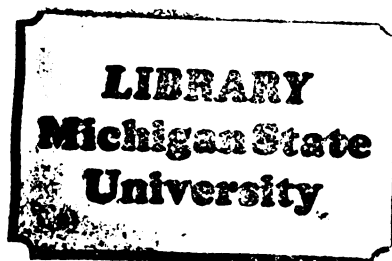


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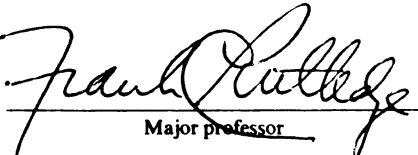
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THE DEPICTION OF THE COWBOY
IN SELECTED NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICAN POPULAR DRAMAS

By

Kay Marcella Robinson

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ABSTRACT

THE DEPICTION OF THE COWBOY
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The influence of the cattle-frontier (cowboy) myth on Americans is a far-reaching one; in fact, it is the most deeply embedded of any of the frontier myths. That the myth lacks a significant basis in reality is also true; nevertheless, the myth exerts a potent influence.

The actual cattle frontier existed only from 1865 to 1886, but the legend it inspired provided the basis for the "Western" in all its various manifestations. A good deal has been said about the cowboy as he exists in modern Western novels and in film and television. However, the character of the cowboy as he initially existed in the popular art forms has not been much examined. Thus the focus of this paper is the cowboy as depicted in selected late nineteenth-century melodramas. Included are an examination of the influence of the frontier on American character, and the emergence of the cowboy, both in actuality and in mythic form. This is followed by definitions of popular culture and theatre and description of the appearance of the cowboy in the two forms

from which the popular theatre borrowed the character: dime novels and the Wild West Shows.

Eleven plays featuring cowboy characters provide the major basis for the paper; internal evidence groups the plays as having been written and produced from the 1880's into the first decade of the 1900's (pre-dating Owen Wister's The Virginian and Edwin S. Porter's The Great Train Robbery). Examination of the plays in light of knowledge about popular theatre forms and about the legendary cowboy's first appearances in popular culture forms reveals the debt owed to dime novels and to the standard melodramatic structure of the period.

Even though the plays with cowboy characters were not especially "Western", or, indeed, very different at all from melodramas with Eastern settings, the cowboy heroes of these dramas are an integral part of the growing myth, a myth which would be somewhat re-shaped in the twentieth century, but which owes its essential character to the nineteenth-century cowboy hero of the dime novels and popular melodramas.

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INTRODUCTION

In retrospect the cowboy became not simply an employee who got a dollar a day, plus beans and bacon, for exhausting work. He was enshrined as the mountain man who rode free--tough, alone, and unmarred by civilization. . . .He enthralled a nation which wanted to believe that power could be exerted without paying the price in lost innocence. In many ways, the cowboy of fiction and film, less interesting than his counterpart in fact, was the most striking creation of America's last frontier.¹

The influence of the cattle-frontier (cowboy) myth on Americans is a far-reaching one; in fact, it is the most deeply embedded of any of the frontier myths.² That the myth lacks a significant basis in reality is also true. Nevertheless the myth exerts a potent influence: as a result of the teachings of such noted historians as Frederick Jackson Turner, Americans are generally convinced that it was the settling of the gradually extending frontier which made America great. They are further convinced that life on the frontier created the unique American character--individualist, democratic, energetic, optimistic, pragmatic, and materialistic.

¹Bernard A. Weisberger, The Age of Steel and Steam (New York: Time Inc., 1964), 55.

²Charles W. Harris and Buck Rainey, eds., The Cowboy: Six Shooters, Songs, and Sex (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 154; and George D. Lillibridge, Images of American Society: A History of the United States (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976), 85.

Drama has always been a repository of the significant myths of various periods,³ so it is to be expected that nineteenth-century drama would reflect this frontier myth, including the cattle frontier mythic hero. To investigate the role of that cowboy hero in the popular drama of the late nineteenth century became the goal of this dissertation.

The cowboy who provided the original model for that role was spawned by one of America's many advancing frontiers, this one the cattle frontier. The actual cattle frontier (the period of the open range and the long cattle drives) existed only from 1865 to 1886, but the legend it inspired provided the basis for the modern Western, whether live drama, film, television, or novel. Because of his enormous popularity in this century (on the rise again after waning briefly in the last decade), one might assume that the cowboy also dominated Western popular arts in the late nineteenth century. This is simply not so. The cowboy in nineteenth-century popular arts, particularly in the dime novels and drama, was a minor character

. . .introduced to lend authenticity and background color to stories set in the Southwest. . . .even in his heyday he never seriously rivaled the popularity of the plainsman or the outlaw to say nothing of that ageless veteran, the backwoodsman.⁴

³David Mayer and Kenneth Richards, eds. Western Popular Theatre (London: Methuen, 1977), 272.

⁴Daryl Jones, The Dime Novel Western (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 1978), 99.

An examination of the titles of dime novels published by the Beadle brothers (the most famous and successful of the dime novel publishers), and of the titles of the popular dramas written about the West, reveals that the vast majority of their heroes are Indian scouts, trappers, and colorful lawmen. However, the nineteenth-century fictional cowboy had all the attributes which would become a part of the important twentieth-century myth as it evolved. Therefore, he is indeed significant.

A good deal has been written about the cowboy as he exists in the twentieth-century novels of writers such as Zane Grey and Louis L'Amour, and as he exists in the film and television Westerns. However, the cowboy character as he initially existed in the nineteenth-century popular arts forms, particularly the popular drama, has not been thoroughly examined. All the frontier types are surveyed in Stuart Wallace Hyde's doctoral dissertation, "The Representation of the West in American Drama from 1849 to 1917,"⁵ but not in any great detail; in-depth studies of the trapper, the miner, and the Indian in the drama, however, are fairly prevalent. Since there are no intensive studies of the cowboy character, the goal of this dissertation is to examine the cowboy and his appearance in the popular drama.

⁵Stuart Wallace Hyde, "The Representation of the West in American Drama from 1849 to 1917" (Ph.D. Dissertation, Stanford University, 1953).

In order to understand the role of the cowboy in the nineteenth-century drama, it is helpful to understand how the cowboy came into existence and how he relates to the frontier concept in general. Thus this paper begins with an examination of historian Frederick Jackson Turner's thesis concerning the American frontier, and the enormous influence of that thesis on the thinking of Turner's time (end of the nineteenth century) and of later periods. Because Turner thought the frontier such a significant influence, the fact that the cowboy emerged out of it is also significant; description of the characteristics of that "real" cowboy is followed by examination of the emergence of the mythic cowboy. It was the cowboy of myth, not the real one, who would become the melodramatic cowboy hero who, though minor when he first appeared in the last decades of the nineteenth century, grew more and more important in the twentieth century. It is important to understand both the real and the mythic ancestry--not to do so is to miss not only the connection between the reality and the myth, but also the significant connection of the myth to the drama and the popular arts, since it is through those popular arts that the myth was propagated.

Chapter II defines popular culture and popular theatre; it examines the birth of the dime novel cowboy, direct ancestor of the popular theatre cowboy, and the birth of the Wild West Shows, the other major influence on the development of popular dramatic literature about the West.

Examination of eleven melodramas featuring cowboy characters comprises Chapter III: The Girl from L Triangle Ranch, The End of a Texas Trail, Rose of the Range, My Western Girl, The Cowboy and the Lady, A Fight for Honor, Ranch 10, Dad Carter, The Ranch Girl, The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, and Burley's Ranch. The examination of the plays includes commentary on the characteristics typical of the cowboy myth which exist in each play, plot summaries, and performance notes and history.

The sampling of plays is limited; few scripts for nineteenth-century popular dramas still exist.⁶ It is not possible to accurately date all of the plays, but internal features indicate that they were written and produced between the 1880's and the 1910's. A cut-off date of 1903 was originally established, since that year marks the largest sale of Owen Wister's quintessential western novel, The Virginian (first published in 1902), and the appearance of Edwin S. Porter's The Great Train Robbery, the first cowboy

⁶After compiling a list of plays with apparently appropriate titles (drawn largely from the U.S. Copyright Office's Dramatic Compositions Copyrighted in the United States, 1870 to 1916), I sent inquiries to a number of libraries and special collections across the country. (See appendix for this list of plays.) About three-quarters of the libraries responded, and their responses were generally negative--they either had none of the plays at all or had only one or two plays. In addition, the various libraries tended to have the same one or two plays. Of course, many scripts were never copyrighted; those which were copyrighted did not necessarily become a part of the Library of Congress Collection; and correspondence with the Library of Congress revealed that such scripts as were included in the Collection, if dated before 1900, have now been destroyed.

movie. Since both so thoroughly affected the development of the twentieth-century cowboy myth, it seemed logical, considering the limits of this dissertation (the focus here is the nineteenth century, as enormous amounts have already been said about the twentieth-century cowboy myth), to deal only with plays preceding these two landmarks of popular culture. Although some of the plays discussed here post-date 1903, they are included because they do not yet reflect the influence of Wister or Porter.⁷

Only two of the plays were ever performed in New York. The Cowboy and the Lady opened on Christmas Day 1899 at the Knickerbocker Theatre for a run of 44 performances.⁸ Ranch 10 opened at the Windsor Theatre on 28 May 1883, and also appeared at Haverly's Theatre for two weeks, beginning August 21.⁹ (Ranch 10 premiered in Norristown, Pennsylvania, in 1882, and is known to have been performed in the Denver

⁷Two other limitations have been observed in the paper: (1) only straight melodramas were selected for inclusion; a number of late-nineteenth-century "musicals" with cowboy characters exist (perhaps the ancestors of Gene Autrey's films?), but are not considered here since I wished to deal only with the standard melodrama; and (2) because the available scripts tend to be scenarios rather than fully developed scripts, there is limited information within the scripts describing settings, costumes, suggested blocking, and special technical effects; therefore only limited comment can be made on possible production values.

⁸Ima H. Herron, The Small Town in American Drama (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1969), 156.

⁹T. Allston Brown, History of the New York Stage, from the First Performance in 1732 to 1901 in Encyclopedic Form, 3 vols. (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1903), II: 364, 484.

and Rocky Mountain area in the 1880's.¹⁰⁾ No record exists indicating New York performances for any of the other nine plays. They were grist for the various regional and traveling repertory companies; five are known to have been part of tent-show repertory: Dad Carter, The End of a Texas Trail, A Fight for Honor, My Western Girl, and Rose of the Range.

These plays do not have particular merit in and of themselves; they cannot be described as great dramatic literature. However, they attain significance as a group because they reveal how nineteenth-century popular drama perpetuated the cowboy myth which was becoming so important to America, and because they reveal how readily playwrights adapted contemporary trends into the incredibly popular melodramatic structure. Although a limited sampling, these plays can be considered representative of other plays with cowboy characters for a number of reasons: (1) the plays are so similar in structure that it seems unlikely that other plays with cowboy characters would be radically different; (2) the fact that these particular scripts are still available indicates that they were important enough and/or widely produced enough for the scripts to appear in various collections, and are thus representative of popular drama; and (3) the internal features fulfill extensively the characteristics of popular drama.

¹⁰Eleanor M. Gehres, Head of the Western History Department of the Denver Public Library, to Kay Robinson, 15 September 1980.

CHAPTER I

THE AMERICAN WEST AND THE COWBOY: FACT AND FICTION

An understanding of the cowboy character in nineteenth-century melodrama begins with an understanding of the emergence of the "real" cowboy and how both he and the mythic cowboy based on him reflect the uniquely American character as defined by Frederick Jackson Turner.

One hundred and fifty years ago, the American West from the Missouri River to the Pacific Ocean was a vast unknown, and Americans could believe that "free" land (uninhabited land) would be available forever.

The appeal of the undiscovered is strong in America. For three centuries the fundamental process in its history was the westward movement, the discovery and occupation of the vast free spaces of the continent. . . .To [earlier generations] it seemed inevitable. The free land and the natural resources seemed practically inexhaustible.¹

Only a few years later, however, the 1890 Census Report made a significant observation:

¹Frederick Jackson Turner, Frontier and Section; Selected Essays of Frederick Jackson Turner (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1961), 100.

'Up to and including 1880 the country had a frontier of settlement, but at present the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement, that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line.²

This report led an obscure historian from Portage, Wisconsin, to propound to the American Historical Association meeting at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair that the end of the frontier marked the end of an era in American history. Frederick Jackson Turner, then a 32-year-old professor of history at the University of Wisconsin, eloquently conveyed his frontier thesis to the assembled historians:

He would be a rash prophet who should assert that the expansive character of American life has now entirely ceased. . . . But never again will such gifts of free land offer themselves. For a moment, at the frontier, the bonds of custom are broken and unrestraint is triumphant. . . . And now, four centuries from the discovery of America, at the end of a hundred years of life under the Constitution, the frontier has gone, and with its going has closed the first period of American history.³

Although none of Turner's listeners were completely converted by this address, within a decade his thesis was well-known and respected. Its implications formed the basis for re-evaluation of America's history, sociology, literature, etc. What Turner had to say was not radically new, but he was the first to coherently pull together a number of popular beliefs and then express them in a manner so poetical as to be very nearly mystic.

²Fon Wyman Boardman, America and the Gilded Age, 1876-1900 (New York: H.Z. Walck, 1972), 83.

³Turner, Frontier and Section, 61.

What Turner expressed as one element in the complex character of America, his more ardent disciples (many of them his students at the University of Wisconsin, one of the most distinguished being Dr. Carl Becker, John Stambaugh Professor of History at Cornell University⁴) magnified into the explanation for America's personality. Such fanaticism was bound to cause rebellion; the attack on Turner's thesis occurred in the 1930's, at which time Turner's every point was held up to ridicule.⁵ Since then, reappraisal of Turner's thesis and its criticism has brought a return of respect for the thesis. What many of Turner's harsh critics missed, of course, was that although his assertions were not infallible, he was expressing popular beliefs, and what a nation believes is true affects its growth and character, no matter what the actuality may be.

Turner shared several misconceptions common to his day, especially concerning the frontier as a "safety valve to drain off the dispossessed Eastern workers in periods of

⁴Frederick Alexander, Moving Frontiers; an American Theme and Its Application to Australian History (Port Washington, NY: Kennikat Press, 1969), 4.

⁵The following are major articles of criticism: Murray Kane, "Some Considerations on the Safety Valve Doctrine," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 23 (1936-37): 169-188; Carter Goodrich and Sol Davison, "The Wage Earner in the Western Movement," Political Science Quarterly, 50 (1935): 161-185; Carter Goodrich and Sol Davison, "The Frontier as Safety Valve: A Rejoinder," Political Science Quarterly, 53 (1938): 268-271; Carl N. Degler, "The West as a Solution to Urban Unemployment," New York History, 36 (1955): 63-85; and Fred A. Hannon, "A Post Mortem on the Labor-Safety-Valve Theory," Agricultural History, 19 (1945): 31-37.

depression."⁶ However, because Turner's thesis did collect and organize a number of popular beliefs about the frontier, it provides important information about the mentality of nineteenth-century America. As we shall see, that mentality affected the popular arts, including the theatre, just as it affected other aspects of life; therefore, an examination of that mentality is in order.

A major factor in nineteenth-century America's "mentality" was the country's shift from a pre-industrialist ethos to an industrialist one.⁷ Accompanying this value shift came the shift from rural to urban habitation.

In 1860 four out of every five Americans lived in places with less than 2,500 people. In 1900 just about every seventh American lived in a city of more than 250,000 inhabitants. And every 12th American lived in New York, Philadelphia or Chicago.⁸

Despite this heavy urban polarity, most Americans believed in the American frontier as a "safety valve," one of Turner's main arguments in support of his thesis. Turner subscribed to the idea that the frontier allowed disillusioned and jobless Eastern workers to leave the city (to "go West, young

⁶Ray Allen Billington, The American Frontier Thesis: Attack and Defense (Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1958), 20.

⁷G. Edward White, The Eastern Establishment and the Western Experience: The West of Frederic Remington, Theodore Roosevelt, and Owen Wister (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 20.

⁸Bernard A. Weisberger, Reaching for Empire (New York: Time Inc., 1964), 33.

man"), thus raising wage scales in the East and discouraging radical political philosophies from emerging.

The concept of the frontier as "safety valve" encompassed four quite different aspects: (1) a direct valve allowing the escape of unemployed Easterners to the cheap Western lands during depressed periods; (2) an indirect valve through which Eastern farmers displaced by Western agricultural competition went West rather than competing for factory jobs; (3) a resources valve "through which the sequential exploitation of natural resources kept wages high and slowed the growth of radical unrest;"⁹ and (4) a socio-psychological valve which operated in the sense that as long as Easterners believed they could escape to the West, they were less discontented than if they had no such hope.

Turner's critics attacked the first two aspects in particular. A major argument was that Eastern workers could not become Western farmers because they simply could not afford it.¹⁰ In addition, statistics show (as indicated above) a steady move to the cities, not away.

Later critics¹¹ believe, however, that an indirect safety valve did indeed decrease pressure on the Eastern labor

⁹Billington, American Frontier Thesis, 21.

¹⁰A minimum of \$1500 (to pay for the land, transportation to it, and equipment to work it) would be needed to begin a farm--and Eastern laborers rarely earned more than a dollar a day.

¹¹Such as Norman Simler in "The Safety-Valve Doctrine Re-Evaluated," Agricultural History, 32 (1958): 250-257; and Ellen von Nardoff in "The American Frontier as Safety Valve--The Life, Death, Reincarnation and Justification of a Theory," Agricultural History, 36 (1962): 123-142.

market, particularly before the Civil War, by luring workers to jobs in Western cities and attracting Eastern farmers to the West. Although the population shift certainly was from rural to urban, at the same time (between 1860 and 1900) the nation's rural population also increased--by some twenty million¹²--thus providing modest relief to the Eastern labor market. In other words, the safety valve actually did operate, albeit on a small scale. (If it did not do so, the rural population would not have increased at all.)

Most important of the four aspects of the "safety valve" was its sociopsychological function. Nineteenth-century Americans believed that they could escape to the frontier whenever they chose. This wasn't actually so, but America accepted the rags-to-riches tales about the West as reality, tales significant because they emphasized the American ethic of upward mobility. Turner's thesis accurately pointed out this phenomenon. A number of the plays discussed in Chapter III feature heroes who have come West for the express purpose of making their fortune, as well as proving their manhood, thus reflecting the upward mobility ethic so prevalent in the country at the time the plays were written. The plays in which this is most clearly portrayed are The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, The Ranch Girl, My Western Girl, and Rose of the Range.

¹²Billington, American Frontier Thesis, 23.

Along with his main thesis about the frontier as safety valve, Turner also developed the argument that the American character owes its uniqueness to the influence of the frontier:

American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. . . .The result is that to the frontier the American intellect owes its striking characteristics. The coarseness and strength combined with acuteness and inquisitiveness; that practical, inventive turn of mind, quick to find expedients; that masterful grasp of material things, lacking in the artistic but powerful to effect great ends; that restless, nervous energy; that dominant individualism, working for good and for evil, and withal that buoyancy and exuberance which comes with freedom--these are traits of the frontier, or traits called out elsewhere because of the existence of the frontier.¹³

Starting with Andrew Jackson's simple frontier credo as a basis (suspicion of the rich, and the firm belief that anybody can do anything), Turner and others developed a complex theory explaining the American "personality." According to these theorists, the frontier experience created a national character with several special qualities: individualistic, nationalistic, democratic, equalitarian, energetic, socially mobile, optimistic, pragmatic, and materialistic. In the following section, these national characteristics, as outlined by Turner, are discussed along with the arguments made against Turner's assertions.

Americans tend to admire the idea of individualism, which in the nineteenth century was often associated with the image of a "pathfinder." Certainly frontiersmen had to be

¹³Turner, Frontier and Section, 38, 61.

self-reliant, for life on the frontier was difficult. This self-reliance appealed to the American public, particularly Easterners, leading to wide acceptance of the philosophy that an individual should be able to act economically, politically, socially, or whatever, without interference. Individualism clearly has negative attributes as well. Violence, conflict with authorities, selfish indifference toward the problems of others, are all by-products of the hardships of frontier existence. "Lynch law" and the "law of the six-gun" could only emerge in an individualistic society. The heroes of several of the plays examined in this paper subscribe to this philosophy of enforcing personal justice, particularly in The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, The End of a Texas Trail, A Fight for Honor, and Rose of the Range.

Like that of so many other countries, America's nationalism promoted the idea that America's culture and way of life were innately superior to all others. Turner saw the frontier as a "crucible," in which "'immigrants were Americanized, liberated and fused into a mixed race, English in neither nationality nor characteristics.'"¹⁴ The difficulties of life on the frontier compelled a more national outlook than had been possible in the more differentiated Eastern colonies. This nationalism had both benign and malignant aspects. The benign aspect--based in the assumption that American society and government were superior--welcomed waves

¹⁴Alexander, Moving Frontiers, 7.

of immigrants as new citizens and promoted the adoption of American institutions by other nations. The less benign aspect saw growing efforts late in the century to exclude "less desirable" immigrants--a manifestation of a smug belief in racial superiority. Unfortunately, the plays discussed in this paper depict heroes with just such an attitude of smug racism. This is especially true in Rose of the Range, The End of a Texas Trail, Dad Carter, and My Western Girl.

Residents of the frontier wholeheartedly supported the idea of democracy as they set up governments in the new territories. Turner went so far as to assert that the West democratized the East. An integral part of this democratic attitude was the equalitarianism necessitated by life on the frontier. Because of the hardship, what was important was to survive and to help others survive--exigency is a great leveler. Minor differences could be tolerated, but major differences still caused problems because there was such a need for everyone to work and contribute--there was no room in Western tolerance for impractical intellectuals, for instance. No advantage accrued from ancestry, social status, or education. The plays examined here reflect this: having an Eastern education proves to be no advantage to the heroes of The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, The Ranch Girl, and Dad Carter.

To survive on the frontier required energy and optimism, a sort of buoyant confidence based in the ethic that those who work hard get ahead, an ethic which permeated

American society. Turner was convinced that the opportunity symbolized by the frontier was in no small part responsible for the optimism. Many of the heroes in the plays featured in this paper are strong believers in this work ethic, and indeed have come to the frontier because of its opportunities for getting ahead. This is especially true in Burley's Ranch, The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, Ranch 10, and Rose of the Range.

Finally, the frontier character manifested a good deal of pragmatism and materialism. What worked in the East often became irrelevant in the quite different world of the frontier West. So the frontiersman became a practical opportunist who assumed his share of the West's seemingly indefatigable resources of land, timber, minerals, precious metals, etc., often in a wasteful, extravagant, and selfish manner. Since hardly anyone believed the resources would ever run out, no one exhibited much concern about the extravagant consumption of America's riches.

Turner's evaluation of the effect of the frontier on American character was not immune from attack, of course. Critics point out that although the typical Westerner was regarded as individualistic, he was at the same time dependent on the help of others to combat Indians, deal with natural disasters, build roads, protect land rights, etc.

The frontiersman was also generally in debt.¹⁵ So much for rugged individualism.

As for democracy, although the West was freedom-loving, that freedom did not encompass everyone. For instance, anyone could vote--so long as he was twenty-one, male, white, and not an idiot or felon. Everyone (male) had the right to seek wealth, but sometimes there wasn't quite enough to go around: unscrupulous entrepreneurs acquired large amounts of money while their employees barely survived. Such circumstances are typical of Eastern capitalism rather than of an ideal democracy. Freedom from typical government interference frequently resulted in violent altercations and the lawless justice of vigilantes.

The selfish consumption of natural resources unfortunately was an Eastern as well as a Western habit. Not until after the 1890 census report did Easterners call for conservation and demand that Westerners practice it as well.

Above all, to call the frontier experience the "most American" of experiences seems inappropriate when one considers the fact that at no time did the frontier West account for as much as ten percent of the nation's population.¹⁶

¹⁵Thomas Andrew Bailey, Probing America's Past; A Critical Examination of Major Myths and Misconceptions, 2 vols. (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1973), 1: 242.

¹⁶Patrick Gerster, Myth in American History (Encino, CA: Glencoe Press, 1977), 75.

However, Americans have always believed that the rugged adventure of claiming and taming the frontier is what made America great, so ultimately Turner was right. Every generation recreates and revitalizes the myth of the West. The "West" as an idea and an ideal still appeals to the restlessness of a mobile nation:

'But I reckon I got to light out for the territory ahead of the rest, because Aunt Sally she's going to adopt me and civilize me, and I can't stand it. I been there before.'¹⁷

One of the most pivotal of America's western frontiers was the cattle frontier, which gave birth to that significantly American hero--the cowboy. The cowboy character in the plays forming the core of this paper was not based on observation of real cowboys. Instead, that melodramatic character owed his nature to the mythic cowboy character created by writers in the nineteenth century, primarily the dime novelists. An understanding of the creation of that myth and the reality which spawned it is necessary for proper appreciation of the melodrama's cowboy character. Consequently, the next section describes the genesis of the real cowboy, followed by an explanation of his transformation into myth.

To appreciate properly his fine, manly qualities, the wild rough-rider [cowboy] of the plains should be seen in his own home. There he passes his days; there he does his life-work; there, when he meets death, he faces it as he has faced many other evils, with quiet,

¹⁷Hans Galinsky, ed., The Frontier in American History and Literature; Essays and Interpretations (Frankfurt am Main: M. Diesterweg, 1960), 78.

uncomplaining fortitude. . . .Hard and dangerous though his existence is, it has yet a wild attraction that strongly draws to it his bold, free spirit.¹⁸

This romantic description by Teddy Roosevelt (an ardent admirer of the West) appeared in a late 1880's edition of Harper's Magazine. Roosevelt's glorification of the free and courageous spirit of the cowboy sounds very much like the twentieth-century concept of the cowboy, but was actually a defense of a type of American who did not enjoy wide respect when Roosevelt wrote. And, at the same time that he wrote this paeon, the cattle frontier which spawned the American cowboy was already closing.

The cattle frontier had its start immediately after the Civil War. Early Spaniards had introduced cattle in Texas; those herds multiplied at a rapid rate to a total of some 5,000,000 by 1865, the vast majority of them "mavericks" which could be claimed by anyone caring to apply his brand. When Texas ranchers discovered that steers worth three or four dollars a head could be sold for ten times that price in the upper Mississippi Valley, they determined to capitalize on that fat market. The problem, of course, was how to get the cattle to market. The answer was the Long Drive. In the spring of 1866, the first drive brought cattle from Texas to the Missouri Pacific Railroad at Sedalia, Missouri. The

¹⁸Thomas C. Jones, Shaping the Spirit of America; Articles from Harper's and Century Magazines Recalling Events and Times That Helped Determine the Present National Image of the United States of America (Chicago: J.G. Ferguson Publishing Company, 1964), 251.

trail was a difficult one and a good number of cattle died along the way. However, enough profits accrued so that further drives were planned. The cattle frontier's first entrepreneur appeared: Joseph McCoy, a stockman from Illinois, chose Abilene, Kansas, as the railhead at the end of the trail, and congenially laid out a trail from the Red River north to Abilene. This trail avoided hills and wooded areas and thus reduced losses. Since it connected at its lower end with a trail blazed by the half-breed Indian trader Jesse Chisholm, it became known as the Chisholm Trail, perhaps the most famous road-to-market in America. McCoy built stockyards, pens, and loading chutes in Abilene and that city quickly established its preeminence. Although other cow towns sprang up as the railroads crept westward (including the infamous Dodge City), Abilene served as the guide for all that followed. From 1867 to 1872, nearly 1,500,000 head flowed through Abilene into cattle cars headed east.¹⁹

The long drive, romantic as it was, did not survive, for it was uneconomical--beef lost weight on the trail, Indian tribes charged tolls for invasion of their lands, and the market was glutted by the arrival of dozens of herds simultaneously each spring. Since the custom of letting

¹⁹Foster Rhea Dulles, The United States Since 1865 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969), 43-44; Ray Allen Billington, The Westward Movement in the United States (New York: Van Nostrand, 1959), 78-79; and William Peirce Randel, Centennial; American Life in 1876 (Philadelphia: Chilton Book Co., 1969), 140.

cattle graze on buffalo grass near the railheads was already established, cattlemen soon started experimenting with keeping cattle on the range all winter long. The cattle proved hardy enough to withstand the climate, and thus herds were driven northward to stock the ranges of the Great Plains. The cattle frontier swept swiftly northward--into Wyoming by 1868, Montana by 1871, the Dakotas by the mid-1870's.

This rapid growth held the seeds of destruction for the wide-open cattle frontier. There was so much profit to be made in the cattle business that money and adventurerers poured in from all over the world. Speculation soared as Easterners and Europeans read reports in magazines and newspapers stating that 40% to 50% annual profits were to be expected.

Not surprisingly, such tales brought hundreds of young men to the West, either with their savings strapped to their waists or ready to borrow--at interest rates varying from two percent a month to one percent a day. Prices skyrocketed as a result of wild bidding: cattle selling for \$8 a head in 1879 brought \$35 in Texas in 1882, \$60 when resold in Wyoming. Land that was marginal at best was turned into pasture between 1880 and 1885, but an unusually wet weather cycle during those years kept the business alive. The summer of 1886 broke the wet cycle. Endless hot and dry weather withered the grass; seasoned cattlemen sold their weakened herds in a panic rather than face the winter with them. That proved to be a wise move, for the winter of

of 1886/87 entered the record books as one of the worst ever and cattle died by the thousands. Humanitarians and profit-seekers alike agreed that winter feeding had to be the rule in the future. Ranchers fenced their fields (barbed wire had been invented in 1873) and planted hay; well-tended pastures replaced drifting herds as the cattle kingdom's wide-open days ended. In only twenty years, the cattle frontier had been born, burgeoned into an enormous industry, and destroyed itself through overstocking and greed. The cowboy, however, still had a job, even though not so "romantic" as it once had been. One old-time cowboy reminisced about the early days of the cattle frontier:

'I remember. . .when we sat around the fire the winter through and didn't do a lick of work for five or six months of the year, except to chop a little wood to build a fire to keep warm by. Now we go on the general roundup, then the calf roundup, then comes haying--something that the old-time cowboy never dreamed of--then the beef roundup and the fall calf roundup and gathering bulls and weak cows, and after all this a winter of feeding hay. I tell you times have changed.²⁰

It is of interest to note that cowboy characters in the plays studied in this paper seem to have duties more like the ones described above rather than working long drives. There is, in fact, little reference to the work duties for the hero in any of the plays. In the one play which does make much reference to the hero's cowboy work--Rose of the Range--the hero presents himself as a "cowdoctor" who advocates fencing and controlled breeding of stock, both of which are

²⁰Billington, Westward Expansion, 689.

quite distant from the romanticized long-drive duties of the twentieth-century myth.

The cowboy was not an invention of the cattle frontier era--Mexican vaqueros ("cow people") had herded cattle in the Southwest for at least two centuries, and they provided the pattern for the American cowboy as well as much of the terminology. The big-horned saddle (introduced originally into Spain by the Moors), bridles, spurs, rawhide rope, etc., were all Mexican and Spanish in design and origin. The cowboy's vocabulary incorporated Texas English versions of Spanish words: cincha (cinch), caballerango (wrangler), chaparejos (chaps), la reata (lariat), caballo (cayuse), jaquima (hackamore), and estampida (stampede).

The cowboy's costume also owed its heritage to the vaquero, although American cowboys wore less decorative outfits than their Mexican counterparts. Denim jeans, sombreros or wide-brimmed black wool hats, and high-heeled, sharp-toed boots were standard features, all of them functional, as was the whole costume. Jeans were strong and long wearing, yet comfortable; the wide-brimmed hat protected the eyes and the head and neck. The heels of the boots prevented the rider's feet from slipping through the stirrups and helped the cowboy brace himself in quick turns and stops of the horse; the sharp toes meant a cowboy could thrust his feet into the stirrup quickly and easily. The leather chaps covering his legs protected the cowboy from brush and prevented chafing of the thighs. Also part of

the costume were the vest (a carryall for tobacco, watches, paper, pencils, matches) and the bandanna (a neck shade and a dust filter). Cowboys seldom wore coats if they could avoid it, as coats hindered arm action. Many cowboys added cartridge belt and holsters to their costumes. The revolver served several functions: stopping the charge of a maddened steer, killing a rattle snake, turning back stampeding herds, self-defense against rustlers and Indians. However, the gun added weight, and ammunition was expensive, so many cowboys seldom carried guns. Because of the expense of ammunition, those who did regularly carry guns could not afford the practice necessary to become "sharp-shooters."

The cowboy worked hard for his pay of \$30 to \$50 a month. A range rider spent much time alone, cooked for himself, and slept on the ground. He drove cattle back onto home ranges, branded calves, ran off strays, rounded up and counted grazing herds, all the time keeping a lookout for Indians and rustlers. If he worked a long drive he faced the additional problems of unfamiliar territory, erratic weather, unknown Indians, and the ever-present horrifying danger of a stampede. Breaking and training horses was hard and dangerous work, and many of the horses never surrendered completely to training. Because of the strenuous nature of the job, the cowboy's working years rarely numbered more than half a dozen. Odie B. Faulk explains why:

Broken bones, crippling, and death were constant threats to the cowboy. To be thrown from a horse meant bruises at the least; often it meant a broken leg, usually set improperly, and could be fatal. One kick from a

temperamental horse could kill. . . .A terrified herd stampeding at night could bring injury or death to the cowboy in a hundred ways. . . .Equally a hazard was an unexpected blizzard in winter which could trap a cowboy on the range where he might freeze to death. Sleeping on the hard ground brought arthritis to many a cowpoke, and the simple act of roping could result in the loss of a finger or two if the hand was caught between the rope and the saddle horn. Little wonder that the average working life of a cowboy was only seven years.²¹

The cowboy played every bit as hard as he worked and received full treatment at the hands of the saloon keepers, gamblers, and dancehall girls in the railhead towns. Dodge City and others welcomed the cowboys, whether they arrived there at the end of a long drive or on a monthly spree from a nearby ranch. Hard-earned cash in his pocket, the cowboy hit the streets and saloons and didn't leave until his money ran out--generally in less than 24 hours. But while the money lasted, he enjoyed all those things he couldn't find on the open range--especially booze and women. The only women most cowboys knew were the dancehall girls, since the cowboy profession did not encourage normal patterns of courtship, marriage, and family; married cowboys were definitely the exception. So the cowboy had little contact with "decent women;" the women he did associate with earned their money by dancing with the cowboys (seventy-five cents for ten minutes) and getting a part of the cost of the drinks their cowboy "escorts" bought for them at the bar. Prostitution was rampant, and since there was no form of

²¹Odie B. Faulk, Dodge City: The Most Western Town of All (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 65.

medical inspection, so was venereal disease. The women who appear in the plays studied in this paper are not representative of the types of women real cowboys came in contact with. In the plays here the women are virtuous, whether young or old, with only one exception--a Mexican villainess in The Girl from L Triangle Ranch. It may be significant that the only "bad" woman who shows up in these plays is not white.

Later sections of this paper discuss the general depiction of the cowboy in the popular arts as white. An editor of a cowboy pulp magazine has explained why:

'It is understood by us, and should be understood by everyone, that we are dealing with the popularity of Western stories as concerns readers who are white, who may be called Nordics, using this term advisedly. The white race has always been noted for being hard-drinking, hard-fighting, fearless, fair and square. The heroes of Western stories have these characteristics.'²²

If the creators of nineteenth-century popular art had adhered to reality, however, the white cowboy would have been joined by Mexican, Indian, and black cowboys. (The heroes of the plays forming the basis for this paper are all white.)

Considering the Spanish heritage of the cowboy, it is not surprising to find Mexican cowboys; Indian cowboys got high marks from contemporary observers; and estimates of the number of black cowboys range as high as one in four.²³ One

²²Walter Prescott Webb, The Great Plains (Boston: Ginn, 1931), 467.

²³Faulk, Dodge City, 66.

of the most notable of the black cowboys wrote an autobiography, The Life and Adventures of Nat Love Better Known in the Cattle Country as "Deadwood Dick"--By Himself, which reads much like white cowboy autobiographies from the same period.

Evidence indicates that the highest population of black cowboys occurred in the years immediately after the Civil War. In that period, the hard work tended to level racial differences. Occasionally a saloonkeeper would require blacks to drink at one end of the bar, whites at the other, but overt racism did not appear until the cattle frontier closed. As the West became more populated, the black cowboy was forced into other occupations: Nat Love became a pullman porter in 1890.

The racism that grew throughout the period, and which is witnessed in the popular arts, did not limit itself to blacks. Teddy Roosevelt noted it matter-of-factly in the late 1880's:

Some of the cowboys are Mexicans, who generally do the actual work well enough, but are not trustworthy; moreover, they are always regarded with extreme disfavor by the Texans in an outfit, among whom the intolerant caste spirit is very strong. Southern-born whites will never work under them and look down upon all colored or half-caste races.²⁴

So much has been said about the travails of the Indian, both in his treatment by whites and in his treatment in the legends of the West, that no more will be added here. Unfortunately, as Thomas Gossett points out, the nineteenth

²⁴ Jones, Shaping the Spirit of America, 226.

century

. . .was obsessed with the idea that it was race which explained the character of peoples. The notion that traits of temperament and intelligence are inborn in races and only superficially changed by environment or education was enough to blind the dominant whites.²⁵

It is clear, of course, that the qualities Frederick Jackson Turner posited as our frontier heritage exhibit themselves quite nicely in the cowboy: he is individualistic, nationalistic, democratic, equalitarian (at least in the early part of the era), energetic, optimistic, and pragmatic. As such he was prime material for myth-makers, and it is an interesting process through which the cowboy transmuted from the rough laborer of reality to the strong, silent mythic hero with the six-gun.

In 1891, Prentiss Ingraham, author of the first dime novel with a cowboy as hero, still felt it necessary to defend cowboys from their bad public image. In Buck Taylor, the Saddle King, Buck (the first dime-novel cowboy hero) explains:

'I know well, that a great many wicked men have crept into the ranks of our cowboy bands; but there are plenty of them who are true as steel and honest as they can be. . . .We live a wild life, get hard knocks, rough usage, and our lives are in constant peril, and the settling of a difficulty is an appeal to revolver or knife; but after all, we are not as black as we are painted.'²⁶

How the cowboy made the transition from desperado to hero cannot be precisely determined. Right from the

²⁵Thomas F. Gossett, Race: The History of an Idea in America (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), 244.

²⁶White, Eastern Establishment, 50.

beginning, the cowboy had defenders, of course, and, as early as 1887, one British traveler observed that the cowboy was already assuming mythical qualities:

The cowboy has at the present time become a personage; nay, more, he is rapidly becoming a mythical one. . . . the true character of the cowboy has been obscured, his genuine qualities are lost in fantastic tales of impossible daring and skill, or daring equestrian and unexampled endurance.²⁷

As the British traveler pointed out, at about the time the cattle frontier closed, the cowboy began to take on the characteristics of myth rather than reality. That conjunction cannot be considered coincidental. Once the actual cattle frontier died, it could become a place of perfection in the past and a useful "never-never-land" for the writers and performers who popularized it. Those hero makers, however, would never have created the myth if there had been no demand for it. Significantly, that demand came from Easterners, not Westerners.

Any number of theories have been put forth as explanations of the need for the Western myth, and, in particular, the cowboy myth, but it is not within the realm of this paper to deal with that extensive area of study. Suffice it to say that the cattle frontier offered as hero a rugged individualist answering to no one and carving his own path, free of Eastern socio-economic rigidity, and that such a rebel naturally appealed to an Eastern audience ready to reject its industrialized, anonymous existence.

²⁷John Baumann, "On a Western Rancho," Fortnightly Review XLVII (1887): 516.

Several frontier characters momentarily reigned as hero; ultimately the cowboy would surpass them all. However, the cowboy the Easterner idolized would have only a superficial resemblance to the real cowboy. The transition from reality to myth occurred rather rapidly. Early journalists reported news about the West and the cattle frontier quite realistically, but by 1880, correspondents began to romanticize cows and cowboys in their reports. Magazines such as Harper's, Scribners, and the Century extolled the gallantry of the cowboy and his "code":

There had arisen a person in a big hat. . . . This type loved horses, respected good women, and when working at his trade performed heroisms that must evoke powerful admiration in the Eastern breast. He was muscular, he was brave, he told the truth, he stuck to his pardner, he scorned to shoot an unarmed enemy. . . .²⁸

The cowboy myth owes its existence primarily to Buffalo Bill's Wild West Shows and to late nineteenth-century dime novels. They served as the "troubadours" so necessary for the propagation of a myth according to Mody Boatright:

Their function is not merely to publicize the hero. More importantly it is to develop myths about him and to assimilate these myths to the archetypal myths of the culture. A myth cannot flourish without a congenial climate of opinion. In contemporary civilization the troubadours are historians, biographers, journalists, novelists, script writers.²⁹

²⁸ Bernard DeVoto, "Birth of an Art," Harper's Magazine CCXI (December 1955): 8.

²⁹ Mody C. Boatright, "The American Myth Rides the Range," Southwest Review XXXVI (Summer 1951): 158.

More will be said about the Wild West Shows and the dime novels in later chapters, but for now it is important to note that the writers for both, as well as the writers of the plays considered in Chapter III, were Easterners, that their prime goals were to provide entertainment for their audiences and financial rewards for themselves, and that only a very few had any direct experience with the cattle frontier. Despite the fact that writers knew little about the actual cowboy existence, they certainly knew that the cowboy provided a unique and glamorous subject for adventure tales. And, as little as the writer knew, his audience knew even less. The writer did know his audience, however, and knew it wanted excitement, action, and adventure for vicarious thrills. That's what he provided. In so doing, he actually perpetuated the traditional hero myth--the chivalric loner whose background is somewhat mysterious, who fights his battles alone, and who ultimately is rewarded with a wife and riches. The cowboy is recognizable as

. . .one who in other times, other costumes, other dramas has struggled in the valleys of the Euphrates and the Nile, in Greece, Spain, Scandinavia, and Camelot. He is the Hero. In the western legend he has exchanged his shining helmet for a ten-gallon hat, his breastplate for an embroidered shirt, and his lance for a pair of 'six-shooters'.³⁰

The mythic cowboy hero, although based on the reality, quickly became idealized into an easily recognized

³⁰Warren J. Barker, "The Stereotyped Western Story," Psychoanalytic Quarterly XXIV (1955): 271.

stereotype, with specific traits. First, he is young, of impressive stature and inevitably handsome, with a natural nobility which sets him apart from his scruffier companions. Accompanying his good looks are natural courage and strength as well as a plethora of skills such as trailing, marksmanship, and hand-to-hand combat. Every cowboy hero in the plays examined in Chapter III displays these qualities.

The cowboy hero exhibits above-average cleverness--he always outwits his adversaries. His cleverness never is used for less than truly virtuous ends, of course; the cowboy hero demonstrates "acute powers of moral perception" that enable him to "ferret out evil and destroy it." An intriguing dimension of his strong morality appears in the hero's "willingness to subvert the law, or to violate it outright, in order to realize true justice."³¹ The cowboy hero follows a "higher" law than that dictated by man, and he often waxes philosophical about his lonely, but correct path in the world. If rewards eventually follow--as they inevitably do--then that's proof that he made the morally right decision. Two of the plays discussed in Chapter III provide particular examples of this: The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot and The End of a Texas Trail.

Real cowboys might chuckle at the mythic cowboy's gentility. He speaks in refined and elegant--if somewhat stilted--language, neither smokes nor drinks, and professes

³¹Jones, Dime Novel Western, 116.

to be a Christian. He treats women chivalrously, but only if they act in traditional "womanly" behavior patterns: the cowboy hero will only marry an old-fashioned girl. Cowboys apparently know very few, if any, older women--no one's mother, old-maid aunts, or the like, ever appear on the scene. These characteristics are evident in the plays analyzed in this paper.

For all his gentility, the cowboy hero has a savage streak. If he believes he is right (as he always does), then he proceeds to do what is "right," often at the cost of others' lives (especially Indians and nasty white villains, but often innocent bystanders as well.)

Despite his essentially virtuous nature, the cowboy hero is also a racist. The myth-makers ignored the mixed racial heritage of the cowboy and made the mythic hero bright white. Blacks appear only as occasional cooks or as good-natured but stupid retainers. None are depicted as heroic; most are depicted as rank cowards. Mexicans appear equally infrequently and are generally villains if they do appear--stupid, cowardly, uncouth, and treacherous. They receive much physical abuse from the white race, often from the hero. Indians have the dubious distinction of appearing frequently, dubious because unfortunately they tend to be depicted as villains or the ignorant dupes of white villains. If they are good, they generally fit the Tonto image--a stoic, not too bright, but endlessly faithful companion to the hero. Even the good Indians die with alarming regularity in the

popular art forms, and bad ones rarely make it out alive, illustrating the widely held nineteenth-century belief that "the only good Indian is a dead Indian." The plays chosen for analysis in this paper clearly depict this racism on the part of the heroes, as Chapter III's discussion illustrates.

SUMMARY

By the end of the nineteenth century, the character who serves as the focus of this paper--the cowboy--had acquired most of the qualities we associate with the twentieth-century version. Although he would not attain his full stature as the quintessential American hero until the appearance of the modern Western novel (starting with Owen Wister's The Virginian), and the leap from the written page to the motion picture screen (initiated by E.S. Porter's The Great Train Robbery), all the essential characteristics had been provided by nineteenth-century mythmakers. The myth is based partially in the frontier mentality so aptly delineated by Frederick Jackson Turner, and partially in the reality of the cattle frontier. But the largest contribution to the myth comes from the romantic version of cowboy life presented to Eastern readers by Eastern writers, writers who often knew little about the facts of cowboy existence. In any case, the nineteenth-century mythic cowboy, with his characteristic good looks, courage, nobility, virility, racism, etc., was firmly established as an important American hero.

CHAPTER II

POPULAR CULTURE AND THE COWBOY HERO

To discuss the phenomenon of the cowboy in nineteenth-century theatre demands first of all a definition of popular culture and then identification of the particular characteristics of the nineteenth-century popular literature and theatre. The word "culture" started out describing growth, as in cultivation; in the nineteenth century it changed to a noun signifying "acquaintance with and taste in fine arts, humanities, and broad aspects of science as distinguished from vocational and technical skills." In the twentieth century, the term transmuted to "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group."¹ This proliferation of meanings led to many individualized definitions of culture, reflecting the segmenting of culture into such divisions as high culture, low culture, mass culture, and popular culture, with the inherent snobbism that comes from labelling one culture "high" and another for the "masses."

Researchers of popular culture have defined several characteristics. They point out that popular culture is an

¹Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary (Springfield, Mass.: Merriam, 1977), 277.

inherently urban phenomenon. Not until the great population growth of the nineteenth century, and the subsequent concentration of the population into urban or near-urban areas was "popular" culture possible.

Between 1880 and 1900 alone the urban population had more than doubled, rising from fourteen to thirty million. New York and Brooklyn accounted for over two million in 1890; Chicago and Philadelphia for over a million each; Boston, Baltimore, and Washington for about half a million apiece. There were in all twenty-eight cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants.²

One result of urbanization was the "creation of a huge market for entertainment, with identifiable desires and responses."³ With the formation of modern mass society and the development of mass media forms (print and live theatre in the nineteenth century), came the possibility of a mass culture which could be widely transmitted and which appealed to an audience that had never existed before; popular culture is essentially middle class.

Popular theatre and the other popular arts take forms characterized by clear and simple delineations of good and bad, strong and weak, etc. This characteristic guarantees the "accessibility" (intellectually) of the forms to large, relatively unsophisticated audiences--another characteristic of popular culture. Popular arts remain "popular" only so long as they do not deviate from conventions accepted and endorsed by the majority. Once the conventions of a popular

²Norman I. Cantor and Michael S. Werthman, eds., The History of Popular Culture (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 456.

³Russel B. Nye, The Unembarrassed Muse: The Popular Arts in America (New York: Dial, 1970), 2.

art form are established, they cannot be lightly ignored, for ". . .predictability is important to the effectiveness of popular art."⁴ Popular art forms must be widely and easily available as well: mass-production means wide and rapid distribution, and quantity is often associated with quality in popular culture.

The nineteenth century saw the birth and thriving growth of a number of popular arts. One of the most important to the cowboy's appearance in the drama was the dime novel, from whose pages dramatists lifted, with barely any changes, the cowboy hero.

In 1860, a small firm owned by Irwin and Erastus Beadle and their partner Robert Adams, began publishing the inexpensive novels which were to make the name of "Beadle and Adams" famous. The exciting stories (each about 30,000 to 50,000 words) with their splendid heroes appeared weekly. They not only provided good entertainment, but also offered escape from the monotony of urban life in the machine age--and readers bought them by the thousands. These dime novels fulfilled the qualities typical of all popular culture as described earlier: mass-produced, selling largely in urban environments, saluting common men (with uncommon attributes) as heroes, relentlessly supporting middle-class morality and virtues, and unfailingly following the conventions established for the form.

⁴Nye, Unembarrassed Muse, 4.

Although Beadle and Adams instructed their authors not to write about fields in which they had "no intimate knowledge,"⁵ the authors felt no compunction to obey that directive. Easterners who had never ventured West experienced no qualms about writing exciting adventures celebrating life on the Western frontier. If they knew little about that life, their urban audiences knew even less and enjoyed the vicarious thrills, however inaccurate. The same was true of Eastern dramatists who wrote about cowboys.

Several types of dime novels appeared, including those with detective heroes, those set in large cities, and those with women as main characters. By far the most popular of all dime novels was the Western. Frontier heroes appeared by the 1870's, and the cowboy-hero conventions established in those dime novels were the ones adopted for the stage.

The cowboy's role in nineteenth-century dime novels was minor in comparison with other frontier heroes. Though he achieved hero status by the late 1880's, he never achieved the same level of success in dime novels as did the trapper, the plainsman, and the outlaw. The same is true in drama, where miners join the list of popular frontier heroes. The cowboy never achieved major status on a nationwide scale until he was discovered by the film-making industry. That does not diminish his importance, however, for the

⁵Albert Johannsen, The House of Beadle and Adams: and Its Dime and Nickel Novels; The Story of a Vanished Literature, 3 vols. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1950), I:4.

nineteenth-century hero established most of the characteristics we associate with the twentieth-century prototype.

The real cowboys who served as models for fictional cowboys were not the stuff of dreams; the drudgery and routine of their lives would hardly have made typical dime-novel fare. Consequently the cowboy had to be romanticized. Although there were passing references to the actual chores of real cowboys, dime-novel cowboys most often appeared as border-ranger types who fought Indians, confronted rustlers, and chased law-breakers--much more exciting than branding cattle--so that at first the cowboy of the nineteenth-century dime novel was hardly distinguishable from other frontier heroes, except in his distinctive dress.

The first dime-novel cowboy hero, Buck Taylor, appeared in Buck Taylor, King of the Cowboys, by Prentiss Ingraham (1887). In that novel, Buck (a "real" cowboy in Buffalo Bill Cody's Wild West Show for several years and nicknamed for his ability to tame wild horses) had to pass several tests of strength and skill in order to become a Texas Ranger. No "cowboying" (such as driving herds, rounding up strays, repairing fences) took place; Buck captured and tamed a beautiful horse, killed some Indians, saved another Indian's life, was attacked by Indians and Mexican raiders, etc., then returned to his ranch, where life was much quieter.

Ingraham tended to dandify Buck and his other cowboy heroes, yet in this first appearance as hero, the cowboy

already was the strong, silent type so familiar in twentieth-century Westerns:

They beheld a man six feet in hight, [sic] hardly over twenty-five or six, and with broad shoulders and a form as erect as a soldier's.

He was dressed in fringed buckskin leggings, stuck into top-boots, and a gray merino shirt and hunting-jacket completed his attire, while a black sombrero sheltered his head.

His face was one to command respect, cast as it was with a perfection of feature that was striking.

Darkly-bronzed was his complexion, and his brown hair, worn long upon his shoulders, and a dark mustache made up a face at once handsome, resolute and commanding.

He carried a Colt's repeating-rifle, and a pair of revolvers in his belt. . . .⁶

Dramas featuring cowboy heroes provide descriptions nearly identical to this one (see Chapter III), another indication of the debt dramatists owed to the dime novelists.

While Ingraham depicted the cowboy as a dandy, Frederick Whittaker, another prominent dime novelist, tended to portray the cowboy as an uncultured, lawless, but attractive, ruffian:

Then, up to the door of the Metropolitan Hotel dashed a score of mounted men, on small, wiry horses, covered with foam and dust, and James Arthur, for the first time in his life, saw the spectacle so familiar to the citizens of Muleville--'cowboys on a tear.' . . . [W]hat impressed the nervous stranger most was the fact that these men seemed all crazy with excitement or drink, and were firing recklessly all round them into the windows of the houses, as if careless what damage they did, which was the fact.⁷

⁶Prentiss Ingraham, "The Wild Steer Riders; or, Texas Jack's Steers," Beadle's Dime Library #834 (17 October 1894): 2.

⁷Frederick Whittaker, "Parson Jim, King of the Cowboys; or, The Gentle Shepherd's Big 'Clean Out,'" Beadle's Dime Library #215 (6 December 1882): 3.

The third major writer of dime novels featuring cowboy heroes was William George "Gilbert" Patten; Patten's cowboy heroes were noble and courageous, not at all "dandies." Patten's manly cowboys provided the major model for nineteenth-century dramatists as well as for Owen Wister's "Virginian," the archetypal twentieth-century cowboy.

Despite the differences from author to author, the formula of the cowboy hero was quickly standardized into several typical characteristics (all also true in the melodramas): (1) the cowboy hero is aristocratic in bearing, if rustic in choice of dress; (2) he is incredibly virile and good looking; (3) he is brave, though not foolhardy, and he rejects violence until he apparently has no other recourse--then he is ruthless; (4) he never seems to have anything to do with cows--in fact, seems to be a man of leisure; (5) he is unerringly accurate, a sure-shot no matter what the weapon or the circumstances; (6) he is a teetotaler or very nearly so; (7) he is a "clean" fighter and will not take unfair advantage; (8) he recovers almost instantaneously from wounds; (9) he is a loner with no apparent near relatives or dependents--he is also unencumbered by material possessions, seeming usually to own only his horse, his guns, and the clothes on his back; (10) he is a racist--the "fair fight" ethic exists only for other whites; blacks, Indians, and Mexicans are dispatched with brutal regularity; (11) he associates mainly with men--the "code of the West" is a male ethic; (12) he is sensitive to Nature and understands it; and

(13) he is inevitably highly moral; if the situation demands, he will decide what is necessary to accomplish justice, even going beyond the bounds of law to do so. The examination of the plays in this paper reveals how neatly the melodrama's cowboy hero fulfills these characteristics.

The cowboy-hero dime novels display a number of additional characteristics which would make their way into the dramas: deaths of villains (or unfortunate good types) are "clean"--no lingering, no suffering; many Indians, Mexicans, and a few villainous white men typically die. Sensational violence prevails--showdowns and confrontation scenes are required. It is invariably pointed out, however, that the hero does not enjoy violence and killing, while the savage heathen outlaws enter combat "with a kind of manic glee to fulfill an uncontrolled lust for blood."⁸

Women in cowboy-hero dime novels and melodramas are the hero's reward for his courage and steadfastness in the face of villainy. As mentioned earlier, there are generally two types of women in these novels and plays; both are young. (Older women rarely appear; the heroine's father usually seems to have brought her up alone.) One type of woman is good, genteel, often blonde; the other is the familiar fallen woman with a heart of gold. The latter type never gets the hero and often is caught in the line of fire before the story

⁸ John G. Cawelti, The Six-Gun Mystique (Bowling Green, OH: Popular Press, 1971), 60.

ends; the "good girl" usually wins the hero's hand in marriage. This, of course, exemplifies the high moral tone of these dime novels and the plays patterned after them: the traditional role of woman is upheld, sexual transgressions are punished (usually with death), and the sanctity of marriage is reaffirmed. Happy endings are de rigueur.

Although most of the dialogue in the dime novels is excruciatingly naive, no one seemed to mind. Nor did playgoers object to similar dialogue in the melodramas. Some passages are quite entertaining, however, for most of the novels--and the plays as well--have at least one humorous character to leaven the action. To a modern reader, such characters are often the most charming:

'Chain up right thar!' exclaimed Ben. 'You're jumpin' from the point.'

'Like the boy who sits down on an inverted tack, eh?' grinned the stranger. 'That is another chestnut. It's remarkable how many stale jokes there are afloat in the world. Did you ever stop to think--'

'Holy smoke! You give me pains, old man! I'm fishin' arter your name.'

'I used to go fishing myself, when I was a boy. It's really a great sport, isn't it. Especially when you catch a licking. If I didn't catch any fish, I could always depend on catching a licking when I got home, so I was not euchered. Now--'

'Now, will you give us that name?'

'Really, I fear that is impossible. It was given me when I was very young, and I have kept it ever since. You must have one of your own, and so you can't actually need another.'⁹

While the dime novel took its place in popular culture history, other popular culture forms also thrived,

⁹William G. Patten, "Cowboy Steve, the Ranch Mascot; or, The Bond of Blood," Beadle's Half Dime Library #806 (3 January 1893): 5.

including theatre. Although not enjoying as spectacular a development as the dime novel, the "popular" theatre in the nineteenth century appeared for the same reasons, and, as should be increasingly clear, the cowboy hero made a direct leap from the pages of dime novels onto the stage of popular theatre's melodramas.

A major factor in the popular theatre's development was the nation's rapidly expanding population. The tremendous growth in nineteenth-century cities meant that theatres had much larger potential audiences, especially in the middle and lower classes. Astute theatre managers determined to find the proper inducements to draw those crowds to the theatre; the result was segmentation of the audience. Up until about the 1870's, theatres (along with other urban cultural institutions) integrated urban society. "An undifferentiated urban audience crowded together to experience drama, visual art, or music."¹⁰ This was partially due to economic necessity: large operating costs necessitated equally large audiences to offset expenses. Only when the urban population expanded and public transportation improved, did producers have a large enough potential audience that they could afford to appeal to only one segment.

¹⁰ Alan R. Havig, "American Historians and the Study of Popular Culture," Journal of Popular Culture XI, 1 (Summer 1977): 183.

From mid-century on, a shift occurred as theatre expanded to encompass those larger audiences. No longer was there one heterogeneous audience which viewed a miscellany of forms (tragedy, comedy, farce, melodrama, dance, opera) in "proportions that, if they did not satisfy, at least attracted all classes."¹¹ Instead, theatre managers began to take advantage both of the existence of a large and affluent middle class, which wanted its own kind of theatre, and of the subtle snobbism of the upper classes, who wanted a theatre where patrons dressed well and came for "culture"--and where the lower classes would be excluded by the ticket prices.

[The theatre] expanded and divided--into legitimate drama, foreign-language drama, farce, vaudeville, circus, burlesque, minstrelsy, opera, symphony--each with its separate theatre and separate audience. One roof, housing a vast miscellany of entertainment each evening, could no longer cover a people growing intellectually more disparate.¹²

Two major theatrical traditions developed out of this segmentation: one was a "serious" theatre patronized by the upper and upper-middle class; the other, "popular" theatre appealed to the middle and lower classes (artisans, farmers, shopkeepers, factory workers, etc.)

This popular theatre, like all popular culture, necessarily responded to its audience's demands. Since the

¹¹David Grimsted, Melodrama Unveiled; American Theatre and Culture, 1800-1850 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), 75.

¹²Ibid.

theatre offers the opportunity for immediate evaluation, the audience has a great deal to do with what is presented.

Hewitt quotes from the contemporary chronicle of a French journalist who describes the American style of showing approval:

'I must mention here the Americans' strange manner of applauding a favorite actor of a good scene. In France, and everywhere else in Europe. . .we clap and sometimes shout bravo, and whistle only when we are disgusted. . . But with Americans, whistling is an expression of enthusiasm: the more they like a play, the louder they whistle, and when a San Francisco audience bursts into shrill whistles and savage yells, you may be sure they are in raptures of joy.'¹³

Theatre-goers delighted in the power they exercised--what could be more democratic than to have the majority rule in the theatre as elsewhere? This popular theatre audience got what it wanted: plays that "spoke directly to their nationalism and egalitarianism and new stage characters that made heroes of 'common' white Americans."¹⁴ The attendance at such plays was huge.¹⁵

¹³Barnard Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A.; 1665 to 1957 (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959), 166.

¹⁴Robert C. Toll, Blackening Up: The Minstrel Show in Nineteenth Century America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 13.

¹⁵A 1915 survey of attendance at theatrical amusements provides some astonishing statistics: Milwaukee, with a population of 373,857, had sixty-two playhouses with total capacity of 42,232--average weekly attendance was 349,673. Detroit, population of 465,756, reported average weekly attendances of 547,409. Kansas City reported weekly attendances of 554,064, more than twice the city's population--Richard Henry Edwards, Popular Amusements (New York: Association Press, 1915), 32-33.

When the spread of the railroads made travelling companies financially feasible, America's small towns also were able to view a broad spectrum of live popular entertainment:

Beaver Dam, Wisconsin's Concert Hall, was typical of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of similar theatres that dignified small towns across the nation in the late nineteenth century. . . . Empty it did not look like too much more than a ninety-foot-long, flat-floored room with a raised stage at one end, the only glamour being the grand proscenium arch that towered twelve feet over the stage. Empty, that was all the room was. After all, it also served as the town's lecture hall, athletic arena, ballroom, city council chamber, political headquarters, skating rink, and National Guard drill room. But when the folding chairs were lined up in neat rows and filled with people, when the curtain with its beautiful painting of the Bay of Naples dropped, when the kerosene footlights cast their warm glow, when the anticipation of the crowd electrified the room, it became a real theatre, as good--well, almost as good--as any other.¹⁶

Several characteristics distinguish popular theatre in all periods: (1) the author (if known) is indifferent to his reputation as a "high-class" writer; (2) those who produce the play have little interest in the author; (3) the literature is not the sort to be either noticed or praised by critics; (4) scripts often do not survive in written form, or can be located only in memoir collections, diaries, etc.; (5) scenario takes precedence over script--that is, movement, sound, and technical effects are more important than words; (6) much highly visible action is essential and the action is sequential rather than consequential (often dependent on

¹⁶Robert C. Toll, On with the Show (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 141.

the ease of making scenery shifts); (7) scripts offer vicarious escape and sentimental nostalgia as well as sensational effects which often are dramatically unnecessary but exist only as exciting momentary experiences; (8) the structure of the scripts is standardized and easily recognizable, following well-established forms; (9) the characters invented in the popular drama "tend to generate and to develop mythologies and traits of character that extend far beyond the life given to them in the dramas in which they first appear,"¹⁷ and who thus pass from the theatre into popular folklore; (10) high morality reigns--it's obvious who is good and who is bad and it is expected that virtue will triumph over vice and that the good will then receive suitable material rewards; and (11) comic relief eases the high moral tone.

Perhaps most essential is that popular theatre reflect the values and needs of the society which produces it:

More than any other art form [theatre] has to say clearly what its audience already knows in its heart of hearts, to reveal pre-existent truths that require but words to be recognized.¹⁸

Nineteenth-century popular theatre appealed to an audience distressed by the technological advances and disruptions of the age. Although that audience delighted in the special stage effects made possible by technological achievements,

¹⁷David Mayer and Kenneth Richards, eds. Western Popular Theatre (London: Methuen, 1977), 263.

¹⁸David Grimsted, "An Idea of Theatre History: An Informal Plea," Educational Theatre Journal XXVI, 4 (December 1974): 426.

they found the rapidly growing technology outside the theatre threatening. The popular theatre had to offer reassurance that traditional values still operated.

The popular theatre in the nineteenth century offered several forms of entertainment to its audiences, including foreign-language drama, farce, burlesque, vaudeville, minstrelsy, and above all, melodrama. Such fare was available at cheap prices--from ten to thirty cents--to large urban audiences at such New York theatres as the Bowery, the People's, the Windsor, the Third Avenue, the National, and the London; Chicago's Alhambra and Madison Street Opera House; Boston's Grand Opera House; and the People's Theatre in Philadelphia. Smaller cities patronized traveling shows at the same cheap prices in their own "temples of amusement."¹⁹

By far the most popular of the popular entertainments was the melodrama, widely criticized then and in later periods as "claptrap" or worse, but "which meshed so exactly with public taste that no amount of critical abuse affected its popularity."²⁰ Most nineteenth-century American melodramas are four-act plays arranged in ten to twenty scenes and featuring spectacular stage effects. The major theme is vice vs. virtue, and, of course, virtue always wins, but only after enduring countless ordeals and surmounting

¹⁹Cantor and Werthman, Popular Culture, 457-458.

²⁰Tamara K. Hareven, ed., Anonymous Americans: Explorations in Nineteenth-Century Social History (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1971), 87.

endless obstacles. Honesty, chastity, personal integrity, and other such Christian virtues are properly rewarded; vice is punished.

The plays forming the spine of this paper all possess the characteristics typical of melodrama, the major structural characteristic being "Action": the standard nineteenth-century American melodrama consists of scenes of pursuit and capture, imprisonment and escape, false accusation, numerous setbacks, several near-disasters, rescues, and recognition and reunion--all tumbling one after another in rapid progression.

As is true of all popular theatre forms, the characters of melodrama tend to be stereotypes. Five major character-types appear in the nineteenth-century American melodrama: (1) the hero, entirely good; (2) the villain, entirely bad; (3) the heroine, entirely good; (4) the father figure, essentially good; and (5) the comic character, often silly, but essentially good-natured.²¹ It is important to remember that main characters are either wholly good or wholly bad, never a combination of the two. Chapter III reveals how closely the plays selected for analysis here follow these five stereotypes.

The hero is courageous, faithful, protective of all women, perceptive of evil, noble, and an instinctive natural

²¹Toll, On with the Show, 147; and Thomas Herbert Dickinson, An Outline of Contemporary Drama (New York: Biblo and Tannen, 1927), 23.

man (that is, he is in tune with nature and listens to the voice of nature). It's interesting to note that being noble and following his instincts are apparently the hero's only career--little mention is ever made of how he earns his living. When a career is specified, we rarely see the hero carrying out the duties associated with that career. Such is the case with all the cowboy heroes in the plays analyzed in this paper.

The hero's antagonist, the villain, embodies lust, vice, lack of conscience, avarice, excessive ambition, cold-bloodedness, and deceit; he is frequently a serious threat to the heroine's chastity. The villain inevitably meets defeat and usually dies, generally pointing out a moral before expiring.

The heroine is often fair-haired (an outward sign of her inner beauty), always virtuous and chaste, but in danger because of her feminine weakness. Much of the excitement of melodrama results from the threat to the heroine's virtue--the villain can be very attractive and a much smoother talker than the hero; if he has his way with the heroine (even if by rape or by tricking her with a false marriage), her destiny is tearful repentance, madness, and death. If she remains strong in her virtue and recognizes the hero's worth, she is rewarded with marriage to him. The heroines of the plays covered in this paper follow this pattern without deviation, and in all cases the plays end with the heroine joining the hero in blissful matrimony.

The father figure (often the heroine's father) is good-hearted, but not as instinctively wise as the hero--he can be fooled by a glib villain. He provides moral lectures and elevated sentiment and is always seen as deserving of supreme filial piety. Mothers hardly ever appear in melodramas except as sacred memories. This proves true in the plays studied in this paper, the majority of which have father figures to guide the heroines.

With all these wholly good--and thus sometimes unfortunately boring--characters, it should not surprise us that melodramas need comic relief. In nineteenth-century American melodrama, this is provided by comic servants of both sexes. All of the plays studied in this paper feature one or more such comic characters. These characters are of humble position, naive but possessed of natural caniness, good-natured, and lively. They often represent ethnic, racial, or regional stereotypes. Not only do they lighten the seriousness of the play, but they also provide more "human" foils for the impossibly pure hero and heroine.

A number of references have already been made concerning the high morality espoused by the melodrama. A morally edifying conclusion is essential because the world of the melodrama revolves around

. . . a clear moral order in which reward depended on the righteousness of one's conduct: if one obeyed the code, happiness lay ahead; if one violated it, destruction must follow.²²

²²Hareven, Anonymous Americans, 83.

The language used in melodrama varies from section to section: in the serious portions, the language tends toward the artificial, very bloated and contrived ("humble garments" and "beauteous finery"), containing archaic poetic expressions such as "whither" and "yon", and making much use of metaphor (the heroine is apt to be a rose or a violet while the villain is a serpent or a wolf). The comic sections, in contrast, use much simpler language, which is individualized to the character, sometimes with highly exaggerated diction and dialect. It is much more vigorous and concrete than that of the serious sections, and, of course, provides an effective foil as a result. The plays examined in this paper are typical in their use of language, for they include both the serious and the comic styles. Chapter III provides several illustrative passages of dialogue.

Among the most popular American melodramas of the nineteenth century were those featuring frontier heroes, Davy Crockett reigning supreme for years. As Hewitt points out, Frank Murdoch's Davy Crockett presented

. . .for the first time not only the frontiersman as hero but also the theme of Western strength and essential goodness triumphant over Eastern weakness and corruption. The United States had grown old enough and big enough so that the conflict between West and East could replace the conflict between America and England or France.²³

²³Hewitt, Theatre U.S.A., 226.

Late in the century, the American public became acquainted with the cattle frontier and the prairie West, primarily through the dime novels and the Wild West shows. Stage shows featuring cowboy heroes appealed strongly to a public eager for excitement. Making many of the Western dramas even more exciting was the appearance in them of real-life heroes: "Texas Jack" Omohundro, "Wild Bill" Hickok, and, above all, "Buffalo Bill" Cody, whose various shows helped shape America's concept of the cowboy and thus influenced the depiction of the cowboy on the stage.

A hack writer named E.Z.C. Judson, better known by his pen name of Ned Buntline, often receives credit for "discovering" Buffalo Bill. Donald Russell's excellent biography of Buffalo Bill convincingly explains that such credit is something of an exaggeration. Whatever the actual situation (and the apocrypha are legion), Buntline did publish the first story about Buffalo Bill, who quickly became a national dime-novel hero; in all, 557 dime novels about him were published.

Because of the success of Buffalo Bill in the dime novels, he soon appeared as a character in plays. Substantive popular culture history wasn't made, however, until Buntline convinced Cody to appear as himself in The Scouts of the Prairie, a pastiche created by Buntline in less than four hours. Scouts of the Prairie opened in Chicago on

16 December 1873, to a complete sellout.²⁴ When the curtain went up on Buffalo Bill, Texas Jack, and Buntline, the heroes froze. The ever-resourceful Buntline asked Cody a question about a recent hunt; Cody began talking about it, got a favorable audience response, and the show went on--almost totally adlibbed, which did create some interesting problems:

As Buntline saw his hastily written dialogue lost forever, he was at his wit's end how to bring the curtain down on the first act. Finally he signalled into the wings for the phony Indians. They came in screeching, looking like badly made-up tramps from the railway yards. Following their mentor's example, Buffalo Bill and Texas Jack seized the hostiles. One by one the stage Indians went down, to the very last man. Never was there a show like this. As can happen in the theatre, a play intended to be serious was taken as a rollicking comedy. What the audience beheld was an adolescent's fantastic dream of the Wild West.²⁵

The second and third act offered more of the same.

The Chicago Times was not tremendously impressed by this opening performance:

'On the whole it is not probable that Chicago will ever look upon the like again. Such a combination of incongruous drama, execrable acting, renowned performers, mixed audience, intolerable stench, scalping, blood and thunder, is not likely to be vouchsafed to a city for a second time--even Chicago.'²⁶

That critic had grossly underestimated Buffalo Bill's appeal, however; the show was a huge success, playing six performances

²⁴Henry Blackman Sell and Victor Weybright, Buffalo Bill and the Wild West (New York: Oxford University Press, 1955), 100.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶Donald Russell, The Lives and Legends of Buffalo Bill (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1960), 196.

in Chicago before leaving on tour. Scouts of the Prairie played seven Eastern cities on its way to New York, including Cincinnati, where the Daily Gazette offered a much warmer appraisal of the show than had the Chicago paper, perceptively mentioning several features ultimately essential in Buffalo Bill's popularity:

'[The play] has in it all the thrilling romance, treachery, love, revenge, and hate of a dozen of the richest dime novels ever written. . . .[I]ts novelty is so striking, and its subject is such a popular one with so many readers of thrilling border tales, that the temptation to see the real actors in those tragedies can not be resisted.'²⁷

Scouts of the Prairie opened at the Bowery Theatre in New York on 31 March 1874, and continued its successful run. Over the next eleven seasons, Buffalo Bill appeared in at least twelve of these dramas, all of them exploiting his personality and his "authenticity as frontier scout and Indian fighter."²⁸

Ned Buntline did not have the vision to foresee all the possibilities in Buffalo Bill's future, but Cody soon met a man who did: John M. Burke (later "Arizona John"). Burke idolized Cody and had the imagination to see the kind of national hero Buffalo Bill could become. He tirelessly promoted Cody, serving as a superb "press agent" before the term had even been invented.

²⁷Ibid., 198.

²⁸Mayer and Richards, Western Popular Theatre, 139.

During the years of "thundering melodramas," Cody dreamed of an outdoor show, telling Burke over and over:

'Take the prairie and the Injuns and everything else right to em' [the audience in the East]. . . 'That's the idea. There ain't room on a stage to do anything worthwhile. But there would be on a big lot where we could have horses and buffalo and the old Deadwood coach and everything! That'd be something they'd never seen before! That'd be showing them the West!'²⁹

The idea for such an exhibition did not originate with Cody, nor with his famous Wild-West-Show partner, Nate Salsbury (whom he met early in 1882). Nineteenth-century audiences already could see outdoor exhibitions of Indian activities and other aspects of Western life.³⁰ And perhaps Cody would never have gotten his Wild West show off the ground (because of financial problems) had it not been for a Fourth of July celebration put on by the citizens of North Platte, Nebraska, Cody's home. The citizens asked Cody to take charge of their "Old Glory Blow-Out," and take charge he did. Instead of the rodeo and bronco busting contests originally envisioned, Cody tried out his dream of a Wild West show. The show was a great success, leading Cody to organize a touring show for the next season: "The Wild West, Rocky Mountain and Prairie Exhibition" opened in Omaha, Nebraska, on 17 May 1883. Despite discipline problems and growing dissension between Cody and his partner, "Doc" Carver,

²⁹Sell and Weybright, Buffalo Bill, 130.

³⁰P.T. Barnum exhibited Indians as early as 1841, and in 1876, Indian agent John B. Clum organized a touring Indian show whose playbill looks remarkably like many of those presented by Buffalo Bill.

the show was a hit with crowds:

The Wild West show was an instant national mania. Cody's show. . .coincided exactly with current popular interest in the romantic West, and could hardly have been better qualified to appeal to the great American public.³¹

Cody and Carver soon split and Nate Salsbury joined Cody, the beginning of a long and profitable partnership. Together they established the formula so successfully used year after year in the Wild West Shows:

- a) An opening scene in which most of the characters are introduced
- b) Individual scenes which display the skills of individual frontiersmen or cowboys
- c) Scenes of Indian life and the customs of the frontier
- d) A battle, chase or escape scene
- e) The exploits of Buffalo Bill
- f) A final scene of a natural disaster or of Indian treachery which is concluded with the triumph of the white man.³²

The urban Easterners who made up the primary audience for these Wild West shows were often joined by such distinguished visitors as Governor David B. Hill, Mark Twain, Henry Irving, and Prince Dom Augusta of Brazil. Twain wrote to Cody to express his delight:

'Down to its smallest details the Show is genuine. . . . It brough back vividly the breezy wild life of the Plains and the Rocky Mountains. It is wholly free from sham and insincerity and the effects it produced upon me by its spectacles were identical with those wrought upon me a long time ago on the frontier. . . . [Y]our bucking horses were even painfully real to me as I rode one of those outrages for nearly a quarter of a minute. It is often said on the other side of

³¹Nye, Unembarrassed Muse, 192.

³²Mayer and Richards, Western Popular Theatre, 139.

the water that none of the exhibitions which we send to England are purely and distinctly American. If you will take the Wild West Show over there you can remove that reproach.³³

Cody did ultimately take his show to Europe, where it proved equally popular.

The most elaborate of the Wild West shows, a huge production of The Drama of Civilization written, designed, and staged by Steele MacKaye, was performed at Madison Square Garden in 1887. Descriptions of it (an especially comprehensive one appears in William Bransmer's "The Wild West Exhibition and the Drama of Civilization"³⁴) suggest an unbelievably extravagant event. As might be expected, such peaks are achieved only once, and Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, along with its many imitators, began a gradual decline. The importance of the show, however, in the history of popular culture and in the history of the cowboy in popular culture, cannot be overestimated, as Russel Nye points out:

Brief as its history was, the Wild West show exerted a powerful and lasting influence on the American imagination. It embedded in the popular cultural tradition, as nothing else did, the great, romantic legend of the American West. The Wild West parade. . . was a picture indelibly impressed on the memory of millions of Americans who saw it. And at the head of the parade sat the man who personified it all; Buffalo Bill, straight in the stirrups, with flowing white hair, fringed buckskin jacket, and broadbrimmed Stetson held aloft, his big white horse prancing to the music, symbol of a lost era.³⁵

³³Sell and Weybright, Buffalo Bill, 151.

³⁴Mayer and Richards, Western Popular Theatre, 133-156.

³⁵Nye, Unembarrassed Muse, 193.

Thus the cowboy hero, epitomized by such figures as Buffalo Bill, established his place in all the major popular culture forms of the nineteenth century. As the next chapter will make clear, his appearance in the drama is heavily patterned on the dime novel cowboy and the style presented by Buffalo Bill, as well as on standard melodramatic hero characteristics.

SUMMARY

Though a relatively new field for investigation, popular culture studies have revealed a number of traits found in all culture forms labelled "popular." The important popular culture forms of the nineteenth century featuring cowboy heroes were the dime novel, the Wild West Shows, and the standard melodrama. Common to all these forms were the characteristics of being essentially urban, concentrating on common men as heroes, celebrating middle-class morality, and strictly following the conventions developed for each form. By the end of the nineteenth century, the importance of the cowboy hero and his particular characteristics were firmly established in the three popular culture forms discussed here: the dime novel, the Wild West Shows, and the melodrama.

CHAPTER III
THE COWBOY HERO IN SELECTED NINETEENTH-CENTURY
AMERICAN MELODRAMAS

With the American predilection for melodramas and the fascination with the "real" characters of the Wild West, it is unsurprising that a large number of melodramas featuring Western heroes appeared in the late nineteenth century. The majority of these plays never received performance in New York, but instead provided fodder for the nearly insatiable traveling repertory companies. The scripts in many cases were never copyrighted and many have been lost or destroyed; those scripts which are still available are widely scattered and difficult to locate--this is to be expected since popular theatre literature is not usually readily accessible. The melodramas forming the basis for this paper fulfill the criteria of popular theatre as defined earlier in several other ways as well: (1) the authors, with the exception of Clyde Fitch, are not particularly well known and in the cases where any advertising material accompanied the script, the author's name had no significance in efforts to persuade producers to do the show; (2) the writing style of the plays is clearly pedestrian and varies little from script to script; (3) action and effects are generally more important than words, though clever

passages do appear; (4) a substantial amount of action--fist fights, gun fights, etc.--occurs in each play; (5) sentiment is a strong element; (6) the structures are essentially alike; (7) all the scripts promote a high moral message; and (8) all incorporate comic relief.

As mentioned earlier, melodramas usually have five recurring character types: hero, heroine, villain, father figure, and comic. This is true of the eleven plays examined here.

The heroes in the eleven plays fit very closely into the criteria established in previous sections; it is nearly impossible to distinguish them from the dime novel cowboy heroes or from traditional melodramatic heroes. All of the heroes in these dramas are young--in their twenties. All of them are good looking and virile (they also exhibit the typical heroic ability to recover incredibly quickly from wounds), and all are admired by men and women alike--this admiration of the hero by men as well as women is typical of melodramatic heroes. The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot features two heroes, and the tribute one pays to the other is typical:

You've got plenty sand, and the way you handle yourself is a caution. Don't be scared o' me; as ole Popeye used to say, 'a branded steer ain't never goin' to run after a hot iron.' My name is Vinton, Joe Vinton, but the boys call me Snapper. I kain't be handled without a buckin' strap, and never could; but that's nature; and was branded into me the first time I saw daylight. I put up a good wrastle, but it was slow compared with your'n. I liked you the minute you began to strip, and that's why I'm yere

now--I'm sorry I made a monkey of myself, an' I'd like your name and your hand along with it.¹

With two exceptions, all the heroes wear traditional cowboy garb. As mentioned earlier, the scripts do not contain extensive character descriptions, but when they do, the hero gets full cowboy regalia:

Steve Tuttle, a broncho buster, is a good looking, smooth-shaven man about twenty-five years of age. Wears flannel shirt, with bandanna handkerchief tied around the neck, the knot at back. Broad, leather, fringed, saddle trousers, over his leather boots. Spurs are fitted to his boots; corduroy vest, cartridge belt, with holsters on either²side containing Colt revolvers, completes costume.

Clearly the author knew what real cowboys actually wore, and he added the all-important firearms that the mythic cowboy inevitably carried. All the heroes featured here know how to use a gun and feel it gives them power:

The law? There's no law west of the Pecos and you know it. This is the only law. (TAPS GUN.) And³if you want to try it out with me, let's go.

All eleven plays include instances of the use of a gun to threaten, wound, or kill. There is a savage streak in many of the heroes, and they either kill the villain or condone someone else's doing so. Gun wounds are part of the

¹Franklyn Whitman, The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot (Manuscript, Library of Congress, 1902), 6-7.

²Anthoney E. Wills, Burley's Ranch (Chicago: Dramatic Publishing Co., 1907), 3.

³Bob Feagin, The End of a Texas Trail (The Texan) (Manuscript, Rosier Tent Show Repertory Collection, Michigan State University Special Collections Library, n.d.), 11.

action in Burley's Ranch, The Cowboy and the Lady, The End of a Texas Trail, A Fight for Honor, The Girl from L Triangle Ranch, and Rose of the Range. Death from a gun shot occurs in eight of the plays: Burley's Ranch, The Cowboy and the Lady, The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, The End of a Texas Trail, A Fight for Honor, The Girl from L Triangle Ranch, Ranch 10, and Rose of the Range. Knife attacks are also frequent, appearing in five plays--Dad Carter, A Fight for Honor, Ranch 10, Rose of the Range, and My Western Girl--with two deaths resulting from such attacks--Ranch 10 and My Western Girl.

Often the hero's use of a gun is for the protection of the rights of women, whether they are old or young, white or ethnic, as is illustrated by this typical passage:

CLAXTON

By what right do you meddle with Mrs. Wesley's affairs?

LOGAN

By the right of American manhood, which is always ready to rescue a lady from the insults of a ruffian.⁴

The heroes of these plays are not tempted by "bad" women, as is sometimes true in the dime novels. They all seem to possess some sort of natural ability to quickly recognize the "good" woman who is meant for them. Sometimes that woman does not immediately return the hero's love. If that happens, and if the woman mistakenly believes herself

⁴Frank Dumont, The Girl from L Triangle Ranch (Manuscript, UCLA Libraries, 1908), 16-17.

in love with another, the hero stoically accepts the situation, as long as the other man is white:

JIM

I've got a bit o' bad news ter give you.

STEVE

(APPREHENSIVE.) Bad news? What is it, Boss?

JIM

You were right about Margie--she's goin' ter be married to another.

STEVE

Another?

JIM

(BROKENLY.) Yes--she's engaged to the Lieutenant.
(PATTING HIM ON SHOULDER.) But there, my lad, don't take on so. It's hard, I know--but what are we to do? She's chosen fer herself--and there's no way of undoin' it--that I kin see.

STEVE

Neither would I have it undone. I've loved Margie since she was a little bit of a tot--so high--
(ILLUSTRATES.)--and had hopes of makin' her my own; but now that it's all settled--and she's lost ter me--I've got ter brace up and make the best o' it, I suppose. But I wouldn't want to mar her happiness; no, no--I wouldn't want ter do that fer the world.⁵

This nobility toward women is echoed in the heroes' behavior toward all "good" people; the heroes of these plays are eager to do what is right. It is significant that these melodramatic heroes--just like their dime novel ancestors--feel no doubt that they know what is right. In fact, they

⁵Wills, Burley's Ranch, 22.

often seem fired with a kind of pristine righteousness, and, in cases where they've been wrongfully accused of crime, they are filled with faith that their innocence will be proved, for such is God's justice:

Stop! For I swar in the name of the man that made them stars, there shall be no fitting about me while we are standing hyar with our feet in the blood of this dead indian. I surrender myself to be tried by the laws of God and man and if thar's a warm spot in your souls an inch square, you'll feel for the poor devil, who stands hyar accused of this awful crime and of which he swears in the name of the Great Jehovah he is innocent.⁶

Although most of the language is rather stilted, the hero's righteousness can lead him into eloquent outbursts:

Your Honor, I shall not attempt to stir your blood with any ornamental rhetoric, nor wet your eyes with any pathetic appeal. I wish to trust my life not to your emotions, but to common sense. I am innocent, and knowing that, I have been and am not now afraid to trust myself alone and otherwise undefended to your unprejudiced judgment. I could have brought famous lawyers from the East to defend me, but I didn't feel I needed them. Out here in the great West it is truth we are looking for and we know it when we see it. . . .It's the truth that I offer in my defense, and that I can do without help from anyone.⁷

None of the heroes drink. Many of them are loners, with no noticeable ties to close relatives or material possessions. Such is the case with each of the following heroes: Steve Tuttle in Burley's Ranch; Joe Vinton in The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot; Tom Dawson in The End of a

⁶Harry Meredith, Ranch 10; or, Annie from Massachusetts (Chicago: Howard and Doyle, 1882), 21.

⁷Clyde Fitch, The Cowboy and the Lady (New York: Samuel French, 1908), 106-107.

Texas Trail; Jim Radbourne in A Fight for Honor; Jack Lester in Dad Carter; Harry Logan in The Girl from L Triangle Ranch; and Dan Davis in Rose of the Range. As mentioned earlier, if the hero is close to anyone, it is probably to a male companion. Teddy North has such a friend--Bill Ransom--in The Cowboy and the Lady; the double heroes of The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot quickly become fast friends; in The End of a Texas Trail, the hero, Tom Dawson, is accompanied everywhere by a mute Mexican named Pinto; the double heroes of Ranch 10, Al and Tom McClelland, both treasure the friendship and loyalty of a local doctor, Theophilis Robbins; and Dan Davis, the hero in Rose of the Range, is best pals with his sure-shot partner, Sleepy Peters.

Although most of these heroes are cowboys (in My Western Girl, the hero is an army officer who works in the West; in The Girl from L Triangle Ranch, the hero is the newly elected sheriff), and there are cowboy characters in all the plays, there are only passing references to the duties entailed in such a career. Just as in the dime novels, the hero's work duties have little, if any, place in the action of the play. The play which makes the most reference to the hero's work responsibilities is Rose of the Range. The hero of that play, Dan Davis, pretends to be a "cow-doctor," which is a rather modern concept, and he understands the necessity for fencing and controlling the breeding of stock, all of which suggests that the playwright knew something about actual cowboy duties late in the century, and was not entirely dependent on the myth.

The heroes are all honest, chaste, filled with filial piety, and highly moral. They are also all racists, which is emphasized by the ethnic backgrounds of the villains they confront. In the plays examined, the majority of the villains belong to one ethnic group or another. The most frequently appearing type is the Mexican, who is usually called a "greaser" and is portrayed as truly despicable. The following passages are typical of the racism expressed in the plays: (1) in reference to a Mexican: "I don't give a hoot if he can trace his lineage back to the apple tree in the garden of Eden. His skin is too dark for him to get any ideas about a daughter of mine."⁸ (2) After being addressed as a "worthless nigger" by a Mexican: "That's all right about the nigger part of it. I'd rather be a real nigger than a half breed Mexican greaser trying to pass himself off as a white man."⁹ (3) "CLAXTON: Can you trust that Indian? WESLEY: Sure! If he and his redskins are shot down, it will be a small loss to the community."¹⁰ Mexican villains show up in eight of the plays: Jose Rotaro in Burley's Ranch; a band of Mexican ruffians hired by the white villain in The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot; Sanchez in The End of a Texas

⁸Bob Feagin, Rose of the Range (Manuscript, Rosier Tent Show Repertory Collection, Michigan State University Special Collections Library, n.d.), 2.

⁹C.A. Phillips, Dad Carter (Manuscript, Rosier Tent Show Repertory Collection, Michigan State University Special Collections Library, n.d.), 18.

¹⁰Dumont, L Triangle Ranch, 26.

Trail; Manuel Gonzaga in A Fight for Honor; Texas Burns in Dad Carter; Miguel Mendoza in My Western Girl; Nathalie (a villainness) in The Girl from L Triangle Ranch; and Don Esteban in Rose of the Range.

Indian villains figure in two of the plays: Roaming Bear and Black Eagle in Burley's Ranch and Quick Foot Jim in The Cowboy and the Lady. A Portuguese villain appears in one play: Joseph "Red Bullet" Kebook in Ranch 10; and in four plays white men are villains: McClinchy in Burley's Ranch; Ezekial and his son Stephan Arnold in The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot; Mad Dog Ginsey in The End of a Texas Trail; and Harvey Wesley and Tom Claxton in The Girl from L Triangle Ranch.

Not all the ethnics who appear in the plays are villainous. Good Mexicans appear in three plays: Pinto, the hero's sidekick in The End of a Texas Trail; La Chuza, a duenna in My Western Girl; and Pedro and Chiquita, servants in Rose of the Range. Even where good Mexicans appear, however, there is a clear element of racism present:

ROSE

Well, I've got to give you credit. You are the only one I ever saw that could make those Mex's move faster than a walk.

DAN

They're lazy devils. They would lay down on the job completely if I didn't keep after them.¹¹

¹¹Feagin, Rose of the Range, 24.

Good Indians show up in four plays: Wakita in Burley's Ranch; Pepita in The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot; Silver Bud in Ranch 10; and Starlight in Dad Carter. All of them are female, none are comic, and in Burley's Ranch, The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, and Ranch 10, they are in love with the hero.

One play, Burley's Ranch, features a Chinese character, So Long, a comic male. Three plays include Irish characters: Mrs. Wheeler in The End of a Texas Trail; Widow O'Kelly in A Fight for Honor; and Neeley Barrett in Ranch 10. Three plays have blacks in the cast, all males and all comic: Skunkton Peters in Dad Carter; Eclipse in The Girl from L Triangle Ranch; and Foodle in The Ranch Girl.

This analysis clearly indicates that these eleven plays do not deviate from standard practices for the treatment of ethnics followed in the composition of late nineteenth-century melodramas. It is unfortunate that such treatment created (and perpetuated) racism as an intrinsic part of the cowboy myth.

THE PLAYS

In the remainder of this chapter, the eleven plays are treated at length. Plot summaries are included (1) to allow the reader at least a superficial acquaintance with the action of the plays; (2) to illustrate the familiar melodramatic story lines used in the plays; and (3) to permit reference to the play's action in the commentary following each summary.

The plays are grouped for discussion when they have sufficient similarities. Commentary on each play discusses its fulfillment of the criteria established and the possible staging techniques used.

The chart on the next page depicts the most frequently appearing characteristics of the plays and indicates which plays possess them.

	Rose of the Range	The Girl from L Triangle Ranch	My Western Girl	Dad Carter	Ranch 10	The Cowboy and the Lady	A Fight for Honor	The End of a Texas Trail	The Ranch Girl	The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot	Burley's Ranch
Traditional cowboy garb	X	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X
Use of a gun	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Death from a gun shot	X	X			X	X	X	X		X	X
Knife attacks	X		X	X	X		X				
Death by knife attack			X		X						
Few ties to relatives or possessions	X	X		X			X	X		X	X
Close male companion	X				X	X		X		X	
Mexican villain	X	X	X	X			X	X		X	X
Indian villain						X					X
White villain		X						X		X	X
Good Mexicans	X		X					X			
Good Indians				X	X					X	X
Irish character					X		X	X			
Black character		X		X					X		
Father figure	X	X	X	X					X		X
Older woman			X		X		X	X			X
Hero from East			X	X					X	X	
Secondary love story	X	X				X	X	X	X	X	X

BURLEY'S RANCH

Of the eleven plays, Burley's Ranch is most like a dime novel. At the same time, it has a twentieth-century flavor--the Indian attack on the ranch and the lengthy siege which ends with the arrival of the cavalry are familiar features of film Westerns.

BURLEY'S RANCH

by Anthoney E. Wills

Major Characters:

Jim Burley (father of heroine)
 Steve Tuttle (hero, cowboy)
 General Blanchard (Commander of Fort Macon)
 Lieutenant Robert Thurston (stationed at Fort Macon)
 Willie Warren (comic character, juvenile)
 McClinchy (villainous character)
 So Long (comic character, Chinese)
 Jose Rotaro (villainous character, Mexican)
 Roaming Bear (villain, Chief of Ute tribe)
 Black Eagle (villain, son of Roaming Bear)
 Margaret Burley (heroine)
 Mira Wiggs (soubrette)
 Wakita (daughter of Roaming Bear)
 Uriah Burley (comic character, mother of heroine)

Settings:

Act I: Interior of Burley Ranch House

Act II: Same

Act III: Same

Plot:

Act I. Jim Burley wants his daughter Margie, the apple of his eye, to marry his ranch foreman, Steve Tuttle:

I can't ferget what a help the lad's been ter me all these years. I never had a better foreman and we've made more money on the ranch since he's taken hold o' things--with his new ideas and all that--than ever before. He's done right by me and I intend ter be squar' with him. (WITH FEELING.) He loves yer, gal--as you must a seen afore this. He'll make you a good husband and it'll be a happy day fer your maw and me when the Parson announces--the ceremony's over.¹²

Margie is in love with a Lieutenant from a nearby fort, however.

Burley has been trying to mediate between other ranchers, including the villainous McClinchy and Rotaro, and the Indians, in a boundary dispute. Wakita, daughter of Roaming Bear, Chief of the Indian tribe, is friends with the Burleys and warns them about McClinchy and Rotaro's plan to kill Burley.

A contingent arrives from the fort (along with a comical young reporter, Willie Warren) to meet with the ranchers and the Indians. Along with them is Margie's Lieutenant, Robert Thurston. Steve tells Margie that he's always loved her, but he manfully gives her up. Thurston

¹²Wills, Burley's Ranch, 11.

abuses Steve, however, and is revealed as a bit of a cad.

Act II. Thurston is discovered tearing up an incriminating letter. Distressing word arrives that Indians are assembling in large numbers.

Wakita gives Margie the scraps of Thurston's letter, which reveal that he already has a wife. Margie breaks their engagement.

The conference between the ranchers, soldiers, and Indians takes place, but no peaceful settlement can be reached--the Indians will fight for the land taken from them by McClinchy and Rotaro.

Rotaro tries to leave but is shot and Wakita arrives with news that the Indians are about to attack. When the General calls for a volunteer to ride to the fort for help, Thurston cravenly refuses and accuses the General of being too cowardly to go either. Steve volunteers and Margie notes his bravery.

Act III. A week of siege has passed and provisions are running low. Margie realizes how she's wronged Steve. Willie Warren and Mira Wiggs spoon.

Roaming Bear comes to parley with the ranchers; he wants them to unconditionally surrender but they refuse, of course. He berates his daughter Wakita for befriending the white man and tells them not to hope for help from Steve--Black Eagle (Roaming Bear's son) shot him before he could even leave the ranch.

Just then, a bugle is heard in the distance and it's clear that help is on the way--in the form of the cavalry. When Steve arrives, he explains that he was only stunned by Black Eagle's shot; the soldiers rout the Indians, and Margie and Steve declare their love for each other.

Burley's Ranch is clearly of the nineteenth-century melodrama genre in several ways: (1) it features a father figure, one of the five recurring character types of the melodrama; (2) it features a comic love affair which mirrors the more serious one between the hero and heroine; and (3) it contains other comic relief scenes featuring the comic juvenile, the Chinese servant, and the heroine's mother. The appearance of the heroine's mother is unusual since, as noted earlier, the heroines usually seem to have only a male parent or father-figure. Even here she appears as a minor character with no major part in the action.

This play offers the most detailed descriptions of characters, costumes, settings, and lighting and sound effects, along with specifications for the use of dialect. These features, plus the inclusion of detailed blocking instructions, may indicate that this play was fairly widely known and produced--at any rate, well enough known to be published in a standard script (as opposed to scenario) form.

As is typical of many nineteenth-century melodramas, this play incorporates some "modern" elements, specifically a

telegraph and a camera. Although neither is critical to the resolution of the action (as is the camera in Dion Boucicault's Octoroon), they both add to the excitement. Use of the camera provides many of the comic moments, as most of the characters do not know what a camera is and are startled when the comic juvenile (owner of the camera) says he wants to "shoot" them.

THE COWBOY AND THE TENDERFOOT

THE RANCH GIRL

The next two plays, The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot and The Ranch Girl, have several common features: (1) each has two heroes, one of whom is a Westerner and the other an Easterner; (2) both have heroines from the East; (3) both have a secondary love plot; (4) both have a scene set at a railroad station; and (5) in both, one of the heroes is an Easterner who has moved out West to become a better man. The idea of the West as a crucible in which a man may test his worth appears in several of the plays. In The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, the hero who has come West to test his mettle is a better man almost as soon as he gets off the train. In the first act of the play, he asserts his goals:

Nevertheless, I'm going to strike it, and I'm going to strike it hard. I've lived a mighty easy life so far, but I suppose I couldn't appreciate it, and not long ago Dad called me into his office, and looking at me sternly said, 'Young man, 25 years ago today, you were brought into the world. Up to the present day you have done nothing. As this is the beginning of what we may term your fiscal year, it might not be a bad idea to take stock of your qualifications. What are they?' I said, 'Well, I am an active member of

the N.Y. Athletic Club, I'm able to box and fence and pull a tolerable oar. Rather good at football, but a rank amateur at polo and golf. A number one horseman and a crack shot--add to these a little general information gained at college and the brilliant inventory is made complete.' He said, 'What kind of a structure can be reared on such a foundation?' I said, 'That's a poser, Father.' Then he said, 'I am going to see if there is any Hunter blood in you; I'm going to put you thro' a course of heroic treatment. Away out in Arizona there is a gold mine. I understand that it has done what a great many other gold mines exploited in the East have failed to do, and that is, produce gold. I have been credibly informed that \$5000 will put the property in good condition and place it on a paying basis. The name of the mine is The Blue Devil. Here, my boy, is a deed to the property and a certified check for \$5000. Now, then, let's see what's in you!' That's what I came to Arizona for, Snapper, and I'm going to pull success out of these mountains if it costs my--well, I won't cast any bluffs, but I mean business.¹³

THE COWBOY AND THE TENDERFOOT

by Franklyn Whitman

Major Characters:

Joe "Snapper" Vinton (second hero, cowboy)
 Randolph "Purty" Hunter (hero, tenderfoot)
 Ezekial Arnold (villain)
 Stephen Arnold (villain)
 Bob Galloway (comic character)
 Bess Chester (heroine)
 Kate Vinton (Vinton's former wife)
 Pepita (Indian, companion to Bess Chester)

¹³Whitman, Cowboy and the Tenderfoot, 11.

Settings:

Act I: Railway Station, Phoenix, Arizona

Act II: Shaft of the Blue Devil Mine

Act III: The Chester Home, Near the Blue Devil

Act IV: Cave Creek Canyon

Plot:

Act I: Randolph "Purty" Hunter, the Tenderfoot of the title and a graduate of Yale, arrives in Eastern garb at the railway station. Because of his apparel, he is teased by Joe "Snapper" Vinton, the Cowboy of the title. Purty shows that he is no lightweight and defeats Snapper in a fist fight, thus earning Vinton's respect. The two become fast friends. We also meet Bob Galloway, a traveling salesman who provides comic relief.

Purty reveals that his father has sent him West to make a success of the Blue Devil Mine as a sort of test of his manhood. The former owner of the mine was a man named Chester, who is now dead. His daughter Bess is in Phoenix, and is supposedly engaged to Stephen Arnold.

Arnold and his father trick Purty (a letter from his father leads Hunter to trust the Arnolds) and sell him a number of worthless mines, taking all the money he'd brought with him to get the Blue Devil operational. Purty and his new pal Snapper go off to the Blue Devil to do what they can.

Act II. Bess Chester and her Indian companion Pepita arrive at the Blue Devil. Bess never got the money for the sale of the mine and thinks she still owns it. They

meet Snapper, who used to work on the Chester ranch (as a cowboy) and who once saved Pepita from drowning. Purty is quite impressed with Bess and lets her think she's still the owner of the Blue Devil while he tries to trace the check his father had given to Bess's father for the mine.

The Arnolds arrive and Purty swears them to secrecy about the true ownership of the Blue Devil. He also refuses to sell back the phony mines. (His attitude is that of "I'll have to take my medicine.") Bess and Stephen Arnold quarrel, so Purty thinks perhaps he'll have a chance for her hand. He romantically burns the Blue Devil deed, so that the mine is indeed once again Bess's property.

Act III. Snapper reveals that he was married once, but his wife was tempted away from him by another man. He still seeks her and the man.

The Arnolds offer Bess a loan to work the mine. When Purty refuses to shake Stephen's hand, Bess angrily banishes him.

At this point, a stage coach arrives, bearing an ill woman who can travel no further. She turns out to be Kate Vinton, Snapper's wife, who is dying of tuberculosis and is trying to find Snapper to beg his forgiveness before she dies. When Stephen Arnold hears who the woman is, he leaves hurriedly; it's clear that he's the man who took her away so many years before.

Snapper wants Kate to reveal who the other man was before he'll forgive her; she's reluctant. However, Snapper

figures out the truth from papers and letters in her satchel; he forgives her and she dies in his arms. Snapper then goes off after Arnold to get his revenge, but only after a fight with Purty, who tries to hold him back. Snapper bitterly attacks Purty:

Curse you and your false hearted friendship. If you stood in my place and I in your'n, I'd have throttled the cur--I'm done with you, do you yere--By the Lord, I'm jest beginnin' to find you out. . . .(KNEELING BY KATE'S BODY.) Sleep, sweetheart!. . .I never prayed in my life before, but I'm goin' to pray now; an' I ask you, Almighty Gawd, to give me the life of the hound who brought her low, an' do with my soul--damn it, kill it--whatever You will. Only give him to me--to me.¹⁴

This passage is typically illustrative of the cowboy hero's assumption that he knows what is "right," and that he must assume the task of meting out justice to villains.

Act IV. Purty is recovering from injuries incurred when he was attacked by Ezekial Arnold's "Greasers" (Mexican hired hands). Galloway tells Purty that the Arnolds have discovered that the real vein of gold lies not in the Blue Devil Mine but in one of the "worthless" mines they had sold to Purty.

Ezekial Arnold comes to try to buy back the mines (with no intention of letting Purty know the truth about the vein of gold, of course). He tries to threaten Purty through Bess Chester's position. However, Purty now has evidence that Arnold falsely endorsed Bess's check for the sale of the mine.

¹⁴Ibid., 18.

After Arnold leaves, Bess arrives. After a quarrel, the truth is revealed, and Bess and Purty declare their love for each other.

Snapper enters and asks forgiveness from Purty for the rough treatment he gave him. He still wants to kill Arnold, however; Pepita also wants him to do so. It becomes clear that Pepita and Snapper are sweet on each other and will end up together at the end of the play.

After much action and the entrapment of a number of Mexican villains, Stephen Arnold appears and Snapper kills him (with Pepita's rifle). A special effect is called for here, as Arnold is supposed to tumble down a waterfall and end up dead at Snapper's feet--sweet revenge. The final tableau reveals Snapper with Pepita and Bess with Purty.

The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot requires the most complicated technical effect of any of the eleven plays. References to sound effects, suggested costumes, and suggested blocking are relatively general, but the printer has included quite a bit of information about the necessary creek, although that description is still sketchy. In the Act IV preface we read the following: "Cave Creek Canyon by moonlight. Real water. Creek at back of padded run,--tank of water. Plank thrown across at center in back."¹⁵ Since apparently even the printer recognized how vague this is, a

¹⁵Ibid., 18.

hand-printed note has been inked in: "See author for further description of water effects. Very simple."¹⁶ We get a better idea of the construction when we reach the climactic moment:

[Arnold] turns, runs across plank, turning throwing plank into water. Runs up trail, appears on Rock. Snapper runs up on bank; Pepita hands him a Winchester. Snapper pulls up Winchester--shoots--a blinding flash of lightning--a dummy figure falls from rock into creek and is washed down to tank at Snapper's feet. In the meantime Steve has come around to side of tank and gets in position to appear. Snapper reaches over, pulls him up and drags him by collar, head first, down to center. Steve hangs limp as though dead.¹⁷

This script is a particularly rough copy with a number of errors which have been corrected by hand some time after printing. A major error is the mislabeling of the heroine. For large sections of the original script, she is called "Lil" rather than "Kate." How this error occurred can only be surmised; perhaps some sections were lifted nearly intact from another script, where the heroine's name was Lil.

A final interesting note about this play is that one of the heroes falls in love with an Indian girl. It is highly unusual for a hero to have more than a passing interest in non-white heroines. In this case, there may be two mitigating circumstances: (1) the hero in question is the lesser of the two heroes in the play--the more important hero does end up with a white girl; and (2) this will be the second marriage for the hero, and his first wife (who dies during the play) is white.

¹⁶Ibid. 18.

¹⁷Ibid., 24.

THE RANCH GIRL

by George L. Raymond

Major Characters:

Harry Merriman (hero, Easterner)
Layton Lorn (hero, rancher)
Thomas Gall (Alice and Betsy's uncle)
Foodle (comic character, black)
Winnie Lorn (heroine)
Alice Alwell (heroine)
Betsy Blinder

Settings:

Act I: Near Railway Station, Southwestern Texas
Act II: Interior of Layton Lorn's Ranch House
Act III: Same as Act II
Act IV: Same as Act I

Plot:

Act I. Alice Alwell and Betsy Blinder arrive to visit their Uncle Thomas Gall. Harry Merriman, a young and somewhat unserious fellow engaged to Betsy, has tagged along.

Layton Lorn and his sister, Winnie, appear. Winnie is visiting Layton's ranch to recover from after-effects of measles; she wears a veil to protect her still-sensitive eyes.

Betsy and Harry meet Layton and Winnie and mistakenly believe that Winnie is Layton's wife. Harry and Winnie immediately like each other and engage in some rather

sparkling dialogue as he tries to get her to lift her veil and show her face. This is unusually good dialogue:

HARRY

I wonder if I have seen you. You have an advantage--that veil--

WINNIE

I think it was on the first base.

HARRY

You are right. You saw me?

WINNIE

And heard you.

HARRY

Humph! Somebody must have done well! If I yelled so loud that you heard me?

WINNIE

Why, yes, if I heard the club.

HARRY

The club!--That is good--when it made a hit at the ball.

WINNIE

It was not at the ball that I heard it sing.

HARRY

But how could a ball-club sing except--

WINNIE

But I mean the glee club.

HARRY

First bass on the glee club! Humph! Humph! The only bass bawling of mine was on the bass-ball-nine. There was a Merryman, though, on the glee club, but he was much darker than I. If you lifted your veil, you might see it.

WINNIE

Have no curiosity, thank you. I heard you, perhaps at commencement.

HARRY

Still wrong! None heard me speak there. Not a man of such standing, you see; but of understanding, looked out for my bass, and the ball at my feet put my whole sole into my work.¹⁸

After Harry and Betsy tell Alice that they think Layton and Winnie are man and wife, she despondently reveals that her only reason for coming West was to try to see Layton. She and Layton had been in love, but were separated by their parents because Layton did not seem serious about his future. Layton went West to prove himself. Alice is devastated to think he's married, for she had hoped. . . .

Act II. At his ranch, Layton and Winnie chat and it becomes clear that Winnie is enjoying the West. News arrives of a raid by a Mexican band of thieves; Layton must go after them and leave Winnie pretty much alone. After he leaves, Harry shows up and Layton's cowhands plan to hang him since they think he's a thief and know he's a dude. Winnie saves him by talking the hands into putting him into women's clothes. (They get his clothes--their major goal.) Harry suspects who Winnie must be, but he goes along with the gag and there is much comic business arising from Winnie treating Harry as a female servant. Harry's presence comes in handy--he keeps the ranchmen from getting into the booze supply.

¹⁸George L. Raymond, The Ranch Girl (Manuscript, Library of Congress, 1901), 15-17.

Act III. Betsy, Alice, and their uncle Gall arrive in a rain storm. In the succeeding conversation, Betsy bitchily reveals that she's only interested in Harry because he's a good catch (wealthy). She's extremely rude to Harry (still in his female servant disguise). When he's had enough, he reveals his true identity.

Act IV. Betsy, Alice, and Harry are all getting ready to leave for the East. The engagement between Betsy and Harry is definitely off. Winnie appears to say goodbye to Harry; it is obvious that they are well on the way to matrimony.

Betsy's uncle tries to make her see her shallowness. Since he is something of a misogynist, this is an unusually strong passage, and it reveals how "good" women ought to behave, according to acceptable modes.

GALL

There are some society women; and you are one of them, Betsy, who in character often seem just what they are in appearance. Three fourths of their substance is dress; and all of the soft sleek satin and silk is on the outside.

BETSY

And what on the inside, pray?

GALL

Well, very extensively, pins.

BETSY

You are cruel.

GALL

A cry is much better than never washing the rouge off.

BETSY

And barbarous!

GALL

Wish I could make your soul as clean as a barber can make my face!

BETSY

You know I have always been good and religious.

GALL

And so were those who stabbed and killed the martyrs of old. They were all of them very religious. But not even their daggers could wound like the sting of a woman's tongue. For that can kill the soul. If ever you marry, Betsy, your husband's hand may be hard; and his face have a beard like a bear's but, simply because he is human, his heart may be soft as a babe's; and the one needs a woman's love as much as ever the other. He would never have asked for this love had he failed to need it, Betsy. Most young men, too, imagine that the woman they love is an angel. She is not, of course; but they think so. And if, when you get then married, and they come to you for rest, with as holy a feeling as if they were coming to heaven itself,--if then, you sting, merely sting them, the devil himself could not match your driving them down to hell; and when you have driven them there, your prayers, your meetings, your psalm-tunes, your beads, your Bibles, your prayer-books, your charities, and your virtues can never conjure one charm to keep the devil away from them or from you.

BETSY

You are losing your self-control.

GALL

Are you frightened?--I wish I could frighten the devil that lives inside of you, out of you. I have just had a note here, Betsy, and all of your friends, at home, are talking about this match as the one bright hope of your life. I know what has broken it now; and I mean you shall learn a lesson.¹⁹

¹⁹Ibid., 61-62.

Layton and Alice enter; Alice has discovered Layton and Winnie's true relationship and so she and Layton have sworn their love to each other once again. Layton feels that now their future is happy; he has proven his worth and manliness and nothing should prevent his marriage to Alice.

The Ranch Girl is the only one of the plays to be written in verse, and does include a few songs. However, the author has attempted to make those musical interludes somewhat realistic by having them performed by an itinerant group of musicians who arrive on the same train as several of the major characters.

As noted above, The Ranch Girl contains some of the best dialogue, displaying considerably more wit and style than the other plays. Another in which this play differs is that it does not have a villain who appears in the action; however, there are several references to off-stage villains.

This script provides brief character and costume descriptions and some general blocking notes, plus a fairly detailed description of the interior in which Acts II and III take place.

One of the heroes in this play spends nearly two full acts attired in a woman's dress. Although such a "disguise" allows him to discover the truth about his fiancée, it is a highly unusual occurrence. It is probably significant that it is the Eastern hero who dons women's

apparel; the manly cowboy hero would hardly compromise his masculinity in such a fashion.

THE END OF A TEXAS TRAIL

A FIGHT FOR HONOR

In the next two plays, The End of a Texas Trail and A Fight for Honor, two major similarities pertain to female characters. Both feature as heroine an ex-Easterner who has come West to try to make a go of running a ranch. Neither heroine's parents are alive, but both have a parent figure in the play. As discussed earlier, such a figure is usually male, but in these two plays, that figure is female. Both of these older women are feisty, frank, and plump.

Other similarities include (1) the presence of a second love story--and in A Fight for Honor there are actually three love plots, two of them comic (the older woman mentioned above is involved in one of the plots); and (2) problems caused by the use of liquor on the part of secondary characters.

THE END OF A TEXAS TRAIL

by Bob Feagin

Major Characters:

Tom Dawson (hero, cowboy and Texas Ranger)

Skippy (comic character)

Pinto (mute, Mexican, hero's companion)

Mad Dog Ginsey (villain)

Sanchez (villain, Mexican)

Marion Moore (heroine)

Molly (soubrette)

Mrs. Wheeler (comic character, Irish)

Settings:

Act I: Exterior of the Moore Homestead in the
Pecos County in West Texas

Act II: Same

Act III: Same

Plot:

Act I. Marion Moore is trying to make a go of her ranch with the help of Molly, Mrs. Wheeler, and Skippy. A band of villains are trying to drive everybody off the land and they murdered Marion's father (a homesteader) before the action of the play begins.

Skippy and Molly provide a comic love interest. Much of their dialogue centers around food--there's been no money, so they've all had to eat great quantities of beans and nothing else. Molly is particularly sick of them.

Sanchez arrives and tries to kiss Marion against her will. He is stopped by Tom Dawson, who propitiously arrives with his mute companion, Pinto. Skippy explains Marion's situation to Tom.

Marion is further threatened by Mad Dog Ginsey (the villainous sheriff) and again Tom intervenes. The following passage reveals the typical righteousness of the cowboy hero and his unfailing regard for the rights of good women:

TOM

Then look up there on the mesa, right there at that clump of purple sage. Do you see anything?

GINSEY

Not a thing--Wait a minute. I saw the sun flash on something.

TOM

You saw the sun flash on the barrell of a 30-30 rifle. That rifle has got a bean on the back of your neck.

GINSEY

Oh, like that, eh?

TOM

Like that. Now go back and tell your gang of killers that they aren't just frightening a girl anymore here. They're up against someone that can shoot as fast and as straight as they can.

GINSEY

What's your game here?

TOM

Just interested in seeing fair play, that's all. This girl's Dad filed on this homestead legal.

GINSEY

This here's cow country. No cussed nesters are gonna come in here and ruin this range by farming it.

TOM

You mean the Government has let you run cattle free here so long that you think you own this range. Well, you don't. This is still Government land, and this section has been filed on.

GINSEY

This section won't stay filed on. If you're smart you'll pull your freight right now. If this place ain't clear by Monday we'll burn it clear. (ENTER MARION FROM HOUSE.) There you are young lady. You needn't

think that hiring a couple of gunmen is going to save you. I can bring ten to your one.

MARION

What do you mean? I have hired no gunman.

TOM

Oh, yes you have, Miss. Me and Pinto are on your pay roll.

GINSEY

You better take my advice and fan the breeze outer here. I ain't gonna waste time warning you again.

TOM

You don't scare me at all, Ginsey. I've faced worse men than you and I'm still here.

GINSEY

You're pretty brave when you've got a man covering me with a rifle.

TOM

I don't think I need any help in dealing with you. I think you're a tin-horn just throwing a bluff.

GINSEY

Why, dam you--(STARTS FOR GUN. REMEMBERS. FLINCHES. RUBS THE BACK OF HIS NECK.) O.K. You win this pot, but the game is just starting. You ain't the only one that can get killers to do their work. I'll be seeing you.

TOM

I'll be looking for you. (GINSEY EXITS.)

MARION

What on earth did you do to him? That's the first time anyone ever backed him down.

TOM

I just showed him my ace in the hole, that's all.²⁰

Act II. Tom has given Marion and the others money for "real" food (no beans) and he has been out searching for Marion's widely scattered cattle. He plans to build fences to contain them.

Tom explains to Marion how his own father had been a homesteader twenty years earlier. One night, his father disappeared with a man; later he was found dead, shot in the back. Tom has been searching for the killer ever since; he heard the man's voice and thinks he'll be able to recognize it if he hears it again.

In a comic sequence, Skippy is chased out of the house after knocking over all the supper fixings. Then he knocks Molly's lemon meringue pie into the well. She sends him down the rope after it. Sanchez interrupts and ends up with the pie in his face, courtesy of Skippy, and a bang on the head from a lead pipe, courtesy of Molly.

Act III. Although it is the deadline day for Marion to leave her ranch or be burnt out, Tom and Marion have gone off riding. While they're gone, Sanchez and Ginsey arrive to threaten Tom. We find out that Tom is a Texas Ranger. When Tom and Marion return, life looks fairly rosy--it's Tom's job to break up gangs like Ginsey's. However, there is a dark lining to such a silver cloud; though Tom and

²⁰Feagin, End of a Texas Trail, 11-12.

Marion profess love for each other, they know that Tom must continue his search for his father's killer. Tom notes that there is something vaguely familiar about Ginsey. It can be observed that this passage seems very familiar, for passages like it abound in nineteenth-century melodrama.

MARION

Oh, Tom, it all seems like a dream. To think that all my troubles are over and this place will be mine, mine to build into a home, free from trouble.

TOM

You won't be free from trouble until we are rid of Ginsey.

MARION

Oh, Tom, I'm afraid for you to meet that man. He's a killer and they say he's as fast as lightening with a gun.

TOM

Don't let that worry you. I've done nothing but practice with a six-gun ever since the day I found my father lying in the trail. I'm faster than Ginsey, because he's afraid.

MARION

Afraid?

TOM

Yes, afraid, By this time he knows who I am. He knows that, in line of duty I've downed dozens like him. That fear will ride his hand when he goes for his gun.

MARION

But I'm afraid for you. Maybe he won't come back.

TOM

Oh yes, he's got to come for me. Everyone knows that I backed him down. He'll be laughed out of the country

if he don't face me. But even if he didn't come, I'd go looking for him.

MARION

But why?

TOM

It's my job. That's what the Governor has hired me to do, to stamp out men like him so that this country will be a good place for people like you to settle. Texas needs new blood. Besides I owe it to my father's memory. A man like Ginsey shot my father in the back--gave him no more chance than a mad dog. Mad dog--Ginsey--I wonder?

MARION

You wonder what, Tom?

TOM

This Ginsey, has he always lived here?

MARION

I don't know; I haven't been here long myself, you know. Why do you ask?

TOM

There is something hauntingly familiar about Ginsey, and I don't place what it is. I wonder if he could be--but no, that's too fantastic.²¹

Later, Ginsey arrives with a threat--"Get out of town by sundown"--and pulls out a watch to punctuate the threat; Tom recognizes it as his father's watch. In the ensuing scuffle, Ginsey tries to shoot Tom in the back, but a shot from off-stage (Pinto) knocks the gun out of his hand. In true manly sportsmanship, Tom gives Ginsey a half-mile start and then goes after him.

²¹Ibid., 27-28.

While Tom is gone, Sanchez returns and in a comic sequence forces Skippy to drink tequila with him. The tequila gives Skippy enough courage to bop Sanchez over the head, impressing Molly mightily.

Tom returns with the news that Ginsey is dead, and he goes in to propose to Marion. Skippy and Molly go to the bench as Skippy also prepares to propose, but once again he gets in trouble when he sits down in Molly's precious lemon meringue pie.

The script of The End of a Texas Trail offers only general blocking suggestions and a few technical effects (very limited). The author does, however, offer quite a thorough description of two pivotal props: the lead pipe and the lemon meringue pie. The business incorporating the pie is broad slapstick.

The End of a Texas Trail employs a revenge theme, as melodrama so frequently does. And there are also some interesting similarities to "The Lone Ranger." The hero of the play is a Texas Ranger as well as possessing cowboy skills, and he is accompanied by a mute ethnic companion (in this case Mexican rather than Indian) who proves as loyal and stalwart as Tonto.

A FIGHT FOR HONOR

by Miron Leffingwell

Major Characters:

Jim Radbourne (hero, cowboy)
George Gordon (hero's half-brother)
Byron Turner (comic character)
Manuel Gonzaga (villain, Mexican)
Widow O'Kelly (comic character, Irish)
Miggles (soubrette)
Marian Converse (heroine)

Settings:

Act I: Yard of the Converse Ranch
Act II: Interior of the Converse Ranch
Act III: Same as Act II
Act IV: Same as Act I

Plot:

Act I. At the Converse Ranch, everyone is waiting for the arrival of Marian Converse with the foreman, Jim Radbourne. Marian's father had been very wealthy and then lost everything in a crash; however, he had deeded the ranch to Marian before then and now she is coming West to try to make a go of the ranch. Waiting for Marian's arrival are Mrs. O'Kelly, the housekeeper; Jim's ward, Miggles; Jim's weak half-brother, George Gordon; an itinerant who speaks in rhymes, Byron Turner; and a Mexican hand, Manuel Gonzaga, who often leads George astray.

George buys a ring from Gonzaga which he gives to Miggles in order to make up their most recent spat. (They care for each other, but bicker constantly.)

When Jim and Marian arrive, they bring news that Marion's stagecoach was held up on the way and she lost a treasured ring to the bandits. Jim explains what will happen to the thieves when they're caught, causing Marian distress. This passage illustrates the view propagated by the Western myth that the West and the East operated under different legal codes:

MARIAN

And in case these unhappy men are taken--

JIM

Well, in a case like that, we organize ourselves into a court of law where there's mighty little learning, but a heap o' justice, and over that court presides a judge named Lynch, and--and--well, these particular individuals are never seen again.

MARIAN

Monstrous! And would you take part in such savagery?

JIM

I am of the Southwest, ma'am, and I must do its work.

MARIAN

Why, if you should do SUCH work, I would never want to see you again.

JIM

(AFTER A PAUSE.) This is the West, ma'am, and we

look at these things differently from the folks you have been brought up with.²²

Jim goes on to explain all the adventures he experienced on a previous trip to New York (the trip in which he saved Miggles from her life of poverty and brought her West). And, he emphasizes that he's a simple kind of fellow:

I don't call myself civilized--I wouldn't have the nerve to do that. Some one would call my bluff. I haven't any education except knowing something about men--good and bad. I want to do what's right, what's honest, what's just, and so, Miss, I must follow the light as God shows it to me, that's all.²³

Such a passage is typical of many of the heroes discussed here and emphasizes their "simple" nature as well as their firm belief that they know what is right.

Jim swears George to marry Miggles--he has stolen her heart and he must do right by her.

Miggles shows Jim the ring George gave her. Jim realizes it must be Marian's; he tries to force George to reveal where he got the ring. (He knows George didn't steal it himself, for he was on the ranch at the time of the robbery.)

Act II. Marian is encouraging Miggles to go East to school; Miggles is upset when she discovers that George is encouraging this plan--she feels that he's trying to get rid of her.

²²Miron Leffingwell, A Fight for Honor (Manuscript, Rosier Tent Show Repertory Collection, Michigan State University Special Collections Library, 1897), 8.

²³Ibid., 10.

Marian is subpoenaed to give evidence about her ring. Miggles tries to get George to tell the truth about where he got the ring, but he refuses and they argue.

George, through mistaken loyalty to a "friend," warns Gonzaga to escape; Jim also suggests that Gonzaga absent himself.

Marian must immediately dispatch some important papers which will clear her father's name and restore his holdings. George is to be the messenger, but Jim accuses him of being untrustworthy, and George leaves in a huff (after making up with Miggles). Turner is selected as messenger, but he doesn't get far--Gonzaga overheard the plans and Turner gets ambushed. He explains that Gonzaga and George stole the packet, and Jim goes after George, though Marian begs him not to.

Act III. Marian and Mrs. O'Kelly wait at the ranch for news. When Turner appears, they hide him in the cellar so that he won't be able to testify. George then appears and Marian hides him in her room.

When Jim returns, he confronts George. George has explained to Marian that he took the papers to the right people; she believes him, but Jim doesn't and he gives George a gun to shoot himself with and thus avoid the shame of hanging. Miggles arrives with proof that George is telling the truth. When Jim calls George out, George doesn't trust him; in the ensuing scuffle, Jim is accidentally shot.

Act IV. Turner and Mrs. O'Kelly, who are now engaged to each other, are baking Miggles' wedding cake. We learn that Jim is blind from the wound he received in his fight with George.

Marian enters to tell how Jim just kissed her--there are stars in her eyes.

George has reformed and is returning this evening after being away on important ranch business.

Jim and Marian get engaged; while Jim is in the house, Gonzaga shows up and attacks Marian. When Jim comes out, Gonzaga attacks him, but Jim's bandage falls off his eyes and he can see. Jim overcomes Gonzaga, but then lets him go. When Gonzaga shiftily tries to shoot Jim, Turner kills Gonzaga with the revolver he's propitiously been carrying ever since he was robbed. George arrives and everything ends happily with a triple wedding in sight.

The copy of A Fight for Honor is extremely rough, being poorly laid out and containing a large number of typographical errors. However, it does include some blocking notes and is one of only two plays included in this paper to have floor plan drawings. (The other is The Girl from L Triangle Ranch.) Those drawings offer no more than a very roughly pencilled sketch with a few suggested dimensions for set pieces. The sketches clearly indicate the use of wing-and-drop sets, although one has some suggestion of being a box set.

The Wild West Shows receive a reference in the play, as the soubrette character dresses up in a costume which the other characters describe as being like Annie Oakley's. This is the only direct reference to the Wild West Shows in any of the plays surveyed.

The play provides a very strong defense of the "lynch law," articulated by the hero in a passage with eerily modern flavor:

JIM

The people have been roused by his crimes. McKandlass robbed and murdered men and women, and then juggled with the law. The red tape of the courts freed him every time.

MARIAN

Mob law can never be justified.

JIM

There are times when mob law IS justified. If men like McKandlass are not destroyed quickly, they live to laugh at our law, and the whole scheme of justice. We must strike terror to the hearts of these criminals if we don't want to be overridden by a band of cutthroats.

MARIAN

All this is savagery.

JIM

Be that as it may, Miss Marian, we must fight fire with fire.²⁴

²⁴Ibid., 30.

THE COWBOY AND THE LADYRANCH 10

The Cowboy and the Lady and Ranch 10 have been grouped together because they both contain courtroom scenes in which the hero must defend himself against a false accusation of murder. The hero is his own defense attorney in The Cowboy and the Lady while a close friend represents the hero in Ranch 10. The flavor of the two trials differs markedly. That of The Cowboy and the Lady is serious in tone with several dramatic features: (1) the heroine declares her love for the hero from the witness stand (the declaration is a happy surprise to him); (2) the hero is actually found guilty by the jury; and (3) he then is saved by a last-minute confession forced from the true villain. The trial in Ranch 10 is far less serious: (1) the judge is one of the comic characters in the script; (2) the hero's friend must serve as both defense attorney and court clerk, and the judge's assistant agrees to be the prosecutor, because no one else can or will show up for their duties; and (3) much of the testimony is nothing more than very funny passages of dialogue, quite irrelevant to the case being tried.

These two plays are also, as mentioned earlier, the only ones of the eleven known to have been produced in New York.

THE COWBOY AND THE LADY

by Clyde Fitch

Major Characters:

Teddy North (hero, rancher)
 Bill Ransom (hero's sidekick)
 Weston (character, heavy)
 Quick Foot Jim (villain, Indian)
 Mrs. Weston (heroine)
 Midge (soubrette)
 Molly Larkins (proprietress of dance hall)

Settings:

Act I: Teddy North's Ranch
 Act II: The Dance Hall
 Act III: Silverville Courtroom

Plot:

Act I. Several plot threads are revealed in the exposition. Quick Foot Jim, a half-breed Indian cowboy, is sweet on Molly Larkins, proprietress of the Silverville Dance Hall. However, Weston (a dude) has been courting her (successfully, as we discover later). Jim threatens Weston.

Midge, charming and sprightly champion rifle shooter, is coming to live at Teddy North's ranch. (Her father is a "wrong 'un" and is lynched that same morning.) North means to make Midge his sister.

Mrs. Weston appears in the distance; all the ranch hands discuss how flirty she is, but Teddy defends her and it's clear he thinks she's very special. When Mrs. Weston

arrives, she teases Teddy about his clothes (he dresses in a very dandified style). Mrs. Weston makes cocktails for everyone (badly) and invites them all to a dance.

Bill Ransom (Teddy's partner) reveals to Teddy that he loves Midge, but Midge loves another cowboy, Joe. Teddy tells Midge his true feelings about Mrs. Weston.

When Mrs. Weston leaves, she takes a dangerous route (despite warnings) and slips over a ledge. Teddy saves her, but swears everyone not to tell her who her rescuer was (she was unconscious). Only after Mrs. Weston has left for home with a cowboy escort does Teddy discover that he broke his arm in the rescue effort. The following passage reflects the manner in which the heroes of these plays deal with pain:

PETE

Shake, Boss! (TEDDY WISHES TO SHAKE HANDS, BUT FINDS HE CANNOT RAISE R. ARM.)

TEDDY

Why! Hello! I--I can't--

PETE

Can't you raise your arm, sir?

TEDDY

And it pains--I didn't realize--I didn't know! (HE IS WHITE AND SHOWS THAT HE SUFFERS.)

MIDGE

You're hurt! You're hurt!

TEDDY

Oh, no, only--

PETE

(TOUCHING HIS ARM SOFTLY--TEDDY WINCES.) You've broken your arm!

TEDDY

What! The devil! I believe I have!

PETE

It ought to be set at once.

MIDGE

But there ain't no doctor for miles!

TEDDY

Oh, never mind! It ain't so much-- (HE IS GETTING WEAKER.)

PETE

Yes, it is! It ought to be tended to this minute! I ain't exactly a doctor, but if you don't mind my bein' a bit rough I kin set it somehow or other for you. It ain't the first time. Shall I try?

TEDDY

Oh, yes, have a go at it.

MIDGE

It'll hurt! It'll hurt!

TEDDY

No, it won't. It'll be fun.²⁵

And Teddy bravely grits his teeth as Pete sets his broken arm.

Act II. It's the evening of the dance. Jim jealously threatens Molly and warns her to have nothing to do

²⁵Fitch, Cowboy and the Lady, 42.

with Weston. When guests arrive, Weston gives a warm kiss, warmly received, to Molly--and is seen by Jim from his hiding place. After general frivolity and a sequence in which each of the ranch hands asks Teddy to put a good word in for them with Midge, Midge runs in, distressed because Weston has made a pass at her. Teddy is very upset, but Mrs. Weston calms him and then confronts her husband angrily.

While everyone else is out of the room, Weston and Molly embrace again; Jim, who's watching, has stolen Mrs. Weston's pistol from Teddy's jacket and now uses it to kill Weston. When Teddy and Mrs. Weston come into the darkened room, each thinks the other committed the murder. When the Sheriff comes to arrest Mrs. Weston, Teddy confesses to the murder.

Act III. At his trial, Teddy is defending himself and is surprised (but very happy) when Mrs. Weston declares before the whole court that she loves him. Just as it looks as though Teddy will be found guilty, Molly rushes forward to testify and Jim shoots her. Jim is told (untruthfully) that Molly's dead, and he becomes distraught since he did love her, so he confesses to the murder of Weston. Teddy and Mrs. Weston swear their love to each other, and Midge and her cowboy Joe are united.

The Cowboy and the Lady is unquestionably the best known of the eleven plays, and, in fact, is still available from Samuel French. Because it is from that publishing

agent, it has quite thorough descriptions of sets, sound and music effects, character personalities and dialects, costumes, and blocking. The French script also includes photographs of an early production. The exterior set appears to be a wing-and-drop system with some large set pieces; the interiors of the dance-hall and the courtroom are clearly box sets. The costumes in these photographs indicate a dandified cowboy garb (not realistic) and a highly stereotyped and stylized costume for the Indian villain.

This play tends to be a bit more sophisticated than the others studied here. Several contemporary dances form part of the action in Act II, the heroine prepares cocktails for the men and carries a ladylike little pistol (the only one of the heroines to do so), and, more seriously, adultery serves as a major theme. The hero falls in love with a married woman and is sorely tempted by her; however, in keeping with the myth, he never lets her know how he feels until after she is free. The heroine falls in love with the hero while her husband is still alive, but escapes our condemnation because her husband is so clearly unworthy of her and because she does not declare her love until she is forced to do so under oath. An adulterous affair does take place in the play, between the heroine's husband and the villain's wife. The wife, Molly, seems a fairly typical fallen woman whose heart is still in the right place, for it is she who saves the hero after the jury has found him guilty of the crime her husband actually committed. It

by Harry Meredith

Al McClelland } (heroes, twin brothers, cowboys)
Tom McClelland }

Theophilis Robbins, M.D.

Joseph Particular Prose (comic character)

Barney Holt

Parson Jim Scripture

Coriander Lucretia Smalley (comic character,
heroine's aunt)

Annie Smalley (heroine)

Neeley Barrett (comic character, Irish)

Silver Bud (Indian)

Joseph "Red Bullet" Kebook (villain, Portuguese)

Act I: Exterior of Ranch 10
Act II: Interior of Corral
Act III: Rocky Mountain Pass
Act IV: Courtroom--Cheyenne

Plot:

Act I. Annie Smalley has come out West to her Aunt Coriander's Ranch 10 to recover from a lung ailment and has fallen in love with Al McClelland, a cowboy on the ranch. When Annie tells her aunt about her engagement to Al, Coriander expresses a wish that it were Tom instead of Al. Tom is Al's twin brother, who's been mining in Colorado and not seen at Ranch 10 for over ten years.

In the exposition we also meet Neely, the housekeeper; Doctor Theopholis Robbins, a local good guy; Silver Bud, an Indian girl who works as a servant in the kitchen; and Joe "Red Bullet" Kebook, a wealthy but nasty Portuguese who lusts after Silver Bud.

In a comic passage, circuit judge Peter Particular Prose arrives with his assistant, Barney Holt, to take a census of Ranch 10's inhabitants. Prose is a great admirer of florid adjectives, as this humorous passage illustrates:

PROSE

Well, here we are at last, Ranch 10. This is the last until we reach the up river Ranches. Why, is there no one here to receive me? I--a circuit Judge, as well as a government official! Do they think a census taker is nobody?

HOLT

It looks like it.

PROSE

It's an unambiguous, deleterious, infectuous, predestinationest! A delightful smell, however, comes from yonder kitchen. It's stupendous, futricious, meretricious, delicious!

HOLT

I'll tell you better after I've tasted it.

PROSE

You are all together too irrational, irascible, detrimental, contemptimental. (TURNS TO HOUSE.) Is there anyone alive in that house? If so, come forth and pay your respects to the representative of the grandest government under the sun. If you don't, I magnify you--bull-doze you.²⁶

During the census taking, Annie finds cause to defend Al from aspersions cast by Prose:

Stop, sir! I must correct you when you speak ill of Al McClelland. I know the truth regarding the circumstances of which you speak. Joseph Kebook is the owner of a number of wretched tenements in Cheyenne; from one of these a sheriff was expelling a poor family, Kebook was assisting in his brutal way, and was using unnecessary force against a young girl, a cripple, who could not move as quickly as the rest. He pushed her roughly and the poor girl fell to the ground. McClelland was passing and he saw it all; in the glory of his manhood he fell upon the pitiable monster and punished him as the lion would the coward wolf. This is the man whose character you would blacken; this is the man of whom I would say to you: Go do likewise.²⁷

Such passages are quite typical and tell us much about what makes these heroes so attractive to the heroines.

Al has written his brother Tom to come for the wedding; while the others eat dinner inside, Tom arrives and goes into a cabin to clean up and rest before meeting Al's bride-to-be.

Silver Bud loves Al and begs him to take her along as a servant when he marries Annie. Al cannot refuse her plea;

²⁶Meredith, Ranch 10, 6.

²⁷Ibid., 11.

he then exits to shoot a hawk so that Silver Bud can use the feathers to make a fan for Annie. Joe has observed the scene and enters to confront Silver Bud, who admits that she loves Al and hates Joe.

Silver Bud is shot from off stage and dies. When Al offers a reward to whoever can identify the killer, Joe rushes in to accuse Al, whose shotgun has just been fired (at the hawk). Al escapes so as to have the freedom to clear his name. Just then, Tom awakens, comes out of his cabin, and is mistaken for Al. He tells Annie his true identity and then decides to take Al's place and go to trial.

Act II. Tom is a prisoner at Ranch 10, with Joe Kebook and his aides as the guards. Dr. Robbins has arranged to be named sole guardian and he plans to release Tom on his own recognizance.

Tom and Annie talk about the future; Tom is obviously in love with Annie. Tom figures that Al went to Tom's cabin in the Colorado Rocky Mountains; Annie decides that she must go after him and bring him back in order to save Tom. She will dress in men's clothing. Joe enters and boasts to Tom that it was he (Joe) who really killed Silver Bud, and the two men fight. When Dr. Robbins arrives, he dispatches Joe and the other outlaws, but tells Tom that Joe's confession means nothing without witnesses.

Annie comes to say goodbye to Tom. When the others from the ranch come looking for her, she hides in Tom's cabin. When he is forced to open it. Annie is in her male

attire and pretends to be Tom and Al's younger brother Phil.

Act III. Annie has found Tom's friend in Colorado, Parson Jim Scripture, and they are seeking Al, who is fearfully wounded from a fall off a cliff. When they find Al (by tracking his bloody footsteps), Annie tells him how Ranch 10 was burned and how Tom saved her life, and that Tom is imprisoned in Al's place.

Al begs the Parson to marry them, which he does. Al tells Annie to tell Tom that he must love her as Al has and, indeed, take his place. Then Al dies in Annie's arms; Annie swears to find out who's really responsible for Silver Bud's death--and, indirectly, for Al's, too.

Act IV. The act begins with a comic passage between Judge Prose and Dr. Robbins. Since no other court officers show up, Prose's assistant Holt is named prosecutor and Robbins takes on the duties of defence attorney, court clerk, and stand-in for the defendant.

Tom arrives late with testimony that Joe Kebook tried to bribe him to escape East.

During the trial, most of the major characters testify, some in comic passages, some in serious ones. When Robbins calls Joe to the stand, we learn that his nickname, "Red Bullet," comes from his penchant for using copper bullets, which are large and poisonous.

Since Annie is still missing, Joe accuses Tom of killing her. Things look bad for Tom, but Annie appears at

the most propitious moment for a tearful and loving reunion. She urges him to stay Al and not reveal his true identity.

Dr. Robbins then reveals that he and Annie disinterred Silver Bud's body the night before and discovered that she was killed by a copper bullet(!).

Tom confesses his true identity, the jury immediately finds him not guilty, and Joe is arrested for killing Silver Bud and for destroying Ranch 10. Annie and Tom rejoice in each other's love.

A rather special feature of Ranch 10 is its use of twin brothers as the heroes. The play is set up so that a single actor would have no trouble portraying both roles (there is plenty of time for costume changes, etc.). The use of twins of course allows for the mistaken identity business, which seems to owe something to Boucicault's The Corsican Brothers, although Boucicault's technique shows a more delicate touch.

The script contains only the most rudimentary set description and very few blocking notes. Interestingly, however, it does contain a number of pencilled-in notes, indicating that this copy actually served as a production script.

Ranch 10 is the only one of the plays to include a "breeches" part. The heroine spends two acts attired as the hero's younger brother so that she can go off to seek his twin in the mountains.

As was discussed earlier, Ranch 10 features a courtroom scene. One of the typically melodramatic elements in that scene is the unmasking of the villain by identification of the murder bullet. The exhumation of the body and subsequent analysis of the fatal bullet give a rather modern twist (with a flavor of "Quincy" about them.)

DAD CARTER

MY WESTERN GIRL

Dad Carter and My Western Girl have been grouped together since both include scenes taking place in a large Eastern city and heroes who come from the East. Dad Carter's hero was brought up in the East, but was sent West by his father so that he might acquire some maturity. So, although he's proud to be a cowboy, he's eager to return East and go back into the business world. Thus the final act of the play takes place in Chicago, where the hero has once again assumed the role he was trained for--that of a businessman. It's intriguing that once he's back in the city and no longer so much in touch with nature, the hero loses his ability to spot the villain.

My Western Girl's hero is not a cowboy, but travels widely in the West as a part of his military duties; among his many skills are those of the cowboy. Two acts of this play take place in Washington, D.C., in the hero's family home. Though there are confrontations with the villain in Washington, the major clash occurs in the West. It is there

that the hero seems most natural and comfortable with his surroundings. The heroine too is more at home in the West than she ever is during her sojourn in Washington, where she goes to be "educated."

DAD CARTER

by C.A. Phillips

Major Characters:

Dad Carter (father of heroine)

Rube Whatte (comic, actually Pinkerton detective in disguise)

Jack Lester (hero, cowboy)

Dummy Boyd

Skunkton Peters (comic character, black)

Texas Burns (villain, Mexican)

Starlight (Indian)

Nell Carter - "Little Sure Shot" (heroine)

Settings:

Act I: The Yard of Dad Carter's Ranch House

Act II: The Cattle Rusters' Cabin

Act III:

Scene 1: Same as Act I

Scene 2: In a Woods

Scene 3: A Rocky Pass

Act IV: A Parlor in Chicago

Plot:

Act I. Jack Lester arrives at Dad Carter's ranch looking for work. Rube Whatte tells Jack that Carter is a rustler, but a fair man. Carter and Jack hit it off and Jack is hired.

The character Dummy Boyd is introduced. Boyd's parents were murdered when he was still a child, and he lost his hearing and ability to speak after that. He lives a hermit-like existence in a cave on Carter's ranch.

Texas Burns, Carter's rustling partner, comes to find out about Jack. It's revealed that Burns has had his way with Starlight, a young Indian girl who works on the ranch, but he refuses to marry her. Starlight thinks that Burns is after Nell, Carter's daughter, a sharp-shooter and a somewhat rough soubrette type. Before the act ends, Nell defends Jack from a sneak attack by Burns.

Act II. Skunkton Peters (whose first name is abbreviated by nearly everyone, naturally) is standing guard at the rustlers' shack while the others are out on a raid. Burns comes looking for information he might use to blackmail Carter. When Carter steps out of the cabin, Burns says he wants to marry Nell, which Carter absolutely refuses to consider.

Starlight has overheard this conversation and when she confronts him, Burns tries to strangle her. He is prevented by Rube Whatte, who scares Burns off. Dummy Boyd comes through tracking Burns, and is sent after him, but

only following extensive comic deaf-and-dumb business.

Jack and Nell appear and are obviously spooning. Carter pumps Jack, who reveals that he's a Harvard graduate, his father is rich, and that he (Jack) had gotten too big for his britches. He confesses:

After I came out of Harvard, I went home and my father took me into business with him on the board of trade and the stock exchange and it was not long until I had more money than I knew what to do with. I joined the 'Royal Order of Smart Alec's' if you know what that is, and in a year's time I was going so fast I burned the wind. I tried to smoke all the cigarettes and drink all the booze that was made but the odds were too big and I went down and out. The Governor stood it as long as he could and then he told me that I was out of it and that I would have to look out for myself, and now that I look back and see what he put up with, I don't blame him. . . .He told me to leave Chicago and if the time ever came when I could come back and look and act like a man, that my old place was open to me. I've done it, Dad, and I'm going back and I want to take Nell and you with me.²⁸

Jack proposes to Nell and they exit. Burns enters, finds Jack's dropped knife, and uses the knife to threaten Starlight. Dummy Boyd shoots the knife out of his hand before he can injure her. When everyone re-enters, Burns accuses Jack of the attack (because of the ownership of the knife), but the unconscious Starlight is still clutching Burns' hat, so the truth is known.

Act III. Scene 1. Carter has gone straight and is keeping Starlight on the ranch to protect her. He has

²⁸Phillips, Dad Carter, 28.

received an offer for the ranch, which Nell wants him to accept.

Burns abducts Starlight (she knows too much about him) and Skunkton follows him.

Carter decides to sell the ranch.

Act III. Scene 2. Several characters pass through (a front-of-the-curtain scene), including Rube Whatte and Skunkton, Burns and Starlight, and Nell tracking Burns.

Act III. Scene 3. In a rocky pass, Starlight is discovered tied up; Dummy Boyd tries to free her but is clubbed over the head by Burns. In the ensuing passage, Burns admits that he's the one who killed Boyd's parents. (Starlight already knew this--one of the reasons why Burns had to abduct her.)

Burns goes upstage to Boyd, talking and threatening and revealing his guilt--he feels safe doing so since Boyd is deaf. While this goes on, Nell sneaks in and replaces Starlight under the blanket.

Boyd suddenly speaks--the blow to his head restored his hearing and speech. He and Burns fight and Burns gets the upper hand, but Nell leaps to the rescue.

Act IV. Jack has taken everyone to Chicago and now it is the day before Jack and Nell's wedding. Skunkton, Starlight, and Nell don't trust a Mr. Mardo, who Jack thinks is all right.

A gentleman named Farrell arrives--it's Rube Whatte without his disguise. Then Mardo enters and we discover that

he's really Texas Burns. Farrell confronts Mardo; Mardo poisons the wine, but Farrell sees, and so does Starlight, who replaces the poisoned decanter.

Boyd, Nell, and Jack all enter, as does Farrell, who has once again donned his Rube disguise. In an exciting passage, he accuses Mardo of poisoning the wine, which Starlight corroborates. Then he reveals Mardo's true identity and has him arrested. This passage is typical melodramatic fare.

NELL

What is the matter, Mister Mardo, are you not going to drink with us?

TEXAS

Oh the toast does not interest me, why should I drink?

DAD

Why should you drink? By the eternal you should drink because my girl done you the honor to ask you. See here, Mardo, you've acted strange since you first came here, and I've got about enough of it and I want to know what it means.

NELL

There, don't be angry, father, I presume Mister Mardo has good reason for not wanting to drink.

RUBE

You can bet a horse he has.

TEXAS

May I ask what you know about it, sir?

RUBE

Yes, you may ask and I'll tell you, sir. The reason you won't drink is because the wine has been poisoned and you are the only one that knows it.

ALL

Poisoned! (ALL PUT GLASSES WHEREVER MOST CONVENIENT.)

RUBE

That's what I said, poisoned. And he knows who did it.

TEXAS

Maybe you'll go far enough to say that I did it myself.

RUBE

Yes, I'll go just that far, you did it.

TEXAS

Mister Carter, am I to be insulted in your house in this manner?

RUBE

Insult you! No, I tried that the first time I ever met you and it was a failure.

TEXAS

My friend, at the proper time and place I'll make you prove this. (STARTS TO GO.)

RUBE

Don't be in a hurry; this is the proper time and place. I'll do it now.

TEXAS

Now?

RUBE

Right now. There were two people in this room who say you put the stuff into the wine.

TEXAS

I say it is a lie.

STARLIGHT

And I say that it is the truth. I saw you put something into the wine from a white paper and when your back was

turned I came in, changed the decanters, took away the white paper, and here it is. (HOLDS IT UP.)

TEXAS

And your other witness?

RUBE

Was me. I sat right there in that chair and saw all that went on behind my back in that little hand mirror on that table.

TEXAS

(TURNS AWAY, GETS GUN OUT QUICK.) There is only one way-- (TURNS ON RUBE WITH GUN HALF RAISED.)

RUBE

(AS TEXAS TURNS AWAY, GETS A LARGE REVOLVER OUT AND WHEN TEXAS TURNS, IT IS RIGHT IN HIS FACE.) And that's the wrong way, now put that thing on the table before you hurt yourself with it. Now I think your string is about played out, Mister Tex Burns.

ALL

Tex Burns!!!

TEXAS

Yes, Tex Burns--but who the devil are you?

RUBE

Well, to you and these good people I've always been known as Whatte, but to the Pinkerton detective agency I am known as Farrell the Chicago detective.²⁹

By the time all this has transpired, it's past midnight and Jack and Nell embrace as they realize it's their wedding day.

²⁹Ibid., 54-55.

This script of Dad Carter offers some rough description of settings and makes specific reference to the use of drops. It also includes a brief prop list, one of the few scripts to list props separately from the body of the play. The costume descriptions are fairly extensive and point up an interesting distinction between the dress of the hero and the villain: the hero is to be attired in relatively realistic cowboy garb, but the villain wears dandified cowboy garments, including angora chaps.

Blocking indications are sketchy, but the script does give fairly thorough notes for special fight sequences and for one or two other special scenes. One bit of business which is quite pivotal to the resolution is very carefully described. In this bit, the Pinkerton detective sits in a chair so that he is hidden from the villain, but is able to watch every move the villain makes (poisoning a decanter of wine) by holding a hand mirror at such an angle that the villain's actions are reflected in it.

The presence of the Pinkerton detective is quite unusual for these plays. The cowboy hero here is not as pivotal to the action of the play and the capture of the villain, suggesting that this play was written late in the period covered and is thus a transitional play between plays with frontier heroes and plays with detective heroes.

MY WESTERN GIRL

by E.C. Filkins

Major Characters:

Gabe Husks (comic character)
 Shep Shangles (comic character)
 Mercedes (heroine)
 Miguel Mendoza (villain, Mexican)
 La Chuza (Mexican duenna)
 Tom Rathbone (hero's brother)
 Capt. Philip Rathbone (hero, military)
 Mrs. Rathbone (hero's mother)

Settings:

Act I: Peaceful Valley Ranch
 Act II: Mrs. Rathbone's Home, Washington, D.C.
 Act III: Same as Act II
 Act IV: Same as Act I

Plot:

Act I. The exposition begins with a humorous dialogue between Gabe Husks and Shep Shangles, who's a local judge. This passage is quite a bit of fun and certainly wittier than many of the plays offer.

SHEP

Evenin' Gabe.

GABE

Evenin' Shep. (PAUSE.) Finished holdin' court?

SHEP

Yep!

GABE

Much that was excitin'?

SHEP

Not much. The last day was rather quiet. Except that the county attorney shot Editor Tolliver in the knee, because he smiled satirical like during his last argument. The jury all tried to get into the fracas, but I knocked the foreman down with my mallet. That was good idea of yours, Gabe, suggestin' I should use a bung-starter for a gavel. It gives weight to my decisions, so to speak.

GABE

How did the matter end up?

SHEP

I finded them all for contempt of court.

GABE

The newspaper man, too, and he was only smilin'?

SHEP

Of course if he hadn't of smiled it wouldn't have provoked the county attorney to use his artillery. Besides I don't allow as how the game laws protects newspapers anyhow. Well we was proceedin' peaceful like when Jim Joskins and his red-headed wife, they started somethin'; she had him up for wife beatin' and I had only fined him fifty, seein' as how she had started things at the dinner table. Well she paid his fine, then she turned on me with a buggy whip. It's always the wimmen that start things anyway.³⁰

As their conversation gets more serious, Gabe and Shep commiserate over the fact that their ward Mercedes (an orphan) is going East to get educated.

³⁰E.C. Filkins, My Western Girl (Manuscript, Rosier Tent Show Repertory Collection, Michigan State University Special Collections Library, n.d.), 1.

A neighboring rancher, Miguel Mendoza, arrives and we learn that Mercedes' mother was Mexican. Mendoza intends to marry Mercedes, even though she's poor, because he believes she will inherit her Mexican grandfather's fortune. (Mercedes knows nothing of this.)

Captain Philip Rathbone rides up to the ranch house and Mercedes at first mistakes him for the man she believes herself in love with (who's a member of a gang). Later, we'll learn that Philip and Tom, Mercedes' "lover", are twin brothers. There is an instant rapport between Mercedes and the Captain, but he must leave, not before promising to return, however.

Tom Rathbone enters, but Mercedes is cold to him, for he's been drinking. He wants her to go away with him, and then casually reveals that he's already got a wife back East. When Mercedes orders him to leave, he seizes her with rape in mind. In the ensuing struggle, Tom is killed and falls into the well. Mendoza has been watching and tells Mercedes that he will never reveal what has happened. Mercedes leaves in distress for the East that very night.

Act II. In exposition between Mrs. Rathbone and Philip, we learn about Philip and Tom's kinship, and Tom's perpetual escapades, which Philip has had to bail him out of, time after time. Mrs. Rathbone wants Philip to marry her ward, who turns out to be Mercedes! When Philip and Mercedes re-discover each other, they are blissful. Gabe and Shep arrive to visit and bring news of Mercedes' inheritance,

which has been suppressed by a shyster lawyer so far, and they reveal that they're trying to find the mother of a murdered man (Tom).

Mendoza visits Mercedes regularly and proposes marriage to her, during which he accidentally drops a piece of paper which incriminates him as a traitor. Shep finds it, confronts Mendoza, and gets the will (relating to Mercedes' inheritance) away from Mendoza.

Act III. During a ball at Mrs. Rathbone's, Mendoza accidentally reveals to Philip that he is indeed a traitor. Before the ball is over, Philip is called away on urgent military matters. Mendoza tells Mercedes that the man in the well is Philip's brother, and that if she won't marry him, he will tell Philip that she murdered his brother.

Although Mercedes tries to break off with Philip, she finds it too difficult and decides to tell him the painful truth. Just then, Shep enters and says that he killed Tom.

Act IV. Much has happened since the night of the ball. Mercedes' duenna, La Chuza, has discovered that her son was betrayed to the Mexican government by Mendoza; she swears to get revenge for her son's death. Philip arrives at the ranch and reveals that his mother has died. Gabe and Philip discuss the likelihood that Shep did not kill Tom and is covering for someone.

Mendoza arrives and argues with Philip:

MENDOZA

Captain Rathbone, I saluted you just now!

CAPTAIN

Yes,--I saw you.

MENDOZA

And you ignored my courtesy.

CAPTAIN

I certainly did. I am an American soldier and can only feel contempt for a man who has not only acted the coward's part, but to line his own pocket basely betrays the misguided creatures whom he had enlisted in what he claimed to be a patriotic enterprise, and then led them into a trap to be butchered like sheep that he might save his own neck. I forbid you to ever recognize me again.³¹

When Mendoza tries to shoot Philip in the back, Gabe and Shep stop him and try him in a sort of kangaroo court.

When Mercedes enters from the ranch house, Mendoza accuses her of Tom's death. She admits her guilt and takes the blame, telling Philip how she accidentally shot Tom in their scuffle. Gabe reveals that Tom was knifed, not shot, and he produces the knife. La Chuza identifies it as Mendoza's. She acts out what really happened the night of Tom's death and then stabs Mendoza several times, thus getting her revenge.

As in so many of the plays, My Western Girl's heroine has a father figure to care for her. What makes this play a little unusual is that the heroine actually has two such

³¹Ibid., 50.

guardians, and they are far more comic than the typical father figure.

Another special feature in this play is the presence of twin brothers. Unlike Ranch 10, however, which also has twin brothers played by one actor, the twins in My Western Girl are not both good men. One is decidedly a "wrong un" and is killed early in the action. His relationship to the hero allows for several plot twists: (1) although the heroine is mistakenly fond of the bad brother for awhile, when the good one comes along, she quickly recognizes his worth and gives him all her love, typical of the melodramatic heroine; (2) the fact that the man killed and dumped in the well is the hero's brother sets up the profusion of confessions--several characters trying to protect one another--which would not have been necessary if the dead man were a stranger; and (3) the need to identify the murder victim sets up the final confrontation and revelation.

My Western Girl is a very rough copy with extensive pencilled-in editing and blocking notes, plus references to various bits of business. Many of these pencilled-in pieces of business are referred to only by name and are not explained at all. There are (as is typical of most of the plays), however, some fairly lengthy explanations of necessary business in the script.

THE GIRL FROM L TRIANGLE RANCH

The Girl from L Triangle Ranch is unusual in that it has a female villain, the only one of the eleven plays to do so. The play includes a large number of villains, many of them Mexican (the female villain is half-Mexican). Several other ethnic types makes appearances as well, making this the play with the most ethnics in it. It is the only play with a Hebrew character.

THE GIRL FROM L TRIANGLE RANCH

by Frank Dumont

Major Characters:

Harry Logan (hero, sheriff)
 Harvey Wesley (villain)
 Tom Claxton (villain's sidekick)
 Solomon Donahue (comic character, Hebrew)
 Caleb Push (comic character)
 Eclipse (comic character, black)
 Franklin Barton (heroine's father)
 Ethel Barton (heroine)
 Bolivar (soubrette)
 Nathalie (villainess, Mexican)
 Mrs. Caleb Push (comic character)

Settings:

Act I: Mining Camp in New Mexico
 Act II: Outlaws' Den in Mexico
 Act III: Franklin Barton's Ranch

Plot:

Act I. The play begins with exposition about the gang of outlaws led by Harvey Wesley. We learn that Wesley had been engaged to Ethel Barton back East, but that she jilted him. He has come out West and located near Ethel's father's ranch, hoping Ethel will visit and he'll be able to get her back or get revenge.

Ethel enters with her father, Franklin Barton, owner of the L Triangle Ranch. She has come West to visit him, even though the area is dangerous. Wesley confronts her, declares his love, and seizes her with rape in mind, but is stopped by the young sheriff, Harry Logan. Wesley's outlaws gang up on Logan, but he is saved by the intervention of Ethel, Barton, and several of the comic characters of the play, which include Solomon Donahue, a wandering Hebrew, and Caleb Push, a hustler and a photographer. At this point, we also meet Mrs. Push, who is trailing her husband, and we are treated to the first of several reunions which involve much kissing, slapping, fainting, and Mrs. Push being shoved into somebody else's arms by Push.

In a moment a more serious event takes place as Wesley challenges Barton in the street and shoots him. Since there are no witnesses, Wesley accuses Logan of the murder. Harry swears his innocence--and is believed by Ethel, of course--but must prove his innocence in court.

Act II. At the outlaws' hideout, we discover that they have taken Harry into Mexico while pretending to take

him to jail. We meet an Indian Wesley has hired to raid Barton's ranch and kidnap Ethel. What's important about this Indian is that he's really Barton--who wasn't killed, only wounded--in disguise.

A comical interlude follows with Bolivar and Eclipse (Barton's ward and a black servant from the ranch, respectively), who are tracking Logan; this is followed with more comedy as Donahue, Push, and Mrs. Push (still tracking her husband) enter. When the outlaws return, Push and Donahue manage to hide in the cabin.

The outlaws have kidnapped Ethel and she is threatened by Nathalie, queen of the cattle thieves, but Harry has freed himself and stops Nathalie. Harry and Ethel declare their love for each other just before a big fight with the outlaws. Despite surreptitious help from Push and Donahue, Harry is overpowered and it looks very much as though the cabin--and Harry and Ethel--will be blown up. Mrs. Push saves the day with help from Push, Bolivar, et al. In the ensuing battle with the outlaws, the good guys overpower the bad.

Act III. At Barton's ranch, Wesley has come to try to court Ethel's forgiveness and says if she does forgive him, he'll prevent a big raid on the ranch. When she refuses, he threatens her life. Harry stops him (again), but is in turn stopped by Tom Claxton, one of Wesley's associates. However, before Harry and Ethel can be hurt, Barton, still in disguise, intervenes.

In a comical sequence, Bolivar and Donahue discover that they rather like each other, and Mrs. Push is passed from arm to arm, this time ending up in Eclipse's arms, where she revives from her faint.

MRS. PUSH

My dear husband!

ECLIPSE

Go 'long. I ain't nobody's husband!

MRS. PUSH

I'm so glad you support me.

ECLIPSE

I can't support myself.

MRS. PUSH

(SHE SEES ECLIPSE'S FACE AND SCREAMS.) Oh! You are black in the face!

ECLIPSE

Yes, ma'am! I'm black all over.

MRS. PUSH

You are mortified.

ECLIPSE

I'm multiplied--and pacified.

MRS. PUSH

Where did you get that face?

ECLIPSE

It was a birthday present.

MRS. PUSH

Why don't you wash it?

ECLIPSE

It would only make it worse.

MRS. PUSH

(SCREAMS.) You are not Caleb Push!

ECLIPSE

Who said I was?

MRS. PUSH

Why, you are a colored man!

ECLIPSE

No, I was born that way.

MRS. PUSH

How came I in your arms?

ECLIPSE

I don't know, ma'am. You just blew in.³²

The outlaws re-enter and Nathalie reveals the reason for her bitterness toward Ethel: she is Ethel's older and illegitimate half-sister (by Barton and a Mexican woman). When Logan once again intervenes, Wesley accuses him again of Barton's murder. Barton reveals his true identity and in the resulting melee, Nathalie is accidentally shot by Wesley, and the outlaws are overcome.

The script for The Girl from L Triangle Ranch provides quite complete costume descriptions. As in several of the other plays, the hero's garb is fairly realistic while

³²Dumont, L Triangle Ranch, 49-50.

villain's is more flamboyant. The script also describes a stereotyped Indian disguise as well as several other "disguise" costumes.

Floor plans are included with the script and indicate a system of drops and set-pieces. There is some description of what the drops should depict. The script also includes fairly extensive blocking notes. Among the special effects described is the gunpowder used to threaten the cabin in which the hero is trapped. The notes call for a combination of black sand and real gunpowder, the real gunpowder being used for the first few feet of the "fuse."

There is a great deal of slapstick action in this play, plus many ethnic jokes. This action is much broader than in any of the other eleven plays, and includes numerous nagging-wife bits, jokes about the black skin of Eclipse, business of hitting people over the head with sausages, and Hebrew jokes. Since one of the characters owns a camera, there are also a number of bits of business where ignorant ethnics are frightened by the promise to "shoot" them with the camera. (These are very similar to such instances in Burley's Ranch.)

ROSE OF THE RANGE

Rose of the Range offers the most modern view among the eleven plays of a cowboy's duties. The hero understands the need for fencing and is familiar enough with the care of pure-bred cattle to pass himself off as a "cowdoctor."

The hero of this play differs from those of the others in that he is actually an itinerant performer who accidentally gets "cast" in the role of cowdoctor and foreman. Like all the heroes, however, he proves admirably suited for his duties.

ROSE OF THE RANGE

by Bob Feagin

Major Characters:

Colonel Coleman (father of heroine)

Sleepy Peters (comic character)

Dan Davis (hero, cowboy)

Don Esteban (villain, Mexican)

Pedro (comic character, Mexican)

Rose Coleman (heroine)

Chiquita (soubrette, Mexican)

Settings:

Act I: Yard of the Coleman Ranch in New Mexico

Act II: Same

Act III: Same

Plot:

Act I. Rose Coleman has been keeping company with Don Esteban, although nobody else approves. Her father, Colonel Coleman, has sent East for an educated "cowdoctor" to assist him as foreman; this doctor's name is Davis.

Dan Davis and his sidekick Sleepy Peters, a pair of down-and-out entertainers, arrive at the ranch. Rose

mistakes Dan for the new foreman. Dan accidentally intercepts a telegram for the Colemans in which the real Dr. Davis cancels his contract because of illness. Dan sees this as a golden opportunity and decides to pretend that he is the doctor; since he was raised on a ranch in Texas, he thinks he has the know-how to do a good job, and he only plans to carry on the masquerade until he's proved his worth, at which time he'll tell the truth.

Don Esteban tries to bribe Dan to let the Coleman herd be stolen; thus the Colonel would fail and would have to accept the rich Esteban as a son-in-law. Dan indignantly refuses. Here we see the moral righteousness typical of cowboy heroes:

ESTEBAN

I will lay all my cards on the table. Miss Rose and I are very much in love. The Colonel does not favor me as a son-in-law. He has sunk his whole fortune in this new venture. If he fails, he is broke.

DAN

How will that help you?

ESTEBAN

Once the Colonel is broke, things will be different. I am the richest man in this state. A rich son-in-law, in his position would then be desirable.

DAN

What are trying to do, hire me to poison them or something?

ESTEBAN

Nothing so crude as that. We are but twenty miles from the border. Just across the line, in Mexico, is the bandit leader El Lobo. I can get word to him.

DAN

And then?

ESTEBAN

Then, on a night he shall name, you will leave the entire herd in the south pasture, unguarded. The next morning the herd will be gone, and you will find yourself the richer by ten thousand dollars.

DAN

You dirty, slimy crook!

ESTEBAN

What?

DAN

You heard me. If you think you're going to get your greasy paws on that girl thru any help of mine, you're crazy.

ESTEBAN

Careful, you fool. You are speaking to Don Esteban. I have killed men for less than what you have said.

DAN

Well, you don't scare me. Get going, and the next time you make me a dirty proposition like that, I'll knock your teeth down your throat.³³

Act II. The help (all Mexican) at the ranch discuss how hard Dan works--and how hard he is working them.

Dan admires Rose, but she is headstrong and Dan is heavy-handed in his courting, no competition at all for the smooth-talking villain;

³³Feagin, Rose of the Range, 20-21.

ROSE

Don Esteban is fascinating, charming. But he has never tried to make love to me seriously. What my reactions would be if he did, I don't know.

DAN

Then it shall be my job to see that he doesn't make love to you seriously.

ROSE

Oh, so I'm to have another guardian, am I?

DAN

You shall as far as Don Esteban is concerned.

ROSE

Indeed? And may I ask why you are so interested in the outcome of my friendship with Don Esteban?

DAN

I should think the answer to that should be obvious. I am a white man.

ROSE

(GETTING MAD.) And what would you call him?

DAN

He calls himself a Spaniard, but I'd call him just a plain greaser.

ROSE

Oh, you're just like father. Just because the man's skin isn't as white as yours--

DAN

No--yours.

ROSE

Don't quibble. Neither of you have the slightest justification for your hatred of Don Esteban.

DAN

I didn't say--

ROSE

And both of you are downright insulting to me. You seem to think that I am a low-grade moron without enough intelligence to select my own companions.

DAN

Well, excuse me, Miss Rose. I didn't mean to make you mad.

ROSE

Don't flatter yourself. I'm not 'mad', as you term it, simply annoyed. I don't care to discuss the subject further, and, if you wish us to remain friends, it would be a good idea to avoid it in the future. (EXITS IN HOUSE.)

DAN

Whew! I sure kicked over a hornet's nest that time.³⁴

Don Esteban comes to see Rose and proposes to her, but more as if he were selecting a breeder cow than a wife. "The time is here for me, Don Esteban, to take a wife, a woman worthy of carrying on my noble line. I have selected you for that honor."³⁵ Rose is incensed and sends Esteban packing, which enrages him.

In a comic sequence, Sleepy courts Chiquita and brags of his courage, which Chiquita says is good since Pedro jealously kills all her sweethearts.

As the act ends, El Lobo raids the ranch, steals the prize herds, burns the corrals, etc. In the fracas, the Colonel is wounded.

³⁴Ibid., 26-27.

³⁵Ibid., 34.

Act III. Dan and Sleepy are exhausted after having tried to track El Lobo all night.

Rose and Dan make up and declare their love for each other. Their love scenes are paralleled with comic love scenes involving Sleepy, Chiquita, and Pedro.

Don Esteban arrives and accuses Dan of giving information to El Lobo so as to help him successfully raid the ranch. He then reveals that the real Dr. Davis is still in Albuquerque. Just when things look their worst, Sleepy arrives. He had gone to Esteban's ranch to arrange to borrow fresh horses. While there, he discovered the stolen cattle--Esteban is El Lobo. As Esteban tries to escape, Sleepy picks him off with his rifle. (Sleepy has been established earlier as a sharp-shooter.) There is general relief and rejoicing, especially on the part of Sleepy, for Pedro and Chiquita have made up and Sleepy's skin is safe once again.

Rose of the Range is the only one of the scripts to include a prefatory drawing suggesting some of the flavor of the play. This line drawing gives a fairly realistic depiction of Western garb on the cowboy and his heroine. The cover also includes a sales pitch for purchasing the rights to the play:

This play has everthing that a good Western SHOULD Have. Action--Thrills--Heart Interest--Glamour--All WOW Curtains--Good Leads--A Suave Spanish Heavy--A Good Love Story--and A WOW HILL BILLY COMEDY that can be played Toby.³⁶

The script includes only extremely brief descriptions and very few blocking suggestions. According to the prefatory material, either an interior or exterior setting can be used, but the action of the play seems to call for an exterior.

Like so many of the plays this one includes a secondary love story and a father figure (the heroine's actual father in this case).

SUMMARY

Analysis of selected nineteenth-century melodramas with cowboy characters reveals that the cowboy hero in popular drama follows the guidelines for such characters as established in popular literature. The plays are identical with other melodramas of the period in structure, use of stereotypical characters, language style, etc. It's evident that the cowboy character was simply a convenient and popular "dressing" for the traditional melodramatic hero. Typical traits exhibited by the cowboy heroes in these plays are the same as those in other popular forms: youth, virility, good looks, traditional cowboy garb, strict morality, strength, belief in the power of the gun, respect for women, belief in justice, chastity, and a high degree of racism.

³⁶Ibid., preface.

CONCLUSION

The focus of this paper has been an examination of the cowboy hero in nineteenth-century popular drama. Appreciation of the development of that cowboy hero necessarily begins with an understanding of the contribution made by America's frontiers in general in the development of American character. Frederick Jackson Turner, in his famous thesis concerning the frontier's influence, identified the intrinsically American characteristics as individualism, nationalism, democracy, equalitarianism, energy, social mobility, optimism, pragmatism, and materialism. The American cowboy, who certainly fulfills Turner's set of characteristics, emerged as a feature of one of America's many succeeding frontiers: the cattle frontier. This frontier which spawned the cowboy existed for a period of only twenty years, beginning immediately after the Civil War; the character it produced, the American cowboy, worked hard and lived a decidedly unglamorous life barely resembling the myth which was soon to evolve.

The cowboy began to take on mythic qualities simultaneously with the closing of the actual cattle frontier. This development occurred mostly in the widely popular dime novels and Wild West shows, where the cowboy seemed to fulfill

a national need. Eastern writers created a hero who offered excitement, adventure, action, all kinds of vicarious thrills, embodied in an archetypal character: the cowboy hero has the characteristics of heroes from all periods--youth, handsomeness, natural nobility, strength, courage, virtue.

The mythic cowboy hero was born and grew toward his quintessential twentieth-century form in popular art forms of the nineteenth century, specifically in the dime novel, the Wild West Shows, and the popular theatre. Each of these forms exhibits the typical characteristics of popular culture: urban in appeal, essentially middle-class, simple, accessible, moral, and predictable. The cowboy hero appeared first in the dime novel, in the 1870's, and then in the popular theatre as it segmented into a "serious" and a "popular" theatre, exhibiting a number of standard characteristics, whichever form he appeared in: virile, brave, having little to do with cows, handy with a gun, a teetotaler, a loner, a racist, following the male ethic, in touch with nature, moral, and protective of women.

Melodramas featuring cowboy heroes exhibit standard characteristics of that dramatic genre: the theme of vice vs. virtue, with virtue inevitably winning; extensive exciting action; and stereotypical characters. Buffalo Bill's appearances in such melodramas and later in his outdoor Wild West Shows helped further establish the cowboy hero in the popular drama.

Chapter III's examination of a selected number of nineteenth-century plays featuring cowboy heroes shows more specifically the characteristics typical of the nineteenth-century melodramatic cowboy heroes. Although there are some minor differences from the cowboy hero as he appears in the dime novel, his depiction in these plays reveals what a debt the plays owed to the novels. Here again is the handsome, courageous, virtuous young man we have met before in other popular culture forms.

It should be clear that these cowboy heroes, deriving as they do from the dime novels and Wild West Shows, have little to do with reality. Playwrights recognized the country's interest in this new American hero and added him to stock dramatic structure, specifically the melodrama. However, even though the plays with cowboy characters were not especially "Western", or, indeed, very different at all from melodramas with Eastern settings, the cowboy heroes of these dramas are an integral part of the growing myth, a myth which would be somewhat re-shaped in the twentieth century, but which owes its essential character to the nineteenth-century cowboy hero of the dime novels and popular melodramas. Those popular art forms served as major propagators of the myth. It is that function of perpetuating the myth which gives the forms their major significance, since they are neither good literature nor good drama in the traditional sense.

The identification of the cowboy as hero and the subsequent rapid inclusion of him in various popular art forms reflects a recurring pattern in popular culture; the pragmatic recognition and adaptation of characters and ideas popular with the public is essential to the survival of any popular form. Although he was not the most important of nineteenth-century melodramatic heroes, employment of the cowboy as hero reflects the perceptiveness of writers who realized quickly that here was a character with national appeal who neatly fitted into the already popular melodramatic structure. There is no essential difference between nineteenth-century American melodramas with cowboy heroes and nineteenth-century American melodramas with other types of heroes, such as miners (particularly in Bret Harte's plays), scouts and trappers (epitomized in Frank Mayo's depiction of Davy Crockett), "noble savages" (Edwin Forrest's *Metamora*), and the detectives who became popular late in the century (Dick Brummage and the English Hawkshaw and Holmes), usurping the cowboy's place. It is also interesting to note that there is no essential difference between nineteenth-century American melodramas with cowboy heroes and twentieth-century American melodramas featuring such heroes as those depicted by Charles Bronson, Clint Eastwood, and Jan Michael Vincent. These twentieth-century heroes continue the nineteenth-century pattern of rugged individualism, the male ethic, and the administration of personal justice; they certainly all follow the "Code of the West."

It seems unlikely that examination of more plays such as the eleven included here would reveal any significant differences from the observations made in this paper. However, an investigation of plays with cowboy heroes written after 1910 ought to reveal the growing influence of Owen Wister and Edwin S. Porter, since research solidly indicates that both were major factors in the development of the modern Western. Other research might include an examination of the occurrence of older women in these scripts: perhaps the rather frequent appearance of these older female characters in the plays (they do not appear in the dime novels) reflects the composition of the companies who performed the plays. All touring companies would include an older woman to handle character parts such as Juliet's nurse. Use of all the company members in all the productions would seem to be the most "cost-effective." Perhaps this is the explanation for the existence of the older women in the scripts.

One of the less attractive characteristics of the mythic cowboy hero in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is his racism. It is not entirely clear why this racism developed in the myth so early, since, as was stated earlier, the West's population of real cowboys included numerous Indians, blacks, and Mexicans. Undoubtedly, the racism reflects Eastern attitudes toward non-white ethnic groups, and because the myth was being propagated by Eastern writers and performers, those Eastern attitudes permeated

the myth. The role of the Indian in nineteenth-century popular drama has been extensively investigated, as has that of the black. It does, however, seem likely that further study of the role of the Mexican in such plays might be worthwhile, especially since the real cowboy owes so much of his heritage to the Mexican vaguer. It would be of interest to compare the depiction of the Mexican in different types of nineteenth-century melodramas, since such a study should reveal whether the racial prejudice against Mexicans existed across the board or was limited to the dramas about the West. Since the vast majority of the dramas were composed by Easterners, it seems quite likely that all or most of the plays with Mexican characters would exhibit the same Eastern racial bias as is revealed by the plays examined here.

Perhaps another area for study would be an examination of the West as a sort of "baptism by fire", or "proving ground", for spoiled young Eastern men. Several of the plays included in this paper feature a hero who comes West to prove his manhood and to grow up. The idea of the West as a crucible, or testing ground, was an essential part of Turner's frontier thesis, and these plays provide evidence that such an attitude was familiar and quite widely accepted.

Study of the cowboy is unlikely to cease, for he continues to interest Americans:

Among the gimcracks and knickknacks of three centuries of American popular culture, the figure of the cowboy surely occupies a unique position. He is anomalous

and contradictory, a trifle which, unlike other trifles, suggests substance. His one-dimensional image implies both height and breadth, but of depth there is none. He is the subject of no great work of art or literature or music, but his status among the ephemera of popular culture elevates him to the lofty levels of myth and legend. His mark--his brand, if you will--is everywhere on everything. His place in the American mythology, as expounded from drugstore to network and points between, is somewhere above the President and below the Christ. Now, approximately a century after his birth as a cult object, he is what is known as heritage; and, no matter what one makes of him as an item in the intellectual baggage of the American people, it is certain that he cannot be taken lightly.¹

Because he cannot be taken lightly, the cowboy will not soon disappear as a subject of investigation in a wide variety of fields of scholarly interest, including popular culture, sociology, psychology, and history. His is an enduring legend.

¹Harris and Rainey, Cowboy, 154.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX

LIST OF PLAY TITLES SEARCHED FOR

Burley's Ranch (1907) Anthony E. Wills
Cattle King (1885) Marie Townsend Allen
The Cattle King of Texas (1888) Maggie Boyd
The Cowboy (1896) Charles H. Hoyt
The Cowboy and the Tenderfoot (1902) Franklyn Whitman
The Cowboy from Dakota (1899) Albert Carr
A Cowboy Minister (1903) Lewis Praue
The Cow-boys (1895) Joseph Bolsterli
The Cow-puncher (1902) Harry Van Demark
A Fight for Honor (1897) Miron Leffingwell
A Gentleman Cow-boy (1900) Eudora Cauthorn
The Girl from L Triangle Ranch (1908) Frank Dumont
Horse Thieves of Bar X Ranch Frank B. Coigne
Jess of the Bar Z (1901) Forbes Heermans
King of the Cattle Ring (1891) James Halleck Reed
Little Maverick (1891)
My Friend, the Cowboy (1902) Alf Hampton
Only a Cow-boy (1885) Henry Tomkins
Pet of Parsons' Ranch (1886) Farrand Felch
The Queen of the Ranch (1900) George Kennedy
The Ranch Girl (1901) George Raymond

Ranch Hero (1900)

Ranch King (1896) Joseph D. Clifton

Ranch 10 (1882) Harry Meredith

The Round-up Anthony E. Wills

Scotty, the Cowboy Frank Dumont

Silver Spur (1885) Scott Marble

Taming a Cowboy (1893) William Carver

Tenderfoot (1903) Richard Carle

A Tenderfoot in Texas G.M. Scarborough

Ten Mile Crossing (1882) Scott Marble

That Cowboy (1892) Mary Keeler

The Texan (1893) Tyrone Bower

The Texas Avengers

Tigress of the West (1874) Fanny Herring

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