because of a wall of prejudice, intolerance, and even outrage, no matter how strong or weak the evidence. Twain railed against such unconditional cultural reverence:

> We always get at second hand our notions about systems of Government [...] preferences in matters of religion and political parties; and our acceptance or rejection of the Shakespeares and Arthur Ortons and the Mrs Eddys. We get them all at second-hand, we reason none of them for ourselves.[243]

Twain focuses on Shakespeare's authorship as he has the greatest renown, his purpose to show how reverence based on unproven evidence can be exploited to manipulate the ill-informed and vulnerable to reinforce a social hierarchy. In *Huckleberry Finn*, the duke characterises this ability to fool people through their unquestioning belief in the voice of authority by making unsubstantiated claims to be as impressive as possible:

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[243] Mark Twain, *Is Shakespeare Dead? - From my Autobiography* (New York: Harper, 1909), p. 128 <https://archive.org/details/isshakespearedea00twaiuoft>.

> The duke went down into his carpet bag and fetched up a lot of little printed bills […] One bill said 'The celebrated Dr Armand de Montalaban of Paris' […] in another bill he was the 'world renowned Shaksperean tragedian, Garrick the Younger, of Drury Lane, London,[244]

The duke and the king's deceitfulness is an abuse of the voice of authority for personal gain, a contrast to the creative and imaginative slipperiness of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale,* mirrored by Huck, who also breaks the rules, in order to challenge the constructed nature of social boundaries.

The ambiguity of Twain's evidence disputing Shakespeare's authorship indicates that his rhetoric was designed to be polemic, an attack on the highbrow cultural authority of the Stratford-idolaters. Nevertheless, he intended his argument against automatic faith in Shakespeare's authorship to be taken seriously. According to the author Everett Emerson, the most convincing and well-argued sections of the book are the twenty-two pages that Twain reprinted from George Greenwood's *The Shakespeare Problem Restated,* which is included according to Emerson "without permission - which hardly seems appropriate behaviour for an advocate of copyright laws", and for someone self-conscious about accusations of literary borrowing. [245]

Twain leans heavily on Shakespeare's lack of legal experience to dispute his authorship of the plays. However, in the prologue to *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, "A Whisper to the Reader", Twain satirises legal expertise by comically juxtaposing domestic details with legal jargon and rambling classical allusions to Dante and Beatrice that mock claims to legal authority:

[244] HF, p. 144.

[245] Everett H. Emerson, *Mark Twain: A Literary Life* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), p. 294.

> These chapters are right now in every detail, for they were rewritten under the immediate eye of William Hicks, who studied law part of a while in southwest Missouri thirty five years ago and then came over here to Florence for his health…He was a little rusty on his law but he rubbed up for this book… [246]

The blurring of narrative sources, combined with long incoherent sentences deliberately undermines the legal opinion, which is also confused by incongruous references to ancient Italian literary sources. The courtroom detail in the denouement of *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* when Twain is no lawyer himself, suggests that his criticism of Shakespeare for the same deficiency is rather spurious. From the implications of "The Whisper", where disdain for the law is muddled with the literature of dead poets, it can be inferred that the purpose of questioning Shakespeare's authorship is an oblique means of attacking the construction of the literary canon with its reliance on the accepted reputation of long dead authors.

The conceit is satirised further in one of Twain's short stories 'Is He Living or is he Dead?', included in *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Sketches* (1900). In the tale, a group of starving artists promote the work of one of their members, who then fakes his own death:

> Well, then, by way of preamble I will ask you to note this fact in human history: that the merit of many a great artist has never been acknowledged until after he was starved and dead. This has happened so often that I make bold to found a law upon it. This law: that the merit of every great unknown and neglected artist must and will be recognized and his pictures climb to high prices after his death. My project is this: we must cast lots—one of us must die."[247]

Death is thus a necessary means of enhancing reputation and makes his

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[246] PHW, 'A Whisper to the Reader', introduction, p. v.
[247] Mark Twain, *The Man that Corrupted Hadleyburg and Other Stories and Sketches* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1900) <https://archive.org/details/manthatcorrupted00twaiiala>.

works more valuable, and all the friends become rich. The sketch implies that the art world deserved to be duped for revering artists of antiquity above living artists, who are obliged to die before they can be fully venerated.

Joe Falocco however, is critical of Twain's attempt to question Shakespeare's authorship postulating that it was a sense of inadequacy that led to Twain's support for the aristocratic Francis Bacon. Falocco asserts that Twain was unable to accept that Shakespeare could rise from provincial roots to achieve the artistic heights that he felt he could not match, until he was dead, or at least rumoured to be! Thus, by accusing Shakespeare, the ultimate literary icon, of being a claimant, or possibly a collaborative author, Twain was able to vindicate his own works as an authentic form of intertextual, respectful borrowing. [248] It may be that Twain was correct in questioning the authorship of the plays, but chose the wrong literary figure in Francis Bacon to attach his Shakespeare scepticism to.

Leaving aside questions of Shakespeare's authorship, interesting though it is to speculate, what Twain does indicate in *Is Shakespeare Dead?* is that he struggled with accepting that the plays could be written by a humble resident of Stratford-upon-Avon because it would reflect badly on his own literary output. Therefore, Twain was convinced that the true author of the plays attributed to Shakespeare must have had cultural and educational advantages unavailable to the Southern-born, non-conformist

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[248] Joe Falocco, '"Is Mark Twain Dead?": Samuel Clemens and the Question of Shakespearean Authorship', *The Mark Twain Annual*, 2 (2004), 25-40. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41582186>.

schoolboy from Hannibal, Missouri. Equally, denying Shakespeare authorship in *Is Shakespeare Dead?* provides a platform to illuminate the pitfalls of reverence based on received opinion and inherited prejudice that awards disproportionate respect to historical literary figures based on unverifiable evidence and the opinion of experts. For Twain, criticism of Shakespeare's authorship provides a means to make a plea for the right to be critically independent, free from the oppression of received opinion, and without fear of being branded sacrilegious.

In *Huckleberry Finn,* Twain satirises this unconditional respect for high-born credentials when Huck and Jim are first told of the duke's claim to be of aristocratic birth "Jim's eyes bugged out when he heard that; and I reckon mine did too." (HF 137) Though later, through personal experience, and a more detached perspective of 'sivilization', Huck was able to perceive that their companions were merely royal pretenders "It didn't take me long to make up my mind that these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds." (HF 138-140) Huck notes cynically that the fakes and the real ones were all the same anyway taking advantage of others to sustain their positions of power:

> What was the use to tell Jim these warn't real kings and dukes? It wouldn't a done no good; and besides, it was just as I said; you couldn't tell them from the real kind.[249]

Challenging unconditional literary worship is a levelling process that allows scope for other voices to be heard and respected, liberated from definitions of race, religion, gender, and class imposed by the ruling elite.

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[249] HF, p. 172.

Evidence suggests that Twain had a chip on his shoulder regarding literary worth, but he defended the function and dignity of the humourist when he received an honorary MA from Yale University in 1888:

> Ours is a useful trade a worthy calling […] with all its lightness and frivolity it has one serious purpose – the deriding of shams, the exposure of pretentious falsities, the laughing of stupid superstitions out of existence; and […] whoso is engaged in this warfare is the natural enemy of royalties, nobilities, privileges and all kindred swindles, and the natural friend of human rights and human liberties.[250]

Forever inconsistent and playful, however one wonders why Twain would deny that the plays could be from the pen of the son of a lowly glover's son from Stratford upon Avon, when Twain shares a similar humble background, and when they both write for the "belly and the members", as well as for the head. The intermingling of disguised gender roles, low class burlesque and literary virtuosity in Shakespeare plays, is paralleled in Twain's novels, to indirectly target the political anxieties and cultural authority of the ruling class. James Hirsh asserts that while Twain parodied Fennimore Cooper, praised Cervantes, and felt rivalrous towards Bret Harte and Melville, there was no influence that he interacted with so creatively, and with such anxiety, as with Shakespeare. Hirsh notes that Twain Americanises or localises Shakespeare by transferring him to the American frontier and rural backwoods.[251] However, Twain's influence stretches further in cultural exchanges with minstrel burlesques such as *Hamlet the Dainty.* The cast of

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[250] Justin Kaplan, *Mr. Clemens and Mark Twain*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966), p. 147.
[251] James Hirsh, 'Samuel Clemens and the Ghost of Shakespeare', *Studies in the Novel*, 24. 3 (1992), 251-272 (p. 267) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29532871>.
Hirsh, p. 267.

European immigrants, and the white-faced, cigar-smoking ghost from the South (slyly referencing both Twain and the Ku Klux Klan) becomes equal fodder for satire in the interests of deflating and mocking white hegemony.[252] In his notes Twain claims we are all irreverent but only charge others with this offence, so reverence is not something to be proud of, but simply a matter of personal predilection.[253] To overcome this inconsistency, he proposes in jest (so meant to be taken seriously) that only his opinion should matter, as he would be charitable, unlike the fanatical 'Shakesperoids' and other self-appointed arbiters of moral and cultural values.[254]

4.5. Conclusion

Huckleberry Finn and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* are retrospective novels that trace a journey of racial self-discovery from behind a mask of satire, enhanced by creative exchanges with the burlesque subtext of Shakespeare plays. The innovative style of the earlier sections of *Huckleberry Finn* also owes a debt to the polyphonic vernacular, caricatures and exaggerated melodrama of the minstrel stage which mirrors and mocks a constructed white American reality built on systemic inequality and counterfeit. As has been discussed, the final chapters depict Tom Sawyer's chivalric playacting,

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[252]Griffin, *Hamlet the Dainty,* p.4 <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31175035137515;view=2up;seq=1>.

[253] Quoted from Mark Twain's notes in Sydney J Krause, 'Olivia Clemens's 'Editing' Reviewed', *American Literature*, 39. 3 (1967), 325–351 (p. 347-348) <https://doi.org/10.2307/2923298>.

[254] Twain, *Is Shakespeare Dead?,* p. 134.

which reflects a return to a context skewed to favour white rule with its dependency on racial exploitation. The change is signified by the increased use of the racial invective “nigger” (seventy-seven times in the last ten chapters). While Tom’s dominant narrative voice reflects post-Reconstruction Southern white resurgence, the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* is contrary to Twain’s cultural aspirations towards achieving social progress. Twain is highly critical of the sham romanticism of Walter Scott’s novels (the inspiration for Tom’s evasion escapade), his scorn for the heroic mythology an indication that the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* is a burlesque of Southern delusions of grandeur. Twain blamed Scott for ‘medievalising’ the modern world, even incredibly holding him responsible for the Civil War, by helping to foster the indomitable mindset of the Confederate imagination.[255] Such a political context makes it impossible for Huck to resist such white intransigence. The merging of Huck and Twain’s voices in the concluding pages of the novel “If I’d a knowed what a trouble it was to make a book I wouldn’t a tackled it and ain’t agoing to no more.” (HF 322) is Twain’s sense of pessimism expressed through Huck, both dissatisfied at the outcome of their flight from ‘sivilization’. The sympathy and understanding that developed between the raft companions Huck and Jim in their bid for freedom linked them as fugitive others, an interdependence that blurred racial divides and extended the borders of cultural inclusiveness. However, a post-Reconstruction context of white racism, enshrined in law by the Plessy

[255] Sidney J Krause, ‘”The Sir Walter Disease” – A Sick and Sickened Mark Twain’ in *Mark Twain as Critic* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2019), chapter 9
<doi:10.1353/book.71832>.

Fergusson ruling of 'separate but equal', encoded a Southern xenophobic sectionalism which eroded the Civil War aims of abolition and racial equality.

Toni Morrison in *Playing in the Dark* sees *Huckleberry Finn* as a combative critique of antebellum America that sheds light on class and race beneath a mask of satire and overstated innocence. However, she claims that critics of the novel fail to examine the interdependence of slavery and freedom, where Huck's freedom is parasitical, and dependent on Jim's enslavement. Morrison contends that this accounts for Twain's inability to explore the journey into free territory and enable Huck to mature and escape from the constraints of social conditioning.[256] Morrison condemns this white vulnerability in the ending of *Huckleberry Finn* which she equates to a sterile, isolationist attitude to white selfhood.

Such a whitewashed racial imperative, as envisaged by Twain in the ending of *Huck Finn*, is also echoed by late nineteenth century performances of Shakespeare on the legitimate stage, where the burlesque elements were also edited out, and the white male leads took centre stage in order to white ideological hegemony. In nineteenth century performances of *Othello*, the Moor's skin colour, costume and language evolved through the century transforming him from African to lightly tanned to project an idealised vision of white American identity. The erasure of blackness on the stage, and in American literature, is what Morrison refers to as a denial of the influence of a dark Africanist presence in the cultural heritage of the nation.

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[256] Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark, Whiteness and the Literary Imagination* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), pp. 54-59, (p. 55).

However, the racial ambivalence focused on the minstrel mask coincided with what Morrison describes as images of blackness that can be fearful *and* desirable as self-contradictory features of the self. Twain imagines this contradiction through the character of Huck in his alliance with Jim, and in Tom Driscoll, who is careful to mask his racially hybrid heritage for fear of the social consequences, but who also takes dark pleasure in rebelling against the constraints of white conformity.

As in *Huckleberry Finn*, the ending of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* has also been criticised as a racist collapse where, according to Christopher Koy, the ultimate tragedy for Pudd'nhead Wilson is something Samuel Clemens shared with his tragic hero. Koy bases this interpretation on Pudd'nhead's failure to condemn the system of slavery that drove Roxy to protect her child against being sold down the river, arguing that:

> When Roxy fell to the floor and begged forgiveness, Wilson might well have said: "No, get up Roxy. You should not ask for forgiveness."[257]

Thus, Roxy's worst fear was an outcome that Wilson eventually helped to bring about, and which led to his final triumph in the courtroom:

> Troop after troop of citizens came to serenade Wilson, and require a speech, and shout themselves hoarse over every sentence that fell from his lips – for all his sentences were golden now, all were marvellous. His long fight against hard luck and prejudice was ended; he was a made man for good.[258]

Koy was not alone in criticising *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* for its accommodation towards the system of slavery. Stephen Railton also claims that the ending is a socially reassuring erasure that sought popular

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[257] Koy *The Misunderstood Conclusion of Mark Twain's Pudd'nhead Wilson.*
[258] PHW, p. 213.

approval where the objective was also to appease, rather than confront, the prejudices of white readers.[259]

Thus, through Pudd'nhead Wilson's success, Twain recognises his responsibility for Roxy and Tom's downfall, the tragedy being that Twain, and his protagonist Pudd'nhead Wilson, do not have the capacity to oppose a racially biased legal system that sanctions the perpetuation of a racist society. Albion Tourgee, in *A Fool's Errand,* also acknowledges blame for white Southern intractability in the post-bellum era when, despite his best efforts to bridge the colour divide through support for the civil rights of the emancipated slaves, like Twain in the endings of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Tourgee is forced to admit defeat:

> "It was our fault – […] Slavery as a formal state of society was at an end: as a force, a power, a moral element, it was just as active as before. Its conscious evils were obliterated: its unconscious ones existed in the dwarfed and twisted natures which had been subjected for generations to its influences, - masters and slaves alike. As a form of society, it could be abolished by proclamation and enactment; as a moral entity, it is as indestructible as the souls on which it has left its mark." [260]

As Pudd'nhead notes with ironic satire in his almanac, "an enemy can partly ruin a man, but it takes a good-natured injudicious friend to complete the thing and make it perfect", proved by his courtroom success in unmasking Roxy's act of racial reversal (PHW 68). Finally, Wilson becomes a valued member of the Dawson's Landing 'free-thinkers organisation' because he is now regarded as no threat to the establishment. The tragedy is

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[259] Stephen Railton, 'The Tragedy of Mark Twain by Pudd'nhead Wilson', *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 56. 4 (2002), 518-544 (p. 544) <https://doi.org/10.1525/ncl.2002.56.4.518>.
[260] Tourgee, *A Fool's Errand*, pp. 380-381.

that Twain is conscious of his own expediency, but he is also aware that his voice will be cast into obscurity unless shielded by a mask of satire. The predicament is cynically noted in Pudd'nhead's first calendar aphorism "Tell truth or trump – but get the trick" (PHW 1).

Despite the racial contradictions and prevarication in *Pudd'nhead Wilson,* the novel was hailed as "a classic in its own right" by F R Leavis (1956), as well as praised by critics such as Henry Nash Smith and James M Cox based on Twain's handling of race issues and the daring (at the time) subject of miscegenation.[261] Twain had little confidence in the novel which he felt had been cobbled together and lacked originality. This was due to the confusion caused by the overlapping plots concerning identity formation. The dark twins and the debate on nature versus nurture narrative became subservient to the parodic focus on the creation of identity from a psychological and racial perspective.[262] The inevitable depiction of capitulation to the forces of white authority in *Puddd'nhead Wilson* and in *Huckleberry Finn* resonated with the uneasy pragmatism of Twain's own voyage of moral and racial discovery, which unfortunately, ends in disaster for racial progress and equality.

Frank Mayo's adaptation of *Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1895) diluted the racial elements to align with popular dramas of the 'tragic mulatto'. The play proved very successful, as audiences were aware that Chambers is white, and so the 'interracial' romance was acceptable based on the knowledge that

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261 Quoted in Michael Orth, '"Pudd'nhead Wilson" Reconsidered or the Octoroon in the Villa Viviani', Mark Twain Journal, 14.4 (1969), 11-15 (p. 11) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41640864>.
262 Ibid, p. 15.

racial hierarchy would be restored. Significantly, in Mayo's play, the cradle-swap is portrayed as a mistake to characterise Roxy as a fool, rather than as an agent of racial reform. Also, her son Tom Driscoll becomes more melodramatically demonic. The changes reinforce the scientific thinking of the times which contended that heredity was responsible for the formation of identity, and that, 'blood will tell.' [263]

The twists and omissions in Mayo's adaptation reveal that Twain was more radical regarding race, confronting miscegenation indirectly through gender and race inversions allied to minstrel stage ambiguity. Despite evidence supporting both racist, and antiracist, views in *Pudd'nhead Wilson*, Twain uses quotation marks for "black blood" and "nigger" when Tom discovers his racial identity (PHW 47) to distance himself from the racist culture of the times. [264] The implication from the text is that upbringing is a crucial aspect in the construction of identity, as signified by Tom Driscoll's wavering denial and acceptance of his mixed-race heritage. As well as Pudd'nhead Wilson, the racially insecure Tom Driscoll represents another manifestation of Twain's conflicted identity as an outsider to the cultural mainstream, who gains acceptance by masking his true self beneath a veil of irreverence and satire.

Twain's opinions on race and slavery underwent many transformations during the nineteenth century. His early unconditional

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[263] George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper, 1971), pp. 228-255 <https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.01703>.
[264] Railton, *The Tragedy of Mark Twain*, p. 543.

acceptance of slavery is verified by letters home in the 1850s where he stated that he deplored having to walk among crowded New York sidewalks with “negroes, mulattoes, quadroons and other trash.”[265] In his autobiography he explains the origins of his early views on slavery:

> I was not aware that there was anything wrong about it. No one arraigned it in my hearing; the local papers said nothing against it. The local pulpit taught us that God approved it, that it was a holy thing, and the doubter need only look to the Bible to settle his mind [...] and then the texts were read aloud to us to make the matter sure.[266]

This unthinking outlook was replaced over time, and with the benefit of experience and travel, by a sense of guilt and shame at his previous bigotry, which he expressed in a letter to the Hartford sculptor Karl Gerhardt on May 1, 1883. Here Twain concedes that the white man should take a large share of responsibility for crimes committed by those they have mistreated:

> And besides, whenever a colored man commits an unright action, upon his head is the guilt of only about one tenth of it, and upon your heads and mine and the rest of the white race lies fairly and justly the other nine tenths of the guilt.[267]

Twain rails against systemic discrimination in his later works, dropping the satirical mask to reveal a hidden ‘racialised other’ in works including *No.44 The Mysterious Stranger* and *The War Prayer*. In *No. 44 The Mysterious Stranger,* such racial vacillation is liberated through an acceptance and merger across time and space with the dark otherness of August’s alter-ego represented by the black plantation minstrel. This

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[265] Phillip S. Foner, *Mark Twain: Social Critic* (New York: International Publishers, 1972), p. 253.
[266] *The Autobiography of Mark Twain* ed. by Charles Neider (New York: Harper Collins, Perennial Classics, 1990), p. 7.
[267] Letter to K. Gerhardt, May 1, 1883, reprinted in Victor Doyno, *Mark Twain: Selected Writings of an American* Skeptic (New York: Prometheus, 1995), p. 222.

depiction of blackness as an essential and enriching aspect of the self-contradiction of whiteness resonates with Shakespeare's *Othello* where Othello is presented as an African man of nobility and heroism who both reinforces, and transcends, racial stereotyping. Othello's cultural difference is twisted out of shape and demonised, part of a process of dehumanisation needed to justify slavery for the demands of an emerging mercantile economy.[268]

The topical relevance embedded within the juxtaposed sources and diverse narrative style of *Othello* encoded fault lines of religious and political discord during the Elizabethan era. The masking device aligns with the parodic double-consciousness of Twain's novels and the antebellum minstrel burlesques in depicting volatile issues of race, class, gender, and ethnicity that could not be confronted directly for fear of social derision, as was the case for Pudd'nhead Wilson, or in Shakespeare's time, something even worse.

The endings of *Huckleberry Finn* and *Pudd'nhead Wilson* bear witness to Twain's circumspection concerning the overwhelming forces of social conformity, fearful of the ostracising consequences of throwing off the shackles of cultural restraint and the affect it would have on his literary standing. As George Orwell perceptively notes with reference to Twain: "[he] never attacks established beliefs in a way that is likely to get him into

[268] Gustav Ungerer, 'The Presence of Africans in Elizabethan England and the Performance of 'Titus Andronicus' at Burley-on-the-Hill, 1595/96', *Medieval & Renaissance Drama in England*, 21 (2008), pp. 19–55, (p. 20) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24322681>.

trouble.[269] However, Twain's satirical criticism of white American values through double-voiced narrative and social disorder chimes with the duality of his own identity, the personal and public conflict of a divided soul localised and universalised through interaction with the absurd paradoxes of the blackface minstrel burlesques, and the restless balancing of opposites embedded within Shakespeare's plays.

[269] Stuart Hutchinson, Introduction to *The Innocents Abroad* by Mark Twain (Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 2010), pp. v -xvi, (p. ix).

5. Performance and Masking in Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man and his Masquerade*

"It is no more than a moral prejudice that truth is worth more than appearance…Why should we be forced to assume that there is an essential difference between true and false in the first place? Isn't it enough to assume that there are degrees of apparency…lighter and darker hues of appearance.

- Friedrich Nietzsche, Passage 34, *Beyond Good and Evil*

[Captain Ahab] All visible objects, man, are but as pasteboard masks. But in each event — in the living act, the undoubted deed — there, some unknown but still reasoning thing puts forth the mouldings of its features from behind the unreasoning mask. If man will strike, strike through the mask!

- Herman Melville, Chapter 36, *Moby-Dick*

5.1. Introduction

The complex use of disguise in Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man* satires the disingenuous nature of an emerging national identity constructed to reflect the materialistic values and imperatives of the dominant white cultural mainstream. Through an innovative literary exchange with the disorder and ambiguity of blackface minstrelsy, *The Confidence Man* enacts an alternative and more racially representative cultural identity. Melville indicates that the cross-genre style of the minstrel songs and shows transmitted an oral tradition of subliminal folk memory, which resonated with the carnival subtext of Shakespeare plays to which he also alludes. Combined with other literary and popular sources, the interwoven elements created a distinctive and unique American cultural identity. As with the

minstrel burlesques, *The Confidence Man* embraces the spirit of Shakespeare's plays misrule, continuing an ancient tradition of covert dissent that deflates pretentions, exposes hypocrisy, and re-configures social boundaries.

Herman Melville's novel *The Confidence Man and his Masquerade* (1857) performs an ambiguous and deliberately misleading mid-nineteenth century America reality through the inverted lens of blackface minstrelsy and the pervasive influence of Shakespeare.[1] Melville's enigmatic novel was published on April 1,1857, a signal that the novel is a charade not meant to be read at face value, but rather as a satire of the fabricated nature of reality masking the opportunism of a spiritually debased world. The vari-focused form of the novel reflects a period of democratic ambiguity that highlights incongruous attitudes to race and class. Party to this period of political turmoil is the role of blackface minstrelsy, exposing, as well as provoking, class and racial divisions, performed in *The Confidence Man* through interactions between disguised and counterfeit characters navigating the choppy waters of an unregulated society in the period leading up to the American Civil War (1861-1865).

Symbolically, Melville's novel depicts a journey down the Mississippi river to the slave-holding South aboard the white-washed steamboat *Fidele*. The name is an ironic allusion to conflicting and fluctuating attitudes to trust and confidence by a range of shady characters aboard the vessel, whose

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[1] Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man*, (Simon & Brown: www.simonand brown.com, 2012).
(Hereafter references for intertext quotes are indicated parenthetically as CM with page number).

fidelity is tested by engagement with the variously disguised confidence man. The name Fidele also references Imogen in Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline*, her disguise a means of forging an alternative to patriarchal oppression and contrived union that resonates with the political context of nineteenth century America.

The Confidence Man is a difficult novel to decipher as indicated by the many critical interpretations the novel is testament to. The novel hints at allegory with allusions to the Bible and Shakespeare, with no agreement on what the novel means. Phillip Drew focuses on the novel as a parable with immediate reference to Melville's own social context of racial unrest destabilising the Union. Elizabeth Foster sees Melville's confidence man as a Satanic figure threatening to destroy religion, whereas Ernest Tuveson takes the opposite view, regarding the confidence man as a missionary for a new religion from his first appearance aboard the *Fidele* dressed in cream-colours, described as lamb-like, and citing New Testament verses on charity.[2] Another take, expressed by Rebecca Gaudino, is that the novel is about a crisis in the deceptive nature of fiction that ends in an apocalypse of truth obscuring fiction.[3] This analysis is based on the wordplay, which alludes to printing presses, passages, pens, paper, and pages. Melville intends the mystery having the Missouri bachelor declare that the entire

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[2] Ernest Tuveson, "The Creed of the Confidence-Man", *ELH,* 33.2 (1966), 247-270
<www.jstor.org/stable/2872392>.
See Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man*, pp. 9-11.
[3] Rebecca Gaudino, 'The Riddle of "The Confidence-Man"', *The Journal of Narrative Technique,* 14. 2 (1984),124-141
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/30225091>.

ship's a riddle. (CM 81). All interpretations are possible, but none is definitive if separated from the underlying satire that parodies the assumptions of white privilege. A literal interpretation of *The Confidence Man* that disregards the alternative role of the masquerade, resonates with the way in which the legitimate stage appropriated Shakespeare's plays, erasing the low brow subtext, which limited the meaning and relevance of the plays.

The affectation made such performances an automatic target for minstrel stage parody, and for Melville's satirical pen, in order to highlight the limited scope and oppressive nature of the mainstream white culture. Through clever appropriation of minstrelsy devices of masking and role play, Melville orchestrated a range of narrative voices, which, as in Shakespeare's plays, interweave masquerade and bawdy irreverence to preserve the continuity and influence of a subversive folk culture under the radar of the traditional social order.

Melville's *Confidence Man,* while appearing to be a travelogue, is a minstrel masquerade disguised as a novel, pervaded by veiled criticism of race and slavery through satirising the privileging of white skin. Melville's attack on race is oblique and ambiguous, a strategy that owes a debt to the misrule of the antebellum minstrel stage burlesques. To signal this connection, the first avatar of the confidence man is played by the blackface impersonator, Black Guinea. Through his performance which blends comic vernacular with exaggerated melodrama, Guinea invites his audience to

identify with victims of oppression as means of subverting racial prejudice, irrespective of race. (CM 25). Other voices are more sceptical, lacking confidence in Guinea's performance through association with the performance of counterfeit on the minstrel stage. Guinea is a slippery character aligned (as I will illustrate later) with the irreverent subversion of Autolycus in Shakespeare's play *The Winter's Tale* whose detachment allows scope for an alternative vision of moral realism. The minstrel stage caricatures enact a projection of white prejudices, which is echoed by Melville's confidence man through his various disguises and role-playing. These exchanges target prominent figures in the field of politics, law, and philosophy to expose racist attitudes beneath a mask of professed Christianity, justice and democratic principles.

Political expediency is the target of the exchange between the 'soldier of fortune' and 'the herb doctor' in order to depict a national context of contorted political duplicity connected to the Compromise Act of 1850.[4] The clashing and contradictory machinations to prioritise the Union over abolition is portrayed through the different masks of counterfeit employed by the 'soldier of fortune' and the herb-doctor. The soldier falsely claims that

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[4] The Compromise consisted of five laws passed in September 1850 to resolve disputes over slave and free states making up the Union in the wake of the Mexican American war and the surge of territorial expansion. The Fugitive Slave Act which was part of the deal meant that free states were legally obliged to return fugitives to slave states. This forced marriage between bitterly opposed factions was more honoured in the breach than the observance, a temporary truce that delayed rather than resolved the issue of slavery.
For Congressional action related to slavery see Don E Fehrenbacher's 2002 detailed review in *The Slave-Holding Republic: An Account of The United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

he is a war veteran, his counterfeit a necessary survival tactic, whereas the herb-doctor is an opportunist quack imitating the "hog-latin" language of politicians to pedal his cure-all omni-balsamic remedy. His counterfeit mocks the verbose Senatorial debates that undermined the cause of abolition and racial equality beneath a cloak of political pragmatism, allied to the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act and the racially divisive 1854 Kansas-Nebraska Act.[5] The different masks of deceit of the two con-men reflect the complex cross-currents of conflict related to an era of incompatible political and racial division.

The law and the justice system come under scrutiny in the metaphysics of Indian hating which involves confused layers of performance and disguise with Charlie Noble playing Judge Hall, to narrate the story of Colonel John Moredock, a distorted version of the Indian hater from Judge Hall's 1835 *Sketches of History, Life and Manners in the West*. The ironic mask reveals the demonisation of indigenous people as "savages" to promote and justify a programme of ethnic cleansing, which also challenges assumptions of white superiority that are enshrined in law and enforced with 'patriotic' vigour by Judge Hall.[6]

Hypocritical and elitist religious attitudes are also satirised through the philosophers Mark Winsome and his disciple Egbert (thinly disguised as

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[5] The Kansas-Nebraska Act conferred sovereign right to the State to choose whether or not to allow slavery. As a result, the State was flooded with rivalling pro and anti-slavery supporters that led to violent confrontations.
[6] R. Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire* Building (New York and Scarborough, Ontario: Meridian, The New American Library,1980), p. 205.

the transcendentalist poets Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau). Their complex role play involving the disguised con man Charlie Noble exposes an aesthetic ideology that lacks charity. The aloof nature of the philosophy, shown to be detached from practical purpose, perpetuates a system of class privilege, that consequently denies racial equality.

The incorporation of minstrelsy devices of performance and masking, which challenge white assumptions of cultural privilege ripple through *The Confidence Man* to depict a nineteenth-century political context of racial turmoil. The political contradictions related to slavery and race were characterised by disingenuous attitudes to counterfeit, epitomised by William Thompson, America's original confidence man. Thompson was regarded by some as a crook, and by others as an artful dodger living on his wits and ingenuity, the ambiguity integral to the moral confusion surrounding the gap between appearance and reality destabilising class and racial distinctions in Melville's *Confidence Man*.[7] While familiar from the Yankee pedlar of American folklore, the range of contemporary reactions to the conman relates as much to mythical legacy of the trickster who provides source and inspiration for the multiple masks of Melville's own confidence man, and the unpredictable character of the cosmopolitan. The heritage of this ambivalent attitude to the art of the minstrel counterfeiters is mirrored in *The Confidence Man* in a scene where 'The Collector for a Widow and

[7] Johannes Dietrich Bergmann, 'The Original Confidence Man.', *American Quarterly*, 21. 3 (1969), 560–577. <www.jstor.org/stable/2711934>.

Orphan Asylum' defends his earlier disguise as Black Guinea to 'a man with a limp' who accuses Guinea of being an imposter in blackface:

> "Tell me, sir do you really think that a white could look the negro so? For one I should call it pretty good acting."
> "Not much better than any man acts."
> "How? Does all the world act? Am *I*, for instance, an actor? Is my reverend friend here too a performer?"
> "Yes, don't you both perform acts? To do, is to act, so all doers are actors."
> "You trifle. – I ask again, if a white, how could he look the negro so?"
> "Never saw the negro-minstrels, I suppose?"
> "Yes but they are apt to overdo the ebony;"[8]

The subtle reference to "all the world's a stage" from Shakespeare's play *As You Like It* indicates the universality of disguise, where everyone is a player. The implication is that there is a blurred line between the real and the counterfeit, where the falseness of masquerade, as embodied by the minstrel delineators, is just an alternative version of reality. The comment by the 'man with a limp' that "negro-minstrels" tend to "overdo the ebony" merely serves to collapse his cynicism because, by drawing attention to the mask, the counterfeiters reflect the artifice of the prevailing social order. The interaction between the conman 'Collector for Widows and Orphans' and 'the man with the limp' addresses the equivocality of the period regarding where authenticity lies, a conflict that Melville engages with in his meditation on minstrelsy in *Putnam's Monthly*. His article entitled 'Negro Minstrelsy – Ancient and Modern', indicates that his sympathies lie with the Southern 'plantation poets' as guardians of a genuine African American culture. Melville observed the effect of the songs *Jump Jim Crow, Uncle Gabriel* and *Ol' Dan Tucker* as if responding to the magic wand of Prospero,

[8] CM, pp. 44-45.

stating that "A golden age of negro literature had commenced." [9] Within the style of the plantation songs, with their loose rhythms, careless metre, kaleidoscopic imagery and incoherent refrains, Melville also detected a striking similarity to old English and Scottish ballads reminiscent of the ancient plain songs of the "spinsters and knitters in the sun" (*Twelfth Night* II.4) fondly embedded within Shakespeare plays. The continuation of this simplicity of spirit can also be heard in the playful ditties chanted by Shakespeare's minstrel Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, weaving a capricious, yet familiar folk bond of natural imagery:

> The lark, that tirra-lyra chant
> With heigh! With heigh! the thrush and the jay,
> Are summer songs for me and my aunts,
> While we lie tumbling in the hay.[10]

This song of joyful spontaneity resounds with repetitions and rural-inspired onomatopoeia echoing the running commentary of a plantation song with its accompanying turkey chorus:

> "Ole maus William, he gone to legislatur;
> Ah! Chogaloga, chogola, chogolog.
> Young maes John, he done come home from college,
> Ah! Chogaloga, chogola, chogolog."[11]

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[9] Eric Lott (1993) *Love and Theft Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993) afterword, p. 234.
According to Lott, Melville concealed his authorship of a meditation on "Negro Minstrelsy" in the 1855 edition of *Putnam's Monthly.*
[10] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, ed, by John Pitcher (New York: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010), pp. 249-259 (Act 4, scene 3)
[11] Herman Melville, 'Negro Minstrelsy – Ancient and Modern', *Putnam's Monthly*, 5.1, (1855), 72-79 (p. 78)
<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015016891817&view=2up&seq=90&skin=2021&size=175>.

These ballads portray a vividly familiar visual landscape that capture an alternative folk culture, which is preserved and carried forward through oral repetition and cross-cultural fertilisation. This folk heritage is always in danger of being swamped by the conceit of mainstream literary tyranny, as exemplified by nineteenth century legitimate stage appropriations of Shakespeare plays.

The cultural exchange that Melville detected was embraced by the Northern minstrel stage impersonators, a hybrid style of melodrama, social inversion, disguise and Shakespearian revelry, which also influenced the masked satire within *The Confidence Man.* While Melville appears to criticise blackface burlesque as a distortion and exploitation of the plantation African American tradition in his article in *Putnam's Monthly*, this does not deny its positive role as a bridge giving access to marginalised and disregarded voices struggling for inclusion within an evolving American cultural identity.

African American author and literary critic Ralph Ellison (1913-1994), also acknowledges the influence of the hybrid style of the minstrel burlesques. Ellison remarks that even when minstrel performers were most racially offensive there still had to be interaction between the originators and the impersonators, the comedy providing a platform for unrepresented voices and in this way dispersing the colour line just as it was being drawn.[12] This racial crossover was also appreciated by Mark Twain, who

[12] From an interview with Ralph Ellison, quoted in Shelley Fisher Fishkin, *Was Huck Black? Mark Twain and African American Voices* (New York: Oxford UP, 1993), p. 90; also quoted in Eric Lott, *Black Mirror - The Cultural Contradictions of American Racism,* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2017), p. 36.

delighted in the wit and humour of the extravagant blackface acts that burst upon towns in the early 1840s in ludicrous dress, as "a glad and stunning surprise". Twain wrote in his autobiography that "If I could have the nigger show back again, in its pristine purity and perfection, I should have but little further use for opera."[13] Twain's sympathy for the fugitive slave Jim in *Huckleberry Finn*, who engages in burlesque repartee with Huck, recognised that blackface imitation takes to a further, and more extended level an enduring ancestry of coded dissent that mirrors, distorts, and ridicules racist assumptions of white privilege. Corroborating this, Ralph Ellison observed that *Huckleberry Finn's* Jim rarely emerges from behind the minstrel mask[14]. The racial resistance in *Huckleberry Finn* based on embedded minstrel tropes of satire, cross-dressing and racial inversion clearly resonates with interwoven aspects of burlesque in Shakespeare plays. These aspects contribute to the endurance of Twain's novel as an American classic because of, not despite, the irreverence implied by the inclusion of outrageous racial stereotypes for comic effect.

Eric Lott is less forgiving, as indicated in his criticism of Mark Twain's obvious delight in the bawdy masquerade underpinning *Huckleberry Finn,* with Lott regarding Twain's views on blackface culture as either risible or patronising. Lott connects minstrelsy to an unexamined fascination with black exoticism obscured by the minstrel mask.[15] However, the phenomenal popularity of minstrel burlesque across a wide social spectrum in the

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[13] *Autobiography of Mark Twain, Vol.2,* ed. by B. Griffin & H E Smith (Berkeley: California UP, 2013), p. 294.
[14] Ralph Ellison, quoted in Lott, *Black Mirror*, p. 37.
[15] Lott, *Black Mirror*, p. 37.

antebellum era suggests that audiences, while entranced by the physicality and attractiveness of blackness, as identified by Lott, also responded on an intuitive level to the enactment of an alternative culture with deep roots entangled in the continuation of diverse ethnic and racial identities.

White women's rights author Margaret Fuller (1810-1850) also believed that blackface minstrelsy was a legitimate art form in itself, a cultural crossover providing inventive flair to an American identity focused on commercial interests:

> "Jump Jim Crow is a dance native to this country and one which we plead guilty to seeing with pleasure…Such of the African melodies as we have heard are beautiful. But the Caucasian race have yet their rail-roads to make…" [16]

Clearly, Fuller gives artistic credibility to the minstrel performers as authentic, taking the culture of the enslaved and the oral tradition seriously as a vibrant contribution to a new hybrid artform, as opposed to the material interests of the white Europeans valuing economic expansion above artistic expression. However, the ambiguity of the blackface performances, despite being cunningly in tune with the shifting sands of class and racial tensions of the period, were perceived by Melville, and more recently by Eric Lott, in a more ambivalent light as also driven by chauvinistic and commercial motives. The intense fascination with minstrelsy, which went on to influence vaudeville, tap, toasting and ragtime cannot be denied however, because imitation and disguise are integral features of an evolving hybrid cultural identity, on the stage, and in life. The conflicting political forces adjusting to such a fluctuating cultural

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[16] Quoted in Lott, *Love and Theft*, p. 16.

environment are reflected in the contradiction between the mildness and manipulativeness of Melville's enigmatic cosmopolitan.

5.2. Melville and Shakespeare

> "Dolt as I am I have lived more than twenty nine years and until a few days ago never made acquaintance with the divine William"[17]

The above quotation indicates that Melville was influenced by Shakespeare in terms of imagery, philosophy, and resonance. Indeed, the steamboat *Fidele* which provides the stage for Melville's novel *The Confidence Man* alludes to Imogen who is disguised as Fidele, in Shakespeare's play *Cymbeline*. Melville's novel includes undercurrents of interwoven burlesque, an element that refracts, inverts and blurs the main narrative frame, with the low life clowns and imposters using performance and wordplay to destabilise reified concepts of national identity constructed to perpetuate white privilege. In his personal copy of Shakespeare's plays Melville left revealing markings, which indicated that he was animated by the conflict as well as the confluence between appearance and reality, a volatility reworked in *The Confidence Man* using imposture and incongruence to highlight the instability of social order. Such a kaleidoscopic vision of reality is described by Julian Markels in his article on Melville's markings of Shakespeare's plays:

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[17] Letter to Evert Augustus Duyckinck, February 24,1849 published in *The Letters of Herman Melville*, ed. by Merrell R Davis & William H Gilman (New Haven,1960), p. 77.

> When Melville immersed himself in the plays in 1849 his fiction was already preoccupied with the conflict between appearance and reality; but his attention to this theme throughout the plays is as many-sided as Shakespeare's and irreducible to any single focus.[18]

The intentional ambiguity at the heart of Shakespeare's plays is central to an understanding of *The Confidence Man*, which follows a tradition of disorder similarly enacted by blackface minstrelsy in the antebellum era in order to challenge class, gender and racial boundaries. Melville was drawn to the gap between appearance and reality in Shakespeare's plays because it served different purposes, not always demonic and oppressive, but also renewing and reformist, a mutability characterised by the flowing Mississippi and the masked opportunism of the confidence tricksters aboard the whitewashed steamer *Fidele*.

This complexity parallels the variously attired dissident performer Autolycus from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* who plays both amoral and beneficent roles, sometimes unintentionally, enacting a flexibility of principles and realism across court and country spheres, which reflected a period of urban mobility and economic expansion in the Elizabethan era. Such a backdrop of political instability would resonate with the antebellum period, which was fraught with shifting attitudes and alliances over issues of race, and the pragmatic politics of preserving an expanding and divided Union. Equivocation is deeply buried within the pages of *The Confidence Man* through complex role play, melodramatic excess and the fusion of

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[18] Julian Markels, 'Melville's Markings in Shakespeare's Plays.', *American Literature*, 49. 1, (1977), 34–48, (pp. 43-44) <www.jstor.org/stable/2925552>.

incongruous cultural spheres surreptitiously mocking the liberal ambivalence of leading political figures such as newspaper publishers Thurlow Weed (1797-1882) and Horace Greeley (1811-1872), the white arrogance of Judge James Hall, as well as the philosophical elitism of the Transcendentalists.

Contradictory and fluctuating attitudes to identity and race in *The Confidence Man* also reflect Melville's own apparent wavering over abolition because he feared that its immediate implementation would have an irreparable effect on American brotherhood. His support for a delayed democracy is depicted in the 1866 *Supplement* to *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of War*, a stance which resulted in accusations of racial prejudice against him. However, Melville's racial allegiance cannot be attributed with any confidence from the incorporation of diverse cultural worlds in *The Confidence Man*, where both abolitionists and pro-slavery planters are parodied, and where the authority of Shakespearian misrule is summoned to challenge and re-align the social order. For Melville, as for Shakespeare, such indeterminacy was not perceived as weakness or evasion, but intrinsic to an acceptance of the infinite restlessness of the human spirit that transforms assumptions of white right and ethnic otherness into the realms of a more inclusive cultural landscape that also includes respect for individual autonomy.

5.2.1. The Role of Autolycus and Disguise in *The Winter's Tale* and its Significance to *The Confidence Man*

To investigate the indeterminate moral distinction between confidence and counterfeit, Melville's character the cosmopolitan is uncertain about Autolycus, the enigmatic interloper in *The Winter's Tale*, whom he feels should be admonished for his mischievousness, despite admitting that his humour tickles "For a moist rogue may tickle the midriff, while a dry worldling may but wrinkle the spleen" (CM 225). The dilemma echoes contemporary attitudes to William Thompson, the original antebellum conman who was vilified by some, seen as a beacon of business acumen by others, while also vaunted for his artistry. He acted as a role model for the inconsistency of the cosmopolitan who is at once benign, but also conniving. Different commentators reflect a social order in flux, an important influence on Melville's shifting perceptions of reality, and the impact on cultural identity.

Like Melville's cosmopolitan, Autolycus is a wildly costumed conman, a tale teller, a man of masks, and rogue agent of Providence who unsettles and extends social boundaries, if it serves his purpose, and the purpose of art. Parallels with Melville's *Confidence Man* and Autolycus are concerned with whether a con man and a man of masks can be an agent of truth if a better alternative is achieved in the process. Shakespeare's main source for *The Winter's Tale* was Robert Greene's prose romance *Pandosto* (1588), which he significantly modified through the introduction of Autolycus, into a multi-

layered tragi-comic satire that reflected a period of religious turmoil, and the transition from a feudal to a market economy. [19] Shakespeare invented the character of Autolycus for the specific purpose of creating sympathy for the non-conformist outsider, who through his various disguises enacts a progressive role in the ambiguous space between appearance and reality. Autolycus is the most dramatic intervention in any of Shakespeare's appropriations of other works, an indication that his role is fundamental to the play, and its unsettled political and religious conflicts. Autolycus's trickery is his triumph, which is given credibility and status through his vivacious dialogue and his scene stealing dominance symbolising the rise of the opportunist conman as an individual of art and ingenuity, as well as of criminality and cunning. [20]

The verbal agility of Melville's cosmopolitan matches the artful wit of the disguised Autolycus in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, a dissident character who embraces minstrel codes of subversion and disorder through a chaotic discourse of prose, ballads and verse, wit and whimsy that transcends notions of vice and virtue in favour of a Dionysian realignment embedded in the art of masquerade. The ancient codes of pantomime inversion and misrule embraced by the antebellum minstrel stage confer an historic continuity to the blackface masquerades intended, as in the past, to expose and mock the discriminatory policies of the ruling class. To illustrate

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[19] Robert Greene, *Pandosto* (New Rochelle, NY: Elston Press, 1902) < https://archive.org/details/cu31924013129873/page/n5/mode/2up>.
[20] Lee Sheridan Cox, 'The Role of Autolycus *in The Winter's Tale', Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 9. 2 (1969), 283–30 (p. 283) <www.jstor.org/stable/449781>.

this, in an exchange with the Clown, whom he has just robbed, Autolycus uses wordplay to confuse vice with virtue, which resonates with Frank Goodman's wily flip of honest and dishonest in his discourse with the 'no trust' barber in *The Confidence Man*. (CM 290) Autolycus, who claims that *he* has been robbed, blames a servant of the prince whipped out of court for his virtues:

> [Autolycus] I knew him once a servant of the prince. I cannot tell good sir, for which of his virtues it was, but he was certainly whipped out of the court.
> [Clown] His vices would you say – there's no virtue whipped out of court. They cherish it to make it stay there, and yet it will no more abide.
> [Autolycus] His vices, I should say sir. I know this man well…and having flown over many knavish professions, he settled only in rogue. Some call him Autolycus.[21]

Autolycus names himself as the culprit but from behind his mask of disguise, his counterfeit and verbal dexterity revelling in the ambiguity that distorts the gap between appearance and truth, where moral uncertainty is the new reality in an unfamiliar world of social mobility. In the ending of *The Winter's Tale* the Clown embraces the paradox of false "seeming" declaring his faith in Autolycus knowing it to be counterfeit "I know thou art no tall fellow […] but I'll swear it and would thou would'st be…", to which Autolycus responds "I will prove so, sir, to my power." Both the Clown and Autolycus are insufficient, and not what they appear, however Shakespeare infers that there is a power of faith in good intentions that can blend

[21] William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale,* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 1998), Act IV. 3.85…98.

appearance with reality in the interests of social integration and transformation. [22]

Melville employs a similar tactic of linguistic ambiguity in the interchange between the 'no trust' barber, and the cosmopolitan who is disguised as Frank Goodman. Through devious rhetoric the cosmopolitan proves that honesty and dishonesty can coincide depending on the circumstances, and that it is insincerity that is the real vice and "the lasting bar to real amelioration." (CM 291) Through his linguistic ability the cosmopolitan absorbs the difference between opposites, using wordplay to shine a light on constructed concepts of division, where shifts in the use of language can act subtly to re-define conditioned attitudes to race and class. Such flair for semantic dissembling resonates with Autolycus's cheeky declaration "Ha, ha! What a fool Honesty is! and Trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman!" (CM 291). The personification of 'Honesty' and 'Trust' by Autolycus confers an imaginative force upon these concepts, amplifying their meaning to draw attention to their manipulation in the interests of masking courtly vice, the linguistic ill-use semantically pointing to abuse on a wider human scale.

Autolycus represents the ambiguity performed through satire that is at once outrageous and immoral, but which through humour and disguise sows the seeds of an alternative artistic vision related to a fluid identity at odds with the constraints of reactionary State and religious control. Such wiliness is compared to the conniving realism of *Hamlet's* fusty elder

[22] Cox, 'The Role of Autolycus *in The Winter's Tale'*, p. 300.

statesman Polonius, who is regarded by the double-masked conman Charlie Noble as "rotten rather than raw" (CM 226). In the exchange, the cosmopolitan takes a more benign stance describing Polonius as "better ripe than raw" in his old age. (CM 226) While Charlie Noble condemns all deceit as rotten whether raw or ripe, the cosmopolitan is ambivalent, admitting that he is confused by the antics of Autolycus, "a rogue so happy, so lucky…where the sacredest is rattlingly pronounced just the simplest…the devil's drilled recruit… joyous as if he wore the livery of heaven." (CM 224) The range of Autolycus's role-play, emphasised through the antithesis of 'the devil' and 'heaven', (CM 225) enigmatically unites opposites in a way that reverberates with the performed ambiguity of blackface minstrelsy, devices designed to creatively contest and transcend intolerant ideals exemplified by the sensible aphorism of Polonius to his son Laertes "never a lender or borrower be." (*Hamlet* I. 3)[23]

Charlie Noble, while viciously attacking the role of authority vested in *Hamlet's* wrinkled old courtier Polonius, is also critical of Shakespeare's unruly jester Autolycus, an ingratiating tactic based on the false assumption that he is in accord with the cosmopolitan. However, the cosmopolitan, although uneasy, is favourably inclined towards Autolycus based on his wit "for a moist rogue may tickle the midriff, while a dry worldling may but wrinkle the spleen." Also, the cosmopolitan is shocked by the extremity of Charlie's attack on Polonius who is denigrated as a "discreet, decorous, old dotage-of-state; senile prudence, fatuous soullessness!" By contrast, the

[23] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. by Stephen Greenblatt.

cosmopolitan is more forgiving of those with different outlooks. He contends that it is "Madness to be mad with anything…", a stance that endorses a conciliatory attitude towards human flaws and inconsistencies in the interests of building alliances, as opposed to the discordance aroused by Charlie's harsh intolerance. Charlie's disparaging attitude to the old courtier, and to the "moist rogue" Autolycus, resonates with the intractable mood of the South regarding political progress over abolition and emancipation. (CM 224-6).

President Abraham Lincoln in his second inaugural address echoed the consequences of such intransigent hatred, enacted in *The Confidence Man* by Charlie Noble, blaming the Confederacy for the costly consequences of the Civil War "Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish." [24] Through interweaving aspects of *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*, the masked exchange between Charlie Noble and the cosmopolitan, (disguised as Frank Goodman) presages the cataclysm of impending war. Their switch to a discussion on conviviality as the remedy for mankind extends absurdly to convivial murderers and hangmen. (CM 229) The paradox of opposites is taken to the extreme of a genial misanthrope to satirise the seemingly unbridgeable divide leading to the bloodshed and disunion of Civil War. In the case of Autolycus, it is humour

[24] Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, delivered on March 4,1865, Washington DC, Washington DC, Library of Congress, Abraham Lincoln Papers, 1774-1948, MSS30189 <https://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/eadmss.ms009304>.

that is held to be a saving quality, but as it oils his mischievousness, this also creates doubt:

> The bravadoing mischievousness of Autolycus is slid into this world on humour, as a pirate schooner, with colours flying, is launched into the sea on greased ways. [25]

The cosmopolitan's lyrical imagery combined with his conviviality signals optimism for harmonious diversity, but it is tinged with unease at Charlie's assumption that Autolycus is denounced by all (CM 225).

The cosmopolitan's fascination with *The Winter's Tale's* wily dissembler Autolycus indicates Melville's attraction to social renegades as loose cannons able to challenge social divides and blur conventional concepts of national identity. While Autolycus revels in criminality ("I picked and cut most of their festival purses…I had not left a purse alive in the whole army"), such vice is counteracted by the musical resonance of his language, allowing comic sympathy for his underlying unlawful purpose. In his ballad the balance of opposites depicts the social divide in which the multi-costumed Autolycus operates, with the masks alluding to his counterfeit, but also his acumen:

> Lawn as white as driven snow,
> Cypress black as e'er was crow
> Gloves as sweet as damask roses,
> Masks for faces and for noses;
> […]
> Buy, lads, or else your lasses cry. Come buy!
> (*The Winter's Tale*, Act IV. 220…231)

Similarly, in *The Confidence Man*, the lyrical tone of the cosmopolitan's complex language in his dispute with Charlie Noble on the merits of trust,

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[25] CM p. 225.

confers a harmony that unites appearance and reality in the direction of benevolence, as opposed to the discord caused by the disguises of the unscrupulous confidence men aboard the *Fidele*. Such a complex attitude to disguise also relates to the context of the original confidence man William Thompson. As a cunning con artist his talents were both applauded, and condemned, a reflection of contradictory attitudes to unregulated capitalism vying with the egalitarian ideals of an emerging democracy.[26]

In "The Original Confidence Man", J D Bergmann explores the true story of William Thompson, an 1840s New York swindler, who operated during a period when to be a victim of misplaced trust was not universally perceived as a bad thing. Just because there are charlatans in politics, and on the streets, it cannot be assumed that evil is everywhere. Indeed, there was a perception that having confidence meant that Christian and democratic values could still prevail. An 1849 article in Evert and George Duyckinck's *Literary World* even gives credit to the guile of the confidence man in unearthing the humanity of his victims where "in spite of all the hardening of civilization, and all the warning of newspapers, men *can be swindled*." In order to reinforce the positive role of the trickster, the article went on to say that the man who is always on his guard, who can never be moved to pity by any story, has no confidence in others, and they have none in him. He "walks an iceberg in the marts of trade and social life – and when he dies may heaven have that confidence in him which he had not in his fellow

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[26] Matt Seybold, 'Tom Sawyer Impersonates 'The Original Confidence Man.'', *Mark Twain Journal*, 52. 2 (2014),136–42 (p. 138) <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24612794>.

mortals."[27] While optimism in the positive role of trust in appearances was shared in the pages of the *Merchants' Ledger,* it was strongly criticised by *The New York Herald* in an angry satire that condemned the small-time swindler, using the case to highlight the far greater fraud committed by the wolves of Wall Street. Such was the fascination regarding William Thompson and his many aliases that he became immortalised in burlesque as Jeremy Didler, a character who aroused both respect and mistrust, and whose victims were equally pitied and mocked.

The range of reactions by the newspapers, and from the public, indicates the level of ambivalence to fraudsters, an issue associated with urban growth, and exposed by the original confidence man. This includes the editor of the *New York Herald*, James Gordon Bennett whose derision levelled at top financiers and small-scale conmen kept the subject in the public eye. Different responses to counterfeit comment on conflicting American attitudes to conmen that coincided with a new strain of ruthless opportunism which, during the Gilded Age, saw the liminal character of the confidence man become a lauded figure of mainstream culture.[28] The hypocrisy personified by the confidence man in nineteenth century America

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[27] *Literary World,* August 1849, p.133, quoted in Bergmann, 'The Original Confidence Man', p. 566.

[28] In the United States the 'Gilded Age' extended from 1870 to 1900 and was a time of rapid economic growth and rampant capitalism, an era that exuded an aura of great wealth but which left many social problems in its wake. For evolving attitudes to conmen in America during the nineteenth century see Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870,* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1982); also Horatio Alger Jr's 1868 novel *Ragged Dick, or Street Life in New York City with the Boot-Blacks* (London: W W Norton, 2007) which depicts the aggressive pursuit of success as the rising ideology of the times.

relates to a crisis of identity where social positions are uncertain and can be re-invented, and which were confused by appeals to Christian values of confidence and trust summoned to mask the underlying theft.[29] Interestingly, Mark Twain also engaged with the mythology and ambiguity associated with the original conman when, in *Huckleberry Finn,* Tom Sawyer invokes a double disguise calling himself William Thompson before he identifies as his brother, Sid.[30] Twain's interest in the moral dilemma of counterfeit relates to Huck's 'crime' of *stealing* Jim. Huck is disguised as Tom Sawyer to avoid being caught, but Huck is confused by the rules, "it don't make no difference whether you do right or wrong, a person's conscience ain't got no sense, and just goes for him *anyway*." [31]

Changing perceptions of counterfeit and disguise also inform Melville's novel, which includes the implication that the preservation of the Union involves the risk of falling prey to tricksters, an uneasiness characterised by the enigmatic role of the cosmopolitan. The Missouri bachelor plays the part of a jaded cynic who refuses to trust the cosmopolitan to take care of his watch while throwing bearskins and dancing the hornpipe, a scene that imitates a farcical version of Thompson's real life attempt to dupe a victim out of a gold watch on the streets of New York in 1849.[32] The cosmopolitan's plea for confidence from his sceptical companion parodies the conceit of

[29] Seybold, 'Quite an Ordinary Failure', pp. 138-139.
[30] Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. 252.
[31] Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, p. 256.
[32] Bergmann, 'The Original Confidence Man', p. 566.

poets and philosophers who assumed that their intellect was recommendation enough to inspire confidence:

> "Come, come…as a first step to a new mind, give up solitude. I fear, by the way, you have at some time been reading Zimmermann […] whose book on Solitude is as vain as Hume's on Suicide, as Bacon's on Knowledge; and like these will betray him who seeks to steer body and soul by it, like a false religion. All they […] offer aught not in the spirit of fellowly gladness based on due confidence in what is above, away with them for poor dupes, or still poorer imposters." [33]

Despite the risk of being deceived, sympathy lies with the cosmopolitan's melodramatic entreaty for social harmony, rather than the philosophically cushioned isolation of the misanthrope. From this interplay it is clear that *The Confidence Man* is influenced by the ambivalent moral response to the conman William Thompson, with the implication that Melville supported the liberal views of the *Literary World* in acknowledging the ingenious role of the streetwise chancer, granting indulgence for his enterprising mischief in the face of unbridled capitalist greed. This timeless stock character of social upheaval, also integral to the minstrel stage, resonates with Shakespeare's own confidence man Autolycus from *The Winter's Tale,* reprised as a sympathetic figure playing a cameo role in Melville's own literary charade of social realignment.

The Winter's Tale is a tragi-comic collision of opposites, that takes place in two different worlds of Court and countryside, shifting from patriarchal tyranny and death to re-aligned reconciliation through the course of the play. Only Autolycus remains uncontainable and alienated from the reunited family and social alliances of the other characters. As

[33] CM, p. 179.

Northrop Frye remarks Autolycus is, in the end "superfluous to the plot", just kept around in order to be excluded.[34] But detachment is his purpose and his enigma, symbolising a conscious and unresolvable ambivalence, echoed by the cosmopolitan at the heart of *The Confidence Man.* Both characters diffuse discord in favour of the continuous oscillation and blurring of boundaries erected by cultural gatekeepers to control the definition of art and essence. According to Bernhard Malkmus, both Autolycus and Melville's confidence man embody times when:

> Faced with the loss of metaphysical superstructures and with the emergence of bureaucracies making increasing inroads on individuality, the modern picaro and picara discover the confidence game displayed by Melville and develop it into an art of turning social ostracism into a mode of self-assertion by exploiting other people's trust in an idealistic notion of self-reliance. [35]

Through his various disguises and diverse range of voices, a blend of verse, prose, ballads and rhymes, Autolycus dances precariously on the edge of cultural boundaries revealing their porous nature. His aesthetic performance fuses divergent cultural worlds, uniting and transforming the appearance of reality. The prankster's melodramatic role-playing draws attention to the threat to autocratic rule during Tudor times associated with religious conflict and the rising power of the merchant class. His actions merrily flout religious and legal measures designed to segregate and control

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[34] Quoted in Ronald W Cooley, 'Speech Versus Spectacle: Autolycus, Class and Containment in 'The Winter's Tale."' *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance Et Réforme*, 21. 3, (1997), 5–23 (p. 7) <www.jstor.org/stable/43445136>.

[35] Bernhard Malkmus, 'The Birth of the Modern Pícaro out of the Spirit of Self-Reliance: Herman Melville's 'The Confidence-Man."' *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 54. 4 (2009), 603–620 (p. 615) < www.jstor.org/stable/41158467>.

a population edging away from a traditional feudal system to a disordered and rootless urban one. Similarly, the confidence man, through his pivotal role masked variously as the herb-doctor, the man with the weed, the Black Rapids Coal Company speculator, blackface Guinea, the Missouri bachelor, Charlie Noble, Judge Hall and the enigmatic cosmopolitan, allows a glimpse into the unregulated gilded age of quack cures, new religions and quick profits, and a biased legal system shoring up a fragile social order. The social instability is compounded by the performances of social corruption and racial bigotry enacted by the allegedly genuine characters aboard the Mississippi steamboat *Fidele.*

5.2.2. Disguise in *Cymbeline* and its Significance to Identity in *The Confidence Man*

In addition to the destabilising influence of the renegade jester Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale*, Melville also alludes to the transformative potential as well as the venality of disguise and performance in *The Confidence Man* through the novel's engagement with Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* where practically every character is masked, either unknowingly or intentionally. Deceptive appearances act as a defence during times of personal and national turmoil where social boundaries are under pressure related to periods of political and economic upheaval. Attempts by James l to unite the kingdoms of England and Scotland in the 1603 'Union of Crowns' created political and cultural tensions that surface in *Cymbeline* through the

gender switching, disguise and conflicting loyalties on a national, societal, and familial level. Nineteenth century America also experienced such a context of Union instability where the changing political and cultural landscape shaped by immigration, mass migration and speculation fostered an urbanised, opportunist environment ripe for the practice of deception. [36] The use of disguise as an innate aspect of fluctuating identity is embraced in *Cymbeline* through the cross-gender role of Fidele/Imogen in a journey towards personal renewal and individual autonomy. The identity blurring performance resonates with the wily cosmopolitan in *The Confidence Man* who relishes the inventiveness of masquerade and costume to confuse and redefine the ethical codes of a narrowly presented reality predicated on placing confidence in strangers.

Issues connected to Union politics and conflicted identity underlie the theatrical aspects of *The Confidence Man*. Aptly, Melville's novel is set aboard the shifting stage of the Mississippi steamboat *Fidele*, the river's crosscurrents referencing *Cymbeline's* complex and submerged use of disguise central to misleading appearances and political turmoil, interwoven with issues of an emerging national identity. The struggle for political and personal freedom and independence in *Cymbeline* reflects significant themes in *The Confidence Man* where disguise is also used to confuse, acting as an agent of social reform and wider cultural inclusiveness. Inheriting the use of masking and inversion from mediaeval pageants as a means of subverting

[36] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women,* pp. 2-6.
For more information on the political turmoil surrounding national union in the Jacobean era see also Linda Colley, *Acts of Union and Disunion*, (London: Profile Books, 2014).

mainstream authority, Shakespeare widened its potential in *Cymbeline* to encompass introspection that allows character growth, while also inviting audience collusion.

On the early Elizabethan stage there was an ambiguous attitude to disguise and trickery. It was regarded as amusing when related to "social deviants" such as knaves and bawds but seen as degenerate for a female character. [37] In early plays such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* disguise is used to reassess and blur gender roles, with Julia's masquerade justified in relation to Proteus's infidelity. Progressing to *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia's cross-dressing allows her access to the exclusively male domain of the courtroom, her assertive lyrical voice invoked to expose the arbitrary nature of gender assignment. In *Twelfth Night,* mirrored sibling disguise and wit is used to raise gender switching and class confusion to a level where sympathy for the plight of the girl page-boy heroine Viola undercuts any shame associated with masking and trickery. However, Shakespeare's later plays involve a more sophisticated use of disguise corresponding to a move away from comic disorder towards dramatic art, where notions of dishonesty and depravity become defined in an alternative way to the diktat of those in positions of power. Building on the use of masking to shake the precepts of social conformity, disguise in later plays such as *Cymbeline* is so pervasive for both corrupt and creative purposes that it becomes the most significant element of the drama, as well as the most disruptive influence in

[37] Peter Hyland, *Shakespeare's Heroines Disguise in the Romantic Comedies* (Calgary: Calgary University Press, 1978), p. 25 <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/download/32268/26325>.

the play.[38] Such extensive use of disguise, moving from counterfeit as malevolent to a state of blurred reinvention of identity embodies alternative perceptions of reality, a dramatic innovation which corresponds to the use of masked role-play within Melville's *Confidence Man*. Such a complexity of cross-dressing and disguise was also indulged in on the minstrel stage to disrupt fixed notions of national and personal identity.

In *Cymbeline* practically every character is cloaked or false, however counterfeit for evil purposes is superseded by disguise where Imogen, from behind the mask of Fidele, enacts falseness to embody an alternative truth that allows discord to be confronted, rather than denounced or excluded. Unlike previous Shakespeare heroines, the cross-dressed Fidele plays a role of transparent vulnerability that allows her to be perceived in different ways by the audience, but significantly also alters the way she perceives herself. This sympathetic use of disguise where Fidele is adapting the purpose of her role makes her less of an imposter than other players she interacts with. Thus, disguise confers a variable form of identity becoming an intrinsic aspect of a more wide-ranging authenticity. Fidele's performed androgyny is both sympathetic and unthreatening. She symbolises union rather than division as depicted by her discourse with her brothers Arviragus and Guiderius when all are unaware of their kinship, and only Fidele is knowingly aware of her disguise:

> [Arviragus] (to Fidele) Brother, stay here:
> Are we not brothers?

[38] Nancy K Hayles, 'Sexual Disguise in *Cymbeline*', *Modern Languages Quarterly,* 41. 3 (1980), 231-247 (p. 237) <https://doi.org/10.1215/00267929-41-3-231>.

> [Fidele] So man and man should be:
> But clay and clay differ in dignity,
> Whose dust is both alike
> […]
> [Guiderius] (to Fidele) I love thee; I have spoke it
> How much the quantity, the weight as much,
> As I do love my father.

Guiderius and Arviragus's verse unknowingly hints at incest while also erasing gender boundaries, implying that kinship is innate and cannot be hidden by disguise, or denied by class and racist legislation. Thus, while the siblings are all cloaked it suggests that, with different levels of insight, masks can serve unwittingly to create an alternative form of being where rational forms of perception are replaced by intuition, and kinship is revealed as much in the deception as in the reality. Belarius, also in disguise, masked as the father of Fidele's princely brothers, confers credibility to the truth within counterfeit. The dramatic excess of his aside emphasises their instinctive attachment to their high-born sister:

> [Belarius] O worthiness of nature! Breed of greatness!
> Cowards father cowards and base things sire base:
> Nature hath meal and bran, contempt and grace.
> I'm not their father; yet who should this be
> Doth miracle itself, loved before me.
> 'Tis the ninth hour o' the morn. [39]

The juxtaposition of the noble verse with the sudden shift to the domestic domain with the reference to time, combines the real world with an imagined heroic ideal brought together through disguise and drama to create surprising poetic insight. Compared to the twin reversals in *Twelfth Night,* disguise is more subtle and complex in *Cymbeline* which, as well as

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[39] 'Cymbeline', Act IV. 2., in *The Norton Shakespeare*.

acting as a tool for class and gender evaluation, becomes integral to the meaning of the play: the performance of reality acts as a charade of a kind of truth. The amalgamation implies social harmony rather than an incitement to division and disorder. It promotes new forms of perception that are less vulnerable to passive definition and manipulation in the interests of reinforcing imperial domination by the ruling class. Counterfeit indicates that appearance and costume are not reliable indicators of trust compared to an intuitive response to the charade, which becomes the art, the motivation, and the meaning of an alternative form of being as enacted in *Cymbeline* and by the dissembling, role-playing cosmopolitan in Melville's *Confidence Man*. [40]

According to M C Bradbrook in her article 'Shakespeare and the Use of Disguise' (1952), Shakespeare makes disguise an essentially poetic conception and varies the level of it more subtly than ever before. [41] In the later plays, such as *Cymbeline,* roles such as the girl-page, embodied by Imogen (Fidele), become stereotyped based on sets of 'characteristics' that confuses gender and class lines with assurance and ease. Such deliberate self-awareness assumes a knowing audience as part of a game of fantasy that crosses the proscenium arch by blurring the divide between stage and actuality, and thus between performance and reality.

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[40] Peter Hyland, *Shakespeare's Heroines Disguise in the Romantic Comedies* (Calgary: Calgary University Press, 1978), pp. 37-8 <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/ariel/article/download/32268/26325>.
Nancy K. Hayles, 'Sexual Disguise in *Cymbeline*', p. 231.
[41] Muriel C Bradbrook, 'Shakespeare and the Use of Disguise in Elizabethan Drama', *Essays in Criticism*, 2. 2 (1952), 159–168 (p. 61 and p. 65) < https://doi.org/10.1093/eic/II.2.159>.

Besides outward disguise, clever wordplay acts as another veneer of camouflage involved in the construction an alternative identity. 'Only a Page or So', Chapter 11 of *The Confidence Man*, which is just two pages long, alludes to Fidele's girl-page disguise, and to Melville's literary disguise, a use of wordplay that unites disparate sources into a literary union through the manipulation words. Continuing the theme of intertextual literary disguise, the Black Rapid's Coal Company conman invokes Belarius's quote in a coalition of diverse source material that reflects an evolving cultural milieu:

> "Nature", he added, "in Shakespeare's words, had meal and bran; and, rightly regarded, the bran in its way was not to be condemned." [42]

As well as blurring class and gender boundaries by referring to disguise in *Cymbeline*, The Coal Company Man continues to add to the identity confusion through racial stereotyping. He alludes to his avatar Black Guinea as "by nature a singularly cheerful race", using caricature to manipulate race for purposes of exclusion. (CM 78) However, the double mask of The Black Rapids conman collapses the gap between appearance and a reality social engineered to exclude and marginalise the 'bran' for the benefit of the 'meal'. Shakespeare and Melville are figuratively 'on the same page' using wordplay and disguise as a progressive tool for the coalescence of alternatives hidden beneath surface appearances that mask a kinship of disparate alliances and concealed avatars.

In *The Confidence Man,* almost every character is in one or more disguises or is one character in multiple disguises, which reflects cultural insecurity related to the lack of a clear sense of national identity. This

[42] CM, pp. 77-8.

novel's dependence on masks resonates with *Cymbeline* where practically every character in the play also assumes a disguise and becomes reinvented by their performance. Melville's critics were perplexed by the cross-genre convolutions of *The Confidence Man* in the same way as the eighteenth-century critic Samuel Johnson responded to the strange aspects of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*:

> The play has […] some natural dialogues, and some pleasing scenes, but they are obtained at the expense of much incongruity. To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism on unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.[43]

Johnson's criticism could almost refer to the juxtaposed scenes and performances in *The Confidence Man*, or the comic disarray of minstrel stage performances. However, the disorder Johnson complains of depicts the conscious burlesque essential to the structure and meaning of both *Cymbeline* and *The Confidence Man*, a ploy of ambiguity and misrule intended through disguise to deconstruct and transform allegiances, but always with an awareness that this might never materialise. To represent the turbulence of such disruptive political crosscurrents, Melville's novel is performed aboard the steamboat *Fidele* where there is little stability and the principal players appear, retreat and re-emerge masked differently. In *Cymbelin*e, the turmoil mirrors the unsettled context of the Jacobean imperative for Union between England and Scotland In *The Confidence Man*, the tangled web of unreliable narratives, masked performers and varied

[43] Quoted in Jean E Howard, Introduction to 'Cymbeline' in *Norton Shakespeare*, ed by Stephen Greenblatt, pp. 2955 - 2963, p.2955.

styles of discourse muddle and realign concepts of personal and national identity to reflect a time of bitter political and religious wrangling, a context of instability that has relevance to the class ridden, racially vacillating Union politics leading up to the American Civil War (1861-1865).

Cymbeline and *The Winter's Tale* are montage texts where the characters interact in masked and ambiguous ways, Fidele and Autolycus, despite playing significant roles, do not take centre stage or have grand memorable speeches. Consequently, the leading American actors of the antebellum legitimate stage could not marshal these plays to promote white male predominance. Consequently, they were neglected and thus not well enough known to merit minstrel stage parody. The first known performance of *Cymbeline* in America was in Philadelphia, June 29, 1767. Prior to American independence (1776), fifteen different Shakespeare plays were presented with *Cymbeline* the sixth most popular, following closely behind *Othello* on the list, with no mention of *The Winter's Tale*. *Cymbeline's* relative popularity during this period may be related to its themes of the nation's struggle for autonomy from beneath the yoke of imperial rule with its associated cultural and familial upheavals and transformations. The hybrid nature of the play, first listed as a tragedy but also described as a romance and a comedy, indicates a self-parodic instability within the text, which indirectly comments on a time of political turmoil.

Florizel and Perdita, a burlesque version of *The Winter's Tale,* appeared in the late eighteenth century pre-dating a legitimate stage version that was first presented in 1804, an indication that audiences overlooked the

burlesque of cross-dressing and disguise within Shakespeare's original version of the play.[44] An early reviewer described the plot of *Cymbeline* as "absurd, unnatural and improbable" and *The Winter's Tale*, as a poor tale to begin with going from "bad to worse" in Shakespeare's version. Clearly the reviewer misses the comic subversion underlying the multi-layered plot, including Autolycus's vital role in disrupting and satirising the traditional cultural values of the times.[45]

The more complex and progressive use of disguise in *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* play a more diffuse and democratic role, which creates an accord through the restless balance of opposites, a low-key autonomous style embraced by Melville through the role of the cosmopolitan, who uses debate, rather than direct action, to accommodate political dissent. For example, in his efforts to diffuse Charlie Noble's abusive disregard for *Hamlet's* elderly senator Polonius, the cosmopolitan admonishes Charlie's excessive language "Come, come [...] Polonius is an old man [...] Now charity requires that such a figure should – at least be treated with civility." (CM 226-228) Thus, the herb-doctor's melodramatic rhetoric, which satirises government debates on the Fugitive Slave Law (CM 128-9), together with the cosmopolitan's tolerance for the reactionary views of the elderly Polonius, indicates that Melville used wit and roleplay as a progressive tool to foster conciliation rather than conflict, while also recognising the inescapable corruption and evil of the world. In addition, it is clear from his

[44] Alfred van Rensselaer Westfall, *American Shakespearian Criticism 1607-1865* (New York: H.W. Wilson, 1939), pp. 50-55 and pp. 59-61.
[45] Charlotte Ramsay Lennox the First American Born Shakespeare Critic in Westfall, *American Shakespeare Criticism*, p. 67.

circumspect support for the French Revolution, but ultimate revulsion of its bloody aftermath, that Melville steered away from direct conflict as a means of achieving interracial brotherhood and national Union. This conclusion is supported by Melville's experience from living with indigenous islanders, depicted in his novel *Typee.* Melville concluded that the alternative cultural system he witnessed although not perfect, it would not benefit from violent overthrow by another flawed version of civilisation.

By engaging with the lawless charm of Autolycus and the cross-genre, cross-class and cross-gender masking in *Cymbeline*, Melville subtly portrays an alternative and more inclusive form of American identity. The consciously created lack of resolution within *The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline* and *The Confidence Man* rejects the dogmatism of constructed social divides in favour of the uncertainty of performance that blurs the boundaries of class, gender and racial identities in the direction of egalitarian rebalancing and the optimism of a more charitable and progressive society.

5.3. Melville and Minstrelsy

While influenced by the burlesque misrule in Shakespeare plays, *The Confidence Man* is also indebted to minstrel stage masquerades. The immense popularity of their satirical and topical irreverence acted as a channel for the preservation and transformation of traditional cultural rituals, which Melville also contorts and realigns in the interests of racial inclusion and social reform. The cosmopolitan and the multi-masked

confidence man use masquerade to perform the illusiveness of trust, but also paradoxically, to urge trust in the ambiguity of the illusion. A ship of fools on a journey without a destination, at the mercy of the tides and cross currents of a great river, is subject to the conniving, double-dealing of a shape-shifting confidence man. However, once analysed through the lens of minstrel stage satire, historically linked with carnival pageantry and cross-dressed, charlatans in Shakespeare's plays, a perplexing range of disguised and incongruous interactions become more coherent in their disorder and confusion. The art of burlesque which includes misrule, coded language, masks, and costumes are practices inherited from folklore, the oral tradition, and the mediaeval stage where anarchic characters, such as Autolycus in Shakespeare's play *The Winter's Tale,* are invoked to mark out and transcend social boundaries constructed to maintain white privilege. Shakespeare's jester shares the same mercenary, amoral, non-conformist attitude to authority as the antebellum stage minstrels and Melville's cosmopolitan, whose delight in eccentricity acts in the tradition of burlesque to disrupt and redefine the cultural landscape.

It would appear that Melville was familiar with the antebellum minstrel tradition based on accounts of his theatre attendance in New York, London and Paris. The editors of Melville's *Journals* state that during the era of the1850s he was "inveterately going to theatres at all levels."[46] Thus, he was undoubtedly familiar with stock minstrel performances including Dan Emmett's *The Barber Shop in Uproar* (1850), also known as *The German*

[46] *Herman Melville, Journals,* ed. by H C Horseford & I Horth (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1989), p. 173.

Farmer, which he re-parodies in the 'no trust' barber's repartee with the cosmopolitan. The inclusion of performance and masking in *The Confidence Man* connected the novel to the antics of the ante-bellum minstrel stage where racial difference was strongly impressed through caricature, while it was simultaneously undermined and contradicted through satire and farce, the ambivalence, a ploy to unsettle preconceived racial assumptions. Minstrel and bawdy Shakespearian elements within *The Confidence Man* scrutinise and reconstruct attitudes to race and slavery in nineteenth-century America, particularly legal and philosophical attempts to idealise whiteness and promote intellectual prestige to the detriment of the indigenous, the disadvantaged and the enslaved population.

The opening disguise of the con man as the blackface minstrel Black Guinea sets the scene, linking the novel to burlesque minstrel performances. A physically deformed echo of the wily blackface trickster Jim Crow, Black Guinea enacts the moral and racist exploitation of the antebellum era. Alongside this incarnation, a more transcendent vision of American society based on the artfulness of disguise or 'confidence in uncertainty' is personified by the cosmopolitan, a more charitable version of the devious multi-masked confidence man, a figure who plays the role of "speculativeness" in business and the "shameful corruption" in politics, as described by Mark Twain and Charles Dudley Warner in their 1873 novel

The Gilded Age.[47] Although an era of remarkable industrial expansion and immigration leading to scientific achievements, unbounded capitalism and increased mobility, the flip side of this was social fragmentation where people became vulnerable to the unscrupulous acts of confidence tricksters and the ruthless ambition of power seekers.[48]

Melville embraces blackface disguise for the conman Black Guinea in *The Confidence Man*, unlike Twain and Stowe who use minstrel devices but do not invoke the burnt cork mask literally. Whereas Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe intertwine minstrel sketches into their novels in order to expose and ridicule ingrained and patriarchal racist attitudes, *The Confidence Man* is a minstrel performance disguised as a novel, contesting attitudes to cultural identity and racial equality through complex role-play and the shifting art of disguise. Except for the dialect of the ethnically suspect Black Guinea, the language of the novel is highly literate providing an outer frame, or disguise, of white privilege that operates to reassure the preconceptions of the reader. The various theatrical style encounters in *The Confidence Man* bear a close resemblance to blackface minstrel shows with its amalgam of wordplay, comic banter, tall tales and sentimental melodrama designed to entertain by appropriating and manipulating blackness while performing an indictment of duplicitous attitudes to race.

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[47] Quoted in *The Gilded Age Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, ed, by C W Calhoun (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1996), p. xi.
For the crisis of social identity caused by a fluid social world that gave rise to the confidence men in nineteenth century America see also Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830*-1870.
[48] Calhoun, ed, *The Gilded Age – Essays on the Origins of Modern America*, *Introduction* pp. xi – xix.

The symbolically crippled character of Jim Crow played by Black Guinea performs this double-dealing role accepting money from the country merchant (CM 25), while also establishing a racial presence and thus imagining black participation, an element essential for the possibility of future social inclusion and reform.

As has already been noted, anti-slavery campaigner and self-emancipated slave Frederick Douglass expressed divergent attitudes to the counter-cultural role of minstrelsy. In1848, he described it as a way "to make money and pander to the corrupt taste of their white fellow citizens", but he also argued that "we have allies in the Ethiopian songs" in a lecture to the Rochester Ladies 'Anti-Slavery Society' (1855). Douglass also stated that minstrel songs written by the American composer Stephen Foster, such as "Uncle Ned" and "Old Kentucky Home" (1853) can "awaken sympathies for the slave, in which Anti-Slavery principles take root, grow up, and flourish."[49] For instance, Stephen Foster's early melodies such as "There's a Good time Coming" (1848) express an egalitarian vision of the future. The words written by Scottish born poet Charles McKay, with music by Foster forge a link between indigenous American and immigrant folk cultures:

> Worth not birth shall rule mankind.
> Shameful rivalries of creed shall not make the martyr bleed.
> And a poor man's family shall not be his misery.
> Let us aid it all we can, ev'ry woman, ev'ry man.[50]

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[49] Frederick Douglass, 'The Anti-Slavery Movement Lecture' delivered to the Rochester ladies Anti-Slavery Society, January 1855 in *Frederick Douglass, Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. by Philip S Foner (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 2000), p. 329.

[50] Charles McKay and Stephen Foster, 'There's a Good Time Coming' (Cincinnati: Peters and Field, 1848).

Clearly Foster had a radical democratic agenda that spanned cultural barriers, and which was part of an ethnic melting pot in the evolution of an American cultural language. Influenced by his abolitionist friend, Charles Shiras, Foster composed songs increasingly sympathetic to the experience of enslaved African Americans that had a more elevated tone to the early minstrel songs. In "My Old Kentucky Home Goodnight" (1853) there is no dialect, and the lyrics express complex emotions that cater to the parlour music market, while awakening sympathy for the plight of the dispossessed. The nostalgic sentiments about being sold down the river cannot be taken simply at face value:

> The days go by like a shadow o'er my heart,
> Now there's sorrow where all was delight.
> The time has come, when I am sold apart
> Then my old Kentucky home, good night![51]

The composition is clearly ironic. "My Old Kentucky Home" is a metaphor for death, with the opposing imagery of sorrow and delight designed to disrupt sentimental attitudes to slavery promoted by those who benefit from its continuation. Dale Cockrell calls "My Old Kentucky Home" Foster's commitment to radical change with a mission to steer the early minstrel ditties away from racist caricatures. [52] Foster's songs such as "My Old Kentucky Home "(1853), "Nelly was a Lady" (1949) and "Old Black Joe"

Quoted in Steven Saunders, 'The Social Agenda of Stephen Foster's Plantation Melodies', *American Music*, 30. 3 (2012), 275–89 (p. 275) <doi.org/10.5406/americanmusic.30.3.0275.>.

[51] Stephen Foster, *My Old Kentucky Home, Good Night!* (New York: Firth, Pond, 1853) <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/songs/kyhomef.html>.

[52] Quoted in Saunders, The Social Agenda of Stephen Foster's Plantation Melodies', p. 277.

(1860) humanise heartache and loss across the colour line in an evolutionary process that brought folk ballads from the periphery to the cultural mainstream. Although sympathetic to the plight of the enslaved in the early days, Foster had his name removed from the minstrel songs, an indication that he had ambitions to be taken seriously as a songwriter of national repute.[53] Despite Foster's artistic aspirations, Frederick Douglass acknowledged the ambivalence in the over-sentimentalised laments of Stephen Foster, which explains Douglass's guarded support for the "Ethiopian serenaders". Echoing this cross-racial tribute, Douglass also gives anti-slavery credit to Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin,* despite her white middle-class, religious heritage, stating that her novel "could light a million camp-fires in front of the embattled hosts of Slavery."[54]

The heart-rending songs of home and loss integrate the European ballad with the traditional resonances of the plantation songs in a cultural cross-over that resonated with diverse ethnic audiences. The cultural exchange was recognised by Melville in the Southern plantation songs he wrote about in his 1855 *Putnam's* article "Negro Minstrelsy – Ancient and Modern". This shared cultural character is supported by evidence that there were black people at performances of *Uncle Tom's Ca*bin in New York where, according to minstrel scholar Sarah Meer, burlesque interludes were

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[53] Stephen Foster in a letter to E P Christy, May 25,1852, quoted in Charles Hamm, *Yesterdays Popular Song in America* (New York & London: W W Norton, 1983), p. 251.

[54] Frederick Douglass, *The Anti-Slavery Movement: A Lecture*, (Rochester: Lee, Mann & Co, 1855) <https://archive.org/details/antislaverymovem00doug/page/n1/mode/2up>.

essential to the staging of Stowe's wildly popular novel. A playbill from The National Theatre (formerly The Chatham) advertising a performance of *Uncle Tom* on August 22, 1855 describes "A neat and comfortable Parquette has been prepared in the lower part of the Theatre for the accommodation of Respectable Colored Persons", and also that there was a special entrance and ticket office for non-whites.[55] The only explanation for the mass appeal to mixed audiences is that the shows could be appreciated on different levels, with Northern white audiences concerned with maintaining racial hierarchy, a perception reinforced by the segregated arrangement of the playhouse, and black audiences more alert to hints of white hypocrisy and social instability that fostered hopes of racial change and freedom. Meer argues that the pervasive nature of blackface forms in the 1850s raised the profile of racial discrimination, helping to increase the possibility of abolitionist writing, even including some black writing,[56] The implication is that performances which promoted a specific racial agenda would not be acceptable to Northern audiences who were not directly involved in slavery, whereas the deliberate disorder staged by the minstrel burlesques, which both reinforce, and undercut racial injustice, found great favour.

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[55] Laura L Mielke and Martha Baldwin, '"a black diamond among thim American wifes" Kate Edwards Swayze's Anti-Slavery Adaptation of George Coleman's *Inkle and Yarico'*, *Scholarly Editing*, 36 (2015), p. 27 <http://scholarlyediting.org/2015/editions/intro.swayzedrama.html>.

[56] Sarah Meer, 'Minstrelsy and Uncle Tom' in *The Oxford Handbook of American Drama*, ed. by Jeffrey H Richards & Heather S. Nathans (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 81-96 (p. 82) <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199731497.013.018>.

The popularity and paradoxes of the antebellum minstrel performances both informed and influenced *The Confidence Man,* in which incongruous political and philosophical alliances conflicted by ingrained prejudices are performed in an attempt to fabricate a genuine and inclusive American cultural identity. In addition to the inclusion of a blackface character, the encounter between the cosmopolitan and the 'no trust' barber is another stock scene also borrowed from the minstrel stage, a parody of the blackface parody *The Barber Shop in Uproar*, a burlesque appropriation of the highbrow Italian opera *The Barber of Seville*. Melville's double disguise is designed to parody a patronising attitude to ethnic minorities by mocking the hierarchical pretensions and the racist apathy of the theatre-going middle class. The cultural clash targeted by the minstrel stage satirises the political turmoil surrounding attitudes to race and ethnic discrimination while leaning on European refinement for cultural prestige. Although Melville attended a range of theatre performances in New York, Paris and London, Jennifer Jordan Baker in her study of minstrel influences in Melville's *Benito Cereno,* suggests that while he identified with the disruptive antics of the minstrel stage, he was also "deeply unnerved by the unrest that mixture might create."[57] Such contradictory sympathies relating to social upheaval feed into the unreliable and disguised voices in *The Confidence Man,* which portray the development of a democratic republic corrupted by a culture of systemic racism and ethnic discrimination.

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[57] Jennifer Jordan Baker, 'Staging Revolution in Melville's *Benito Cereno:* Babo, Figaro and 'The Play of the Barber'', *Prospects*, 26, (2001), 91-107 (p. 99).

Other exchanges, such as the section of Melville's novel dealing with the Indian hater John Moredock, also owe a debt to the minstrel stage with its grotesque satire and exaggerated melodrama embedded in the tall tales of pioneering white adventurers who promoted land settlement while eradicating the rights of ethnic minorities and other non-white groups. With colour, ethnicity, disability and female gender bars to full citizenship, a patriarchal racial assumption of white right and economic entitlement provided the basis for Western expansion which, through a deliberate process of dehumanisation, sought to justify the ethnic cleansing of the indigenous population of North America.[58] Melville's second-hand account of Judge Hall's narrative, which includes another interwoven layer of melodramatic discourse, creates myth-building screens of fictitious propaganda used to confer judicial legitimacy upon a racist policy of white oppression, a history reinvented through the satire and disguise invoked by Melville's masked and biased narrative of Indian hater John Moredock.

Burlesque tropes of masking and performance are also employed as a means of examining the role of philosophy in the creation of a cohesive national identity in a racially fractured society. An idealised form of comradeship characterised by the erudite Mark Winsome and his protégé Egbert comes under scrutiny in a staged encounter with the cosmopolitan disguised as Frank Goodman. This exchange is then doubly masked when Egbert is asked to take the part of the conman Charlie Noble, an avatar of the reactionary author and lawmaker Judge Hall. The interweaving of disguised

[58] R. Drinnon, *Facing West: The Metaphysics of Indian-Hating and Empire Building,* Part 3, pp. 165-218.

conmen with shifting and dissembling alliances, unmasked through the role-play satirises a social context with a selective vision of democracy and racial equality, with a philosophy that lacks cultural roots and practical application which is unable to relate to a coherent sense of national identity.

As with Shakespeare, the minstrels are re-imaginers, adapting and distorting chronicles mixed up with a divergent range of other sources to meet audience demands, while forging an alternative and transformative cultural vision. Shakespeare did not live in Rome or in Venice and the minstrels were mostly Northern urban white men who did not directly experience plantation life, but this does not preclude their ability to create a socially progressive counter narrative with social relevance and universal significance.

5.3.1. - "We live amid surfaces, and the true art of life is to skate well on them."

Ralph Waldo Emerson –*Essays, Second Series* (1844)

It is now time to introduce the confidence man and a range of his masquerades all of whom are disingenuous American types posing as respectable trustworthy individuals. Melville begins with the most conspicuous and blatant of all American counterfeiters – the blackface minstrel, and thus Black Guinea is the first to make an appearance in his novel.

Herman Melville's *The Confidence Man and his Masquerade* is a cultural rehearsal playing out scenes with the same character taking different parts to examine American cultural identity from different perspectives. Black Guinea is disguised as a blackface minstrel to provoke and unsettle racial attitudes, but also to imagine wider social inclusion and political reform for the African American population. Black Guinea, a distorted imitation of Jim Crow the iconic symbol and star of the minstrel stage, opens the show aboard the floating stage of the steamboat *Fidele*. The fascination and fear of minstrelsy's wheeling and dealing Jim Crow is appropriated and exploited by Guinea's deformed physique. Through Guinea's blackface disguise Melville uses satire and blackface masking to symbolise a context of systemic racism and social corruption that perverts the line between appearance and reality. This lack of trust in reality is examined through masquerade and performance in Melville's cryptic portrayal of ante-bellum social and racial tensions through the interaction of a multi-disguised conman and a range of passengers, who represent stock characters negotiating a mobile and diverse immigrant culture.

At curtain up Black Guinea takes the role of the interlocutor introducing a range of his own aliases, whose roles are to exploit and bamboozle the confidence and racial prejudices of a burgeoning population wary of losing privilege and identity as a result of immigration, emancipation and economic expansion. For a nation advocating republican values and democracy, the reality did not measure up to this egalitarian

ideal but was instead driven by a white sense of entitlement as depicted in Melville's novel. As Tony Tanner argues:

> Melville's confidence-man (or men) – deft, fraudulent, constantly shifting – can be seen as a major symbol of American cultural history[59]

The degraded, crippled, yet cunning, blackface character of Black Guinea performs the racist dogma that pollutes an idealised white version of American cultural identity, which is then confounded by his role as a masked opportunist, a double act that links the ambiguity of minstrelsy and confidence men who entertain as they exploit the racial anxieties of their victims. Black Guinea speaks in dialect, his grotesque appearance and shabby costume making him a target for racist belittling, a presumption of inferiority which is refuted by his witty banter and faux innocence, a mask designed to cajole while taking advantage of a smugly condescending audience. The exaggerated caricature panders to white assumptions of superiority:

> "What is your name, old boy?" said a purple faced drover, putting his large purple hand on the cripple's bushy wool, as if it was the curled forehead of a black steer.
> "Der Black Guinea dey call me, sar."
> "And who is your master, Guinea?"
> "Oh sar, I am der dog without massa."
> "A free dog, eh? Well on your account I'm sorry for that, Guinea. Dogs without masters fare hard." [60]

Black Guinea is patronised and dehumanised by the drover who calls him 'old boy' and pats his hair as if he was a steer. Guinea's deliberate fawning subservience (he refers to himself as 'a dog without a master') is a

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[59] Tony Tanner, *The Confidence Man* by Herman Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1999), introduction pp. 14-15.
[60] CM, pp. 16.

ploy designed to boost the confidence of white privilege, which is then blinded to the cunning of the wily conman. The discourse between Guinea and the drover imitates minstrel repartee, the comic façade of Guinea's naiveté exposing the pro-slavery sympathies of the drover that puts black people on a par with animals and thus as better off when they are owned. However, Guinea's clever wordplay in banter with the drover casts doubt on preconceptions of inequality based on skin colour:

> "Where do you sleep of nights?"
> "On der floor of der good baker's oven, sar"
> In an oven? Whose pray? What baker…bakes such black bread in his oven alongside of his nice white rolls too?
> "Dar he be" with a broad grin lifting his tambourine high over his head.
> "The sun is the baker, eh?" [61]

The reference to the black and white rolls being side by side in the same oven comically undermines proslavery claims that white and black people are racially different, an assumption Guinea's banter disproves as the rolls all come from the same dough and are baked by the same sun, and so are in essence all the same. The shared oven for the black and white rolls also draws attention to anxieties concerning racial amalgamation, a fear targeted by an exaggerated depiction of intermarriage on the minstrel stage and performed in T D Rice's operetta *Otello* (1853), a burlesque version of Shakespeare's *Othello.*

In *Otello* abhorrence of miscegenation is satirised using pronounced dialect and comic inversions of racial hierarchies in Desdemona's song of reunion, performed incongruously to the tune of *The Girl I left Behind Me:*

Kase if you like me, and I like you,

[61] CM, pp. 16-17.

And our lubs are in communion,
De longer den de family grows,
More stronger am de Union.[62]

The ambiguous lyrics infer that Otello and Desdemona, his 'white' wife, are alike as well as liking each other. However, Otello's blackface mask and Desdemona, blacked up and played by a man, adds to the comic paradox of racial confusion, intended to dissolve as well as to define racial and gender divides. The farcical situation of Otello and Desdemona's child, whose face blacked up on one side and white on the other accepts, as it parodies, racial segregation, a minstrel tactic designed to unmask and contest racial discrimination.[63] T D Rice's masquerade *Otello* is politically apposite to the racial contradictions of the antebellum era. The racial and gender inversions mock liberal attitudes to abolition and emancipation that vies with efforts to defend the paradox of a divided Union. The conflict of interests that resulted in compromised political alliances provided fuel for the provocative incongruity of the minstrel stage burlesques.

Through the role of Black Guinea, Melville invokes the quick wit and adaptability of the minstrel stage, which could address taboo subjects from behind a mask of wide-ranging racial hostility. This unstable cross-racial, class conflicted situation is illuminated through the tetchy exchange between the Methodist minister who is sympathetic to Black Guinea and the Man with the Wooden Leg who accuses Guinea of being a fraudulent 'painted decoy'. When the minister, on behalf of Guinea, pleads a case for

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[62] Thomas Dartmouth Rice, 'Otello – A Burlesque Opera' in *Jump Jim Crow* ed. by W T Lhamon Jr. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), pp. 343-383, (p. 363).
[63] Rice, p. 362.

charity on the basis that "he looks honest, don't he?", the wooden-legged man replies "Looks are one thing and facts another…but that a rascal he is." The wooden-legged man views disguise only as a form of deceit, but the moralising minister argues for unconditional trust in appearance as the antidote to madness, delivering an impromptu sermon to Guinea's audience of believers and cynics:

> "Oh, friends, oh beloved…next to mistrusting Providence there be aught that man should pray against, it is against mis-trusting his fellow man. I have been in mad houses full of tragic mopers, and seen there the end of suspicion: the cynic in the moody madness muttering in the corner…" [64]

The extremity of the language in the minister's apocalyptic sermon undermines its credibility, the pronounced alliteration and exaggeration collapsing into a parody that mocks the humanitarian role of the Church regarding its attitude to race and slavery. The Methodist movement had initially strongly opposed slavery with John Wesley referring to it as an evil "the vilest that ever saw the sun", and calling the slave trade "execrable sum of all villainies." However, due to pressure from Southern states, the Methodist hierarchy urged their brethren not to be judgmental in criticising slavery, even adopting a resolution at the General Conference in 1836 opposed to modern abolitionism.[65] Such religious insincerity is characterised by the Methodist minister's later volte-face, where swayed by the suspicions of the crowd, he becomes suspicious and distrustful of Black Guinea. (CM 25) The switching of allegiances not only makes a dig at the

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[64] CM, p. 24.
[65] Steven E Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, (New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 2010), pp. 48-49.

Church's unchristian attitude to the plight of the enslaved, but also represents the expediency of the religious establishment, who intent on avoiding political turmoil, preferred to brush aside the abolitionists rather than face the wrath of an enraged pro-slavery lobby. Such pragmatism was also noted by Harriet Beecher Stowe in *A Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin,* and in her fictional novel *Dred: A Tale of the Dismal Swamp* (1856). By 1843 dissatisfaction led to secession of anti-slavery members of the Methodist Church, a moral schism that sowed the seeds of the political divide over slavery that would tear the nation apart in the Civil War.

Despite Guinea's doubly masked role as blackface minstrel and profiteering conman, which casts doubt on his role as the American South's unashamed nemesis, his comic performance also elicits sympathy for his plight. The divided responses of his audience disrupted traditional class and racial allegiances. This social disparity is demonstrated through Guinea's exchange with Mr Roberts, the country merchant from Pennsylvania who professes faith in Guinea's masquerade because of his ill treatment by the chorus of hecklers. The trickster is rewarded with half a dollar. However, the merchant's patronising donation clouds his compassion ("And here, here is some proof of my trust…Here, here, my poor fellow"), inferring an element of guilt associated with being a Northern beneficiary of the slave system (CM 25). During the exchange Guinea takes advantage of the merchant by secreting his dropped business card, a tactic that casts aspersions on Guinea's motives, and by association on minstrelsy's moral and racial integrity. This furtive action casts Guinea as a blackface schemer who, by

allowing white people to exercise their benevolent superiority, helps to drive a wedge between the white working class and freed black slaves. Thus, Guinea masquerades in blackface playing the dual roles of victim of oppression and agent of revenge, a double consciousness also enacted in minstrel travesties such as *Otello* and *Hamlet the Dainty*. His behaviour also resonates with Shakespeare's irreverent con artist Autolycus to muddle and complicate cultural identity across the race divide.

When Black Guinea encounters the merchant again, he is disguised as a respectable man in mourning fallen on hard times. The merchant's charitable sympathy is influenced by the linguistic skill and trustworthy appearance of the confidence man who, through the force of his rhetoric, persuades him that they are acquaintances:

> "For God's sake don't leave me. I have something on my heart – on my heart. Under deplorable circumstances thrown amongst strangers, utter strangers. I want a friend in whom I may confide. Yours, Mr Roberts, is almost the first known face I've seen for many weeks."[66]

The melodramatic outburst is designed to manipulate the benevolence of the merchant who gave a pittance to the unfortunate Black Guinea but donates a sizeable banknote to the more respectable man with a weed. As Black Guinea and the man with the weed are the same person, the more sympathetic response by the merchant to Guinea's white avatar demonstrates that skin colour is not a valid means of differentiating between people. The exchange signifies that racial categories are intangible and invented, erasing assumptions of superiority based on skin colour crucial to the justification of slavery, and the entitlement of white authority.

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[66] CM, p. 31.

Despite his compassion, the merchant's racism has been unmasked by his unequal treatment of the same person, tailored to skin colour, rather than merit. Thus, despite his counterfeit, sympathy lies with Black Guinea's avatar because his masquerade has revealed the merchant's deep-seated bigotry and collusion with a corrupt system that condones discriminatory social and racial attitudes. The scene between the merchant and the conman reveals that false appearance is not unequivocally evil but can play a positive role in exposing prejudice and disunion, while also allowing marginal voices to be heard.

The interaction of diverse performances and convoluted role-play in *The Confidence Man,* from the wily cosmopolitan's to the invented dialect of Black Guinea characterises a literary colouring aimed at representing and levelling an amalgam of hidden voices in society, which white privilege attempts to erase or deny in the interests of creating a unified, refined identity. Through the use of exaggerated dialect, the blackface minstrels imitated, but did not claim African American authenticity, a technique that relates to Melville use of role-play and masking to narrate the stories of other socially unheeded voices, blurring racial boundaries through comic invention and inversion. In the minstrel style of interlayered ventriloquism Melville adopts ethnic patois in a postscript to a letter *of* his mother's, *from* his brother Allan:

> Dear Sergeant,
>
> How is you? Am you very well? As to myself I haint been as well as husual. I has had a very cruel cold for this darnation long time, & I has had and does now have a werry bad want of appertisement. – I seed

Mrs Peebles tother day & she did say to me not to fail to tell you that she am well.

No more at present
From your friend
Tawney.

In playing the minstrel, Melville sets out to transgress propriety and literary conventions by affiliating with a hybrid source of national identity. By using minstrel vernacular in the postscript to his mother's letter, Melville plays along with the racial caricature of minstrelsy, the hybrid mimicry a means of mocking white conceit and racial strata based on colour. Melville signs himself Tawney, significantly the name of the old African American sheet anchor-man in his novel *White-Jacket*, who is portrayed against white racist expectations as sober, frank, intelligent and who is held in high esteem where he is often invited into "our top of tranquil." [67] Tawney speaks with the same articulate voice as the narrator and his fellow mariners, conferring an equal and colour-blind status to his voice. Caroline Karcher comments that "Tawney is so successful an attempt at breaking down racial barriers, including colour blindness in human relations, that one could wish that Melville had availed himself of this more often".[68] But maybe he did, but in a more abstruse manner through the masking and incongruous blending of sources in *The Confidence Man*, following in the footsteps of Shakespeare by using a palimpsest re-imagined through art and play-acting. Through

[67] Herman Melville, *White-Jacket: or, The World in a Man-of-War* (New York: New American Library, 1979), pp. 317-324 <https://archive.org/details/whitejacketorwo00melv/page/n5/mode/2up>.
[68] Quoted in Timothy Marr, 'Melville's Ethnic Conscriptions', *Leviathan: A Journal of Melville Studies,* (2001), 5-29 (p. 12) <https://archive.org/details/whitejacketorwo00melv/page/n5/mode/2up>.

engagement with vernacular in the postscript to his mother's letter, Melville plays along with the racial caricature of minstrelsy, the hybrid mimicry a means of mocking white conceit and racial hierarchy based on colour. The cultural amalgamation aimed to redress the exclusion of race and ethnic diversity within an American national identity, but which denied any conclusive resolution to a social order constructed for the perpetuation of white privilege.

5.3.2. In which Black Guinea discards his Visible Mask

As well as Black Guinea another significant avatar of the conman is the 'No Trust' barber characterising the streetwise chancer whose chair provides the pivotal setting for cultural interaction. As has been noted earlier, Melville was familiar with antebellum minstrel shows. The barbershop piece was a stock setting that developed from the comic farce of blackface, where exchanges between ethnic stereotypes are performed, the lowly barber enacting a reversal of social hierarchy by becoming a figure of power, with the pompous client a potential victim of black cut-throat retribution. Dan Emmett's *The Barber Shop in Uproar* is an example, which builds on minstrelsy devices of provoking social disorder, using broad patois, cutting wit and racial inversion. The German farmer Hans Nitrelhammer is held captive beneath a whiteface mask of shaving foam administered by Pompey Smith, the African American barber. The German

farmer complains that he is being murdered: "Auch! Murder! How dat razor pulls." The lurking threat of violence in lines such as "Hold still I tell you! Twill feel good when it gits done hurtin."[69] is a more aggressive response than the 'wheel about, turn about' satire and disorder of jumping Jim Crow, a reflection of ethnic tensions related to deferred democracy and racial injustice. Melville's roguish barber also alludes to Shakespeare's low-life tapster Pompey in *Measure for Measure* who disdains Vienna's hypocritical edicts to clean up the city's morals through his humorous encounters with the forces of the law. His comic banter shakes the foundations of Lord Angelo's authority, indicating that there is little prospect of justice ever prevailing despite the avowal of official decrees. Shakespeare's low life characters resonate with Pompey Smith's barbershop masquerade, its irreverence and conflicts alluding to social tensions and corruption, while also exposing the difficulty of dealing with the problem. The cutthroat nature of the barber shop razor also hints at revolution and disunion aligned to the path of bloody insurrection of the 1848 French Revolution, which Melville alludes to in another shaving scene connected to bloody revolution.

The shaving scene in Melville's novella *Benito Cereno,* which is set in 1799, just ten years after the French Revolution (1789), also emulates the racial inversion of the barbershop masquerade, with Captain Cereno at the mercy of the Senegalese slave Babo's cut-throat razor. The slave revolt, signalled by Babo's disrespectful use of the Spanish flag as a shaving smock,

[69] Dan Emmett, 'The Barber Shop in Uproar' in *Burnt Cork – Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstre*lsy, ed. by Stephen Johnson (Amherst & Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), pp. 43-48.

relates to an American context of rising racial tension, which led inevitably to Civil War. As with the class-based insurrection of the French Revolution, the bloody-thirsty outcome of racial violence in *Benito Cereno* replaces one form of tyranny with another. *The New York Times* in 1856 reviewed *Benito Cereno* as "melodramatic, *not* effective", a literal interpretation that overlooks how the novel draws upon the race and class inversions of minstrelsy to perform the hypocrisy and contradictions of white American imperialism.

Based on the aftermath of the French Revolution, Melville was ambivalent in his support for Civil War as an effective means of achieving inter-racial harmony and saving the Union. This led to accusations of racism against him, a criticism that Melville addresses in the prose 'Supplement' to *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of War.* (1866) While Melville advocates reconciliation between the races, and between North and South, his racial stance is compromised, to some extent, by his claim that sympathy for former slaves "should not be allowed to exclude kindliness to communities who stand nearer to us in nature." [70] Melville's problematic views on race stem partly from his sympathy for the defeated South "The great qualities of the South [...] we can perilously alienate, or we may make them nationally available at need."[71] However, Melville also urged benignity to the freed

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[70] Herman Melville, *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of War* (New York, Harper, 1866), supplement, pp. 259-272 (p. 267) <https://archive.org/details/battlepiecesanda00melvrich/page/268/mode/2up>.
[71] Melville, *Supplement to Battle-Pieces*, p. 267.

slaves convinced that as a result of the terrors of war, the South will feel that secession, like slavery, is against Destiny.[72]

In Melville's works such as *Typee* and *Moby Dick* the inconsistent voice of the narrator destabilises a clear attitude to white imperialism. However, the fusion of a democratic range of characters in these novels is analogous to a philosophical and political vision of universal brotherhood that embraces the vibrancy of ethnic diversity to undermine mistaken assumptions of American pre-eminence. This conception of unity through the accommodation of difference is reinforced through the mystic voice of Ismael in *Moby Dick:*

> "What do I wish that this Queequeg would do to me? Why unite with me in my particular Presbyterian form of worship. Consequently, I must then unite with him; ergo I must turn idolator."[73]

In *The Confidence Man* Melville takes the amalgamation of class and race relationships to a more complex level through inconsistent perspectives and multiple role-playing resonating with an increasingly fragmented and ethnically diverse nation on the brink of secession and war. To reflect this in *The Confidence Man* the roles of the barber and client are switched and stage-managed using disguise and clever wordplay in order to confound social hierarchy. The 'no trust' barber is unnerved by the excessive charm of the cosmopolitan in the guise of Frank Goodman whose forceful rhetoric disarms the barber's scepticism. In the banter that ensues Frank becomes increasingly verbose dominating the discourse in the oratorical

[72] Ibid, p. 260.
[73] Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, ed. by G T Tanselle (New York: The Library of America, 1983), p. 849.

style of a politician. The bombast undermining the reliability of the cosmopolitan, and by association the sincerity of antebellum Senate debates regarding racial reform. Doubt lingers on in the repartee when Frank asks the barber if he would trust a stranger to be an honest man:

> Barber; Not unlikely I should sir."
> Frank: Well now – suppose that honest man met you by night in some dark corner of the boat…asking you to trust him for a shave – how then?
> Barber: Wouldn't trust him sir."
> Frank: But is not an honest man to be trusted?"
> Barber: Why - why – yes, sir"
> Frank: There now don't you see, now?"
> Barber: See what?"
> Frank: Why you stand self-contradicted, barber don't you?"
> Barber: "No"[74]

The double negative 'not unlikely' confuses the understanding of trust and no trust, diluting the difference between the two, shaking belief in what has been agreed, and where reality lies. Frank departs without paying for his shave thanks to his linguistic ingenuity, his dialogue creating uncertainty through an amalgam of art and humour, an evasiveness that chimes with Shakespeare's eclectic man of mystery Autolycus. The 'no trust' barber tears up their written contract, implying that the substance lay in the wordplay rather than in the written word, a perspective that reverberates with the convoluted oratory of government debates and the resulting compromised legislation dealing with issues of slavery and the threat of secession by the Southern states.

Befuddled by banter and placing trust in strangers also resonates with the scepticism of the *New York Herald* in the case of the original confidence man, William Thompson, whose talent was both respected and reviled by

[74] CM, p. 290.

different commentators, but raised distinct scepticism in the pages of the *New York Herald*.[75] It's interesting to note however, that on August 18,1849 *The Literary World* published by George and Evert Duyckinck, a close friend of Melville's, ran an article in praise of the skill and talent of the artful trickster stating that:

> "That one poor swindler, like the one under arrest should have been able to drive so considerable a trade on an appeal to so simple a quality of a confidence of a man in man, shows that all virtue and humanity of nature is not entirely extinct in the nineteenth century. It is a good thing and speaks well for human nature…that men *can be swindled*." [76]

In other words, to be a victim to the wiles of the conman is not necessarily a bad thing as it shows an inclination to be compassionate and to have faith in mankind, building humanitarian bridges rather than erecting defensive walls. Such complexity, ambiguity and contradiction regarding reaction to the original confidence man was undoubtedly an influence on Melville's satirical allegory, where the reader is left with a sense of uncertainty as to whether the cosmopolitan is an ambassador for trust, or an exploiter of the trust of others to further his own interests, or even a shifting amalgam of both positions in line with a process of cultural re-alignment in an unstable world. The original confidence man was regarded as a hero and a villain, a counterfeit threat no longer confined to the minstrel stage, but on the streets, and aboard the steamship *Fidele*. He is a stranger who interacts across a wide social spectrum disrupting moral values and blurring class and race identities to represent a more diffuse and democratic political

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[75] Bergmann, 'The Original Confidence Man', p. 566.
< www.jstor.org/stable/2711934>.
[76] Bergmann, 'The Original Confidence Man', p. 567.

context. Frank expresses this view of confidence as a recipe for social progress and as an antidote to the barber's unforgiving 'no trust' perspective:

> [Frank] "look now; to say that strangers are not to be trusted, does not that imply something like saying that mankind is not to be trusted; for the mass of mankind are they not necessarily strangers to each individual man? [77]

This wider inclusiveness of American cultural identity, which accepts the transformative role of performance shifts the impact of the minstrel stage savants as deflators of cultural pomposity, modifying the role of the masquerades to the more contained and less threatening format of minstrel jamborees and ethnically specific vaudeville shows that gradually replaced the staged rebellion of the blackface performances. While false appearance can be seen as a force for social tolerance, paradoxically it can also lead to greater ethnic separateness and the assertion of cultural difference. Ethnic divisions can then be manipulated by the dominant power in their own interests, a situation parodied and perverted by the barbershop burlesques and by Melville to contest the presumptions of American imperialism.

5.3.3. Counterfeit Confusion

The exchange between the herb-doctor, another mask of the confidence man, and the soldier of fortune Thomas Fry, adds more elements of confusion to an uncertain social context. This is because Thomas Fry's fraud is justified, as opposed to the counterfeit of the confidence man, which

[77] CM, p. 292.

is exploitative. Thomas Fry is mistakenly arrested and invalided while a prisoner in the Tombs in New York, and so in order to survive he claims to be a wounded ex-soldier. By contrast, the quack medicine man or herb-doctor exploits the medical vulnerabilities of an uprooted and suggestible American population, a masked performance that also satirises the cure-all remedies offered by politicians and religion. The soldier of fortune, as an opportunist conman, cuts through the herb-doctor's scientific bombast, the different shades of counterfeit undermining confidence in political and moral certainty promoted by the State and the Church.

Fry, as a victim of class-ridden injustice, ironically makes a living by claiming to be an ex-soldier. His experience of street protest, when he is imprisoned for witnessing a crime committed by a gentleman wealthy enough to evade charges, means that he feels no loyalty to a disfigured political system. To earn a living, Fry lies out of expediency, and a shameless disregard for authority, which re-assesses attitudes to the morality of counterfeit. The herb-doctor's confident nationalism, dressed up in the flowery language of political oratory and religious rhetoric, only fuels Fry's sense of social alienation. His question to the herb-doctor, "What do you talk your hog-latin to me for?" (CM 129), reflects the schism of growing class and ethnic tensions that culminated in street riots, such as the 1849 Astor Place Riot in New York when culture became politicised, divided along class and national lines, and posing a threat to the Union.

In *The Confidence Man*, the exchange between the herb-doctor and the Soldier of Fortune captures the underlying enigma of the truth of deception

within a corrupt political system. Reflecting the social instability of the times, conflicting class and racial allegiances are signalled through the changeable voice of the herb-doctor. Sympathy is accorded to the plight of the invalided soldier of fortune, whose counterfeit is applauded as fair retribution against injustice. The herb-doctor recognises the soldier as a fellow traveller, with Fry, disguised as Happy Tom "crippled in both pins at glorious Contreras", exploiting the patriotism of passengers aboard the *Fidele.*, His name subtly alludes to Harriet Beecher Stowe's character Uncle Tom, a figure appropriated as a symbol of passive compliance to white rule, while overlooking his role of resolute resistance to white racial tyranny in the final chapters of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.[78] Uncle Tom's dual role foresaw what the American historian W E B Du Bois would later theorise as the 'double-consciousness' of black men, an ambivalence captured on the minstrel stage by drawing attention to the mask. The ambiguous attitude of the herb-doctor towards the 'ex-soldier' reflects the contradictions enacted on the minstrel stage which were confluent with the political and racial complexities surrounding the 1846-1848 war with Mexico. [79] The herb-doctor gives the wily fake soldier credit for his ingenuity ("Aye, one that fights not the stupid Mexican, but a foe worthy of your tactics- Fortune!"),

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[78] Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (Ware, Herts: Wordsworth Classics, 1995), chapters 23-40.
[79] *The United States and Mexico at War: Nineteenth Century Expansionism and Conflict* ed. by Donald Frazier (New York: Charles Scribner,1998). (The United States victory in the war with Mexico (1846-1848) greatly increased patriotic fervor but intensified the debate over slavery because of the annexation of Texas into the Union as a slave State. The dilemma resulted in a series of compromise bills in1850 that helped to postpone the prospect of secession, but increased support for abolition.).

but criticises him for his anti-patriotic cynicism when he refers to his country disrespectfully as "free Americky". (CM 127) However, the apocalyptic rhetoric of the herb-doctor's lecture acts as a mask for his lack of sincerity, his oratory sliding into the ambiguous realms of a burlesque pump speech:

> But it is never to be forgotten that human government, being subordinate to the divine, must needs, therefore, in its degree, partake of the characteristics of the divine. That is, while in general efficacious to happiness, the world's law may yet, in some cases, have, to the eye of reason, an unequal operation, just as, in the same imperfect view, some inequalities may appear in the operation of heaven's law; nevertheless, to one who has right confidence, final benignity is, in every instance as sure with the one law as the other.[80]

The theatrical delivery with the lengthy sentences, rambling clauses, broken by significant pauses, denoted by the unevenly spaced commas, is a parody of Senate rhetoric and Church sermons, the elaborate artifice of the language used as a weapon to ridicule authority and a national identity in denial of cultural diversity. The absurd contortions of the language imitate Senate disquisitions that attempt to bridge insoluble political differences over the perpetuation of slavery against threats of secession by the Southern slave-holding states.

The grand style of the conman herb-doctor's speech is a parody of Senator William H Seward's famous 'Higher Law' speech (1850) arguing that California should be admitted to the Union as a free state, an incendiary proposition that threatened the balance of pro- and anti-slavery forces in the U S Congress. Although Seward publicly supported the abolition movement, he privately opposed The Fugitive Slave Act included in the 1850

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[80] Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, p. 129.

Compromise Bill. Thus, to avoid political controversy that might split the Union as well as jeopardise his career, Seward invoked a higher law than the Constitution as a means of delivering freedom and an end to slavery:

> It is insisted that the admission of California shall be attended by a compromise of questions, which have arisen out of slavery. I am opposed to any such compromise, in any and all the forms in which it has been proposed, because, while admitting the purity and the patriotism of all from whom it is my misfortune to differ, I think all legislative compromises radically wrong and essentially vicious. They involve the surrender of the exercise of judgment and conscience on distinct and separate questions, at distinct, and separate times, with the indispensable advantages it affords for ascertaining truth […] But there is a higher law than the Constitution, which regulates our authority over the domain and devotes it to the same noble purposes. The territory is a part—no inconsiderable part—of the common heritage of mankind, bestowed upon them by the Creator of the universe. We are His stewards and must so discharge our trust as to secure, in the highest attainable degree, their happiness…[81]

The sincere intent of the extravagant oratory disguises its prevarication. Seward is desperate to sustain the Union, but unable to commit to legislative enforcement for fear of political fragmentation and the risk of Civil War. While Seward accepted the historical inheritance of slavery from the nation's colonial past, he passionately opposed its perpetuation as inconsistent with the principles of the Republic:

> You may separate slavery from South Carolina, and the State will still remain; but if you subvert freedom there, the State will cease to exist.[82]

Through convoluted exchanges between the herb-doctor and the soldier of fortune Melville engages with minstrel devices of comic bluster and melodramatic excess to expose the farcical outcome of the great 1850

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[81] William H Seward, *The 1850 Compromise: A Nation on the Brink – The Spectre of Civil War* (speech to the Senate, March 11,1850) <http://sageamericanhistory.net/civilwar/topics/1850compromise.html>.
[82] Seward, 'Compromise Speech', March 11,1850.

Compromise debate that took place in the United States Congress. After days of long-winded debate, a tenuous agreement was reached that allowed the opposing parties to claim victory. These events are satirised by the herb-doctor's poetic response to the cynicism of the soldier of fortune. The use of elevated language of optimistic faith in nature, as a mask for political vacillation, is merged with a sly dig at the impractical romanticism of the philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson:

> "To mere reason your case looks something piteous, I grant… yet, how sweet to roam day and night through the groves, plucking the bright mosses and flowers, til forlornness becomes a hilarity, and, in your innocent independence, you skip for joy?"[83]

The farcical imagery of the invalided soldier skipping for joy epitomises the delusion of the 1850 Compromise meant to unite the nation, but which ironically increased support for abolition in the free North when the price of safeguarding the Union meant collusion with the practice of slavery. The morally ambiguous, yet more benign, Seward-like voice of the herb-doctor, who offers his remedy gratis to the soldier of fortune in an act of cross-cultural friendship, invokes greater sympathy for his more charitable confidence in humanity, which begs a more forgiving attitude towards his quack remedies.

In his speech Senator Seward gives precedence to freedom rather than legislation as the means of exorcising slavery, a position endorsed by Melville in 'the Supplement' to *Battle-Pieces*. Like Melville, Seward urges Christian charity and common sense "our natural solicitude to guarantee the basic civil liberties to blacks should not find expression in measures of

[83] CM, pp. 129-130.

dubious constitutional righteousness towards our white countrymen – measures of a nature to provoke, among other of the last evils, exterminating hatred of race towards race."[84] Such conciliatory sentiments advocating charity towards those responsible for slavery inevitably left Melville open to accusations of racial prejudice.[85] However, disputes between protagonists in *The Confidence Man* are confusing and never fully resolved, which suggests an accommodating approach intended to defuse and modify the antagonisms of political extremes.

The herb-doctor's minstrel-style travesty of Seward's speech to Congress also resonates with the bawdy aspects of Shakespeare plays, and with the Shakespeare burlesques which satirise the authority of the Church and State, which does not practice the humanity and justice that they preach.[86] The hypocrisy is indicated in Otello's speech to the Senate in T D Rice's burlesque operetta, which appropriates Shakespeare's *Othello* to deflate the pretensions of authority through the racial inversion and respect for the socially dispossessed and marginalised:

> Most potent, grabe, and reberand Signiors, my bery noble and approbed good Massas: Dat I hab tuck away dis old man's darter – is true and no mistake. True, I's married her. De bery head and tail ob my offence hab dis extent, no more, rude am I in talk.[87]

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[84] Melville, Supplement to *Battle-Pieces,* p. 267.
[85] Carolyn L Karcher, *Shadows Over the Promised Land: Slavery, Race and Violence in Melville's America* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1980), pp. 272-3 <https://www.proquest.com/docview/302976845>.
[86] Ray B Browne 'Popular Theatre in *Moby Dick'* in *New Voices in American Studies* ed. by Ray B Browne (West Lafayette, Indiana: Perdue University Studies, 1966) pp. 89-101 (p. 92).
[87] Rice, 'Otello', p. 350.

The herb-doctor's jumble of flowery language aligns with the motley pageantry of blackface vernacular tipping over from melodramatic excess to irony, a performance that illuminates the façade of government attempts to solve the enigma of a cohesive national identity confounded by the conflicting cross-currents of sectional, class and racial politics.

Borrowing from minstrel performance motifs to undermine white political conceit links *The Confidence Man* to the contradictions of the herb-doctor's confidence in charity as of benefit mankind:

> "Charity marvels not that you should be somewhat hard of conviction, my friend, since you, doubtless, believe yourself hardly dealt by; but forget not that those who are loved are chastened."[88]

However, confidence in the herb-doctor's benevolence is inconclusive, which disrupts any conclusion regarding support for abolition, racial equality and political accord between North and South:

> "Mustn't chasten them too much, though, and too long, because their skin and heart get hard, and feel neither pain nor tickle."[89]

The hard-hearted soldier of fortune remains immune to the vacillating pronouncements of the herb-doctor. As a victim of an unfair system of justice, Thomas Fry is unable to be charitable towards his oppressors, instead he takes advantage of their gullibility. By contrast, the opportunist herb-doctor switches, without qualm, from anti-slavery sympathiser to effusive Northern pragmatist, manipulating the system to his advantage through false identity and fake remedies.

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[88] CM, p. 129.
[89] CM, p. 129.

In Melville's *Confidence Man,* as in the minstrel burlesques, the battle line opposed to assumptions of white privilege is not drawn exclusively along the axis of colour, it also includes disadvantaged white people, who together form cross-racial affiliations of the afflicted. This ethnic communality echoes the racial diversity of audiences who flocked to minstrel shows prior to political shifts that benefitted from provoking class and racial divides in order to assert a hierarchy of white cultural control.[90] This schism is what Eric Lott refers to as the creation of a caste system of the white working class that opposed abolition because of economic pressures which fractured previous cross-racial alliances:

> It has been a commonplace of antebellum labor history that such hostility was generated in part out of the extreme competition for work in the earliest stages of "initial proletarianization" in America, though it is now clear that the myth of black competition was a cover story for white workers' precipitous descent in the class structure.[91]

It was this rising sense of xenophobic working-class pride that boiled over onto the streets of New York, contributing to the mob violence of the Astor Place Riot (1849). Focused on American and English theatrical rivalry, the riot resulted in the deaths of at least twenty-two people, with many more injured.[92] Blood flowed on the streets of New York in a class war that

[90] David R Roediger, *The Wages of Whiteness, Race and the Making of the American Working Class*, revised edition (London: Verso, 2007), pp. 75-76.
[91] Lott, *Love and Theft*, p. 127.
[92]Levine, Lawrence W Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow, The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in* America (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 64-5.
(The protest was marked by cries of "Burn the den of the aristocracy!" and turned violent when a crowd attempted to storm the theatre entrance with the militia firing into the crowd. While the tone of the language evokes the French Revolution, the riot resulted in working-class civil war undermining any radical or national purpose).

foreshadowed the Civil War and paved that way for the New York draft riots of 1863. [93] Melville's support for the English actor William Charles Macready (he was one of a number of mainly upper-class signatories to a petition to *The New York Herald*) labelled him as a cosmopolitan and anti-patriotic. Melville's opposition to mob rule was not class-based, however, but an assertion of individual artistic freedom resistant to the forces of popular pressure.

Using his literary skill, Melville waged his own war to blur and disrupt class and racial boundaries. Black Guinea is doubly masked as a blackface version of the confidence man, and white fraudsters such as the soldier of fortune Thomas Fry masquerade as victims of oppression representing social alienation on different levels, while undermining rigid concepts of identity. Thus, 'a prim-looking stranger' condemns the soldier of fortune as a rascal and a liar, but the herb-doctor justifies the soldier's masquerade as pardonable "The vice is unfortunate…Consider he lies not out of wantonness."[94] The herb-doctor condones Thomas Fry's disguise as an invalid soldier as an acceptable means of fighting misfortune at the hands of white oppression and injustice. Both the confidence man and the fake soldier form a coalition of fraudsters pandering to, and exploiting, white sympathy, with Thomas Fry living for real what the herb-doctor, Black Guinea and the other aliases of the confidence man enact for personal profit. It might appear that Thomas Fry was playing a whiteface version of the

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[93] Iver Bernstein, *The New York Draft Riots, Their Significance for American Society and Politics in the Age of the Civil War,* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.148-151.
[94] CM, p. 27.

crippled Black Guinea, both figures deluding their persecutors by feigning cheerful subservience. However, Fry was a real victim, if not a real soldier, fighting against misfortune and prejudice, which oppressed and excluded a wider range of people than the black population.

Fry's mistreatment at the hands of a prejudiced social hierarchy has parallels with the action taken against Shakespeare's Othello because of his status as a cultural outsider. In a lecture for the BBC on *Othello* in 1963, the black anti-colonial writer and activist C L R James claims that the source of Othello's trouble was his cultural alienation not necessarily based on skin colour:

> I say with the fullest confidence, that you could strike out every single reference to Othello's black skin and the play would be essentially the same. Othello's trouble is that he is an outsider. He is not a Venetian. He is a military bureaucrat, a technician, hired to fight for Venice, a foreign country. The senate has no consciousness whatsoever of his colour. That is a startling fact but true. (*Spheres of Existence* 141)[95]

It may be surprising that a Trinidadian historian of high literary standing would express such colour-blind perspective, however by not confining his reading of the play to race, James widens resistance to oppression beyond issues of blackness to incorporate a shared humanity of alienation that spans class and racial boundaries. While the disordered excess of the minstrel stage attacks the race divide from one side of the

[95] Quoted in Pier Paolo Frassinelli, 'Reading C L R James Reading Shakespeare.' *Shakespeare in Southern Africa*, 18 (2006), 11-19 (p. 11) <https://www.academia.edu/4243545/Reading CLR _JamesReadingShakespeare>.

fence, through focus on the racialised mask, C L R James attempts a similar feat from the other side, by whitewashing the mask.

As a white victim of social alienation, the invalid Thomas Fry resonates with another misshapen outcast in the shape of the wheelin', dealin' minstrel Jim Crow. Influenced by the minstrel stage devices of disguise and inversion, Melville's *Confidence Man* Melville reveals the cross-racial fellowship of alienation shared across the colour line. The social alliance reflects a context that discriminated against those who did not conform to an idealised version of American manhood as defined by white patriarchal precepts. Ambiguous and hypocritical attitudes to social equality which Melville identifies through the exchange between the herb-doctor and the 'soldier of fortune' are also satirised in minstrel songs by Frank Wilder, and in the compositions of the newspaper editor and satirist Charles Halpine (Miles O' Reilly).

In mid-nineteenth century America, the disabled veteran and the freed slave were regarded in conjunction as both deserving of sympathy, but also as suspect. Being an invalid was to lose a place in society to the extent that the person may as well be coloured. Those who did not conform to a national ideal of white able-bodied, male independence and ability were considered social outcasts who posed a threat to white privileged social order. Douglas Baynton, a historian of whiteness and disability reinforces this attitude regarding white entitlement to power constructed on notions of idealised white masculinity. He argues that African Americans, immigrants and women are victims of white male power because they had to challenge

assumptions of inferiority related to incapacity and frailty. White men defined, and thus became the self-proclaimed embodiment of the new nation and the essence of its prestige.[96]

American wars increased the social gap between white male citizens and the disabled, an inequality captured in the popular war song "The Invalid Corps" (1863), which focused on a unit also known as the Cripples Brigade:

> Some had the ticerdolerreou,
> Some what they call "brown critters",
> And some were "lank and lazy" too,
> Some were too "fond of bitters".
> Some had "cork legs" and some "one eye"
> With backs deformed and crooked.
> I'll bet you laugh'd till you had cried
> To see how "cute" they looked.[97]

The lyrics which lump "brown critters" with the sick and disabled ridicules a social underclass united across the colour line. The focus on disfigurement through allusions to the hunch-backed "cripple" Jim Crow has parallels with antebellum minstrel songs, but lacks the ironic satire that disrupts, as much as it derides, attitudes to race and disability. However, Charles Halpine's composition *Sambo's Right to be Kilt* (1862) follows the traditions of

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[96] Douglas C Baynton, 'Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History' in *The New Disability History: American Perspectives: 6'*, ed. by Paul K Longmore & Lauri Umansky (New York: New York University Press, 2001), pp. 33-57.
[97] Frank Wilder, *The Invalid Corps*, (Boston: Henry S Tolman, 1863). (Part of the Civil War Sheet Music Collection) <https://www.loc.gov/collections/civil-war-sheet-music/>.
See also David R Roediger, 'Emancipation from Whiteness' in *The Construction of Whiteness: An interdisciplinary Analysis of Race Formation and the Meaning of a White Identity*, pp. 74-99 (p. 79).
>

minstrel parody, as the poem ironically grants equal rights on the battlefield, but only as a human shield to protect a white man's skin:

> Some tell me tis a burning shame
> To make the naygers fight
> And that the trade of being kilt
> Belongs but to the white
> But as for me upon my soul!
> So lib'ral are we here
> I'll let Sambo be shot instead of myself
> On ev'ry day of the year.[98]

This song, written by newspaper editor Charles Graham Halpine (1829-1868) resonates with the disguised ambiguity of the minstrel stage. Allusions to lynching ('tis a burning shame') and the slave market ('the trade of being kilt') subtly expose an underlying subtext of racism and inhumanity beneath the comic mask. Charles Halpine was an Irish-born immigrant, journalist and satirist who followed in the minstrel footsteps of using dialect, parody, and ironic wit to expose social injustice and racial discrimination. Halpine, as an ex-soldier, who resigned due to poor eyesight, sympathised with those defined as of less social worth. Serving under General David Hunter, Halpine helped draft the orders that granted freedom to all slaves in the Union Army. This led to the formation of the first black regiment to fight for the Union. Although an action not universally approved in the North, Halpine's poem was written in defence of General Hunter's controversial

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[98] Irwin Sibler, *Songs of the Civil War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1960), pp. 328-330. Composer S Lover, lyrics by Miles O'Riley (a pseudonym for Charles Halpine) <https://archive.org/details/songsofcivilwar0000silb/page/330/mode/2up>.

decision.[99] The poem goes to the heart of the hypocrisy of American national identity, where you could die for your country, and yet still be denied full citizenship, which was an automatic entitlement of the white male population.

Halpine was a committed social campaigner, especially on behalf of Union war veterans, but he was also sceptical of the real purpose and effect of Northern Republican support for black social justice.[100] In the poem *My Sambo of the Kom Heraus,* Halpine imitates the restrained stance of the Whig newspaper editor and Union supporter Henry Jarvis Raymond (1820-1869). The jaunty rhythm serves as a satirical mask targeting liberal ambivalence related to immigration and race:

> Trust not Frederick Douglass, my Sambo,
> Trust not Greely, my Sambo,
> Trust not Ward Beecher or Tilton,
> Great chief of the Nix-kom-heraus;
> But trust your own Raymond my Sambo;
> Who'll never desert you, my Sambo
> While you're good for a vote or a dollar
> Oh chief of the Nix-kom-heraus.
>
> You shall marry us white folk, my Sambo,
> We'll marry your black folk, my Sambo,
> You shall eat with us, vote with us, sleep with us,
> Great chief of the Nix-kom heraus;[101]

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[99] Halpine's poem appeared in the *New York Herald* in 1862 as 'Private Miles O' Reilly'. He became editor and then owner of the New York newspaper *The Citizen* but he wrote articles, sketches and stories for many other publications, including New York's *Leader* vastly increasing the paper's circulation and influence.

[100] Halpine, biographical sketch, pp. x-xii.

[101] Charles G Halpine, *The Poetical Works of Charles G Halpine (Miles O'Reilly*) (Berkeley, CA, Harper & Bros, University of California Press, 1869), pp. 310-311 <https://archive.org/details/poeticalworksch01roosgoog/page/n320>.

The patronising repetition of 'my Sambo' in Halpine's provocative verse raises concerns about a genuine commitment to racial equality and the abolition cause espoused by prominent Northern republicans. The allusions to a racially and ethnically hybrid nation are designed to inflame anxieties concerning racial parity across the white political spectrum. Halpine's comic verse also alludes to similar scepticism related to fears of miscegenation satirically depicted in T D Rice's burlesque operetta *Otello*. In *Otello* the lyrics of the folk song *The Girl I Left Behind Me*, which Otello sings to welcome Desdemona to Cyprus, are adapted and the sentiments reversed. Originally an Irish fife tune and traditional song of leave-taking, it was re-worked and sung to countless sets of words applicable to different circumstances and causes. The song was originally brought over to America by British forces during the period of the Revolutionary War (1775-1783). It was later adapted by The Confederate Army as a marching song with changing the lyrics to mock Abe Lincoln, while the soldiers of the Mexican army composed the grim joking version "The Leg I left behind Me". [102] The familiarity of the song made it ripe for minstrel parody, where the tear-jerking lyrics of departure are incongruously reversed to welcome Desdemona to Cyprus. The minstrel appropriation of the song symbolises an inclusive cultural union that spans the race and class divide:

> *Otello*
> I've libed on land, I've libed on sea,
> In ebery clime and station.
> And dere no station in all de world

[102] 'The Girl I left Behind Me', *Age of Revolution* <https://ageofrevolution.net/born-in-battle-the-american-revolution-online/music/the-girl-i-left-behind-me/>.

Like de state of annexation.[103]

Despite his commitment to social justice Halpine, like other Northern Unionists, was torn between supporting abolition and a commitment to the preservation of the Union. In his poem *Black Loyalty* he acknowledges that the anti-slavery cause was vindicated:

> Full six years we have given to the Black
> And the thing was undoubtedly right
> […]
> To the Black rebel glory and power,
>   To the White rebel chains and disgrace,
> Oh madness and worse rules the hour –
>   We are false to faith, wisdom and race!
> You were rebels and bad ones but still
>   You share my misfortune – you're White![104]

Alive to the wrongs of his country, and sympathetic to the socially downtrodden from all walks of life, Halpine also laments his whiteness and contribution to the fratricidal bloodshed. Thus, in the poem *Philadelphia* Halpine feels compelled to plead for mercy for the South in the interests of healing the wounds of a nation riven by racial tension and institutional injustice:

> Be merciful to the South -
> […]
> For brothers we were in the glorious past,
> And brothers again we must be at last -
>   Be merciful to the South![105]

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[103] Rice*, Otello* p. 363.
(This song was originally a colonial fife song, possibly of Irish origin, its parody on the minstrel tradition an indication of cultural cross-over signifying an intermingled folk heritage that blurs and distorts racial identity. See also Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow*, note 43, pp. 445-446).
[104] Charles G Halpine, *The Poetical Works of Charles G Halpine (Miles O'Reilly)* (Berkeley, CA, Harper, University of California Press, 1869) <https://archive.org/details/poeticalworksch01roosgoog/page/n320>.
[105] Halpine, *The Poetical Works*, p. 58.

Halpine and Melville align with the minstrel stage parodies in using caricature and ambiguity to satirise social injustice affecting a range of socially marginalised people. In his poetic works Halpine, like Melville in *Battle-Pieces,* also voices a disparate array of perspectives on racial issues ranging from support for black Yankee regiments and, respect for the bravery of the white Confederate forces, to criticism of spineless black rebel soldiers and, scepticism about Northern endeavours to abolish slavery related to fears of creating a racially degraded nation. Such literary detachment could be interpreted as unprincipled indifference towards a racially egalitarian society, especially in the light of Halpine's commitment to North and South reconciliation based on brotherhood and a shared skin colour.

Similar criticism of political vacillation was also levelled at Melville for his belief that art is a more effective means of overcoming obstacles to fraternal accord. He warned that violent retribution would be counter-productive to preserving the Union and would lead to endless internecine strife. This perspective is illustrated by Carolyn Karcher:

> Melville apparently believed, the radical effort to break the power of the old slave-owning class would only unite southerners in undying enmity towards both their conquerors and their former slaves.[106]

Literary critic Joyce Adler also condemned Melville's lenient stance towards the South based on his rhetorical comment "Can Africa pay back this blood/Spilt on Potomac's shore?"[107], which she describes as "a pathetic

[106] Karcher, *Shadows Over the Promised Land,* p. 273.
[107] Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, 242, quoted in Karcher, *Shadows Over the Promised Land,* p. 267.

lapse of the uncompromising moral vision Melville had shown in his fiction and in the body of *Battle-Pieces*."[108] However, in the prose Supplement to *Battle-Pieces,* Melville's plea for "a generosity of sentiment public and private" makes clear his conviction that it was the surest way to peace and harmony to heal the wounds of a war-ravaged nation. Thus, despite the renowned obduracy of the defeated Confederacy as unlikely to cooperate on equal terms with those they had brutally subjugated in the past, Melville nevertheless urges confidence in South in order to achieve reconciliation and brotherhood.

5.3.4. - In which Confidence becomes more Confusing

While the herb-doctor and the soldier of fortune use disguise and melodramatic excess to parody and confuse a white ideal of national identity constructed to exclude those deemed socially outcast, the saga of the Indian hater John Moredock invokes a more complex technique of multiple masking to satirise the myth of white imperial pre-eminence established through a process of dehumanisation and ethnic cleansing of the Indigenous population.

Melville's depiction of retribution, rather than the reconciliation he advocates in *Battle-Pieces*, is enacted in the complex role-play, disguises, and ironic satire in the Indian hating chapter of *The Confidence Man* to expose the fallacy of American civilisation. In this parable, the cosmopolitan

[108] Quoted in Karcher, *Shadows Over the Promised Land,* p. 267.

performs the role of interlocutor to animate the "noble savagery" of the Indigenous population demonised by the ruthless Indian killer Colonel John Moredock (CM 96). The exchanges challenge Moredock's white entitlement, which is sanctioned in written narratives such as Judge James Hall's *Sketches* (1835)[109] and *Mr Parkman's Tour* (1846).[110] These pioneering tales of the wild West glorified ethnic genocide in order to subjugate and deny the rights of indigenous people, a process of dehumanisation allied to the subjugation of the enslaved population in the South.

The pervasive role of blackface masquerade, employing melodramatic overload to destabilise narrative confidence, plays a key part in Melville's masquerade of the frontier tale of the Indian hater John Moredock. The blurring of fact with fiction is reported second-hand by the fraudulent Charlie Noble, allegedly based on an account by his father's friend Judge Hall, who is really Charlie in disguise. Charlie's double masking serves as a distancing device intended to assess and manipulate audience response, while also invoking judicial authority to confer historical legitimacy.

Central to the parable of white hubris in denying the rights of minority sections of American society is Melville's charade of the Indian hater, a masquerade using satire and multi-layered disguise to recount a program of

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[109] James Hall, *Sketches of History, Life, and Manners, in the West* (Philadelphia: Harrison Hall, 1835) <https://archive.org/details/sketchesofhistor02hall>.

[110] Francis Parkman, *The Oregon Trail*, *being Sketches of Prairie and Rocky Mountain Life*, ed. by William Ellery Leonard (Boston &London: The Athenaeum Press, 1910) <https://ia800304.us.archive.org/18/items/oregontrailoffra00park/oregontrailoffra00park.pdf>.

ethnic cleansing that condones racist violence under the auspices of Judge Hall's state-sanctioned authority. Melville's veiled parody is based on the real Judge Hall's *Sketches of History Life and Manners in the West, Volume 2* (1835), Hall's depiction of the real-life, avenging Indian hater Colonel John Moredock.

However, the backdrop to Melville's Indian hating saga originates with a poster on display near the Captain's office, which is described "As if it had been a theatre bill" (CM 7). The inference is that performance is an aspect of myth creation, with a reward offered for the capture of a mysterious imposter recently arrived from the East, adding to the dramatic affect. According to Richard Drinnon in his book *Facing West* (1980), Judge James Hall (1793-1868) is the source of Charlie Noble's Moredock narrative, his identity as a hawker aboard the *Fidele,* hinted at by his wares, which consist of romanticised fictions of frontier life.[111] These include *The Lives of the Measan*, *The Pirate of the Mississippi* and *The Thugs of the Green River Country,* which are all titles published by the real Judge Hall, lawyer, soldier, banker and author of fictional Westerns glorifying the expansionist exploits of white pioneers on the western frontier.(CM 7-8) The implication is that the Judge is the mysterious imposter from the East, but also that he is disguised as Charlie Noble, a ventriloquizing act intent on manipulating the historical record in favour of endorsing white imperialism. The supposition that Judge Hall is Charlie Noble is based on the similarity between the Judge's portrait in the frontispiece of his book *The Romance of Western*

[111] Drinnon, *Facing West*, p. 205.

History (1857), which describes him as "genial in bearing but undercut by tightly closed, thin lips", which aligns with Melville's depiction of Charlie Noble as exuding "the warm air of cordiality, contrasting itself with not what kind of aguish sallowness of saving discretion lurking behind it." (CM 185). Judge Hall is thus retelling his own narrative of John Moredock, but from behind the mask of the conman Charlie Noble. Melville's duplicative description draws attention to the process of myth-making and cultural acceptance in the construction of the might and the right of the white historical record. However, Charlie's flamboyant attire, false teeth, "too good to be true", and the spotlighted entrance "lit by a zoned lamp swung overhead, and sending its light vertically down, like the sun at noon" emphasises the role play, which undermines confidence in his authority. In addition, the rhetorical effect of the double negative "Beneath the lamp stood the speaker, affording to any one disposed to it no unfavourable chance for scrutiny", subtly draws attention to theatrical ambiguity, which implies that the Judge, and by association white authority, dressed as it is in robes of legislative objectivity, is both masked and disingenuous.(CM 185-6) This also suggests that Judge Hall's tales of the wild West are romanticised fiction presented as historical truths exalting the virtues of the white man, the perfect stage for Melville's own parody of Indian hating. His imitation of the Judge's masked narrative invokes overlapping layers of disguise and melodramatic re-invention to mock attempts to mythologise white heroics based on concocted and anecdotal retelling.

Charlie Noble's meta-narrative begins using animal imagery of panthers and possums to demean Native Americans, a process of dehumanisation aimed at justifying Moredock's murderous campaign of Indian killing. Judge Hall's disguise as Charlie allows him to comment on the actions of the lawless backwoodsman John Moredock; however, through his slanted perspective and the blatant inconsistencies, the Judge undermines the credibility of the legal system. In one breath Charlie Noble (alias Judge Hall), condemns the moral indignation of the massacred "Red Indians", which they want tested in the Supreme Court, while his own opinion regarding the depravity of "Indians" as "tomahawkers" and horse thieves is accepted without question or excuse. The melodramatic excess of Charlie Noble's discourse, which aligns the backwoodsman with Alexander the Great, Moses in the Exodus, the Emperor Julian of Gaul and, ironically from a racial perspective, the "Polynesian upon the comb of the surf", (CM193) acts to ridicule Judge Hall's fictional history as an attempt to use his judicial weight to confer legendary status on pioneering 'Indian haters'.

Taking the complications of racial dispossession to another level, Melville, like Shakespeare, leans on an existing plot as a palimpsest for his own version, the additional material providing insight into the concerns of the author. *The Confidence Man* deviates from Judge Hall's original version in *Sketches of the West* (1835) where there is no explanation as to why Moredock, the great Indian hating hero, refused to be considered as a State Governor. This omission is addressed in Melville's rewriting of events in order to shed light on the absurd assumptions of white civilisation founded

on a history of savagery that they condemn in others. [112] In Melville's added section, the Judge declares that Moredock feels it would be an impropriety within the limits of his paternal chief-magistracy to be Governor of Illinois and part time killer of human beings. It is an explanation that reveals as it mocks a racist agenda of ethnic cleansing concealed beneath Hall's judicial wig, a satirical dig at the appointed bastion of Christian civilisation and legislative impartiality. (CM 202-3) By contrast, Melville's confusing interplay of disguised and satirical narrators demonstrates that white racial pre-eminence is an anecdotal and overstated myth created through the extermination of alternative cultures. After retiring from the bench, the real Judge Hall continued in his role as a public speaker, his histrionic rhetoric exemplified by his Fourth of July orations, which praise the virtues and grandeur of the white American empire, where nothing could stop westward expansion short of the Pacific. Abolitionists are deplored, as are the British and their depraved literature. Judge Hall's denunciation is revealing in its philistine lack of self-awareness:

> "Fielding and Smollet[t] were men of genius, but we cannot believe that any man of delicacy ever read their novels without disgust, and we would be sorry to accuse any lady of having read them at all."[113]

The prejudice and misogyny of Hall's address brands him as a reactionary American patriot with a blinkered vision that undermines his judicial integrity and intellectual credibility.

Melville's dramatic staging, disguises and role-play did not prevent some critics from interpreting the Indian hating story literally, and even as a

[112] Drinnon, *Facing West*, p. 213.
[113] Judge Hall quoted in Drinnon, *Facing West*, p. 205.

direct expression of Melville own views.[114] Critics such as Daniel Hoffman in '*The Confidence Man* in Form and Fable' and J W Shroeder's 'Sources and Symbols for Melville's *Confidence Man'* accept Indian killing as a moral necessity based on the partisan retelling of Moredock's history of events, failing to note the caricatures and contradictions in Melville's masked burlesque version of the story.[115] Contemporary newspapers also contributed to this false impression, printing excerpts from Melville's chapters on the Indian Hater out of context that focused on the heroic Western theme as ammunition for imperial propaganda, while overlooking the ambiguity of the story's disingenuous frame and underlying masquerade.[116]

Melville's favourable review of *Mr Parkman's Tour* (1857), a book by Francis Parkman Jr, ostensibly about the Indigenous tribes of the Rocky Mountains, only added to uncertainty regarding Melville's stance on ethnic and racial equality. Parkman's narrative automatically accepts the paramount right of the white man to kill whoever impedes the interests of Western economic expansion, with such assumptions of white entitlement providing the material for literal interpretations of the Indian Hater section of *The Confidence Man* by some critics. However, while Melville commended Parkman's ability to write about white racist audacity under the guise of a

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[114] Joyce A Adler, 'Melville on the White Man's War against the American Indian', *Science & Society,* 36. 4 (1972), 417-442 (p. 423) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40401671>.
[115] Adler, 'Melville on the White Man's War', pp. 423-424.
[116] 'Melvilliana: Melville's Moredock', *Brooklyn Evening Star,* 21 May,1857; *Philadelphia Saturday Evening Post,* 21 April,1857; *Boston Saturday Evening Gazette,* 4 April,1857 <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/search/pages/results/>.

thrilling adventure yarn, he also vehemently condemned the brutal racist actions of the trailblazing escapades. Parkman's *Tour* begins aboard a steamer crammed with a disparate group of adventurers, Spaniards and Indians heading South down the Mississippi to a life in the wild West, an opening that chimes with the 'wolves in sheep's clothing' aboard Melville's whitewashed steamer *Fidele,* heading towards a politically uncertain post-bellum future. Melville's positive review of *Parkman's Tour* does not however, preclude sharp criticism of the inhuman contempt shown to the Native Americans, whom he notes were slaughtered with the same indifference shown to buffalo. Melville's disdain for Parkman's triumphalist rhetoric, based on indefensible white savagery, is satirised through Judge Hall's tall tale of John Moredock, the Judge's double mask a device to emphasise the theatricality in order to suspend criticism of the historical accuracy.[117]

Influenced by first-hand experience as a common seaman aboard the USS United States from 1833-34, Melville rejects the racist assumptions of white entitlement endorsed by Judge Hall's narrative in favour of interracial comradeship in the construction of American cultural identity. His novel *White-Jacket* (1850) includes the perspective of an old African American sailor named Tawney who is described as "a staid and sober seaman, very intelligent, with a fine, frank bearing, one of the best men in the ship, and held in high estimation by everyone." Tawney's erudite discourse on the

[117] Herman Melville, review of 'The California and Oregon Trail' by Francis Parkman Jr, *Melvilliana*, March 24, 2012 <https://melvilliana.blogspot.com/2012/03/mr-parkmans-tour-text-of-melvilles-1849.html>.

barbarity of war confers an authority that overturns the conventional model of racial hierarchy:

> "But as the whole matter of war is a thing that smites common-sense and Christianity in the face; so everything connected with it is utterly foolish, unchristian, barbarous, brutal, and savouring of the Feejee Islands, cannibalism, saltpetre, and the devil."[118]

As has been noted already, Tawny is an alias Melville uses in the postscript he added to a letter sent to his mother from his brother Allan, the name signifying Melville's colour-blind sense of brotherhood and respect for racial difference. A pioneer of an American frontier on the high seas, Melville's direct experience of egalitarian comradeship is not compatible with the barbaric genocide of indigenous people promoted vicariously by Judge James Hall through his romanticised fiction, and by Francis packman's subjective travelogues.

The way that Melville's stance on Western adventurism is confused by his partial praise for *Mr Packman's Tour* resonates with an antebellum context of political ambiguity which incongruously united those who supported emancipation, provided it did not divide the Union or threaten social hierarchy. For instance, New York *Tribune* editor and Northern congressman Horace Greeley (1811-1872) recognises the special contribution of the black troops during the Civil War, even admitting that some black regiments are superior to their white counterparts, but then he

[118] Herman Melville, *White-Jacket,* p. 322 <https://archive.org/details/whitejacketorwo00melv/page/n5/mode/2up> .

speaks of “the blacks” with condescension as less equal man for man than white soldiers in any protracted battle. Erik S Lunde elucidates Greeley’s inconsistent attitude to race in his biography:

> While calling for black freedom and citizenship Greeley tended to deny black equality, an inconsistency representative of others of a liberal persuasion […] ”To exalt them to the disparagement of *our* White soldier would be as unwise as unjust.” [119]Greeley’s treatment showed that many anti-slavery advocates could also compromise their principles.[120]

Similar disturbing views were also expressed about ethnic minorities in Greeley’s *An Overland Journey*. In a description of indigenous people, which is presented as objective truth, Greeley reinforces racist assumptions of white superiority describing them as:

> Squalid and conceited proud and worthless, lazy and lousy, they will strut out or drink out their miserable existence, and at length afford the world a sensible relief by dying out of it.[121]

Greeley’s patronising notion of cultural elitism leads him to propose an industrial school to improve their lives, which after a period of twenty years might “silently transform an indolent savage tribe into a civilised Christian community.”[122] The irony of a white slave-holding nation defining civilisation and Christian values would not have been lost on Melville where such racist conceit is exposed through the rhetoric of the masked, satirical

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[119] Horace Greely, *The American Conflict, Vol II* (Hartford: O D Case, 1866), p. 528 <https://archive.org/details/americanconflic00greegoog>.
[120] Erik S Lunde, *Horace Greeley* (Boston: G K Hall, 1981). p. 76 <https://archive.org/details/horacegreeley00lund/page/n>.
[121] Horace Greeley, *An Overland Journey from New York to San Francisco in the Summer of 1859* (New York: C M Saxton, Barker & Co., 1860), p.153 <https://archive.org/details/overlandjourneyf00gree/page/152/mode/2up>.
[122] Ibid, p. 155.

narrative in the chapters on the Indian Hater, which while unsettled to some extent by his mixed review of *Mr Packman's Tour,* is contested in his 1850 novel *White-Jacket.*

The cosmopolitan's detached performances echo Melville's seemingly ambiguous responses to ethnic rights and cultural imperialism. In *Typee* (1846) his novel set on a South Sea Island, criticism of barbarous aspects of the islanders' culture also does not equate to unqualified support for an American definition of civilisation:

> The fiend-like skill we display in the invention of all manner of death-dealing engines, the vindictiveness with which we carry on our wars, and the misery and desolation that follow in their train, are enough of themselves to distinguish the white civilized man as the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth.[123]

Alternatively, in the Sandwich Islands, Melville saw no alternative to British imperial rule, regarding it as more favourable to the chaos and corruption of the native rebellion.[124] While Melville's position on the merits, or otherwise, of colonialism may appear to be racially suspect, undemocratic, and anti-American (as when he supported the English Shakespearian actor William Charles Macready during the 1849 Astor Place riot), in fact his equivocation is the result of personal experience and observation of different cultures, both as a mariner, and as a mutineer, while living amongst islanders in the South Pacific.

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[123] Herman Melville, *Typee – A Peep at Polynesian Life*, London: Penguin Classics, 1996), chapter 17.

[124] Rachel A. Blumenthal, 'Melville's Politics of Imperialism', *Vanderbilt Undergraduate Research Journal*, 2006, Vol. 2.1(2006), 1-9 (p. 4).

In *The Confidence Man,* the cosmopolitan enacts this ethical opacity through his detached nonchalance. However, by blurring the moral and ethnic sympathies of the cosmopolitan, while it allows leeway for racial and political comradeship, the prevarication also creates the opportunity for the social injustices it seeks to destroy. Even so, the cross-over of burlesque satire from the minstrel stage to the world of newsprint and editorial comment and into the mouth of Melville's oleaginous herb-doctor, indicates the penetration and influence of minstrel satire to scrutinise confidence in the political will to extend the bounds of social inclusion for those socially disadvantaged either by race, gender, disability, or ethnicity. This contrasts with the selective focus of the legitimate stage in dealing with attitudes to race and social exclusion, particularly pronounced in adaptations of Shakespeare's *Othello.* The intent to deny the colour and diversity of the nation's multi-ethnic heritage masks anxieties ambiguously caricatured in the topsy-turvy world of the minstrel burlesques woven into the role-play and narrative style of Melville's *Confidence Man*.

5.3.5. Hypothetical Counterfeit and the Real Thing

On the surface, Melville's novel *The Confidence Man* seems to fit into the genre of the picaresque, its floating ship of fools invoking social mobility, speculation, and rogue traders. However, this masks an underlying satire of political and philosophical elitism which targets amongst others the high-brow aesthetics of the transcendental poet Ralph Waldo Emerson and his

protégé Henry David Thoreau, among others. Taking on the role of unreliable interlocutor, the cosmopolitan negotiates the unstable landscape between the philosophical and materialist extremes of political and racial alliances. Melville's masquerade between the 'boon companions' as enacted by the cosmopolitan playing Frank Goodman and the disguised conman Charlie Noble (a mask for Judge Hall), and then reprised with the philosophy student Egbert playing the role of Charlie, confuses the culture clash by muddling the aspirations of high American exceptionalism with vulgar con artists jumping aboard the rolling capitalist bandwagon.

Through the charade of 'The Boon Companions' Charlie Noble reveals his hypocrisy and uncharitable nature when asked for a loan by his new companion Frank Goodman. The disorder is signalled through the wordplay over the meaning of 'the press', which summons up the producer of wine for Charlie, but the printed press for Frank. These different interpretations signal a cultural gap, however Frank's praise for Charlie's eloquence as the "indefinite privileges of the poet" in his description of the pleasures of the press, allows art to heal their differences. (CM 218) Frank's friendship with the bottle indulges his appreciation of Charlie's poetic effusions on the efficacy of wine (as when he declares that "Every heart is icebound till wine melt it, and reveal the tender grass and sweet herbage budding below, with every dear secret, hidden like a dropped jewel in a snow-bank…"), until Frank reveals the secret that he is in urgent want of money. Material want clashes head on with poetic excess, which results in Charlie's sudden change of tone from revelling in the celestial delights of natural beauty, to

spluttering outrage ("none of your dear Charlies!... go to the devil sir! Beggar, imposter!" (CM 232-34)) exposing the uncharitable nature and selective meaning of his professed companionship. Farcically, Charlie aligns himself with the parsimony of Polonius's aphorism "Neither a borrower, nor or a lender be/ For loan oft loses both itself and friend" (*Hamlet*, 3.1), a character in a previous encounter he had condemned as "the bowing and cringing, time-serving old sinner" whose "soul is gone out."(CM 225) Hoist by his own metaphysical petard when confronted by the practical application of friendship, Charlie, the agent of white authority, is unmasked as the fraud and hypocrite he attributes so vehemently to his "boon companion" Frank. Charlie's principles of friendship, as above banal materialism, emulate, but also contest, the aesthetic ideals of the poet Henry Thoreau (1817-1862) who states that when money is involved it would become a matter of alms, and thus it would degrade friendship:

> when he forgets his mythology and treats his friend like a Christian, or as he can afford - then Friendship ceases to be Friendship, and becomes charity; that principle which established the almshouse is now beginning with its charity at home, and establishing an almshouse and pauper relations there.[125]

As with Charlie Noble, Thoreau's philosophy of fraternal accord aligns with the practical advice of the Polonius when it comes to withholding material support. Rather than supporting universal kinship, Thoreau's noble concept of friendship would appear to create barriers that restrict the realm of

[125]Henry David Thoreau, *Friendship: An Essay* (Boston: Alfred Bartlett, Merrymount Press, 1907), p. 23 <https://archive.org/details/friendshipessay00thor/page/22/mode/2up>.

brotherhood to those within the bounds of financially independent white privilege.

The role play investigating a selective attitude to philanthropy in the Boon Companions is taken to another level in the 'The Hypothetical Friends', a play within a play where the satirical attack on romanticised fellowship gets even more complicated as the characters and their avatars overlap. The layered masquerade, which confuses the distinction between conmen and actors, subverts the ethics of companionship promoted by Mark Winsome's 'Essay on Friendship' which is a parody of the sublime ideology of Henry David Thoreau's transcendental poem *Friendship*. Thoreau's paean to idealised comradeship transcends earthly differences to advocate strength in union, but of the exclusive philosophical kind:

> And each may other help, and service do,
> Drawing Love's bands more tight,
> Service he ne'er shall rue
> While one and one make two,
> And two are one;[126]

In the role-play, the cosmopolitan (reprising his role of Frank Goodman) persuades the philosophy student Egbert to take on the part of Charlie Noble, (an alias of Judge Hall, appointed pillar of the legal and literary establishment) in a performance entitled 'The Hypothetical Friends'. The multi-focused metadrama muddles perceptions of reality to challenge Winsome and Egbert's philosophy of interracial fellowship.[127] However, while masked as Charlie Noble, Egbert reveals his true colours in denying

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[126] Henry David Thoreau, *The Complete Works of Henry David Thoreau* (1817-1862) (Hastings, East Sussex: Delphi Classics, 2013).
[127] CM, chapter 33.

his new companion Frank a loan which he justifies on the grounds that it would sully the aesthetic nature of true friendship. Thus, Egbert dismisses Frank's plea for help ("How foolish a cry, when to implore help, is itself the proof of undesert of it.") in accordance with his transcendental view of friendship. In his indictment against Egbert's heartless response, Frank unmasks the philosopher as a performer in fact, as well as in fiction:

> Oh this all along, is not you, Charlie, but some ventriloquist who usurps your larynx. It is Mark Winsome that speaks, not Charlie.[128]

Doubly disguised as Charlie Noble, who is impersonating Judge Hall, Ebert, not only blows the cover of his own performance but also reveals the elitist nature of his ideology of friendship. The masquerade also exposes the underlying connection between the Establishment and theories of romantic idealism oddly allied as the self-appointed arbiters of national cultural identity.

Egbert (playing the role of Charlie) goes on to compare Frank's need of money to that of being a dependent slave, whining "like fortune's whipped dog", his lack of sympathy signalling a divisive and callous attitude towards those less fortunate. In the discourse Frank alludes to the spirituality provided by Nature that bound their past friendship, the lyrical allusions undercut by bawdy innuendo to deflate the highbrow conceit:

> Call to mind the days we went nutting, the times we walked in the woods, and wreathed about each other, showing trunks invined like the trees: oh Charlie![129]

[128] CM, p. 265.
[129] CM, p. 265.

The exchange satirises Thoreau's transcendentalist essay on friendship, which severs godlike qualities from their earthly unions:

> Friendship is not so kind as imagined; it has not much human blood in it, but consists with certain disregard for men and their erections, the Christian duties and humanities, while it purifies the air like electricity.[130]

In the ongoing exchange between the hypothetical friends, Egbert, with unintentional irony, goes on to defend his mentor's superior nature as one "which on no account can ever descend to do good". (CM 262) Egbert informs Frank that friendship cannot be sullied by sordid considerations of money:

> "A little cold blood in your ardent veins, my dear Frank, wouldn't do you any harm, let me tell you…what more distressing to delicate friendship, formed early, than your friend's eventually, in manhood, dropping off in a rainy night for his little loan of five dollars or so? Can delicate friendship stand that?"[131]

The discourse illuminates their different perspectives on the meaning of comradeship. Through the vari-focused role-play and disguises, the highbrow philosophy, that excludes a friend in need, is unacceptable to the hapless Frank. The linguistic sparring between the actors parodies a Greek tragedy, the aesthetic vision of comradeship espoused by Charlie/Egbert comically deflated by the classical excess of Frank's cry for help:

> "Oh Charlie! you talk not to a god…but to a man who, being a man, is the sport of fate's wind and wave, and who mounts towards heaven or sinks towards hell, as the billows roll him in tough or on crest."[132]

Egbert's dismissive response to Frank's appeal for aid ("Don't whine like a whipped dog, Frank, or by the heart of a true friend, I will cut ye.") (CM 264-

[130] Thoreau, *Friendship*, p. 22.
[131] CM, p. 264.
[132] CM, p. 264.

5) reveals the gap between theoretical and actual support for social injustice, an ambivalence echoed by minstrel stage disorder intended to unnerve confidence in white cultural hegemony.

However, in defence of his illustrious teacher Mark Winsome's congenial relation with the universe, Egbert asserts "if it find little response among mankind at large, it is less that they do not possess teachable tempers, than because they are so unfortunate as not to have natures predisposed to accord with him." Unwittingly, Egbert compliments those alienated by transcendentalist views of friendship as possessing "teachable temperaments", inadvertently acknowledging some humanity beneath the cerebral carapace, which Frank hopes will modify the espousal of a philosophy that banishes help from the world. (CM 265-6) Frank's moralising voice blends with that of the narrator to express a more humane desire for universal harmony between opposing factions, all the better if achieved unintentionally, a situation that resonates with the unexpected coalitions arising from passionately argued government debates on the future of the Union on a collision course with demands for the abolition of slavery.

In refusing Frank's request for money Mark Winsome's protégé Egbert, masked as Charlie, describes a loan as an "unfriendly accommodation", a paradox that emphasises the political brokering involved in endorsing the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Designed to preserve the Union, it ironically achieved the opposite of its intention, increasing support for abolition and emancipation in the free North by those outraged at enforced complicity

with Southern slavery. Such political railroading in the interests of political Union is parodied by Egbert's long-winded speeches, with his patronising rhetoric on the poetic meaning of comradeship disarrayed by Frank's hysterical outburst "Help, help, Charlie, I want help!" Comic in its tragedy, Frank's explosive reaction performs a theatrical resistance, the melodramatic excess mocking the commercial price put on brotherhood as symbolised by negotiations over barrels of flour. With tragic irony, the double-masked Egbert illuminates his case further through allusions to the auction block and the slave trade when explaining the stain of 'unfriendly accommodation':

> "Well, now, where is the friendliness of letting a starving man have say, the money's worth of a barrel of flour upon the condition that he shall let me have the money's worth of a barrel and a half of flour;…especially if he fail so to do, I shall then to secure myself the money's worth of my barrel and his half barrel, put his heart up at auction, and, as it is cruel to part families, throw in his wife's and children's." [133]

According to Egbert, friendship is anathema to the world of commerce and interest rates, where a barrel of flour and a family of slaves are cast in the same light as commodities, a conflation that denies humanity and spiritual harmony. Egbert's creed of universal accord is thus shown to be selective, as well as racist, the role-play highlighting the failures of Egbert's philosophy to embody a unique American cultural identity. Through the convoluted interactions, Egbert's voice of spiritual accord is revealed to be aligned with Charlie's cold-blooded expediency and, by association, with the white establishment voice of Charlie's alias, Judge James Hall.

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[133] CM, p. 260.

The convoluted masquerade provokes as it parodies, the disguises and role play emulating the masked ambiguity of minstrel masquerades to satirise assumptions of white hegemony. Charlie's incongruous response to Frank's cry for help upsets the balance between the protagonists, but not beyond hope of friendly accord. The performance and masking obscures the gap between appearance and reality, the satirical ingenuity and disguise shown to be a balancing act that is not without redemptive power.

5.3.6. - Life is a pic-nic *en costume* one must take a part, assume a character, stand ready in a sensible way to play the fool

(Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man*)[134]

In the guise of the 'Philosophical Intelligence Officer' the confidence man's next performance is directed at the cynical attitude of the machine-age Missouri bachelor, who also declares the teachings of St. Augustine as his spiritual guide. However, despite believing all boys to be rascals, the bachelor is persuaded to purchase a boy from the Officer, beguiled by the philosopher's sycophancy and overblown rhetoric, which is reinforced by his professional appearance – the 'Philosophical Intelligence Officer' proudly displays his credentials by means of the brass plate attached to his collar. Targeting the bachelor's claims to spirituality, the conman maintains that he

[134] CM, p.177.

has studied mankind, which has made him familiar with the teachings of St Augustine, whose example could be applied to reform boys:

> Respected sir, have I not already told you that the quite new method, the strictly philosophical one, on which our office is founded, has led me and my associates to an enlarged study of mankind. It was my fault if, I did not, likewise, hint, that these studies directed always to the scientific procuring of good servants of all sorts, boys included […] have been conducted equally among all books of all libraries, as among all men of all nations. […] – when I behold you on a mild summer's eve, thus eccentrically clothed in the skins of wild beasts, I cannot but conclude that the equally grim and unsuitable habit of your mind is likewise but an eccentric assumption, having no basis in your genuine soul, no more than in nature herself."[135]

Dramatic pauses in the speech, indicated by the many commas, signal a performed erudition designed to bamboozle the scholarly pretensions of the hard-nosed Missourian. In the speech the conman also satirises the bachelor's philosophical conceit, which is aligned to the mystical concepts of the poet Ralph Waldo Emerson's transcendental vision of nature. In his essay on 'Self-Reliance' (1841), Emerson sought to delineate a unique philosophy of American exceptionalism, unfettered by past religious doctrines:

> There is a time in every man's education when […] he must take himself for better for worse as is his portion; that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on the plot of ground which is given him to till.[136]

To reel in the Missouri bachelor, the brass-plated philosopher appropriates Emerson's philosophy of nature in a parody that incongruously blends

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[135] CM, p. 166.

[136] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Essay on Self-Reliance* (New York: Roycroft Shop, 1910), p. 10 <https://archive.org/details/selfrelianceessay00emerrich/page/10/mode/2up>.

expansion of the mind alongside economic expansion of the continent. He invokes nature as the basis of scientific miracles for enhancing trade, a concept that successfully targets the economic instincts of the Missouri bachelor:

> Yes, yes, yes […] yes, yes; and now that I think of it, how often I've sadly watched my Indian corn in May, wondering whether such sickly, half-eaten sprouts, could ever thrive up into the stiff, stately spear of August."[137]

The sexual allusions resonate with the bawdy revelry of the minstrel stage, mocking the pretentions of white elitism through association with the earthy vulgarity of nature. The underlying satire of the discourse suggests that Emerson's abstract approach towards nature limits, rather than encourages, social transformation, where the exclusion of the "sickly half-eaten sprouts" of less noble class and ethnic types may never become "the stiff, stately spear of August". The exchange between the cynical bachelor and the dissembling philosopher centres around the fact that St. Augustine was a reformed sinner. According to the philosopher with the brass plate, the boys are rogues only because they have not been properly brought up, implying that social improvement is dependent on having confidence in the lowly and less fortunate, a risk worth taking despite the chance of being made to look a fool. The episode ends inconclusively as to who owns the intellectual high ground and where moral integrity lies; - however the Missourian is forced to admit the clever cunning of his protagonist, noting that if "the man is a trickster, it must be more for the love than the lucre. Two or three dirty dollars the motive to so many nice wiles." (CM 173)

[137] CM p. 167.

The many unresolved perspectives create ambiguities that reflect the convoluted political and racial landscape of mid-nineteenth century America, while envisaging some confidence in humanity that allows leeway for social inclusion and cultural progress. Melville's interaction with the lowbrow vulgarity and social misrule embraced by Shakespeare and minstrel burlesque acknowledges the influence of the past as an enduring legacy shaping the present, a cultural debt denied by Emerson in his account of his 'Original Relation with the Universe' in his essay *Nature*:

> Why should not we have poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? …why should we grope among the dry bones of the past, or put the living generation into masquerade out of its faded wardrobe? [...] There are new men, new lands, new thoughts. Let us demand our own works and laws and worship.[138]

Emerson's plea for a unique American culture while deeply eloquent, is nevertheless devoid of the patchwork richness of past traditions and experiences, symbolised by the bizarre coat of many colours worn by the eccentrically clad cosmopolitan, and thus, his insight does not resonate with an emerging national cultural identity at the mercy of fortune-seekers and fraudsters on the streets, on board the *Fidele*, and in the seats of Government. Melville confirms a belief in an open-ended debt to the past in an 1849 letter to his publisher Evert Duyckinck "the truth is we are all sons, grandsons, nephews or great-nephews to all who go before us. No one is his own sire." Written after attending a lecture given by Emerson, Melville's

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[138] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *Nature* (Boston: James Munroe, 1836), p. 6 <https://archive.org/details/naturemunroe00emerrich/page/6/mode/2up>.

letter includes the comically cynical comment, "I was very agreeably disappointed in Mr Emerson."[139]

The antebellum minstrelsy tradition is highly significant to the underlying burlesque that illuminates *The Confidence Man.* According to Ben Cotton, who was described as one of the two greatest end-men with Chicago's Manning's Minstrels, minstrelsy was originally founded on a cultural cross-over of mutual respect for different heritages. Cotton recalled his camaraderie with black Mississippian musicians:

> "I used to sit with them in front of their cabins […] We were brothers for the time being we were perfectly happy."[140]

Blackface minstrelsy is not wholly black, but, as in Shakespeare's *Othello,* it is a mask for a multi-cultural hybrid of marginalised voices subject to discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, disability, class and gender. The antebellum minstrel stage was a blend of African banjo and dance styles, fused with Irish fiddle tunes, clog dances and European hymns and ballads, that resonated with the folk memory of both African American and European immigrant audiences which, in response to political changes, became corrupted, signified by Melville in the form of the mercenary blackface cripple Black Guinea.

According to Eric Lott, hardening attitudes to race provoked by economic forces such as wage slavery and immigration then led to the

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[139] Allen Cunningham, 'Prime Passage: Herman Melville on Emerson; "His brains descend down into his neck"', November 10, 2010 <http://mallencunningham.blogspot.com/2010/11/prime-passage-herman-melville-on.html>.
(Includes excerpts from Melville's letter to Evert Duyckinck, March 3, 1849).
[140] Quoted in Lott, *Love and Theft*, p. 50.

formation of a self-consciously white working-class caste mentality.[141] Blackface minstrelsy was not responsible for this increased class and racial tension, but merely projected the social schism through the performance of a coarser parody and threats of violence, as enacted in Melville's 'Barber Shop' pastiche. This political degradation, also symbolised by the grotesque, dehumanised Black Guinea, envisaged the eventual post-bellum policy of segregation, with Jim Crow undergoing a political somersault from champion of burlesque misrule to the emblem of Southern apartheid legislation. However, even though minstrelsy underwent a change from what author W T Lhamon Jr describes as early instances of white fascination with black performance where there was little laughing at blacks, to the harsher mid-century, class-conscious, stereotyped enactments, he indicates that there still remained scope for subversive comment through the use of minstrelsy devices of satire and melodrama.[142]

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[141] Ibid, p. 8.
[142] W T Lhamon, Jr. *Raising Cain Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

5.4. *The Confidence Man* – in His Own Time

In his article ‘Appearance and Reality in Melville’s Confidence-Man’, Philip Drew argues that the novel should be read as an allegory with immediate reference to Melville’s own society, a time of racial instability that threatened the future of the Union and the cultural identity of the nation. [143] Critical responses to *The Confidence Man* ranged from the bemused to the confused, particularly if the novel is read literally, rather than through the lens of mischievous parody. Elizabeth S. Foster interpreted the multi-masked confidence man as a satanic figure bringing about the end of religion. [144] Ernest Tuveson sees him as the missionary of a new religion of trust in one’s fellow man;[145] whereas Rebecca Gaudino decodes the novel as the product of Melville’s crisis regarding the deceptive nature of fiction in representing or explaining reality. Guadino’s view is based on the many references to writing tools, papers, passages and puns, which, she notes, concludes in an apocalypse of truth-obscuring fiction.[146] However, *The Confidence Man* could also be interpreted as an individual artistic approach to illuminating the political predicament of the times, the satire a reflection of a lost dream of defiance disheartened by the faded ideals of the Constitution. The Missouri bachelor’s comment “In short, the entire ship’s a

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[143] Philip Drew, ‘Appearance and Reality in Melville's *The Confidence-Man*.’ *ELH*, 31.4 (1964), 418–442 (p. 419) <www.jstor.org/stable/2872355>.
[144] *The Confidence Man by Herman Melville,* ed. by Elizabeth Foster (New York: Hendrick House, 1954), p. xvii, xlvi.
[145] Tuveson, ‘The Creed of the Confidence-Man’, 247-270.
[146] Gaudino, ‘The Riddle of "The Confidence-Man"’, pp. 124-141.

riddle", if linked to the paradox of trusting in the ingenuity of a conman as a symbol for shifting political allegiances and economic opportunism, makes it possible to understand, if not to resolve, the reality-blurring drama aboard Melville's floating steamboat theatre *Fidele*. (CM 81)

The multiple perspectives and inconclusive dramas enacted within *The Confidence Man* also reflect Melville's anxieties regarding class and ethnic discord leading to Civil War that would result in a nation divided along racial lines. For Melville the internecine bloodshed of the Civil War was not an acceptable price to pay for defeating systemic racial oppression because it pitted the inhumanity of slavery against the equally barbaric death and destruction of fellow Americans.[147] According to Larry Reynolds in his study of the impact of European socialist revolutions on American literature, Melville was obsessed by, and sympathetic to the cause of the peasant revolt during the French Revolution of 1789, but also sceptical that a mass uprising could affect significant social change.[148] Based on the history of the aftermath of the rebellion Melville concluded in the preface to *Billy Budd* that revolution could become another form of tyranny and "a wrongdoer, one more oppressive than kings." "Under Napoleon" he noted revolutions "enthroned upstart kings." However, Melville does acknowledge that the revolutionary spirit emboldened others to rise up against real abuses

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[147] John Stauffer, 'Melville, Slavery and the American Dilemma' in *A Companion to Herman Melville*, ed. by Wyn Kelley (New York: John Wiley, 2006), pp. 214- 229 (p, 217) <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/swansea-ebooks/detail.action?docID=284251>.

[148] Larry J. Reynolds, *European Revolutions and the American Literary Re-naissance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), p. 101.

leading to the Great Mutiny, which, despite the death penalty meted out to the ringleaders, did prompt reforms in the British navy.[149] In his novel *Benito Cereno,* Melville departs from Captain Amasa Delano's original source material, reversing the roles of the oppressor and the oppressed to illustrate how power corrupts within a system that condones the abuse of one race by another.[150] Melville's emphasis on the dehumanising effects of power combined with the brutal retribution enacted in the aftermath of the French Revolution would have influenced his hesitancy in supporting civil war as a solution to transforming attitudes to racial injustice. Also, through his experience of living with South Sea Island "savages" as documented in his novel *Typee*, Melville understood the role of interracial respect and comradeship as the key to achieving racial tolerance and political reform.

In *The Confidence Man* Melville employs a blend of satire, disguise, and layered role-play to address the competing ideologies and political expediency concerning race and identity, the seeming compromises undermining concern for a higher law of humanity, rather than a sign of a detached attitude to the inherent inequities of class and racial prejudice. In Melville's complex representation of racial issues author Toni Morrison detects his underlying preoccupation with the subject of blackness, arguing that Melville has:

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149 Herman Melville, *Billy Budd, Foretopman,* in *Four Short* Novels (New York: Bantam, 1957), p.197.

150 Amasa Delano, *Voyages and Travels in the Northern and Southern Hemispheres* (Boston: E G House, 1817) <https://archive.org/details/anarrativevoyag00delagoog/page/n8/mode/2up>.

> much more to say about race than has been realised […] not so much transcending politics, or escaping blackness, as […] transforming it into intelligible, accessible, yet artistic modes of discourse.[151]

In his earlier novel *Pierre or the Ambiguities* (1852) Melville engages with family tensions and divisions over race that allude to an uneasy relationship with issues of identity, which is reflected by an antebellum context of racial discord. In *Pierre*, through the tracking down of the runaways, Melville mocks the South's craven recourse to the law to repatriate fugitive slaves. He also casts aspersions on the ideals of the abolitionists when confronted with the reality of racial equality through Pierre's conflicted commitment to his mixed-race half-sister Isabel over the white "transparently immaculate" Lucy (*Pierre* 238).[152] In *Pierre,* Melville perceives no simple solution to a family, or a nation, riven by racial discord. Pierre's ambiguous identity is symbolised in the novel's contorted grammatical style, convoluted sentences, and strange language, which is focused through the lens of racial discrimination. The spirit of Shakespeare is echoed in *Pierre* through its resonance with the tragic ending of *Romeo and Juliet*, which anticipates the personal and political fallout of internecine conflict.[153] *Pierre* was a critical and financial failure, while Melville's later novel *The Confidence Man*, which performs ambiguity through interaction

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[151] Toni Morrison, 'Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature' in *Within the Circle: An Anthology of African American Literary Criticism from the Harlem Renaissance to the Present,* ed. by Angelyn Mitchell (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1994), pp. 168-400.
[152] Nancy F Sweet, 'Abolition, Compromise and "The Everlasting Elusiveness of Truth" in Melville's *Pierre*', *Studies in American Fiction*, 26. 1 (1998), 3-28.
[153] Herman Melville, *Pierre, or the Ambiguities* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971).

with minstrel disorder and Shakespeare's balance of opposing perspectives, merely baffled those who failed to see the underlying satire. [154] The multiple disguises and convoluted role-play which satirised and contested blinkered attitudes to white entitlement was lost on those who read the novel literally.[155]

Through focus on the mask of counterfeit in his minstrel style satire *The Confidence Man,* Melville develops a perspective to interpret hybrid identity allied to the performance of racial double consciousness. The masked pragmatism concerning race issues and identity in Melville's novels particularly in *The Confidence Man* resonates with the incongruous policies promoted by the radical *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley (1811-1872), who was also involved in the founding of the Republican Party in the 1850s to actively promote economic reform and end the expansion of slavery. A committed abolitionist in the 1840s, Greeley was associated with Whig campaigner Thurlow Weed, an alliance alluded to by Melville's intellectually pretentious charlatan 'the man with the weed'. This version of the conman targets the inconsistent racial policies of the Whigs, and Horace Greeley's dissembling stance on abolition if its endorsement might result in

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[154] Melville's *Confidence Man* confused contemporary reviewers who thought it was a practical joke. The reviewer in *The New York Dispatch* claims that nothing is concluded, and that he has no idea what the book was driving at. He goes on to criticise Melville for trying the patience of the public by publishing "such puerilities" as *The Confidence Man.*
"The Confidence Man. His Masquerade", *New-York Dispatch,* 5 April 1857. *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*. Lib. of Congress <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030364/1857-04-05/ed-1/seq-4/>.

[155] Walter Dubler, 'Theme and Structure in Melville's "The Confidence Man."', *American Literature*, 33. 3 (1961), 307–19 (p. 319) <https://doi.org/10.2307/2922126>.

election defeat or pose a threat to sectional reconciliation.[156] In *The Confidence Man*, 'the man with the weed' persuades a student to ditch Tacitus in favour of *Pleasures of Imagination* by Mark Akenside (1721-1770), a didactic poem on deist philosophy and nature whose high tone prefigures the abstract works of Emerson and Thoreau (performed by philosophers Winsome and Egbert in Melville's satirical mirror). [157]Akenside's three-volume poem was criticised by the Irish essayist Edward Dowden (1843-1913) as not rooted in the common heart, and as extreme Whigish "windy, theoretical republicanism" by the scholar and critic George Saintsbury (1845-1933), comments chime with Nathaniel Hawthorne's dismissal of Ralph Waldo Emerson in terms of "that everlasting rejecter of all that is, and seeker for he knows not what."[158] Akenside, a qualified doctor, switches his political allegiance, becoming an arch Tory supporter of Lord Bute[159] when appointed royal physician, tempering his views in revised editions of his poem, becoming less rebellious and more sympathetic to Christianity and social institutions.

The doctor philosopher made changes to the original 1744 version of his poem of beauty and imagination by softening the radical idealism,

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[156] James M. Mc Pherson, 'Grant or Greeley? The Abolitionist Dilemma in the Election of 1872', *The American Historical Review*, 71. 1 (1965), 43–61 (p. 44-45) < https://doi.org/10.2307/1863035.>.

[157] Mark Akenside, *The Pleasures of the* Imagination (London: T Cadell & W Davies, 1806) <https://archive.org/details/pleasuresofimagi00aken/page/n7/mode/2up>.

[158] Richard Klayman, "Beyond the Scarlet 'A': Hawthorne and the Matter of Racism', *Historical Journal of Massachusetts,* 35. 1 (2007), 1-20 (p. 5) <http://www.westfield.ma.edu/mhj. >.

[159] Prime Minister of Great Britain 1762-1763 and favorite of King George III.

replacing ‘truth’ with ‘order’ to signal a more reactionary position where social harmony is regulated, rather than trusted to imagination and individuality:

> Majestic Truth; and where Truth deigns to come,
> Her sister Liberty will not be far.

In the revised 1757 version this invocation is altered to:

> Wise Order; and where Order deigns to come,
> Her sister Liberty will not be far.[160]

Significantly, ridicule as a means of exposing folly is drastically reduced in the 1757 version, with passages inciting rebellion, such as “Spurning the yoke of these inglorious days”, cut out altogether. The implication is a shift away from the radical idealism of Whig democracy towards support for the stability vested in the monarchy of Akenside’s patron King George III. Thus, the intense support by ‘the man with the weed’ for Akenside’s *Pleasure of the Imagination,* which is described as a serene and cheery book “fitted to inspire love and trust”, comically casts aspersions on Whig opportunism and integrity. Through association with Akenside, Melville subtly attacks the transcendental idealism of Emerson, as well as the political evasiveness of prominent Northern intellectuals such as newspaper editors Thurlow Weed and Horace Greeley. (CM 38) In the 1848 election campaign Whigs and Democrats claimed to be both antislavery, and proslavery parties, depending on the speaker and the audience to be persuaded, a political tactic that worked to maintain traditional party

[160] Jeffrey Hart, ‘Akenside’s Revision of the Pleasures of Imagination’, *PMLA, 74*. 1(1959) 67–74, (p. 68) <https://www.jstor.org/stable/460387>.

allegiances. Even a reluctant Greeley switched from the anti-slavery Free-Soilers back to the fence-sitting Whigs for what he perceived to be the greater good of the party and the unity of the nation.[161] Senator William H Seward and his political advisor Thurlow Weed together controlled the Whigs in New York, who, following the successful pattern of the 1840 presidential election campaign, avoided taking any stance on the issue of slavery in the 1848 campaign.[162] Such a platform of irresolution is satirised by Melville through the quack herb-doctor's verbose parody of William Seward's Compromise speech (CM 129), a veiled attack on Whig manoeuvring. This ambivalence is also embodied by the patronising rhetoric of 'the man in the weed' who is aligned with Akenside as a beacon of dubious political integrity. (CM 38)

The political expediency of conflicting interests, which Melville satirises in the exchanges between the herb-doctor and the soldier of fortune resonates with T D Rice's burlesque *Otello* through the elaborate patois in Otello's obsequious address to the Senate that justifies Desdemona's murder because she is the 'wrong' colour:

> One word before you go
> I hab you for to know
> I done de state some sarbice,
> And de foe hab laid her low
> [...]
> If his wife hab been black
> Instead of white, all had been right
> And she wouldn't hab got de sack.[163]

[161] Woodworth, *Manifest Destinies*, p. 308.
[162] Ibid, p. 305.
[163] Rice, 'Otello' in Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow,* pp. 382-383.

Incongruous perspectives on race are also mocked in the Missouri bachelor's exchange with the wavering abolitionist sympathies of the quack herb-doctor whose 'Omni-balsamic Reinvigorator and Samaritan Pain Dissuader' comically symbolises the notion of a political panacea designed to remedy all aches and pains of class and racial hostility. (CM 149-50)

This complex political landscape confounds the policies of many prominent Northern liberals including *Tribune* editor Horace Greeley who is opposed in principle to slavery but is equally against free market capitalism and the exploitation of labour, both in the North, and in the South. Consequently, Greeley came to sympathise with figures such as Welsh philanthropist and social reformer Robert Owen (1771-1858), and the trade union organiser George Henry Evans (1805-1855) who identified *white* slavery as a higher cause than abolition, clashing with fervent abolitionists such as William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass.[164] A focus on the rhetoric of class oppression during the 1840s united disparate factions across party lines and between the North and South, a political accord aimed at ending slave labour, but which in effect side-lined the campaign for racial equality and abolition. Representation of race on the minstrel stage became twisted to reflect this rising class-consciousness, with the mask shifting from its folklore heritage in ambiguous misrule to performing a more reactionary context of racial discord and ethnic hostility.[165] In his coverage of the 1856 presidential election, the African American journalist and abolitionist James McCune Smith (1813-1865) quotes from *Moby-Dick* to

[164] Lott, *Love and Theft*, p. 155.
[165] Ibid, p. 28.

discuss the role of Horace Greeley and William Seward, indicating the way in which Melville merges the disparate worlds of theatre and politics to illuminate their interdependence. While McCune Smith admires the democratic commitment and passion of both Greeley and Seward, he nevertheless concludes "neither is morally fitted to advance the cause of Human Freedom [when] tried by the only just standard" which is, according to Smith, "a full and cordial belief that all men are by nature *free* and *equal.*"[166]

Balancing diverse ethical and racial interests during a politically turbulent period left both Greeley and Melville open to critical attack from uncompromising abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass who regarded the scourge of slavery as the overriding political issue. For Douglass the Civil War was The Abolition War which would bring about the liberation of the slave, as well as the salvation of the Union, asserting that "Civil War was not a mere strife for territory and dominion, but a contest of civilisation against barbarism."[167] In a speech delivered to the Women's Loyal League in New York on January 13,1864 Douglass expressed his views on the meaning and mission of the Civil War:

> I end where I began—no war but an Abolition war; no peace but an Abolition peace; liberty for all, chains for none; the black man a soldier in war, a labourer in peace; a voter at the South as well as at the North; America his permanent home, and all Americans his fellow countrymen. If accomplished, our glory as a nation will be complete,

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[166] James McCune Smith (Communipaw) in *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, March 7, 1856, quoted in Robert K. Wallace, *Douglass and Melville Anchored Together in Neighborly Style* (New Bedford, MA: Spinner, 2005), p. 55.
[167] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, (Radford, VA: Wilder, 2008), p. 195.

> our peace will flow like a river, and our foundation will be the everlasting rocks.[168]

The passion of Douglass's address sheds light on Melville's apparent vacillation. While theoretically opposed to slavery Melville, like Horace Greeley, feared exacerbating the racial divide and undermining peace between the free and slave states through focus on the abolition cause. His ambivalent position on race and slavery is depicted in the prose Supplement to *Battle-Pieces* (1866) where he writes "In one point of view the co-existence of the two races in the South—whether the negro be bond or free—seems (even as it did to Abraham Lincoln) a grave evil."[169] While this statement suggests that the system of slavery is evil, it also implies support for racial segregation as a humanitarian option in the interests of political reform. Melville urges patience and mercy from the North, in order to "kindle the bards of Progress and Humanity" in recognition of the failure of the Civil War to achieve the goal of ending slavery, declaring "Emancipation has ridded the country of the reproach, but not wholly of the calamity". [170] However, Melville is at pains to present a balanced range of perspectives in *Battle-Pieces.* The ballad poem 40 "The Frenzy of the Wake" is sympathetic to the fierce courage of the Southern white Confederacy and, critical of the panic of the black troops, as opposed to poem 38 "The March to the Sea" in which the 'glorious glad' marching of General Sherman's Yankee army gives

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[168] Frederick Douglass, 'The Mission of the War' contributed by *Blackpast*, January 28, 2007
< https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/1864-frederick-douglass-mission-war/>.
[169] Melville, Supplement to *Battle Pieces,* p. 269.
[170] Ibid, p. 272.

equal status to the slave recruits. The lyrical references to nature signal racial harmony in the march for equality:

> All nature felt their coming,
> The birds like couriers flew,
> And the banners brightly blooming
> The slaves by thousands drew,
> And they marched beside the drumming,
> And they joined the armies blue.[171]

The range of perspectives in *Battle-Pieces* and its prose Supplement drew criticism regarding Melville's racial sympathies, a reaction to which he was not unprepared writing that "one who desires to be impartially just in the expression of his views moves as among sword-points presented on every side." William Dean Howells, editor of *The Atlantic Monthly*, also attacked *Battle-Pieces* describing it as an unfitting response to the hundreds of thousands who had been slaughtered in the Civil War, censure based on poem15 'A Utilitarian View of the Monitor's Flight':

> Is it possible—you ask yourself, after running over all these celebrative, inscriptive, and memorial verses—that there has really been a great war, with battles fought by men and bewailed by women? Or is it only that Mr Melville's inner consciousness has been perturbed, and filled with the phantasms of enlistments, marches, fights in the air, parenthetic bulletin-boards, and tortured humanity shedding, not words and blood, but words alone? [172]

Taken out of context verse 15's meta-poetic focus, which begins "Plain be the phrase, yet apt be the verse…", may appear unseemly in the light of the extreme loss of life, but the prominence of the artistic veneer captures the extent of Melville's uncertainty regarding the consequences of the Civil War.

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[171] Melville, *Battle-Pieces,* p. 128.
[172] William Dean Howells, review of *Battle-Pieces and Aspects of War* by Herman Melville, *The Atlantic Magazine*, February issue (1867) <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1867/02/reviews-and-literary-notices/308618/>.

His prevarication is characterised by the wide variation in style and rhythm of the poems in *Battle-Pieces*, which is extended to a deeper level by the covert union of disparate cultural references. It also resonates with interpretations of *The Confidence Man* as a book infused with references to words and writing to address the enigma of the truth, as described by Rebecca Gaudino, which is also a narrow interpretation if it does not consider the underlying satire and incongruous associations that aimed to blur the boundaries of class and racial partitions.[173]

Shakespeare's influence through a balancing of different perspectives is embedded within *Battle-Pieces* to widen the scope of reflection related to the irony of armed conflict as a means of achieving national unity and human equality. Melville's' elegiac verse "Misgivings" (1860) alludes to a sense of regret when violent impulses are heeded at the expense of 'the world's fairest hope':

> When ocean-clouds over inland hills
> Sweep storming in late autumn brown,
> And horror the sodden valley fills,
> And the spire falls crashing in the town,
> I muse upon my country's ills—
> The tempest bursting from the waste of Time
> On the world's fairest hope linked with man's foulest crime.
>
> Nature's dark side is heeded now—
> (Ah! optimist-cheer disheartened flown)—
> A child may read the moody brow
> Of yon black mountain lone.
> With shouts the torrents down the gorges go,
> And storms are formed behind the storm we feel:
> The hemlock shakes in the rafter, the oak in the driving keel.[174]

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[173] Gaudino, 'The Riddle of "The Confidence-Man"', *The Journal of Narrative Technique*, 14. 2 (1984)124-141.
[174] Melville, *Battle-Pieces,* p. 13.

"The tempest bursting from the waste of Time" acts as a metaphor for the catastrophe of the Civil War, covertly alluding to Shakespeare's sonnet 129 "A Waste of Shame", with its expression of disgust at being overcome by savage passions:

> Th' expense of spirit in a waste of shame
> Is lust in action; and till action, lust
> Is perjured, murd'rous, bloody, full of blame,
> [...]
> Enjoyed no sooner but despised straight,
> Past reason hunted; and no sooner had
> Past reason hated [175]

Melville's verse invokes an ambiguity - is it the waste of Time (dealing with the problem of slavery – "man's foulest crime") or the Time of waste (the humanitarian cost of the war) that is the tragedy of the conflict? The irregularity of the rhythm and the bent rhyme of "gorges go" creates a sense of instability and unease. The fusion of a ballad style with iambic pentameter merges myth within poetic depictions of the violent forces of nature. The allusions to Shakespeare's sonnet of frenzied urges and bitter regret blur personal tragedy with political catastrophe across time, and beyond the bounds familiar to Melville's audience.

Melville asserts that the poems in *Battle-Pieces* are spontaneous responses to an historic event - "I seem, in most of these verses to have placed a harp in the window which wayward winds have played upon the strings." [176] This assertion resonates with Mark Twain's 'Notice' in the preface to *Huckleberry Finn,* with its disavowal of motive or moral, the implication that *Battle-Pieces* is an artistically imagined and individual

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[175] William Shakespeare, Sonnet 129 in *The Norton Shakespeare*, p. 1967.
[176] Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, preface.

record of historic events where, according to Robert Milder, Melville visualises "a wise and magnanimous America re-established on the bedrock of a tragic vision."[177] Confirming his humanitarian credentials Melville also asserts that "Those of us who always abhorred slavery as an atheistical iniquity, gladly we join in the exulting chorus of humanity over its downfall."[178]

However, while Melville's sympathy for his vanquished countrymen in the aftermath of the war is both progressive and benign, it also patronising. His descriptions of the African American population contain references to slaves as ignorant and indebted, a stance which accentuates the fragile balance of power between the races:

> In our natural solicitude to confirm the benefit of liberty to the blacks, let us forbear from measures of dubious constitutional rightfulness toward our white countrymen—measures of a nature to provoke, among other of the last evils, exterminating hatred of race toward race. In imagination let us place ourselves in the unprecedented position of the Southerners—their position as regards the millions of ignorant manumitted slaves in their midst, for whom some of us now claim the suffrage. Let us be Christians toward our fellow-whites, as well as philanthropists toward the blacks our fellow-men.[179]

Carolyn Karcher also notes Melville's ambivalent support for abolition. She observes that whenever there is a rebellion in his works, Melville opposed tyranny and oppression, but violent means were not acceptable to him.[180] Melville is circumspect in his support for the anti-slavery cause because of the human cost on both sides of the conflict. He maintains that in

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[177] Robert Milder, 'The Rhetoric of Melville's *Battle-Pieces*.', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*,44. 2 (1989), 173–200 (pp. 175-176) <www.jstor.org/stable/3044944>.
[178] Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, Supplement, p. 268.
[179] Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, Supplement.
[180] Karcher, *Shadows over The Promised Land.*

the aftermath of the war "the glory fell short of the pathos" leading to his call for Christian forgiveness and fellowship for the defeated South as the noblest means of achieving national unity and social reform.[181] Melville's inclination towards a conciliatory approach, urging patience and gradual emancipation, is revealed in poem 51 "Formerly a Slave":

> Her children's children they shall know
> The good withheld from her;
> And so her reverie takes prophetic cheer –
> In spirit she sees the stir.[182]

Melville's poem took inspiration from a sublime portrait by Elihu Vedder (1836-1923) that lifted a slave woman peanut seller in New York into a transcendental symbol of suffering, influencing Melville's perception of racial anguish as beyond calamity raised into the universal realms of art and timeless tragedy.[183]

Melville's sympathy for the South and for national reconciliation on compassionate grounds, and for the sake of forging interracial comradeship, led to claims that his attitude towards abolition was unreliable. However, evidence from various texts indicates that Melville, while not addressing the issue of slavery directly, refutes simplistic binary attitudes to race. This position is illuminated by blending contradictory and inconclusive perspectives, which are disguised through performances obscured by surface appearances. Thus, in *The Confidence Man*, a hesitant attitude to

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[181] Melville, *Battle-Pieces*, Supplement.
[182] Melville, *Battle-Pieces,* Poem 51,'Formerly a Slave'.
[183] This portrait appeared in the National Gallery in the Spring of 1865. Vedder was best known for his illustrations of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam.* In 1891 Melville dedicated a book of poems about devotion to art to Vedder.

abolition is depicted through the irresolute voice of the conman herb-doctor, which is disparaged by the Missouri bachelor who describes abolitionists as "Picked and prudent sentimentalists. You are the moderate man, the invaluable understrapper of the wicked man [...] who may be used for wrong, but are useless for doing right". (CM 149) By contrast, such a picture of human inconsistency in the face of racial turmoil is portrayed as not without merit where, even in the uncharitable Missouri bachelor, some virtue is glimpsed. Although the Missourian admits he is without slave sentiments, he does acknowledge the harsh life of a slave "Bad enough to see whites ducking and diving for a favour, without having these poor devils of niggers congeeing around for their corn. Though to me the niggers are the freer of the two." (CM 149) Indoctrinated into a belief of the protected life of the bonded slave, the chauvinistic bachelor, demonstrates some fellow feeling for those he terms "the poor devils." The intersection of contradictory views by unreliable, fraudulent and self-interested characters in *The Confidence Man* using disguise and roleplay enacts the obstacles and complexity of achieving interracial equality and accord through compromise and conciliation, even in the face of intractable opposition.

Similarly, in his novel *Typee*, Melville confounds and overthrows racial assumptions. His educated and articulate narrator Tommo is compelled to escape captivity back to American 'civilisation', despite describing the white man as "the most ferocious animal on the face of the earth", because although he is well treated by the cannibal "savages", he is not free. Through personal experience, Melville asserts that there is little difference between

"savage" islanders and "civilised" whites, and also that racial oppression is never benign when freedom is denied.[184] Melville blurs ethnic and racial hierarchies through disparate cross-genre amalgamations to imagine an alternative cultural world of interracial sympathy, acceptance and respect, conceding, in accord with the philosopher Babbalanja in *Mardi,* that war against slavery "would be a greater evil than slavery itself." [185]

Melville's literary masking to validate his political inconsistency is at odds with the more focused perspective of Frederick Douglass who was vehemently opposed to appeasing the South for the sake of preserving a racially unjust Union, describing slaveholders as the "hated enemy" deserving of violent destruction. [186] However, the rhetoric in Douglass's poem *The Tyrant's Jubilee,* which serves as the conclusion to his 1852 speech 'What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?', combines a willingness to fight for freedom that also imagines human brotherhood and an end to lordly power:

> God speed the year of jubilee
> The wide world o'er
> When from their galling chains set free,
> Th' oppress'd shall vilely bend the knee,
> And wear the yoke of tyranny
> Like brutes no more.
> That year will come, and freedom's reign,
> To man his plundered fights again
> Restore.

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[184] Herman Melville, '*Typee,* A Peep at Polynesian Life', in *The Writings of Herman Melville, Volume One,* ed. by Harrison Hayford, Hershel Parker and G. Thomas Tanselle (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) p. 125.
[185] Howard Welsh, 'The Politics of Race in 'Benito Cereno.'', *American Literature*, 46. 4 (1975), 556–566 (p. 561) <www.jstor.org/stable/2924580>.
[186] *Frederick Douglass & Herman Melville - Essays in Relation,* ed. by Robert S Levine & Samuel Otter (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 125.

God speed the day when human blood
Shall cease to flow!
In every clime be understood,
The claims of human brotherhood,
And each return for evil, good,
Not blow for blow;
That day will come all feuds to end.
And change into a faithful friend
Each foe.

God speed the hour, the glorious hour,
When none on earth
Shall exercise a lordly power,
Nor in a tyrant's presence cower;
But all to manhood's stature tower,
By equal birth!
That hour will come, to each, to all,
And from his prison-house, the thrall
Go forth.

Until that year, day, hour, arrive,
With head, and heart, and hand I'll strive,
To break the rod, and rend the gyve,
The spoiler of his prey deprive —
So witness Heaven!
And never from my chosen post,
Whate'er the peril or the cost,
Be driven.[187]

The ballad form has a driving martial rhythm, the drumbeat-like intensity of the rhyme scheme of each verse indicating an absolute determination to overcome the outrage of slavery, "whate'er the peril or the cost". The language is erudite with references to head and heart and manhood celebrating the equality of humankind when free from tyranny. The dense rhyme scheme marshals supressed rage at racial injustice as an impediment to freedom and racial equality, with the imperative two-word clout at the end of each verse signifying a resolute drive towards liberty. While Melville

[187] *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings,* pp. 188-206.

always backed away from revolution perceiving it as counterproductive to comradeship and Union, Douglass saw it as an irrefutable moral imperative whatever the human cost, with the potential for anti-slavery rebels to win respect, and to unite across racial boundaries.

For Frederick Douglass a slave has agency gaining freedom through self-determined means as depicted in his multi-focused novel *The Heroic Slave,* in which the enslaved protagonist Madison Washington leads a successful slave mutiny. The outcome of such heroic action would then result in interracial brotherhood and equality that would lead inexorably to universal suffrage. In Douglass's *The Heroic Slave*, Madison Washington achieves subjectivity through direct representation, and comradeship through freedom.

Consequently, Douglass was contemptuous of the disorder of minstrel masquerade as a device to challenge the racial entitlement of white authority. Douglass's literal interpretation of the minstrel mayhem interpreted it as a form of racist degradation, describing blackface acts as "the filthy scum of white society, who have stolen from us a complexion denied to them by nature, in which to make money, and pander to the corrupt taste of the white fellow-citizens." [188] His bitter comment relates to an occasion when Douglass's daughter Rosetta was excluded from Seward Seminary in Rochester, New York when the college had no objection to admitting the Virginia and the Christy's Minstrels to entertain the assembly.

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[188] Frederick Douglass, 'The Hutchinson Family – Hunkerism', *North Star,* October 27,1848 <http://utc.iath.virginia.edu/minstrel/miar03bt.html>.

On that occasion, Douglass was directing his hostility towards the highly polished and less provocative version of blackface performance, rather than the raucous satires of the original blackface minstrel shows, which targeted the hypocrisy and arrogance of white privilege through outrageous racist and ethnic irreverence, interwoven with topical references. Originally, minstrelsy was an enormously popular form of entertainment playing to mixed audiences, with blackface entertainers mimicking black dandies, who were themselves imitating white aristocrats, performances that transcended and distorted class and racial divides to create an affinity of voices neglected by the hegemonic white ideology. According to the cultural historian W T Lhamon Jr, when T D Rice blacked up to sing "Jump Jim Crow" he "changed the complexion of American cultural performance bringing blackness into the house in a way that started some Americans, white and black, to consider identifying with it." [189] However, audience solidarity became subject to rising social tensions which affected class and ethnic sympathies, as noted by theatre scholar and author Mary Henderson:

> Part of a general emergence of artisan culture into national view, the minstrel vogue, along with mass political parties…helped to create or organise a new public whose tastes the popular amusements now represented for the first time.[190]

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[189] W. T. Lhamon, Jr., 'Turning Around Jim Crow' in *Burnt Cork – Traditions and Legacies of Blackface Minstre*lsy, ed, by Stephen Johnson, p. 20.
[190] Mary Henderson, *The City and the Theatre: New York Playhouses from Bowling Green to Times Square* (Clifton, NJ: James T White, 1973), p. 103.

A popular minstrel song reflects this economic and cultural shift through theatre attendance, the vernacular and italics satirising the emerging social gap:

> De Astor Opera is anoder nice place;
> If *you* go thar, just wash your face!
> Put on your "kids", and fix up neat,
> For dis am de spot of de *eliteet!* [191]

The many nuances of disguise, caricature and disorder of blackface performance mocking contentious attitudes to abolition and fears of miscegenation, which particularly concerned American identity in the antebellum period, became subject to distorted interpretations linked to the rise of class consciousness. The outcome resulted in dedicated theatres accommodating ethnic polarisation and class division, a cultural schism which dissipated sympathy for the abolition cause and racial equality. This disunion between class and race is reflected in the inconsistent performances and double masking in *The Confidence Man* where an educated elite, characterised by the philosophers Mark Winsome and his student Egbert, is unable to represent and identify with an expanding and disparate popular culture.

Blackface performance in the antebellum era both provoked and parodied this burgeoning racial tension, where T D Rice, best known for his iconic performance as the topsy-turvy Jim Crow, performed blackness in

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[191] George Christy and Charles White, 'Pompey's Rambles' in J. Kensett Kellogg, *Ethiopian Melodies* (Philadelphia: T B Peterson & Brothers, 1800?), pp. 15-16 <https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3A31735061820647/viewer#page/6/mode/2up>.
(Quoted in Lott, *Love and Theft*, p. 65).

opposing directions. He undercut support for cross-racial working-class solidarity, while simultaneously using outrageous caricature to mock destructive racial stereotyping. This is played out in the inverse racial imagery of his Jim Crow verse:

> I met a Philadelphia niggar
> Dress'd up quite nice & clean
> But then he 'bused de Yorkers
> I thought was very mean.
> [...]
> Now my brodder niggars,
> I do not think it right,
> Dat you should laugh at dem
> Who happen to be white.[192]

Jim Crow confuses the scenes in which he appears offering no resolution regarding racial classification and equality. He performs misrule, which can be traced back the transitive pageantry of folklore, a footprint embedded in the incongruous masquerades enacted in *The Confidence Man*.

In contrast to Frederick Douglass, Melville was powerfully influenced by the role of masquerade as a counter narrative to blur and transcend class and racial identity. Melville perceived freedom differently to Douglass as derived from within, in what John Stauffer terms, "the tragicalness of human thought in its own unbiased, native and profounder workings."[193] For Melville, an understanding and tolerance of the differences between people dissolved constructed social barriers, with confidence in humankind the key to interracial comradeship and social reform. In *The Confidence Man*

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[192] Quoted in Lhamon, *Raising Cain*, pp.167-168.
[193] John Stauffer, 'Interracial Friendship and the Aesthetics of Freedom' in *Frederick Douglass and Herman Melville, Essays in Relation,* part 1, chapter 6.

caricatures exposed and ridiculed the artifice of class and race divides, which are then dispelled through the exaggerated performance and parody inherent in masquerade. Melville and Douglass's opposing perceptions of the relationship between freedom and friendship was rooted in life experience and racial background, which influenced their different literary approaches to addressing issues of slavery, abolition, and maintaining national Union. For Melville freedom depended on fellowship that bridged physical and psychological divides, while for Douglass fellowship involved active participation in the drive for freedom and equality aimed at achieving visibility and autonomy for black voices.[194]

While the intentions of Liberal Republicans and abolitionists may have been to reunite the country following the calamity of the Civil War, this all fell apart with concessions that allowed the vanquished South to replace slavery with a racist caste system of segregation. Given the extent of the racist propaganda that flooded the country in terms of cartoons, novels, musicals, songs and clownish 'Uncle Tom' memorabilia aimed at ridiculing the ambition of black suffrage, it is difficult to imagine that Northern liberal abolitionists had confidence in the commitment of white Southern statesmen to support the democratic principles of a Union that authoised racial equality. The paradox of universal but selective comradeship, performed in *The Confidence Man* by the philosophers Winsome and Egbert, and then re-performed by the cosmopolitan and Egbert in the guise of Charlie Noble, is a double masking that characterises the lip-service given to

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[194] Stauffer, Part 1, chapter 6.

equality, not only directly by the South, but also covertly by Northern liberals, hypocritically claiming to be radical reformers. Disguise and masquerade perform such inconsistency in Melville's novel in order to locate the fluctuations and evolution of race issues that clash brutally with the forces of self-interest and political expediency, a disorder that resonates with the conflict underpinning issues of personal and national identity in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, and parodied by the counter-culture anarchy of Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale.*

5.5. Conclusion

Melville, like Shakespeare, bounced off the works of others, distorting and re-imagining them to suit his purposes of social relevance and individual expression. The incorporation of a wide conglomeration of sources from Shakespeare to plantation songs acts as a literary mask to disguise and obscure Melville's subjectivity. However, the multivocality of his novels indicates that his sympathies lie in the direction of social progress through finding a harmonious balance between rivalrous factions striving for cultural inclusion essential to transforming the straitjacket of white imperial dominance. Such intertextuality signals Melville's concern for a colour-blind humanitarian brotherhood that also advocates eventual emancipation and racial equality.

Melville contests the colour coded caste system based on racial difference in his cross-genre novel *Typee,* which depicts the indigenous

islanders as equally “civilised” and “savage” as the colonial invaders who seek to colonise the island for self-interested economic purposes, under the banner of delivering Christianity and democracy. Through this semi-autobiographical fiction Melville discovered however, that it is not possible to return to an imagined past of living a life of indigenous simplicity and that, despite the imperfections of Western civilisation, the struggle for progress must continue, but as noted by D H Lawrence in his essay on *Typee* and *Omoo*, “with weapons of the spirit, not the flesh” [195]

To this effect Melville continued his own war against cultural alienation in *The Confidence Man*, through engagement with the ambiguity and absurdity of the antebellum minstrel shows, which pushed racial matters to the fore in the loudest and most grotesque manner in a Janus-like staging that appropriated African American culture to mock the hypocrisy of the white establishment attempting to deny the contribution of hidden voices in the formation of a genuine, national cultural identity. Melville’s interaction with the carnivalesque tradition in Shakespeare’s plays performs a similar role, transmitting an alternative cultural identity through the inclusion of disruptive characters and folklore traditions in order to sustain an ancient heritage at risk of being erased in favour of a new social order intent on demonising resistance to the dominant regime.

Melville’s interaction with the bawdy elements of Shakespeare however, signals that his focus was wider than the racial schisms of

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[195] D H Lawrence, ‘Herman Melville’s *Typee* and *Omoo*’ in *Melville: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. by R V Chase (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1962), pp. 11-20 (p. 16).

antebellum America. He used minstrel tropes of masking, layered role play, and satire to illuminate the gap between surface representation and the underlying tragedy of cultural alienation and racial exclusion. Melville's innovative literary style thus owes a debt to the antebellum minstrel shows whose imitation of "black" gestures and vernacular enabled the performers and audiences to identity with the African American and European folk fusion that shaped a unique hybrid American cultural identity. The incongruous mix of military allusions with the comic vernacular in Jim Crow's ditty *Gumbo Chaff* illuminates just such a cultural union:

> Dare Jim beats de drum and Joe's de fifer,
> An I is dat child what can read an cifer;
> Twice one is five den carry six to seven,
> Twice six is twenty nine and eighteen's eleven,
> So 'twixt you and me it's very plain to see,
> Dat I learn to play the Banjo by de double rule of three.[196]

The cheeky rhyming couplets of the song celebrates a cross-cultural alliance through the mix of instruments, the European fife and drum fused with the African banjo, which was played to amuse the white folks at home, a collaboration that mocks, as it promotes, a racially merged cultural identity.

The cryptic confusion of Melville's novel is characterised by the bizarrely attired cosmopolitan, a fictional conjurer, but also a social realist, who reproves the Missouri bachelor for his cynical mistrust, a false carapace that lays him open to being groomed by the manipulative herb doctor. The cosmopolitan entreats confidence in the absurdity of counterfeit in alliance with the masked ambiguity of the minstrel tradition that offers no resolution or transparency to contentious issues of race and equality, the layered role

[196] Quoted in Lhamon, Jr, 'Songs', p.141

play framing the pervasive comic disorder of a false reality. The cosmopolitan contemplates this enigma through the character of Shakespeare's anarchic clown Autolycus, concluding that his humour and artfulness excuses his mischief, leaving scope for dissent:

> "Can his influence be salutary? True, in Autolycus there is humour; but though, according to my principle, humour is in general to be held a saving quality, yet the case of Autolycus is an exception; because it is his humour which, so to speak, oils his mischievousness."[197]

While Melville's *Confidence Man* recognises the tragi-comic paradox of resistance to racial equality, enacted through complex disguises and contradictions of those who proclaim democratic values, Frederick Douglass saw the struggle for emancipation in more apocalyptical terms as a battle against the outrage of human bondage, a situation that justified retribution against the South even if it meant the end of the Union. Their different political approaches are depicted through the literary variations of form and rhetoric, with Melville's multivocal satire and engagement with minstrel masquerade using humour as a tool to defuse and transform attitudes racial enmity and disunion.

In Douglass's novella *The Heroic Slave* dialogic parity between the different racial voices confers agency to the mutinous slave in order to symbolise racial equality, a levelling up narrative device to portray cultural inclusion. By comparison, Melville's narrative style of elaborate high prose in *The Confidence Man* is a mask of white privilege and confidence, designed to involve the readership and society in the construction of class and race hierarchy, purposely confounded by the shifting sands of masquerade and

[197] CM, p. 225.

false appearance. The masquerade of the cosmopolitan, with his alliteration, bad puns, and effusive verbosity, as in his banter with the 'no trust' barber, satirises the high prose of Shakespearian verse. The implication is that the lofty tones appropriated by leading actors on the legitimate stage, and in the inflated rhetoric of American politicians, are also a disingenuous charade, designed to reify white prestige and power. The refracted influence of Shakespeare's transgressive subtext, whether through disguise as employed by Fidele, or in the shape of the unruly Autolycus, as with minstrel burlesque, claims ownership of Shakespeare's plays for a broader cultural audience than that of a white political and literary elite. As noted in the chapter on "The Refinement of Shakespeare on the Legitimate Stage" low brow carnivalesque characters were often edited out, or severely chopped, to give greater prominence to the leading male roles, appropriating Shakespeare as a subliminal literary weapon to endorse the values of the dominant culture.

Critics such as Eric Lott, however, are less convinced of the progressive role of minstrelsy, maintaining that the blackface burlesques drew attention to the problems of race in the antebellum period. Lott argues that the racialised mask, as well as being provocative and ambiguous, also enacted a divisive socio-economic role:

> That the minstrel show took up these issues at all is perhaps more significant than that it did so in an objectionable way; yet the fact that it shoved racial matters to the fore made it even less palatable to the elites than the usual run of "low" comedy. [198]

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[198] Lott, *Love and Theft* p. 90.

This interpretation is reinforced through twenty first century eyes, where blackface minstrelsy is perceived as racially demeaning because of the corruption of the minstrel jester Jim Crow reincarnated as the degraded embodiment of racial segregation, rather than an ambassador for the inclusion of African and European folk traditions as dynamic elements in the creation of a unique American cultural identity.

Melville's *Confidence Man* depicts the complexities and confusions of race and social alienation by drawing attention to the mask of comic disorder with all its passion and its paradoxes, its humour, and its delusion, where appearance and reality are interwoven and mutable, illuminating the racially biased roles of religious doctrine and political legislation that helped to perpetuate the system of slavery. Through the satirical complexity of *The Confidence Man,* Melville's political allegiance emerges as multi-faceted and multi-layered, conscious of the radical and threatening act of revealing the hidden "other", while inspired by engagement with Shakespeare's balance of shifting opposites, and the representation of ambiguous attitudes to race and otherness on the antebellum minstrel stage.

6. Conclusion

In the Afterword to his seminal *Love and Theft*, Eric Lott argues that the contradictions in nineteenth century blackface performances reflected the inchoate racial ideologies of the times. Minstrelsy, argues Lott, was the 'social unconscious' of blackface.[1] Few doubt by now that white minstrelsy performers were enthusiastic borrowers of black culture, which they adapted and adopted into an authentic American counterculture with divergent, if not mutually contradictory, effects.

Taking my inspiration partly from Lott, my attempt has been to assess the anti-slavery role and impact of the ante-bellum minstrel burlesques in nineteenth century America, through interaction with performances of Shakespeare's plays, particularly *Othello.* An overview of the pervasive influence of Shakespeare's plays into the realms of common currency of American culture seemed to me essential because of the influence they had on shaping American national identity and cultural values. Assessing the way in which performances of *Othello* evolved on the legitimate and minstrel stages also illuminates contradictory and fluctuating attitudes to concepts of cultural nationalism and issues of race. Ironically, the legitimate stage appropriated Shakespeare's plays, particularly *Othello*, to assert a sense of nobility and white national pride. The paradox was satirised on the

[1] Lott, *Love and Theft,* p. 234.

minstrel stage in the *Othello* burlesques led by Thomas Dartmouth Rice, the original incarnation of the scarecrow folkloric figure of Jim Crow. Rice wrote and starred in *Otello: A Burlesque Operetta,* one of the most popular Shakespeare burlesques. The comic disarray of class, racial and gender roles mirrored and mocked the constructed boundaries to challenge the assumptions of the prevailing social order. Such was the success of Jim Crow in the minstrel burlesques that, like the 'Tom Shows', he became the victim of racist propaganda, and was redefined by the dominant cultural mainstream as the symbol of racial segregation.

The minstrel burlesques played on not being taken seriously, a metadramatic device of detachment, the gross caricatures pandering to - as well as parodying - prejudices under the noses of the cultural gatekeepers. The postbellum appropriations of minstrel burlesques that included the racist 'Tom Show" versions of Stowe's Un*cle Tom's Cabin* were removed from the social context and historical legacy of the original minstrel tradition. Minstrelsy then became the distorted instrument of racist propaganda as a result, which is how the tradition is perceived through twentieth century eyes following a sustained post-Reconstruction erosion of racial rights that began in 1877.

However, despite the absorption and corruption of the minstrel masquerades into the sentimental 'Tom shows', and entertaining vaudeville acts in the post bellum era, the blackface burlesques made imitation black

music and dance, central to popular culture that continued to contest social boundaries. This gave rise to African American minstrel troupes which were popular in the South particularly amongst the freed slave population. The Rabbit Foot Minstrels were one of the most enduring of the shows, providing a platform for African American singers such as Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith to become renowned and influential artists in the history of the American jazz and blues tradition that crossed over to and influenced the cultural mainstream.[2]

Aligned to the continuing influence of the minstrel shows in blurring racial boundaries, it is also interesting to note that in the twentieth century white pop sensation Elvis Presley was very popular with black audiences, and that he paid tribute to the black artists who inspired his music:

> A lot of people seem to think I started this business. But rock 'n' roll was here a long time before I came along. Nobody can sing that kind of music like coloured people. Let's face it: I can't sing like Fats Domino can. I know that.[3]

Conventional wisdom would equate performers such as Elvis Presley, Bill Haley, and Jerry Lee Lewis as part of a long line of white exploiters of African American cultural heritage, following in the footsteps of the blackface minstrels of the antebellum era. They could be regarded with nothing but contempt, or be seen as cultural pioneers who provided a stepping stone to interracial amalgamation and mutual respect. In 1970,

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[2] Seymour Stark, *Men in Blackface, True Stories of the Minstrel Show*, (Library of Congress: Xlibris Corporation,2000) p. 139; Mel Watkins, *On the Real Side – A History of African American Comedy* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1994) p. 133.

[3] *Tan Magazine*, quoted in Brian Ward, 'Champion or Copycat? Elvis Presley's Ambiguous Relationship with Black America' by Brian Ward in *The Conversation*.

African American fifties rock and roll singer Little Richard stated that "I thank God for Elvis. I thank the Lord for sending Elvis to open that door so I could walk down the road, you understand?" [4] In 1956, a hundred and one years after Melville wrote *The Confidence Man*, which also owes a debt to the role play and masking of the minstrel tradition, Elvis Presley topped both the white pop charts, and the black R & B charts with his single 'Heartbreak Hotel'. The racial ambiguities of the minstrel stage thus continued, taking new form in the popular culture of the twentieth century. Elvis acknowledged his profound indebtedness to black bluesmen for his cross-racial appeal, which Nat Williams, a black announcer on the Memphis based radio station WDIA, depicted in his clever parody that inverts white anxieties about miscegenation:

> How come cullud girls would take on so over a Memphis white boy […] when they let out a squeak about B. B. King, a Memphis cullud boy […] Beale Streeters are wondering if these teenage girls' demonstrations over Presley don't reflect a basic integration in attitude and aspiration which has been festering in the minds of your women-folk all along, Hunh?? [5]

The astute satire with its mimicked vernacular in effect confers minstrel stage continuity to Presley as a twentieth century blackface performer, but without the mask.

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[4] Quoted in Brian Ward, 'Champion or Copycat? Elvis Presley's Ambiguous Relationship with Black America' in *The Conversation* <https://theconversation.com/champion-or-copycat-elvis-presleys-ambiguous-relationship-with-black-america-82293>.

[5] Quoted in Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding, Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations* (London: University College of London Press, 1998) p. 135.

To endorse the positive effect of blackface performances in disrupting racial boundaries, the critic Ralph Ellison also credits the composite minstrel voice in *Huckleberry Finn* as a path to vanquishing the memory of slavery. According to Ellison, Twain's novel opened the door to the integration of black and white American identity through a linguistic osmosis that cuts across racial differences and social status, stating that "the black man [was] a co-creator of the language that Mark Twain raised to the level of literary eloquence."[6] But as I have sought to demonstrate Shakespeare was part of that linguistic fusion. The bawdy 'Celtic' world of Fluellen and MacMorris in Shakespeare's history plays anticipates some of the ethnic vernacular comedy of the minstrel shows. In creating minstrel versions of Shakespeare's plays nineteenth century Americans were drawing on, and foregrounding, aspects of the Renaissance plays themselves; aspects that were often erased or downplayed on the legitimate stage. These bawdy elements would lead James Baldwin, later in the twentieth century, to 'stop hating Shakespeare'. During the nineteenth century they informed and co-existed with minstrel conventions.

As I have sought to illustrate, this amalgamation created a form of cultural hybridity that informed the writings of Stowe, Twain, and Melville. In a racially stratified society, minstrelsy often involved the racist

[6] Ralph Ellison, 'What Would America Be Like Without Blacks', Essay, April 6, 1970
From Teaching American History
<https://teachingamericanhistory.org/document/what-america-would-be-like-without-blacks/>.

denigration of African Americans, but its practices and conventions could also be drawn upon to challenge and re-configure cultural and racial hierarchies.

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