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HEROINES OF AMERICAN MIDWESTERN  
REPERTOIRE THEATRE COMEDY-DRAMAS

By

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A DISSERTATION

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## ABSTRACT

### HEROINES OF AMERICAN MIDWESTERN REPERTOIRE THEATRE COMEDY-DRAMAS

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The success of a popular dramatic form like the repertoire or "rep" show (theatrical entertainment brought by small traveling troupes to American small towns at the turn of this century and through its first decades) lies in how its plays reflect and pass on the audience's concerns and beliefs. In order to see how one set of audience beliefs--the vision of the nature of women--is reflected in repertoire plays, this study analyzes the central female character in each of a group of representative scripts, comedy-dramas (a popular form of melodrama) written during the first four decades of this century and performed by a Midwestern repertoire company, the Rosier Players. Another primary source is interviews with Waunetta Rosier Oleferchik about her repertoire show experience. Chapter One reviews the historical experience of American women from the turn of the century to the nineteen forties and their representation in popular literature and drama. Chapter Two reviews the expectations of repertoire audiences. Chapter Three analyzes the purity, passivity or aggressiveness and domesticity of the plays' heroines and discusses their experience in relationship to the life of American women. Following the study's conclusions, an appendix contains a short

history of the Rosier Players and describes a contemporary performance.

The heroines of repertoire comedy-dramas reflect the co-existence over four decades of old and new attitudes toward women. Most of the heroines, all sexually virtuous and morally superior, passionately act upon their values, reflecting the audience's belief in the right of morally superior women to be concerned with the ethical climate of the home and community. The heroines also reflect the importance of marriage--its domestic power and community status--to American women not only by winning good marriages as their just rewards but also by restoring or enlarging the family circle and strengthening community ties.

The repertoire comedy-drama heroines, who reflect the slowly changing life of American small town women of 1900 to 1940, are idealized characters who face women's perennial, real problems and emerge triumphant while still preserving the conservative, family-oriented, multi-generational audience's vision of the desirable community.



To Edward A. Wright

A great teacher and director and a grand showman. In memory of performances in the Granville, Ohio, Opera House and the big blue tent of the Denison Summer Theatre.

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## INTRODUCTION

At the turn of this century and through its first decades, rural American communities were eager for dramatic entertainment but did not have the facilities or audiences to support either permanent stock companies or metropolitan-based touring companies. Instead, hinterland entertainment needs were met by small traveling troupes performing plays in repertory. These "repertoire" companies performed in the small town theatres called "opera houses" and, increasingly as the opera houses were converted into motion picture theatres, in tents. Audiences in the Midwest especially welcomed the "rep shows"<sup>1</sup>; this "central" area had the largest number of companies.<sup>2</sup> In their time, repertoire shows were commercially viable; they paid their way, like all forms of popular drama, because they not only entertained their audience but also corroborated its familiar values and attitudes.

Repertoire shows reached the height of their popularity in the 1920s. Their numbers decreased as the Great Depression, World War II, and new forms of popular entertainment such as radio and the movies took their toll of audiences. Nevertheless, the great appeal of the rep shows in their heyday and the continuing appeal of the last remaining Michigan company, the Rosier Players, make the play scripts used by them an interesting subject for study. Such a study can provide specific analysis of individual plays instead of generalizations about repertoire plays as a class and can increase our

understanding of the appeal of repertoire theatre to its audience. Specifically, a study of repertoire play heroines--the central female characters who are the focus of the audience's interest and sympathy--can increase our understanding of how this form of popular drama reflects the changing images of American women from 1900 to 1940, the period when repertoire theatre flourished.

Although many works have been written on the image of women in American popular culture, most of them concentrate on women characters in novels or movies. Though Rosemarie Bank has discussed central female characters in American melodramas and frontier plays from 1863 to 1915, most scholars of drama deal with the image of women in plays with some claim to historical or literary fame: Margaret Fleming, O'Neill's works, Pulitzer Prize winners, or Broadway successes like The Philadelphia Story and The Animal Kingdom. Several books and dissertations have also been written about repertoire theatre; but only Martha Langford in her 1978 dissertation, "The Tent Repertoire Theatre of Neil and Caroline Schaffner," and Robert MacDonald in his 1978 dissertation, "The Popular Drama of Repertoire, 1880-1919," have thoroughly analyzed specific plays. Neither has extensively or exclusively written about central women characters.

This study uses as its primary source the scripts belonging to Midwestern repertoire company, the Rosier Players of Michigan.<sup>3</sup> From the 239 individual plays, I have selected those performed by the Rosiers--basing my selection on the list in Robert Klassen's dissertation, "The Tent-Repertoire Theatre: A Rural American Institution," on plays mentioned in newspaper articles or promotional materials, and on plays I have seen the Rosiers perform. I have chosen to analyze the

heroines of "comedy-dramas" (melodramas),<sup>4</sup> a type of play popular from 1900 to 1939, the period when repertoire companies were most active.

In addition to other sources, I have relied on interviews with Waunetta Rosier Oleferchik in which she discussed her repertoire show experience.<sup>5</sup>

Chapter I of this study is an overview of the actuality and image of American women from the turn of the century to 1940—their historical experience and their representation in popular literature and drama. Chapter II is a review of the expectations of American mid-Western repertoire theatre audiences. Chapter III is an analysis of the heroines of representative repertoire theatre plays. A conclusion follows. An appendix includes a short history of the Rosier Players and a description of a contemporary performance by the company.

## NOTES: INTRODUCTION

<sup>1</sup>Also called rag operas, tent shows, tent-rep shows, or Toby shows (after the comic "rube" character who appeared in many of the plays, even though some companies included few or no Toby plays in their repertoire).

<sup>2</sup>Alfred L. Bernheim, The Business of the Theatre: An Economic History of the American Theatre, 1750-1932 (New York: Benjamin Bloom, 1932), p. 99.

<sup>3</sup>Photocopies of these scripts were donated by Harold Rosier to the Russel B. Nye Popular culture collection of the Special Collections Division, Michigan State University Libraries.

<sup>4</sup>Harlowe R. Hoyt, Town Hall Tonight (New York: Bramhall, 1955), p. 43.

<sup>5</sup>Tapes of these interviews are now in the G. Robert Vincent Voice Library of the Michigan State University Libraries.



## CHAPTER 1

### ACTUALITY AND IMAGE: AMERICAN WOMEN FROM THE TURN OF THE CENTURY TO 1940

To understand the treatment of heroines in the popular drama of mid-Western American repertoire theatre, it is first necessary to review the general principles of American popular art. According to Russel B. Nye in The Unembarrassed Muse, the American popular arts, of which popular drama is one form, resulted from the shift from upper class to middle class art patronage which began in the eighteenth century, gained momentum through the nineteenth century, and exploded in the twentieth century. In order to thrive monetarily under this patronage, the arts increasingly reflected the values of the large and growing middle class majority of the population. Popular art is aimed at this majority audience. It is

"popular" in the sense that the majority of people like and endorse it and will not accept marked deviations from its standards and conventions . . . .

[Because it] confirms the experience of the majority . . . , [it] has been an unusually sensitive and accurate reflector of the attitudes and concerns of the society for which it is produced . . . .<sup>1</sup>

Since any form of popular drama reflects the attitudes and concerns of its audience and confirms their experience, understanding the nature of the heroines of repertoire drama next involves reviewing the situation of women in American society from the turn of this century through the years preceding World War II, the years when repertoire theatre flourished. This review presents women's

experience of their sexuality and morality, their activity in the larger society, and their lives at home as wives and mothers.

#### The Experience of Women in American Society: An Overview

As most current work on the history of women's experience in America shows, the period from the turn of the century until the beginning of World War II was a time of change--change sometimes leading toward greater political, economic, and social power for women, change sometimes diminishing such power. Some individual women during this period left their protected pedestals in the cluttered parlors of the Victorian home to seek satisfaction in the wider world. Many others sought satisfaction in the home and local community.

#### Sexuality and Morality

At the turn of the century, the traditional nineteenth century middle-class view of an unmarried woman's sexual morality--sexual inviolability--prevailed. The ideal young woman, though no longer protected by as many petticoats or bumpered by a bustle as she had been in preceding decades, shielded her mono-bosomed body in a restrictive corset. She might display her instep or even a smidgen of ankle by a skirt two to three inches off the floor, but she was still sheltered, "swathed not only in silk and muslin, but in innocence and propriety."<sup>2</sup> Her person and reputation were protected by her menfolk--both family members and suitors. She and her friends followed the prevailing moral code:

1. Women were the guardians of morality.
2. They were basically "finer" (purer, more delicate, more sensitive) than men and should be protected so that they could behave accordingly.

3. Therefore, young girls remained sexually "innocent" (although not necessarily ignorant of biological facts about reproduction). They had a romantic courtship, which involved nothing more physically exciting than mild kissing, and then married.
4. Men might have sexual experiences before marriages but only with "bad" women.<sup>3</sup>

To uphold the code--because nothing in a woman's life could atone for a sexual slip--small town young women had an imaginary but powerful chaperone: community expectation.<sup>4</sup> As "good" girls, they were supposed to exercise judgment in warding off sexual advances. Boys were to respect good girls, seeking no more than to collect a kiss while playing Post Office.<sup>5</sup> The system worked well: "these boys and girls knew they were expected to behave with perfect propriety toward one another and only rarely did they fail to do so,"<sup>6</sup> even when falling in love. When a boy needed more than friendship, he got it from "chippies" met on the streets or at amusement parks or from the hired help.

In the early years of the twentieth century a "good" young woman still behaved with sexual propriety (though often for "hygienic" reasons instead of purely moral ones), resolving to enter marriage both virginal and healthy. She was aided by popular magazine articles which emphasized the "mental health" reasons for purity. For example, in "A Girl's Preparation for Marriage" in the Ladies' Home Journal for March 1908, Alice Preston chides the "older generation" for not telling younger women why allowing young men "the engagement's privilege" of holding hands is wrong. According to Preston, such

behavior, by arousing the emotions and passions, could disease a young woman's nerves and undermine her strength. Preston states that the truth of sex, "the sacred physical facts, . . . should be known as simply and directly as any of the other big, simple facts of life."<sup>7</sup> But she does not wish to name or discuss these facts in her article. To do so would be to dwell unhealthily on such matters. Preston's purpose is to teach a young woman that her "girlish power and justice and reverence and loveliness," her power to attract and hold a man, depend on her sexual restraint.<sup>8</sup>

For young men and women of this period, "sex and romantic love occupied two separate spheres, which, if they worked out for the best, would be fused in marriage."<sup>9</sup> This fusion was supposed to create a "mutuality" of desire. But women were assumed, whether because of their more spiritual nature or because of social conditioning, to desire less sexual activity than men. Therefore, when men exercised their sexual powers unrestrainedly and excessively, the result in marriage was "sensual usurpation on the one side and loathing submission on the other."<sup>10</sup> Many people, not just feminists, believed that a wife could thus become a legal prostitute, expected "to give her soul and body to one man" whenever he wished but, unlike a professional, having no control over "time or conditions."<sup>11</sup>

In an effort to foster a single, restrained sexual standard for both women and men, the Social Purity movement (an unstructured association of individuals and groups) had gained momentum. The movement, which since the late nineteenth century had won many people to its beliefs, proclaimed on a "scientific" basis that women should determine the amount of sexual activity in marriage. Social Purists

maintained that restraint in married sexual activity meant that men preserved their "vigor" and women their "beauty and spirits," and that the fewer children born of such marriages were physically and mentally healthier. In raising these fewer but better children, women could become better mothers, the calling for which God and nature intended them. Social Purity did not aim so much to repress sexuality as to strengthen women's freedom and power in their separate sphere, the home. By controlling sexual activity a woman reduced her husband's power within the home, and, in an age of unreliable contraceptive measures, reduced family size and the dangers of childbirth.<sup>12</sup>

During the years just prior to World War I, the popularity of the queenly Gibson Girl, who convinced her suitors to take no liberties and her husband to exercise sexual restraint, was challenged by the emergence of the Progressive Era "new woman." The "new woman," though she did not break the basic tenets of the old moral code, might, with "mischief in her eye,"<sup>13</sup> revise them from time to time, especially the kissing clause. The new woman "smoked cigarettes, drove automobiles, bobbed her hair, and generally kicked up her heels in a manner that shocked her conservative elders."<sup>14</sup> The new woman was not a Theda Bara vamp. Some new women discarded their corsets and wore V-necked dresses in the daytime, but their narrow hobble skirts limited their activities; and though their ankles showed when they kicked up their heels, these same ankles were often covered by high-topped shoes.

Though the new woman was a "Ragtime" predecessor of the flapper, she had not yet achieved the flapper's freedom. Basically urban and often upper-middle class, she nevertheless influenced the standards

of moral behavior—at least in the realm of fantasy—for ordinary middle-class women. The same Ladies' Home Journal which had published Alice Preston's admonition to young women in 1908, two years later published a July 1910 "romance number." On the cover, a couple in evening dress passionately embrace.<sup>15</sup>

In the twenties the freedom of the "new woman" increased, spread, and received wide public notice. American women were pictured as dancing to a saxophone's wail and drinking prohibited gin in a speakeasy—a far cry from the previous decades' image of the ideal girl. Women's behavior had changed partly because of the war. They had experienced independence when they became factory workers, served in the armed forces, or went to France as nurses. But the war only accelerated turn-of-the-century changes. Smaller families, smaller houses or apartments, canned and other prepared foods, electrical appliances all meant less time needed for housekeeping. Increased leisure time accelerated women's demand for social and sexual emancipation.

Twenties women wanted to attract men but not as queens to be served. Instead, they wanted to be men's "casual and light-hearted companions."<sup>16</sup> The twenties woman, if she wanted a man, would go after him openly, driving him around in her sports car, swimming or skiing with him. She would not be coy or manipulative, would not resort to "hypocrisy, fluff, and 'hookum.'"<sup>17</sup> The flapper might smoke, dance, and pet, but "at heart she was honest and deserved the hero's love."<sup>18</sup>

In the twenties, couples related with increasing informality. They danced wildly or cheek-to-cheek, the man's ungloved hand on the

woman's bare back.<sup>19</sup> They rode around in the increasingly popular closed cars, even late at night, escaping their parents' and neighbors' eyes. Couples necked and petted at parties, not just when alone together in their cars. They believed in popularized versions of Freudian psychology in which every human motive was attributable to sex<sup>20</sup> and mental health meant an uninhibited sex life. Since more reliable methods of birth control were more easily available, a "fall" was no longer necessarily accompanied by an infant and/or a hasty marriage.

Of course, in small towns fewer young women behaved in these "wild" ways, and even in cities "nice girls didn't do such things."<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, women were generally more open about their sexual feelings. Girls wanted to "be considered as ardently sought after, and as not too priggish to respond," but much of their casual sexual attitude was assumed; and though they petted, they drew the line at real affairs.<sup>22</sup> Petting was a way to get a husband.

Though many women moved toward a male single standard of sexuality, the double standard was not really rejected by most people. Sex outside of marriage was illicit and dangerous for women: "it violated mores learned in childhood, and it could result in pregnancy or . . . in venereal disease . . . [because] birth control devices were still difficult to obtain."<sup>23</sup> Women were to fend off too-ardent suitors until they brought them to the altar; but once they married for love, sexual fulfillment would follow. "For these women, as in the nineteenth century, sex was something they 'gave' their husbands--but now they were supposed to enjoy it too."<sup>24</sup>

After the stock market crash in 1929, the energetic, free-swinging flapper with her skirts at her rouged knees disappeared along with the national prosperity. When the ideal thirties woman emerged, she was a lady—poised, glamorous, sophisticated, "immaculately groomed and . . . [knowing] that champagne had bubbles in it,"<sup>25</sup> but also practical, responsible, and yet traditionally feminine. She was

the sort of girl who might be able to go out and get a job, help shoulder the family responsibilities when her father's or husband's income stopped; who would remind them, in her hours of ease, of the good old days before there were all-determining booms and depressions, the sentimental old days which repeat itself reminded them of; and who would look, not hard, demanding, difficult to move deeply, but piquantly pretty, gentle, amenable, thus restoring their shaken masculine pride.<sup>26</sup>

The thirties young women's ideal of love and sex was that "men and women should meet and mate in gallant, graceful, stylish love, as expressed in the dancing of Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire."<sup>27</sup> They read magazine articles which discussed sexual issues but emphasized relationship: "more approval of marriage and family life, more approval of 'comradeship, understanding, affection, sympathy, facilitation, accommodation, integration, cooperation' than in 1920."<sup>28</sup>

Although smaller cities and towns were still not publicly at ease with sex, sociological studies showed that women had considerably increased their premarital sexual activity.<sup>29</sup> Such activity could be both necessary and possible because people could not afford to marry young and contraceptives (condoms), though not displayed, were readily available in drugstores.<sup>30</sup> And most people were not promiscuous; they expected to marry those with whom they had sexual experiences. They claimed that they deviated from the conventional standards



because of "true love,"<sup>31</sup> and, according to national polls, were less ready to condemn others for the same behavior.<sup>32</sup> The commonest premarital sexual behavior, carried on from the twenties, seems to have been petting. It preserved a woman's technical virginity and was "a compromise between new opportunities and old values."<sup>33</sup>

#### Activity Outside the Home

Especially in small towns, at the turn of the century, women spent many hours in the weekly home tasks: Monday--washing; Tuesday--ironing; Wednesday--mending and sewing; Thursday--relatively free for reading and embroidering; Friday--cleaning; Saturday--baking and marketing; Sunday--going to church and cooking the big family dinner.<sup>34</sup> Society still judged women primarily as cooks and housewives. But on those relatively free Thursdays and in the evenings middle-class women in particular became involved in other activities. Their free time increased as the lower birth rate and improved technology decreased their work in childrearing and housekeeping. However, though "technology freed [women] . . . from the menial labor that had dominated the lives of their mothers and offered them opportunities to go outside the home, . . . it did not free them from the commitment and obligation to the home that had structured their mothers' aspirations and choices."<sup>35</sup>

Therefore, in this new free time women became more involved in moral and cultural uplift, activities appropriate to their separate sphere. (Men were too busy with their work--life's practicalities and realities--to be concerned with either cultural or social welfare.)<sup>36</sup>

Many women formed clubs where "female fellowship would work to elevate the moral character of society,"<sup>37</sup> first in the cities and later in the small towns. There local matrons declared that social, reading, and study groups showed that they were just as culture-conscious as their urban counterparts.<sup>38</sup> Many groups discussed literature or spent a good bit of time on Japanese flower arranging, but some worked diligently for the community welfare. An example is that most determined of the women's clubs, the Women's Christian Temperance Union, founded in 1873 and with a membership of 160,000 by 1880. Frances Willard, its founder, called the W.C.T.U. "the home going forth into the world," virtuous womanhood organizing to transform the masculine society.<sup>39</sup> The W.C.T.U. had a particularly enthusiastic following in the rural areas and small Midwestern towns where its activities, like those of the Social Purity movement, were a way for women to increase their power over men:

the participation of small-town women in temperance activity reached below the surface fact of almost endemic drunkenness. Most obvious was the woman's new consciousness of 'rights' and status. In the community where she had gone to war against the men, temperance was the perfect weapon. It was the men, sodden and bestial, who sinned against the community and against its women, [the men] who, in defiance of Christian morality, staggered home to despairing families.<sup>40</sup>

Eventually, the W.C.T.U. moved beyond temperance because it discovered that whatever improved the home or town helped the cause. For example, it pushed for reform of jails because the inmates were victims of saloons. It agitated for female wardens and police matrons so that the "fallen women" inmates were not at the mercy of lustful male jailors.<sup>41</sup> In small towns the W.C.T.U. chapters

not only agitated against liquor and tobacco and harrassed saloon-keepers, but also urged social reforms, such as a

new orphanage to replace the county poor farm, visited the sick, and donated food and money to the destitute . . . . the wide-ranging concern for the town's moral well-being was exemplified in the activities of a Thorntown, Indiana, branch which took up a collection to send a local prostitute to the hospital for treatment of her narcotics addiction and encouraged a man with syphilis to undergo the then standard treatment with biochloride of gold. Although perhaps regarded as busybodies by some, the staunch Thorntown ladies seem not to have been unduly inhibited by squeamishness or Victorian decorum.<sup>42</sup>

During the Progressive Era, women, a main source of that period's reforming spirit, continued their efforts for social change. Women had the advantage over male reformers, who might be judged sentimental or radical if they tried to establish kindergartens or promote safe factory work environments. Moreover, women's moral superiority would not only justify their being concerned with life's more sordid aspects but serve as armor for them in the crusade.<sup>43</sup>

However, reforming women of this era which saw itself as "scientific" did not rely on their moral superiority alone. In their concern for children, they took the new scientific approach to human life and saw the child as "a particularly complicated and vulnerable creature" who needed more than affection in the well-kept home. A mother, according to one Progressive reformer, "must not rely too much on her natural instincts, the well-deserving but much-vaunted mother sense."<sup>44</sup> She not only had to be educated to rear her children effectively, she also had to see to it that well-trained teachers and other public workers continued that effective child-care when the child was not at home.<sup>45</sup>

The great reform movement in which all women's groups eventually came together was suffrage. Even here women derived their power from their traditional family role. They declared their right to vote

not because they were equal to men but because, through their characters as wives, mothers, and homemakers, they could make a moral contribution to political life. Not all women believed in this right or that women's special nature could make a positive contribution. But American supporters of the vote won. They did it with arguments based on the special strength of women's nature: women deserved the right to vote because they were morally superior to men. They would bring this moral superiority to the ballot box, voting for the candidates who would protect future mothers, young children, the aged and infirm--the candidates who would improve society.<sup>46</sup>

The League of Women Voters offers insight into the changes in women's political action after women's suffrage was assured. The League advocated reform: tighter consumer protection laws, child labor laws, public support for indigent mothers, and repeal of laws forbidding women to serve on juries or hold public office. But its primary purpose was to educate women for responsible citizenship in an objective, non-partisan, and basically cautious way:<sup>47</sup> "'wooing our legislators in a dignified and league-like [ladylike] manner.'"<sup>48</sup>

During the Depression, some women continued their reforming activities, often through both the political pressure that their various organizations applied and also through direct involvement. Leaders of earlier reform movements took jobs within the various social welfare agencies of the Roosevelt administration. Women's involvement was "crucial to the formation and passage of much New Deal legislation,"<sup>49</sup> especially that in aid of families and children. Women were major promoters of the Social Security Act of 1935 and the Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act of 1936.<sup>50</sup> The outstanding example of

the woman political activist was Eleanor Roosevelt. She advised her husband on domestic affairs. She coordinated the women campaign workers. She toured the country, speaking out for the disadvantaged and becoming their unofficial White House resident lobbyist.<sup>51</sup> But in all this activity she maintained the traditional view of women's political role--to ameliorate male aggressiveness with their "understanding hearts."<sup>52</sup> Although newspapers often criticized Mrs. Roosevelt, by the end of the 1930s the public opinion polls rated her as very popular.

Nevertheless, though particular women were very influential in the Roosevelt administration, the generally approved public role for women did not change radically. Middle class wives in "Middletown" (Muncie, Indiana), for example, were expected primarily to care for the family and then "to take part in aesthetic pursuits and 'unpaid civic activities of a refined or charitable sort.'"<sup>53</sup> Women generally did not make use of their right to vote, did not develop an interest in politics, or if they did, were discouraged by men from becoming active.<sup>54</sup>

Although turn-of-the-century American society generally approved of women's volunteer activity, to be active in the outside world for pay was something few women did. In 1900 20.4 percent worked.<sup>55</sup> They were involved in almost all the professions--in token numbers-- and in the majority of occupations. But they were primarily teachers, servants and laundresses, office clerks and sales people, and apparel workers. In increasing numbers, they worked in factories. And they were mostly unmarried. Everyone, including women, believed that it was neither proper or possible to rear children and hold a job at the

same time. Most women who worked outside the home for pay did so only until they got married. They saw jobs as temporary (until the right man came along), as insurance (to help the family in a financial emergency), or as a last resort (no good man was available).<sup>56</sup>

Working women reflected badly on their fathers' financial abilities, and they were also believed to face potential assaults on their virtue. "Unfortunate financial circumstances" might force a well-brought up young lady to work, but to set out on her own to earn money "was selfishly causing her father needless embarrassment: somebody might think that he couldn't support her. By common consent the best—and safest—thing for a girl to do was to sit at home and help her mother about the house and wait for the 'right man.'"<sup>57</sup> For those young women who went to work anyway, especially the increasing number of office workers

"it was hoped that their inevitable contacts with rude men of business would not sully their purity. If women who had not had 'advantages' worked by the millions in shops and factories—at wages as low as six to eight dollars a week . . . this was understood to subject them to appalling temptations . . . ."<sup>58</sup>

Some of these temptations were the stuff of melodrama, but young working women who lived away from their families or who were orphans supporting themselves faced the very unpleasant prospects of poverty and isolation. Their low wages made it difficult to live in a safe, respectable place. They paid high rent for a furnished room and cooked inadequate meals on gas plates. If they needed nice clothes for their office or sales jobs, they cut back still further on their grocery money. For recreation, they had to depend on the generosity

of male friends, yet being careful all the while not to damage their reputations. In fact, their virtue was often suspect: people thought that if they could afford to live alone they must be mistresses or prostitutes. To solve these problems, many young working women boarded in private homes, losing freedom but gaining approved social connections in their quasi-daughter roles.<sup>59</sup>

The wage-earning women constituted a separate force—one not in competition with men—of low-skill, low-pay, low-security, low-mobility workers easily hired and easily fired. The women worked in noisy, crowded, poorly ventilated surroundings. The supervisors, usually males who also did the hiring and firing, were often overbearing—enforcing arbitrary rules and elaborate fine systems, shouting, swearing and using sexual innuendo, playing favorites.<sup>60</sup>

At the turn of the century, most married women did not work outside the home, at least after the first child was born. If they worked then, it was usually because of a compelling need: the husband had deserted the family, had experienced prolonged illness or unemployment, or had died prematurely. Even under such circumstances, married women tried to avoid working "out." For the middle-class married woman "to work openly had almost as much shame about it as to take charity; somehow or other the truly prudent family would have saved for a rainy day."<sup>61</sup> Women who went out to work had to take the poorer jobs, part-time and close to home, because they still had the primary responsibility for home and child care; and they faced criticism from family and friends. In that pre-day care center age if they could not devote enough time to adequate child care, they lost both self-esteem and status in the community.<sup>62</sup>

Even later, in the Progressive Era, little changed for American working women, though during the brief period of World War I, many women either entered the work force for the first time or left their traditional jobs. Instead of working for the Red Cross or knitting socks and sweaters, they became auto mechanics, telegraph messengers, and elevator operators.<sup>63</sup> Although conservatives feared that such activities would make women unsuited to family life, many women enjoyed war work. Women also entered the armed forces: the Navy had eleven thousand female yeomen working as clerks and stenographers. As one of them pointed out, it was not just for the thrill of the uniform. The yeomen worked seven days a week for the duration of the war to release sailors eager for action "on the deck of a destroyer somewhere in the Atlantic."<sup>64</sup>

But such variety of work was short-lived. Women who had taken on men's jobs during the war were laid off when it was over. Others were refused important jobs because they were assumed to leave the work place as soon as they married. Most middle-class women simply did not work. Their situation is illustrated by the attitude the Lynds found in Middletown: "In the Middletown of the 1920s, it was considered unfeminine for business-class wives to discuss money and demeaning for them to work outside the home."<sup>65</sup> Heroines like Amelia Earhart notwithstanding, women were meant to enjoy the privilege of staying at home.

In 1930 more women worked for pay than did at the turn of the century; but though more women worked, their employment categories and situations were not appreciatively improved. One out of four industry codes established during the Roosevelt administration--an administra-



tion generally friendly to women--permitted women to receive lower wages than men, and this was in the industries in which most women were employed. Furthermore, the women who worked were criticized for taking jobs away from men. Even though government studies showed that women worked to support themselves and their families and that the all-pervasive segregation of work by gender meant little actual displacement of men by women, the public still believed that, Depression or not, women worked for "pin money." Women were blamed for causing the Depression: "By leaving home....they had weakened the moral fiber of the nation and rendered inevitable a crisis of the spirit."<sup>67</sup> In a 1936 Gallop Poll eighty-two percent of all the respondents and seventy-five percent of the women themselves felt that women shouldn't work if their husbands had jobs.<sup>68</sup> Even the government supported this belief with official policies that discriminated against women and gave the few available jobs to men. Men got WPA preferment. In the civil service when jobs had to be cut, one spouse was dismissed if both were working: three fourths of those dismissed were women.<sup>69</sup>

### Marriage and Motherhood

At the turn of the century, though women increasingly worked outside the home as volunteers for social reform and civic endeavor or temporarily for pay, they and nearly everybody else felt that "the appropriate field for women was caretaking and nurturing . . . ."<sup>70</sup> The ideal way to nurture and care was to become a wife and then a mother. Marriage was an escape from parental control: "A husband might turn out to be as great a tyrant as a father, but at least he had been chosen, and a sensible young woman could exercise her intelligence on

the choice."<sup>71</sup> Marriage and motherhood also conferred power and status. Mothers, the primary dispensers of both love and discipline, had authority over their children. Wives who planned and controlled the family budget had economic power. Married women found status in the approval of friends and neighbors who saw them as clearly necessary to the emotional and economic stability and continuity of the family.<sup>72</sup>

In small towns women preferred even bad marriages to the spinsterhood which meant a life of teaching school, working in libraries, caring for aged parents, or living with relatives as unpaid servants. Women who had never found men or who had been jilted went out West or to large cities to escape both the pity and ridicule of being "old maids."<sup>73</sup> In local newspapers the elaborately described details of the marriage ceremony filled the social columns and crowded out national or world news.<sup>74</sup> Marriages were important because they concerned families, and families meant continuity and identity. Whether people stayed in the small towns or moved to the cities, "the ideal of family as identity remained; it conferred love and self-esteem by simply being born into it; and by extension, one's home town was a community to which one belonged at birth . . . ."<sup>75</sup>

Marriages meant families and marriage meant motherhood, an estate exalted at the turn of the century by great men who claimed, "All that I am I owe to my darling, angel mother." While urban men pursued money and small town men struggled with business failure, women maintained the emotional center of the family. Especially in the small towns the women began to dominate

"The female presence pervaded the town's life; the female as mother—cooking, baking, admonishing, loyally supporting the beaten husband, sponsoring culture, maintaining the church, upholding the old values . . . finally subduing the town, making it into a larger mother, the place where trust and love and understanding could always be found. . . ." <sup>76</sup>

Even later, in the Progressive Era, most Americans—including women—continued to think of marriage and motherhood as the natural goals of a woman's life.<sup>77</sup> As one popular novelist put it, marriage and nursing an infant were the two closest relationships a woman could have. "Relationship" and the quality of it continued to be the key words used by anyone describing marriages. Women were no longer expected to be submissive to their husbands: by 1909, "obey" had been omitted from civil marriage vows and also from some church ceremonies. Though many women found traditional marriage fulfilling, middle class women, in particular, were experiencing rising expectations. Many of them were educated; some had worked before marriage. In the press they read praise of women active in the reform movements and in professions. In work with their various women's organizations, they got out of their homes and into public life. Working-class women, having little leisure time, did little volunteer work; and the church and ethnic societies to which they belonged reinforced the patriarchal tradition. But though the numbers of working-class desertions increased, divorce—difficult, expensive, and a disgrace—was no solution to an unhappy marriage.

Farm wives seemed to lead the most traditional lives and to be the least discontented because of their important function in the family economy; their necessary housekeeping, child-rearing, vegetable and chicken-raising, preserving and cooking for family and hired hands supposedly gave them more status than city wives. Yet daughters who

had completed high school came into conflict with their parents. Farm women close enough to town to be active in women's groups (eventually they dominated the W.C.T.U. and even joined the suffrage movement) longed for more activity outside the home. Those who lived on isolated farms were even more discontented. They complained of being treated as subordinates, not partners by their husbands. The men bought modern labor-saving machinery while the women had no electricity. The men socialized on buying trips to town or in group work like thrashing while the women stayed on the homeplace. Being idolized as "the salt of the earth, the sheet anchor of society and the humanizing and purifying element in humanity"<sup>78</sup> in their traditional roles as sisters, wives, and mothers was not enough compensation for isolation and monotony.

Nevertheless, most women continued to marry--and to remarry if widowed--and they expected to become mothers. A good mother was concerned about her children's upbringing. She read magazines which, while featuring stories on women prominent in reform, also gave much advice on and glory to home management and child-rearing. Neither the society nor the women in it were ready to abandon their traditional roles when even feminists believed that romantic love in marriage could not only be real but lasting, that "motherhood is the highest fulfillment of women's nature," and "that, in the line of physical evolution, motherhood is the highest process."<sup>79</sup>

Even flappers could settle down and become domesticated. In a 1922 New York Times article, "Flapping Not Repented Of," the author, an "ex-flapper," tells the readers that the flapper will improve with

age, becoming a mature young woman who will be a better wife and mother than the staid young women of an earlier decade

"Watch her five years from now and then be thankful that she will be the mother of the next generation, with the hypocrisy, fluff, and other 'hookum' [of the older feminine ideal] worn entirely off. Her sharp points wear down reasonably well and leave a smooth polished surface. You'll be surprised at what a comfort that surface will be in the days to come!"<sup>80</sup>

The writer was pointing out an important fact of American women's life in the twenties. Divorce may have been on the rise, but so was the number of marriages. No matter what personal freedom young women sought and found, most of them eventually got married; and then they kept house (with new cleaning products and appliances to cut down the drudgery),<sup>81</sup> raised children, and maintained the family social position.

However, the new ideal wife carried over some of the characteristics of the flapper in that she was to be her husband's companion as well as his housekeeper and childraiser. In fact, her primary relationship was to be with her husband instead of her children, whose needs and demands should never keep her from sharing his activities. Marriage was supposed to blend passion, spiritual harmony, and friendship--a mixture of the previous decade's idea of romantic love with the present decade's new sexuality. But the wife bore the burden of keeping married romance alive by her personality and physical attractiveness. Popular advice books, magazine articles, and advertisements told her how to behave and what deodorants, mouthwash, and cosmetics to buy. Soap ads showed her how to get her cleaning done quickly so that she could join her husband in golf or dancing.

The new Lydia Pinkham pamphlet declared, "Life seems so dull when couples forget honeymoon days."<sup>82</sup>

Apparently, something was needed to spark marriages. The Lynds found that business-class husbands and wives did not communicate well and that though they might occasionally play golf together and cards with other couples, most of their leisure-time activities were segregated by sex. Most Middletown marriages seemed held together by the community disapproval of divorce and by focusing on day-to-day problems such as paying off the mortgage.<sup>83</sup>

If Middletown business-class marriages were silent, Middletown working class marriages were weary and dreary. For many working class wives "marriage meant poverty, cruelty, adultery, and abandonment."<sup>84</sup> When asked what gave them the courage to go on when they were discouraged, no working class wife named her husband's support. If business class men went to their clubs without their wives, working class men met at the saloon or cigar store. Sexual relationships were troubled, but discussion of sexual adjustment and contraception was taboo. Business class women approved of birth control and used relatively effective contraceptive methods, but few working class couples used any method, and those that they did use were ineffective. Thus babies were the inevitable consequence of physical pleasure. But low pay and unemployment meant that additional children placed a terrible economic burden on the family. Wives who felt that husbands were insensitive in their demand for marital rights, in trying to avoid unwanted pregnancies, often avoided their husbands.<sup>85</sup>

In the Depression years not so many women married because people could not easily afford to set up housekeeping and raise families.

Not only did the marriage rate drop, so did the birthrate, not just because fewer people were marrying but also because they more readily used improved methods of birth control. Still women in general "were retreating into domesticity and femininity."<sup>86</sup> Among the movies they flocked to see were those with a persistent plot: "a hard-nosed professional woman or a wealthy woman who was taught by a strong man that sex and marriage were all that really mattered in life."<sup>87</sup>

Within the family sphere, some women achieved more power and status because sometimes they were able to get jobs--no matter how wretched or badly paid--when their husbands could not and because, unlike the men, who had lost self-esteem, they found and showed stability under stress. A newspaper editor presented a popular view of the return of women to the family center: "Society is not made poorer because mother is now neglecting the encyclopedia from which sprang full blown the club papers with which she formerly bored her fellow clubwomen, and is devoting more of her time to cook-books."<sup>88</sup> Though some out-of-work husbands took on child-rearing tasks, women were still the primary care providers in families which had become closer knit. Husbands, wives, and children now spent more time in each others' company--listening to the radio, playing Monopoly because there was no money for travel or public entertainment. Some of this time might be "hard time"--wives blaming husbands for their failure to provide for the family, husbands under stress berating their families. But basically, as the Lynds found in Middletown, thirties marriages were much like those of the twenties: "somewhat impersonal, tolerant couples . . . planning together the big and little immensities of personal living by which people in families in

this culture seek to ameliorate the essential loneliness and confusion of life."<sup>89</sup>

People in the thirties generally developed a stronger sense of family. Although the marriage rate had dropped, the divorce rate did also. Divorces cost money. But people also realized the damage divorce could do; a 1937 Fortune poll showed that the majority of Americans were against easy divorce.<sup>90</sup> As the tensions of economic hard times increased, Americans prized the "emotional sustenance"<sup>91</sup> that home and family, with women as the center, could give.

#### The Image of the Heroine in American Popular Drama

The life of the majority of American women from the turn of the century to World War II is reflected in the popular image of women's experience. Women's sexuality and morality, their activity in the larger society, and their lives within the home are mirrored in the purity, passiveness or assertiveness, and domesticity of the heroines of popular literature and drama.

Scholars have analyzed this image in several typical popular forms which share the same world-view and conventions—nineteenth century gothic and sentimental novels, early twentieth century romantic novels and women's magazine fiction, and nineteenth and early twentieth century melodrama. They have identified the chief traits of the central women characters as purity, with attendant moral and spiritual superiority; passivity, with resultant dependency; and domesticity, with values and concerns centered on the family. Although these traits may seem quaintly "Victorian," some scholars find them persisting well into the twentieth century and even



appearing in heroines of less "popular" forms: "serious" drama and social comedy. Other scholars see significant variations or redefinitions of these traits over time, reflecting the changing majority experience of American women and the changing attitudes and concerns of society about them.

### Purity

According to most scholars, the quintessential characteristic of the heroine of popular literature and drama is her purity. Of course, the heroine is beautiful, but her beauty is important mainly because it is the outward manifestation of her inward and spiritual grace, a special aspect of which is sexual purity. David Grimsted in Melodrama Unveiled: American Theatre and Culture, 1800-1850, finds this purity at the center of melodrama. The plot is the villain's constant attempts at "shattering virtue's temple" and the hero's equally constant efforts at preventing such a catastrophe.<sup>92</sup>

The heroine's sexual purity makes her highly attractive to men. Maurice Disher in Melodrama: Plots That Thrilled describes the villain as irresistably drawn toward the heroine's perfection, desiring to possess it through seduction or marriage.<sup>93</sup> But though purity is the heroine's most prized possession, it is fragile: it can be destroyed by "one false step" even if she does not take that step by choice but is pushed by deceit or rape.<sup>94</sup> She or her protectors have to guard her purity vigilantly. In fact, according to Kay Mussell's analysis of gothic novels, the heroine's ability or luck in keeping her virtue unsullied in spite of terrors or temptations is a way of demonstrating that she is worthy of the hero's love and defense--whether the hero is a vile would-be seducer or a straight-arrow paragon of virtue.<sup>95</sup>

Furthermore, the heroine's social rank has no effect on her worthiness. As Disher points out in Blood and Thunder, if she is "honest," a cottage girl or a saloon keeper is as respectable as a queen.<sup>96</sup> The lowly but virtuous heroine is a "natural" lady--regardless of her dress, speech, or manners--who, at the conclusion of the plot, achieves personal happiness as the result of her moral behavior.

Even as late as the first two decades of the twentieth century, heroines are still preoccupied with protecting their sexual reputations. According to Ellen Hoekstra in New Dimensions in American Popular Culture, women characters in popular magazine fiction shun overt sexual expression. For them

"interest in sexuality is forbidden; physical attraction can be expressed only in etherelized romantic love . . . . Masculine sexuality is pictured as coarse and brutish, something which no decent women could anticipate with pleasure . . . . Women characters are repelled by physical affection, with the exception of the engagement kiss."<sup>97</sup>

Even a girl who has undeservedly received a bad reputation--usually through flirting--is partly responsible because her carelessness has allowed the community to misinterpret her acts.<sup>98</sup> A heroine must not only be chaste but appear chaste.

However, while chaste herself, the heroine can understand those not so pure as she. Frank Rahill in The World of Melodrama finds that even as early as the 1830s, melodrama's heroine is sympathetic towards the "girl who takes the wrong turning and the wife who forgets her marriage vows."<sup>99</sup> In late nineteenth-century novels described by Dee Garrison in an American Quarterly article, the heroines, critical of pompous practitioners of conventional religious pieties, are sympathetic toward sinners because they are victims of society rather

than receivers of just desserts.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the heroines of post-Civil War melodrama are not necessarily paragons of virtue, nor does the preservation of their chastity constitute the prime action. In half of one hundred melodramas Rosemarie Bank sampled for her article in Women in American Theatre, the villains are not interested in the heroine's "person or fortune."<sup>101</sup> In fact, according to Pauline Schaffer's dissertation on the heroines of serious American drama from 1890 through 1928, fallen women were acceptable to the American audience as central figures as early as 1909 (ie, Laura in Eugene Walter's The Easiest Way).<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, as Schaffer points out, most heroines, even in the twenties, though sympathetic toward other women's sexual plight, are not guilty of premarital sex or affairs after marriage—and the few who are, are sorry afterwards.<sup>103</sup>

Only in the decade of the thirties in a more sophisticated form of drama such as social comedy, do some heroines, according to Joanne Loudin in her dissertation on comic heroines from 1900 to 1940, express open attitudes toward their and others' sexuality as part of their own decision to act openly and without guilt outside the socially conventional code.<sup>104</sup>

The popular heroine's ability to forgive the sinner indicates that her purity is more than chastity; not only does she teach tolerance and forgiveness of those who have erred and repented, she is morally and spiritually superior in other conventional ways as well. For example, she is selfless rather than self-interested, willing to sacrifice herself rather than see others suffer. The heroine of melodrama might even barter her cherished chastity to protect her old father (who moralizes about her virginity but isn't above selling her

to the villain to pay off debts) though she is eventually saved from actually paying the price.<sup>105</sup> The heroine is especially morally and spiritually superior to worldly and sensual men. She can redeem male characters and show them the road to salvation, even converting a potential seducer into a model husband. In post-Civil War melodramas, according to Bank, the central plot is not based on sexual rivalry with the heroine as prize but is ideological, concerned with a wide variety of personal ethical behaviors. In these plays, the heroine has particular power as a spokesperson for the right way to live.<sup>106</sup> A heroine may drink, swear, and gamble--especially in frontier drama--but her basic virtue and goodness gives her the right to speak out on moral issues. According to Bank, she defines the play's moral climate by her concern for human values: love, generosity, charity, tolerance.<sup>107</sup> In early twentieth century women's magazine fiction, the morally strong heroine can lift a man up--for men are spiritually weak--and inspire him not only to live a more moral life but to become a material success as well. Thus, Hoekstra finds that the heroine's goodness gives her intuitive wisdom about social and economic matters as well as about spiritual ones. The heroine's purity is linked to more than just her immediate sphere of influence.<sup>108</sup> Grimsted states the popular view that the stability of both the home and the wider society rest on women's purity;<sup>109</sup> and Katherine Fishburn, author of Women in Popular Culture, sees this purity as representing to the audiences what is best 'about America.'<sup>110</sup>

One other aspect of the heroine's purity which enables her to declare the right way to behave may be emotionality--a characteristic

which is viewed negatively by some analysts of popular drama. Loudin,<sup>111</sup> Judith Stephens, in her dissertation on women in Pulitzer Prize plays from 1918 through 1949,<sup>112</sup> and William Steele in The Character of Melodrama<sup>113</sup> list many emotional responses--the heroine is flighty, cries a lot, faints at the sight of blood, and does not make rational decisions--as signs of female weakmindedness. But in the world of popular drama, reliance on emotions or feelings in making judgements may be additional proof of the heroine's morally superior nature. Furthermore, though females are believed to have a more finely tuned intuitive sense than males, positive non-rationality is not an exclusively feminine characteristic. In early twentieth century America, the romantic belief in intuition as a democratic virtue still prevailed: the common people--nature's noblemen and noblewomen--quite rightly substitute intuition for reason and education. A good person--hero or heroine--has a wisdom of the heart which is more valuable than anything cerebral analysis can produce.

### Passivity

Allied to the purity of the popular heroine is her passivity. Kathryn Weibel in Mirror, Mirror finds that even contemporary women characters are pictured as insecure, unaggressive, and having little control over their own lives. Victims in a man's world, terrorized by men and yet needing deliverance by them, they are little changed from the heroines of early melodrama who suffered all kinds of horrors before finding happiness.<sup>114</sup> Grimsted believes that if "virtue triumphant"--the melodramatic world-view--is to be a dramatically exciting theme, then that virtue must first suffer unjustly.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the

virtuous heroine's passivity makes her a prime candidate for persecution by the villain.

Not all melodramatic heroines are totally passive. Steele points out that though the heroine is the "victim of the villain's misdeeds," she often boldly defends herself against him.<sup>116</sup> Grimsted also maintains that instead of being contested for by the villain and hero, she sometimes acts as a buffer between them, struggling herself with the villain to protect the hero from drink or debt.<sup>117</sup> In addition, Grimsted notes that many heroines of 1800-1850 patriotic plays in temporarily disguising themselves as men, act like them--independent and aggressive.<sup>118</sup> Rahill mentions a group of late nineteenth century tomboy-waifs--feisty young girls who challenge the villain<sup>119</sup> and the 1900 to 1910 "ten-twenty-thirty" working girl soubrettes--tough but true women who assist the heroine.<sup>120</sup> In fact, Bank finds that after the Civil War, heroines of melodrama shift from the passive to the active mode: they help resolve the plot action through their courage and inventiveness more times than the hero does and, in defining the plays' moral climate, make, act on, and defend their moral choices, often at considerable personal risk.<sup>121</sup> Thus their purity leads to action, not passivity.

Some heroines of popular literature and drama are not passive because they have some economic power; they are not totally dependent on men--relatives, guardians, or husbands--for financial support. In late nineteenth and early twentieth century melodrama, women work if they have no men to support them. They may run saloons like the Girl in The Girl of the Golden West<sup>122</sup> or even be settlement house workers like the heroine of Clyde Fitch's The Moth and the Flame, a more

"serious" play but one that comes from the melodramatic tradition.<sup>123</sup> They are very rarely, however, involved in well-paying and/or long-term careers, and they never see work as ultimately more fulfilling than marriage to the right man.<sup>124</sup> Neither do the working girl heroines--the models, "typewriters," factory or shop girls--of the 1900 to 1910 "ten-twenty-thirty" melodramas.<sup>125</sup> On the other hand, popular magazine fiction, from 1915 through the end of World War I presents an increasing number of working-women heroines who find success and fulfillment, but in glamorous, fantasy occupations such as actress or playwright.<sup>120</sup>

Heroines of other than popular literature and drama also grow more independent. Schaffer contrasts middle nineteenth century heroines like Hazel Kirke, who merely respond to men's actions, with late nineteenth and early twentieth century heroines like Margaret Fleming, who do not accept immoral male behavior.<sup>127</sup> Loudin contrasts late nineteenth century comedy heroines--babyish, tearful, manipulative when necessary but then retreating to the protection of a father or husband<sup>128</sup>--with the heroines evolving from 1900 through the 1920s--responsible, independent, refuting the authority of men, and creating order out of their chaos. According to Loudin, these women engage in caustic repartee with men. They are free from male authority because they hold jobs in the outside world. If they marry, they see marriage, when combined with career and/or educational pursuits, as a place for individual happiness and 'self-expression.'<sup>129</sup> However, Loudin finds that in plays of the 1930s, the comic heroines retreat from independence: their goals becomes once

again to belong to a man, and they ultimately give action in the "outside" world back to men.<sup>130</sup>

### Domesticity

The third major characteristic of the popular drama heroine is her domesticity; that is, her world is defined by the family and the maintenance of its values. Grimsted finds that "emotionally intensified" domestic problems constitute the plots of many 1800 to 1850 melodramas.<sup>131</sup> The "adventure" of the plot, with its dangerous potential of virtue lost, is encompassed by the security of the family sphere: childhood with parents on one side; marriage with husband and children on the other. In the melodrama, wild and passionate temptations and tribulations, though needed for dramatic conflict, have to be defeated by domestic morality.<sup>132</sup> Moreover, the heroine's goodness and purity are fundamental to her domesticity. She is constantly concerned about the well-being of her family—parents, siblings, children. And her virtue also makes her into a metaphorical home for her husband—a 'mansion of peace', as Grimsted points out, a giver of solace and happiness for man, whose greatest reward is a good home and a good wife.<sup>133</sup>

Before the trials of the plot begin, the heroine is often protected by a parent, usually her father. Her passivity is also fundamental to her domesticity. According to Disher, if she has no known family of origin or has lost her connection with it, this loss of parental protection is an invitation to dishonor and ruin.<sup>134</sup> Grimsted notes that the heroine who does not lose her family is often torn between love for one of its members and love for a potential husband. Since her self-sacrificing goodness combines



with her domesticity to make her especially vulnerable, she may find herself in serious conflict between duty and love, for example, marrying the villain to save her honored old father or at least putting off her marriage to the hero because the father's welfare demands such a sacrifice. The hero is forced to understand her choice: a daughter who cannot be dutiful to her father cannot later transfer that duty to a husband.<sup>135</sup>

Of course, not all women characters are so bound by parental ties. According to Grimsted, the "lively girl" soubrette will often go against her parent's wishes.<sup>136</sup> And Garrison finds late nineteenth century popular novel heroines resenting and denying parental authority without suffering any fatal consequences.<sup>137</sup>

Nevertheless, the popular heroine never totally loses touch with her domesticity because it is her reward as much as it is a man's. If she does not have a family at the beginning of the plot, she gains one at the end. The heroine's reward for enduring and/or overcoming threats and perils is marriage. In popular fiction in which the heroine is already married, the happy ending is a vastly improved marriage. Leslie Smith in an article in Nye's New Dimensions describes early nineteenth century sentimental novels in which the heroine is a long-suffering wife. The reward for enduring virtue is a reformed husband and a repaired marriage. Occasionally the bad husband dies, whereupon the wife is rewarded with marriage to a good man-- continued domesticity. By mid-nineteenth century, according to Smith, the novel heroines are primarily young girls for whom the happy ending is "true love rewarded and a marriage made." The villain is often a designing woman rival who is punished by spinsterhood or, what

is worse, a loveless marriage. Smith says that the moral is clear: only good women get good husbands.<sup>138</sup>

Eventually some women characters rebel, at least temporarily, against the idea of marriage as the perfect reward. The soubrette, who, as Grimsted says, has more common sense than the heroine, is somewhat skeptical of the joys of marriage.<sup>139</sup> Occasionally in late nineteenth century novels, Garrison finds a heroine who goes against the conventional mode, remaining unmarried and independent while the men go to rack and ruin without her. Other heroines see men as trophies, objects to be controlled by marriage. If these women have to marry, they do not passively submit to their husband's authority but find ways to improve their own.<sup>140</sup> Heroines of the serious drama, especially in the 1920s, increasingly come to believe that to continue in a marriage in which love has died or never existed, especially if it has been entered into primarily for economic reasons, is to be the equivalent of a prostitute.<sup>141</sup> In magazine fiction of the same period, however, Hoekstra finds that women learn to overcome their feelings of dislike for their husbands and not to expect perfection. In many of these stories, women concentrate less on being wives and more on being mothers. Motherhood is that "sacred institution" for which a woman's intuition and spirituality make her especially fitted. According to these stories she can find more satisfaction in loving her children than in loving a man.<sup>142</sup>

For most heroines, then, the most satisfactory aspect of domesticity is marriage and raising a family. The alternative of work outside the home is never gratifying. Working girl heroines work out of economic necessity and to get, or until they get, a husband. Even

in post-1915 magazine stories--where working girl heroines increase in number--business is still an interlude before marriage. Girls give up their jobs to men, such as returning soldiers, who need them. If they are in positions of authority over men, they are uncomfortable. If they marry their bosses, they put an end to their careers. They are warned not to forget their natural callings of homemaker and mother, and the stories make it clear that business isn't as satisfying as home, husband, and children.<sup>143</sup> According to Loudin, in social comedies of 1900 to 1918, lower-class working women secretly yearn to be "ladies" who don't work. Although they are able to support themselves, they envy those who don't have to.<sup>144</sup> Though most twenties social comedy heroines reject conventional domesticity, thirties heroines of such plays, who want to be "useful" in society, see that usefulness as marriage and childbearing.<sup>145</sup> Their goal is to go back to the family, to be, according to Loudin, "the image of maternity ensconced within the home,"<sup>146</sup> the home which they control. The thirties heroine has returned to the Victorian domestic focus of the heroine of earlier melodrama. According to Bank, Victorian heroines never let their jobs interfere with their futures as wives and mothers, and their own virtue is the model by which they bring up their children to be virtuous members of society.<sup>147</sup>

### Summary

Throughout the first four decades of this century the accepted behavior of women--whether Gibson Girls, new woman, flappers, or sophisticated ladies--continued to show the change from sheltered innocence and prim propriety, from separation of romantic love and sexuality to more self-assertive vitality and expectations for the

fusion of love and sex in relationships with men. Women displayed more sensuality ("the public expression of sexuality through behavior that could be termed erotic"<sup>148</sup>). But the still strong beliefs in women's inherent moral superiority and the continuance of turn-of-the-century ideals of moral rectitude prevented most women from behaving promiscuously. Though they were not adverse to physical expression of sexual feeling, most of them preserved their virginity for marriage or at least for the man they hoped or intended to marry.

Throughout this period, women continued their unpaid activities in behalf of community and national welfare, though the great surge of turn-of-the-century and Progressive reform diminished with the demise of the suffrage and temperance movements. However, women continued to work for peace, health, child welfare, and family relations—the province of their special sphere. Because American society believed that it could be improved by women's naturally nurturing and supportive efforts, such activities won social approval, provided, of course, that the reforming women did not neglect their own children or husbands. As for women doing paid work, their experience is summed up by Carl Degler:

On the eve of World War II, in short, the chief patterns of women's work were remarkably similar to what they had been at the end of the 19th century, forty years before. Over four-fifths of working women were single and only temporarily in the work force prior to marriage; less than 15 percent of all married women with husband present were employed . . . . Most working women were still engaged in a narrow range of occupations, most of which were traditional, such as unskilled factory, clerical, and sales work. Even the proportion that women constituted in the work force had not changed substantially since 1900.<sup>149</sup>

In spite of women's growing intolerance of unsatisfactory marriages and the rise of the divorce rate during the Progressive Era

and the twenties, in spite of women's increasing expressions of personal freedom, and in spite of their continued movement into public life and the economic sphere, marriage and motherhood remained the goal which American society felt to be the most appropriate for women and the goal which most women eventually sought. They believed that life's meaning and satisfaction came from the family, not from work outside the home. Increasingly seeing themselves as their husbands' companions rather than as their dependents, they found respectability and power in managing the family's physical welfare and acting as its emotional center.

The image of the heroine in American popular literature and drama of 1900 to 1940 reflects the experience of most American women of this period. The heroine only occasionally possesses the pale purity of early nineteenth century heroines; only occasionally do passive virtues win her honor, love, and happiness. However, she remains chaste (reflecting the society's inability to deal with women's sexual freedom outside marriage) but not necessarily cold and aloof. The moral superiority which allowed women to be social activists in real life allowed a stage or literary heroine to be the spokeswoman for ethical and responsible behavior. Heroines generally continue to become less and less passive: instead of being frail flowers, they often take independent, assertive action in defense of the right. However, though their independence may lead them to flout male authority through most of the plot, at the end most of them marry--once again reflecting the experience of real women. The heroines marry good men with whom they can have satisfying relationships.<sup>150</sup> Goodness leads to domesticity.

NOTES: CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup>Russel B. Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America (New York: Dial, 1970), p. 4.

<sup>2</sup>Frederick Lewis Allen, The Big Change: America Transforms Itself, 1900-1950 (New York: Perennial-Harper & Row, 1969), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Frederick Lewis Allen, Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties (New York: Perennial-Harper & Row, 1964), pp. 73-74.

<sup>4</sup>Allen, Big Change, p. 10.

<sup>5</sup>Richard Lingeman, Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620-the Present (New York: Putnam, 1980), p. 268.

<sup>6</sup>Allen, Big Change, p. 10.

<sup>7</sup>This Fabulous Century, Vol. I (1900-1910) (New York: Time-Life, 1969), p. 166.

<sup>8</sup>Fabulous Century, I, p. 168.

<sup>9</sup>Lingeman, p. 269.

<sup>10</sup>Carl N. Degler, At Odds: Women and the Family in America from The Revolution to the Present (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1980), p. 274.

<sup>11</sup>Degler, p. 276.

<sup>12</sup>Degler, pp. 280-281.

The Social Purists were apparently successful: by the turn of the century both frequency of intercourse and the birth rate had declined. (Degler, p. 296.)

<sup>13</sup>This Fabulous Century, Vol. II (1910-1920) (New York: Time-Life, 1969), p. 11.

<sup>14</sup>Fabulous Century, II, p. 30.

<sup>15</sup>Fabulous Century, I, p. 162.

<sup>16</sup>Allen, Only Yesterday, p. 89.

<sup>17</sup>"Flapping Not Repented Of," The New York Times, 16 July 1922, in The Twenties: Fords, Flappers, and Fanatics, ed. George E. Mowry (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), p. 175.

<sup>18</sup>Lois W. Banner, Women in Modern America: A Brief History (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1974), pp. 165-166.

<sup>19</sup>Alan Jenkins, The Twenties (London: Peerage, 1974), p. 24.

<sup>20</sup>Allen, Only Yesterday, pp. 81-83.

<sup>21</sup>Allen, Only Yesterday, p. 76.

<sup>22</sup>Eleanor R. Wembridge, "Petting and the Campus," Survey, 1 July 1925, in The Twenties: Fords, Flappers, and Fanatics, ed. George E. Mowry (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 176.

<sup>23</sup>Banner, Women, p. 151.

<sup>24</sup>Carol Hymowitz and Michaela Weissman, A History of Women in America (New York: Bantam, 1978), p. 293.

<sup>25</sup>Alan Jenkins, The Thirties (New York: Stein and Day, 1976), p. 26.

<sup>26</sup>Frederick Lewis Allen, Since Yesterday: The 1930s in America, September 3, 1929-September 3, 1939 (New York: Perennial-Harper & Row, 1972), p. 112.

<sup>27</sup>From a biography of John O'Hara as quoted in Jenkins, Thirties, p. 214.

<sup>28</sup>Allen, Since Yesterday, p. 107.

<sup>29</sup>Theodore Caplow and others, Middletown Families: Fifty Years of Change and Continuity (New York: Bantam, 1983), pp. 166-167.

<sup>30</sup>Jenkins, Thirties, p. 214.

<sup>31</sup>Banner, Women, p. 195.

<sup>32</sup>Caplow, p. 167.

<sup>33</sup>Caplow, p. 165.

<sup>34</sup>Lingeman, p. 270.

<sup>35</sup>Sheila M. Rothman, Woman's Proper Place: A History of Changing Ideals and Practices, 1870 to the Present (New York: Basic Books, 1978), p. 21.

<sup>36</sup>Lingeman, p. 272.

- 37 Rothman, p. 64.
- 38 Lingeman, p. 273.
- 39 Rothman, p. 67.
- 40 Page Smith, As a City Upon a Hill: The Town in American History (New York: Knopf, 1966), p. 156.
- 41 Rothman, p. 68.
- 42 Lingeman, pp. 271-272.
- 43 Banner, Women, pp. 98-99.
- 44 Rothman, p. 97.
- 45 Rothman, pp. 120-121.
- 46 Rothman, pp. 128-130.
- 47 Banner, Women, pp. 132-133.
- 48 A League representative as quoted in Banner, Women, p. 134.
- 49 Banner, Women, p. 172.
- 50 Banner, Women, p. 174.
- 51 William H. Chafe, The American Woman: Her Changing Social, Economic, and Political Roles, 1920-1970 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), pp. 43-44.
- 52 Eleanor Roosevelt as quoted in Banner, Women, p. 175.
- 53 Caplow, p. 64.
- 54 Chafe, pp. 31-32.
- 55 Allen, Big Change, pp. 11.
- 56 Rothman, p. 47.
- 57 Allen, Big Change, pp. 11-12.
- 58 Allen, Big Change, p. 11.
- 59 Leslie Woodcock Tentler, Wage-Earning Women: Industrial Work and Family Life in the United States, 1900-1930 (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), pp. 116-117.
- 60 Tentler, pp. 46-47.
- 61 Rothman, p. 85.



- <sup>62</sup>Tentler, p. 160.
- <sup>63</sup>Fabulous Century, II, pp. 218 and 228-229.
- <sup>64</sup>Fabulous Century, II, p. 220.
- <sup>65</sup>Caplow, p. 91.
- <sup>66</sup>Hymowitz and Weissman, p. 308.
- <sup>67</sup>Banner, Women, p. 186.
- <sup>68</sup>Degler, p. 414, and Banner, p. 186.
- <sup>69</sup>Rothman, p. 222.
- <sup>70</sup>Rothman, p. 22.
- <sup>71</sup>Degler, p. 388.
- <sup>72</sup>Tentler, pp. 176-179.
- <sup>73</sup>Lingeman, p. 277.
- <sup>74</sup>Lingeman, p. 315.
- <sup>75</sup>Lingeman, p. 280.
- <sup>76</sup>Page Smith, p. 172.
- <sup>77</sup>Except where indicated, information about marriage and motherhood in the early twentieth century is taken from Carl Degler's At Odds: Women and the Family in America and Lois Banner's Women in Modern America.
- <sup>78</sup>A farmer as quoted in Degler, p. 409.
- <sup>79</sup>Emma Goldman and Charlotte Perkins Gilman as quoted in Banner, p. 119.
- <sup>80</sup>"Flapping," pp. 175-176.
- <sup>81</sup>Nevertheless, even in the twenties in some small towns women hid flattened store cans in the garbage so that the neighbors wouldn't think they were lazy. (Lingeman, p. 271.)
- <sup>82</sup>Rothman, pp. 184-185.
- <sup>83</sup>Caplow, pp. 114-115.
- <sup>84</sup>Caplow, p. 114.
- <sup>85</sup>Caplow, pp. 115-117.

- <sup>86</sup>Banner, Women, p. 196.
- <sup>87</sup>Banner, Women, p. 201.
- <sup>88</sup>Banner, Women, p. 192.
- <sup>89</sup>As quoted in Caplow, p. 118.
- <sup>90</sup>Allen, Since Yesterday, p. 109.
- <sup>91</sup>Banner, Women, p. 191.
- <sup>92</sup>David Grimsted, Melodrama Unveiled: American Theatre and Culture, 1800-1850 (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 176, 179-181.
- <sup>93</sup>Maurice W. Disher, Melodrama: Plots That Thrilled (New York: Macmillan, 1954), p. 113.
- <sup>94</sup>Grimsted, p. 176.
- <sup>95</sup>Kay J. Mussell, "Gothic Novels," in Handbook of American Popular Culture, Vol. I, ed. M. Thomas Inge (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1978), p. 151.
- <sup>96</sup>Maurice W. Disher, Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and its Origin (London: Frederick Muller, 1949), p. 177.
- <sup>97</sup>Ellen Hoekstra, "The Pedestal Myth Reinforced: Women's Magazine Fiction, 1900-1920," in New Dimensions in Popular Culture, ed. Russel B. Nye (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1972), pp. 54-55.
- <sup>98</sup>Hoekstra, p. 48.
- <sup>99</sup>Frank Rahill, The World of Melodrama (University Park, Pa.: Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1967), p. 201.
- <sup>100</sup>Dee Garrison, "Immoral Fiction in the Late Victorian Library," American Quarterly, 28, no. I (Spring 1976), 88.
- <sup>101</sup>Rosemarie K. Bank, "The Second Face of the Idol: Women in Melodrama," in Women in American Theatre: Careers, Images, Movements, eds. Helen Krich Chinoy and Linda Walsh Jenkins (New York: Crown, 1981), p. 242.
- <sup>102</sup>Pauline W. Schaffer, "The Position of Women in Society as Reflected in Serious American Drama from 1890 to 1928," Diss. Stanford 1965, p. 130.
- <sup>103</sup>Schaffer, p. 239.

<sup>104</sup>Joanne Marie Loudin, "The Changing Role of the Comic Heroine in American Drama from 1900 to 1940," Diss. Univ. of Washington 1974, p. 181.

<sup>105</sup>Grimsted, pp. 181-183.

<sup>106</sup>Bank, "Second Face," pp. 240-242.

<sup>107</sup>Rosemarie K. Bank, "Heroines in Frontier Melodrama," unpublished paper delivered at the Ohio-Indiana American Studies Association Semi-Annual Conference, 17 April 1981, Bloomington, Ind., pp. 2-3, 6-7.

<sup>108</sup>Hoekstra, p. 46.

<sup>109</sup>Grimsted, p. 228.

<sup>110</sup>Katherine Fishburn, lecture, "Women in Popular Culture," Women's Studies Seminar Series, Michigan State Univ., East Lansing, Mich., 27 Jan. 1982.

<sup>111</sup>Loudin, p. 45.

<sup>112</sup>Judith Louise Stephens, "The Central Female Characters in the Pulitzer Prize Plays, 1918 to 1949," Diss. Kent State 1977, p. 9.

<sup>113</sup>William Paul Steele, The Character of Melodrama (Orono, Maine: Univ. of Maine Press, 1968), p. 5.

<sup>114</sup>Kathryn Weibel, Mirror, Mirror: Images of Women Reflected in Popular Culture (Garden City, N.J.: Anchor, 1977), p. ix.

<sup>115</sup>Grimsted, pp. 173-174.

<sup>116</sup>Steele, p. 5.

<sup>117</sup>Grimsted, p. 180.

<sup>118</sup>Grimsted, p. 174.

<sup>119</sup>Rahill, p. 237.

<sup>120</sup>Rahill, pp. 277-278.

<sup>121</sup>Bank, "Second Face," pp. 239-240.

<sup>122</sup>Bank, "Second Face," p. 239.

<sup>123</sup>Schaffer, p. 114.

<sup>124</sup>Bank, "Second Face," p. 239.

<sup>125</sup>Rahill, p. 277.

- 126 Hoekstra, pp. 52-53.
- 127 Schaffer, pp. 58, 66, and 91.
- 128 Loudin, pp. 45 and 71.
- 129 Loudin, pp. 81-82 and 198.
- 130 Loudin, p. 200.
- 131 Grimsted, p. 10.
- 132 Grimsted, p. 220.
- 133 Grimsted, p. 173.
- 134 Disher, Blood and Thunder, p. 83.
- 135 Grimsted, pp. 181-182.
- 136 Grimsted, pp. 184-185.
- 137 Garrison, p. 88.
- 138 Leslie Smith, "Through Rose-Colored Glasses: Some American Victorian Sentimental Novels," In New Dimensions in Popular Culture, ed. Russel B. Nye (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1972), pp. 93, 95, and 101.
- 139 Grimsted, p. 185.
- 140 Garrison, pp. 74 and 77-79.
- 141 Schaffer, p. 189.
- 142 Hoekstra, pp. 48-50.
- 143 Hoekstra, pp. 52-53.
- 144 Loudin, p. 100.
- 145 Loudin, p. 180.
- 146 Loudin, pp. 9-10.
- 147 Bank, "Heroines," p. 3.
- 148 Lois W. Banner, American Beauty (New York: Knopf, 1983), p. 15.
- 149 Degler, pp. 416-417.

<sup>150</sup>This image of the heroine still exists in some modern drama representations of early twentieth century women. For example, Alma Winemiller of Tennessee William's Summer and Smoke is the cool virgin who speaks out about John Buchanan's licentious behavior, especially with the vamp Rosa, and who eventually converts him. However, because Alma's acceptance of her own sexuality comes too late, it is Nelly, the "new woman" combining the best of body and soul, who wins the reformed hero. If this play had been written during the period it portrays, Alma and John would have been about to be united in marriage at the curtain.

## CHAPTER II

### THE REPERTOIRE THEATRE AUDIENCE AND ITS EXPECTATIONS

In addition to reviewing the actuality and image of American women during the period when repertoire theatre was most active, understanding the treatment of heroines in repertoire plays also involves reviewing audience expectations for this form of popular drama the fulfillment of these expectations.

#### The Popular Audience

According to Russel Nye, to be commercially successful any form of popular art must reflect the attitudes and confirm the experience of its audience:

The popular artist corroborates . . . values and attitudes already familiar to his audience; his aim is less to provide a new experience than to validate an older one . . .

. . . . .  
The popular audience expects entertainment, instruction, or both . . . . [In providing this entertainment and/or instruction] the popular artist cannot disturb or offend any significant part of his public . . . . [because popular art] has to pay its way by giving the public what it wants . . . .

The audience for popular drama, for example, wants its familiar attitudes and concerns--whatever it believes to be valuable and necessary for the social system to survive--reflected in the world of the play. In this desire it is not much different from the audience for any drama; one reason we enjoy plays is "to see our wisdom confirmed by events."<sup>2</sup>

Especially when a community experiences change and possible decay does the need for reassurance about traditional wisdom and values arise. These values support the "world" or setting within which the action of the play occurs. The world of a play is as much beliefs and concepts as it is time and place; it is a place where certain kinds of situations can, should, will take place. "The nature of a play's world determines what can happen within the play, limits the possible situations, the range or depth of the action."<sup>3</sup> The reassuring "moral fantasy" world of popular drama, a place where events work out the way the audience wishes, is discussed by both John Cawelti in Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories in Art and Popular Culture and by J.S.R. Goodblad in A Sociology of Popular Drama. The reassurance offered by the moral fantasy world does not mean dull uneventfulness. Although this ideal world lacks "the disorder, the ambiguity, the uncertainty, and the limitations of the world of our experience,"<sup>4</sup> the plays must be exciting and entertaining to take their audience members temporarily away from their routine lives. But, according to Goodblad, the necessary "entertainment" factor does not mean pure escape. The audiences, because they witness plays which reaffirm and pass on already existing values, are "not escaping from their social obligations but escaping into an understanding of society."<sup>5</sup>

According to Goodblad, exciting, entertaining plots do require conflict, often incited by those who do not comply with community standards. But no matter how superficial the conflicts may seem to a sophisticated observer or on how much of a fantasy level they are dramatized, they still are likely to be those experienced in real life

by members of the community. And even though, through the actions of the villains, the audience may temporarily cross the boundary between permissible and forbidden behavior, it nevertheless favors plays in which the resolution of the conflict clearly emphasizes "social duty and social integration."<sup>6</sup> Forbidden actions are ultimately censured, problems are solved, and "discord turned to harmony"<sup>7</sup>—a reassuring process to the audience as it participates in the idealized "moral fantasy" world of the play.

The popular audience's need for reassurance is strong. Therefore, popular dramas do not preach social change because change is not reassuring. But they do accommodate change. According to Cawelti, they are "concerned not only with the affirmations of traditional conceptions of morality but with integrating and harmonizing what might be called the conventional wisdom with new currents of value and attitude."<sup>8</sup> The moral lesson of the popular drama changes as the moral code, the community consensus of opinion about permissible behavior, changes. The existing formulas with their conventional patterns "evolve in response to new audience response"<sup>9</sup> because they can assimilate new audience interests and values and thus "ease the transition between old and new ways of expressing things."<sup>10</sup>

Among other examples of this evolution of values in popular literature and drama, Cawelti describes the changing relationship of women characters to traditional Christian beliefs. In early nineteenth century melodrama, the moral fantasy world combined the idea of Divine Providence with the social values of feminine purity, masculine dominance, love, social respectability, and domesticity. The heroine submitted to God's will as a help in enduring her



suffering at the hands of the villain and, as a result, made a respectable marriage. By the middle of the nineteenth century, in social melodramas, a type which became more popular as audiences became more educated, heroines were menaced less by sexual bounders and more by corrupt social institutions. This change was an attempt to reconcile the increasing conflict between traditional Christian resignation in the face of trouble and the secular values of a rapidly changing society which sought solutions to social ills through action. According to Cawelti, by the end of the nineteenth century continuing changes in attitudes towards meekness and forgiveness led to heroines who expressed their faith and purity by vigorously defending both against "aggressive and agnostic males."<sup>11</sup> In the early twentieth century, the era of Progressive reform with its new concepts of femininity and relationships between men and women, the popular melodramatic novels and plays displayed more sympathy for divorced women and prostitutes and presented bold or even wild heroines whose purity and morality were balanced by their vigor and courage in pursuing their goals.<sup>12</sup> A truly Progressive Christian heroine based her life on active love and service and could feel "a passionate and deep attachment to a morally revitalized and loving man."<sup>13</sup> The conventional formula patterns of traditional concepts of morality--romantic love and monogamous family-oriented male and female relationships--were thus integrated with the new currents of value and attitude toward women's social roles.

#### The Repertoire Audience

One popular theatre form which reassured its audiences with plays which dramatized both the triumph of traditional values and the

integration of new ones was the repertoire show. In the early decades of this century repertoire was very popular with its small town/rural audience.<sup>14</sup> This audience was unsophisticated, conservative, and multi-generational. By the 1950s and 1960s, when only a few repertoire shows remained, audiences were less isolated and homogenous than they had been in preceding decades. Neil Schaffner, the Iowa tent-repertoire actor-manager, maintained that his audiences of this period were a cross section of the community, including people who were educated, "professional," and who also attended theatre in New York and Chicago.<sup>15</sup> But generally, repertoire audiences were less sophisticated and more conservative than urban audiences; and, according to Harold Rosier, a Michigan repertoire actor-manager, they liked the same type of entertainment as did an earlier generation.<sup>16</sup>

Repertoire audiences came to the theatre to be entertained, to laugh and have a good time at plays that were "wholesome." They did not demand great dramatic literature, pungent social comment, or psychological probing<sup>17</sup> although they approved of a lesson about righteous living integrated with or appended to the entertainment. They also expected plays that several generations could enjoy. The continuity of family experience--attendance by several generations and over several generations--was and still is a strong factor in repertoire audience composition. In her 1978 dissertation on the Schaffner tent-repertoire company, Martha Langford emphasizes the inclusion of several generations of a family in the audience and says that younger people's loyalty to repertoire shows was often based on a childhood experience of attending. Langford cites her own family experience as an example. Her grandmother, a strong, individualistic

woman suspicious of change, who in the 1925-1960 period was forty-one to seventy-seven years old, attended tent repertoire because it presented wholesome entertainment for all the family. Her mother, also strong and individualistic but less conservative, who in the 1925-1960 period was sixteen to fifty-one years old, at first attended for the same reasons but later, during the Depression and World War II, went because the plays were inexpensive and convenient, and eventually because "it was a pleasant habit of long standing." Landford herself, strong but both less individualistic and less conservative, born in 1930 and thirty years old in 1960, attended at first because she was taken by her family to the wholesome entertainment, later as a gesture of community support, and finally because the show was connected with her memories of a simpler time.<sup>18</sup>

People still attend the two remaining repertoire shows, the Schaffner Players (or the Jimmy Davis Show) in Iowa<sup>19</sup> and the Rosier Players, now under the management of Jackson Community College, in Michigan. They do not attend just because cleanliness is a virtue. In spite of "what-is-the-world-coming-to" complaints about the moral aspects of movie and television entertainment, people who look for "wholesomeness" can find it in these media by selective viewing. They come not only because they are looking for wholesome entertainment but because they are curious, are interested in theatre history, because they are indulging in a pleasant habit, and because going is for them as it was for Martha Langford, a tradition--often stemming from childhood. Waunetta Rosier Oleferchik, Harold Rosier's wife and partner, tells of older people coming down to help put up the Rosier Players' tent and bringing their grandchildren with them to show how

their grandfathers used to help around the lot when the show came to town.<sup>20</sup> They come in a spirit of family/community cohesiveness. "Family entertainment" means not just that a show is "clean" enough for women and children to watch, but that it can be attended by a family group of several generations and thus help reaffirm the continuity of family and community experience.

According to Clifford Ashby, audiences for the Davis Show "are responsive and appreciative--even if some old-timers tend to shake their heads over this burlesquing [Davis' company of college students do "cut-down, re-written versions of tent show classics, played in broad, slapstick style"] of the good old days."<sup>21</sup> In Michigan small towns, according to one college student who has played piano for the Rosier Players for several seasons, the old-timers apparently find nothing to shake their heads about when the Rosiers come to perform. The company is welcomed, by audiences who return each year, "as a part of their family who has come back to visit. People over sixty remember the old shows and tell us we do it just like the old days."<sup>22</sup>

#### The Nature of Repertoire Plays

Some of the old shows, the plays of the good old days and the simpler times, are described by Harlow Hoyt in Town Hall Tonight. In this chatty history of his family's ownership and management of the opera house in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, at the turn of the century, Hoyt points out that small town mores changed so slowly that several generations could hold much the same beliefs and values. Beaver Dam audiences wanted "wholesome" plays that developed an exciting story for relaxation and escape but that wouldn't offend anybody's religious beliefs. Although in the early 1900s managers began to bring in

Broadway plays leased to stock companies and although plays were often advertised as educational and morally uplifting,

Problem plays were few and far between, at least in our territory; . . . audiences demanded something of the strong, simple school. The hero must win against all changes. The villain must get his bumps and the heroine must protect her virtue against all comers, though equipped with no more spirit than a mouse with a cold.<sup>23</sup>

And the paired men and women characters were always "set up for marriage at the end of the show."<sup>24</sup> Actually, many repertoire heroines had considerably more spirit than Hoyt gives them credit for. But the characters and their experiences still reaffirmed the audience's values.

Even during the twenties and thirties, times most of us think of as more sophisticated if not totally wild and jazzy, a simple entertaining wholesomeness was the characteristic most publicly approved by repertoire audiences. According to William Slout, whose family ran a tent-repertoire company in Michigan during these decades, the play selection "carried over from the opera house repertoire" of the late 1800s and early 1900s and also included "new or revised pieces reflecting contemporary notions."<sup>25</sup> In the twenties many repertoire companies performed Broadway comedies and mysteries. However, the high cost of royalties sent managers to sources other than Broadway. Some plays were written or adapted by repertoire people;<sup>26</sup> and many were purchased cheaply from brokers such as Alex Byers, whose Chicago Manuscript Play Company employed hacks to turn out scripts, many of which were adaptations of popular novels or pirated, slightly modified versions of Broadway plays tailored to repertoire theatre audiences. Managers also traded scripts with each other, freely altering them to fit their companies and their

audiences, adding local references for laughs and audience rapport and also changing titles to avoid paying royalties or to help draw crowds.

As "family entertainment," a welcomed contrast to the perceived immorality of the movies<sup>27</sup> or most of Broadway, repertoire shows flaunted their virtue. Advertising heralds for the Rosier Players in 1938 depicted the company as "Presenting the Latest and Best in Wholesome Dramatic Entertainment" and in 1939 stated "It has always been our policy to run a CLEAN FIRST CLASS show, fit for everyone to see, so that when we leave your town, we leave a host of friends." Mrs. Oleferchik said that such a policy was only common sense: "A repertoire show playing a small town always thought of their audience first. You had to or they wouldn't come to see the show. And you couldn't offend them in any way."<sup>28</sup>

Though repertoire shows were reputed to be moral, some people still had fears about them, mostly unfounded as many anecdotes show. Michigan repertoire actor Bert Arnold's mother threatened to walk out of a performance if she heard one thing that she felt was wrong. She stayed, of course.<sup>29</sup> Arnold said that at a "Women Only" matinee where the Henderson Stock Company, a Michigan repertoire troupe, played What Every Woman Wants, a minister came to see if there was anything risque in the script. He watched the performance while standing on a ledge "way up in the wings" and afterward was reassured enough to come to the cast party and discuss the play. There wasn't anything in that play compared to today, said Bert. Why, he'd been ashamed to work in some of Vern Slout's shows at the Ledges Playhouse (in Grand Ledge, Michigan) because of the language.<sup>30</sup> Repertoire companies had to be very circumspect; "If they said 'Damn' or 'Hell'

that was as far as they dared to go. And then that would be in extreme situations."<sup>31</sup>

Some play titles like Getting Gertie's Garter or Up in Mabel's Room suggest that the humor might have been off-color and the moral code somewhat liberal, but these suggestions were gimmicks to attract crowds:

The situations may be fraught with such possibilities ["objectionable dialogue and situations"], and possibly some of the jokes could be taken the wrong way, but the plays remain morally "clean" . . . the potential for obscenity is there, but it is never allowed to reach the surface.<sup>32</sup>

One wonders what division or compartmentalization of values occurred in an audience which demanded a "clean" show and yet which could be lured by titillating titles. The "potential for obscenity" mentioned by Clark can be seen in part of a Toby monologue presented by Harold Rosier to a Michigan State University theatre class in 1974. Toby gets a kick out of watching girls swimming nude in a river. One girl, angered, holds a wash tub in front of her as she comes out of the water to confront him. Toby says she's going to be even madder when she discovers that there's no bottom in the tub.<sup>33</sup> This is certainly a situation which depends partly on sexual innuendo for its humor, but since the language Rosier uses is not "blue," apparently the scene is acceptable to a "family" audience.

To further bolster their claim to be moral and educational, repertoire companies would often include in their weekly bill plays which promulgated community standards for righteous living even though they sometimes had provocative titles. The Rosiers, for example, did at least one "moral show" a week: The Guttersnipe, Little Miss Light Fingers, Why Wives Go Wrong, and even some Broadway plays-- The

Painted Lady, Paid in Full, and Bought and Paid For,<sup>34</sup> described by a New York reviewer as having a "vulgar and brutal scene."<sup>35</sup> Apparently repertoire audiences, though they wanted to laugh and enjoy themselves, didn't mind occasionally watching a more serious play which dramatized a lesson confirming their moral stance and social values. Nor were they adverse to receiving this lesson from plays imported from the New York stage.

Repertoire plays were "clean" not only because they contained no morally objectionable dialogue or situations or because they preached the ways of the righteous but also because characters and situations were cleanly defined or unambivalent. Many scholars would agree that

Rural drama lovers adamantly refused to accept the tendency of Broadway playwrights to endow villains with some heroic qualities designed to win the sympathy of the audience. Nor did they endorse heroes and heroines who had any vices . . . .<sup>36</sup>

However, even a cursory reading of the scripts turns up villains who are not totally bad and who do have some claim on positive audiences responses, especially in the last act. Furthermore, the heroines, as their characters change to accommodate the changing image of women in American society, are not always "pure as the driven snow" in the sense that some stereotyped early nineteenth century heroines appear to have been. Nevertheless, William Slout's statement that the repertoire audience, still tied to nineteenth century cultural and social attitudes, wanted "wrong disposed of in confirmance with Christian practice . . . . Filial devotion . . . stressed . . . . deviates from right . . . allowed back into the fold,"<sup>37</sup> can be taken as generally true. Repertoire audiences wanted their plays to express the conventional wisdom, whatever that wisdom might be for the era in which the plays were performed.



The plays, though they had no literary value, contained characters and situations which related to the audience's experience and with which they could identify. According to most scholars, these would be small town situations and characters; plays that dealt with urban characters and problems lacked appeal. In fact, writers about this theatre all emphasize that the dominant theme was the contrast between rural and urban points of view, for example, the virtue of small town life as opposed to the wickedness of city experience. This was a popular theme, they say, because in the transition from an agricultural to an industrial society, many rural young people had left their tightly knit family groups for the greater freedom of thought and action of life in the city. Those who remained in the small towns needed reassurance that their choice had been a wise one. The following typical statement expressed scholars' views of the rural-urban clash found in some repertoire plays:

Most plays presented the conflict between rural and city life, but each took great care that in the final analysis the rural viewpoint emerged as superior. This treatment aided immeasurably to the satisfaction of the audience. This approach helped the rural audience to justify their existence by reinforcing the attitude that their way of life was the equal of urban life and that conservatism was as essential to human thought as modernism or progressivism.<sup>38</sup>

However, even a cursory reading in the range of scripts produced over several decades reveals that many repertoire plays did not deal primarily with literal city-country conflict nor were all the plays about country or small town life.

In discussing repertoire scripts with Waunetta Rosier Oleferchik, I asked about some plays in the Michigan State University collection which seemed quite different from the types described by most scholars

of repertoire theatre. Bought and Paid For is an example, written with relative sophistication of both characters and themes. Because Bought and Paid For is concerned with urban people, including a working woman, and speaks out very clearly on the sexual rights of women in marriage and women's need to preserve their individual identity in the face of husbands' opposition to their values, the play did not seem to be a good choice for morally conservative audiences which were supposed to prefer small town characters pitted against city villains. Nevertheless, the Rosiers played Bought and Paid For in the thirties and forties as a "dress bill"<sup>39</sup> with very good audience reception. According to Mrs. Oleferchik, Michigan repertoire audiences liked such plays as a change from typical comedies and Toby shows. She felt that the values portrayed in this play make it a very modern show which could be revived now.

Mrs. Oleferchik said that repertoire audiences could accept plays like Bought and Paid For in which the heroines were urban "pink-collar" workers because the characters' experience reflected the real life of women regardless of where they lived. True, women in small town/rural areas rarely worked outside the home unless financial necessity forced them into the labor market. But they knew from their own experience or the experience of other women in the community of the hardships involved in having to work at low-paying jobs. In Leslie, Michigan, Mrs. Oleferchik's home town, women who were widowed or who had alcoholic husbands clerked in the drugstore, groceries, or dime stores or worked in the bean or pickle factories. (Many small towns like Leslie had small factories staffed almost entirely by women.) These women would have been glad to see the end of the

necessity to work at dull, often physically exhausting and stagnating jobs. Thus the repertoire plays' conventional happy ending--marriage and money for the heroine--reflected these women's fantasies: no repertoire heroine was ever rewarded with a "poor but happy" marriage. To women in these small towns, personal happiness in a good marriage meant a loving husband but also social status and financial security: the reality of love is that "it's nice if there's a little money along with it."<sup>40</sup>

### Summary

Although managers like Neil Schaffner maintained that people came to repertoire shows for entertainment, not to learn how to solve society's problems,<sup>41</sup> small town audiences were learning how to understand their particular society's problems and conventions as dramatized in these popular plays. And the resolution always supported the unambivalently "good" side of the conflict, the side that the audience had always known in their hearts was right. Thus the repertoire plays' dramatic decorum--"what can properly be expected in this sort of play"<sup>42</sup>--was also the social decorum of conformity to community conventions based on the reality of community life. This decorum was not only the avoidance of what was unseemly or offensive to the community but also the promulgation of community values.

All drama creates a sense of communal experience.<sup>43</sup> Repertoire drama was able to be especially proficient at evoking this sense of community because it was performed before a relatively unchanging multi-generational audience and because it pictured and espoused traditional community values, while at the same time accommodating the slow changes of attitude and experience.

NOTES: CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup>Russel B. Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America (New York: Dial, 1970), pp. 4-5.

<sup>2</sup>J.L. Styan, The Elements of Drama (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1960), p. 49.

<sup>3</sup>S.W. Dawson, Drama and the Dramatic (London: Methuen, 1970), p. 24.

<sup>4</sup>John G. Cawelti, Adventure, Mystery, and Romance: Formula Stories as Art and Popular Culture (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 13.

<sup>5</sup>J.S.R. Goodblad, A Sociology of Popular Drama (Totowa, N.J.: Rowan & Littlefield, 1972), p. 178.

<sup>6</sup>Goodblad, p. 40.

<sup>7</sup>Goodblad, p. 177.

<sup>8</sup>Cawelti, p. 267.

<sup>9</sup>Cawelti, p. 34.

<sup>10</sup>Cawelti, p. 36.

<sup>11</sup>Cawelti, p. 275.

<sup>12</sup>Among the novels Cawelti lists as typical examples, Augusta Jane Evans' St. Elmo, E.P. Rowe's Barriers Burned Away, and Harold Bell Wright's Shepard of the Hills were adapted for the stage and performed by repertoire companies.

<sup>13</sup>Cawelti, p. 280.

<sup>14</sup>The tent show variety of the twenties was especially popular. According to Don Carle Gillette, in "The Vast Tent Show Industry," (The New York Times, 16 Oct. 1927), approximately 400 tent-repertoire companies were playing to an audience of 78,800,000 a year. Gillette's figures may be exaggerated; Equity figures (which do not include the many non-Equity companies) show an average audience of 9,688,000 per year for the four years of 1923 to 1927. Nevertheless, at its peak, tent-repertoire theatre clearly attracted large audiences. (Robert D. Klassen, "The Tent-Repertoire Theatre: A Rural

American Institution," Diss. Michigan State 1969, pp. 28-31.)

<sup>15</sup>Neil E. Schaffner and Vance Johnson, The Fabulous Toby and Me (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 184.

<sup>16</sup>Klassen, p. 84.

<sup>17</sup>They were not like the contemporary movie and theatre audiences described by Philip C. Lewis, a film and television writer who, as a young actor, had played in tents and opera houses:

They sit in the placid audiences pondering the significance of pauses, waiting for the meaning which will not be divulged, postpone reactions until post-mortem determination of what they should have seen, heard, and thought, and torpidly watch the conflict of gray versus gray, the sonof-a-bitch villain against the bastard hero for control of the shitty business with the hero winning so he can learn that he has lost.

(Trouping: How the Show Came to Town [New York: Harper & Row, 1973], p. 163.)

<sup>18</sup>Martha F. Langford, "The Tent Repertoire Theatre of Neil and Caroline Schaffner: A Case Study in Tent Repertoire Theatre," Diss. Univ. of Colorado 1978, pp. 105-106.

<sup>19</sup>Clifford Ashby, "Folk Theatre in a Tent," Natural History, April 1983, p. 20.

<sup>20</sup>Waunetta Rosier Oleferchik interviewed by Christine Birdwell and Marsha MacDowell, Jackson, Mich., 6 Nov. 1981.

<sup>21</sup>Ashby, p. 20.

<sup>22</sup>Barb Grondin, "MSU Students Uphold 85-Year Tradition with Tent Show," The State News (East Lansing, Mich.), 3 May 1983, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup>Harlowe R. Hoyt, Town Hall Tonight (New York: Bramhall, 1955), p. 74.

<sup>24</sup>Hoyt, p. 90.

<sup>25</sup>William L. Slout, Theatre in a Tent: The Development of a Provincial Entertainment (Bowling Green, Ohio: Bowling Green State Univ. Popular Press, 1972), p. 71.

<sup>26</sup>Repertoire people still adapt scripts. Mrs. Oleferchik said that she took several plays, "ripped them all apart and came up with the story" of The Sticky-Fingered Kid, featuring her granddaughter as the orphan and herself as the orphanage matron. (Oleferchik, 6 Nov. 1981.)

<sup>27</sup>Even in college town East Lansing, Michigan, in 1926-27 the

proposed leasing of part of the new Abbot building for a movie theatre led a local women's group, the Child Study Club, to petition the city council against the lease because "a theatre in East Lansing would disrupt life as it was that that time" with bad effects "on children and property values," and serve "as a wedge for other undesirable ventures." A special community ballot took place, but the State Theatre opened in November 1927 with The Fair Coed. (Denise Shaheen, Chuck Spaniola, and Carolyn Smith Haun, "Business History," in Diamond Jubilee brochure, ed. Dawn Flynn, East Lansing, Mich., 1982, n. pag.)

<sup>28</sup>Oleferchik, 6 Nov. 1981.

<sup>29</sup>Harold Rosier interviewed by Robert MacDonald, Jackson, Mich., 19 Nov. 1973.

<sup>30</sup>Bert Arnold interviewed by Robert MacDonald, n. p., 21 Oct. 1974.

<sup>31</sup>Oleferchik, 6 Nov. 1981.

<sup>32</sup>Larry D. Clark, "Toby Shows: A Form of American Popular Theatre," Diss. Univ. of Illinois 1963, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup>Harold Rosier, taped performance in theatre class, Michigan State Univ., East Lansing, Mich., 12 Feb. 1974.

<sup>34</sup>Waunetta Rosier Oleferchik interviewed by Christine Birdwell and Marsha MacDowell, Jackson, Mich., 23 Nov. 1981.

<sup>35</sup>"Popular Values in Broadhurst Play," 17 Sept. 1911, in The New York Times Theatre Reviews: 1904-1911 (New York: The New York Times and Arno, 1975), n. pag.

<sup>36</sup>Klassen, p. 82.

<sup>37</sup>Slout, p. 79.

<sup>38</sup>Klassen, p. 144.

<sup>39</sup>This was a play which included a scene in which wealthy people would wear fancy evening clothes to a dinner or dance. The dress bill was always featured in the advertising because audiences in the small towns, where no one ever wore evening clothes, enjoyed seeing the fashions. (Oleferchik, 6 Nov. 1981.)

<sup>40</sup>Oleferchik, 6 and 23 Nov. 1981.

<sup>41</sup>Schaffner, p. 178.

<sup>42</sup>Dawson, pp. 32-33.

<sup>43</sup>Dawson, p. 84.

CHAPTER III  
PLAY ANALYSES

The "comedy-dramas" or melodramas selected for analysis were written during the years when repertoire theatre was most active:

Paid in Full (1907)

Aimee the Circus Girl (1909)

Bought and Paid For (1911)

The Girl from Out Yonder (1913)

Tildy Ann (1925)

The Hoodlum (1920s)

The Bitterness of Sweets (1930s)

The Governor's Lady (1936)

Each analysis includes a plot summary; a discussion of the play's presentation of the heroine's purity, passivity, and domesticity; and a discussion of the heroine's experience in relationship to the actual life of American women of the time. Background information such as the author, the date of first performance, and dates when the play was performed by the Rosiers is presented in notes at the end of the chapter.

Paid in Full (1907)<sup>1</sup>

## Plot Summary

As he helps his wife Emma clear off the table after dinner, Joe Brooks, upset by his low pay at a New York steamship line and the fact that the owner, Captain Bill Williams, has given raises to three other men but not to him, condemns the evils of capitalism, including the contempt in which his in-laws hold him for making such a small salary. He even suspects that Emma, tired of the drudgery of housework, wishes she had married Jimsy Smith, a diamond-in-the-rough family friend and former suitor, who has received one of the three raises. But Emma declares her love for Joe and her willingness to put up with hard times. Jimsy drops in for a visit as does Captain Williams and Emma's snobbish sister, Beth, who makes fun of the Brooks' poorly furnished apartment. Angered, Joe shouts at the Captain for grinding down his workers and thus forcing Emma "to wash and scrub and sweat in the heat." Jimsy, who stops the tirade and hustles the Captain and Beth out of the apartment, tells Joe that he could have been fired except for the fact that the Captain, a hard man, is very fond of Emma. Joe is further upset by Emma's refusal to go with friends to the theatre and dinner because she doesn't have the right clothes. When Jimsy offers to take them out, Joe says he's quite capable of taking Emma out himself.

Four months later, however, the Brookses are living in an attractive hotel apartment paid for, Joe says, with a large raise and back pay. Jimsy arrives to tell Joe that the Captain knows that he has paid for this new life by embezzling money from the steamship line. The Captain also arrives to confront Joe, but, seeing how well



Emma looks living in a more affluent style, says instead that he will see Joe in his office in the morning. After the Captain leaves, Joe admits the theft to Emma but blames both her "preaching" and her silent suffering (in addition to the fact that her father died without leaving them any money). Joe says that he began to steal the night she refused to go to the theatre because of her shabby wardrobe. Now he wants her to go to the Captain and use her charms to do whatever is necessary to persuade him not to prosecute. Over Emma's protests that no husband would ask a wife to "\_\_\_\_\_", Joe says that other women have done what he's asking her to do. He's gone the limit for her; now it's her turn to do the same for him. Though she thinks Joe mean and contemptible, Emma agrees to see the Captain so that Joe can't blame her if he goes to jail.

At the Captain's apartment, although Jimsy offers to pay back the money Joe stole, the Captain prefers to negotiate with Emma in spite of Jimsy's threat to come after him with a gun if Emma doesn't give Jimsy an open, honest smile the next time he sees her. Emma enters, the first lady but not the first woman to call on the Captain, and pleads with him for an "honorable" way to save Joe because she cannot place herself "on the market." The Captain, who has counted on her being a good woman and who would have been disappointed if she had acted differently, gives her an already prepared note cancelling Joe's "debt" and accepting his resignation. Further, he would like Emma for "a sort of a daughter." After Emma leaves, Jimsy, who has been lurking outside, enters to say that she smiled honestly at him.

Back at their apartment, Joe nervously awaits Emma's return. When she gives him the Captain's note but avoids his embraces and

questions, Joe becomes suspicious, accuses her of planning to return to the Captain, and badgers her with questions about what occurred on her visit. Emma finally tells Joe that she has done nothing wrong but that he is a low, rotten cad in his willingness to see her "degraded" as long as he escapes the consequences of his theft. Joe at first wants to give their relationship another chance, but, angered at Emma's reluctance, starts to beat her. At that point Jimsy rushes in, stops the beating, sends Emma off to her mother, and tells Joe, "You have no more rights. You relinquished them all under the terms of your deal with Emma, and you've been Paid in Full."

### The Heroine's Character

#### Purity

At the beginning of the play, Emma is presented as a loving wife, working hard at household tasks (although she came from a monied background) without a great deal of complaining, though she is ashamed to go to the theatre in her worn clothes. (According to Joe, she has also on occasion sighed and moped about their poverty, but she denies this.) She is supportive of her husband, admiring what she sees as "noble, self-sacrificing, and brilliant in his tirades against socialism and the cruelty of the rich." But she now is worried about the bitterness that has changed him. Emma has high ethical standards: she loathes a thief; she dislikes the hardness of Captain Williams, whom she believes to be a greedy capitalist who grabs whatever he can. However, her goodness attracts the "villain" Captain (a fact which she doesn't recognize but Joe does), but repulses Joe who berates her for being always so "damned saintly" and constantly "preaching" her moral beliefs. It is, in fact, her goodness that he blames for part of his

troubles: "You tried to make yourself a martyr; every moment of your life was a mute protest against our poverty." He couldn't go to her with his problem because she would only preach at him, and so he kept on stealing. Furthermore, now that he may go to jail, he charges that she is thinking only of her disgrace.

However, no matter what charges Joe makes (and anything he says about Emma is suspect since he is portrayed as weak and egocentric), Emma displays true virtue when he asks her to intercede with the Captain for him. Emma at first finds it hard to believe that Joe is actually suggesting that she go alone to the apartment of a man with the Captain's reputation, but Joe reveals his true rottenness: "You can handle him alright. And besides, you know how far you can let a man go. All women know that." Moreover, Emma will still appear virtuous because only she, the Captain, and Joe will know what she's done. And Joe "won't think less of" her. Thus Joe becomes the villain; only instead of destroying the heroine's chastity, he sends her to another man for the same purpose.

Emma is not a totally self-sacrificing heroine. She is disgusted by Joe and wonders (apparently not possessing the reliable instincts of the pure at heart) how she could ever have believed him to be noble and unselfish; she agrees to visit the Captain because she does not want Joe to blame her if he goes to jail. However, the statement that it will be her business alone how she bargains with the Captain sets up the possibility that she is angry enough with Joe to cuckold him.

But at the Captain's apartment Emma maintains the ideal of the "lady": she tells the Captain, the putative villain, that she has

never done such a thing before, that she intends no "romance," and that she is open to an honorable way to save Joe: "You know what I mean by honorable, you know what any good woman means when she says 'honorable'." When the Captain asks what she means to do if he is not honorable--"You came here for a purpose. You ain't no child. What if I am the beast and brute you say I am? What then?"--she speaks out for the right way to behave and thus not only defends herself but also shows herself superior to men: the husband who offers her for sale and the Captain who stands "ready to buy." The Captain, a villain capable of being restrained by a good woman, is pleased that she has lived up to his image of her:

I knew you were that kind of woman. If you hadn't done just what you did do, I'd have been the most disappointed man in the world . . . . I banked on your being good, and you are good, clean down to the middle of your heart. I know women--I've bought mine all over the world . . . . There ain't but two kinds: the good and the bad, and there's no half way.

Attracted by Emma's purity from the first time he met her, the Captain not only does not force his attentions on her but rewards her virtuous stance by saving Joe and asking her to be a daughter to him. He thus shows himself to be more than the hard, greedy man she thought him (and again shows her instincts to be fallible).

On Emma's return home, she continues her duel with villains and her demonstration of her superiority over men, first by avoiding Joe and his embraces and then by confronting his behavior and his suspicions (he has gone back on his promise not to blame her for anything she might have done). Emma tells Joe that she has done nothing wrong:

You are the only one who had degradation in mind and was willing that it should happen if it resulted in your

escaping the consequences of being a thief . . . . Had he [the Captain] demanded and I submitted<sup>2</sup> and brought back that paper and given myself to you again<sup>2</sup> you would have been content and happy.

Emma refuses to act the prostitute's role by giving herself sexually to a husband she rightly despises. Instead she leaves him.

#### Passivity

Through half of the play, Emma's life seems controlled by her husband. A tomboy before she married, now she stays at home, making only a "mute protest," if that, against their poverty, putting up with it as a wife's lot, not making any attempt to find a job (the possibility is never mentioned in the play). Nevertheless, she has the power of a good woman both recognized and faulted by Joe. Emma, he says, has caused him to become a thief. When she can't think of a way to help him and stands wringing her hands--a sure sign of helplessness--Joe says that she has sexual power over the Captain, that she could not only persuade him not to prosecute Joe but could get him to give them even more money.

Emma still seems controlled by Joe because, though she tells Joe how despicable he is, she nevertheless goes to the Captain, risking rape. Once at the Captain's apartment, however, she overcomes initial uncomfortableness (her tomboy background may have been mentioned in order to make her now-courageous behavior more credible) to stand up for her right not to be used by men:

I know what you want me to do . . . what my husband sent me here for. I know. You can be the brute and beast that you are; he can be the contemptible cur that he is. He can offer me for sale and you stand ready to buy. But I've got something to say about it, and I want you to know that if I wanted to place myself on the market as you say, I couldn't. You disgust me, and I'm not afraid of you or of him or of anyone.

Emma's brave stand resolves this plot action because in conquering the brute by confirming his good opinion of her she wins the letter squaring Joe. Furthermore, Emma returns home to confront Joe and declare that she is leaving him. This action also partly resolves the plot, but it is completed by Jimsy, who rescues her from a beating.

Emma is a heroine who defends herself against villains but who is also defended by men: the Captain, who is attracted to her goodness and in effect redeemed by it, refuses to take advantage of her; Jimsy, who loves her, threatens to shoot the Captain if she doesn't leave his apartment with the right kind of smile on her face and also stops Joe from beating her, thus allowing her to escape. Emma is a prize offered to the Captain by Joe, who later tries to reclaim her, and ultimately to be won by Jimsy, who, though the bastard offspring of a Colorado miner and a woman who "hiked" there, is still one of nature's gentlemen.

#### Domesticity

Though the women in her family of origin pressure her about her poverty, Emma has rejected their views to support her husband, her second family. Because her sister Beth is a snob and her mother has never understood her, she rejects their criticism of the way she lives: "bad luck, ups and downs are what a woman ought to expect when she marries . . . ." However, in sticking by Joe, she is not only confirming her choice but is also submitting to the authority of her dead father who wanted her to marry Joe. She loves Joe, of course, but also wanted to please her father, a good man whose memory she evokes when she asks the Captain not to prosecute Joe.

Having chosen Joe, Emma is loyal to him. She initially believes him to be a honest critic of the social system and worries about the changes that she sees in him. But though she is loyal, she is unjustly accused by Joe of being a poor solacer since her mute martyrdom has driven him to embezzelment.

Finally Emma rejects her husband's authority when he kills her love and respect by asking her to risk her chastity in visiting the Captain. On her return, she avoids his embraces with the implication that she will not become a married prostitute. She rejects her second family in order to stand by her principles. Helped by the hero Jimsy, she plans to return to her mother. However, she will presumably not have to stay long with the first family that is critical of her because eventually she will replace the bad old husband with a good new one,<sup>3</sup> Jimsy, who is also a favored employee of the Captain. The Captain, who has shown himself to be a honorable man, will replace her dead good father. Thus her new family will be one in which she is both honored and financially secure.

#### Actuality

Emma does not display any of the frivolously free behavior of the Progressive Era "new woman." She reflects instead her serious side. Though not involved in social reform, Emma supports Joe's belief in the victimization of labor by capital, and she dislikes capitalist Captain Williams, showing that she is in sympathy with the spirit of the times. Her refusal to give herself to Joe, whom she despises, because she would then be a "legal prostitute" is also in keeping with beliefs about marriage current in this period. Her leaving Joe shows that she, like many women of this era, is more concerned about the

relational aspects of marriage that she is about obeying marriage vows or rules. The potential divorce also shows that she can be counted among the "new women." However, her very possible remarriage to Jimsy (who not only loves her but is advancing in his job) shows that she, like most real women, would prefer to return to the married state.



Aimee the Circus Girl (1909)<sup>4</sup>

## Plot Summary

When a small town circus crowd, panicked by an escaped tiger, tramples Amy the bareback rider, Robert Gordon, a local minister, carries her to his parsonage across the street from the circus lot. Dan, the clown who is Amy's unofficial guardian, arranges for her to stay at the parsonage until her fractured ribs heal--to the shock and dismay of Deacon Butes, hypocritical pillar of the church, and Sarah, Robert's spinster housekeeper. Sarah, however, is soon won over by Amy's charm. As time passes, Amy falls in love with the peace of the small town, with the process of learning to read (especially the Bible) and to speak less roughly, and with Robert, who loves her also. However, Joshua Gordon, Robert's "magnate" father, prejudiced by his own short-lived marriage to a circus/vaudeville performer and wishing to marry Robert to his ward (a woman Robert says is too worldly to be a minister's wife), tries to get rid of Amy by blackmailing the Deacon into making her his mistress or marrying her. As Amy is turning down the Deacon's proposition, Dan returns with Robert. To prevent a fight, the Deacon reveals that Joshua Gordon is behind his actions. However, in order not to come between Robert and his calling, Amy returns to the circus, convincing Robert that she misses the glitter and excitement. After she leaves the parsonage with Dan, a series of confrontations reveal that she is really Joshua Gordon's long-lost child, the product of his marriage to the performer, a good woman whom he had deserted when his father threatened to disinherit him. Searching for Amy, the Deacon, Sarah, Robert, and Joshua arrive at the circus. The lovers are reunited when Joshua explains his relationship to Amy and begs her to marry Robert, who is his adopted son.

The Heroine's Character

## Purity

Amy is not a model of middle-class decorum; her speech is slangy and uneducated. But she is no immoral "tough." For example, the wine Sarah gives her to revive her after the accident is the first drink she has ever had. Nevertheless, Sarah wonders that Amy isn't "dead or damned" because she has had no "bringing up." And Amy, once introduced to Robert's household, sees herself as too wild to live there and feels a need to be more refined. She also wants an education, something more than "circus tricks and talk."

However, decorum aside, Amy's hard job in the rough world of the circus has not morally coarsened her; she is a virtuous young woman, "clean up to the middle of her heart," as Dan the clown says. The stodgy middle-class characters are suspicious of her virtue because of her life as a declasse performer: Sarah is at first upset about having a bareback rider under her roof, and Joshua Gordon sneers that "a woman of her calling" must always have a price. But when her chastity is tested by the Deacon, acting as a comic tool of Joshua, the real villain, Amy sees through his compliments and turns down his proposition:

Deacon: It's a man's privilege to make love to a pretty girl.

Amy: And it's a woman's privilege to draw the line--and I draw it at you.

At this point Amy is not deeply angry at the Deacon, but she does want him to know where she stands. However, when he continues to insult her by offering her "everything except marriage," she slaps him, boldly defending her chastity with more than repartee.

Amy understands people's true attitudes partly because of the survival wisdom gained from her circus experience and partly because she has the intuitive wisdom of the truly good person: "I can tell de real thing from de phony every time." For example, she recognizes that the Deacon is hypocritical about drinking and teases him about his habit. This knowledge of the right also leads her to speak out on more serious matters. She defends her dead mother against Joshua Gordon's slurs: even if her mother had been a sinner, Amy is still her child and will not deny her. She asks Robert to respect Joshua even though he has plotted against her: "Remember, you have always called him father." She turns down Joshua's offer of money: "You can't mend a broken heart with gold." She even defends religion, and in doing so shows her superiority to its male proponent. When an angry Robert is about to renounce his calling because of the community's moralistic stand against her, she reminds him to forgive his enemies as she does.

Amy is also selfless. Worried that the townspeople's criticism of Robert's relationship with her will interfere with the effectiveness of his ministry, she returns to the circus and refuses to allow Robert to follow her. Even when she is reunited with him in the last act, she is still willing to give him up rather than to jeopardize his future. And Amy is tolerant and forgiving, finally pardoning Joshua for his offenses against her.

#### Passivity

Amy is a version of the tomboy-waif and "rough soubrette" female characters of melodrama, not of the delicate flower type. Far from being the insecure and unaggressive sort of heroine pictured as typical by many writers on popular culture, she is not only sprightly

and vivacious, occasionally acting as a light comedienne, but also courageous and independent. For example, in Act I she is eager to return to the circus because she does not want to give in to her injuries. If she can't ride bareback again, she'll get a new act.

Amy is also not afraid to stand up to older and socially superior characters like the Deacon and Joshua Gordon to defend what she knows to be right. She comically chides the Deacon for his drinking and his advances to her, and her slap puts him in his place before Robert and Dan rush into "rescue" her. Sarah criticizes the Deacon's treatment of Amy, but this action is part of her own attack upon injustice and also underscores for the audience the contrast between Amy's honesty and the Deacon's hypocrisy; it is not needed by Amy. Amy also vigorously defends her dead mother and her own work against Joshua; and, though she has told Robert to respect Joshua, at the end of Act III she tells Joshua, "Oh, I am sorry that he calls you father." She is persecuted by the villain Joshua and she temporarily loses or gives up the man she loves, but she is not in peril because she is passive or dependent.

Amy makes and carries out her own decisions. When in Act II Dan arrives to take her back to the circus, she chooses not to go with him because she loves Robert. In Act III she chooses to return to the circus to save Robert's credibility in the community. In Act III, in spite of the fact that her and her mother's experiences have taught her how hard the world is for a woman, she refuses Joshua's offer of money: she'll earn her own living at the circus; she is not a beggar. (Some of this determination seems to be inherited from her mother, who had refused to return to her husband after he deserted her.) Though

Robert forbids her to leave, Amy, aided by Dan, sticks to her decisions and, unlike the heroines of the 1918-1949 Pulitzer Prize plays, is not stopped, suitcase in hand, by the her.<sup>5</sup> In fact, she refuses Robert's offer to follow her, saying that she is tough and can stand the circus life but he can't. The other characters are forced to seek her out at the circus when they learn the truth of her birth. Not until all situations have been explained and arranged to her satisfaction--Joshua asks her to forgive him and to marry Robert, assuring her that Robert's future is secure--not until events have come around to what she can accept as right, does she agree to marry Robert. Her final action could be viewed as submitting to Joshua's male-parental authority--marrying because Daddy now permits her--but she is actually agreeing to do what she has wanted to do and under the conditions she has felt were right all along.

#### Domesticity

Amy is a typical popular art heroine in that her world is defined by family values. In fact, Amy has four families in her circle of domesticity: her problems arise because of a clash of values between and within these families; and her reward is a union of several of them in an enlarged family sphere. Her family of origin has been lost: her mother, deserted by her father, had joined the circus "concert" and then died of a broken heart. But Amy is not ruined by the loss of her parents. She is raised by her second family, the circus people represented by Dan the clown, to be a virtuous, charming loyal, perceptive, honest, hard-working though uneducated and far from sedate young woman: she loves them and they love her like a daughter/sister.

Because of the accident Amy then comes under the care and tutelage of a third family, Robert and Sarah. They provide refinement: a clean house and "civilization" (improvement in reading, speech, and manners). Robert, a combination of father and older brother, acts as an authority figure for her, but so does Sarah. She becomes a surrogate mother, giving Amy the first kiss she has had since her mother died. (In the Deacon's Act III statement that she and Robert are out in a boat having a good time with the parish children there is some indication that Amy will also be a good mother.) Amy has moved from a second "good" family to a third "good" one.

The threat to Amy's happiness which provides plot conflict come partly from outside this third family sphere, from the intolerance of the townspeople represented by the Deacon, but mostly from within it, from the intolerance of Joshua Gordon, Robert's father. The villain Joshua is also Amy's father, though this is not revealed until later in the play. (The audience is also possibly led to believe, at the end of Act II, that Amy and Robert's relationship is therefore incestuous because the clues that Joshua is not Robert's biological father are very subtle and easy to miss--at least in reading. Of course, at the end of the play it is stated clearly that Robert is the son of Joshua's dead friend.) So the father who caused her to lose her family of origin also tries to separate her from her third family and potential husband. However, she returns to her second family, the circus, where she won't be patronized and where she is always welcome; she is not cast out alone. At the end of the play she is rewarded for all the good qualities instilled in or nurtured by her second family

and for the refinement taught by her third family by receiving a fourth family, a combination of her first and third--Sarah, a mother; Joshua, a now repentent long-lost father; and Robert, a husband-to-be--an all-encompassing domesticity.

Even Amy's work is defined by the sphere of her second family. Amy enjoys being a circus bareback rider and is, according to Dan, a good one. She is eager to return to the circus until she falls in love; then she wonders if giving up the circus will bring her happiness. When she returns to the circus, Con, the manager, says she is as good at riding as she was before the accident nine months ago.

But though she has had a career, Amy is still a typical melodramatic heroine in that conflict over love and duty lead her to self-sacrifice. She gives up Robert because she thinks the community will reject him if he marries her, and she returns to the circus to benefit him, not to fulfill herself. Amy is very protective of Robert. He calls her "child," but in some ways she acts like his mother, worrying about his position in the community and not wanting to come between him and his father. At the end of the play, Amy, also typically, gives up her career to marry Robert. Romantic love is her motivation for this action, which within the world of the play would not be construed as a sacrifice but as a reward. Amy and Robert embrace and recite the "whither thou goest" lines from the Book of Ruth. But at least they are both saying them together.

#### Actuality

In spite of her rough circus background, Amy's behavior exhibits the sexual purity expected of a young woman in the early 1900s. But her vivacity, her spirited defense of herself and her ethical

standards, and her ability to make and carry out decisions are not only traditional characteristics of the stock soubrette but also characteristics of the Progressive Era "new woman." Amy works for a living. However, she holds a job which, though difficult and dangerous, is far more glamorous than the domestic, factory, or clerical ones held by most real American women during this period. Furthermore, the circus people care for her and act as her family. She does not experience the stresses and loneliness faced by many actual shop girls and factory workers. Yet, although she enjoys her work and is skilled at it, she, as most of the real women of the day would wish to do, leaves her work for the traditional role of wife—to a man with both some status in the community and a wealthy adopted father.



Bought and Paid For (1911)<sup>6</sup>

## Plot Summary

Robert Stafford, millionaire, expresses his continuing interest in telephone operator Virginia Blaine by inviting her, her sister Fannie, and Fannie's fiance, Jimmy Gilley, to his apartment for dinner. Although both Fannie and Jimmy try to convince Virginia of the advantages of marrying a wealthy man, Virginia, even though she is attracted to Robert, is reluctant because she is concerned about how much he drinks. After sending Fannie and Jimmie off to look at his art treasures, Robert proposes to Virginia. And although she says that she doesn't love him yet and needs time to consider his offer, by Act II (two years later), she has married him. Jimmy and Fannie, also married, have a baby girl, and Robert has hired Jimmy to work for him--at an inflated salary. The Stafford marriage, however, is troubled because of Robert's drinking. Returning from an evening on the town, Robert attempts to claim kisses from Virginia because, by marrying her, he has "bought" her. Virginia shoves him away and runs out of the room. Although Robert apologizes the next day, Virginia threatens to leave him since, refusing to be "bullied" by a woman, he has constantly broken his promise to stop drinking and has robbed her of her self-respect. When Robert declares that she will be unable to do without the luxuries he has provided, Virginia gives him back her "price", her jewelry including her wedding ring, and exits.

Virginia returns to work as a low-paid sales clerk and lives with Fannie and Jimmie, who has left his job with Robert and just lost another. The Gilleys' financial strains lead to much bickering and bullying, but Virginia will not back down on her resolve to live

without Robert. Jimmy, determined to return the Gilleys to the good life, is convinced that Virginia and Robert need only to see each other to resume their marriage. He therefore tells Robert that Virginia wants to see him. When Robert arrives, he is willing to make Virginia any promise if she will resume the marriage, but she says that he need promise nothing and that she has been ready for a long time to go back to him. Although Virginia almost changes her mind when Fannie reveals Jimmy's plot, Robert convinces her that being together is all that matters; and she accepts her wedding ring inscribed "eternal love."

### The Heroine's Character

#### Purity

Not one to believe that heaven alone will protect the working girl, Virginia, a telephone operator well aware of sexual harassment on the job, is careful to protect her reputation. For example, she will not go to Robert Stafford's office until she has checked to see if he is the sort to make a pass. Nor will she go to dinner at his apartment until her sister Fannie and Fannie's fiance Jimmy are invited as chaperones. Moreover, Virginia is not just assuming a virtue, playing hard-to-get to become a wife instead of a mistress. In contrast to Jimmy and Fannie, who believe that marriage for money is a legitimate goal, Virginia believes in marriage for love, not for practical reasons: "Love doesn't go where it's sent."

Besides maintaining her personal chastity, Virginia also upholds a number of other ethical values. She is honest: she tells Robert that she, Jimmy, and Fannie cracked his expensive vase (Jimmy wants to blame the servant). She defends Robert's self-made wealth from

Jimmy's jealous sniping. She doesn't drink, refusing a martini when all around her are guzzling theirs. Furthermore, she condemns Robert's drinking even as he proposes to her and after they are married refuses to drink wine with him even though he threatens to pour it down her.

Though she is chaste, honest, a believer in enterprizing hard work, and a teetotaler, Virginia does lack the willingness to sacrifice herself which is a characteristic of many of melodrama's heroines. For example, she will not obey her husband at all costs either by giving lipservice to Robert's beliefs about the authority of husbands or by giving in to his sexual desires when he is drunk.

Nor does she sacrifice her principles to her relatives' desire to live a comfortable life even though Jimmy triggers her guilt and anxiety by accusing her of ruining his business career, forcing Fannie to drudge at housekeeping in a dingy apartment, and depriving Fanny and Jimmy's little daughter of educational and economic advantages. (Considering the amount of bullying she has received from Jimmy, Virginia shows understanding and forgiveness, telling Fannie not to blame Jimmy too much because "things are rather hard for him," a statement for which Fanny calls her a thoroughbred.)

However, Virginia judges not only Robert but also herself, recognizing that though she loves Robert now, she had not originally loved him "as a woman should love the man she is to marry." Virginia would not have married Robert if he had been poor; therefore, she accepts responsibility for not living up to her own principles. Recognizing her part in their hardships and worn out by her miserable job, Virginia still refuses to compromise and return to Robert. She sacrifices for her principles, not for her family.

For this heroine, the moral superiority of defending and acting on what she believes to be right is more important than the moral superiority of selflessness. It is more important than accommodating her husband and thus living a comfortable life herself and securing one for her family. The basic principle for Virginia is a woman's right to self-respect within the marriage relationship. But Robert denies her this right. Virginia is not only upset by Robert's drinking and by his refusal to do more than promise to try to stop. She is repelled by his sexual behavior when he is drunk; it is not real love or passion but the behavior of a beast who has her in his power. When Robert insists on his marital rights because he has "bought and paid for" her, raising her from being a telephone operator making ten dollars a week to being the wife of one of the richest men in town, she cries, "Does that make you own me body and soul? Does it mean that I have no rights of my own? If it does, then marriage is horrible . . . . The minute a husband begins to speak of his legal rights, it means he has lost his moral rights, and those are the things that count." Because Virginia knows the difference between what is legally right and what is morally right, she defines the moral climate of the play.

#### Passivity

In Bought and Paid For there is a great deal of declaration and discussion about male authority. Robert talks about being so successful that no one can walk over him. When he proposes, he says that he can make Virginia love him, and though she does not say yes right away, he knows that she will. After they are married, he believes that since he has bought and paid for Virginia with jewels

and motor cars, she belongs to him, a chattel acquired as he acquires a company or machinery. He won't promise to do more than try to stop drinking because he won't be bullied: he is the head and boss of the family as he is the head and boss of his business.

Virginia, however, finally refuses to bow to Robert's authority. When he drunkenly tries to claim a kiss which she does not want to give, instead of crying or fainting she pushes him into a chair and runs off. The next day, though he apologizes for his behavior, he still won't promise to do more than try to stop drinking. Virginia responds that in the past she has "cried--and suffered--and forgiven" him, but now, though she loves him, she will leave him in order to maintain her self-respect. Though Robert first accuses her of bullying him and then declares that she has become accustomed to luxury and will not be able to survive without it, Virginia leaves behind the jewelry, including her wedding ring, which she loves but which, as her "price", makes her feel like a prostitute. Refusing an allowance, she goes to work as a salesclerk at five dollars a week, believing that Robert will never back down and that she has lost him forever.

Virginia stands by her decision though her new life is very unpleasant. Tired and cold, she returns at night from a job she hates to face Jimmy's accusations (he no longer works for Robert and has just lost his new job). But she rallies from her momentary anxiety to say that they'll get along somehow: "We've shared the good times together and we'll take the hard ones the same way."

Although Virginia makes decisions, acts on them, and stands by them, she is not really instrumental in initiating the final action of

the play. The women believe and hope that "things will turn," but the men take the initiative; Jimmy tricks Robert into coming for her. Virginia admits that because of her love for him she was ready to give up her resolution and return to him even though she "would have lost all I was fighting for." Robert says that he has missed her sweetness and goodness so much that he is willing to make her any promise she asks, but she no longer asks. However, when Virginia discovers Jimmy's trick, she almost refuses to go with Robert because "everything is wrong--everything!" But Robert, by quick and rather Jesuitical reasoning, points out that she has gained her sought-for promise and not surrendered her principles. He gives her the victory; she praises his magnanimity in giving it to her. When Robert finally says that nothing matters but that they love each other and are together again, she accepts from him the return of her "eternal love" wedding ring. Though she is won over by his rationalizing, Virginia is rewarded for standing firm on her principles by being reunited with the strong man she loves, now reformed, and also by regaining economic and social status. Presumably, she can now wear her jewels without feeling that they are the price of her body and soul.

#### Domesticity

Although Virginia is presented as a working woman in Act I--she is a telephone operator, one of the common "pink collar" jobs of that day--the work is not satisfactory. The pay is low, and threats to chastity lurk everywhere. When she returns to work after leaving Robert, her new job as a salesclerk is even less fulfilling and worse paid. Work is never a satisfactory alternative to marriage, which brings greatly improved social and economic status to both her and her relatives.

These relations--her sister Fannie and Jimmy, Fannie's fiance and later husband--are Virginia's first family in her circle of domesticity and continue as part of her family after she marries. She does not believe in their values, for example, marrying for money. And they are parasites, gaining undeserved wealth and status from her marriage to Robert. But they love her (only partly because of her wealth) and provide her with a daughter-surrogate, their child, little Virginia. Virginia, who has no child, can show her deep love by playing fairy godmother, giving the child clothes, toys, and education. Her inability to continue giving these things and her separation from Robert causes her much guilt and anxiety. Fannie, however, supports her decision (though she points out twice that Virginia would never have been able to leave Robert if they'd had a child); and though Jimmy nags her, she will not leave them because she has "to have somebody to love"--and she loves them, even Jimmy. She will not leave this family as she left Robert. And though this family suffers and complains, it does not throw her out.

Virginia acquires a second family when she marries Robert. However, in acquiring this family, Virginia has violated her principles, marrying at least partly for money and letting Robert make love to her when he is drunk. She grows to love him, but this love is not enough to keep a husband and wife together if the husband cannot respect his wife's principles and he treats her like chattel, even precious chattel. The threat to this marriage which provides the plot conflict arises within the marriage or second family from a clash of principles: a man's need to be boss vs. a woman's right to her self-respect. (Actually, in a veiled way the play deals with marital

rape.) Virginia flees from this second family because, as chattel, she feels like a prostitute, not a wife. She returns to her first family with whom she then lives, mostly for economic reasons (she and Jimmy pool their miniscule salaries to eke out a drab existence).

Nevertheless, it is her first family which reunites her with her second family, though a primary motive for Jimmy is to recapture the comfortable life (reuniting a husband and wife is important but not as important as getting his old job back). The reunion is initiated by the first family but actually accomplished by Robert's recognition of his need for her and his changed attitude toward his authority over her and her rights in their marriage. Thus Virginia is rewarded for sticking to her principles with the domestic prize of an earlier time: the repaired marriage and the reformed husband. But she is rewarded for taking actions, not patiently enduring. This affirmation of domesticity is reassuring to the repertoire audience because of its integration of old and new values. A woman can assert her rights in opposition to her husband's traditional role as head of the family whose every desire she must fulfill. She can leave him to preserve her self-respect. She can endure hard times to uphold her principles. And in the end she can win, gaining back wealth and social position for both herself and her relatives, gaining recognition of her value and right in marriage, and the love of a reformed husband now worthy of her love.

#### Actuality

Virginia is a working woman who experiences the long hours, low pay, and sexual harrassment which were facts of life for "working girls" of her era. She leaves work for marriage, and she returns to



work when the marriage denies her right to self-respect. Her values reflect the moral issues of the pre-World War I twentieth century. For example, her stand against the "legal prostitution" of submitting to a drunken husband reflects the era's stand against the "sensual usurpation" and "loathing submission" of marriage decried by the Social Purists. Virginia, in leaving Robert because she believes, as many people of that era did, that married love should mean mutuality rather than male authority, shows a "new woman's" spirit. In sticking to her principles in spite of her miserable economic situation, she shows a "new woman's" determination. And in the end, with her principles, still firm, she leaves her hated job and returns to her improved marriage, as the real women of her generation would have done.

The Girl from Out Yonder (1913)<sup>7</sup>

Plot Summary

When her canoe overturns in the harbor of a Maine seacoast town, Mrs. Elmer is rescued by Flotsam Barton, an eighteen year old child of nature, rough and untutored but charming, devoted to her father, the lighthouse keeper, and not yet interested in marriage. Mrs. Elmer introduces Flotsam to her nephew Edward Elmer, a civil engineer. Attracted to Flotsam, he wants to teach her the manners she would like to acquire so that she won't be made fun of for being different. Flotsam's father, Captain Amos Barton, is startled at the sight of Elmer, who resembles John Hamilton, his father (Elmer has taken the last name of his aunt, who raised him), a man the Captain believes he killed many years ago in a drunken fight.

Several weeks later, Flotsam is behaving in an increasingly grown-up manner as a result of her growing attachment to Edward. This behavior annoys Cousin Simonson, the Captain's housekeeper, a widow who likes to keep men dangling while she enjoys her independence. Elmer would like to send Flotsam away to school for more polishing. He also proposes marriage and she joyfully accepts, angering Joe Clark, a fisherman who wants to marry her himself. Joe, in order to stop the marriage, tells Edward that the Captain killed his father. Edward, who can't forgive the crime, sees it as a barrier between him and Flotsam. The Captain then tells Edward that Flotsam, far from being his daughter, is a baby saved from a shipwreck. Later he admits to Joe that this is a lie. When Flotsam learns of the Captain's effort to save her engagement, she breaks off with Edward and decides

to keep the lighthouse going while her father is in prison for his crime.

Two years later Flotsam and Cousin Simonson are preparing for the Captain's return from prison. Simonson pursues Joe, who has been helping Flotsam run the lighthouse and who still cares for her though she won't marry him. Joe, although upset to learn that Simonson has only pretended to be widowed because society looks down on old maids, is won both by her understanding that his heart really belongs to Flotsam and by Simonson's four thousand dollar savings.

Edward, back in town to work on the piers, renews his old dream of a cottage shared with Flotsam, but she feels that, though she will always love him and never marry anyone else, her father's crime stands between them. Her competing loyalties are no longer a problem, however, when the Captain, returned from prison, receives a death-bed confession letter from Brian Hawkins, the only witness to the crime. It was Hawkins who had done the murder for the money Mr. Elmer was carrying.

### The Heroine's Character

#### Purity

Although Flotsam can "cuss like a pirate" and has a quick temper, she is basically a child of nature who not only talks to the waves and seagulls but is answered by them and thus is pure as nature is pure. Among her virtues is courage: when, as a child, she broke her ankle, she didn't cry; when Mrs. Elmer's canoe overturns, she rescues her (it is this courageous act that first brings her to Edward's attention); when the Captain, her father, goes to prison, she runs the lighthouse. "Now," she says, "is the time to show the stuff

I'm made of, and I'm going to brace up and show it." Flotsam also upholds cultural values: love for and loyalty to an old father; a desire for education to take the edge off her rough manners; and steadfastness to the man she loves but cannot marry.

The Girl from Out Yonder does not have to face a villain who makes attempts on her chastity. Both men in her life offer marriage; however, she is clearly superior to them since Joe first tries to manipulate her father into favoring him as a suitor and then reveals the Captain as the killer of Edward's father, and Edward cannot forgive the Captain's crime. Flotsam, however, is able to understand and forgive his feelings. The best proof of Flotsam's moral superiority comes in the prayer scene. When she and the Captain pray for strength to endure his imprisonment, he makes her his intercessor with God: "Master Skipper . . . listen to her in my place."

#### Passivity

Flotsam is a very active heroine who works in the "family business"--fishing, managing a sailing crew, and running a lighthouse. In fact, she is not skilled at women's work: she has never been taught to sew and has great trouble mending her father's vest. She enjoys her traditionally male occupations which call for the great physical courage instilled in her by her father, who, when she was small, told her to be a "plucky little tar."

In her close relationships to men, Flotsam is both dependent and independent. Flotsam accepts male guidance from Edward, who acts as her schoolmaster for manners: she is not to cross her legs or say "darn." He even persuades her to go away to school though she is reluctant to leave her beloved father. She persists, over Simonson's

disapproval, in letting down her skirts and putting up her hair in order to look more grown up for Edward; and when her father says she is wrong to do this, she kisses and hugs him into submission, a manipulative behavior. However, she also stands up to the men in her life. Once she has discovered that her father has lied about her not being his child, she refuses to go with Edward and stays with her father to await the police. She refuses to marry Joe, even though he has helped her and Simonson while her father has been in jail; she refuses to marry Edward when he returns to work on the harbor piers two years after their parting. Flotsam's interactions with men are symbolized by the tea leaf fortune showing her pursuing a man. She is pleased because she thinks it means that she is independent. But Simonson says it also shows her being pursued by a man, the traditional feminine role.

Though she possesses an independent spirit, Flotsam is not involved in resolving the plot: the discovery of the true murderer, which allows her to marry Edward, comes about through a letter from a dying man, not from any effort on her part. And with her marriage she will presumably give up all her independence and become a housewife in a country cottage, waiting for her engineer husband to come home from work in the city at the end of the day.

#### Domesticity

Before she settles down to married life in a vine-covered cottage at the end of the play, Flotsam has experienced a rather "wild, tomboyish" freedom. Some of her "queer" speech and dress can be put down to the fact that she is a motherless child. Her mother, who would have taught her the manners she lacks, is dead; and she is

left with only one half of a family of origin or three fourths, perhaps, counting Cousin Simonson, who, according to the Captain, has never understood her.

However, Flotsam has a very close relationship with her father. She is reluctant to leave him to go to school, and he fears being left by her if she marries Edward. Joe is able to play on these fears by telling the Captain that if Flotsam marries him, she'll come back often to see the Captain, bringing her babies. Flotsam rejects the Captain's effort to save her engagement to Edward and insists on running the lighthouse for him while he is in prison (she polishes all the brass to please him on his return). Thus, though she has a responsible job, it is her father's job held in trust for him. Even though the Captain is being released from jail, instead of accepting Edward's second proposal she chooses to stay with her father because it is the "natural" thing to do. It is "natural" for Edward not to forgive a wrong done to his own flesh and blood, his father; and it is "natural" for her, even though she loves Edward and will never marry anyone else, to stay with her own flesh and blood, her father. Thus she is a typical heroine of melodrama, caught in the conflict between duty and love and siding with duty.

However, when the conflict is resolved by the discovery of the real murderer of Edward's father, Flotsam is rewarded for being dutiful with romantic love; and she and Edward are reunited. Flotsam will leave her independent life to settle in the dream house Edward described for her when he first proposed and which he also evoked, when he again asked her to marry him: a "Queen Anne" cottage in the country with trees, birds, vines, and roses, close enough to the city

so that he can ride the street car to work. She shows no regret at giving up being a lighthouse keeper for becoming a suburban housewife because such a life is presented as romantically idyllic.

Interestingly, The Girl from Out Yonder also presents an anti-romantic view of marriage, even an anti-marriage point of view--or, at least, an anti-second marriage point of view--in the speeches of Cousin Simonson. Simonson, a nominal widow, declares the advantages of being once married but now free:

A widder woman that has been married once has got a standing in the community. She's not like an old maid--lonely and undignified--and always grabbing at the first chance she can get. You see, I am for women's rights. We don't have no rights when we are young girls. We are always spending all our days--and nights, too--studying out how to catch a man that's of any account. And when we do catch him, hand and foot, we have no rights the rest of our lives. And if we don't catch him, we're a miserable, looked down on old maid--and one state is as bad as the other, or worse. The only chance we women have of leading an independent life is when we have caught a husband an killed him off . . . . We are widders after that, with the right to make a man dangle as long as he will stay on the hook.

Simonson also belittles romantic love: "What has love got to do with happiness? What is love anyway? Love is a little sighing, and a whole lot of lying." But ultimately she gives in--to marriage, if not to love: "After all, there ain't no such thing as independence. If we aren't in bondage to someone else, we're in bondage with ourselves." She admits to Joe, who on discovering that she was never married, believes that she lived in sin with "Archibald," that she invented a dead husband. She didn't want the loss of social status that being a spinster means. But though Simonson now means to marry, she does not want to waste time with a romantic wooing. She will get Joe to marry her by pointing out that she has four thousand dollars which he can

use to buy his own fishing boat. When Joe says that his heart belongs to Flotsam, Simonson says, "What do I care about your heart? It's your name--and a husband's protection-I want. We aren't going to let such a silly thing as love interfere with our happiness." Though Simonson finally declares the desirability of marriage, she does so for practical reasons. Moreover, her attitude lets the audience members see their ambivalent feelings about marriage both dramatized and resolved.

#### Actuality

Flotsam, in spite of her quick temper and rough manners, has the core of spirituality and strong moral sense that women of her era were believed to possess. She exhibits the vivacity and persistence of both the stock soubrette and the "new woman." Like the "new women" she often seems to combine early twentieth century values with those of the 1920s. Flotsam works, but her traditionally male jobs are not the sort held by most women of the period. She isn't skilled at occupations like sewing, but she uses traditional female devices--hugging and kissing--to get her father to agree to what she wants. Her tea leaf fortune pleases her because it shows her to be pursuing a man--like a woman of the up-coming twenties--yet the fortune also shows her being pursued. And she is willing to trade her wild lighthouse for a vine-covered cottage in the suburbs. However, women's growing discontent with marriage because it denied them their rights and freedom is expressed by Simonson. She describes very clearly the ambivalence of the married state for women: the social status it bestows and the independence it denies.



Tildy Ann (1925)<sup>8</sup>

## Plot Summary

Tildy Ann, "a family drudge, a Cinderella of modern times," the daughter of Charity Brewer's dead brother, has been living with the Brewers since she was ten and has been acting as an unpaid housemaid. Egged on by Charity, John Brewer, having lost money on his local movie house, has embezzled funds left by his brother to Tildy Ann. Now he fervently hopes that the marriage of his flapper daughter Annabelle to wealthy Bordon Hamilton will bring him money to make up the loss. Brewer is, however, basically a good man who loves Tildy Ann and disapproves of his wife and daughter's treatment of her. Typical of this treatment is Annabelle's search of Tildy Ann's room, where she finds love letters written to Douglas Merton, a movie star. To defend Tildy Ann from Annabelle's scorn Brewer lies, saying that he gave his niece a letter of introduction to Merten's manager, who then introduced her to the star when she was on a visit to Los Angeles. At this point Constable Zeb Peabody brings in the manager, Clayton de Mille. Because de Mille and Merton are in town on a lay-over of their train trip to New York, Brewer has asked that the star make a personal appearance to bolster his theatre's sagging business. Everybody is surprised that when Merton arrives at the Brewer home, he makes Tildy Ann a flowery speech about how much he loves her and gives her a big kiss.

The next day word of the "romance" between Tildy Ann and Merton has been spread all over town by Zeb and Trudy Warner, a spinster neighbor. Although Charity makes several unsuccessful attempts to keep Tildy Ann out of the public eye, the young woman decides to enter

the theatre's beauty contest; the prize is a screen test for Douglas Merton's next movie. Charity begins to treat Tildy Ann more kindly because Brewer threatens to tell that he has lost her money. In the meantime, Clayton de Mille, making a play for Annabelle, reveals that Zeb persuaded Merton to pretend he loves Tildy Ann in order to give her more status with the family. But Merton, impressed by Tildy Ann's sweetness, has gone beyond pretending. He orders a beautiful gown for her to wear in the beauty contest and takes her in to dinner on his arm.

While Tildy Ann dresses for the beauty contest and Charity fantasizes about Annabelle marrying de Mille, Bordon Hamilton, who now wants to marry Tildy Ann, threatens Brewer: unless he gives permission for the marriage, Hamilton will reveal his theft; if he agrees to let Hamilton marry Tildy, Hamilton will replace the lost money. But Brewer refuses. When Tildy Ann reappears in her new dress, she astounds everyone with her beauty; and, as she goes to the beauty contest, it is clear that Douglas Merton is really in love with her. After Tildy wins the contest, a number of revelations are made: Bordon reveals Brewer's embezzlement; Clayton de Mille reveals that he is already married and has just been toying with Annabelle; Merton reveals that he will take Tildy Ann to Hollywood as his wife. Annabelle's threat to tell everything to the newspapers is countered by Brewer's threat to reveal how the family has been living off Tildy Ann's money. When Constable Zeb, at Hamilton's instigation, arrives to arrest Brewer for fraud, Merton promises him enough money to cover his losses. Brewer then tells Charity to fix up the front bedroom for the lovers; Charity's scandalized protest is silenced by Tildy Ann's

revelation that Brewer knows that she and Merton have just been married by a justice of the peace.

### The Heroine's Character

#### Purity

In her patient purity Tildy Ann is a throwback to pre-Civil war heroines. Although she first appears with ragged clothes and dirty face, saying "I don't reckon" and "I knowed," underneath the low-class exterior is a high-class sweetness of heart and soul, presented mainly by contrast with the well-dressed but mean, selfish, and loose flapper, Annabelle. Zeb says that Tildy Ann is innocent and old-fashioned but that Annabelle parks in cars with men and drinks from hip flasks. Annabelle, says Clayton de Mille, is the kind that could be induced "to step a little"; and he proceeds to make a pass at her, using a movie career as bait. Charity accuses Tildy Ann of being a "\_\_\_\_\_" because she accepts a gown for the beauty contest from Douglas Merton, but Brewer points out that Annabelle often accepts presents like silk stockings from any number of men. And Tildy Ann, unlike Annabelle, doesn't plan to go off to Hollywood with a married man.

Tildy Ann is not only sexually pure, she also makes saintly responses to abusive treatment. She is not angry that Brewer embezzled her inheritance; the money did him good. When Brewer gives her Annabelle's new dress to wear in the beauty contest, she gives it back to Annabelle, saying that it is enough that she can now call Charity "Aunt" instead of "Mrs. Brewer." Tildy Ann is clearly morally superior to the other women, who, while comic, are still villains who

try to prevent her from occupying her rightful place in society as well as developing her relationship to the hero.

But if the women are Tildy Ann's enemies, the men are all her admirers and/or defenders. Zeb defends her character and arranges the "Joke" with Douglas Merton to give her some social status. Brewer, who dislikes his wife and daughter's treatment of her, finally asserts his authority so that she may have a chance at love and happiness. Even Bordon Hamilton, a rotter, is attracted to her and wants to marry her. And of course the hero, Douglas Merton, falls in love with her. Though a lowly household drudge, she is worthy to be loved by a man of high rank: America's royalty, the movie star.

#### Passivity

In her insecure unaggressiveness, Tildy Ann is also a throwback to heroines of earlier times, the type Harlow Hoyt described as having "no more spirit than a mouse with a cold." She is an uncomplaining household drudge—a working woman who for eight years has done the cleaning and the cooking (for which Annabelle takes the credit) and for which she has been paid fifty dollars and Annabelle's cast-off clothing. Charity and Annabelle abuse her and sneer at her for having the temerity to think that a girl in her position could meet a movie star, but she does not defend herself against them. She doesn't have enough nerve to mail her love letters. Everything that happens to her is effected by someone else. Even her one attempt to speak out in behalf of right, her protest about Charity's treatment of Brewer, is silenced by Charity, who tells her to shut up. And Tildy Ann then apologizes.

Her passivity, however, appeals to the men who defend her. Brewer makes up a story about arranging an introduction for her to Douglas Merton in Los Angeles. Zeb not only gets Merton to pretend that he is in love with her but also sees to it that the newspaper photographer takes her picture. Merton, really attracted to her, takes her to dinner, persuades her to enter the beauty contest--Tildy Ann says she wouldn't have thought of it herself--and buys her a gown to wear. She is truly "a modern Cinderella"--pretty, passive--to whom good things finally begin to happen.

#### Domesticity

Everything about Tildy Ann's life is home-centered, especially since she is virtually a captive slave, the family domestic. She works at menial tasks for her second family, having lost her first--and presumably loving--one when her parents died many years ago. This loss of her family of origin has left her open to exploitation by her second family, especially her aunt and cousin who treat her badly and relegate her to low social status. Although as an eventual heiress she is entitled to a comfortable life, the aunt has denied her even that possibility by nagging her husband into using Tildy's money to keep up their place in society. Within her second family, she is loved only by John Brewer, her uncle by marriage and her quasi-father. He rejects his own daughter, Annabelle, by being very critical of her morality and defends Tildy Ann. (When he kisses her, Charity even accuses him of making love to her.)

Tildy Ann does not seek to escape this dreadful second family. But she is rescued anyway--by the "handsome prince"--movie star, aided by Zeb and Brewer. With Merton, she will find a third family and a

great deal of social status: she will go to Hollywood as a wife, not to find a movie career, and presumably as a star's wife she will be spared any further housework.

The fact that she is married also brings community and second-family approval. When Brewer tells Charity to make up a bedroom for Tildy Ann and Merton, Charity is scandalized at what appears to be pandering. However, once she finds out that the marriage has already taken place, she calls Merton "darling boy" and Tildy Ann "dear child." A sexual relationship is now permissible and the marriage consummation is being speedily expedited. When Zeb asks, "What's going on?" Brewer says, "Night shirts in about one minute." And Zeb's line, "Too bad I didn't bring mine," ends the play.

#### Actuality

Tildy Ann is a domestic worker, a typical twenties working woman. But patient, meek, and mild, she is no flapper. Instead she seems like the model of nineteenth century virtuous womanhood. It is Annabelle who is the flapper. Her drinking, driving around with men, and the possibility that she can be induced to dispense sexual favors are typical negative flapper characteristics, unacceptable behavior in the world of the play and often criticized in the real society. However, in the last scene the near double entendre of lines about the hasty preparation of a bedroom where Tildy Ann and Douglas Merton can spend their wedding night gives a glimmer of the twenties' idea that sexual fulfillment is a legitimate part of love if it's accompanied by a marriage license.

The Hoodlum (1920s)<sup>9</sup>

## Plot summary

Toby Botts, bringing produce to the Argyle country estate, stays to observe and record the behavior of rich people in order to gain material for a play he is writing. Jerry Argyle, the family heir, has been squeezed out of the affections of his blind father, Peter, by his stepmother, Natalie, a woman who pretends to sweet sincerity but who is conspiring with her lover, Hal Brundage, to frame Jerry for embezzling money from the family business. Actually, Hal has stolen the money, hidden it in a money belt, and plans to escape with Natalie to Europe.

Ruth Martin, a young woman looking for a ride back to town because her date has gotten fresh, arrives at the Argyle home. Instantly attracted to Jerry and convinced of his honesty, she offers to hide him from the police. Ruth also defends Jerry to Peter, who, however, is taken in by Natalie's vocal acting powers. (He cannot see her facial expressions.) While everyone is quarantined at the Argyle mansion because of an outbreak of small pox among the servants, Ruth and Toby, with the aid of Hardy, the loyal butler, scheme to save Jerry and expose the lovers. Natalie, increasingly angered and upset by the friendly reception the household gives Ruth and Toby, earns everyone's scorn by refusing to take care of her ill child. Finally Hal's chastisement sends her rushing upstairs to his bedside. In the meantime, when Peter thanks Ruth for all she has done to help during the crisis, she asks to be repaid with his belief in Jerry's innocence. Though Peter says that to accept Jerry is to repudiate Natalie, whom he loves, Ruth finally reconciles the father and son. A

changed Natalie returns from tending her child; overwhelmed as Peter tells her of his grateful love, she confesses her misdeeds and her newly realized love for him. Peter forgives her and says they will begin a new life together. In the midst of a general spirit of forgiveness, Toby tricks Hal into revealing that he, not Jerry, is the embezzler. Jerry then provides Hal with money to escape to South America because Hal has been a gentlemen and refused to implicate Natalie. The play ends with Jerry declaring that he will marry Ruth immediately and Toby declaring that this is a "swell finish" for his play.

### The Heroine's Character

#### Purity

Ruth Martin is another tough-talking "rough soubrette," who lives in an alley, says "dat" and "dey're," and even swears:

Peter: ...you'll have to wait until Mr. Brundage gets back; I'll have him take you home.  
 Ruth: I'll have a heluva long wait.  
 Peter: Do you always swear like that?  
 Ruth: No! You oughta hear me when I really get started!

Wise in the ways of the world (she knows that married men are the most likely to make passes), she nevertheless is virtuous: she has punched the nose of a date who got fresh with her while they were riding in his car, and she worries about what her mother would say if she saw her wearing the low-cut dinner gown borrowed from Natalie. Good herself, Ruth is also attracted to goodness in men. One look into Jerry's eyes shows her with the intuitive wisdom of the truly good that he is "square" (honorable):

Dat's what eyes is for, to look into and see what kind of a guy is behind them . . . . He's so square dat you could go joy-riding with him, and get broke down a hundred miles



from nowhere, and have to stay dere all night, and when y'come home de next day and told yer Ma, she'd say . . . "I'll bet you nearly froze to death . . . ." Dat guy'd never get close enough to y' to keep y' warm.

Ruth's chastity and her appreciation of the same virtue in Jerry is contrasted with the sinful sexuality of the adulterers Natalie and Hal Brundage. Her ability to see people's characters in their eyes also gives her an advantage over Peter Argyle, who, though saintly, is blind and therefore cannot see the honesty in Jerry's eyes and the deception in Natalie's.

Though Ruth is tough, she is also sensitive to other's feelings. She is ashamed that she hasn't noticed Peter's blindness and, to avoid hurting him, lies about the contents of Natalie's farewell note. She also tells Peter that his beloved Natalie has probably been deceived by someone and has acted in good faith when she told him that Jerry embezzled money. Basically honest, Ruth's lies are "white," told to avoid causing pain or to speed the reconciliation of Jerry and Peter.

Ruth is loyal: she will wait for Jerry if he goes to jail. She is selfless: unlike the cowardly Natalie, she helps care for the sick child, and the only reward she asks is Peter's reconciliation with Jerry. But primarily, she is honest, speaking out strongly for what she believes is right. In spite of her sympathy for Peter, she tells Peter that he is stupid to drive Jerry away; and she blasts Natalie for her lack of concern for her sick child. Although she is not alone in defining the moral climate of the play—Hardy and Toby also defend Peter and criticize Natalie, and even embezzler Hal evokes her guilt over the child—Ruth is the most outspoken on moral issues.

Though only the villainess Natalie is offended by her behavior, Ruth, for love of Jerry, wants to become a lady: to speak like Jerry

(and presumably give up swearing) and to wear clothes like Natalie.

But Jerry knows that she is fine as she is:

It doesn't matter whether you live in an alley or a mansion, whether you speak cultured English or the jargon of the streets; it is the character beneath the veneer which makes a lady . . . . Nobility of heart . . . . You are loyal, you are game, you are a fighter . . . . you will stand for what you believe right; you will defend the helpless.

Ruth, a loyal, honest, fighter, is contrasted with Natalie, who is, until her third act conversion, a faithless, deceitful manipulator.

#### Passivity

No "guttersnipe" is ever passive. Ruth not only defends her own virtue, she also defends the wrongly accused; and to do so, she takes the risk of arguing with those older or above her in social status. Not only does she fight physically to protect herself--her boyfriend would not have treated her to a meal "if he'd known all he was going to get outa me was a busted nose"--she fights with words to defend Jerry (who is a passive hero, taking no real action to clear himself). She tells Peter that he is stupid and unloving to drive Jerry away, abandoning "please" for "You're heartless! You aren't fit to be a father." Undeterred by Natalie's remarks about her lack of refinement, she taunts Natalie to make her angry enough to reveal her true nature:

I got your number! An' I'm goin' to queer your game, don't you think I'm not! You've double-crossed Mr. Argyle; you've tried to make Jerry out a thief; and now you're trying to railroad him to the pen, but I'll be dammed if you're going to get away with it.

Ruth offers to hide Jerry from the police, searches Natalie and Hal's rooms for the missing money, carries out a plan to get the family

jewels away from Natalie and into the safe, and refuses to give back Natalie's note to Peter. But Ruth's most important plot action is to reconcile, through her arguments, Jerry and his father. She does not, however, resolve the final action. It is Toby who discovers where Hal has hidden the money and who, by pulling a gun on him, forces him to hand over the evidence and confess his crime. Though Ruth is certainly spunky and clever enough to take these actions, Toby must perform his traditional role: saving the day at the end of the play.<sup>10</sup>

#### Domesticity

Ruth pops into the Argyles' life through their french windows, a stranger who changes their lives through her values and actions. In the revised script she is not presented as having a clearly defined family circle. True, she has a mother "in the alley," from whom she has presumably learned her values, but the revised script places no emphasis on this. Ruth has no conflict between love for Jerry and duty to her mother. She does, however, face conflict with members of her potential second family, the Argyles. She challenges Natalie, who tries to get rid of her. She confronts Peter; but though she runs the risk of alienating him, he is not really offended by her: he calls her impertinent but says he admires her loyalty.

Ruth does not initially seem to be looking for a husband (she has walked away from a date). But she falls in love almost immediately with Jerry and checks his availability as a potential husband. And from then on, much of her action is to pursue marriage with him. She asks if a rich, educated man could marry a person like her. She is willing to change her manners for him. She rejects Toby, who is

"sweet on her." She instigates Jerry's proposal by asking if he has a steady girl and is overjoyed to receive the answer that he wants to marry a lady at heart who lives on the other side of town.

Ruth repairs the Argyle family circle and finds herself a place in it by reuniting Peter and Jerry. For her spirited, active virtue she is rewarded by a "marriage made" when at the end of the play Jerry says (for the first time in a direct way), "You're going to become Mrs. Jerry Argyle . . . . I'm going to marry you right now." Not only will Ruth have a husband with which to form a new circle, she will also gain a new extended family: Peter as her father-in-law, a reformed Natalie as her mother-in-law, and Peter and Natalie's child as her little brother-in-law. As Toby says, "a swell finish for a play."

#### Actuality

Ruth is another heroine who is both a stock soubrette and who also reflects the behavior of the real twenties women. Although she does not drink, smoke, or pet, she swears and makes no effort to hide her attraction to Jerry. (However, Jerry appeals to her because he keeps sexual desire under control; she doesn't have to fend him off—he is the type of man the pre-World War I Social Purists would have approved of.) Like the flapper, Ruth is straight-forward, spiritedly speaking her mind. The qualities that Jerry appreciates in her—her loyalty, her "gameness," her ability as a "fighter"—are the flapper's boyishness. They are contrasted with the deceitful manipulations of the adultress Natalie. Natalie breaks her marriage vows and is a poor mother. Ruth, on the other hand, is loyal and naturally adept with children, unlike twenties mothers who read

experts' advice, afraid to make mistakes. Ruth, like other twenties women, has caught a man through her forthright behavior and will become a good wife and presumably a good mother.

The Bitterness of Sweets (1930s)<sup>11</sup>

## Plot Summary

As Mom Ewing is scolding Toby Tatum for fooling around with his camera, fingerprinting set, and inventions instead of working in the Ewings' small town garage and tourist home, Ethel Davis and Maizie Cronin, on their way out of New York, stop for gas and Cokes. Almost broke, the young women are planning to meet Jep, Maizie's brother. But Ethel, fearful that Jep will get them into trouble as he did before and wanting instead to earn an honest living, persuades Maizie to get rid of Jep if Ethel can find them jobs. Mom Ewing and her son John, who is attracted to Ethel, invite the girls to dinner to discuss the possibility of their working for the Ewings, doing the jobs that Toby is neglecting. As Maizie returns to get her purse, she spots MacMahon, a crooked policeman and their New York nemesis. MacMahon is investigating a recent robbery at the garage. Maizie wants to leave, but Ethel, deciding to face up to their situation, tells the Ewings that she and Maizie has been serving time at the women's detention farm for shop-lifting. They had been harassed by the police when they tried to find jobs in New York, but now, away from the city that wants no part of them, are trying to go straight. Mom says that she'll be glad to have them work for her because "one mistake doesn't make a criminal." John reveals that he also served time for hauling bootleg liquor during Prohibition; but that he came back to the community, worked hard living down his crime, and is now the oil dealer for the area. At this point, MacMahon enters to arrest Ethel and Maizie at gunpoint as accomplices in the station burglary and to take them back to New York. However, when Toby's latest invention, a gasoline

substitute, blows up MacMahon's car, the explosion knocks MacMahon down and John grabs his gun.

A week later, Ethel and Maizie, to whom Toby has taken a shine, are working hard at the Ewings'. Because John has vouched for them all, including Jep, the sheriff will not arrest them. Maizie tells Mom that MacMahon arrests women for crimes that they didn't commit, then offers to let them go if they "are nice to him." MacMahon, still investigating the robbery, hears John say that he has hidden a thousand dollars collected from area gas station owners in a sachel in his closet until he can take it to the bank. MacMahon, after Toby has tricked him into leaving his fingerprints on the garage bill, blackmails Jep (who has committed the original robbery) into stealing the collection money and then getting the Ewings out of the house with a fake car accident while MacMahon plants the sachel in Ethel's room. MacMahon then plans to arrest Ethel for the theft, take her back to New York, and blackmail her for her sexual favors. However, Toby secretly takes a picture of MacMahon with the stolen money.

The next morning Maizie gets Toby to propose marriage, but Ethel is still being hounded by MacMahon to engage in a less legal relationship. Declaring that he wants Ethel because she is the only woman who ever escaped him, MacMahon threatens to ruin her relationship with John. John, backed by Toby and Maizie, threatens to beat him. When Ethel says that she'd better leave before MacMahon causes them all trouble, John proposes to her.

MacMahon returns with the sheriff, ostensibly to take the collection money to the bank. When the money is discovered missing and the empty sachel is found in Ethel's room, MacMahon starts to arrest

Ethel. However, Toby saves the day, first by tricking MacMahon into giving up his gun and handcuffs, and then, as deputy sheriff, arresting him on the evidence of the picture showing him with the stolen money and the FBI report on his fingerprints, showing him to be a wanted criminal. Both pairs of lovers are united to marry that very afternoon and to eat Mom's home-baked wedding cake.

### The Heroine's Character

#### Purity

Ethel Davis is a repentant sinner who is at least partly a victim of big city society and Depression economics. She had gone to the city "to make good in a big way," but the city "wanted no part of her." And she turned to Maizie and a brief life of crime only because she had no money. But as Mom Ewing says, "One mistake doesn't make a criminal." Ethel proves this statement true by her honesty about her past; she confesses it to the Ewings as part of her determination to go straight and find honest work, even if it doesn't pay well. Now, as Mom says, she has left bitterness and unhappiness behind and deserves "wholesome goodness," like the sweet center under the bitter chocolate coating of her favorite chocolate creams. To this statement of acceptance and promise of a happy future, Ethel responds with the emotionality that confirms her true feminine goodness. Though Toby says that crying when you are sad and also when you are happy doesn't make sense, Maizie points out that "a woman ain't supposed to make sense," a confirmation of heart-wisdom over head-wisdom. Furthermore, Ethel is more than basically pure and honest. She would sacrifice her new-found security by leaving the Ewings so that MacMahon won't make trouble for John.



Ethel is primarily a heroine pursued by a villain who wants sexual favors and defended by a hero who wants marriage. Ethel has defended herself against MacMahon in the past. She has told him "no" in New York and gone to jail as a result; and even though MacMahon threatens to tell John something that will turn him against her, she still refuses. It is, in fact, her so-far successful defense of herself that keeps MacMahon so determined to have her. However, Ethel also asks for and accepts the defense of John, also a repentant sinner; and the romantic purity of their relationship is contrasted with the rambunctious, earthy wooing of Toby and Maizie.

#### Passivity

Ethel is a working girl who had career ambitions but saw them fade. She had gone to New York, determined to be successful but had failed. When she tried to work after her release from prison, the police prevented her from keeping a job. Now she has come to a small town in search of better prospects and is temporarily stranded, but not for long. She seeks and gets work at the Ewings' tourist home and garage. She's not a free-loader; she's determined to live an honest life, no matter how hard it is, and not to slide further into crime.

Ethel has also successfully defended herself against the villain MacMahon and continues to refuse his propositions. In doing this she shows a streak of practicality: "Even if I gave in, you'd hate me within a week [and presumably toss me out]," an echo of the "fatal step" which leads inexorably to ruin. However, Ethel sometimes seems to be wearing out, run to earth by MacMahon's hounding. When she meets the strong hero John, she begins to rely on him for protection, asking him to prevent MacMahon from arresting her and Maizie and

taking them back to New York. John, backed by Toby with a sledge hammer and Maizie with a tire iron, reinforces her refusal of MacMahon. And by his proposal of immediate marriage, John makes another intervention to stop MacMahon's hounding. Ethel is also saved by Toby whose exploding gasoline substitute foils MacMahon's first attempt to take her back to New York and whose tricks finally expose MacMahon as a crook and ensure Ethel's safety. MacMahon's pursuit of Ethel is the basis of the plot, but the plot's final action is resolved by Toby.

#### Domesticity

Ethel moves from big city working girl and ex-con to small town domesticity very quickly, preferring the "peace, security, and love" to be found with a small-town family to the furs and diamonds MacMahon offers her as part of New York high life. At the beginning of the play her only family is quasi-sister Maizie, but before the first act is over, she becomes Mom Ewing's quasi-daughter and John's potential spouse. The rest of the plot is concerned with whether she can escape the villain to become a daughter-in-law and wife. At the Ewings' she continues to work but in the family business and as a woman should: helping out at the gas station in a "cute uniform" and doing tourist home housework, a job which John says, "you can't ask a man to do." Mom promises her that the Ewings "from now on . . . are going to see that you taste nothing but the sweets of happiness," which turn out to be marriage to John, a small business man who makes a comfortable living. Ethel will achieve status and a place in the community by this marriage. There is no reference made to her potential as a mother. The producing of babies is left to Toby and Maizie who, in

their wooing sense, discuss raising a family. Toby's wedding present to Maizie is a pair of baby pants--which she throws in his face as the last action of the play.

#### Actuality

Ethel is one of the amenable women of the thirties who could shoulder her share of the family responsibilities by working in the family business and still be traditionally feminine. She needs men to rescue her from the villain and thus allows them to assert their masculinity. Her jail sentence, her subsequent harassment by the police, and her inability to find a job in the city place her firmly in the thirties milieu. Her flight from the city to the small town can be considered part of the "small but pronounced movement from the cities back to the villages and country . . . . [of] people who had moved to the city in search of higher pay . . . and who had lost their jobs as economic conditions deteriorated."<sup>12</sup> In a fantasy world which yet reflects some of the realities of the Depression, Ethel finds the sweets under the bitterness of bad times-- the same emotional sustenance of marriage and family sought and found by real people of that era.

Another aspect of the Depression, the ambivalence toward producing children, is reflected in the comic wooing of Maizie and Toby. Maizie wants children right away but Toby doesn't. However, when he seems to acquiesce by presenting her with a pair of baby pants as a wedding present, she throws them in his face.

The Governor's Lady (1936)<sup>13</sup>

## Plot Summary

Because the people are sick of corrupt politicians like Tim Murtaugh, Colonel Henry Madden, chairman of the reform party, plans to run honest though socially maladept John Caldwell, a young farmer-turned-lawyer, for governor. John, too honest and brave to be deterred from publishing the evidence of Murtaugh's corruption, loves the Colonel's daughter Pat, a young woman who upsets her father by her devotion to enjoying herself. The Colonel tells John that he has never revealed to Pat that her mother, whom she believes to be dead, actually left the Colonel years ago because she wanted more excitement in her life. Their conversation is interrupted by Toby Sawyer, John's country friend, who comes to visit in the city but stays to become Madden's new office boy. Pat, convincing her father that she can give up parties to help John in his campaign, begins her own campaign to give John some social polish.

John gives the papers incriminating Murtaugh to Toby to put in a safe deposit box. Murtaugh, when his attempt to bribe John fails, threatens to smear Pat with the revelations of Fay Langdon, a notorious honky-tonk owner from Chicago. Pat, however, has made John promise that, no matter what, he will publish the evidence against Murtaugh. Otherwise, she will not marry him. John is then confronted by the notorious Fay, who tells him that unless he withdraws from the governor's race, he will see his "sweetheart disgraced in the eyes of every decent-minded person in the state." When Fay dramatically removes her dark glasses, the Colonel recognizes her as his long-lost wife, Lucille.

Both the Colonel and John agree that to shield Pat, they must give in to Fay Lucille and Murtaugh's demands. The Colonel, in a last attempt to bribe Lucille, angers her with his unwillingness to forgive her or accept the possibility of her reform. When Pat discovers that the newspaper expose of Murtaugh has been cancelled, she is furious that the two men she has "staked my life--my honor--on are yellow." However, Toby reveals that he has given copies of the evidence to Murtaugh but has kept the originals. Pat and Toby deliver the originals to the newspaper and go to meet Lucille. On Pat's return to her father's office, she tells him that she is no "softy" who needs protection and that she is proud of her mother who has been working as a governess since she left the Colonel. Lucille, who has been hired by Murtaugh to pose as Fay Langdon, would have told the Colonel of the deception if he had displayed any kindness or understanding toward her. Though the Colonel still maintains that he cannot forgive his wife, he melts when Pat presents her to him. The play ends with the Colonel embracing Lucille and Pat embracing John.

### The Heroine's Character

#### Purity

Although Colonel Madden calls his daughter a fine girl and says that thoughts of her have kept him "straight" whenever he has been tempted to do something politically shady, he also implies his fear that there is something potentially tainted about Pat. Can she really be a lady when her mother "wasn't--well--exactly what she should have been"? Pat's mother had wanted "a good time, excitement" and, when the Colonel was too busy getting ahead, looked for that good time elsewhere by running away with a lover. The Colonel has tried to

ameliorate the influence of such a woman by telling Pat that her mother is a dead saint. Pat, although she seems primarily concerned with enjoying her social life, has done nothing wrong. Nevertheless, any time she mentions liking amusement, the Colonel becomes nervous: she's acting like her mother. When Pat's mother suddenly appears in the person of Fay Langdon, "known from coast to coast as a keeper of disorderly houses" and just paroled from the Texas State Prison for Women, the threat of a legacy of bad blood becomes real. On the basis of her mother's life, Pat could be smeared by Murtaugh as a "common, little \_\_\_\_\_," not fit to be a governor's wife. If she is associated with such disreputableness, she becomes a political liability.

However, before the first act is over, it is clear to the audience that Pat is a true heroine, not a frivolous party girl. She declares to her father that she can cheerfully give up her good times to help any man she really loves, even if he is poor, so long as he keeps fighting for the right. Her declaration that she can "face hard knocks with a grin" indicates her ability to make sacrifices for her man's support and advancement (though she does not seem to be giving up anything crucial).

Certainly Pat is not "fast": when John, thankful for her offer of help on his social advancement, eagerly grasps her hands, she warns him, "Don't advance too rapidly." Furthermore, she is safe from hereditary evil. The heartless mother who might have passed on her sinful ways to Pat is revealed as having tender feelings (she has missed her daughter) and being capable of reform. After she left the

Colonel, she soon gave up her lover and has supported herself in honest work as a governess, too proud to return.

Pat is not only a good person, she also teaches others the right way to behave with both her resoluteness and her forgiveness. Resolutely, she refuses to marry John until he has won her respect as well as her love in the political and moral battle against Murtaugh. Although she becomes very upset when she realizes that she can't count on John or her father to publish the evidence of corruption, she then resolutely turns this evidence over to the newspapers, showing herself to be morally superior to the men. She is also morally superior in her tolerance of and sympathy for the sinner Fay. The Colonel's hardness of heart has convinced a yet-undecided Fay to continue with the smear campaign: she says, "If you had given me one word of affection or sympathy yesterday I would never have gone through with this . . . . But you treated me like a leper." Pat, however, forgives Fay's "one ghastly mistake" (the descendant of the nineteenth century's "one false step"), accepts her as her mother, and is proud that Fay/Lucille has supported herself with honest work all these years. Pat also rebukes the neglect of women's needs by her father and other husbands: "Oh, you men make me sick. If you studied your wives half as much as your business, you would see a difference in your marriages." She then reconciles the Colonel and Lucille. By taking action against Murtaugh, by forgiving her mother's transgression, by speaking up for companionship in marriage, and by prevailing upon the Colonel to accept Fay/Lucille as his wife, Pat defines the moral climate of the play.

### Passivity

Pat is an assertive woman, the active partner in personal relationships. By taking over when others have bungled, she resolves most of the plot actions. Though she begins the socializing of John at her father's instigation, her agreement to sacrifice her own social life to support John's career is described with a very aggressive football metaphor. Bucking the line and running interference for her man until he carries the ball over for the touchdown is an assertive concept of a wife's role, even if the husband is the "star" who makes the score. Once Pat has agreed to stand by John, she becomes the aggressive partner in their relationship, inviting him to sit by her, telling him that he can acquire social polish by squiring her around town and that he can begin by taking her out for a soda. Pat is not only more assertive than John, she is more of a realist about political life. Unlike John, she knows how dangerous Murtaugh is, that he has not given up his efforts and still possesses some effective means to coerce John into surrendering the evidence. Indeed, John seems so gauche, naive, and often passive that he will not function well if he does win the election unless Pat and her father tell him what to do and when and how to do it. Pat will be as much a governor as a governor's lady.

John and the Colonel, however, do not understand Pat's tough resoluteness. They believe that because she has been shielded by the Colonel and "never had a moment's pain in her life," she cannot stand the scandal and loss of friends which will result from the public revelation of her mother's identity. Therefore, they wish to play the traditional male roles, protecting the heroine from the persecution of



the villain Murtaugh by surrendering the incriminating evidence to him. Such cowardice shakes Pat. But, after Toby tells her that her men were blackmailed into their decision and that he has kept the original evidence, Pat forges ahead: "We're going to show this town that there's one Madden that can't be bluffed. I'm going to put Dad and John over in spite of themselves." After calling the newspapers and telling them to print the story of Murtaugh's corruption, she chides her father: "Daddy, what kind of a daughter did you think you had? Did you think I was a softy?"

Pat gives Toby credit for saving the political day by keeping the original evidence and depositing a copy in the bank. (Traditionally, Toby must be involved in the resolution of the plot.) But she is the one who resolves the final action of the play. She speaks out fearlessly in condemnation of men's neglect of their wives' emotional needs, then, by bringing Lucille into the Colonel's office over his protests, reunites her mother and father.

#### Domesticity

Pat is "Daddy's girl" because her first family has been split when her mother left many years ago. Her father has raised her with the image of a dead "angel" mother as her inspiration. And Pat in her turn has been an inspiration for her father, keeping him away from the shady side of politics by her mere existence. "Thank God. You are my child," the Colonel cries; and Pat is truly his daughter throughout the play, especially in her political savvy.

But if Pat is Daddy's girl, she also surpasses him. She rejects his attempt to protect her from the harsh truth about her mother and the social consequences of its public revelation and becomes the "one

Madden who can't be bluffed." Though she has criticised her father's belief that she is a "softy" and his treatment of his wife, she has guaranteed the political success of the Colonel's party and candidate John. And she reunites her parents. When her appeal to their father-daughter relationship--the Colonel has always given her everything she wanted, and now she wants her mother back--is rejected by the Colonel's declaration that he can never forgive his wife, she simply overrides his protests by presenting Lucille to him. Of course, he melts. Pat's actions are for the good of the family. A "mother restored" and her parents' repaired marriage are part of the happy ending.

As for her own marriage, Pat has in effect been handed over to her father's choice, a nice honest young man with a good political future who is already in love with her. But Pat still retains an option: she will not marry John unless he wins the fight with Murtaugh. She wins the fight for him, but still chooses to marry him. Pat will be more than a solace and giver of happiness. She will not stand behind John but "shoulder to shoulder" with him and even move out ahead to run interference. John, naive and even passive, needs her help and direction. She is not making a great sacrifice to give up partying to become a governor's wife. Her marriage will give her a sphere of activity which is both domestic and worldly, in which she can carry on her father's tradition and in which she will not be neglected by her husband in favor of his work because she will be an active partner in that work. In effect, her marriage-family circle will intersect with her first family circle, and both will intersect

with the circle of activity in the wider society. Pat may well be John's governor as much as she is his lady.

#### Actuality

Pat is a heroine who reflects both the twenties' and thirties' experience of women. Like a twenties woman she enjoys amusement and parties and is aggressive in her relationship with John. Yet she is also the thirties "lady" who goes out with him for a soda to instruct him in social graces. Not promiscuous herself, her sympathy for her mother reflects twenties' and thirties' relaxed attitudes about women's sexual experience. Though not running for political office herself, her political wisdom and the aid she gives John's campaign--even in its heightened melodramatic form--reflects both the active style of twenties women and the role of some women in the New Deal. In trying to shield her from the effects of Murtaugh's schemes, her father and fiance may be reflecting the tendency of males in those decades to discourage women from political activity. Though few real women in the thirties developed an interest in politics, Pat's enthusiasms will carry over into her marriage. As John's wife she will be an ex-flapper who can give up "good times," "face hard knocks with a grin," and work for her man's advancement--all excellent qualities in a thirties' wife. Furthermore, since she will be working with John, she will not again have to voice the perennial complaint of women that husbands neglect wives for business.

## NOTES: CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> The Paid In Full script calls the play a drama and says it is the property of Arnold and Larmigna. Page 7 is missing. It probably contained a speech by Joe Brooks, denouncing capitalism's abuse of workers.

Both Robert Sherman and the U.S. Copyright Office give the author as Eugene Walter and the date as 1907. Walter Meserve calls Eugene Walter a writer of relatively realistic plays about men and women ("The Dramatists and Their Plays," in American Drama, Travis Bogard, Richard Moody, and Walter J. Meserve, Vol. VIII in The Revels History of Drama in English, gen. ed. T.W. Chaik [New York: Barnes & Noble, 1977], p. 209), the most significant American author of pre-World War I social melodrama (An Outline History of American Drama [Totowa, N.J.: Littlefield, Adams, 1970], p. 186). Social melodramas, although they depict contemporary social problems, "retain the characteristics of melodrama" - they "stimulate feeling rather than thinking, and the scenes are put together with a view to sensational entertainment" (Meserve, Outline History, pp. 174-175) - and "use or comment on social problems or conditions rather than treat them intelligently and imaginatively" (Meserve, Outline History, p. 186).

According to a New York Times article, ("Paid in Full, Nearly a Hero, The Rising of the Hero," 1 March 1908, in The New York Times Theatre Reviews: 1904-1911 [New York: The New York Times and Arno, 1975], n. page), most New York managers refused to produce the play because of the "unpleasantness" of its theme and the fact that the couple is not reunited at the end. But it finally opened in New York in 1908 for 161 performances. (Edwin Bronner, The Encyclopedia of American Theatre, 1900-1975 [New York: A.S. Barnes, 1980], p. 361).

<sup>2</sup> "and given . . . again" is marked as a cut.

<sup>3</sup> According to the same New York Times reviewer, some members of the audience were displeased that they did not actually see Emma paired off with Jimsy at the final curtain.

<sup>4</sup> Aimee the Circus Girl is probably a shortened version of Amy or Amy, Child of the Circus by Miron Leffingwell, copyright 1909. A note on the last page of the script reads "Re-written and copied by J.W. Sights, at, --Strawberry Point, Iowa Jan. 23rd, 1923." It is listed on its cover as a "comedy-drama." The character's name sometimes is given as Aimee, sometimes as Amy.

<sup>5</sup> Judith Stephens, "The Central Female Characters in the Pulitzer Prize Plays, 1918 to 1949," Diss. Kent State 1977, p. 72.

<sup>6</sup> Bought and Paid For, also a "social melodrama" (Meserve, Outline History, p. 186), opened on Broadway in 1911 and played for

431 performances. Some reviewers said the play became a hit mainly because of the performance of Frank Craven as Jimmy Gilly, the parasitical shipping clerk. The play was revived in 1921 for 30 performances (Bronner, p. 61).

Arthur Hornblow wrote a 1912 novel version of the play. The novel gives more background detail for each character, contains long speeches made by the characters to defend their actions and values and is also more explicit and titillating than the play script about sexual passion: ". . . he seized her, overpowering her by sheer brute strength, leered at her like some gibbering ape, polluted her lips with whiskey-laden kisses, claimed possession of her body with the unreasoning frenzy of a beast in rut." (Arthur Hornblow, Bought and Paid For: A Story of Today [New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1912], p. 176).

The Rosiers performed Bought and Paid For in the thirties and forties, probably under the title Eternal Love, and in the sixties under its original title.

A note on the last page of the Rosier script reads "Tampa Florida Jan 15/36," presumably where and when Harold Rosier or Richard Henderson either acquired the script or copied it. Among other changes made to eliminate minor characters and simplify language or cut long speeches, the repertoire script also has a revised second act curtain. In the original Broadway script, a drunken Robert demands a kiss from Virginia, his wife. When she kisses him on the cheek, he demands a "real one" and, though she struggles, kisses her "full on the mouth." Virginia flees to her bedroom and locks the door. "Stafford takes the poker from fireplace, rushes to door, smashes in panel, puts his arm through and opens door as THE CURTAIN FALLS" (George Broadhurst, Bought and Paid For [New York: Samuel French, 1916], p. 58). In the repertoire script, Robert's demand for a kiss is met with a kiss on the forehead. He asks for a "real one" and tries to kiss Virginia, but she shoves him into a chair and runs "off R," leaving him looking dazed and saying, "Well, I'll be damned."

<sup>7</sup> The Girl from Out Yonder has also been performed as The Fisherman's Daughter. On the last page of the script is typed "Copied in the rotten town of Greentown, Indiana, July 15, 1921." Written by hand is "property of Ed Mills." Both Robert Sherman and the U.S. Copyright Office date the play at 1913 and list the authors as Pauline Phelps and Marion Short. Sherman says that the play was first performed in Bay City, Michigan.

<sup>8</sup> The first two pages of the Tildy Ann script contain typical Robert J. Sherman play slogans: "Our territory--Podunk to Broadway. We supply both places"; "It's a Sherman play. And comes from the firm that writes plays and submits them to the small shows first." They also contain some comments on this particular script: "Here is the perfect tent play. No swearing--no Hell's or Dam's [sic]. Nothing to offend. As full of heart interest as a nut is full of meat. Plenty of clean comedy." The script also contains a long section in which a movie house owner and a man who wants to buy him out debate the use of theatres for a variety of entertainments, including repertoire shows.

On a tape of the Rosier Players' 1977 production of Tildy Ann, Harold Rosier as Master of Ceremonies says that the play was written about 1925 and was very popular in both opera houses and tents.

<sup>9</sup>The title page of the M.S.U. Library's copy of the The Hoodlum says "A new comedy-drama by Ted and Virginia Maxwell." (The Maxwells wrote plays during the 1920s. The Online Computer Library Center lists one copyrighted in 1926.) The revised script (which I received from Mrs. Oleferchik) eliminates the character Agnes Martin, Ruth's (or Rag's) mother, and therefore some of the more sentimental speeches. It contains a three-page addition to the beginning of Act I: a scene for the child of Peter and Natalie. In the older script, the child, a boy, never appears. In this revision the child is called Lori, the name of the Rosiers' granddaughter.

The Rosiers have performed this play under other titles: Love Is Blind, The Guttersnipe, and possibly Rags to Riches. Natalie was a favorite role with the repertoire actresses, according to Mrs. Oleferchik.

<sup>10</sup>Larry L. Clark, "Toby Shows: A Form of American Popular Theatre,": Diss. Univ. of Illinois 1963, p. 17.

<sup>11</sup>The script says "A 3-Act Comedy-Drama by Bob Feagin." According to Gerry Blanchard, director of the Rosier Players and a professor at Jackson Community College, it is one of a group of Feagin plays written in the 1930s. The Rosier Players last performed it during their summer 1982 tour.

<sup>12</sup>Richard Lingeman, Small Town America: A Narrative History, 1620 -- The Present (New York: Putnam, 1980), p. 393.

<sup>13</sup>The first page of the script says "A Comedy-Drama in three acts by Bob 'Slat's' Feagin" and is marked as copyrighted in 1936. (It is not a version of the 1912 play by Alice Bradley, produced by Belasco with the famous Childs Restaurant set.) The Rosier Players most recently performed this play on their summer 1982 tour.

## CONCLUSION

The heroines of the representative repertoire comedy-dramas analyzed in this study do not always closely fit the historical or popular images of women in the years from 1900 to 1939. For example, the history of women's experience in the twenties would lead us to expect vigorous, active heroines like Ruth, the hoodlum, who defends both herself and the hero and, with some help from Toby, catches a crook. But among the twenties repertoire heroines there is also Tildy Ann, who passively acquiesces to mistreatment and needs rescuing by men. The popular literature of the thirties tells us that women were retreating and leaving action to men, that they were like Ethel, in The Bitterness of Sweets, who flees the city and finally has to rely on Toby and hero John for her salvation from the crooked detective. But among the thirties repertoire heroines there is also Pat, the governor's lady, who takes over a political campaign when her menfolk fail her and, with some help from Toby, foils the crooked politician. By this assortment of active and passive heroines, repertoire plays reflect the slow change, the intermingling of values over four decades--the venerated or tolerated remnants of old attitudes toward women co-existing with accommodated or integrated versions of the new.

However, a community attitude that did not change was the belief that women should be pure. All of the repertoire heroines in this study are not only sexually virtuous but, more importantly, morally superior. Indeed, most of them are passionate in their purity in the

sense that they believe strongly in a value, cause, or person and act upon that belief. For example, both Emma in Paid in Full, and Virginia in Bought and Paid For want to preserve their married chastity. Emma does not want to be used as a sexual bribe to keep her embezzler husband from going to jail, and Virginia does not want to go to bed with a drunken husband. But both heroines speak out and take action on a broader issue than chastity. They oppose the immorality of men's treatment of women as chattel. Repertoire heroines have the power of purity, reflecting the society's belief that because of their moral superiority, women have the right to be concerned with the ethical climate of the home and community. At their least active, repertoire heroines illustrate the standards of female purity; at their most active they demonstrate women's actions for justice in the home and community--their moral sphere.

Another value that did not change is the domestic one--the importance of marriage and family in the life of women. Passionate purity leads to domesticity. All but one of the representative repertoire heroines end up married or about to be married or with an improved marriage as the curtain falls. The exception, Emma in Paid in Full, has a potentially good husband waiting to replace her rotten one. The heroines not only fulfill their domestic destiny by marriage they also strengthen the family circle, reuniting separated members, replacing lost relatives with quasi-ones. For example, Amy, the circus girl, not only gains a husband, she also regains a lost (and now repentant) father and finds a substitute mother.

Marriage for the repertoire heroine is not just a way of confining her to or protecting her in her proper place and separate



sphere. It is not just a convenient way for a hack writer to conclude a play; nor is it just the western theatre tradition of ending a comedy with a marriage. It is the heroine's reward. In the moral fantasy world of melodrama, virtue is triumphant. In the world of repertoire comedy-drama, which is a type of melodrama, triumphant virtue is often represented by the heroine, who, with goodness which is more than chastity, has fended off or even foiled the villain, healed rifts, restored broken relationships--who has helped people to live more harmoniously within the family and community. What better reward for such a woman than marriage to a good man? Women's actual experience with the society of the times shows little attractiveness in alternatives to marriage like spinsterhood and/or paid work with its lack of money, power, or status. Power and status lay in marriage and the resulting family. And in the plays at least, the heroine always found a husband who could support her in comfort and sometimes even was quite wealthy.

More importantly, the heroine's marriage represents continuation of the family, both the nuclear and extended versions. And continuation of the family means continuation of the community; to the audience, family closeness equals community closeness. Rural and small town people fear family and community disintegration: the loosening of family ties, the death of the old people and the movement of the young ones to larger towns and cities for work and new life styles. But, they believe that with a good woman at its center, a family can stay strong and united. The members of a strong, united family stay in the community, reaffirming its traditional values

because to do otherwise would cause too much disintegration-producing tension.

For the repertoire plays to be commercially viable they had to appeal to the basically conservative, family-oriented, multi-generational audience of men and women by reflecting their values and beliefs. For example, in the heroines, women audience members could admire and temporarily identify with several ideal images of themselves. In the heroines they could see women who faced the perennial issues they themselves faced--sexual rights in marriage, betrayal of trust, sexual harassment, the conflict between responsibility to self and responsibility to family, the conflict between love for a mate or potential mate and love for parents, the need to increase power within the family, and the need to find a "good" husband. Both women and men of varying ages could see these issues presented in an entertaining manner--the exciting, heightened situations of the plot--and in an acceptable form--stock characters, "clean" language, and reassuring happy endings which preserved the integrity of the heroine and also of the family and community. They could feel the power of women who could accomplish good for themselves, their domestic circle, and their small segment of society.

Repertoire plays reflect the life of Midwestern small town/rural America in the decades from the turn of the century to World War II. It is not an exactly mirrored reflection of scrupulously realistic detail, "warts and all," but rather a selective reflection of the beliefs, values, attitudes, and dreams of the audiences. Whether they portray urban or small town heroines the plays present the way the audience wanted to see women in relation to the life they actually

experienced: the audiences' vision of the desirable community, the way that life should or ought to be--and sometimes actually was.

The plays confirmed existing values and showed the extent and degree of integration of "new" ideas. They did not encourage change, but they may well have supported those who still struggled with changes that had occurred but were not yet totally integrated into the life of all members of the community. They taught the audience how to behave or what to be in terms of community standards, presenting what many audience members believed but wanted publicly reaffirmed or appreciated. And they still perform these functions. I think of one old lady attending a Rosier Players' performance of The Governor's Lady. As Pat proclaimed those deathless lines, "Oh, you men make me sick. If you studied your wives half as much as your business, you would see a difference in your marriages," the old lady nodded repeatedly and looked pointedly at her husband. That old woman knew what, in spite of the effects of the women's movement, men are still really like and what women still want, and wanted her husband to get the message too.

## **APPENDIX**

## APPENDIX

### THE ROSIER PLAYERS OF MICHIGAN: A MIDWESTERN REPERTOIRE COMPANY<sup>1</sup>

#### The Henderson Stock Company and the Opera House Years

The Rosier Players like to advertise that their repertoire company has been in operation since 1898, the date of the organization of the Henderson Stock Company. In 1939 the Henderson Stock Company became the Rosier Players when it was purchased by Harold Rosier, one of its featured players.

Rosier, born 1912 in Leslie, Michigan, had been fascinated by touring shows all through his childhood.<sup>2</sup> Even though his religiously conservative family believed theatre and theatre people to be sinful, some arts were apparently acceptable. When Harold showed ability at drawing, his father bought him paints to make religious pictures. A visiting Chautauqua<sup>3</sup> entertainer who saw a display of fourteen-year-old Harold's paintings hanging in the family bakery offered to teach the boy to do chalk talks,<sup>4</sup> at which Harold became very adept. Rosier gave the chalk talks to area churches and other groups; and when he re-entered Leslie High School at age nineteen (he had dropped out to help support his family), he supported himself for three years while getting his diploma by presenting the chalk talks, dramatic readings, and impersonations throughout southern Michigan. Rosier had intended to become a student at the Art Institute of Chicago but

didn't have enough money. Instead, in 1934 he accepted an offer by Richard Henderson to join the Henderson Stock Company. Henderson, while performing in Leslie, on the advice of a friend, the high school English teacher who also directed plays, had gone to see Rosier in the senior class play. He was so impressed that he hired him immediately for the rest of the Henderson Company tour.<sup>5</sup>

Organized in 1898, the Henderson Stock Company was reputed to be one of the finest in the midwest. It toured Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Wisconsin, and Michigan, always in opera houses with the exception of one season under canvas with the Hunt Stock Company. Harold quickly became a headliner with the Hendersons and also continued with his solo acts when the touring season was over. In the off-season of 1936, while teaching a WPA drama class in Leslie, Rosier met Waunetta. They met again when he did a chalk talk at her country church. Two days later he invited her to the Valentine Ball at the Masonic Temple (where he was performing at intermission). She accepted, they began dating, and they married in June with no opposition from her family, which, unlike Harold's, loved theatre and always attended every show that came to town. Waunetta Rosier began performing "right away." After they had been married a week or two, Harold handed her a script and said, "Learn this." Waunetta, "right off the farm," wasn't "keen on it" but learned anyway and began performing with Harold--initially in short pieces such as scenes from famous plays and Toby or Uncle Si and Sis Hopkins skits--at school assemblies, club groups, and opera house evenings.

Planning to retire, Richard Henderson died of a heart attack as his last tour ended in October 1937. In the fall of 1938, Mrs.

Henderson (Fanny Asbury), still wishing to perform but not to deal with managerial responsibilities, sold the company--scripts, props, costumes, and one truck--to Harold Rosier. Rosier renamed the company the Rosier Players and continued to play stands in most of the towns which had been the Hendersons' traditional Michigan territory, performing only indoors.

The early Rosier company consisted of Harold and Waunetta, Mrs. Henderson (until her retirement in 1940), another leading role couple, and a character couple. Some actors stayed with the Rosier Players for several seasons; others "jumped on" to another show when they wanted a change of locality. The Rosier Players were a small company because they "played commonwealth," that is, after they paid the bills, they divided the rest of the profits equally. Harold played Toby and other character or "general business" roles--the uncles, bankers, lawyers, and other men of about forty, the "in between" age. Waunetta played ingenues, soubrettes, some leads and the Sis Hopkins roles in the Toby plays. Everyone in the company played in the band and/or had a vaudeville act: Fanny Asbury played the xylophone; Harold Rosier not only did chalk talks but also had a ventriloquist act and played the musical saw; Waunetta was in the skits.<sup>6</sup>

The Rosiers continued as a successful repertoire company for four years but began to face such serious problems with the rationing and shortages of World War II that they missed the summer 1942 tour. Harold began to work in Ypsilanti, selling house trailers to war plant workers.<sup>7</sup> Just after World War II, the Rosiers moved from Leslie, built a house in Jackson where they had opened a trailer sales business, and closed the repertoire company. But they didn't cease

performing. Because Harold's invalid mother was living with them and they could not leave her for any extended period, they opened the Rosier Players School Assembly Company so that they could perform during the day but be home in the evening.

#### The Tent Years

After the death of Harold's mother, the Rosiers decided to reorganize their repertoire company. Although they had performed indoors in the past, Harold Rosier began to believe that a tent would more readily identify their company as a distinct entity and communicate the idea of "wholesome family entertainment" to the public.<sup>8</sup> In 1964 the Rosiers purchased the tent, chairs, scenery, trucks, and tent trailer of the Jack Collier Tent Show of Illinois. The equipment had been in storage since 1954 when Mr. Collier, aging and widowed, disbanded his company. It took the Rosiers over a year to get the equipment in shape. They overhauled and painted the trucks, scraped gum from the chairs and varnished them; and Rosier built and painted new scenery.

At first, because the Rosiers were now older and found touring difficult, they remained in one location for the whole season, performing plays from the old repertoire and occasionally a contemporary mystery. In 1966, their first year in the tent, the Rosiers performed at the Stage Coach Stop in the Irish Hills near Tecumseh, Michigan; in 1967, 1968, and 1969, they performed at History Town, located between Brighton and Howell, Michigan, and also at the Brighton Little Theatre. In the tradition of repertoire's total family involvement, the Rosier's daughter Waunetta began performing with them, playing



leading lady and villainess roles and doing a magic act. Eventually the Rosier granddaughter Lori also joined the company.<sup>9</sup>

In 1969 the company experienced difficulties. Interviewed for an article in the Lansing, Michigan, State Journal, Rosier said that with attendance at one fourth that of the preceding year the show had lost money all summer at History Town. Rosier remembered how in the past "a tent show actor was a big man about town" but now mourned, "We're no longer a part of the American way of life."<sup>10</sup>

### The Jackson Community College Years

The Bicentennial celebration, however, gave the Rosiers a chance to become part of the American way of life again when they were endorsed by the national, state, and local Bicentennial commissions. In 1976 they gave the show to Jackson Community College on condition that it be continued "without change in format or concept."<sup>11</sup> Rosier performed with and taught the ways of repertoire to college students. He refused to allow them to burlesque the old plays and made them stay in character, unlike some directors of other shows who would allow actors to step outside the frame of the play; for example, directing them to pretend to forget lines in order to get laughs.<sup>12</sup> The community college toured the show (with the Rosiers in the company) under local sponsorship in each small community. They often fitted their performances into the small town schedules of festivals and promotions, returning each year if they could generate a good-sized audience and dropping towns like the one where for two years they were given a lot with water standing in puddles or the one where the high school coach objected to their raising the tent on his playing field.

On June 2, 1980, Harold Rosier died, the death of an actor, just before he was to begin rehearsals for the forty-sixth season of the Rosier Players and while he was on stage getting ready to perform as Toby. According to Rosier piano player Gene Gaunt, "He picked up his famous red wig, but dropped it. He apologized to the audience, saying he felt faint. He collapsed on the stage and died."<sup>13</sup> Mrs. Rosier continued to go out with the show. She helped select scripts, gave advice on costumes and properties, played character roles, acted as mistress of ceremonies to introduce the performances every night, and was the "old bag" (old woman) in the vaudeville skits. During the 1981 season she met Warren Oleferchik, supervisor on a construction project at the Jackson shopping mall where the Rosier Players were concluding their tour. And as might well happen to a deserving heroine in a repertoire play, she married him in the fall.

#### The Rosier Players Today

In the summer season of 1982, the Rosier Players traveled their mid-Michigan circuit with their tent, folding chairs, stage, lights, scenery, and costumes packed into three trucks--two old, blue, box-bodied ones and a more modern-looking vehicle with sliding side panels. During the first week of August the Players performed at "Turkeyville U.S.A." near Marshall, the Cornwells' 180 acre turkey "ranch" which includes a restaurant, ice cream parlor, "general store" and gift shops, and antiques barn. The second and third generations of Cornwells now operate the ranch and also offer their customers flea markets, arts and crafts fairs, Fourth of July fireworks, and a traveling circus in an atmosphere of commercialized nostalgia ("It's

real America" says the brochure), a family business which appeals to customer families.

When the theatre audience arrives at the performance space, a cleared area behind the restaurant, it sees the Rosier Players' trucks parked beside the yellow-orange tent. After buying tickets--two dollars for adults, one dollar for children, babes in arms free--from a young woman in a vaguely turn-of-the-century gown, the audience members--a mixed group of children, young adults, middle-aged and old people--pick out their seats in the grass-floored tent. At the front is the canvas proscenium, red with white stars, pierced by two "doors" or covered entrances. The maroon or faded red main curtain is topped by a blue valance. The band, in striped shirts and derbies or straw hats, enters from the stage right proscenium "door" and on piano, guitar, saxophone trumpet, and drums plays tunes like "Ain't Misbehaving'," "Up the Lazy River," and "Frankie and Johnny." One old man in the audience bounces up and down with the music. While the tent fills to about five sixths of its capacity, popcorn and lemonade sellers, also in vaguely period costume, pitch their wares. A female vocal trio sings some late thirties'-early forties' swing. The band adds antics and jokes: when they play "Hold That Tiger," one member goes looking for it; the piano player, in a hat with ears and snout, says he will do a song about a farmer who fell in love with a sow--"Pig O' My Heart."

Next, after the whole company appears on stage to sing its theme song, the Master of Ceremonies, Michael Wright, presents his warm-up speech. When he states that the Rosiers present family entertainment, of which there is so little nowadays, the audience applauds. Wright

presents the history of the show, which still uses its original form and scripts. He says that since it has been eighty-seven years on the road, it is therefore the longest running repertoire show in the nation. Wright next discusses the tent and how it manages to stay up without a centerpole, tells of Rosier Players memorabilia on file at the Lincoln Center and Smithsonian, says that the company would like to meet the audience in front of the stage after the show, and pushes sales of the fifty cent programs. Next comes a sing-along of five old favorites, and finally the play.

This night the Rosier Players are performing The Governor's Lady, one of the group of four Bob Feagin plays from the thirties that make up this season's bill. The play concerns an honest political boss' attempt to crush a corrupt political machine by running an honest young farmer-turned-lawyer for governor. The audience loves the political jokes; they're still applicable to the current campaign:

Toby: He can't be a politician; he has his hands in his own pockets.

The set is minimal: flats, a desk and chair, a couch. The costumes are attractive versions of thirties' styles. The acting is somewhat broad, with important lines delivered full front, but no more so than in many late thirties' and early forties' movies. Perhaps the narrow width and small apron of the proscenium are also responsible for this delivery since they tend to confine the actors to a small space where any lines delivered to the sides or upstage would be lost to the audience.

At the intermission two of the actors sing "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" The Master of Ceremonies promotes the Friday and Saturday shows and announces that the band will play at noon in the

gazebo on the Turkeyville grounds. The audience buys more lemonade and popcorn, especially from the actor who plays Toby, doubles in the band, and has been with the company for several seasons.

When the play begins again, the audience stays involved with the action, even though the outcome is obvious. At the heroine's last big speech, condemning men for their neglect of their wives, an old woman, looking at her husband, nods her head in agreement. The play ends, the actors bow, the band plays, and some of the audience go up to the stage to meet the cast (the program provides a space for autographs).

## NOTES: APPENDIX

<sup>1</sup>Except where noted, the information in this Appendix comes from interviews by Christine Birdwell and Marsha MacDowell with Waunetta Rosier Oleferchik, Harold Rosier's widow, on 6 Nov. 1981 and 23 Nov. 1981 in Jackson, Michigan.

<sup>2</sup>Even in Leslie, with a population of eight hundred, Rosier would see one or two stock companies at the opera house in the winter and in the summer have an entertainment feast: The Belle Barchus show, the Jack Kelly Stock Company Number Two, the Hunt Stock Company, two medicine shows (Sharpstein's and Princess Red Feather's) and the Chautauqua. (Harold Rosier interviewed by Robert MacDonald, Jackson, Michigan, 19 Nov. 1973.)

<sup>3</sup>Chautauqua was "a cultural and educational movement in the United States started in the summer of 1874 as a tent meeting on the shores of Lake Chautauqua in New York State. In a short time, there were chautauqua tents all over the country traveling established circuits, usually in the summer months. Show business crept in quite rapidly . . . . A typical chautauqua program would contain elements of vaudeville and dramatic sketches (plus the usual lecture and other 'cultural' attractions)." (Don B. Wilmeth, The Language of American Popular Entertainment [Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1981], p. 50.) The Chautauqua performers were considered respectable because their material was "educational"--geared to a church-going audience. (William Bales interviewed by Harold Rosier, Chelsea, Mich., 1978)

<sup>4</sup>A chalk talk artist told a story and simultaneously illustrated it with colored chalk drawings on large sheets of paper arranged on an easel or other device so that the audience would easily view the pictures as the story unfolded.

<sup>5</sup>Rosier, 19 Nov. 1973.

<sup>6</sup>Some of these were burlesque skits which might be a little "off color" but were not "blue" or risqué like the material used by the Sun Players, described by Mrs. Oleferchik as "right off from Chicago."

<sup>7</sup>Rosier, 19 Nov. 1973.

<sup>8</sup>Robert D. Klassen, "The Tent-Repertoire Theatre: A Rural American Institution," Diss. Michigan State 1969, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup>Mrs. Oleferchik said that Rosier audience have always liked the idea of a family show, not just one which catered to families but one that was run by and performed in by a family. They liked watching the

show's children grow and become involved in the productions as the Rosier daughter and granddaughter did.

<sup>10</sup> Jim Martinson, "Actors Take Final Bow as Touring Tent Show Folds," The State Journal (Lansing, Mich.), 6 Aug. 1969, n.p.

<sup>11</sup> G.L. Blanchard, Rosier Players souvenir program, 1979, n.p.

<sup>12</sup> Mrs. Oleferchik gets irate about such practices: "Michigan people would laugh us off the stage."

<sup>13</sup> Barb Grondin, "MSU Students Uphold 85-Year Tradition with Tent Show," The State News (East Lansing, Mich.), 3 May 1983, p. 7.

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