The Farces of John Maddison Morton.

Billy Dean Parsons

Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College
PARSONS, Billy Dean, 1930-
THE FARCES OF JOHN MADDISON MORTON.

The Louisiana State University and Agricultural
and Mechanical College, Ph.D., 1971
Speech-Theater

University Microfilms, A XEROX Company, Ann Arbor, Michigan

© 1971

BILLY DEAN PARSONS

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

THIS DISSERTATION HAS BEEN MICROFILMED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED
THE FARCES OF JOHN MADDISON MORTON

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in The Department of Speech

by Billy Dean Parsons
B.A., Georgetown College, 1955
M.A., Louisiana State University, 1958
January, 1971
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The writer wishes to express his deep appreciation to Dr. Claude L. Shaver for his guidance and encouragement in the writing of this dissertation and through years of graduate study. He would also like to express his gratitude to Dr. Waldo W. Braden for his encouragement and faith; and to Dr. Clinton Bradford, Dr. William J. Olive, Dr. Owen Peterson, and Mrs. Irene Huenefeld, he expresses a heavy debt. Finally, his insurmountable debt to his deeply devoted wife and two beautiful children he lovingly and gratefully acknowledges.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ............................................ ii
ABSTRACT .................................................. iv
INTRODUCTION ............................................... 1

PART I. BACKGROUND

Chapter
   I. BIOGRAPHY ........................................ 8
   II. PLAYHOUSES ....................................... 26
   III. AUDIENCES ....................................... 58
   IV. PLAYERS AND PLAYBILLS ......................... 80
   V. A CONSIDERATION OF FARCE ...................... 104

PART II. THE PLAYS

VI. PLOTS ............................................... 122
VII. CHARACTERS ....................................... 163
VIII. LANGUAGE ......................................... 181
IX. ACTING ............................................. 218
X. THEMES AND STAGING ................................ 250

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS ......................... 259
APPENDIX ............................................... 267
BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................... 273
AUTOBIOGRAPHY ......................................... 281
ABSTRACT

John Maddison Morton was the most prolific and probably the best of the low farce writers of the nineteenth century. His most famous work, Box and Cox, is still frequently performed at colleges and universities, and a number of his other plays are equally worthy of production.

The low farce and melodrama were the two most popular play forms of the nineteenth century, and yet, very little has been written about farce, its characteristics and its exponents. The purpose of this study is to examine the works of one major writer of farce in an effort to gain a better insight into the genre as a whole.

Three major influences helped to shape the writing of John Maddison Morton: playhouses, audiences, and players. The playhouses changed in size and number as the demand for spectacle grew and the audience changed in composition and dramatic taste. Consequently, a majority of Morton's farces were written to be presented in the "minor" houses. The audience, early in the nineteenth century, completed the shift in composition from the gentry of the Restoration to the "butcher and the baker." They were extremely vocal, and Morton and his fellow writers adopted methods to fit the audience. The players
who performed in Morton's plays were the outstanding comedians of the day, and he often wrote for specific actors.

A bill of fare in the mid-nineteenth century usually contained at least three plays each evening. The farce was normally the final attraction, and it often did not begin until well after midnight. Morton's farces, however, seem to have been an exception. They were presented in either the first or second position in forty of the fifty playbills examined.

Farce is defined as a form of comedy in which recognizable people often do improbable things. The more recognizable they are, the more absurd, thus human and funny, they seem. The purpose of farce is not just to incite laughter, but to delineate a kind of Everyman as he faces the realities of life and the universe. In the process, man is often made to look ridiculous, absurd, and ludicrous. Plots of farces are generally said to revolve about the machinations of several stock characters and often use such devices as deformity, caricature, parody, irony, and disguise-un-masking.

Morton's farces divide nicely into three major categories: (1) plays in which an uncle is trying to marry his niece, a guardian his ward, or a parent his child; (2) plays in which a husband or wife, a lover or
intended masquerade as the conjugate partner of a third party; and (3) plays with divergent plots which may be called non-marriage plays. He used a number of devices, such as misunderstandings, deus-ex-machina endings, letters, repetitions, tricks, jokes, and conflicts between master and servant. His plays always end with a "tag."

Morton used stock characters of the "low" variety, and a vast majority of his plays contained at least one "stupid" character around whom the plot revolved. He was exceptionally gifted at fitting his characters to the actors at hand.

Social and moral themes did not occupy a place in Morton's farces. The costumes were the costumes of the day, and the sets were usually painted backdrops.

The use of language in a dramatic situation, dialogue, was the greatest contribution of John Maddison Morton to the art of playwriting. He used the familiar devices of all farce writers, but his dialogue is characterized by the results he achieved rather than the devices he used. His language is set apart by its tone or style, which depended heavily on pure wit, the unexpected, the incongruous, and the absurd.
INTRODUCTION

Allardyce Nicoll, in his *History of Early Nineteenth Century Drama: 1800-1850*, says that "theatre-lovers of today" show an "almost total ignorance . . . concerning the fortunes of the theatres during those fifty years,"

The truth of his statement is evident when one tries to find definitive studies dealing with nineteenth century theatre. In fact one might designate this century as "lost" or "hidden" in the annals of stage history. That so little is known seems strange—in fact, paradoxical—for most libraries contain numerous "memoirs" of actors, actresses, theatre managers, and playgoers of the nineteenth century. Perhaps one reason for our lack of knowledge is that we have long considered the theatre of this century as being debased, stale, primitive and lacking in taste. A closer examination, however, reveals that almost every theatrical change or renovation credited to the twentieth century had its genesis in the nineteenth. The value of detailed studies as adding to our knowledge concerning this period

---

should, therefore, be evident. Nicoll, recognizing the
need for such study, says that the purpose of his book is
"to outline at least the main features of the playhouse
and dramatic development during those years, and to provide
a general background for the possible study, along more
specialised lines, of particular plays or of particular
movements in the world of the theatre." Nicoll later makes
an appeal for the study of the farce of this period and
suggests avenues for future studies to follow:

The farce stands alongside of the melodrama as
the most characteristic and most popular play-
form produced in the age; and as such it demands
our close attention, whether our aim be to re-
capture and explain the theatrical tendencies
of these decades or to follow the fortunes of our
drama from the eighteenth century on to the modern
period.

George Rowell, whose work, The Victorian Theatre,
presents the only other more or less complete picture of
the nineteenth century English stage, also recognized the
importance of detailed study of this period. He expresses
his awareness in the following statement.

The nineteenth century saw the emergence of the
modern stage as we still understand it: a stage
framed by the proscenium arch, lit by electricity,
boxed in by canvas flats. The evolution of this
stage cannot be followed without reference to the
plays written for it.

Here then is basic material for English
theatre history in an expansive period. Actors',
authors, and managers' memoirs, prints, programmes,
and other ephemera of the theatre, all these are accessible to the enthusiast; but the source of that material—the plays themselves—has long been difficult of access. The texts are to be found, if at all, in Acting Editions often poorly printed and some long out of print. Many of the plays, popular in their day, have not seen the light of publication at all, but lie like treasure trove in the vaults of the Lord Chamberlain's Office at St. James's Palace.

Rowell and Nicoll have both suggested the importance of further, more detailed research into the theatre of the nineteenth century, especially research dealing with the plays of the time. The purpose of this study then is to examine the farces of John Maddison Morton as a reflection of the English farce of the nineteenth century. It is admittedly true that the works of any one writer may not indicate the trends of any given age, except in a general way, but it is also true that no whole may be completely and accurately described until the parts of that whole have been examined in detail. The examination of other farces of the period and the description of the genre as a whole must be the work of other writers.

Many of Morton's farces were translations or adaptations of French works. The purpose of this study, however, is not to compare the works of Morton with French farces he may have used as sources, but to examine these farces as a reflection of the English farce of the day as written by

---

Morton. There are at least four reasons for not considering the French plays: (1) The practice of borrowing sources was as old as British drama. Shakespeare is known to have used ready made plots in many of his plays, and the practice was not born with him. (2) As may be observed by again considering the passages already quoted from Nicoll and Rowell, obtaining English editions of the plays is often very difficult. Determining which plays were translations or adaptations and then finding the French originals would surely be an insurmountable task. (3) Even if the originals from which Morton may or may not have copied could be obtained, determining the degree of plagiarism might be as difficult as trying to say how much Shakespeare borrowed from Kyd, or Marlowe, or Greene, or Lyly, or someone else. (4) The purpose of this study is not to examine the faults or merits of Morton as a playwright, but to analyze his plays as at least generally representative of a very popular type of entertainment in nineteenth century England.

As Nicoll points out, melodrama and farce were the two most popular types of entertainment from 1800 to 1850, and by reading the playbills of the period, it is evident that they retained their popularity during the second half of the century. Eric Bentley quotes Nietzsche as saying, in 1870, that "only the farce and the ballet may be said
Bentley expresses his own estimate of the place of farce in the nineteenth century by saying that "the real glory of the Victorian stage lay in the farce, the extravaganza, and the comic opera." Much has been written about the melodrama of the period, but the only work to deal exclusively with the English farce is that of the German writer, Klemm (Die Englische Farce Im 19. Jahrhundert.)

Since farce has never been adequately analyzed, the general area for this study was chosen. The works of Morton were chosen for two reasons: (1) Morton was one of the better farce writers of the nineteenth century. Thomas H. Dickinson, in The Contemporary Drama of England, lists the leading writers for each type of entertainment. Morton and William Bernard are the only ones listed for farce, and The Cambridge History of English Literature says that "no one produced more successful or more amusing farces than John Maddison Morton." (2) Of the

6Ibid.
approximately eighty-five farces written by Morton,² ninety-one were available to the writer. Most of Morton's major works are included in this ninety-one. Furthermore, this number, approximately one-fourth of his total output, should present a representative sampling of the type of farce written by him. The plays available were printed in acting editions published by various play leasing companies. Most are undated and other sources had to be consulted to determine dates of production, theatres, managers, and actors involved. The play titles, all available publication data, and the dramatis personae are listed in the Appendix in order to provide a quick reference source.

Rowell says of the nineteenth century stage, "the evolution of this stage cannot be followed without reference to the plays written for it."¹⁰ Conversely, the plays cannot be accurately studied without reference to the stage for which they were written. The first part of this study, therefore, contains chapters on the playhouses, audiences, and players and playbills. It closes with a consideration of farce. Part two is the heart of the study and is devoted to an analysis of Morton's plays. Chapters


¹⁰Rowell, Nineteenth Century Plays, p. v.
are included on the plots, characters, language, acting, and themes and staging.

It is hoped that this study will contribute significantly to the understanding of an important part of the nineteenth century theatre and that later studies will add to this knowledge.
PART I: BACKGROUND

CHAPTER I

BIOGRAPHY

Thomas Morton, the father of John Maddison Morton, was educated for the bar but took up playwriting because of his intense interest in the theatre. He was held in high esteem by his contemporaries, and one of his plays, Speed the Plough, remained popular throughout the nineteenth century. Late in life, he was elected "an honorary member of the Garrick Club, a rare proceeding." He was unfortunate in that he wrote during a period when authors were not well paid. According to The Gentleman's Magazine, "some of his comedies had been so successful as to be represented for 50 nights in succession. The lowest price he ever got for a play was £90 or £100, and highest £300." 

---


2 The Gentleman's Magazine, X, N.S. (December, 1838), p. 677. This same article contained information that Mr. Morton sold the copyright to Children in the Wood for £50. The following interesting note was also included: "the usual mode of remunerating authors, when Mr. Morton commenced writing for the stage, was, by giving them the receipts of the third, sixth, ninth, and twentieth nights, after deducting the expenses of the house; and he describes with what anxiety he used to watch the clouds on those evenings, as a stormy night very frequently converted the author's 'benefit' into a loss" (p. 677).
And according to his obituary in another issue of the same magazine, he might have become a wealthy man if he had been born a generation later.

Had the Dramatic Copyright Act been in existence twenty years earlier, Mr. Morton would have realised a fortune by his writings. To show the confidence placed in his abilities by the managers of our theatres, it need only be stated that when his Town and Country was to be brought out, in March, 1807, Mr. Harris, of Covent Garden, before the parts had been written out for rehearsal, agreed to give him a draft for 1,000£ for it, the theatre taking all risks of success or failure. Mr. Harris was well rewarded for his liberality, for Town and Country is one of the stock pieces of every theatre in the kingdom. John Kemble was the original Reuben Glenroy, but it was also a favourite part with Kean.3

Thomas Morton's parents died when he was a young child. He was reared and educated by an uncle named Maddison, for whom he named his second son.4 When he died on March 28, 1838, he was survived by all three of his sons and his daughter.5 His eldest son, Thomas Morton, the younger, spent some time in India and, when he returned to England shortly before his father's death, was in bad health. He and John Maddison Morton co-authored at least one drama, All That Glitters is Not Gold. Morton's

---

4Ibid., p. 551.
5Kunitz, British Authors, p. 456.
youngest son was an artist of some note; his daughter married in India.  

John Maddison Morton, like his father, became a dramatist almost, as it were, by accident. He was educated in Paris and Germany from 1817 to 1820, and after a brief stint at a school in Islington, he entered the seminary of the lexicographer, Dr. Charles Richardson. Dr. Richardson's school was, apparently, a favorite among theatre people, for there he met, according to Clement Scott, "Julian Young, Charles James Mathews, John Kemble, Henry Kemble, John Liston, Dick Tattersall, and young Terry, son of Terry the actor, whose widow subsequently married the lexicographer, Dr. Richardson."  

Morton remained in the seminary until 1827. The next few years of his life are uncertain, but, in 1832, Lord John Russell appointed him to a government job as a clerk at Chelsea Hospital. Again government office work seems to have been a favorite among theatre people, for W. S. Gilbert, Robert Reece, Tom Taylor, and Anthony Trollope are known to have held such positions.  

---

On March 9, 1835, while Morton was serving as a clerk in the hospital, his first play was presented at the Queen's Theatre on Tottenham Street. The name of the piece was My First Fit of the Gout, and the lead roles were played by Wrench, Morris Barrett, and Mrs. Nisbett.

Clement Scott says the play was first presented in April. According to Scott, "it was in April, 1835, that Maddison Morton produced his first farce, at the little theatre in Tottenham Street, destined afterwards to flourish as the Prince of Wales Theatre, and to be the nursery of Robertsonian comedy." The writer for The Athenaeum of 1891 and the writer for The Times of the same year disagree with Scott as to the name of the theatre. They say the play was produced in the Queen's Theatre, and in this they are correct. The discrepancy is probably the result of the name of the theatre being changed from the Queen's to the Prince of Wales sometime after the play was produced. At any rate, a close reading of The Times of 1835 reveals that the play was indeed produced in the Queen's Theatre and that the opening performance was given on March 9 and not in April as Scott maintains.

By 1840 Morton's love for the stage had become so powerful that he gave up his job as a clerk at Chelsea.

---

10 Ibid.
11 The Athenaeum, p. 876; The Times (London), December 21, 1891, p. 6.
Hospital and turned entirely to playwriting as an occupation. Apparently he looked more like a clerk than a playwright. Clement Scott once described him as "an elderly gentleman of the old school, prim, neat, well set up and rosy-cheeked as a winter apple." The writer for The Athenaeum said he was a "man of simple tastes and retiring disposition," and Scott, in The Drama of Yesterday & To-Day, again vividly characterized Morton.

there never was a man who looked less like a comic dramatist and man of letters than Maddison Morton. With his bright red pippin apple face, clear complexion and distinguished air, he looked like a country squire of the old school. A more courteous old gentleman I never met. He was passionately fond of fishing, and he took snuff in abundance and in last century style.

What Scott meant by "last century style" is hard to imagine, but apparently Morton was indeed a heavy user of snuff and had a lifelong devotion to fishing. He once told Scott that he had "devoted the best part of his after-life to two principal objects, 'Fishing and Farce-Writing.'"

From 1840 to 1865, the period when farce was most popular, Morton wrote with an amazing fury. Most of his

---

13 The Athenaeum, p. 876.
plays, something over one hundred and twenty including plays of all types, were written during this period.

The reason is obvious: he had to be prolific in order to earn a comfortable living. The Times, with Morton's productivity and the poor price paid for farces in mind, says that Morton "in these days of splendid remuneration for dramatists might have been expected to make a small fortune, . . ."

And The Athenaeum says that "the price paid for farces was insignificant, ranging from five shillings—we have seen a farce for which that sum was paid acted at a West-End theatre, at which it ran for some weeks—to about fifty pounds, . . ." 16

In all fairness to theatre managers, it must be admitted that farces were usually written in only one act and did not constitute the principal part of an evening's bill. On the other hand, an excellent farce was tremendously pleasing to an audience, produced gales of mirth and laughter, and as Scott says, was seen by "the world and his wife."

Benjamin Webster told Maddison Morton, not long before his death, that he, Webster, as a theatre manager had made more money by farces than any other description of drama. This is not difficult to account for. The author was certainly not

16 The Times (London), December 21, 1891, p. 6.

17 The Athenaeum, p. 876.
overpaid; the farces were evidently well acted; it cost next to nothing to produce them, and if successful, the world and his wife went to see them.18

The *Times* states that "Benjamin Webster used to say of Morton's farces that one of them would draw as many people to his theatre as a good melodrama."19 And if "the world and his wife" could be construed to mean royalty, then even that was possible, for Queen Victoria and Prince Albert were in attendance at the premiere of Morton's *Lend Me Five Shillings*. The *Times* of February 19, 1846 says, "the farce from beginning to end was shouted at, there being no heartier laughers in the house than Her Majesty and Prince Albert, . . ."20

Morton's farces were successful for two reasons: (1) he was a good writer, and (2) some of the leading "low comedy" actors of the day appeared in them. Because of Morton's constant borrowing from French sources, some have contended that he was not a good writer. This seems to be a harsh judgment. In the first place, his plays always reflected a quality and style that made them peculiarly his; in the second place, his fellow authors borrowed also, so the practice was not unusual.

---

The reviewer of *The Times* consistently spoke of the originality and comic quality of Morton's work. On July 1, 1844, the reviewer said that "if it be a greater merit to amuse one's fellow-creatures for one hour than to 'bore' them for three, we would rather be Mr. Maddison Morton than divers other dramatists who shall be nameless."21 Four years later, in a review of *Poor Pillicoddy*, the reviewer was more explicit.

A French piece, called *Une Femme a deux Maris*, has been adapted into a very amusing English one, under the odd title of *Poor Pillicoddy*. Adapted, we say--not translated--for Mr. J. M. Morton, who is the dramatist on the present occasion, has a happy knack of illustrating a French structure with very droll English dialogue, and is by no means to be confounded with those dictionary-consuming operators who, by a process the reverse of magical, convert a smart French work into an insipid English one.22

Two years later, in 1850, the reviewer continued his praise of Morton in his critique of *Friend Waggles*.

In all probability the outline of the piece is taken from the French, but it is not on this or on the situations that its success depends. Mr. Morton has endowed it with all that extravagantly comic dialogue which is peculiarly his own, and a fire of smartness is kept up from beginning to end. Wherever he takes his plots, his verbal jokes in his best pieces are always original and thoroughly English, and in these and his power of fitting his actors his real strength consists.23

---

21 Ibid., July 1, 1844, p. 5.
22 Ibid., July 13, 1848, p. 5.
23 Ibid., April 17, 1850, p. 8.
Whether the same person reviewed plays for *The Times* from 1844 to 1850 is unknown, but it is certainly unlikely that the same person continued to write the reviews through 1860. At any rate, it was in 1860 that *A Regular Fix* opened at the Royal Olympic Theatre, and the reviewer for *The Times* was there. The next day he had the following words of praise:

No one can write a farce of the old school—a farce brimful of extravagant situations, of violent improbabilities of action and diction—with such unqualified gusto as Mr. J. Maddison Morton. Of his thousand and one farces there are probably not half-a-dozen that may not be readily traced to the French stage, yet is he one of our most original writers; for, though his plots come to his hand ready-made, the dialogue, when he is in his best mood, is so thoroughly his own that it can be distinguished in a moment from that of every other dramatist. His personages do not commonly overflow with wit, in the narrow sense of the word, nor is he remarkable for a proficiency in punning. It is by a startling violation of all logical rule, or a striking contradiction to the teachings of universal experience, that he surprises his audience into a roar. . . .

On other occasions the writer for *The Times* paused to praise Morton for his originality and writing skill, but enough has been quoted to show that, even though he did indeed borrow plots from French sources, Morton was a fine dramatist in his own right and not just a slavish translator. In the preface to an edition of six of his plays, Morton acknowledges his debt to French sources but

maintains his contributions were great. He says: "I thankfully admit my indebtedness to French material, claiming, however, for myself, considerable alterations in plot, situations, etc., and complete originality of dialogue." 25

Morton was not praised by his immediate contemporaries and quickly forgotten. The type of farce written by him lost its appeal by 1865, and so he wrote very little from that date until his death in 1891. On the occasion of his death, the writer for The Athenaeum, even though the days of Morton's popularity had declined, wrote of his plays: "Most, if not all, of these were adaptations; still, so much local colour and so much clever and characteristic dialogue did he supply, that they bear, as a rule, few traces of foreign origin." 26 And Clement Scott, a much younger man than Morton, wrote warmly of him:

It is sometimes brought as a charge against Maddison Morton that his plays are taken from the French, and as such are devoid of original merit. But how little such as these understand Maddison Morton or his incomparable style. He may have borrowed his plots from France, but what trace of French writing is to be found in the immortal 'Box and Cox,' or 'Woodcock's Little Game'? 'Box and Cox' is taken from two French farces, one called 'Frisette,' and the other 'Une Chambre a Deux Lits,' but the writing of the farce as such belongs to the man, and is as distinctly


26 The Athenaeum, p. 876.
original and personal to him as anything ever said or written by Henry James Byron. For my own poor part, I consider that Maddison Morton is funnier than any writer for the stage in his day. It is the kind of dry, sententious humour that tickles one far more than the extravagances, the puns, and the strained tomfooleries of the modern writer of burlesque, the very burlesque that Maddison Morton considers was the death-blow to the old-fashioned English farce.27

When one considers all of these statements about the writing of John Maddison Morton, one realizes that it was not without reason that he was referred to as "the most prolific and happiest of our farce-writers."28

Perhaps a word as to why Morton borrowed so much from French sources is in order. There are three obvious reasons: (1) French plays were not generally known to English audiences and were readily available; (2) Morton learned French while living in Paris, could easily handle the language, and apparently liked the French farce; and (3) because of the low prices paid for farces, he had to be prolific in order to earn a living. Using French sources was one way to do this.

Morton's farces were successful because he was a good writer, and because some of the leading "low comedy" actors of his day appeared in them. The Athenæum says that "very many of the farces in which Wright, Buckstone,


28 The Times (London), April 3, 1852, p. 5.
Compton, Harley, and other low comedians were seen were by him." And The Times of 1891 says that "many of his farces met with singular success, especially since at one time or another they had the help of such players as the elder Farren, Liston, the Keeleys, Buckstone, Mrs. Stirling, Wright, Mrs. Glover, Compton, Harley, Robson, Charles Mathews, Sothern, and Mr. Toole." 

As has already been indicated, the attractiveness of farce started to decline sharply about 1860, and very few low farces achieved much success after 1865. Morton assessed the reason for the decline in a letter to a friend.

The introduction of 'Burlesque' gave the first 'knock-down blow' to the old-fashioned farce. I hoped against hope that its popularity would return, and that some employment might still be found for my pen. I was disappointed, and as the only means of discharging liabilities which I had in the meantime unavoidably contracted, I was compelled to part with my copyrights, the accumulation of a life's laborious and not unsuccessful work. 

The low farce was dead and no amount of wishing and hoping could bring it back. Whatever sum Morton received for his copyrights surely did not last long. His mental condition is unknown. One source characterized him as a "soured old man" but this is uncertain. In 1867

29 *The Athenæum*, p. 876.


32 Kunitz, *British Authors*, p. 455.
he tried giving public readings, without success, and in 1880 he was given a benefit by his friends. The benefit took place at the Gaiety Theatre on Wednesday, July 21, 1880. The following notice ran for several days prior to the performance.

Maddison Morton Testimonial.—A SPECIAL MATINÉE will be given in AID of the TESTIMONIAL FUND to Mr. J. MADISON MORTON on Wednesday, July 21, GAIETY THEATRE.—WOODCOCK'S LITTLE GAME, Morton's comedy-farce, at 2 o'clock. Supported by Messrs. E. L. Blanchard, H. J. Byron, H. T. Craven, Charles Dickens, W. S. Gilbert, Paul Merritt, R. Reece, Palgrave Simpson, Alfred Thompson, Edmund Yates, W. Yardley, Sir Charles Young, Bart., and other members of the Dramatic Authors' Society; Miss Sophie Larkin, Miss Measor, Miss Cicely Richards, and Miss Kate Bishop. The Rumulus and Remus duet, Mr. D. James and Mr. T. Thorne. BETSY BAKER, Maddison Morton's farce, in which Mrs. Keeley has kindly consented to reappear on this occasion only. Mouser, Mr. J. L. Toole; Mr. J. Billington, Miss Amy Roselle. COX AND BOX, by Maddison Morton and F. C. Burnand. Music composed and conducted by Dr. Arthur Sullivan. Messrs. Arthur Cecil, George Grossmith, and Corney Grain. Private boxes, from £2 2s.; stalls and front balcony, 2ls.; balcony, 10 s. 6d.; upper boxes, 5s. Box-office open 10 till 5. Donations to the Fund will be thankfully acknowledged by Mr. Edward Ledger, the Era office, Wellington-street, W.C.

MRS. KEELEY has kindly consented to reappear as BETSY BAKER, in aid of the Testimonial Fund to Mr. J. Maddison Morton.—GAIETY, next Wednesday.

It is interesting to note the number of important people who participated in some way in the testimonial performance. Their willingness to participate and to lend their names to the support of the benefit no doubt testifies to the esteem in which they held Maddison Morton. Mrs.

---

33 The Times (London), July 19, 1880, p. 10.
Keeley revived a role she had originally created in 1850. The following article, which appeared in *The Times* on July 15, gives some additional information about the benefit.

A performance of some interest will take place at the Gaiety on the afternoon of Wednesday next for the benefit of Mr. Maddison Morton. That gentleman, who in his long lifetime has done as much as most men to increase the "harmless stock of public pleasures," has entered upon an old age less cheerful and serene than he has deserved to find it. A fund is in process of formation to secure him from all further trouble or anxiety, and it is to swell this fund that the performances we have noted has been organized. The programme will be almost entirely of Mr. Morton's own manufacture: Woodcock's Little Game, acted by amateurs (a favourite piece this among amateurs, who generally find some difficulty in settling rival claims to the part of Woodcock); Cox and Box, which is, as all the world knows, an ingenious rearrangement by Mr. Burnand and Mr. Arthur Sullivan of the old familiar Box and Cox, and in which Mr. Corney Grain and Mr. Arthur Cecil will for one happy moment re-unite a long-severed partnership; and last, but not by any means least, Betsy Baker, in which Mrs. Keeley—the shadow of our days runs backward as we write the name—will resume a part which no one has ever taken from her hands. A promising programme surely; and, as the cause is a pre-eminently just one, it is to be hoped the effect will correspond.

In spite of the efforts of his friends, the results of the benefit must have been slight, for "in 1881, through Queen Victoria, he was named a brother of the Charterhouse." The English Charterhouse was primarily a school for poor boys, but a hospital for old men was attached. This was the hospital of "Greyfriars" where

---

35 Kunitz, *British Authors*, p. 455.
William Thackeray's Colonel Newcome spent his last days, and it was here that J. M. Morton spent the last two years of his life. He disliked the confinement to which he was now subjected: roll calls, chapel, uniforms.  

In 1885, Maddison Morton, in collaboration with W. A. Vicars, wrote his last play, a three-act farce called Going It. Scott says it "kept the house in a continual roar of laughter" and that the author was called for after the opening performance. However true this may be, this play was not a continuing success, and the response it received may have been the result of a benevolent Toole, in whose theatre it was produced, and a sentimental audience.

Saddened by the confinements the Charterhouse imposed upon him, Morton surely was cheered by the efforts of his friends in 1880 and 1885. Their continued devotion was demonstrated by their staging still another benefit in 1889. The following announcement regarding the benefit appeared in The Times of April 3, 1889.

THE MADDISON MORTON TESTIMONIAL.—Mr. Maddison Morton, the author of Box and Cox and several other pieces almost as well known, is now in his 79th year, and is left in his old age with very inadequate resources. A committee has been formed with the object of raising a sum of money sufficient to relieve the declining years


37 Scott, The Drama of Yesterday & To-Day, pp. 219-220.

of one who worked so long for the amusement of
the public. On the list of the committee will be
found such well-known names as those of Mr. Irving,
Sir Arthur Sullivan, Mr. Terry, Mr. James Payn [*sic*],
Mr. Pinero, Mr. Bancroft, Mr. Black, Mr. Woolner,
Mr. G. R. Sims, Mr. Beerbohm Tree, Mr. G. Grossmith,
Mr. Hollingshead, and Mr. Augustus Harris. Com-
munications may be addressed to the honorary
secretaries, Terry's Theatre, Strand.39

Six months passed before the benefit was finally
given. On October 16, 1889, at the Haymarket Theatre, two
of Morton's most popular farces, *Box and Cox* and *Done on
Both Sides*, were presented by his friends. Collette, H.
Nicholls, and E. M. Robson were among the actors who per-
formed. According to *The Times* of October 17, "the
beneficiare, who is now close upon 80 years of age, was
unable to be present; but Mr. Tree thanked the public on
his behalf, and announced that the benefit had realized the
sum of £250."40

Whether Morton was absent because of illness, in-
firmity, or some other reason is unknown. One can, however,
safely conclude that he was deeply thankful for the bene-
volence of his friends.

The last few years at the Charterhouse were surely
painful for Morton. Besides the normal confinement, he
had little opportunity to associate with men of letters.
He did, however, occasionally leave the Charterhouse for

39*The Times* (London), April 3, 1889, p. 3.
40Ibid. , October 17, 1889, p. 9.
a brief visit with Clement Scott and Robert Reece,\(^4\)
and one of his "Brothers" at the Charterhouse was John A. Heraud, a former playwright and critic.\(^5\)

As far as could be determined, John Maddison Morton never married, so when he died on December 19, 1891, his "chief mourner" was a nephew. His obituary in The Times reads as follows:

**THE LATE MR. MADDISON MORTON.**—The remains of the author of Box and Cox, which seems likely to be remembered in theatrical history as one of the most representative farces of the 19th century, were buried yesterday afternoon in Kensal-green Cemetery. Like the Colonel Newcome of immortal fiction, Mr. Maddison Morton was one of the "poor brothers" of the Charterhouse, the list of whom includes the names of Elkanah Settle (Dryden's so-called rival), John Timbs, John A. Heraud, and the Count de Liancourt; and it was in the ancient and pretty chapel of this "masterpiece of Protestant English charity," as Fuller called the foundation—an edifice associated with the memories of Crashaw, Barrow, Blackstone, Addison, Steele, Wesley, Lord Ellenborough, Lord Liverpool, Thirlwall, Thackeray, Leech, and Grote, all having worshipped as scholars within its walls—that the first part of the ceremony was solemnized. The Rev. H. V. le Bas, the preacher of the Charterhouse, officiated. Canon Elwyn, the master, attended the service, together with many of the poor brethren in their distinctive cloaks. Colonel Morton, a nephew of the late dramatist, was the chief mourner. The weather was comparatively fine, a gleam of something like sunshine lighting up the silent quadrangle as the procession passed through it into the busy streets adjoining Smithfield. About an hour afterwards, in a rather dense fog, the body was buried at Kensal-green. Mr. Ryley here represented his "poor brothers," all of

\(^4\)Scott, *The Drama of Yesterday & To-Day*, p. 219-220.

whom, except himself, had been afraid to venture so far in the cold. The wreaths on the coffin were from Colonel Morton, Mr. Samuel French, and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Gascoigne.\textsuperscript{43}

So John Maddison Morton, almost 81 years of age, a writer of farces, a man known and admired by his contemporaries, died. His work, however, has lived on. \textit{Box and Cox} is frequently produced today, and a number of his other plays are equally worthy of production.

Perhaps the best way to end this brief biography is to once again quote his friend and colleague, Clement Scott.

The present generation is familiar enough with "Box and Cox," that best and brightest of good old English farces, and hundreds of other plays of the same kind, that were written years ago by one of the driest of humorists and most genial of gentlemen; but few young playgoers, I take it, are aware how much the stage owes to John Maddison Morton. Of the form and features of one of the most prolific writers for the stage, I believe many of my own contemporaries to be absolutely ignorant. They know little of his antecedents or history, and yet they, and their fathers before them, have laughed right merrily over the quips and cranks, the quaint turns of expression, the odd freaks of humour that distinguished a writer of fun belonging to the old school. No one has ever filled the place left vacant by John Maddison Morton.\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{43}The Times, (London), December 24, 1891, p. 4.

\textsuperscript{44}Scott, "John Maddison Morton," p. 66.
CHAPTER II
PLAYHOUSES

People do not live or work in a vacuum; the playwright is no exception. He is subject to the forces in his society which influence his philosophy as well as his actions as a social creature. The purpose of this chapter is to acquaint the reader with the immediate forces which helped shape the playwriting of John Maddison Morton. They were: playhouses, audiences, actors, and the ability to earn a living.

The rumblings of discontent and the desire for change were felt as the English theatre shifted from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century. As the nineteenth century opened, only two theatres (Covent Garden and Drury Lane) were licensed to present spoken drama for the entire year. The Haymarket had a summer license, but the presentation of "legitimate" drama was prohibited during the regular season. As the audiences at the two patent houses grew, the theatres were enlarged.

Drury Lane had been entirely rebuilt in 1794, with a vastly increased seating capacity—nay, planned 'upon a much larger scale than that of any other theatre in Europe.' It had a proscenium opening of 43 feet by 38, with a stage no less than 92 feet. This gorgeous structure, which aroused contemporaries to paens of admiration and surprise, was burnt to the ground on
February 24, 1809, and three years later (1812) was opened the present Theatre Royal, with a proscenium opening of 33 feet and a seating capacity of well over 3200.¹

Covent Garden had also been destroyed by fire several months prior to Drury Lane, and when it was rebuilt in 1809, "the Auditorium was 51 feet by 52, with four tiers, each containing twenty-six boxes. The width of the proscenium was 42 feet with a height of 36, while the stage itself was 68 feet by 82. It held some 2800 or 3000 spectators."²

The tendency toward the enlarged house had a reverse effect in that, because of poor sight and acoustics, Covent Garden and Drury Lane were forced to resort to spectacle in order to hold their own with the minor houses. In addition, playwrights and actors adjusted their methods to suit the enlarged house. F. G. Tomlins, writing for The Edinburgh Review of 1843, was outspoken in his opinions regarding the size of the theatres:

We have still a few further observations to make on the effects of the great size of theatres, both on authors and actors. The quieter portions of a play are rarely heard, and always imperfectly. In consequence of this, poetry, except in passionate scenes (where it more rarely occurs), is so imperfectly heard that the flimiest balderdash passes current, because nothing but sounding words are caught.

The effect of the great size of theatres on


²Ibid.
actors, is to generate rant and buffoonery: strong lungs and facial contortions are more in demand than the mind and its expressions. These would be lost on a very large stage, except to the side boxes.³

Later in the century, Dion Boucicault wrote of the acoustical problems encountered and overcome in a number of theatres he had worked in or designed. His theory as to how the actor was heard in the upper gallery is most interesting.

The auditorium, packed with an audience and brilliantly lighted, generates considerable heat, while the stage remains at a much lower temperature; this state of affairs causes a current of air to flow continuously from the stage to the auditorium. It carries the voice of the speaker with it. The draught is very sensible felt by the spectators at the moment when the curtain is raised, and its presence may be detected by the movement of the curtain, which tends invariably to distent, or "bag," towards the audience, under the pressure of the cooler air on the stage, so that in some cases the curtain must be anchored down on fixed wires or rods; without which tension the curtain would be blown out over the orchestra.⁴

Either a draught sufficient to carry the actors' voices to all regions of the patent houses did not exist or Boucicault's theory simply did not work in the case of Covent Garden and Drury Lane, for the evidence is overwhelming that actors could not be heard in many portions of those theatres.

Until this time, the minor houses had been restricted

³F. G. Tomlins, "The Past and Present State of Dramatic Art and Literature, addressed to Authors, Actors, and Managers, The Edinburgh Review, 78 (October, 1843), pp. 210-211.

to burletta, "a short burlesque opera, generally concerned with the comic presentation of Greek gods and heroes." The actors in these burlettas were not allowed to use dialogue without a musical accompaniment. And then, according to Nicoll, the manager of Drury Lane made a tragic mistake. He allowed Tom Thumb, a burlesque in which spoken dialogue and songs were used, to be inserted into the repertoire of that theatre and billed as a burletta. The result of this action is surely obvious. If Drury Lane could present a "burletta" containing dialogue without a musical accompaniment, then the minor theatres felt that they should be allowed to do the same. Finally, "after much controversy both in and out of court," burlettas were defined by the Licenser of Plays as "dramas containing not less than five pieces of vocal music in each act, and which were also, with one or two exceptions, not to be found in the repertoire of the patent houses." "The next step," according to Planché, "was to evade the law by the tinkling of a piano in the orchestra throughout the interdicted performances."

---

6 Ibid., p. 165.
8 Ibid.
9 Ibid.
The minor theatres could now present almost any drama they wished as long as they made a pretense at obeying the law. Even Shakespeare was presented in this manner. According to Watson Nicholson, *Othello* was once performed as a burletta, the accompaniment consisting of an inaudible chord being struck on the piano every five minutes. Eventually, the minor houses won complete freedom with the rescinding of the patents in 1843.

Why the patent houses wanted to hold on to their right to do "legitimate" drama is a mystery since they apparently produced very little of it. The following statement from the "Select Committee on Dramatic Literature" bears out this fact and summarizes a great portion of the argument:

The grand argument against the minors is, that they are too small for the representation of the legitimate drama; against the large theatres, that they are too extensive for it; against numerous theatres, that the legitimate drama would perish; for the monopoly, that the licensed few preserve the legitimate drama, though it is allowed they rarely perform it, and the minors declare it to be a losing concern. Within a circle of twenty miles round London none may perform the legitimate drama but Drury Lane and Covent Garden; beyond that, anybody may play it. Now what is there in this mysterious incognito, that it should be confined to one spot of London, and be banished in all other parts within the pale of twenty miles surrounding it. To make the phrase 'legitimate drama' something more intelligible, it may be observed, it is frequently qualified thus— 'Shakespeare and the legitimate drama.' Now it appears, that Shakespeare brings no money, that the minors would not act him if they could, and the majors do not though they might. Shakespeare is

---

never acted for himself, but for some actor, to the
development of whose talents his plays are adap­
ted. . . . We build large theatres, and license and
patent them for the performance of the legitimate
drama, the classical humbug of the stage,—but it is
either never performed or performed to empty
benches.11

It should be observed that the minor houses did not
win the freedom to present any play they wished overnight.
Their freedom came about partially as the result of a
steady growth of power. The erection of new theatres in
London between 1800 and 1835 reflects that growth.

Astley’s was built in 1804, The Adelphi (first
known as The Sans-Pareil) in 1806, The Olympic
in the same year, The Lyceum in 1809 (called also
The English Opera House), The Queen’s (variously
styled The Regency and The Prince of Wales’s) also
in 1809. The following two decades witnessed the
arising of many rivals: The Surrey in 1811, The
Royal Coburg (now The Old Vic) in 1818, The Pavilion
in 1829, The Garrick, The Princess’s and The Strand
in 1830. The thirties, too, energetically carried
on the tradition with The City in 1831, The Orange
Street Theatre (Chelsea) about the same time, The
Albion (alias The New Queen’s), Kings Cross (also
known as The Regent), The New Royal Sussex (which
went by a variety of names; The Pavilion, The Port­
man, The Royal Marvelbone), and The Westminster, all
in 1832, The Globe in 1833, The Royal Borough and
The Royal Standard, St. James’s and The City of
London in 1835. Meanwhile the great Drury Lane of
1812 was hovering near bankruptcy, and Covent Garden
was thinking of abandoning plays for opera.12

There are at least four good reasons why the minors
were doing so well while, at the same time, Drury Lane and

11“Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic
Literature, with the Minutes of Evidence: Ordered by the
House of Commons to be printed, 2nd August, 1832,” The

Covent Garden were fighting for their existance. First, the population of London was growing rapidly, and as the population grew, the demand for places of entertainment grew also. Until this time, the theatre had been the primary place for the public to enjoy "entertainment" in any form. "Boxing-night," on which a pantomine was also presented, seems to have been a fairly common occurrence in a nineteenth century theatre, and all kinds of novelty acts, aquatic and equestrian performances were also presented. Consequently, any time a person sought entertainment, he went to the theatre.

Second, the audience was changing in shape and number. The "polite" element of society, which had dominated the audience since the restoration, was now driven from the pit to the boxes, and many abandoned the theatre altogether. Those who remained usually drifted to the patent houses in the hope of seeing the legitimate drama or opera. A complete discussion of the nature of the audience follows in a later chapter.

The third reason for the success of the minor theatres can be attributed to the relatively compact size

---


of the theatre houses. As has already been stated, Drury Lane and Covent Garden were both huge buildings. They were enlarged time and again until both sight and acoustics were either destroyed or badly damaged. Some of the minors were also rather large, but, for the most part, they were compact enough to allow an actor to be clearly seen and easily heard. Although it is now impossible to obtain descriptions of many of these theatres, the size and other details of the ones listed below may serve to give the reader an idea as to a norm.

The Haymarket Theatre of 1820 is said to have had a pit that "extended to the very footlights themselves," and Cyril Maude described the remainder of the interior in the following manner:

The house holds upwards of 300. It is, perhaps, one of the most elegant interiors in London, but for convenience of seeing and hearing, the worst contrived, and so small are the hall and lobby of the boxes, that whilst sitting in the dress-circle, the audience are not infrequently annoyed by the sounds of carriages rattling in the street.

"The prices of admission are: Boxes 5s., pit 3s., upper gallery 1s. Half-price is not taken. The doors open at six and the performances commence at seven o'clock."

The bad sightlines and acoustical problems were not the result of the size of the house, and it was later remodeled by

---

16Ibid., p. 66.
Webster. The total receipts a full house could provide, approximately one-half the amount of a full house at Covent Garden for the same period, is a good indication as to the size of the Haymarket.

Hollingshead called the Strand "a stuffy little house, in which the audience and the actors could almost shake hands across the footlights"; and Blanchard, after the theatre had been remodeled, described it in the following manner in *The Era Almanack*:

The house was estimated to hold 150 £, at the following prices:--Boxes, 4s.; pit, 2s.; and upper boxes, 3s. There was then no upper gallery. The interior was tastefully decorated in white and gold, with silver pillars, and a comfortable theatre with a good company was acknowledged to be added to the amusements of the metropolis.

The rebuilt Lyceum Theatre of 1816 was "calculated to hold about 350 £," while at the Princess's Theatre, according to Charles Kean, "200 £, is considered a large receipt, and 250 £, an extraordinary one." The Olympic

---


of 1826 was described in the following manner:

The interior at this time was of the horse-shoe form. The proscenium was about 25 feet wide, and the extent from the front of the stage to the back of the pit was 50 feet. The prices of admission were--boxes 4s., pit 2s., and gallery 1s., half-price being taken. When crowded the theatre was estimated to hold 1,300 persons, and the receipts to be about 150 L.

That the Olympic should hold no more than 150 pounds is hard to believe, even with the lower prices considered. The seating capacity was certainly large enough to justify larger receipts.

When Madame Vestris took over as manageress of the Olympic, the interior of the theatre was completely re-decorated. Its ornate quality is evident when one considers the following statement:

In October the house reopened with the interior completely redecorated by Messrs. Crace, under the direction of Mr. Beazley, the architect. The ceiling was painted in imitation of an ornamental silk canopy, drawn tight by garlands of flowers, and bouquets of flowers ran up the pilasters. The stage doors were removed and proscenium boxes substituted. The lower tier of boxes was divided into panels in which were painted subjects selected from the works of the eminent artist Bartolozzi, the grandfather of Madame Vestris.

Finally, The Era Almanack described the Adelphi of 1858 in the rather detailed statement which follows:

The general dimensions were--width of proscenium,
thirty-five feet; height of ditto, thirty-eight feet; length of stage, fifty-six feet; width of stage, sixty-six feet six inches. Total length of theatre, one hundred and fourteen feet six inches. Length from back of boxes to proscenium, forty-eight feet; width between boxes, forty-six feet six inches; height from pit to ceiling, fifty-seven feet. Sitting accommodation was provided for 1,500 spectators.

The descriptions of the foregoing six minor theatres are important to the present study for this reason: of the twenty-one farces used in this study, eighteen of them premiered in these theatres. The breakdown is as follows: Strand, one; Princess's, two; Lyceum, three; Haymarket, Adelphi, and Olympic, four each. Two of the remaining three farces premiered at Drury Lane and one at Covent Garden.

It is also interesting to note that of the seventeen plays for which the theatre manager could be determined, twelve were produced by three regimes: Frederick Robson and W. S. Emden produced two, Madame Vestris produced three, and Benjamin Webster produced seven.

Although Morton's farces premiered in a fairly limited number of theatres, it should be pointed out that his plays were produced in many playhouses over a period of years. For instance, the following plays were presented at the Gaiety Theatre from 1871 to 1886, a time when the low farce was, for all practical purposes, dead: A Thumping

The last reason for the rise of the minor theatres was the laxity on the part of the official licenser of plays in strictly enforcing the law which restricted the minors to certain types of entertainment. Although Planche asserts that there was much court action, it is obvious that the penalties were not severe enough or often enough to discourage the lesser theatres in their attempts to circumvent the law. At any rate, the ridiculous situation soon became obvious to all sensible men, and the emancipation proclamation of 1843 was the result.

Play rental agencies are likely to have been brought into existence as a result of the argument over authors' rights. The Dramatic Authors' Act of 1833 forbade the "performance of any sort of dramatic entertainment, 'or any portion thereof,' without the consent in writing of its author or his assignee." The act provided stiff penalties for offenders, and although they were numerous, at least a step had been taken to protect the authors' rights. A manager distant from London now found it exceedingly difficult to change his bill on a moment's notice as had been the custom. Since he now had to have permission "in writing"

---

26 Planche, Recollections and Reflections, p. 138.
before presenting a play, a manager had to plan his playbills several days in advance. Furthermore, he now had to write to each individual author. This could be extremely time consuming to managers who were not used to this labor and who were fighting just to keep their theatres open.

In the interest of authors and managers alike a mutual agreement had to be reached. Planché provides the answer by describing what was probably the first play rental agency in England:

By the establishment of a society in London, with a secretary who should be authorised by the members generally to grant conditional permission as the agent of the author, and the fixing of a scale of prices, according to the size of the theatre, for every class of protected dramas, managers were enabled to play whatever they pleased without fear of legal proceedings, and could calculate exactly the expenses they were incurring. 27

The theatres not only changed in size; they also changed in design. According to Nicoll, a trend in this direction could be observed as early as 1767 when certain critics expressed a belief that the actors, instead of being so brought forwards, ought to be thrown back at a certain distance from the spectator's eye, and stand within the scenery of the stage, in order to make a part of that pleasing illusion for which all dramatic exhibitions are calculated. 28

As might be surmised from the above quotation, the change in design first expressed itself in the removal of the stage doors which had existed, in some form or other, since the

27 Ibid., p. 139.
time of Shakespeare. Drury Lane first removed its stage
doors in 1780, but they seem to have been restored after
a great clamor had been raised by the actors. When
Drury Lane was rebuilt again in 1812, after being destroyed
by fire in 1809, the theatre once again tried to break with
convention. It could not be determined if the doors were
once again inserted, but Nicoll claims the battle for change
was finally won and the doors banished forever by 1822. The
implication is not that every theatre in England
immediately changed its design by eliminating the proscenium
doors. The process was an evolutionary one which lasted
throughout much of the century; however, a strong trend
was established by 1822.

At the same time that the stage doors were dis­
appearing, the extended stage (fokestage) was also being
reduced. It is therefore possible to say "that about this
time, the twenties of the nineteenth century, the familiar
modern picture-frame stage was established. We can
assume, therefore, that most of Morton's plays were written
to be performed on a stage very similar to those which pre­
dominated during the first half of the twentieth century.

29Ibid., pp. 141-142.
30Dutton Cook, On the Stage: Studies of Theatrical
History and the Actor's Art (2 vols.; London: Sampson Low,
Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 188 Fleet Street, 1883),
I, p. 185.
32Ibid.
When the proscenium arch stage took its now familiar shape, it then became necessary to change the sides of the theatre houses in order to provide better sight lines. The Era Almanack, speaking of the rebuilding of the Haymarket in 1820, observed that "the interior was remarkable for having the sides straight, and the centre very slightly curved; differing in this respect from every other Theatre in the metropolis."33

From the time of Shakespeare through the first few decades of the nineteenth century, the audience in the pit had either stood or sat on hard wooden benches. As we approach 1850, however, a noticeable change can be observed. Upholstered chairs34 and reserved seats start to make their appearance in English theatres. As early as 1829, the Theatre Royal at Liverpool had started a system whereby seats could be reserved.

A new regulation has been adopted at the box-keeper's office. . . . On taking places in the boxes, a slip of paper is given to the party, containing the date on which places were taken, the name of the parties, the number of places, and the number of the box. This arrangement is well calculated to put an end to these clamorous altercations and appeals to the box-keeper, by

33Blanchard, "History of The Haymarket Theatre," The Era Almanack (1873), p. 3.
which an audience is so often annoyed while the first act of the play is proceeding.35

Before 1803, oil lamps and candles constituted what was at best a very poor lighting system. The stage "was lit, not by footlights, but by four large chandeliers, which hung over the heads of the players."36 Even in the brightest areas of the stage the actors could not be seen well, and the scenery was illuminated hardly at all. The house was also dimly illuminated, by modern standards, and not until late in the century was the auditorium darkened for a performance.

Gas was introduced at the Lyceum Theatre in 1803,37 and, for the first time, the intensity of light could be controlled. Whether the Lyceum used the new system on the stage at this particular time is not known, but Nicoll suggests that it was "introduced first for the lighting of the exterior and foyers, then scenery, and for the auditorium, and later for the stage, it offered opportunities which took years to realize."38 A statement in The Era Almanack would tend to substantiate Nicoll. It also


contains some interesting information as to the introduction of gas into other London theatres and a description of how the gas was manufactured.

Gas had been first introduced into Covent Garden, Drury Lane, the Lyceum, and Astley's as a regular mode of illumination, in 1817-1818. Coal gas was originally used; but in 1820 the proprietors of Covent Garden adopted oil gas, which they manufactured on the premises. In November, 1828, occurred the explosion of the gasometers at Covent Garden Theatre, causing the house to be closed, ... 39

Wyndham, in The Annals of Covent Garden Theatre, gives us a more complete account of the explosion of the "gasometer." He also gives us a glimpse of the dangerous working conditions which gas men had to endure.

An unfortunate occurrence soon after the opening of the 1828-9 season compelled the closing of the theatre for a fortnight. This was the explosion, on November 20, of a gasholder in the basement of the theatre, by which two men lost their lives. The accident occurred between one and two o'clock in the afternoon, while the cellars in which the oil-gas apparatus was fixed were being cleaned. In these cellars was an accumulation of putrid oil and dirt, which was floating on the surface of the water in the tanks. This escaped on to the floor, and there became ignited by some workmen's candles. At the same time an escape of gas occurred from the gasometer, and an explosion was the natural result, by which an unfortunate storekeeper and the gas-man lost their lives. 40

Gas lights completely ringed the proscenium, and, as has already been indicated, they were used in the

illumination of the auditorium. There were at least three major results: gas added to the smells one encountered in a theatre, the temperature rose considerably with the use of gas, and fires increased in frequency and intensity.

The fear of fire was ever present with the nineteenth century playgoer. An article in *The Westminster Review* of 1882 listed fourteen major fires that had occurred in London theatres from the beginning of the century to the time the article was written. As can be seen from the quotation below, the lights and carelessness with the use of fire or combustible materials in the course of a production were the major causes of fire. In some cases, the cause could not be determined.

In comparing the accounts of these fires we are forcibly struck with the similarity of cause in several instances. At Astley's in 1803, the Royalty in 1826, and the Olympic in 1849, the fires were traceable (or attributed) to the lights; and in the two former mention is made of the dangerous accumulation of combustible materials. This seems also the probable cause of the fire at Covent Garden in 1856. In the cases of Covent Garden in 1808, Astley's, 1841, the Garrick, 1846, and the Pavilion in 1856 (and perhaps also that of the Royalty Theatre), the fires originated in previous performances on the stage.

We notice also the failure of the tanks on the roof at Drury Lane in 1809, and Her Majesty's in 1867. These failures, as also that of the iron screen at Drury Lane, are precedents of what occurred at the Ring Theatre last year.

---


42 Ibid., p. 418.
Fortunately, most of the fires occurred while the house was empty, usually sometime after the show. The fires caused by gas usually occurred when the workmen forgot to turn off the gas completely before going home for the evening. They were undoubtedly tired after the long hours at the theatre and probably grew careless. Gas, however, was an ever present danger while a performance was in progress. Steele Mackaye tells why:

The rigging-loft is filled with draperies called scenic borders. Among these hang long lines of gas-pipes, provided with many burners, constituting border lights. A net-work of wire covers these lights to prevent the borders from coming in contact with the gas-jets. To a large extent this net-work serves its purpose, but the heat generated by the lights is so intense that the rigging in the loft becomes dangerously dry and inflammable; and as the men on the fly-floors are obliged to work the rigging in great haste, in setting scenes between acts, a very little carelessness on their part is sufficient to start a fire.\(^43\)

One cannot help but wonder that so few fires occurred. Furthermore, when one reads of a particularly ferocious fire, like the one that destroyed a Brooklyn theatre in 1881 leaving over three hundred corpses charred beyond recognition,\(^44\) it is easy to understand the concern and fear of a nineteenth century audience.

Before the disappearance of the forestage and proscenium doors, the curtain, which numerous sources refer to


\(^{44}\)Ibid., p. 463.
as being green in color, seems to have been used only at the end of production. It was not long, however, before the enterprising members of the theatrical profession discovered that the curtain could be a very effective means of heightening the effect of their drama, and according to Nicoll, "by 1850 the end of an act meant 'Curtain,' and the beginning of the next act meant the rising of the curtain, generally to reveal a new set."\textsuperscript{45}

The writer for the \textit{Cornhill Magazine} of 1886 does not necessarily agree with Mr. Nicoll. Apparently in the experience of the \textit{Cornhill} writer the curtain was not generally pulled nor were the lights dimmed for the changing of sets, except in the Lyceum Theatre. After talking of a scene change he had watched, he made this observation: "These sudden pantomimic changes destroy all illusion. At the Lyceum, however, the lights are invariably lowered, and the change takes place in a mystery."\textsuperscript{46}

Exactly when and where the "green-room" of theatres began is uncertain, but even today it is, for the actor at least, a cherished part of the playhouse. It was no less cherished in the nineteenth century. In fact, it served a far greater purpose than it does today and was apparently frequented by select members of the audience as well as the actors.

\textsuperscript{45}Nicoll, \textit{The Development of the Theatre}, p. 190.

I need hardly say that a great feature of all the theatres in 1820 was the green-room. To-day it has practically ceased to exist, but in those times it was the great resort of the wits and other celebrities, and admission to it was eagerly sought. Just as we get all our after-dinner stories from the Stock Exchange today, so in 1820 did they emanate from the green-rooms of the principal theatres. Even Royalty sought the society of the players between the acts, and laughed at the wit of the "rogues and vagabonds"--often more heartily than they did when watching them from their boxes.\(^{47}\)

Since the time of Inigo Jones, audiences had thrilled to advances in staging, but it was not until the nineteenth century that theatres were so constructed that the demand for extreme spectacle could be satisfied. One of the first innovations, installed at Drury Lane as early as 1820, was that of the diorama, "a continuously moving landscape drop, which, when operated, gave the audience the sensation of motion."\(^{48}\) The Era Almanack, in an obvious reference to the diorama, gives the following account of its use at the Victoria Theatre in 1818:

A panoramic effect, then equally new and impressive, was the succession in one scene of sunset, twilight, and moonlight, introduced in an interesting little piece called The Marriage of Camacho, taken from an incident in Don Quixote.\(^{49}\)

It should be obvious to the stage technician that the diorama is the forerunner of the modern day scioptican,

\(^{47}\)Maude, The Haymarket Theatre, p. 72.
\(^{48}\)Hughes, The Story of the Theatre, p. 230.
and there is every probability that it was also the predecessor of another stage device which soon appeared, the cyclorama.

When Drury Lane was rebuilt in 1812, the backstage portion contained several elements that sound strangely "modern". A vast system of traps, a sectional stage operated by lifts, and a fly system equipped with ropes and pulleys were all included. The revolving stage seems to have made its appearance at this time, and a system was installed whereby the "theatre can be either cooled or warmed, and the atmosphere of the different Parts of the House can be kept to one pleasant Temperature throughout the different Seasons of the Year." It is almost certain that other theatres were not long in following the lead of Drury Lane.

The advent of the fly system, the sinking and revolving stages now made it possible to dazzle the audience with spectacle, and it is sometimes amusing to observe how far a theatre manager would go in the nineteenth century in order to be more spectacular than his competitors. One such effort was the installation of a "Looking Glass Curtain" at the Victoria Theatre in 1821. The audience

51 Hughes, The Story of the Theatre, p. 230.
could see itself reflected in this huge mirror which "measured on the surface thirty-six feet in height and thirty-two feet in width, and was composed of sixty-three separate pieces, put together with great care. The Glass Curtain was said to weigh five tons."\(^53\)

As has already been stated, the theatre was the place where the people of the nineteenth century saw all kinds of "amusement." Dog acts, balloon rides, dances, songs, anything which might remind one of the carnival side show were seen in the theatre. In 1810, the Surrey Theatre in London presented a "dog piece." This show soon became so popular that the two dogs involved were exhibited daily "in order to gratify that portion of the public who were unable to satisfy their curiosity in the evening relative to the remarkable sagacity of these animals."\(^54\)

The White Conduit House of London, an outdoor establishment, presented the following performers in 1826:

In July of this year, Mrs. Bland, "the queen of English ballad singers," made her first appearance here, and Mons. Chabert, the "Fire King", who walked into a heated oven and cooked a leg of mutton on his lap, was added to the attractions. The admission was then eighteenpence and half-a-crown. On special occasions, when Graham ascended in his ballon, the price was raised to three-and-sixpence. At this period, hot-rolls and butter


supplied with the tea formed the special feature of the place.55

Equestrian and aquatic performances were other circus-like attractions which appeared in the theatres. Both of these were extremely popular forms of entertainment, and both relied on melodramatic elements, fights, and scenic wonders to thrill their audiences. The equestrian performances used live horses, waterfalls, and circus acts as added audience attractions. It is easy to find pictures of a circus ring which had been installed in the theatres in order to handle the equestrian dramas.

The aquatic dramas were filled with battle scenes in which actual historical battles were reconstructed—complete with gun fire and explosions. The Era Almanack described one of the water arrangements used at Sadler's Wells in 1804.

A very attractive feature for a summer theatre was introduced on Easter Monday, April 2nd, 1804. An immense tank was constructed under the stage, and filled up by a communication with the New River... The tank was of an irregular shape, about ninety feet long, and in some places twenty-four feet wide, the depth being something under five feet, but sufficient for men to swim in. The stage was drawn up by machinery, and there were pipes and engines at the side for the hydraulic supply. At the top of the theatre was another tank, fifteen feet square and five feet deep, for the purpose of producing waterfalls.56

Two of the aquatic pieces performed at Sadler's Wells during this year were Philip and His Dog and The Battle of the Nile.

John Maddison Morton's pantomime, Gulliver's Travels, was presented at Covent Garden at Christmas, 1861. The pantomime was one of the favorite forms for exhibiting spectacle of all kinds. Given on special occasions (boxing-night, Christmas, Easter), the pantomime demanded the accumulated efforts of everyone connected with a theatrical establishment. They relied on gigantic productions, scenic wonders, dazzling costumes, dances, and the unexpected to appeal to their audiences. Planche outlines the typical "plot" in the following quotation:

A pretty story—a nursery tale—dramatically told, in which "the course of true love never did run smooth," formed the opening; the characters being a cross-grained old father, with a pretty daughter who had two suitors—one a poor young fellow, whom she preferred, the other a wealthy fop, whose pretensions were of course favoured by the father. There was also a body-servant of some sort in the old man's establishment. At the moment when the young lady was about to be forcibly married to the fop she despised, or on the point of eloping with the youth of her choice, the good Fairy made her appearance, and, changing the refractory pair into Harlequin and Columbine, the old curmudgeon into Pantaloon, and the body-servant into Clown; the two latter, in company with the rejected Lover, as he was called, commenced the pursuit of the happy pair, and the "comic business" consisted of a dozen or more cleverly constructed scenes, in which all

the tricks and changes had a meaning, and were introduced as contrivances to favour the escape of Harlequin and Columbine, when too closely followed by their enemies. There was as regular a plot as might be found in a melodrama.58

The cost of producing a pantomime was enormous. Over two hundred children were usually used in a single pantomime at Drury Lane, not including the great numbers of adult performers and technicians.59 This expenditure of money by Covent Garden and Drury Lane brought a good deal of criticism because their funds were extremely limited, and because they were supposed to present the "legitimate" drama. Covent Garden and Drury Lane could not exist, however, by doing just Shakespeare and the legitimate drama so they were forced to turn to spectacle in order to keep their heads above water financially. In doing so, they were often in competition with each other more than with the other theatres of the day. This again was a cause for criticism, for it was thought by many that they should cooperate so as to compete with the other theatres instead of each other. J. Falgrave Simpson used a good deal of sarcasm in the following statement about the production of pantomimes in general and at the patent houses in particular:

58Planché, Recollections and Reflections, p. 339.
59Doran, Drury Lane, p. 9.
It is at Easter that both the great theatres--Covent Garden and Drury Lane--the caskets in which we are given now to understand that the "legitimate" was exclusively enshrined, strain all their energies to produce, in rivalry, their great spectacular pieces, in which the principal ingredients are scenery, dresses, fairy effects, broadsword combats, real horses, glitter, show, and pretty coryphees with unexceptionable legs. Among these we find Cherry and Fairstar, Zoroaster, or the Spirit of the Star, Peter Wilkins, with its bevy of flying women in the scantiest attire, and, somewhat later, The Cataract of the Ganges, with real horses and real water. . . . Of a similar description is Richard Coeur-de-Lion, a melodrama derived from Gretry's opera of the same name, with the suppression of the greater portion of the music, in which the great actor of his day, Mr. John Kemble, sang, or was supposed to sing, a duet with Blondel from his prison window, and entered triumphantly, at the end, on a white horse.60

One could easily conclude that the pantomime is a not too distant forerunner of the modern musical, and the hero's entering, or leaving as the case may be, on a "white horse" reminds us of another modern form of drama--the much-abused "Western."

Not only was it now possible to perform scenic wonders, but the trend toward the realistic box set started to take shape in the early nineteenth century. Until this time, the old wing and border sets were used, the scenery was painted in perspective, and even those elements of furniture that were not used in the action of the play were often painted on the scenery. The same desire, however, that caused the appearance of moveable objects and

waterfalls also gave rise to realistic props, furniture and three dimensional sets. It has been customary to give the Bancrofts and Tom Robertson credit for the box set, but in recent years, scholars have uncovered evidence that would seem to prove that Madame Vestris anticipated Robertson by some thirty years. Macgowan and Melnitz are quite outspoken in their claims for Madame Vestris.

There is good evidence that Mme. Vestris used a box-set in November, 1832, for a critic wrote that the stage's "most perfect enclosure gives the appearance of a private chamber, infinitely better than the old contrivance of wings." In 1834, when Drury Lane produced a new play by Planché, a reviewer reported that the "stage was entirely enclosed," and even suggested that there was a ceiling instead of a row of hanging "borders."

The box-set won complete success when Mme. Vestris put on Dion Boucicault's comedy London Assurance at Covent Garden in 1841. Critics wrote of the realism of its rooms with their heavy moldings, real doors with doorknobs, ample and correct furniture. 61

As early as the late eighteenth century David Garrick and Charles Macklin had made overtures in the direction of historic costume, but it was through the efforts of J. R. Planché that the dream was ultimately realized. Planché had long wanted to try his hand at costuming a Shakespearean play in the "proper dress," and so, after a conversation with Charles Kemble, he offered to costume Kemble's production of King John without charge.

Kemble agreed, and *King John* was presented in 1823. Not only was historic costume inevitable from that time forward, but many managers went to the extreme and made it their major business to try to exceed the amount of cost and research expended by all others.

It is interesting to note that it was probably from the pantomime that another of today's rental agencies, the costume house, arose. The custom had been for each theatre to make and retain its own costumes. They were labeled according to type or period and used over and over as the occasion demanded. Pantomimes were large and utilized any number of costumes putting an enormous strain on the costume facilities of any one theatre. Ultimately, the costume rental agency arose, and the *Cornhill Magazine* of 1886 gives us a glimpse as to how it worked.

Nowadays there are regular costumiers, and when a new play is brought out a contract is made with the person who makes and hires out the dresses at a fixed charge, and takes them back at the close of the season. They are then hired again to inferior theatres in town or country. This system is particularly adopted in the case of pantomimes, when some hundreds of dresses are required, which it would be quite too costly a business to buy outright for only a few weeks' use. At the end of the season they are purchased, with the pantomime itself, scenery and properties, for some provincial theatre. They thus return again and again to the costumier's store, and can be finally used for fancy balls, private theatricals, &c.63

---


The "business" side of a nineteenth century theatre was far larger than one might expect. A number of theatres had restaurants and some had bars. The Lyceum even served free ice cream to its patrons in 1835.64 Apparently the restaurants were much like the green-rooms in that they provided a place for the passing of news and social intercourse. They were sometimes set up in strange places, as the following quote from Planché will show:

A Beefsteak Club had been established at Drury Lane, in 1826, in imitation of the original at the English Opera House. The meeting took place in the painting-room of the theatre, a portion of which was partitioned off by scenery. . . . I was not a member of the club, but occasionally dined with it as a guest.

There was much good fun, as may be imagined, at these dinners, and not a little practical joking.65

It is unknown whether the average restaurant was a private club like the one at Drury Lane or a public dining facility. It is also unknown if they were open before a show and whether the members attended the first play of the evening or waited until the feature attraction before entering the theatre. There is no doubt, however, that the restaurants were open after the performance, for "the supper after the play was a great institution."66 Furthermore,

66"In the Pit of a Theatre," The Eclectic Magazine, 42, N.S. (December, 1885), p. 751.
Hollingshead gives an indication as to the menu when he says that "'Alamode beef' was . . . a favourite dish for light midnight feeders, and chops and huge mealy baked potatoes for more robust revellers."\textsuperscript{67}

The exact nature of a theatre staff in the nineteenth century is not common information, but Dr. Doran gives us a partial breakdown and some interesting information about the trials and tribulations of actors in the following quotation:

To return to more general statistics, it may be stated that, in busy times, four dozen persons are engaged in perfecting the wardrobes of the ladies and gentlemen. Only to attire these and the children, forty-five dressers are required; and the various coiffures you behold have busily employed half a dozen hairdressers. If it should occur to you that you are sitting over or near a gasometer, you may find confidence in knowing that it is being watched by seventeen gasmen; and that even the young ladies who glitter and look so happy as they float in the air in transformation scenes, could not be roasted alive, provided they are released in time from the iron rods to which they are bound. These ineffably exquisite nymphs, however, suffer more or less from the trials they have to undergo for our amusement. Seldom a night passes without one or two of them fainting; and I remember, once assisting several of them to alight, as they neared the ground, and they were screened from the public gaze, that their hands were cold and clammy, like clay.\textsuperscript{68}

The total number of employees retained by the theatres is hard to realize. Charles Kean claims that he


\textsuperscript{68}Doran, \textit{Drury Lane}, p. 17.
employed five hundred and fifty persons for the 1858-1859 season at the small Princess's Theatre, and Dr. Doran says nearly nine hundred persons were employed at Drury Lane for 1865. No wonder the receipts had to be quite large in order to keep a theatre open.

The type of theatre John Maddison Morton wrote for was one which was undoubtedly in the process of change in one way or another, but change with an eye toward the realistic theatre of the first half of the twentieth century. The types of entertainment presented, scenery, costumes, backstage equipment, audience space, and lights were all moving steadily toward the day of the Bancrofts, Robertson, and Ibsen. Before the mid-century was reached, low farce was extremely popular, but as the new movements started to reach fruition, farce declined and Morton was out of work.

70 Doran, Drury Lane, p. 3.
CHAPTER III
AUDIENCES

As the playgoer of the nineteenth century entered the theatre he undoubtedly saw a number of things which would appear strange to his twentieth century counterpart. The first thing to catch his attention would probably be the physical characteristics of the auditorium. The green curtain, the rather dimly lit interior, the hard wooden benches of the pit, the crowded nature of the boxes, and the great distance of the upper gallery (the gods) from the stage, crushed up against the ceiling of the auditorium—these would be the objects of his attention.

The rather matronly lady who ushered him to his seat had paid for her position; therefore, she was not the least hesitant in advertising her wares. Cries of "books of the play," and "songs of the evening" echoed through the auditorium. Maude describes the remainder of the scene in his account of the Haymarket Theatre:

Apart from the ladies who looked after the front part of the auditorium, the Haymarket of 1820 also boasted "box-women," who in addition to ushering you into your box tempted you to buy fruit which they carried in baskets on their arms. "Choice fruit and a bill of the play" were offered in shrill tones, while from the gallery came the continual cry, whenever opportunity offered, of "Bottled porter and cider, spruce and ginger beer."
The better part of the audience, of course, refreshed, as they refresh now, in the foyers or "saloons", as they called them in those days, but the "gods" enjoyed the particular privilege of partaking of porter in the seats where they sat.¹

Numerous comments have been made regarding the composition of a nineteenth century audience. The people in the boxes often came in full evening dress, white kid gloves, and "scented" for the occasion.² Even after the performance had begun there were those who entered the boxes: talking, rustling dresses, shuffling feet, banging chairs, opening and closing the doors of the box with abandon, all to the tune of "choice fruit and bill of the play."³ Add to all this the fact that these were probably the fashionable people of the day who had dined and were just now entering the theatre to watch the main play of the evening, and one starts to get a picture of a box at a nineteenth century theatre.

The pit and the upper gallery on the other hand were reserved for the coarser element of society. As has already been observed, the audience was changing just as the theatres

²"In the Pit of a Theatre," The Eclectic Magazine, 42, N.S. (December, 1885), p. 750.
³Emily Faithfull, "The Duty of an Audience," The Theatre, 2nd Series (September 1, 1879), p. 78.
were changing in shape and number. The "polite" element of society either sat in the boxes, or they frequented the patent houses in the hope of seeing the legitimate drama or the opera. Some abandoned the theatre for the novel. The new audience of the pit and gallery, composed mostly of "common" people, was a curious creature. It wanted to see something new, something spectacular, something romantic; and so the plays of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries gave way to spectacle, burletta, melodrama, and equestrian and aquatic performances. Strange as it may seem, when the new Covent Garden was built in 1809, it served as a battleground in determining the audience makeup during the Victorian period; and, according to Rowell, the tide turned in favor of the "butcher and baker" at this time.

The 'Old Price' riots which inaugurated John Philip Kemble's reign at the rebuilt Covent Garden in 1809 mark the triumph of mob-rule in the English theatre. It had been troubled with numerous riots before, but such troubles had either involved personalities, before and behind the curtain, or nationalities, as in the anti-French riots which beset Drury Lane in 1755. In 1809, however, theatre-rioting became a species of class-war: foremost among the grievances of the rioters was Kemble's conversion of the third tier into boxes to shelter the gentry driven from the pit, and the rise in price of admission to the pit from 3s. 6d. to 4s. So effective and varied were the means of protest adopted by the rioters that for sixty-seven nights not a word of the entertainment offered by the Company could be heard in the theatre. Ultimately Kemble had to concede the substance of their demands, and make an object apology for good measure. Small wonder that for the next fifty years polite society
quitted the theatre for the opera house and the novel.4

The conclusion of the O.P. riots was that Kemble reinstated the original price of admission to the pit and opened the new boxes to the public.

The methods employed by the rioters to keep the performances from being heard for so long were many and varied. The tactics used on the evening that a gentleman named Clifford, a lawyer sympathetic to the cause of the rioters, sat in the pit should give some idea as to their inventiveness:

The performance was inaudible; the spectators sometimes stood on the benches, and at other times sat down with their backs to the performers; many, in different parts of the theatre, sang "God save the King" and "Rule Britannia" while the play was being represented; horns were blown, bells were rung, rattles were sounded; placards were exhibited, exhorting the audience to resist the oppression of the managers.5

When Clifford left the theatre he was arrested by a man named Brandon, "a box-keeper in the employment of the manager," and taken to the Bow Street jail where he was summarily dismissed. It seems that Mr. Clifford had not taken part in the demonstrations. His only guilt was to sit in the pit and allow the letters "O.P." to be placed in his hat. He sued Brandon for false arrest and was

---


ultimately awarded damages in the amount of five pounds. This was the only court action taken as a result of the O.P. riots, amnesty being one of the conditions of the rioters granted by Kemble.6

Rioting took place at other times during the century. As late as 1880, when the Bancrofts, as managers of the Haymarket, abolished the remaining benches in favor of orchestra-seats, a riot was precipitated. The patrons of the Haymarket loved the pit, for it was, in their eyes, roomy and comfortable, and afforded an excellent view of the stage. The renovation of the theatre had been amply advertised, the house was full, and when the curtain was raised, the Bancrofts faced the following scene:

The overture was played amid silence. Then the curtain went up and the theatre was turned into a highly-colored imitation of the lion house at the "Zoo" at feeding time. They--I refer to the cheaper portion of the house--hooted, and howled, and groaned like ten thousand demons. Screams of "Where's the pit?" were mingled with shouts that did credit to the malcontents' lungs if to no other part of the anatomy, and for full twenty minutes did Sir Squire in the character of Sir Frederick Blount in "Money" stand awaiting their pleasure.7

Although the composition of the audience was partly determined by the results of the O.P. riots, it would be misleading to imply that the average audience of the nineteenth century always acted in a similar manner. It is true

6Ibid., pp. 181-183.
7Maude, The Haymarket Theatre, p. 169.
that they were sometimes crude and always vocal, but they
were normally a good deal more controlled than in moments
of riot. They had their supporters and their detractors.
One such detractor wrote for The Theatre in 1878:

We are told that our fathers and grandfathers
used to have no objection to the shilling or
half-crown pit, and that people who cannot afford
to pick and choose must not be squeamish. But is
it squeamish for a refined woman to object to the
hustling necessary to get a fair seat in the pit,
to dislike having baskets of "lemonade and stout"
thrust under her notice, and feel doubtful about
her companions who sit so very close to her, who
suck oranges and crack nuts and indulge in various
habits not recognized in polite society? Is it
squeamish for the husband of this lady to feel even
more acutely than she, that the whole thing is
out of the question? There are, it is true, the
alternatives of gallery or amphitheatre, which are
still less to be thought of; and of family circle
or upper circle, or whatever it chances to be
called, which is generally very high up, very stuffy,
more uncomfortable than the pit in its general
accommodation; and, of course, far worse as regards
hearing and seeing the performance. 8

Allardyce Nicoll expressed his opinion concerning the cru­
dity of the audience of this period by saying that the
"early nineteenth century playhouse was a place lacking
both in taste and in good manners, a place where vulgarity
abounded, . . ." 9 He also claimed that one was likely to:

8 "The Cost of Playgoing," The Theatre, 2nd Series
(September 1, 1878), p. 101.

9 Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Early Nineteenth
Century Drama: 1800-1850, Vol. I (Cambridge: At the
University Press, 1930), p. 11.
encounter the "roaring of a drunken bully, ... the besotted solicitations of a prostitute" in such a theatre. 10

On the other hand, Doran maintains that it was "an excellent vulgarity" 11 that inhabited the pit, and the writer for The Eclectic Magazine says he, as a young playgoer, soon abandoned the boxes for the pit, for there he could hear the play without the chatter and the noise of the box doors opening and closing, and there also "those on all sides of you came to see and hear the performance and enjoy it, and by a general agreement the greatest order and silence were preserved, while there was a strong feeling of mutual respect between the actors and the pit audience." 12 Doran, furthermore, maintains that it was the members of the pit who were "truest patrons of the drama. ... " 13

The writer for The Eclectic Magazine also suggested that the actor who did not know his lines was an offense to the pit. Certainly the lines for a Shakespeare play had to be letter perfect, for the older members of the audience often brought books on "Shakespeare nights," acting, as it were, with the players on the stage, sighing, muttering

10 Ibid.
11 Dr. Doran, In and About Drury Lane and Other Papers, Vol. I (London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1881), p. 139.
12 "In the Pit of a Theatre," The Eclectic Magazine, p. 750.
13 Doran, Drury Lane, p. 139.
reproaches, or "exploding with delight" when something was well done.14

Hollingshead says that the mid-century "was not a go-to-bed period," a fact borne out by observing the length of the playbills of the day, and that "the despised 'sixties' was a period of social freedom which put to shame the vaunted nineties."15 Perhaps one could argue that the actions of a nineteenth century audience were not the result of nor desire for "social freedom." It is unlikely, however, that one would disagree that abandon and involvement are the chief characteristics of such an audience. Whatever else one may say about a nineteenth century audience, it must be admitted that they were deeply involved in the action on the stage. Emotions were not hidden but openly expressed. The audience would visibly suffer with Eliza, or Pauline, or Isabelle--wildly cheering some particularly telling point or action in the hero's favour, or groaning and becoming hushed at some setback. Within the memory of the writer, on participating in a production of East Lynne, a kindly little old lady whose theatre experience was deeply rooted in the last part of the nineteenth century, came to the production armed with a full box of facial

14"In the Pit of a Theatre," The Eclectic Magazine, p. 750.

tissues. Her explanation was that *East Lynne* was a "three handkerchief" play for her.

The audience of the nineteenth century was also capable of devilish, even fiendish, acts from time to time. John Thornbury tells a story about Tom Hamblin, the American actor. It seems that Mr. Hamblin weighed almost three hundred pounds and was playing the role of Hamlet: "When, in the fencing scene, the Queen declared that her son was fat and scant of breath, the speech was greeted with three cheers and round after round of applause by the imps of the pit."\(^{16}\) In another case a somewhat inebriated actor was hooted from the stage by an irate audience with a "howl of execration, and cries of 'Put him to bed!' 'Put him under the pump!' No apology would be accepted."\(^{17}\)

On one occasion, when the King and Queen were to attend a performance at the Haymarket, the crush of the crowd trying to get into the theatre was so great that fifteen people were crushed to death in the rush "down the stairs" to the pit, including two heralds of the King.\(^{18}\)

The stories of banter between actors and audience are legion. The actors would occasionally address the

---

\(^{16}\)John Thornbury, "Players and Play-goers Twenty-five Years Ago," *The Galaxy*, XXI (May, 1876), p. 582.

\(^{17}\)"In the Pit of a Theatre," *The Eclectic Magazine*, p. 751.

\(^{18}\)Maude, *The Haymarket Theatre*, p. 73.
audience, a custom Maude decried as continuing as late as Webster's management of the Haymarket in 1837, but the audience even more frequently addressed the actors. Arthur à Beckett tells the story of one poor actor, a "comic villain," who had incurred the wrath of the "gods in the gallery" in general, and one outspoken spectator in particular.

Whenever this ill-used person appeared on the stage the joker to whom I have referred suggested a means of getting rid of him. "Will you be so good as to shoot him with that pistol?" he would say at one moment. "Would you be so kind as to kill him with that knife?" he would request a little later; and add in the next act, "May I trouble you to throw him head foremost down that well." When the comic villain was ultimately slain, this representative of the chorus (who was always courteous) was lavish in his gratitude. "Thank you, sir," he shouted; "I am infinitely obliged to you. May I beg that you will add to the obligation you have conferred upon me by seeing that he is safely buried!" Of course this kind of thing would not be permitted now-a-days; but twenty or thirty years ago it was, alas! more than tolerated.

On another occasion a member of the dress circle got up in the middle of a performance and started putting on his coat to leave. Seeing him, a member of the acting corps then started this conversation:

"I beg pardon, sir," called one of the company from the stage, "but the piece is not over yet."

19 Ibid., p. 126.

"Much obliged to you for the information, sir," returned the gentleman, giving his coat a final tug, "but I've had quite enough of it."21

An actor's "benefit" night could bring him great dividends, or it could, if his "friends" did not attend, cause him great embarrassment. Regardless of how small his benefit might be, the poor actor was expected to do the "courteous" thing and pay great thanks to his "friends." On one such benefit night for William Abbott at Covent Garden, he received, after expenses for the house, one guinea. Whereupon, as a result of a challenge by his fellow actors, he placed the following advertisement in the newspapers, using the guinea to pay for it:

"Mr Abbott begs leave very respectfully to return his heartfelt acknowledgments to the public, for the very distinguished patronage with which he was honored on Monday evening; a patronage he could only claim from the length of time he has been devoted to their service. Mr. Abbott has great pleasure in assuring his friends that he sustained no loss by his benefit."22

Abbott says his advertisement "created a sensation, and a resolution among many not to suffer me to appear again the short remainder of the season...."23 He did appear, however, and was greeted by a "storm of hisses and applause." In response, he stepped forward and addressed the audience:

21 Maude, The Haymarket Theatre, p. 126.
23 Ibid.
If any of those persons who are so liberal with their disapprobation will do me the favor to wait till the end of the performance, I will answer individually to what they demand; like a man, and not like a coward, who sneaks into the theatre under the pitiful pretense of having paid his admission money, conceives he has a right to disturb the respectable part of the audience by his ill-timed malignity. 24

Abbott was successful in this encounter with the audience, though he later said that such a challenge on his part was a foolish thing to do. One cannot help but think that it was with real feeling that he said a player could not be a success unless he had "undergone the ordeal of a London audience." 25

"To hiss, or not to hiss" was an argument that raged throughout the nineteenth century. Should the audience show their disapproval of an action or interpretation by hissing at the performer, or should they remain passively quiet and express their general disapproval at the end of an act or show by gentle applause. Some thought that to hiss was an exhibition of ill-breeding and bad taste and that it completely broke the mood of the actor; others thought the spectator should be allowed to use this means of expressing disapproval and of instructing the actors and managers in what the audience thought was good or appropriate.

---

24 Ibid.
25 Ibid., p. 359.
That a well-timed hiss brought fear to the hearts of the actors cannot be questioned. It meant that an actor did not have to wait to read the reviews to find out how well his performance had gone. He got an instant review, incisive and delivered with force. The effect was so great that some actors never performed again, and even "Macready, then wielding the very sceptre of the English stage, was for a brief space completely upset by a hiss delivered by Forrest, who did not approve of Macready's 'business' in the play scene in Hamlet."27

There was only one time in the nineteenth century theatre that a hiss was good news when directed toward an actor—that was the hiss of appreciation for the excellent portrayal of a villain in a melodrama. Even then, confesses one actor, he always felt an "uncomfortable momentary shudder," because of the adverse implications conveyed by a hiss.28

Any offense to the Victorian sense of morals or breach of accepted conduct was sure to bring a number of hisses from the audience. Thornbury tells of a "light

---

26 Ibid., pp. 532-534.
comedian" who "once indulged in a little indelicate by-play toward one of the ladies of the company. The hiss he received caused him to open his eyes. He did not afterward try such means to raise a laugh." 29

Exactly when the hiss started to be used by audiences as a means of expressing displeasure is unknown, but there seems to have been little question of their right to do so until 1773. In that year Macklin brought charges against members of an audience who had attempted to hiss him from the stage. The resulting decision was given in favor of the audience.

It was held, . . . that as the theatre was open for the reception and entertainment of those who paid for their admission, the audience were entitled to applaud, condemn, and even reject any of the performers; but that if any unjust combination was formed, previous to the opening of the house, to effect the condemnation or rejection of plays or players, redress was obtainable by action at law. 30

The right to hiss again became the subject of court action as a result of the O. P. riots. In the case of Clifford V. Brandon, the decision was again given in favor of the audience, when it was held that "the audience in a public theatre are entitled to express the feelings excited at the moment by the performance, and in this manner

29Thornbury, "Players and Play-goers Twenty-five Years Ago," The Galaxy, p. 587.
to applaud or hiss any piece which is represented, or any perform­er, . . . "31 As far as is known, no other court action was ever taken on the subject of hissing in theatres.

Some felt that the practice of hissing was ultimately kinder than the American practice of simply leaving the theatre as a means of showing disapproval.32 Still others felt that the audience, since it often dictated to managers, actors, and authors the kind of drama it appreciated, would also have to share any blame for the quality of that drama. John Malone sums up this opinion in the following quotation:

Yes, theatre-goers must bear a share of the blame, as gracefully as may be, for it has rested and still rests with them to keep safe the excellence of our dramatic art. Else why have they the privilege of freely expressing approval or dis­like, and are safeguarded from disturbance in the salutary expression of the hiss? No actor, director, or policeman dares assert his judgment against the sovereign power of a well-timed hissing.33

One other aspect of an audience's conduct needs to be examined—that is the conduct prior to the performance and during the intermissions. On these occasions olio (vaudeville acts) were presented: songs, recitations, dance numbers, comedians, acrobats, and trained animals

31 Ibid., p. 181
32 Pollock, "Hissing in the Theatres," The Theatre, p. 149.
are some of the acts that were performed. Almost every theatre had an orchestra that played throughout the evening as the occasion demanded. Thornbury tells of the trying time given an orchestra leader at the Olympic Theatre in New York.

We had quite a good orchestra at the Olympic. The leader was named Wolf. The audience knew most of the pieces by their numbers. If they wished any particular piece played, they called for No. 4 or No. 8 as the case might be. I remember that No. 5 was a great favorite. It was a very pretty, well-arranged set of quadrilles. "Old Wolf" was not always pleased when he had to break off in the middle of one of his own selections to play the favorite No. 5. If he was too slow in complying with the request, they made him play the desired piece twice.

Thornbury also relates how some of the audiences from sections of New York known to be extremely rowdy would often conduct themselves. It seems that on certain nights when a member of the Olympic company, who happened to be a Chatham or Bowery favorite, took a benefit, that the pit of the Olympic would be crowded by patrons from the Chatham and Bowery. They "brought their customs along with them," and when the orchestra played, they kept time with their boot heels. Apparently a policeman was a regular member of the theatre staff, and he would rap his "rattan" for silence. Naturally the boot heels would continue, the policeman would rush to the point of greatest disturbance, the noise would subside and pick up elsewhere, and he would

---

34Thornbury, "Players and Play-goers Twenty-five Years Ago," The Galaxy, p. 587.
rush to that spot only to have the same thing happen. Thus the game was played.

If a member of the pit audience happened to come late to a performance, he was ushered to his seat in a most unusual manner by his fellow pit inhabitants.

On these benefit nights the strange occupants of the front seats of the pit had an original method of making room for a friend who happened to be belated. He was passed clean over the heads of the pittites until he reached the middle of the row where his chums were seated. Then he was dropped down in the centre, and his friend squeezed outward to make room for him, thus unseating the "end men." The displaced in their turn would go to the back of the pit, mount a bench, and getting its occupants to give them a good "send off," throw themselves forward on the heads of those in front. It was [sic] the interest of these to help them on, and they did with a will. Thus the end men were again unseated, and thus the process was kept up ad libitum between the acts.35

Even though the nineteenth century audience was impish and mischievous, it was seldom malicious; and if an actor found favor with an audience, his every word and deed brought great pleasure to them. When one considers, however, the actions of the Bowery and Chatham audiences, it is not too difficult to understand why the pit and gallery were "made as uncomfortable as if the occupiers were intruders of whom the managers would be glad to get rid."36

35 Ibid., p. 596.
36 Doran, Drury Lane, p. 139.
Although audiences of the nineteenth century were justifiably afraid of fire, apparently the greatest danger when a fire occurred was not the flames, but danger of suffocation. Hollingshead says "the old theatres of the sixties were nearly all badly built, badly lighted, badly seated, with inconvenient entrances, narrow winding passages, and the most defective sanitary arrangements." 37 Perhaps it was inevitable that in such theatres disease resulting from the bad ventilation would be pointed to by some as being a greater danger to the public than fire. 38

With poor ventilation already a problem, the use of gas as a lighting source only added to the existing dangers. In addition to giving off enormous amounts of heat, gas caused one's eyes to burn and gave off a steady flow of fumes. Add to this the fact that the gas lines were sometimes faulty and one can see that breathing in such a theatre was certainly difficult if not downright hazardous. The writer for Knowledge magazine of 1883 properly titled his article, "Death at the Play."

When the patrons of the drama assemble in most of the theatres, they find the temperature ranging from 50° to 60° Fahr. By the end of the first act it has reached 80°, and before the close of

37 Hollingshead, Gaiety Chronicles, p. 6.

the second act, 90°. The heat then rapidly increases until 100° are scored, and even then scarcely stops. Just at the point of suffocation, the whole audience is hurried out into the cold night-air or rain, the operation of cutting off the gas occupying about one minute and forty seconds. The consequence of this fall of 80° of temperature in the twinkling of an eye is a chill or shock to the system which brings on pneumonia, malaria, fevers, colds, and all sorts of lung diseases.

Besides the injury to the health, the stifling heat of the theatres is to the spirits most depressing. Many of them being practically air-tight, one feels as if he had been sitting under an exhausted receiver. There being no ventilation, the vitalising properties of the confined air are soon exhausted. Mental and physical weariness and languor result, and a vacuity of mind and thought is manifest on both sides of the footlights.39

Considering the closeness of the theatres, there is little wonder that numerous statements have been written about the smells that inhabited them. Even though some old actors have waxed nostalgic about the smell of candles and oil-lamps, "the well-known incense of the foot-lights,"40 most witnesses have been less than complimentary. Hollingshead says the theatres "smelt of gas, orange peel, tom-cats, and mephitic vapours. Drury Lane, which should have set an example, being large and claiming a patent, was one of the greatest offenders."41

---

40Doran, Drury Lane, p. 136.
41Hollingshead, Gaiety Chronicles, p. 6.
added their bit to the existing odors, and just as a re-
minder, the reader's attention is called to the fact that
a tightly packed audience sitting for long hours in a
close room where temperatures ranged as high as one
hundred degrees (alas, these were the days before Ban, or
even Lifebuoy) undoubtedly added their bit. A statement
by Hollingshead, who after the quotation above really
warmed to his work (no pun intended), should adequately
end the present discussion.

It is not necessary that a theatre should stink
of escaped gas, orange peel, and stale printers' ink, any more than it should smell of scented
programmes. It is not necessary, when visitors
enter the magic portals, that they should sneeze
as if they were in a snuff factory. Neither is
it necessary, at the bidding of a panic-stricken
licensing authority, that every outer wall should
be pierced with "exits in case of fire," until in
place of one problematical death in half a century,
you kill off a dozen playgoers a week with catarrh
and pneumonia.\(^4^2\)

There can be little doubt that an audience that
encountered and overcame such obstacles in order to go to
the theatre truly wanted to see a production. These were
rough, hearty people who wanted to see "entertainment"
befitting their nature. They worked hard, played hard, and
drank hard; indeed, their "'refreshments' consisted chiefly
of an undefined ardent spirit--probably the original fire-
water which exterminated the red man--and the fee-(fi-fo-
fum) system was the rule everywhere.\(^4^3\)

\(^4^2\)Ibid., p. 28.
\(^4^3\)Ibid., p. 7.
There can also be little doubt that an audience which could express its desires so vividly had a tremendous influence on the choice of entertainment presented by theatre managers. Furthermore, the hand-to-mouth budgets on which the managers were forced to operate left no room for experimentation. The actors were also forced to coarsen their methods, although many probably did not need much persuasion. "The evolution of the Victorian theatre," says George Rowell, "shows the audience and dramatist advancing hand-in-hand."^44 The truth of his statement is obvious; the influence of the audience on playwrights was overwhelming. John Maddison Morton and his colleagues wrote plays for a specific audience to be presented in certain types of playhouses. At times, they even wrote for specific managers and actors. All the while, they seemed to write with the same philosophy in mind as that expressed by Herman Merivale in 1886:

All plays are good plays, which do not bore us. And, speaking as a dramatist, I can only say that if I write a play which bores my public—the which public I love, for they are my dearest friends—that play is a bad one.45

The only question that remains is: what kind of plays did the audience of the nineteenth century want to


see most? The answer is found in the "Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature" to the House of Commons in 1832.

Short dramas, which owe their interest to the incidents rather than to the language—dramas, which, like 'The Wreck Ashore,' are by the situations, and the powerful aid of admirable acting, made highly attractive and impressive, though at the same time they have no pretension to a permanent place in literature—dramas like these are the species of production for which we may find the readiest acceptance and the amplest success. This our opinion appears to be supported by several gentlemen experienced in the affairs of the drama, who gave evidence before the committee.46

46 "Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature, with the Minutes of Evidence. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed, 1832," The Edinburgh Review, 57 (July, 1833), p. 307.
CHAPTER IV

PLAYERS AND PLAYBILLS

"I believe I made my first appearance in Old Burlington Street, Burlington Gardens," says J. R. Planché of his birth, "on the 27th of February, 1796, about the time the farce begins at the Haymarket—that is, shortly after one o'clock in the morning." Mr. Planché may have been stretching it a bit when he said the farce started at a little after one o'clock in the morning, but not by much. Hollingshead sets the time for the farce to begin at a "little after midnight." and numerous others speak of the extreme lateness of the hour when the final curtain fell. Maude says that "the curtain generally rose at seven o'clock, and seldom fell till well after midnight, indeed often not until one o'clock." Most theatres in the nineteenth century started the evening's entertainment at six-thirty or seven and presented

---


at least three plays. The price of admission varied according to the theatre one attended and the place one sat. Generally, however, the price of admission was similar to that of the Haymarket in 1820: "Boxes 5s., pit 3s., gallery 2s., upper gallery 1s." In this particular case, the Haymarket did not allow its patrons to enter the theatre for half-price at nine o'clock, but most theatres did. The Haymarket did also under Buckstone's management, and Maude says that there were many "celebrities who availed themselves of this half-price system to snatch an hour or two's relaxation from the cares of office or the din of political strife. Mr. Gladstone was a very frequent attender, and the Duke of Wellington often sat near him in the upper boxes."5

Three seems to have been the magic number as to the events presented each evening. Of the forty-seven plays by Morton for which the original reviews from the London Times were obtained, forty were presented with two other plays on the evenings they premiered, six with three other plays or events, and one with four. Reviews were obtained for nineteen of the twenty-one plays being used in this study. The breakdown for these nineteen, in the same order as

\footnote{Ibid., p. 66.} \footnote{Ibid., p. 145.}
above, is seventeen, two and zero. On the seven evenings when more than three events constituted the bill of fare, it is likely that the fourth, or in the one case fifth, attraction was included in order to make a full evening's entertainment. In one case the fourth attraction was "Four Hungarian Instrumental Vocalists."  

Fifty of Morton's plays were performed on the forty-seven evenings represented by the total number of reviews obtained. Five were performed first among the plays given on a particular evening's bill, thirty-five were performed second, and ten were performed third. Of the plays represented in this study, one was performed first on the evening's bill, fifteen second, and five third.  

It is a well-known fact that the first performance of an evening's bill started at 6:30 or 7:00 o'clock, the second play usually started about 8:30 or 9:00, and the third piece began sometime after midnight. It has also been customary to think of the first play as being presented for those of the audience who wanted to show up at such an early hour. The major piece was then given after the finer segment of society had dined, and a coarse farce (or sometime a melodrama) was presented last for the few who wanted to remain in the theatre until 1:00 or 1:30 in

---

6 The Times (London), June 1, 1847, p. 4.
the morning.

Planché says he was born about the time "the farce begins at the Haymarket;" Maude uses a quotation which says, "It being so very late this evening before the Farce could be begun, the first scene was omitted;" and Thornbury, writing of the American theatre, says, "An evening's entertainment frequently consisted of a five-act tragedy, a melodrama in two or three acts, 'the whole to conclude with a farce.'" The wording is important: "the farce begins," "the farce could be begun," "to conclude with a farce." Apparently it had become so customary to end the evening's entertainment with a farce that one could say, "I was born about the time the farce begins," and most people would know the time of day the speaker had in mind. It is also interesting that Maude says a scene could be omitted from a particular farce without, apparently, damaging the performance, at least for that one audience.

James Robinson Planché was a nineteenth century playwright, a theatrical costumer, and, by virtue of his autobiography, a theatre historian. He gives us a good indication as to the attitude of the actors toward the final play of the evening and his opinion regarding the order in

---

7Maude, The Haymarket Theatre, p. 69.

8John Thornbury, "Players and Play-goers Twenty-five Years Ago," The Galaxy, XXI (May, 1876), p. 584.
which the plays were presented.

No star or principal performer, whose position enables him to dictate terms to the manager, will now condescend to play in the last piece; so some old worn-out farce, disgracefully mutilated to meet the circumstances, is hurried through anyhow by the unfortunate members of the company who are compelled to work, some twenty yawning persons remaining in the house for mere idleness after the curtain has fallen on "the attraction of the evening."

It is impossible to protest too strongly against this custom—cruel to the poor actors, unjust to the author of the ill-treated farce, and disrespectful to the remnant of the audience, who, however few, have paid for their admission, and have a right to the best efforts of the establishment.9

The quotation above leaves little doubt that, in Planché's mind, the "attraction of the evening" was the second play presented, and that a farce was the last piece performed. Rowell, in The Victorian Theatre, supports Planché. The "half-price customers" he refers to in the following statement were those admitted to the theatre at nine o'clock.

In general, melodrama was given pride of place on the evening's bill, with a comic afterpiece tacked on to satisfy the half-price customers who had missed much of the melodrama. Alternatively a comedy might be played as the curtain-raiser. In either case the comedy might be limited to two or three acts, in which neither character nor intrigue had sufficient space for development.10

9Planché, Recollections and Reflections, p. 130.

The playbills containing the fifty plays by Morton show that, for the most part, the first play presented each evening was a melodrama. In five instances a Shakespeare play was performed in the opening position; in at least seven other instances a well-known play was performed—plays like The Vicar of Wakefield, Beggar on Horseback, The Road to Ruin, and London Assurance.

Were the "attractions" of the evening presented first, as the evidence from the playbills would seem to indicate; or were they presented in the second position, as Planche and Rowell maintain? For the purposes of this study, it makes little difference. The important point is that of the fifty plays by Morton for which the playbills were obtained, forty were presented in either first or second position, indicating their worth as judged by the theatre managers of the day.

Who were the theatre managers who originally produced the plays written by Morton? Of the forty-one plays for which the theatre manager (producer) could be determined, twenty were produced by Benjamin Webster, six by Madame Celeste, four by Madame Vestris, three by William Farren, three by Charles Kean (one in connection with Robert Keeley), two by Frederick Robson and W. S. Emden, and one each by H. Wallack, Horace Wigan, and the managerial team of Edmund Falconer and F. B. Chatterton.

Webster produced fifteen of Morton's plays at the
Haymarket Theatre (one with Madame Celeste as "directress"), three at the Adelphi (all with Madame Celeste as directress, Webster as Proprietor or Lessee), and one each at the St. James's and the Olympic. It appears that he was manager of both the Haymarket and the Adelphi for at least a part of the time that Madame Celeste acted in the capacity of "directress." All six of the plays produced by Madame Celeste were presented at the Adelphi. Thus it is evident that a majority of the forty-one plays (twenty-six) were produced by either Benjamin Webster or Madame Celeste.

The playhouses in which the plays were performed were determined in forty-eight cases. The breakdown is as follows: Haymarket, seventeen; Adelphi, ten; Strand, Lyceum, Princess's, and Olympic, four each; Drury Lane, two; and Covent Garden and St. James's, one each. Reynolds, in the Early Victorian Drama says that "farces were popular at both major and minor theatres."\[1\] He then lists several theatres and the farces that were popular at each. The total list included the fifty most popular farces; Morton wrote nine. Four were popular at the Adelphi, two at Covent Garden, two at the Haymarket, and one at the Lyceum.\[2\]

It is also most interesting to notice who the actors were who created the original characters in Morton's plays.

---


\[2\] Ibid.
Numerous players created at least one role, but among those who created two or more, John Baldwin Buckstone leads the way with twelve. He is followed by Robert Keeley, Edward Wright, and Paul Bedford with eight each (Wright and Bedford seem to have usually acted as a team), Miss (Mrs. Leigh) Murray with five, Mr. Charles Selby with four; Mr. Howe, Charles Mathews, George Cooke, Mr. Lambert, Miss Polly Marshall, Mrs. L. S. Buckingham, Mrs. R. Farren, Mrs. Humby, and Mrs. Frank Matthews with three each, and Mr. Frederick Robson, Walter Gordon, J. Vining, Mr. John Harley (the original Cox), James Bland, S, Emery, Mr. Meadows, H. Cooper, Mr. Holl, Mr. Worrell, Miss Julia Bennett, Mr. Glover, Miss Ellen Chaplin, Miss P. Horton, and Miss Reynolds all with two.

When all of these figures are studied together, a clear picture starts to emerge. A vast majority of Morton's plays were written for specific managers (Webster, Celeste, Vestris, Farren, Kean) who produced the plays in selected playhouse (Haymarket, Adelphi, Strand, Lyceum, Princess's, Olympic) with a fairly limited number of actors (Buckstone, Keeley, Wright, Bedford, Selby, Miss Murray, etc.). In other words, Morton originally wrote for the tastes of certain audiences as reflected through the talents of selected actors.

Benjamin Webster was manager of the Haymarket
Theatre from 1835 to 1853. The last year or so of that period he also managed the Adelphi. Webster, a good actor as well as a theatre manager, originally created at least one of Morton's characters and undoubtedly acted in many of his plays. Nicoll says, in speaking of the Haymarket, that "the most important early managements were those of Benjamin Webster (1835-1853) and J. B. Buckstone (1853-1876)."\(^{13}\) Rowell attests to the accomplishments of Webster and Buckstone as comedians.

English comic acting in the early Victorian era centered very largely on the Haymarket, of which two successive managers, Benjamin Webster and John Baldwin Buckston, seemed to personify that acting in their own jovial personalities. Disdaining the tasks of interpretation, they could convulse an audience without completing a single line.\(^{14}\)

Nothing is known regarding the managerial career of Madame Celeste, but Madame Vestris is renowned as the manager of the Olympic Theatre in the 1830's. As was indicated in the chapter dealing with the "Playhouses," there is at least some evidence that she introduced a box-set as early as 1832,\(^{15}\) and Planche gives her credit

---


for an attempt at a shorter playbill—that is, presenting one less play than was customary. Planché says the decision to shorten the bill of fare was the result of an accident. On a certain evening, Madame Vestris prepared a complete bill, but at the last moment one of the pieces could not be produced and the result was that the audience was out by eleven o'clock. Planché and Charles Dance were in the audience and heard several favorable comments on the prospect of getting home at a decent hour. Therefore when Madame Vestris asked their opinion about the bill for the following week, they advised her to announce that her "performances for the future would be so arranged as to terminate every evening as nearly as possible at eleven o'clock." Madame Vestris maintained this practice through her term as manager at the Olympic, but the effect of her experiment on the other establishments is unknown.

As an actress Madame Vestris was one of the leading stars of her day. Maude says that "some critics have raved about her; others have declared her performances to have been hugely overrated. But there was no doubt about her popularity, and she had English playgoers at her feet." Just how much her audience adored her is illustrated by another statement by Maude:

16 Planché, Recollections and Reflections, pp. 128-129.
17 Maude, The Haymarket Theatre, p. 106.
Her return to the English stage after her American visit brought her one of the most magnificent receptions with which an actress has ever been favoured. Hundreds of people had to be content with a glimpse of the Vestris arriving at or leaving the theatre to the tune of "Home, sweet Home," and the audience worshipped their idol more madly than ever. Flowers were showered upon her, and at the end of the evening she was called over and over again.18

Charles Mathews was the second husband of Madame Vestris and eight years her junior.19 He was a prolific writer and adapter, helped his wife manage theatres, and eventually became a light comedian nonpareil. Hollingshead never praises anyone with anything like the fervor he uses in his appraisal of Mathews.

His acting was something that was born and died with him. It was the perfection of what appeared to be unstudied ease and spontaneous and rapid brilliance. There must have been art in it—much and elaborate art—but no microscopic critic could discover it. It attained Horace's standard of excellence—it was the perfection of concealment. Whatever part he played, the gentleman shone through it, and his wildest impudence would have delighted an archbishop. It was theatrical champagne of a rare quality and probably (though I sincerely hope not) of an extinct vintage.20

Sometime after the death of Madame Vestris, Mathews went on tour of America where he ultimately married again.

18Ibid., p. 107.


20Hollingshead, Gaiety Chronicles, p. 327.
In his late sixties he returned to England. His reception on his return is described by Hollingshead:

Charles Mathews's reception on that night was the most enthusiastic burst of feeling I ever witnessed within the walls of a theatre. Apart from my own extensive experience, I cannot imagine any reception that could surpass, or probably equal it. It was not given to a young, attractive, clever, and popular woman, but to an elderly gentleman on the verge of seventy.  

Of Morton's plays for which playbills were obtained, Mathews created roles in three of them. In 1875, three years before his death, Mathews prepared a list of the plays he had written or adapted, created major roles in, or had simply acted in. He listed five of Morton's farces in which he created major roles and two others he played in.  

Two other theatre managers should receive at least a brief mention: William Farren and Charles Kean. In speaking of the Adelphi Theatre, Nicoll says, "success came to it under the managements of William Farren, Alfred Wigan, and William Terriss, . . . ."  

The name of Kean is legendary in English theatrical history. Rowell says that the "Keans devoted themselves

---

21Ibid., p. 309.
22Ibid., pp. 325-326.
to restoring the prestige and standards of a National Theatre, such as had intermittently flourished at the patent theatres before 1843," and his appraisal of Charles Kean as a manager of the Princess's Theatre was that he tried to upgrade the quality of productions in an "insignificant playhouse," with the result that even the Royal family became regular members of the audience.  

The major managers who produced Morton's plays have now been discussed. It should be noted, however, that a majority of managers undoubtedly produced a Morton drama at one time or another. One example will serve: John Hollingshead was manager of the Gaiety Theatre from 1868 to 1886. In a fifteen year period (from 1871 to 1886), he produced at least eight of Morton's farces. This would not seem too significant except for two facts: one, Hollingshead had a number of plays and playwrights to choose from, so to produce a play by the same playwright on an average of every two years is amazing; two, Hollingshead produced plays in a period when, for all practical purposes, the low farce was dead. And yet he produced eight of Morton's farces in a fifteen-year period.

Some of the actors who performed in Morton's plays have already been discussed, but there are a number of

---

26 Hollingshead, Gaiety Chronicles, pp. 459-476.
others who must be considered. The first of these is the incomparable John Baldwin Buckstone. Time and again writers comment on Buckstone's ability to send an audience into a fit of laughter. Hollingshead calls him "the last of the natural, juicy, genuine low comedians," and Maude says his "management of the Haymarket Theatre is, perhaps, the most famous of them all, . . ." "Bucky," as he was known to his friends, was the creator of the role of Mr. Golightly in *Lend Me Five Shillings* by Morton. He was so funny in this role that Queen Victoria "went to the Haymarket no less than five times" to see him perform. Surely there can be no doubt as to the moral character of the production! The play ends with Golightly appealing to the audience to "lend me five shillings." On at least one occasion he appealed directly to the Queen for the loan, without, one would imagine, too much success.

Planché says of Robert Keeley, who created eight roles in Morton's plays, that "a more sterling actor never trod the stage--giving character and importance to the smallest part he played, and never overstepping the modesty of nature." 

---

27Ibid., p. 72.
29Ibid., p. 146.
30Planché, *Recollections and Reflections*, p. 149.
At the beginning of the 1860 season, a benefit was given at Covent Garden for the Dramatic College, and Wyndham says "a more remarkable concourse of great artists had certainly never been seen at Covent Garden or any other English playhouse, . . ."\(^{31}\) Box and Cox was included on bill, and Buckstone, Keeley, Benjamin Webster, Frederick Robson, and Paul Bedford were among those who had created characters in Morton's plays who performed for the benefit.\(^{32}\) No doubt Edward Wright would have been present also, since he and Bedford apparently acted as a team, but he had died the year before. Hollingshead says Charles Dillon "went to the New Adelphi to act with Paul Bedford and take up the low comedian's mantle of the late Edward Wright, . . ."\(^{33}\)

Two other actors who created roles in Morton's plays deserve mention: Frederick Robson and James Bland. Frederick Robson is described as having "more real dramatic instinct and hell-fire in his small body than the whole theatrical world of his time could lay claim to;"\(^{34}\)

\(^{32}\) Ibid., pp. 229-230.
\(^{33}\) Hollingshead, *Gaiety Chronicles*, p. 74.
\(^{34}\) Ibid.
James Bland is described as being the "monarch of extra-vaganza, in which he so long exercised sovereign sway and masterdom, and has never been surpassed by the successors to his throne." 35

One other thing should be said about the actors of the nineteenth century. Just as the audience enjoyed the banter that was carried on between players and audience so apparently did the actors. They also enjoyed ad-libbed repartee with their fellow actors. William Abbott tells of playing across from the great comedian, Liston, in *Guy Mannerin*. Liston had tried on many occasions, without success, to get Abbott to break character and laugh at an inappropriate moment. The audience was aware of this and greatly enjoyed Abbott's consternation. On one particular evening, Abbott was asked by the theatre manager to offer an apology to the audience on behalf of Miss Foote who had taken the part of Julia Mannerin for the evening because Miss Matthews was ill. Abbott agreed to do so and devised a scheme to get even with Liston at the same time. As the performance progressed, Liston kept whispering under his breath to Abbott in an attempt to get Abbott to break character. Abbott told Liston he was going to speak to the audience if Liston did not stop his attempts. This only pleased Liston more, and when Abbott, deliberately,

acted more and more upset, the audience could hardly con­
tain itself thinking Abbott was about to break up. Finally,
Abbott did step forward to address the audience. Liston
was horrified, thinking Abbott was going to speak to the
audience of his indiscretions; the audience was impishly
gleeful, watching the consternation of Liston and think­
ing exactly as he was. There was great delight and applause
when Abbott revealed that he had pulled a joke on all of
them by announcing that Miss Foote would replace Miss
Matthews for that evening.36

The nineteenth century audience would not allow
actors to participate in that which they considered
morally offensive or distasteful. Occasionally, however,
an actor who was a particular favorite with the audience
was forgiven if he participated in a little crude or
questionable humor. Such was the case with Burton, a
favorite of the audience at the Chambers Street Theatre
in New York, in the third quarter of the century.

Burton was very fond of a little vulgarity
occasionally. In "She Stoops to Conquer,"
when (as "Tony Lumpkin") he led "Mrs.
Hardcastle" on the wild-goose chase after
"Constance Neville" and her lover, round
and round the stage, he stopped suddenly,
and raising his foot as if to avoid stepping

36 William Abbott, "Gossip of a Player," The
Knickerbocker, XXIV (September, 1844), pp. 269-270.
on something unpleasant, cried: "Oh, take care, mammy! The cows have been here! The nasty creatures!"

He was fond of letting off a good round oath too when occasion presented itself. He was by no means chary of "damn." His audience tolerated this as an eccentricity of genius. It would not do for any one but Burton to indulge so freely in profanity before the Chambers street audience.37

Actors were also prone to burlesque other actors they had seen performing at a rival theatre. Nell Gwynne is said to have done this by "wearing a hat as large round as a cart-wheel, and which almost entirely hid her. This was done as a 'take-off' on some pastoral play which was being performed at the rival theatre, . . ."38

Numerous comments have been written on the salaries of actors in the nineteenth century. The figures that are given cannot be adequately judged for three reasons: (1) the figures sometimes seem to conflict, (2) the salaries apparently varied greatly from theatre to theatre, and (3) it is impossible to assess adequately the value of the money of that day when compared to modern economic standards. One statement may be made, however, with a reasonable degree of certainty—the average actor of the nineteenth century could expect to enjoy a barely adequate, . . .


Certainly not excessive, standard of living.\textsuperscript{39}

The theatre of the nineteenth century was a theatre of the "common" man. From the restoration to the nineteenth century the theatre had been, primarily, a place frequented by the upper classes of society; by the end of the century, a simple matter of economics was beginning to force the "common" man once again to refrain from attending the theatre with any degree of regularity. As early as 1878 the economic squeeze was beginning to be keenly felt, and a writer for The Theatre of that year expressed his displeasure by saying that "no one can, except as a young bachelor, frequent the theatre for his amusement who is not either very comfortably off, or related to an acting-manager, or blessed with very primitive taste."\textsuperscript{40}

The same writer created the following hypothetical situation to illustrate his point:


\textsuperscript{40}"The Cost of Playgoing," The Theatre, 2nd Series (September 1, 1878), p. 103.
Let us take the instance of a married man with an income of something under four hundred a year, less, that is to say, than the amount on which a not too liberal government allows him -- on the ground, it must be presumed, of his inadequate means -- an abatement of the chief direct tax which he is called upon to pay. Let us suppose that this man wishes to take his wife to the theatre from one of the suburbs in which most of his class live. He wishes to take her not luxuriously, but at any rate with the comfort which is a lady's right; he does not want to hire a brougham and dash up to the stalls as though he were a wealthy "swell," but neither, on the other hand, does he wish to rough it as he was content to do in the bachelor days gone by; so he books a couple of seats in the dress-circle at the cost of ten or perhaps twelve shillings, with in most cases an extra shilling for booking. Add to this the usual six-pence for programme, and the sixpence each in the cloak-room, where coat and bonnet have perforce to be left after a journey. So far we have reached thirteen shillings or so, and by the time we have taken into account any refreshment needed by the pair during a long evening in an exhausting atmosphere -- which refreshment is always abnormally dear -- and the necessary cost of the journeys, we shall find that the night's amusement leaves very little change out of a sovereign.\(^4^1\)

Perhaps the person who suffered most, financially, was the poor author. He was not paid well for his work, and he had no legal protection until at least a third of the century had passed. Consequently, an author had to be extremely prolific in order to earn a living. No wonder numerous authors sought ready-made plots upon which to base their work.

In order to show what financial difficulties

\(^{4^1}\)Ibid., p. 100.
authors must have faced in the first third of the century, one need go no further than the report of the "Select Committee on Dramatic Literature" of the House of Commons. This committee, after hearing testimony of numerous dramatists, concluded that greater remuneration had to be paid to playwrights if they were to earn a living. Their statement as to the amount authors of "shorter pieces" received for their plays is most interesting.

The highest remuneration mentioned is £400 received by Mr. Poole for 'Paul Pry,' but of this £250 seems to have been given gratuitously, in consideration of extraordinary success; and the stipulation entitled him to no more than £150. Mr. Jerrold received for 'Black-Eyed Susan,' which had a greater run than any piece for many years past, no more than £60. The average price given to authors by the Coburg Theatre is from £20 to £50 the piece, when the manager buys it for a stated sum, and incurs the whole risk. When the author's profits are to depend upon the run of his play, he receives from half a guinea to a guinea a-night. The rate appears to have been nearly the same in times when theatres were more frequented, and dramatic authorship was considered a better calling than it is at present. O'Keefe received only £40 guineas for each of three of his most successful farces.

Writers would sometimes write for particular managers, theatres, or actors, as this undoubtedly provided

---

"Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature, with the Minutes of Evidence. Ordered by the House of Commons to be printed. 1832." The Edinburgh Review, 57 (July, 1833), pp. 305-306.
at least a small measure of security. The first real relief did not come, however, until the passage of the Dramatic Authors' Act in 1833. This act provided fairly severe fines to be levied against theatre managers who produced plays without the written consent of the author or his representative. Although this act helped somewhat, there was still much piracy and flouting of the law. There was also still much injustice in the amount authors were paid for their work. No less a person than Thomas William Robertson, though admittedly young and inexperienced, had the misfortune of receiving less than a pauper's sum for at least one of his plays. An article in the Temple Bar relates the incident:

the story of the production of one or two of his earlier pieces would read like a romance. 'David Garrick' was once offered for £10; it has since produced more than £10,000. The acting right for three years was actually sold for £30, or £10 a year. But mark the sequel. For the next piece, 'Home,' produced at the same theatre, £10 a night, instead of £10 a year was paid: the highest piece ever given in this country for a comedy.

Generally, very little was done to alleviate the author's situation until the 1860's and 70's, when Dion Boucicault and others became incensed with the existing

---

43 Planché, Recollections and Reflections, pp. 138-139.
conditions. At that time the author's rights started to be more fully recognized. His position became even more secure with the signing of the International Copyright Agreement in 1887, and the American Copyright Bill in the early 1890's. These laws made it possible for a capable writer to earn a very comfortable living, and there can be no doubt that many excellent men turned to the theatre as an outlet for their writings.

In summary, John Maddison Morton wrote plays that were adapted to playhouses, audiences, managers and actors. He was extremely prolific, for he had to be in order to earn a living; at the same time, his plays were among the best of his day and of the kind he wrote. They were presented in the leading theatres of the day, produced by the top managers, and acted by the significant actors. Furthermore, his plays were judged as relevant and important by his contemporaries, as evidenced by the desirable positions they were given in the playbills.

Rowell testifies to the position attained by Morton and his fellow writers of farce, when he says that "the popular writers of English comedy in the early nineteenth century were theatrical journeymen, trained to run up an afterpiece to an actor's or manager's order."45 A little

---

45Rowell, The Victorian Theatre, p. 64.
later he grudgingly admits the place given to farce in the
nineteenth century and of Morton in particular:

the most that can be said for these Victorian
farces is that before their own audience they
did quicken into life, whereas the more ambitious
efforts of Douglas Jerrold or Boucicault remained
still-born.

Amongst scores of such after-pieces possibly
only Box and Cox by John Maddison Morton retains
an individual flavour. Morton's piece is modest
in scope, but its humour derives neither from a
single character, nor from absurd disguises.
There is an attractive symmetry in the efforts
of Box, the Journeyman Printer, and Cox, the
Journeyman Hatter, to disentangle themselves
first from the room they share, then from the
wife they appear to share. Their exchanges are
gaily antiphonal, and at the end Morton is
not afraid to laugh at the conventions of his
own drama:...46

46 Ibid., p. 65.
CHAPTER V

A CONSIDERATION OF FARCE

Go good folks, God be with you, and give the people your play; from my childhood I have been always in love with the Masks, and in my youth my eyes have turned to the players of farces with delight.--------Don Quixote

It probably was not long after some pre-Aristophanian started writing farces that one of his contemporaries started talking about the low, common, almost vulgar quality of his work. And before long someone else, a pre-Platonian no doubt, became morally incensed that such frivolity and tomfoolery should be displayed in a public place where children could be duped into believing that the laughter that the farce incited was good. At this point a primitive bishop encouraged all who would to refrain from attending the performances. In the course of time the farce did seem to lose some of its appeal, and ever so quickly some said the vulgar thing was dead, never to raise its head again. But alas, cats and phoenixes notwithstanding, someone else wrote another farce that was even more popular than the first one. Moral: "Unreality is mighty and shall prevail; farce crushed to

1New Englander, 43(1890), p. 441.

104
earth shall rise again."\textsuperscript{2} For where man is, farce is.

This simple fable is intended to say one thing: ever since the first author penned a farce, men have said that it was low, unfit to be seen, and was in fact passing out of existence. And although audiences from Aristophanes to the present day have howled with delight at numerous farces, dramatic critics have steadfastly refrained from any hint of approval. As Walter Prichard Eaton said in 1910, "Once in so often one of those kill-joys known as dramatic critics rises to remark that farce is dead--... 'Our respect for reality has become too great to permit the enjoyment of farce,' says the wise critic, 'There are no farces anymore.'\textsuperscript{3} And in 1956 Leo Hughes said, "Only rarely was a voice raised in defense of so 'low' a form of entertainment, and even on those rare occasions the defense was so lamely apologetic or the defender so little deserving of esteem that what was said could count for very little."\textsuperscript{4}


\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 264.

Recently critics have started to recognize the importance and place of farce in the theatrical spectrum.

George Kernodle, in his excellent analysis of farce, makes the following strong statement:

In spite of its enemies, farce has been the most popular of all theatre forms for more than two thousand years. Literary critics have attacked it as trivial and vulgar, and high-brows of all periods have despised it for its use of physical action. Puritans and fanatics have despised it simply because it is funny. . . . Yet year after year, night after night, the broad laugh has been as indispensable a part of the lives of millions of people as their food and sleep.5

No less a critic than Eric Bentley felt compelled to come to the aid of farce. In the process, he had a good deal to say about the Victorian period:

"In our day," said Nietzsche in 1870, "only the farce and the ballet may be said to thrive." He was right, but no one seems to know it. To the extent that the history of Victorian theatre and drama is taught at all in the schools, the word has been that before Shaw and Wilde there were only some shadowy and austere figures like Bulwer Lytton and Tom Robertson. That is misleading because the real glory of the Victorian stage lay in the farce, the extravaganza, and the comic opera.6

The standard definitions of farce usually depict the genre as not being concerned with "probabilities or


realities;" existing only for amusement in the form of a rather unpleasant, raucous laughter; relying on much physical action, especially the erotic; and, in general, delving in a great deal of mockery. As such, farce is usually depicted as being something one should avoid at all costs. Clayton Hamilton, in 1909, drew a distinction between comedy and farce by saying that a "comedy is a humorous play in which the actors dominate the action; a farce is a humorous play in which the action dominates the actors."8

Perhaps the definition of farce one is most likely to encounter says that farce "is a play in which exaggerated types of possible people are found in possible but improbable circumstances."9 Many people have commented on the fact that what at first appears to be improbable in action or language is really just a matter of following one's logic to its ultimate conclusion. For example, Al Capp says that he intended for Li'l Abner to be a


"straight" comic strip, and "as in the straight suspense strips, I dutifully created the standard, popular suspense situations, but something forced me to carry them so far that terror became absurdity."\(^{10}\)

George Kernodle says that a "good farce situation begins with a highly improbably premise, but . . . once the premise is accepted, all the rest follows with absolute logic. . . ."\(^{11}\) Logic, carried to its ultimate conclusion, is the basis for much of the physical abuse found in farce. Dickerson gives a reason for this in his discussion of the use of logic in farce:

Pinero holds that farce shows us probable people doing possible things. This may be explained by saying that farce is the result of the application to the play of a convention of logic beyond the standards of everyday human practice. As a matter of fact, human nature is not logical, and personality varies according to our greater or lesser modification of the codes of logic in human affairs. As a rule the theatre deals only with those actions which lie outside of logic, or as we say, the "human" actions. But farce deals with the incongruity between logic and life. Farce holds people to the pursuit of the conclusions involved in their premises. The improbable things people do in farce are those logical things which in real life they would escape by throwing logic overboard. Being caught in a net of circumstances the real per-


\(^{11}\)Kernodle, Invitation to the Theatre, p. 251.
son would withdraw or explain. Not so the consistent character in farce. He pushes forward on his path until he has reached the human reduction to the absurd.12

The plots employed by a writer of farces are used to show the essential humanity of his characters as they knock heads with the realities of life. The farce character is constantly facing obstacles which are too large for him to surmount, so by retreating, fleeing, giving in, or going round about he lives to fight another day. When there is a chance of winning he fights with great gusto; when to fight is but to lose he uses his wits to find a way out. In this manner the characters in farce are far truer to reality than are the characters in a tragedy.

The reviewer for the Times of 1843 told us what he thought the farce plot should consist of in his review of The Double-Bedded Room by Morton:

a broad farce is usually composed of two elements—viz., the "fun," and the scaffolding on which the "fun" depends. The impossible wills made by deceased uncles, the clandestine attachment, for a young walking gentleman in frock coat and white gloves for a young lady in white muslin and with roses in her hair—these sort of matters belong to the scaffolding. They are not intended to raise a laugh, but are often very necessary, as in them is the spring that sets all the comicality in motion.13

13 The Times (London), June 5, 1843, p. 6.
The "scaffolding" also consists of situations, disguises, mistaken identities, intrigues, social customs, taboos, and conventions. In *A Regular Fix* the "scaffolding" consists of a gentleman being taken to a party in a drunken condition. He falls asleep in an armchair and does not awaken until the next morning when the servants start dusting the furniture. He does not know where he is or how he got there, but, upon looking out of a window and seeing a policeman, he decides to do everything in his power to keep from going outside, especially as the police are already looking for him as the result of another matter. The devices he uses to remain in the house constitute the basis for the entire play.

The characters in a farce constantly fight against the scheme of things. Policemen, bosses, a father who is overprotective of his daughter, an unreasonable landlord, the rival lover—all represent forces standing in the way of the character in farce achieving his will. After talking of the slapstick antics of Punch and Harlequin, Kernodle makes the following observation regarding the restraints against which the character in farce is in such conflict:

> It's a rough world, my masters, full of rules, officers, parents, pimples, and obstructions. There's a surprise around every corner. Nobody believes you or understands you, least of all when you speak the plain truth. Everything conspires to thwart you. There's pain, worry, accident at every turn. Maybe the whole thing has little meaning, but if you keep running fast enough, keep scheming long enough, you can win out.
It may be painful at the time, but it's very funny to tell about afterwards, and it's very funny to see somebody else in a play in the same bind.\textsuperscript{14}

The characters in farce are far from the noble personages of tragedy; instead, they are Everyman facing the same problems and troubles that beset us all. Somehow there is great comfort in knowing that someone else has experienced the things we experience, and there is a good deal of humor in watching the exaggerated reaction and overly loud howls of pain as the blows are laid on.

The hero of farce is usually inferior in some way—small in size, financially destitute, socially undesirable. In this way he becomes, in his moments of triumph, the hero of us all. If he can win, even occasionally, there is the hope that we too can overcome the forces that beset us. The young lover who wins against his true love’s father and the elderly but rich fop the father wants her to marry, the pupil who is suddenly in the teacher’s position, the "good" fugitive who manages to escape the clutches of the law—these are all our heroes. It is not hard then to see why Christopher Fry calls comedy "an escape, not from truth but from despair: a narrow escape into faith... In tragedy every moment is eternity; in comedy eternity is a moment. In tragedy we suffer pain; in comedy pain is a

\textsuperscript{14}Kernodle, \textit{Invitation to the Theatre}, p. 249.
fool, suffered gladly."\textsuperscript{15}

The practice of naming characters according to their characteristics is a device that many playwrights have used. John Heywood, Ben Jonson, Oliver Goldsmith, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan are but a few who used this technique prior to Morton. The Restoration and eighteenth century playwrights were especially fond of the device, so when Morton and his colleagues gave their characters names which indicated their distinctive qualities, they were simply practicing a well-established comedy technique. This practice continued throughout the nineteenth century.

Comedy in general, and farce in particular, has been accused of being addicted to violence. Attention has been called to the fact that there is often physical suffering in the form of beatings. A servant is beaten and we laugh, not because he receives a beating, but because his cries of pain and injury are far out of proportion to the effect the blows are obviously having. Or a servant and master exchange clothes and the master now gets the beating intended for the servant. This is

even funnier, because in addition to the great howls of painless pain, there is dramatic irony in that the master, who is never beaten but often the administrator of punishment, has to take the cuffing intended for the oft-beaten servant. Somehow we do not become greatly concerned that blows are struck and howls of pain registered. We are not concerned because we realize that the recipient of the blows is not really being made to suffer. If we thought the blows were producing actual pain or injury we would suddenly stop laughing, for the farce would turn into a tragedy. Again, we laugh at someone who has slipped on a banana peel, but if the person is obviously injured our laughter turns into concern. Perhaps our laughter is brought about by our feelings of superiority at being able to watch a person lose his dignity, and thus his humanity, by being beaten or by hanging suspended in space totally out of control. The idea of a species of the ugly or ludicrous (of which beatings is a part) presenting the form but not the reality of pain goes back to Aristotle.¹⁶

The speed with which farce is played masks the

violence and makes the action seem abstract. In 1928, Philip Beaufoy Barry wrote a book on *How to Succeed as a Playwright*. He lists three "essentials" of a good farce: good plot, fast pace, and characterization.\(^{17}\) The second of these, fast pace, may be the most important characteristic in the actual playing of a farce. "Play anything fast enough," says George Kernodle, "and, as long as it carries the audience along with it, it will be funny..."\(^{18}\) Eric Bentley is much more specific in his explanation as to why farce should be played at a rapid pace.

Why... do directors of farce always call for tempo, tempo, tempo? It is not just because they admire business efficiency, nor is there anything to the common belief of theatre people that fast is always better than slow. It is a question of the speeding up of human behavior so that it becomes less human. ...\(^{19}\)

The speed with which farce is played masks the violence, and it is also one reason why chase scenes are so enjoyable. "Chase scenes," says Kernodle, "are the high points of delight."\(^{20}\) And Eric Bentley says that "the plot of *An Italian Straw Hat* is one long pretext for


\(^{19}\) Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, p. 248.

flight and pursuit. So is the plot of that homely English imitation of French Farce, Charley's Aunt."

Charley's Aunt is an example of at least two other characteristics of farce: disguises and social taboos. Disguises are a part of an infinite number of farces, and Charley's Aunt hinges as much on the disguise as any element. It is an indispensable part of the "scaffolding" on which much of the "fun" of the play rests. Much of the fun of The "Alabama," a farce by Morton, also rests on a disguise. In this case Christopher Clipper had two seamen as renters: one was a captain who ran off without paying his bill; the other was a lieutenant who eloped with Clipper's rich ward. Accidentally, Clipper stumbles upon a suitcase which the captain lost, and armed with the captain's uniform to use as a disguise, Clipper hurries to the Alabama in the hope of catching the rascals. He is mistaken for the captain and has to direct the ship into battle. The "scaffolding" thus provides the basis for the "fun" of the farce.

Charley's Aunt is also an example of a social taboo used in a farce. Time and again Charley's aunt forgets and smokes a cigar or raises "her" skirts to the gleeful howls of the audience. Kernodle tells how the taboo is handled on stage: "moments of undress or threats

of exposure cause violent laughter as they come close to breaking our strong taboos. Bright-colored underclothes heighten the effect and at the same time prevent any actual exposure." 22

The threat of momentary exposure is the subject of a good laugh in the melodrama, *East Lynne*. When an elderly, prim lady's skirts are raised by the villain revealing her red petticoat, the audience roars with laughter. This is a broad farcical action in a melodrama. Eaton places his tongue firmly in cheek as he approaches the subject of farcical actions in comedies in the following statement. Apparently, some critics had said audiences were annoyed or bored by farce.

As a matter of sad, sad fact, note with what relief the audience at a comedy fastens upon any episode of farce! And when a farce is presented, it is still not obvious to the untrained eye that the audience is annoyed by its farcical episodes. "Charley's Aunt," for example, was a rather famous farce in its time, and when the aunt pulled up "her" skirts, displaying "her" trousers, and raced across the stage, there were seldom any signs of boredom in the audience at such an exhibition of purely farcical humor. 23

The characters in a farce do not stop to think. Thinking would be fatal. Thinking would make one pull up

---


and seek again the world of reality, and farce is un-reality. The world of reality would not accept the wonderfully funny incongruities and absurdities that are so much a part of farce. Nothing could be more absurd than Sophie's assertion, in The Star Spangled Girl by Neil Simon, that she is in love with Andy because she likes the way he smells, unless it is the marvelous process by which Box and Cox discover that they are long lost brothers. Both cases are excellent parodies of the logic used in everyday existence. The reviewer for The Times of 1860 discusses some of the absurdities and incongruities used by Morton in the following quotation:

Absurdity could not go further than the assertion of Box that Cox must be his long-lost brother, because he had not a particular mark upon his arm. Nothing could be more outrageously nonsensical than the statement of a gentleman (in his last new farce) to the effect that his father died in giving him birth, and that his mother died of grief shortly afterwards. But the burst of merriment which is caused by these astounding propositions is something that the shrewdest wit would be happy to achieve. In light elegant pieces of what is called the "drawing-room" kind Mr. Morton is least at home; but let him have a good story laid in what is nominally middle-life, but really an Utopian atmosphere, where every sort of collision is possible, and every kind of behaviour tolerable, and no one will so readily stir an audience with a volley of pleasantries that may be described as a Cockney variety of the Irish bull.24

24The Times (London), October 13, 1860, p. 7.
Philip Barry, who took Morton as one example of a successful farce writer, contended that "exaggeration is the keynote of the farce."\(^{25}\) He explains, however, that exaggeration (or caricature) must have a basis:

All these things which would be barred in "straight" comedy are permissible in farce. But let it be noted that beneath all the exaggeration, there is a tiny foundation of nature and of truth.

As regards the theme of farcical comedy, the author must, of course, resolve this for himself. But there is one everlasting rule that can hardly be bettered, and it was laid down by a brilliant dramatist. Here it is: "GET YOUR CHIEF CHARACTER INTO TROUBLE AND KEEP HIM THERE UNTIL A FEW MINUTES BEFORE THE END OF THE PLAY!"\(^{26}\)

The "tiny foundation of nature and of truth" spoken of by Barry is a much more pronounced element in farce than in any other form of drama. But the nature exhibited by farce is not the dignified nature of tragedy. Instead, it is the basic, perhaps even base, nature of man that is the foundation. The hero of low comedy is usually the butt of the joke. He is not likely to shake or shape the world with momentous intellectual decisions. He is, according to Eric Bentley, much more prone to physical action and feats of strength than he is to an exhibition of intellectual ability.\(^{27}\)

\(^{25}\)Barry, How to Succeed as a Playwright, p. 76.

\(^{26}\)Ibid., p. 77.

\(^{27}\)Bentley, The Life of the Drama, p. 251.
Farce is then a drama of escape for the audience. "What the world needs," says Kernodle, "is a good laugh, the broader the better." Farce answers that need. Its continuing popularity attests to its success. Kernodle suggests that farce has retained its popularity over hundreds of years for three basic reasons: first, "low comedy is a release of pent-up dormant life, one of the surges of springtime;" second, "it brings the great reassurance that all the great clowns have brought, the reassurance that man can take it;" and third, "it is a device for accepting the basic incongruity of everyday living, of spanning the ideal and the real without giving up either."  

The last part of Barry's advice, get the hero into trouble and keep him there, is a characteristic of farce that constitutes a part of the scaffolding that the Times reviewer spoke of.

The one word that seems to unify all of the elements of farce is freedom, or at least a desire for freedom. Freedom of man to act without restraint would solve all the problems faced by the characters in a farce, but then the world would not be as it is. The characters in farce would like to live in a fairyland but continually bump

28 Kernodle, Invitation to the Theatre, p. 248.
29 Ibid., pp. 254-257.
their heads against reality. Since the world cannot be as we would like it, then the farce character must continue on the path described by Kernodle:

It's a mad world, my masters, but you've got two chances. One is in your own persistence. The other is in the very element of accident and unpredictability in the universe. Put those two chances together and it's a laugh. And a laugh is the one way of accepting it, better relaxation than wine, women, or song. Without the relaxation of farcical laughter, man would long ago have torn himself and his neighbors apart.30

What is farce? Farce is a form of comedy in which recognizable people often do improbable things. The more recognizable they are, the more absurd, thus human and funny, they may seem. The purpose of farce is not just to incite laughter, but to delineate a kind of universal character as he faces the realities of life and the universe. In the process, man is often made to look ridiculous, absurd, and ludicrous. The plots of farce traditionally revolve about the machinations of several stock characters: the grave old man, the braggart soldier, the knave, the distressed mother, the parasite, the scheming slave, the saucy maid, the rich old fop, and the young lovers. Plots and character development have also used such devices as deformity, caricature, parody, irony, and disguise-unmasking. The speed with which farce is acted helps to create a feeling of abstraction, and the acting itself is highly exaggerated in style. Exaggeration, however,

30 Ibid., p. 259.
does not imply lack of reality or seriousness. Costumes are usually simple, but again exaggeration is often the basis of comic action or character. The language of farce is usually that of everyday life, liberally interspersed with puns and incongruities.

Did Morton's farces conform to this pattern? The purpose of the second section of this study is to examine his work in detail in order to determine exactly what was included in his farces. He was one of the most prolific and probably the best of the low farce writers, and since there have been no studies dealing exclusively with the one-act farce of the nineteenth century, this study should help to determine the content of those dramas.
The first part of this study attempted to show the background against which the plays of John Maddison Morton were written. The purpose of the second part is to examine Morton's plays in order to determine the methods he employed as a playwright. In order to do this, twenty-one of the approximately eighty-five farces written by him were analyzed (See Appendix). These farces were written over a twenty-nine year period, beginning in 1838 and ending in 1867, and no more than two plays appeared in any one year. The subjects to be treated in the second part of this study are: plots, characters, language, acting, staging and themes.

Before proceeding to an examination of the plots used by Morton, a brief look at some general characteristics of farce as he wrote it is in order. The acting editions of the plays included the anticipated playing time for fifteen of the twenty-one scripts used in this study. The shortest expected playing time listed was forty minutes for
The Trumpeter's Wedding,¹ and the longest was one hour and ten minutes for The "Alabama".² Eleven of the plays had a playing time of forty-five to fifty minutes, and two were listed as being performed in sixty minutes. From these figures one can conclude that a vast majority of Morton's farces were written to be performed in forty-five minutes to an hour, and an assumption that the farces of other writers were similar in length would probably be quite valid.

The names given to the farces are a good indication as to the subject matter treated therein. Three broad divisions or categories are readily apparent: (1) plays whose titles include personal pronouns thus suggesting an intimate quality; (2) plays named for the major character or characters or the character around which much of the action is to revolve; and (3) plays that have names which describe an action, quality, or event. Apart from the dramas analyzed for the present study, the titles given to

¹The Trumpeter's Wedding (London: Duncombe and Moon, n.d.). ²Unless otherwise noted, all plays quoted in the remainder of this dissertation are plays written by John Maddison Morton. Therefore, the author's name will not appear in the footnotes. It should also be noted that all scripts used in this dissertation are acting editions which do not include publication dates. All available publication data will be given in the first reference to a particular play. Only the name of the play from which material is taken will be given in succeeding references.

²The "Alabama" (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.).
the following farces by Morton suggest the subject matter treated: (1) *If I had a Thousand a Year!*; *The King and I*; *My Bachelor Days*; *My Husband's Ghost*; *My Precious Betsy*; *My Wife's Come; Who Do They Take Me For?*; and *Who's My Husband?*; (2) *Slasher and Crasher*; *Margery Daw*; *John Dobbs*; *Grimshaw, Bagshaw, and Bradshaw*; *Friend Waggles*; *Cousin Lambkin*; and *Brother Ben*; (3) *Away with Melancholy*; *Change Partners*; *A Day's Fishing*; *Don't Judge by Appearances*; *Eight Hours at the Seaside*; *An Englishman's House Is His Castle*; and *Where There's a Will There's a Way*.

One of Morton's farces has a very modern quality about its name. If *Waiting for an Omnibus in the Lowther Arcade on a Rainy Day* should appear on the stage today, it would probably be accepted, on the basis of its title, as just another modern play. On the other hand, not even modern plays with long titles could compete with a drama, written by an unknown author, that was performed in London in 1846: *Harlequin and Poonowingkeewangflibedeeedeebuskeebang*; or, *The King of the Cannibal Islands*.

A remarkable fact about the twenty-one plays that were examined for this study is that they all dealt in some way with marriage. Sometimes marriage was a major element in the drama; at other times it was a very minor factor. But it was always included.

The plot of a drama is generally considered to be the sequence of events through which a story is related. In a broader sense, however, that point or event around
which the plot revolves—what the play or story is about—is also a part of the plot and will be considered as such throughout this study. The central issues around which Morton's plots revolved can be divided into three major categories: (1) plays in which an uncle is trying to arrange a successful marriage for his niece, a guardian his ward, or a parent his child. Occasionally the situation may vary slightly. For instance, in *A Capital Match* an aunt is trying to get her niece successfully married, and in *Chaos is Come Again* an uncle tries to get his nephew to marry. Essentially, however, the pattern is unaltered. The plays which belong to this group are: *Who Stole The Pocket-Book?*, *A Capital Match*, *The Two Puddifoots*, *The Alabama*, *Chaos is Come Again*, *Done on Both Sides*, and *The Little Savage*. (2) The second major category also involves marriage. In this case, a husband or his wife, or a lover or his or her intended are caught in what appears to be a compromising position. Infidelity is thus often implied but never consummated. The following dramas are in this group: *My Wife's Bonnet*, *Ticklish Times*, *The Two Bonnycastles*, *The Trumpeter's Wedding*, *Poor Pillicoddy*, *My Wife's Second Floor*, *Aunt Charlotte's Maid*, and *Betsy Baker; or Too Attentive by Half*. (3) The

---


4 *Chaos is Come Again* (London: Chapman and Hall, n.d.).
third major category is best described by the designation non-marriage plays. This is not to say that marriage is not a factor in these plays. It is, but it is not a major factor. Three of these plays are quite similar and have a definite touch of the absurd about them. The other three are divergent in plot. The six plays are: A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion, A Regular Fix, Box and Cox, Lend Me Five Shillings, Whitebait at Greenwich, and A Thumping Legacy.

Group I: Marriage of Niece, Ward, or Child

A fairly detailed look at a plot from each of the three categories would seem to be in order. In the first group, Done on Both Sides is fairly representative. In this play Mr. Whiffles, a retired exciseman, and his wife are anxious to marry their daughter, Lydia, to a man of means. They cannot afford servants, so Mr. and Mrs. Whiffles do all of the work themselves; however, they try to keep up the impression among their neighbors that they are in very comfortable circumstances. They feel they must do this in order to arrange a satisfactory marriage for Lydia. As the play opens, the three Whiffles are busy cleaning. Mrs. Whiffles tells Mr. Whiffles that she met a young man at a tea who appeared to be very well fixed financially and who also appeared to be very interested in Lydia.

The young man, Mr. John Brownjohn, pays the Whiffles
a visit and is very much impressed with the order and cleanliness of their home. Everything about them speaks of money. This is of great importance to Brownjohn, for he is financially destitute and is trying to marry into a wealthy family. This is where the title of the play is appropriate. They both try to hoodwink the other into thinking that each is loaded with money—-it is done on both sides.

Whiffles and Mrs. Whiffles continually slip and make statements that a thinking person would quickly grasp as being evidence of the fact that they are not what they seem, but as each man is a fool only so far as he or she wants to be, Brownjohn wants to be fooled completely. He is! Each time Whiffles or Mrs. Whiffles makes a statement that is damaging to their cause there is just enough evidence left for Brownjohn to rationalize away the remark, and since he desperately wants to believe that they are wealthy, he does.

To the great consternation of Mr. and Mrs. Whiffles, Brownjohn invites himself to dinner. They have no food and no prospects of getting any that day. All seems lost, but at that moment a country cousin, Pygamalion Phibbs, shows up. They try to think of a way to get rid of him, but when they discover that the basket he is carrying is loaded with venison, they welcome him with open arms. He protests that he did not intend to stay, but they insist.
Furthermore, Whiffles cons him out of five pounds to buy wine.

They now have their food problem solved, but another problem presents itself in that they do not know what to do with Phibbs. He is obviously not a member of the upper classes, and if they admit that he is Whiffles' cousin, then all will be lost. They decide to pretend that Phibbs is an old and trusted servant. Phibbs is really a veterinarian by occupation, and he has come to London to see an influential gentleman who could be of assistance in getting him appointed as "Surgeon to the South Hants Troop of Yeomanry." The venison was to be used as a gift, or bribe as the case may be, in appreciation for the gentleman's assistance. In order to get Phibbs to go along with the plan, they tell him that Brownjohn is the President of the Veterinary Association.

The mix-ups that occur because Brownjohn thinks Phibbs is a servant is half of the "fun" of the show. He orders Phibbs about, insults him by calling him Piggy instead of Pygamalion, threatens to fire him, and tells him to serve the table and to wait on the members of the household. He even reprimands him for being lazy, sassy, and impertinent. And each time Phibbs is about to revolt, a member of the family reminds him the Brownjohn is President of the Veterinary Association.

Finally, the truth comes out, but by this time
Brownjohn wants to marry Lydia even if she does not have a large dowry. Lydia and Mr. and Mrs. Whiffles have likewise grown accustomed to the thought of Brownjohn as Lydia's husband. Phibbs is not fond of having been the butt of a huge joke, but he is finally reconciled. In addition, as Lydia's godfather, he pays Brownjohn's bill and presents him with a wedding present of 5,000 pounds. He also decides to serve the dinner. When the others protest, he says:

I tell you I will. I've been ordered about by everybody, and now I choose to order myself about. "Piggy, bring in the venison! don't you hear? Look sharp, and stir your stumps!" I'm ready for anything! (to Audience.) Can I do anything for you? Shall I bring in the venison now, or shall I bring it in tomorrow night? That will do very nicely. Then, with your permission, I'll not only bring it in to-morrow evening, but every evening until further notice.5

As has already been said, Done on Both Sides is representative of the plays in this first group; however, there are some interesting deviations that occur in some of the other plays. In Who Stole the Pocket-Book?, much of the action revolves around the loss of a pocketbook containing a large sum of money. Tompkins Tipthorp, who finds the pocketbook, uses the contents to buy clothes for his beloved and to provide a lovely banquet for six people.

5Done On Both Sides (London: Samuel French, n.d.).

In The "Alabama" Mr. Christopher Clipper has his ward stolen away by a young naval lieutenant, and the Captain of the Lieutenant's ship leaves Mr. Clipper's house without paying for his lodgings. Clipper assumes the disguise of a naval captain in an attempt to catch the two, and as a result, he finds himself commanding the war ship, "Alabama", in the midst of battle.

The final play of this group that should be mentioned is The Little Savage. This play is not nearly as tight in its structure as some of the other plays. One keeps getting the feeling that the play is composed of bits and pieces of numerous plays without their being tied together in an effective manner. For instance, Jonathan appears to be a crude, obnoxious, worthless servant in the first scene. In later scenes, he takes on much more desirable qualities and even appears to have the best interests of his employers at heart. The thing that is most interesting about this play, however, is its resemblance to The Taming of the Shrew. Parker is a confident, swaggering fellow for which Petruchio is the obvious prototype, but in this show, it is Parker who is tamed instead of the lady he woos. Later in the play Larkins seems to take over much of the Petruchio image, only to find himself confronted by a cross between Kate and the mad Ophelia.

7The Little Savage (London: Samuel French, n.d.).
from Hamlet. A further discussion of Parker, Larkins, and Kate will follow in the chapter on characters.

Group II: Husband/Wife--Lover/Intended

The Two Bonnycastles is representative of the husband/wife-lover/intended category. The play opens with Helen, niece to Mr. Smuggins, and Patty, her maid, talking about the fact that Mr. Smuggins has determined that Helen is to marry Jeremiah Jorum, Mr. Smuggins' clerk of only three weeks. Patty tells Helen to refuse to marry Jorum, to hold on to her freedom. She says she believes that Smuggins wants Helen to marry Jorum, because he feels that he can control Jorum and thus hold on to Helen's "little fortune." Helen replies that she has already so accused her uncle and told him to keep the money if that is what he wants. At any rate, she vows she will never marry Jorum.

John James Johnson, a dark stranger in whom Helen has already developed an interest by observing him from afar, shows up and declares his love for Helen. He is a medical student and quite broke but hopes to have money someday.

Jeremiah Jorum is really Mr. Bonnycastle in disguise. He has just recently come to Canterbury as a result

---

8The Two Bonnycastles (London: Samuel French, n.d.).
of an accident in London. He was running across a park in a rainstorm when he bumped into a stranger. As he got to his feet, he thought his watch was missing, chased the stranger, took his watch, and then proceeded on to his house. There he found that he now had two watches, and being afraid of the results of being declared a robber, he fled London without even leaving a readable note in order that Mrs. Bonnycastle would know where to find him. He remembered that Mrs. Bonnycastle, who was a successful businesswoman even before their marriage, was one of the principal customers of Mr. Smuggins. Therefore, he journeyed to Canterbury, used the name of Mrs. Bonnycastle as a reference and got a job as a clerk in Smuggins' office. Three weeks later, and much to his surprise, Smuggins insisted on Jorum marrying his niece. He was horrified at the thought of adding the crime of bigamy to that of robbery, but knowing that the wedding would not be soon and wanting to keep his position, he agreed.

John James Johnson, who was a close friend of Mrs. Bonnycastle's before her marriage, now shows up at the Smuggins' home claiming to be Bonnycastle. He thought Smuggins would be much easier to get to know if he assumed the name of Smuggins' chief client, and since he had never met the real Bonnycastle, he had no idea that Jorum was Bonnycastle in disguise.

Mr. Smuggins is glad to see the new husband of his
old friend and largest customer. Helen is puzzled as to why Johnson is calling himself Bonnycastle, but he explains it to her as they walk in the garden. In the meantime, the real Bonnycastle is disturbed at the thought of another man assuming his name.

Everything is fairly smooth until Mrs. Bonnycastle shows up. Mr. Smuggins tells her he is delighted because her husband (alias Johnson) is already there. He also introduces her to his new clerk (alias Bonnycastle) who is going to marry his pretty niece, Helen. Mrs. Bonnycastle is furious. She thinks Bonnycastle left London in order to marry Helen, so when Johnson and Helen show up and Johnson is greeted by Smuggins as her husband, Mrs. Bonnycastle goes right along with the subterfuge.

The remainder of the play is taken up with the mix-ups that occur: Johnson and Mrs. Bonnycastle, as Mr. and Mrs. Bonnycastle, are given a single room for the night; Jorum (Bonnycastle) stops Johnson with a pistol, ties a rope to his leg, and, from offstage, tries to pull him back into the room every time Johnson starts for the bedroom; Smuggins catches Jorum looking through the keyhole into the Bonnycastles' room and pulls him away; and Jorum and Helen, both jealous by this time, pretend they really are in love and want to be married. Finally, Jorum (Bonnycastle) cannot stand the pressure any longer and tells everyone in no uncertain terms that he is the real Bonnycastle. It is then revealed that Johnson is the person he robbed.
in London; all is forgiven, and everyone is satisfied. The play ends with a speech by Bonnycastle:

I can't now!—all I say—and I say it emphatically—is that I am not a highway robber—I scorn the action—especially for such a trumpery old copper-guilt concern as this. I've got a host of friends here to prove that the charge is utterly groundless, not that I mind it—I rather like it (to audience) I think it's a thing to laugh at—don't you? In short, if you'll back me up, I'll let everybody know that this little affair of the Two Bonnycastles is capital good fun!—may I?—it's all right—hurrah!

The Two Bonnycastles was published by Samuel French and was listed as "number XLIV" of "The Minor Drama" as edited by F. C. Wemyss. Mr. Wemyss included some rather interesting "REMARKS" in the acting script regarding Morton as a playwright and The Two Bonnycastles as a play.

The name of Morton, the author, is a sure stamp of excellence—and, although the play-goer may trace the incidents in half-a-dozen other pieces, yet an auditor must be ill-natured who would look at the plagiarism of a farce which has made him laugh so heartily. The secret of Morton's success is, that he confines his dramatis personae to three, four or five characters, which are in general well drawn, and always played by actors of merit. To Provincial Managers, (whose receipts will not admit of superfluous salaries,) he is invaluable—supplying a library of one-act pieces of such droll construction, as to furnish an excellent evening's performance, wanting only the aid of a female dancer and a comic singer.

The "Two Bonnycastles" will lose nothing in comparison with "Box and Cox," "Slasher and Crasher," or "The Unwarrantable Intrusion," and will be for the season one of the stock farces, which, all who relish a good joke for the joke's sake, will avail of seeing. Never was a robbery upon the highway turned so merry an account, or brought to such a satisfactory conclusion and the author's friends
may "let everybody know [th]at this little affair of the 'Two Bonnymcstales' is capital, good [fun]--it's all right--Hurrah!"

Three other plays from the husband-wife group have unusual elements in the plot structure which should be mentioned at this time. My Wife's Bonnet opened with some of the actors in the audience and the curtain closed. The stage directions relate the situation:

Scene.--The audience part of the Theatre--Curtain down.

TOPKNOT is seated in the Stalls, immediately under the Proscenium Box--Mrs. Topknot and ALFRED JONES enter the Box, MRS. TOPKNOT has her bonnet on--they seat themselves, and begin looking around the House with their glasses--the overture commences--presently the BOX KEEPER is seen to enter the box, lean over and speaking [sic] to ALFRED.9

The Box Keeper says that Mrs. Topknot cannot wear her bonnet in the box. They argue but she eventually pulls it off and places it where it falls into the stalls below. It hits Mr. Topknot who is seated directly below. He stoops to pick up the bonnet as Mrs. Topknot leans over the railing and recognizes her husband. She and Alfred Jones hurriedly pick up their things and leave the theatre. Mr. Topknot recognizes his wife's bonnet and rushes to the box from which the bonnet fell only to find it empty. He gets into a loud argument with the

9 My Wife's Bonnet (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.).
The box keeper, is told to keep quiet by a member of the audience, and is finally drowned out completely by the orchestra. Mr. Topknot rushes from the theatre as the curtain opens on the interior of a room in his home. Although this may not sound too unusual for today's theatre, it must have been quite novel for the mid-nineteenth century.

The Trumpeter's Wedding is another play which is somewhat uncommon in that it is a "musical farce." No less than six pieces of music are sung in this forty minute play. The reviewer for The Times said of the music that it was "of a pleasing though not original kind," and that "the concerted pieces somewhat resemble the finales of Storace's little operas. The most successful morceau was a bacchanalian song, sung with great spirit by Mr. Caulfield." The lyrics to the song referred to by the reviewer are as follows:

All sober silly folks agree
To drink is sad--
That they who drink till they can't see,
Must, must be mad.
But juice of grape, in every shape--
I've reason good to think it--
Can't be so bad, so very bad.
Since Saints and Sinners drink it.

I've often read, and heard it said,
Love makes men blind--
That wine is worse--a very curse
To all mankind.
But as for me, I cannot see
Why folks should take this trouble,

10The Times (London), March 22, 1849, p. 7.
For I maintain wine clears the brain,
By making us see double.\textsuperscript{11}

Morton undoubtedly wrote the lyrics, but whether he wrote the music or hired a composer is uncertain. In later years, Morton and F. C. Burnand were the librettists for \textit{Cox and Box}, a musical version of \textit{Box and Cox}, and Sir Arthur Sullivan wrote the music. Clement Scott attributes an importance to the converting of \textit{Box and Cox} into a musical that is far beyond the worth of the work itself. He says:

It is interesting to note that Maddison Morton's "Box and Cox" was the pioneer of the movement that resulted in the literary and musical partnership of Gilbert and Sullivan. If it had not been for Burnand's "Cox and Box" in all probability the "Sorcerer" and the rest of the operas would never have been written.\textsuperscript{12}

The third play of the husband/wife group which is unusual in its structure is \textit{Aunt Charlotte's Maid}.\textsuperscript{13} In this play Horatio Thomas Sparkins has been a little indiscreet in his relationship with his aunt's maid, Matilda Jones. He has given her a photograph of himself and a lock of his hair as tokens of his affections, and now that he would like to arrange a marriage with a beautiful and wealthy young lady, he finds Matilda is fully prepared

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{11}The \textit{Trumpeter's Wedding}.
\item \textsuperscript{12}Clement Scott, "John Maddison Morton," \textit{London Society}, 49 (January, 1886), pp. 68-69.
\item \textsuperscript{13}Aunt Charlotte's Maid (Boston: George M. Baker & Co., n.d.).
\end{itemize}
to use the items given to her as weapons in the battle of love. Of course, everything is finally settled to the satisfaction of all, but the road to that point is a sometimes precarious and often rocky one for Mr. Sparkins. There is a good deal of irony in the way Matilda makes the master do her bidding now that she is in a position of power. She takes pleasure in resting while directing him to do the common household chores that she might ordinarily do. This is the only play that relied on a reversal of the accepted social order as a comic device, and it is probably the best play in its group.

That marriage should be a part of farce is really not too surprising, for it is in the marriage situation that many of the absurdities of life exist. Barry says "a love interest should invariably figure in farcical comedy, but must not overshadow the main feature. The sentiment must be subordinated to the fast and furious fun." But why should so many of Morton's plays contain a hint of infidelity on the part of marriage partners or engaged couples? Bentley says that "the joke against marriage could be abolished if the family were the un-mixed blessing that many of our contemporaries take it

for." He adds, moreover, that "the close, warm family is also the seedbed of neurosis, vice, and crime. . . ." and that "outrage to family piety is certainly at the heart of farce as we know it." Later in his work he is more philosophical as to why we enjoy watching this desecration:

Farce in general offers a special opportunity: shielded by delicious darkness and seated in warm security, we enjoy the privilege of being totally passive while on stage our most treasured unmentionable wishes are fulfilled before our eyes by the most violently active human beings that ever sprang from the human imagination. In that application of the formula which is bedroom farce, we savor the adventure of adultery, ingeniously exaggerated in the highest degree, and all without taking the responsibility or suffering the guilt.

Of course Morton's farces did not show adultery, but it was hinted at, and the audience probably enjoyed it in a rather prurient manner. As Barry says, the characters returned "to the pious fold of matrimony at about five minutes to eleven every evening."  

16 Ibid., p. 226.
17 Ibid., p. 227.
18 Ibid., p. 229.
19 Barry, How to Succeed, p. 73.
Group III: Non-Marriage Plays

The plays in the non-marriage category are by far the best of Morton's plays as a group. Perhaps one reason is that they do not rely on a hackneyed plot structure but exhibit a great deal of creativity. Compared to some of the other plays, they are certainly refreshing in their originality and completeness. Many of Morton's plays were written for specific actors, and some of the non-marriage plays were also. Nevertheless, the plays in this group have a quality of originality that transcends the limits of vehicles for specific actors and lifts them closer to a universal plane.

Box and Cox is still presented frequently at colleges and universities, and several of the others might be just as popular if given the exposure that has been given to Box and Cox. But because of its long-lasting popularity and wide acclaim from the moment it was written to the present day, Box and Cox is the logical choice for review as the representative play of this group.

The play opens with Cox examining himself in the mirror. He has been to the barber shop, and the barber clipped his hair very short, much to the dislike of Cox. There is a knock on the door, and Cox immediately responds with a line from Macbeth, "Open locks, whoever knocks!" The person knocking in this case is Mrs. Bouncer, the landlady. She has come to clean the room, and while
she is there, Cox takes the opportunity to report a number of things that are displeasing to him. He wants a new pillow, and he wants to know why his coals are always gone and why smoke is constantly in his apartment. He also wants to know what keeps happening to his candles, wood, sugar, and "lucifer" matches. Mrs. Bouncer does not have an answer to his questions, but she suggests the smoke may be the result of the gentleman in the room above his smoking too much. Although Cox is decidedly doubtful as to the ability of smoke to travel down instead of up, he asks her to request that the gentleman not smoke so much. It then occurs to him that the gentleman in question may be the individual he meets so frequently on the stairs, and when Mrs. Bouncer assures him that they are the same, he remarks that the man should be a printer from the way he looks. He bids Mrs. Bouncer a good morning and leaves for work. Before he does, however, he has a beautiful bit utilizing a series of hats that should be noted at this time. Cox is a hatter, and thus he has a number of hats of all kinds. He tries on several and finds that because of his new haircut they are all too large. Mrs. Bouncer remarks about this fact. To which Cox replies:

Cut! It strikes me I've been mowed! It's very kind of you to mention it, but I'm sufficiently conscious of the absurdity of my personal appearance already. (puts on his coat) Now for my hat---(puts on his hat, which comes over his eyes) That's the effect of having one's hair cut. This hat fitted me quite tight before. Luckily I've got two or three more. (goes in at L.D. and
returns, with three hats of different shapes, and puts them on, one after the other—all of which are too big for him) This is pleasant! Never mind. This one appears to wobble about rather less than the others (puts on hat) and now I'm off!. . . .20

The bit with the hats is a comic gag that has been used over and over again with almost certain results.

Cox is hardly out of the door before Box enters. But before he does, Mrs. Bouncer hurriedly straightens the room in the manner liked by Box. She also explains in a soliloquy that he is a printer who works at night, and since Cox works all day, she has been renting the same room to each of them without their suspecting that she is double-dealing.

Box complains about the same things that Cox complained about earlier. Mrs. Bouncer assures him she will do all that she can and exits. Of course the inevitable happens; Cox returns home. The two of them are very excited. They call each other names, accuse each other, call for Mrs. Bouncer, and generally react in a very upset manner. Mrs. Bouncer tells them she is fixing another room, but they must make the best of the situation for a few hours. They argue violently and then start to discover a number of amazing things. They each have been engaged to the same woman, and neither wants to marry her. They decide to draw lots for her, but each tries to win.

---

20Box and Cox (London: Samuel French, n.d.).
with loaded dice and two-headed coins. A letter comes telling them she has died leaving a large estate to her intended, so they now argue over who should be the one to get the estate. Another letter arrives saying the lady is not dead but very much alive and is coming to see her finance right away. Again they each decline the honor of being the lady's finance. A carriage pulls up in front, but instead of the lady appearing, a third letter is delivered. This letter informs them that the lady is aware of their reluctance to marry, so she has decided to marry another. They rejoice, and after some rather circuitous reasoning, they come to the conclusion that they are really long-lost brothers. The play ends with their saying that the house, meaning the auditorium and directed toward the audience, is large enough to hold both of them and that both Box and Cox are satisfied.

Perhaps the most striking thing about the structure of *Box and Cox* is the balanced nature of almost everything in the play. The very names, Box and Cox, have a sound that seems to make them fit together. One without the other seems to be incomplete. They each complain to Mrs. Bouncer about the same things, each has noticed the other on the stairs, and each thinks he has the apartment to himself. They even sleep with their heads pointing in opposite directions, thus giving the image of a balanced bed. They met the same woman, both became engaged to her
at separate times, and both wanted to get out of the engagement. They each happen to have dice that roll sixes, each has a two-headed coin, and each rejoices at the thought of getting Penelope Ann's inheritance. It is only fitting, therefore, that they should ultimately decide to share the room and discover that they are long-lost brothers.

The action and language of Box and Cox both lend credence to the balanced quality of the play, and although action and language in all of Morton's plays will be discussed in later chapters, it is important to take a brief look at each of them as they are revealed in Box and Cox in order to illustrate their contribution to the balanced quality of the show as a whole. The first meeting of Box and Cox shows the balanced nature of much of the action:

Cox. (putting his head quickly in door, L.) Come in, come in. (opens door and enters with a small tray, on which are tea things, &c., which he places on drawers, L., and suddenly recollects) Oh, goodness! My chop! (running to fire-place) Holloa--what's this! The bacon again! Oh, pooh! Zounds--confound it--dash it--damn it--I can't stand this! (pokes fork into bacon, opens window and flings it out--shuts window again and returns to drawers for tea things--encounters Box coming from his cupboard with his tea things--they walk down, C., of stage together) Who are you, sir?

Box. If you come to that--who are you?
Cox. What do you want here, sir?
Box. If you come to that--what do you want?
Cox. (aside) It's the printer! (puts tea things on the drawers)
Box. (aside) It's the hatter! (puts tea things on table)
Cox. Go to your attic, sir.
Box. My attic, sir? Your attic, sir!
Cox. Printer, I shall do you a frightful injury if you don't instantly leave my apartment.

Box. Your apartment? You mean My apartment, you contemptible hatter, you!

Cox. Your apartment? Ha, ha!—come, I like that! Look here, sir—(produces a paper out of his pocket) Mrs. Bouncer's receipt for the last week's rent, sir!

Box. (produces a paper, and holds it close to Cox's face) Ditto, Sir!

Cox. (suddenly shouting) Thieves!

Box. Murder!

Both. Mrs. Bouncer! (each running to door, L.C., calling).

Movement in unison is funny, and for this reason directors of serious plays will go to great lengths to keep actors from moving at the same time in the same way. Movement in unison was utilized several times in this show as a comic device. At the same time, it helped to create the impression that everything about the play was precisely balanced. The first meeting of Box and Cox produced such movement and so did the name of Penelope Ann. The stage directions say that Cox "starts up, takes Box by the arm, and leads him slowly to front of stage." They argue as to who should be the finance of Penelope Ann and then, according to the stage directions, "they go to fireplace, R., and begin ringing bells violently, and pull down bell pulls." Apparently there were two bells and two bell pulls which they used simultaneously. When they read in the letter that Penelope Ann expects to arrive at ten o'clock, they "both simultaneously pull out their watches," and when they think she is at the door, they rush to the door, "slam the door, and both lean against it with their backs."
Toward the end of the show they have a bit of business that revolves around the letters that arrive. The repetition makes the action funny, but the important thing here is that their lines and actions are perfectly balanced. They could even exchange lines and the play would remain unaltered for the audience.

Cox. (opens letter--starts) Goodness gracious!
Box. (snatching letter--starts) Gracious goodness!
Cox. (taking letter again) "Margate, . . ."

When the second letter arrives, the dialogue and stage directions read as follows:

Cox. I forgive you again! (taking letter)
   Another trifle from Margate! (opens letter,
   starts) Goodness gracious!
Box. (snatching letter, starts) Gracious goodness!
Cox. (snatching letter again, reads) "Happy to
   inform you, . . ."

When the third epistle arrives, the following scene occurs:

Cox. Put it under! (a letter is put under the
door, Cox picks up the letter and opens
it) Goodness gracious!
Box. (snatching letter) Gracious goodness!
(Cox snatches the letter, and runs forward
followed by Box)
Cox. "Dear Mr. Cox, . . ."

One final example will further illustrate the balanced quality of the language. Box and Cox are talking about joining a particular branch of the military service to avoid marrying Penelope Ann. Box says, "But they wouldn't have me! they actually had the effrontery to say I was too short---" To which Cox replies, "And I wasn't tall enough."

The manner in which each discovers the name of the other is
perfectly balanced and totally absurd.

Cox. Penelope Ann! (starts up, takes Box by the arm, and leads him slowly to front of stage) Penelope Ann?

Box. Penelope Ann!

Cox. Originally widow of William Wiggins?

Box. Widow of William Wiggins!

Cox. Proprietor of bathing machines?

Box. Proprietor of bathing machines!

Cox. At Margate?

Box. At Ramsgate!

Cox. It must be she! And you, sir—you are Box—the lamented, long-lost Box?

Box. I am!

Cox. And I was about to marry the interesting creature you so cruelly deceived.

Box. Ah! then you are Cox!

The Illustrated London News said of the original production of Box and Cox that "it is some time since we have seen so comical a piece as Box and Cox, produced at this theatre for the first time on Monday evening; and we rarely recollect one that so completely carried the audience along with it." Perhaps the structure of the play was one reason for its comicality.

PLOT DEVICES

Each of the three plays used as representative of the dramas in their categories contained a final speech, two of which were quoted above, which was directed to the audience and which generally contained a plea for approval. This was a common device for ending a farce in the nineteenth

\[21\] Illustrated London News, November 6, 1847, p. 298.
century and was referred to as a "tag." Each of Morton's plays, with the possible exception of Ticklish Times, ended in this fashion.

As was stated in the first part of this dissertation, Lend Me Five Shillings ended with Golightly pleading for a loan in that amount from the audience. Queen Victoria saw at least five performances of the play, including the premiere, and on one occasion J. B. Buckstone, who created the role of Golightly, pleaded directly to the Queen for a loan. One might imagine that other actors who played this role were not above appealing to personalities of importance who happened to be in their audiences. This novelty of Golightly appealing to the audience was one of the more unusual tags.

The most unusual tag of all—one that has a very modern sound—was the tag Morton wrote for A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion. This play was written for the excellent comedy team of Edward Wright and Paul Bedford. Apparently these gentlemen were quite proficient at ad libbing lines and action, for the Times reviewer said of their performance in Slasher and Crasher that they had "full scope

22Lend Me Five Shillings (London: Samuel French, n.d.).
for their ad libitum drollery." Morton undoubtedly knew of their talents and propensity for ad libbing, so he decided to use their skills in creating an original tag for his play. The end of the show is obviously near when the Intruder (Wright) gets written permission from Mr. Nathaniel Snoozle (Bedford) for one John Hohnson, Junior to marry Snoozle's niece. The Intruder then reveals that he is really John Johnson, Junior. At this point Wright drops character and pretends that he has completed the script he has as a player. He assumes Bedford has the concluding speech of the play, so he urges him to continue. The script, beginning with the Intruder's last speech, reads as follows:

Int. Mr. John Johnson, Junior, at your service!
You wouldn't ask me to come and see you, so I came without your asking. I couldn't understand why you didn't answer my letters, so I came to ascertain the reason. I wanted to marry your niece—you said I should never have your consent—I said I would, and here it is! (flourishing letter) I repeat, here it is—Go on, Paul!

Paul Bedford. I haven't got any more in my part!
(taking part out of his pocket, and shewing it.)

Wright. No more have I!
Paul Bedford. I say, Prompter!

Enter Prompter, L.H.

Prompter. Yes, Sir---
Paul Bedford. Hasn't the Author sent the tag yet?
Prompter. No, sir—here's the MS.
Wright. Just like him! You know he didn't send the tag to his last new farce till about five minutes before the curtain went up.

24The Times (London), November 14, 1848. p. 5.
Prompter. I heard him say it was no use his writing a tag, for Mr. Wright always spoke his own.

Wright. That's not the fact. There's no man on the Stage takes less liberties with his Author than I do. Well, Paul--I suppose we must finish the Piece as well as we can. The usual thing is to make a pathetic appeal to the Audience--so be pathetic, Paul--

Paul Bedford. No--you understand that better than I do.

Wright. Then, Ladies and Gentlemen, all I can say is, that if we have committed some errors, let us hope that they are trifling ones: at any rate, we'll manage to correct them by to-morrow evening, if you'll oblige us by looking in--and depend upon it, come as often as you like, we shall never consider it an "UNWARRANTABLE INTRUSION."  

Contrived endings, misunderstandings, repetitions, letters, conflicts between master and servant, disguises, and the use of music were all employed by John Maddison Morton in the construction of his plots. He even introduced mesmerism into the plot of Aunt Charlotte's Maid in 1858. In this manner, he anticipates Henrik Ibsen who also found a use for mesmerism in some of his plays.

Philip Beaufoy Barry, as has been noted, advised the young playwright who wanted to write farce to "get your chief character into trouble and keep him there until a few minutes before the end of the play."  

Morton, used as an example of successful farce writer by Barry, certainly employed this technique. In most of his plays the conflicts

---


and mix-ups are not straightened out until the very last minute, and then the method employed is somewhat contrived. 

In Aunt Charlotte's Maid, Matilda, while pretending to be in a mesmeric trance, labels the wrong man as a "monster" and thus lets Horatio Thomas Sparkins out of the trap she had so neatly set for him. He is then able to secure from her the evidence she was going to use to force him to marry her. He can now marry Miss Volley, Matilda will marry her "lifeguardsman," and all will live happily ever after. All of these things occur within the space of a page, but until that time, the outcome of the play is very much in doubt.

A classical deus-ex-machina ending is used for at least five of the plays: A Thumping Legacy, 27 Chaos is Come Again, The Trumpeter's Wedding, A Regular Fix, 28 and Ticklish Times. 29 In Ticklish Times, Launcelot Griggs has been given a temporary appointment as a city magistrate in the town of Weymouth. At the end of the play Griggs is angry with his father-in-law and orders two constables to take that gentleman to jail. It appears that Bodkins, the father-in-law of Griggs, will have to spend some time

29 Ticklish Times (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.).
in jail, but at that moment, the constables happen to remember that the authority of Griggs as a city magistrate extended only to the capture of Sir William Ramsey, an outlaw who has already fled the city. Everyone is now happy and the play ends with Griggs saying that he is going to "leave public affairs to those who understand them--and that, I take it, is about the wisest thing a man can do in these TICKLISH TIMES."

Another contrived element used in some of the plots might possibly be called irony but is probably better characterized by the term farcical accident. In this case, it is necessary to the plot of the drama for certain events to happen in a manner which might be quite foreign to the normal, expected course of events. For instance, Box and Cox just happen to rent the same room, become engaged to the same lady, and so on. In Whitebait at Greenwich,30 Benjamin Buzzard and his sister, Lucretia, are to inherit a fortune from their aunt if they do not marry. And if either does marry, he or she forfeits his share of the inheritance. They both secretly marry on the same day, both choose to eat their wedding dinner at the Crown and Sceptre in Greenwich, and both are served by the same waiter. Sometime later their aunt sends them a new servant, and who should show up but the waiter from the Crown

---

30Whitebait at Greenwich (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.).
and Sceptre. The entire play revolves around the attempts of each of the Buzzards to keep the other from knowing about his or her secret marriage. They both think the waiter has come to blackmail them, both do all kinds of favors for and make numerous promises to the waiter, and the dumbfounded little waiter does not remember a single thing about either of them. Similar examples could be extracted from many of the plays, but enough has been shown to illustrate what is meant by farcical accident.

The events from *Whitebait at Greenwich* could also serve as an example of another device frequently employed by Morton—that of misunderstandings that contribute to the progression of the plot. All of the plays in the husband/wife category fit this pattern, and so do a great many of the dramas from the other categories. These misunderstandings take two forms: a misunderstanding as to the identity of a person or persons, and a misunderstanding as to the situation that seems to exist at a given moment. In the first case, a character believes another character to be someone other than the person he actually is. Therefore, he makes statements or takes action based on false premises. For instance, Pillicoddy marries the widow of a sea captain who had been declared drowned at sea after having been missing for a number of years. Suddenly a Captain O'Scuttle shows up demanding to see his wife, who, according to the captain, is in Pillicoddy's house. Pillicoddy naturally assumes this is the long-lost Captain
O'Scuttle and acts accordingly, when in truth the sea
captain who is now demanding to see his wife is a cousin
of Pillicoddy's wife's former husband, and the captain's
wife, who has come to visit Mrs. Pillicoddy, is indeed in
the house.31

In a misunderstanding based on a lack of knowledge
as to the situation, the characters are just as prone to
act illogically. In this case a husband or wife often pre­
tends to be the husband or wife of someone else, usually
in order to do a favor for someone they like or are
sympathetic with. In *Ticklish Times* and *The Trumpeter's
Wedding* ladies pretend to be the wives of Robin Hood like
fugitives who need a brief cover in order to escape from
the authorities, and in *The Two Bonnycastles* Mr. Bonnycastle
pretends to be engaged to Helen in order to maintain his
disguise while hiding from the law.

These misunderstandings could have been cleared
up a number of times as the result of a well-timed question
or a revealing statement, but of course the excuse for the
play to continue would have been obliterated and half the
"fun" destroyed. This is one reason why farce is played
at such a rapid speed. A person cannot be given time to
think, for then all would be lost.

Sometimes an attempt is made to justify the con-

31*Poor Pillicoddy* (Boston: William V. Spencer,
n.d.).
tinuing ignorance on the part of the characters involved in a misunderstanding. In *Ticklish Times* Sir William Ramsey assumes the name of Griggs and pretends to be the husband of Mrs. Griggs. They think everything will be all right, for Mr. Griggs is out of town and not expected back in the near future. However, Mr. Griggs does return and both Sir William and Mrs. Griggs try to explain the situation to him. Each time they try to explain what is happening there are a number of people present and they have to whisper, but Mr. Griggs has been given a very fortunate eccentricity; he cannot stand for anyone to whisper in his ear. The first scene in which Sir William tries to explain the situation to Griggs follows:

Sir Wil. Shall I throw myself on his generosity, and explain everything? I will! (suddenly seizes Griggs by the arm, and draws him to R. side.) Listen! (whispers in his ear.)

Griggs. (with a violent start, and putting his finger in his ear, and shaking it violently.) Don't do that! If there's anything I abominate--execrate--it is anybody whispering in my ear.

Sir Wil. But it is important--absolutely necessary. (whispering to Griggs again.)

Griggs. (with another violent start, and again inserting his finger in his ear, and moving it violently about.) For the second time, don't do that. (with an assumed gaiety of manner, and familiarly taking Sir William's arm.) Now, my dear Mr. Griggs--you say you're Griggs, therefore I call you Griggs--suppose we endeavour to solve this little eccentric domestic mystery.

Sir Wil. Once more--let me explain--(again whispering in Grigg's ear.)

Griggs. (same play as before.) For the third time, don't do that...
Later in the play Mrs. Griggs tries to whisper to her husband but with the same results. Morton thus accomplishes two things: He continues the misunderstanding by allowing Griggs to remain ignorant, and he creates a very funny bit by having Griggs repeat the business of shaking his head a number of times.

The continuous repetition of a piece of business or of a particular line is almost certain to produce laughter. So is the repetition of certain events in the plot of a drama. *Whitebait at Greenwich* provides us with an example. John Small, a waiter who served tables at the Crown and Sceptre in Greenwich, is engaged by the aunt of Mr. Benjamin and Miss Lucretia Buzzard as a servant for Benjamin and Lucretia. Unknown to him, they both are secretly married, both had their wedding served by him at the Corwn and Sceptre, and both now think he has come to blackmail them. First Benjamin, then Sally his wife, then Lucretia, and finally Mr. Glimmer her husband all approach John Small and attempt to bribe him into keeping their marriage a secret. The repetition of this action and the growing suspicion on the part of John Small that they are all lunatics constitute a substantial part of the plot of the play. The repetition of the events in the plot builds up the humorous potential of the play.

Disguises constitute a major plot device used by
Morton. Disguises can, of course, take several forms: costumes may be used to create a visual disguise, a character may assume an identity other than his own, or a character may simply play a role that gives him the ability to move or act in a manner that might be considered unbecoming or distasteful under ordinary circumstances.

A disguise using a costume was not often employed by Morton, but he did use this technique on at least two occasions. Christopher Clipper uses a sea captain's uniform to get on board the "Alabama,"^32 and Jansen, thinking Griggs is Sir William Ramsey, dresses Griggs as a pirate in *Ticklish Times*. The stage directions say that Jansen puts a rough jacket on him, pulls a "worsted nightcap" down over his face, and places a "horse pistol and cutlass in his hands."

All of the husband/wife plays, and many of the others, used a disguise based on an assumed identity. Sometimes more than one person assumed an identity other than his own in the same play, as was the case of Bonnycastle and John Johnson in *The Two Bonncastles*.

Role playing was a seldom used disguise, but it does occur in at least two plays: *An Unwarrantable Intrusion* and *The Little Savage*. In the first play the Intruder presents such a menacing image that Mr. Snoozle is glad to

^32The "Alabama."
write a letter saying that John Johnson, Junior has permission to marry Snoozle's niece. He is somewhat chagrined when he finds out that the Intruder is John Johnson, Junior. In The Little Savage John Parker agrees to visit the home of Major Choker in order to ascertain the feasibility of a marriage between himself and Choker's niece. He does so reluctantly, because he has been told by a friend, who hopes to marry the niece himself, that Choker and Kate, the niece, are somewhat ignorant and lacking in social refinement. Nevertheless, his uncle wants him to visit Choker and Kate, so Parker finally agrees. When he arrives, he has assumed the role of a very brassy, presumptuous, and uncouth oaf in an attempt to nullify any chance of a marriage between himself and Kate. Naturally his opinion of Kate changes completely, and he eventually drops the disguise and reveals his true person.

As has already been mentioned, a great deal of music was used in The Trumpeter's Wedding, and a lesser amount was used in almost all of the plays. Thirteen of the twenty-one plays examined employed some music. Sometimes a song was only hummed or whistled, but at other times, as in the case of The Trumpeter's Wedding, an orchestra was used and several songs were sung. One reason for the frequent use of music may be the fact that a theatre usually had an orchestra that played for that theatre only, and so the use of music in a play was not as much of an added expense as one might expect.
The use of a letter as a means of carrying the action of a play forward is a device that has been used as long as there have been playwrights. Morton was no exception. Eighteen of the twenty-one plays used a letter in some way. Some plays used more than one. It will be remembered from the analysis of Box and Cox that three letters were received from Penelope Ann, and when Box feigned suicide, he left a note in his coat pocket for Penelope Ann.

Jokes and tricks were not frequently used by Morton as a plot device, although A Capital Match is one elaborate joke on poor sunnyside.

A conflict between a master and servant was a technique employed on several occasions. In such a conflict the master of the house and a saucy servant collide over a number of issues, usually the amount of work the servant has not done, the quality of work completed, or the language used by the servant. The conflict could be quite lively and sometimes took the form of personal abuse. The confrontation between Buffles and Peggy that occurred at the beginning of The Two Puddifoots is typical:

Buffles. Oh, here you are at last, I've been shouting after you for the last hour.
Peggy. I though I heard you a hollering, but I can't be in two places at once if you hollars ever so!
Buffles. What have you been about?
Peggy. Looking over the crockery, and because
I do as you tell me I gets hollared at!

Buffles. Never mind! Now about the crockery—what state is it in?
Peggy. Well, there's one soup tooreen without 'ere a kiver!

Buffles. (shouting) Cover!
Peggy. That's right, hollar again! Two vegetable dishes, a fish kettle, two salad bowls—

Buffles. (very loud) Bowls!
Peggy. That's right, hollar again! About a dozen and a half plates, all sorts; some cracked, some chipped, but most of 'em cracked and chipped.

Buffles. So much the better. Thanks to the dilapidated state of the crockery department, I shan't be able to give any dinners!
Peggy. Yes you will, 'cause just as I was overhauling the crockery, your landlady, Mrs. Figsby, comes in, and I shows her the state of our'n.

Buffles. Ours!
Peggy. That's right, hollar again! (going up) Oh, here comes Mrs. Figsby. Come in ma'am, I've told master about his crockery, and he's very much obliged to you for lending him your'n!

Buffles. (shouting) Yours!
Peggy. That's right, hollar again!

Exactly why this device was employed by Morton is a mystery. Perhaps he wanted to appeal to the very lowest element in his audiences, or perhaps he was using this element as a means of social judgment. As Gustave Lanson says, "many farces are expressions of popular conscience, of its way of looking at domestic and social relationships." 33

33 The Two Puddifoots (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, n.d.).

In this vein, Mrs. Puddifoot, in *Aunt Charlotte's Maid*, shortened the name of Matilda to Tilda, to which Matilda objected. This was undoubtedly a means of putting Matilda down—not necessarily an intentional thing, but a familiarity that could not go both ways. Thus Matilda lost a part of her dignity. In any case, when this device was used, the servant was pictured as being stupid and slow and the master as being not too far above.

Exposition was revealed in two ways: (1) statements made by servants while doing household chores, and (2) in statements made in asides and soliloquies. Morton often opened a play with a brief scene which was followed by a long soliloquy in which the exposition was revealed. In several of the non-marriage plays, exposition was revealed throughout the show, and occasionally it grew out of the dialogue. Servants commenting on the action throughout the play like a Greek chorus was a method used in *My Wife's Bonnet*.

The *Times* writer of 1843 said that "a broad farce is usually composed of two elements—viz., the 'fun,' and the scaffolding on which the 'fun' depends." The "scaffolding" of Morton's plays was composed of many things. First, his plots were divided into three major categories: (1) plays in which an uncle is trying to marry his niece,
a guardian his ward, or a parent his child; (2) plays in which a husband or wife, a lover or fiancee masquerade as the conjugate partner of a third party; and (3) plays with divergent plots which were designated as non-marriage plays. Second, Morton used a number of devices which were designed to carry the action forward or to serve as elements of comedy. Among these were: misunderstandings, deus-ex-machina endings and farcical accidents, letters, repetitions, tricks and jokes, conflicts between master and servant, and the use of music. Third, Morton occasionally introduced unusual elements into his plots, and he always ended his plays with a "tag."
CHAPTER VII
CHARACTERS

If the characters of farce are the characters one meets in the mundane, ordinary situations of life; if they are mechanical rather than individual and properly designated as "stock" characters; if "the action of the play progresses not because of what the characters do, but because of what happens to the characters";¹ and if Morton's farce fits the accepted pattern of the broader genre, even to a degree, then at least some of these characteristics should be readily apparent from a breakdown of the characters in the farces used in this study. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to determine the kinds of characters used by Morton, with what frequency he used them, and what devices he used in the development of those characters.

There were 128 characters in the twenty-one plays used in this study, and of those characters, eighty-one were men and forty-seven were women. The heavy preponderance of men is somewhat misleading in that service characters were usually men, and several plays dealing with a military, or near military, situation used men

almost exclusively. If the five plays which might be labeled "military" are excluded from the analysis, the remaining fifteen plays used fifty-one men and forty women. The five plays in question are: The Trumpeter's Wedding, A Thumping Legacy, The "Alabama," Lend Me Five Shillings, and Chaos is Come Again. The breakdown of the fifteen plays is somewhat surprising when one considers the social position an actress held in the nineteenth century. Furthermore, a breakdown of mid-twentieth century plays would probably show a greater preponderance of men than the fifteen plays alone, for the simple reason that most plays contain more men than women.

The number of characters per play, including all service characters, was usually five, six, or seven. In fact, fifteen of the twenty-one plays fell into this category. Four plays had five characters, four had six, and seven had seven. Of the remaining six plays, two had eight characters, and four had a number of characters ranging two, three, four, and ten.

The types of characters created by John Maddison Morton are exactly the characters one might expect to find by reading the plots of his plays. Fathers, lovers, uncles and aunts, servants, nieces, daughters, wards, and husbands and wives were the characters from which he made his farces. Of the 128 roles, 100 were written for the types of
characters just named. And if the five plays mentioned above are again excluded, only fourteen roles in the remaining fifteen plays were written for a type of character not mentioned above. This is as one might expect, for if the material of farce is often marriage and the family, then most of the characters should represent the people one could find in that situation.

Following the practice of many playwrights before him, Morton used the names he gave to his characters as a means of describing those persons. For instance, Captain O'Scuttle in Poor Pillicoddy is the typical rough sea captain. Sarah calls him a "bear." He says to Pillicoddy, "and pray sir, didn't it occur to you, . . . that I was just the sort of man to cut your throat, or any other man's that dared to do me an injury." His costume is described as "a rough pea jacket, large white trousers, straw hat, &c." When he enters the stage he strides back and forth letting every bit of his Irish nature show.

The names of some of the other characters are just as descriptive. It does not take much imagination to know that Sarah Blunt is quite frank in her speech, that Mr. Sunnyside is optimistic, that Jacob Close is tight-lipped, and that Hugh De Brass is bold and brazen. Mr. Woodpecker is rather dumb, John Small is diminutive, Mr. Golightly goes as his name implies, and Jerry Ominous is anything but menacing. (see Appendix for a complete list of names.)
Characterization

Characterization, for the most part, is drawn in broad strokes and revealed in asides and soliloquies. Occasionally, however, characterization is revealed from the action or dialogue. In The Trumpeter's Wedding, much is told about the character of Goodlamb in a brief conversation he has with Nelly. Goodlamb is the Mayor of St. Albans, and, as such, the head of the puritan forces in their war with the followers of Charles II. It is early in the morning, and when Goodlamb sees a light in his niece's window, he stops to visit.

Good. I have—and I live to tell it! Wheugh! (Wipes his forehead.) I was about to visit the various posts of danger at the head of our brave townsmen, according to my morning custom, when I saw a light in your window, and so—

Nelly. And so, according to your morning custom, you left our brave townsmen to visit the posts of danger by themselves. Ha, Ha! Well, uncle—have you any news?

The character of Goodlamb is further drawn by his saying that St. Alban's will fight to the end, at least to the end of their fresh provisions. And when Sir Charles Rivers, the leader of the roundheads is captured, it is Goodlamb who suggests that they let Sir Charles go free if he will only agree to take over the city.

As for Sir Charles, there is no mystery about his character. He is pictured as brave, daring, and romantic—
the personification of the Cavalier image. Nelly calls him "brave," and Goodlamb calls him a "dare devil." He is also described by Goodlamb as a Robin Hood who has the ability to slip in and out of the town undetected. Goodlamb says he "thumps the men, and kisses the women." And when Charles finds it necessary to seek refuge in Nelly's room, he leaves little doubt about his love for women.

Sir Charles. (Jumps down, and seizes her hand.)
Be silent--hush! Girl, you'll not betray me?
Nelly. I--I--(looking eagerly at him.)
Eh--no--Sir Charles Rivers! (Taking off his hat.) It is--it is!
Sir C. As you say, it certainly is. But who are you?
Nelly. Nelly--Nelly Roberts!
Sir C. Nelly! My little foster sister--my pretty curly-headed playmate!
Nelly. Yes.
Sir C. That I used to tease so abominably?
Nelly. Yes.
Sir C. And then kiss into good humour again?
Nelly. Yes. Oh, those dear good old times!
(Wiping her mouth--Sir Charles kisses her.)
I see you've not forgotten them!

A very interesting little character shows up in Aunt Charlotte's Maid. Pivot is his name, and he enters late in the show as a complete unknown. As he enters he has a water pitcher put into his hands and is told not to tell anyone about it or he is likely to be strangled. He is completely mystified. A short time later he again enters the stage and has a warming pan thurst into his hands. Again he is told not to say anything. Later a young lady faints in his arms, and when she comes to, she threatens his life. At this point poor little Pivot, who has said
hardly a word, can only rush from the room crying "Help! Murder!" the warming pan dragging behind him.

Naturally some of the plays contain characters that are better developed than others. The Little Savage, as was said in the preceding chapter, has a quality of incompleteness about it, and yet it contains two or three very interesting characters. They are not interesting in themselves, but because they are obviously drawn with The Taming of the Shrew in mind. Parker as a Petruchio figure was mentioned earlier, and so was the scene in which Kate Dalrymple takes on qualities of the mad Ophelia as well as Katherine. In the scene where this occurs, Kate has been told that Lionel Larkins wrote a letter in which he described her in uncomplimentary terms. He did this in an attempt to keep Parker from wooing Kate, for he wants to marry her himself. Nevertheless, Kate is determined to get even with Larkins. The scene opens as Kate enters the room pretending to be mad.

Enter Kate, R., with a sheet of music, which she holds before her—a skipping rope over her arm—singing very much out of tune.

Kate. (sings) "No flower of her kindred—no rosebud" Oh, bother (tossing the music in the air) I shan't practice any more—I'll have a skip! (skips round the stage, till at length she throws the skipping rope over Lionel, and finds herself face to face with him, and then giggles)

Lionel. (aside) What an intellectual countenance! (makes Kate a low bow, she giggles again, and then bobs a curtsey—a side) And what a graceful curtsey! (aloud) My dear Miss Kate! (about to take her hand)
Kate. (suddenly snatches away her hand, and hitting Lionel over the fingers with the handle of her skipping rope) Come, I say, hands off!

Lionel. (aside) Playful trifler! (aside, and rubbing his hand) Rather a nuisance. (aloud, and tenderly) I'm delighted to see you alone.

Kate. (giggling) He, he, he!

Lionel. Because I've something to say to you!

Kate. Oh, oh, oh!

Lionel. Something very particular!

Kate. Ah, ah, ah!

Lionel. (aside, and imitating) He, he, he! Oh, oh, oh! Ah, ah, ah! rather an original style of conversation. (aloud) Of course you know what brought me here?

Kate. Yes, your horse—he, he, he! (swaying the skipping rope round, almost within an inch of his nose, he retreats)

Lionel. Exactly—but my motive? I repeat my motive? (very tenderly)

Kate. Lor'! how should I know? he, he, he!

(giggling)

This scene continues, but enough has been quoted to show the Ophelia part of her character. However, if there is any doubt, another quote should wash it away. This scene precedes the one just quoted. Parker has just told Kate that Larkins is the person who misrepresented her to him.

Kate. I cannot believe what you say!

Park. Will you believe Larkins, if Larkins himself confirms what I say of Larkins?

Kate. (quickly) Yes, yes!

Park. And then you'll reject him with the contempt he deserves?

Kate. Oh, dear no! he must reject me—I have my plan.

Park. Where?

Kate. "In my mind's eye, Horatio!"

Park. He's here! Quick into your room, and listen.

A peculiarity or two of Morton's in choosing his characters should be noted. His characters usually came
from several different walks of life, but he seems to have had an affinity for military men. At least one military figure appeared in twelve of the twenty-one plays. They were not necessarily given a prominent place in an inordinate number of cases, but they were included in the dramatis personae an unusual number of times. He also seems to have had an affinity for certain names. John Johnson, Junior was the name of the Intruder in *A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion*, and a John James Johnson appeared in *The Two Bonnycastles*. Mrs. Puddifoot appeared in *Aunt Charlotte's Maid*, and Puddifoot, Senior and Junior provided the title for *The Two Puddifoots*.

**Braggart Soldier**

Morton used a number of devices in helping to delineate character. The first of these to be discussed is that of the braggart soldier. The braggart soldier, going back to Plautus, is a stock character who is boastful in actions and language, but when the opportunity to prove his valor arrives, he finds it convenient not to fight, or he runs away to boast another day. Golightly acts the part of the braggart soldier in *Lend Me Five Shillings*. Golightly is in love with a widow, Mrs. Major Phobbs, but Golightly is not sure she is a widow. He finally comes to believe that Captain Phobbs, the lady's brother-in-law, is her husband, but since Mrs. Phobbs has
asked that Golightly escort her home from the ball they are attending, he is quite bold in his remarks to the Captain, who believes by this time that Golightly has been flirting with Mrs. Captain Phobbs. At any rate, Golightly almost gleefully goads the Captain, and when the Captain leaves saying that he will return, Golightly says, "The sooner, the better.--(aside.) I'll shoot him as dead as a herring, and then marry his widow." Golightly can afford to be brazen, for as long as there are no weapons in sight, the thought of a duel is really rather remote. But when the Captain does show up with the weapons, Golightly is frightened and has no intention of fighting. And when Moreland, another of the characters threatens Golightly, he faints.

In The "Alabama," Christopher Clipper is the braggart soldier; however, part of the humor created by his blustering results from the incongruity of a man acting very boldly in a costume much too large for him. He is given accidentally the suitcase of the Captain of the "Alabama." He decides, therefore, to use the Captain's uniform as a disguise and, in this way, get on board the ship. The stage directions say the uniform was "much too large and too long for him." Yet he says, "I flatter myself that's something like a fit. (then swaggers about, admiring himself) Not quite long enough in the tail perhaps." Exaggeration is undoubtedly the manner in which he
acted his part. When he gets the uniform on, he is immediately approached by O'Flynn and another sailor. Since only one person on board the ship has seen the new Captain, they mistake him for their new commander and address him as such. Clipper then says, "(aside) He takes me for the captain; it's all right! (aloud, and assuming a sailor's voice and manner) Well, my jovial tar—shiver my timbers—." On board the ship he frequently sways as if the ship is rocking with the storm that is supposed to be coming up at the moment, and his swaggering and posturing alternate with gestures of horror as he first talks to the crew as their Captain and then as he is blanched white with fear at the sound of a gun. He also alternates between confidence when he thinks he has the upper hand and lack of confidence when he knows he is in a position to lose. These extreme changes occur within the course of a very brief period of time, thus making them funny.

A stage direction shows a bit of the comic business in the action and further develops Clipper's character as a braggart. When a gun is heard to fire, Clipper says, "Lud a mercy! What's that?" The stage direction then says, "Phoebe and Clipper get back to back in a terrible fright—second gun—Phoebe screams and rushes into cabin, Clipper almost falling on his back."
The final scene is on the Quarter Deck of the "Alabama." This is the battle scene, and in the course of the fighting, the funnel is blown off and falls on the deck. Clipper has been told that the uniform of the captain is often the focal point of the opponent's gunfire, so he decides, even though it is hot and dirty, that the inside of the funnel is safer than the open deck. Again a stage direction relates the action:

cannon discharged and returned--musketry--loud shouts--Clipper, behind the funnel, bobbing his head, and giving way to a paroxysm of fright--at the sixth cannon the funnel falls with a crash--a shot is supposed to strike funnel, which falls on the stage--Clipper creeps into it.

When the fighting is over, Clipper climbs out of the funnel, only to find that things are not as peaceful as they seem:

Clipp. (crawling out of the funnel, covered with soot) Wheugh! it's too hot in there! So the captain's uniform is a favourite mark, is it? then let'em fire at it! (takes off coat, puts it on the end of a pike, sits down, and holds the coat up as high as he can above his head--firing, shouting, &c. renewed--Clipper drops pike and falls flat on his back--loud shouts of "Victory"--.

One character who just has to be a braggart soldier by virtue of his name is Jerry Ominous in A Thumping Legacy. Jerry has received a letter from a lawyer in Corsica telling him that his uncle has died leaving a large inheritance, and that Jerry only has to come to Corsica to claim the fortune. In reality his uncle is very much alive. He has
tricked Jerry into coming to Corsica, because he wants
Jerry to carry on the family feud that has been in existence
for many generations. When Jerry first enters the inn
owned by his uncle, we know the type of person he is. In
modern slang terminology, he "comes on strong," making
uncomplimentary statements about Corsica and its inhabi-
tants, but when he is challenged, he backs down and tries
another approach.

**Jer.** One thing I can't help remarking, and that
is, that the few natives of this island of the
masculine gender, I have seen, are by no means handsome--(the Brigadier starts)--always excepting the military--of course I meant the common people--the riffraff--like that ill-looking individual there. (pointing to Bambogetti, who starts up and advances to Jerry, who turns round and points at Filippo) I repeat, that ill-looking individual there. (aside) He's the landlord, and won't mind being insulted, because he can put it down in the bill.

Later in the play Jerry is approached by Leoni, the person his uncle wants him to kill as a result of the family feud. Rosetta, who is the daughter of Jerry's uncle and Leoni's lover, has told Leoni that Jerry has come to Corsica for the purpose of killing him.

**Leo.** Sir, I've a question to ask you.
**Jer.** It's no sort of use asking me any questions, my good young man. I'm not a native of these parts--I can't direct you.
**Leo.** That's the very reason I offer myself to conduct you to the person you are seeking--one Leoni.

**Jer.** (starting) Eh!--oh! ah! (aside) I'll swagger a bit. (aloud) Poor devil! he caught sight of me just now, and made a bolt of it. I suppose he's heard what a desperate fellow I am. (cutting and slashing
Leo. He stands before you!
Jer. The devil! (runs behind table) Sir,—I'm unarmed.
Leo. So am I.
Jer. Quite sure?
Leo. On my honour.
Jer. (buttoning up coat, and advancing) Then dash my buttons—(Leoni moves, Jerry runs back again).

As the conversation continues we see not only the actions of a cowardly soldier, but we get a good picture of some of the comic action. The repetition of Jerry continually offering his hand to Leoni, and the attitude with which it is done, makes the gesture funny.

Leo. Harkye, sir! I've heard of your humane intentions towards me—but I beg to tell you I'm not the man to sit quietly at an open window, and let you—(imitates firing a gun)
Jer. And I beg to tell you, sir, I'm not the man to see you sitting quietly at an open window, and—(imitating the action)
Leo. I'm glad to hear it, and I see we shall be able to settle the point to our mutual satisfaction.
Jer. I'm delighted to hear it—give us your hand. (about to take his hand—He draws it away)
Leo. I think there is a way to settle this ancient feud between our families.
Jer. I'm sure there is—we'll consider it settled. (holding out his hand.)
Leo. For, between ourselves, it's a very absurd thing.
Jer. Quite nonsensical. (holding out his hand)
Leo. My idea is—
Jer. I quite agree with you. (holding out his hand)
Leo. Why you haven't heard it.
Jer. Good gracious! What does that signify as long as I agree with it?—how particular you are.
Leo. Well then, you consent—pistols?
Jer. Eh?
Leo. Perhaps you prefer swords.
Jer. Swords!—what for?
Leo. What for!—why to fight with.
Jer. Fight—who?
Leo. Me!
Jer. You!
Leo. You!
Jer. Me!
Leo. We!
Jer. We!—you!—me!—we!—'pon my soul. sir, I don't understand.

The braggart soldier was thus used by Morton as a device of character and as a method of creating comedy. At least seven of the plays contained such a character.

An Element of Costume: Wigs

In three plays wigs were used as a means of establishing character. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that baldness was the method and that wigs were simply used to show vanity on the part of the characters who were bald. At any rate, the sudden revelation of baldness, when a wig was snatched off, was a source of humor.

The first play in which this device was used was *Betsy Baker.* Betsy attempts to make Mr. Marmaduke Mouser fall in love with her and is quite successful. Mr. Mouser, who is married, arranges to meet Betsy at his house. As he enters the room, thinking Mrs. Mouser is gone, the candles are blown out. He calls for Betsy, and Mrs. Mouser answers. He goes to her, thinking she is Betsy,

---

*Betsy Baker; or, Too Attentive by Half* (London: Samuel French, n.d.).
and she snatches his wig off, runs into her room, and shuts the door. Mouser is trying to coax the lady from the room, thinking all of the time that it is Betsy, when Betsy enters from the outside with Crummy, Mrs. Mouser's cousin. She sees Mouser in all his baldness; his age and foolishness revealed for all the world to see.

Bet. (seeing Mouser, and then bursting into a violent fit of laughter) Ha, ha, ha! Oh, my! What a guy! Ha, ha, ha!

Mous. What d'ye mean by a guy? (suddenly re-collecting—snatches Crummy's hat out of his hand, and puts it on) and how—how the deuce did you get out of that room?

In *Who Stole the Pocketbook*, Blossom wears his hat pulled down over his ears to keep from showing his baldness; and in *Chaos is Come Again*, Colonel Chaos is suddenly revealed to be bald when his nephew, Jack Bunce, snatches off his wig. Jack thinks his uncle is a detective who has come to arrest him, so he does everything he can to insult Chaos and make him look foolish. A stage direction says that he "snatches off his wig, flourishes it in his face, and runs among the dancers." Later, when Chaos is revealed to be his rich uncle, Jack begs forgiveness by falling on his knees, "pulling Chaos's wig out of his pocket, and burying his face in it—Chaos snatches the wig, and puts it on wrongside foremost."

The use of baldness and wigs was, therefore, a device Morton used to show age, vanity, and foolishness.
It is a sure method of getting a good laugh as well, for we always laugh when we see someone suddenly revealed as being something we had not thought him to be. We laugh because he has lost dignity and we still have ours; he is ridiculous and very human, and we are secure in knowing that our weaknesses are still hidden. The wig is a form of disguise, and the unmasking, which is a part of the disguise in farce, is funny.

"Stupid" Characters

The last character device to be discussed in this chapter is that of the "stupid" person who appears in at least eleven of the plays. This is the person who is the fall guy, and the butt of the joke. He is the one things happen to which causes the "fun" of the show. Mouser, Ominous, Golightly, Griggs, Bonnycastle, Sunnyside, Pillicoddy, Small, Volley, Buffles, and Clipper are all somewhat stupid. They do not understand, are insulted, react broadly and illogically, and the play usually revolves around them. If they but understood and acted in another manner, the raison d'être of the entire play would collapse. Martin Esslin talks about this character in his book on the absurd.

In the mimeplay of antiquity, the clown appears as the moros or stupidus; his absurd behavior arises from his inability to understand the simplest logical relations. Reich quotes the character who wants to sell his house and carries
one brick about with himself to show as a sample—a gag which is also attributed to the Arlecchino of the Commedia dell'arte. Another such character wants to teach his donkey the art of going without food. When the donkey finally dies of starvation, he says, "I have suffered a grievous loss; when my donkey had learned the art of going without food, it died." Another such moronic character dreams that he stepped on a nail and hurt his foot. Thereupon he puts a bandage round his foot. His friend asks him what has happened and, when told that he had only dreamed he stepped on a nail, he replies, "Indeed, we are rightly called fools! Why do we go to sleep in our bare feet?"

Of course the characters in Morton's plays are not quite as moronic as those in Esslin's examples, but they are definitely in the same vein. For instance, Golightly in *Lend Me Five Shillings* is interested in Mrs. M. Phobbs. She has been dancing with him, and he asks her for another dance. She refuses, because she thinks Moreland is unduly interested in her sister-in-law, Mrs. C. Phobbs, and she wants to keep an eye on them. Golightly keeps trying to make advances, and Mrs. M. Phobbs keeps rejecting him.

Goli. I assure you, my dear madam, I haven't words in my vocabulary to express my delight in meeting you again. Might I be allowed? (Offers his arm to Mrs. M. Phobbs).

Mrs. M. P. No; thank you!

Goli. May I press an ice upon you, or a bottle of ginger beer? (Tenderly)

Mrs. M. P. I'd rather not! (Coldly)

Goli. Shall we stroll through the rooms! (Offers his arm.)

Mrs. M. P. I am too fatigued!

---

Goli. Then I'll run and fetch a chair!
Mrs. M. P. I'd rather stand! (Annoyed)
Goli. Oh!—may I claim this fair hand for the
next quadrille!
Mrs. M. P. 'Tis already engaged!
Goli. May I enjoy the felicitous prospect of
polking with you?
Mrs. M. P. (Sharply.) Mr. Golightly, I wish you
to understand, sir, that I am engaged for the
whole of the evening. (Turns her back on
him, and joins Capt. Spruce and Mrs. C. Phobbs.
Spruce bows, and enters the Ball-Room, C.)
Goli. (After a pause.) Now, I don't want to flatter
myself, but I wish it to be distinctly under­
stood, that I consider myself very ill-treated—
the lovely woman has humiliated me—and with
respect to the lovely woman's assertion that
she's engaged for the whole of the evening,
I look upon the lovely woman as having per­
petrated a very considerable thumper: it's
evident she means to cut me, in which case,
the most manly course for me to adopt, is
obviously to cut her... 

One can certainly say that Golightly was not quickly insulted.

The characters in Morton's plays were the every­
day characters one might meet in a home situation. They
were members of the common occupations, and for the most
part, the action of the plays did not revolve around them
but what happened to them. Characterization was accom­
plished through asides and soliloquies and through certain
devices—the braggart soldier; the device which reveals
personal characteristics, such as vanity and foolishness as
revealed through baldness; and the "stupid" character of
farce. In other words, Morton's characters were, for the
most part, those one might expect to find in the normally
accepted definition of farce.
CHAPTER VIII

LANGUAGE

Though his plots and characters often came to his hand ready-made, since he did often borrow from French sources, the language used by J. M. Morton was peculiarly his own. The Times of 1850 says that "his verbal jokes in his best pieces are always original and thoroughly English, and in these and his power of fitting his actors his real strength lies."\(^1\) Two years later the same newspaper said that "Mr. Maddison Morton, the most prolific and happiest of our farce-writers, . . . though drawing in common with his brethren largely upon foreign sources, never fails to render his materials thoroughly English both in form and spirit."\(^2\) Two years passed again, and this time The Times said of one of Morton's plays that the "personages have more than a usual quantum of fun in their mouths, through the talent of Mr. J. M. Morton for comic dialogue, . . ."\(^3\) Others who have written about Morton echo the accumulated testimony of The Times. His

\(^1\)The Times (London), April 17, 1850., p. 8.
\(^2\)Ibid., April 3, 1852, p. 5.
\(^3\)Ibid., June 5, 1854, p. 10.
plays were thoroughly English throughout, but his strength as a playwright lay in his ability to write dialogue that was fresh, original, and witty. Six years after the last quotation from The Times, the writer for that paper saw the original production of A Regular Fix. In his review, he again praised Morton's ability to write dialogue.

Mr. Morton's dialogue comes off with all the freshness of originality, his characters rattling away their defiances to common sense in a manner that no author can approach. The whole thing is nonsense from beginning to end, and will be called nonsense by every one who has seen it. But there is no mistake about the laughter which this nonsense evokes.4

The characteristics of Mr. Morton's dialogue is the subject of this chapter. Misunderstandings, verbal repartee, repetitions, incongruities and nonsense, mix-ups, and parodies and puns are some of the constituents to be considered.

As has been pointed out in previous chapters, misunderstandings abound in Morton's plays. All of the dramas of the husband/wife category depend heavily on this device, and a number of the other plays also find it useful. Hazlitt says, "Misunderstandings, (malentendue) where one person means one thing, and another is aiming at something else, are another great source of

comic humour, on the same principle of ambiguity and contrast. As a dramatist, Morton undoubtedly realized the value of a misunderstanding in not only creating a humorous situation but in the creation of character and dialogue.

Misunderstandings in Morton's plays usually take three forms: (1) a misunderstanding involving a single word, (2) a misunderstanding involving a segment of language, and (3) a misunderstanding of a situation. In the first of these, misunderstanding a word, a character often reveals his lack of education and knowledge. He thus becomes a "stupid" character who is inferior to the enlightened audience. As such a person, Jerry Ominous asks his uncle by what right he tricked him into coming to Corsica to continue a family feud that should have died generations ago, and Filippo replies, "by the right of consanguinity!" Jerry says, "That's a long word! What is it?" and Filippo replies, "Blood." Jacob Close also reveals his ignorance of the language but shows a great deal of knowledge about


6A Thumping Legacy.
the financial realities of life in the following brief conversation between himself and Mrs. Topheavy:

Mrs. T. Jacob Close, can you keep a secret?
Jac. I'll keep anything you give me, ma'am.
Mrs. T. Jacob, I'm a physiognomist—and I haven't looked into your fine expressive features for the last six weeks, without saying to myself, "That is a man to be trusted."
Jac. Then I wish my baker and butcher were physiognomists!...

Mr. and Mrs. Whiffles in *Done on Both Sides* are at loss as to the meaning of a brief French phrase, but Mrs. Whiffles is of the opinion that it must be good. Brownjohn says, "Miss Lydia Whiffles will pardon my addressing her before, but the epicure always reserves the *bonne bouche* till the last." Mrs. Whiffles is delighted to hear this, and so she says to Whiffles, "*Bonne bouche!* isn't that elegant?" Whiffles can only reply, "I dare say it is--only I don't happen to know what it means!" One cannot help getting the feeling that Mrs. Whiffles was as much in the dark as her husband.

Occasionally words are understood but difficult to pronounce. Mr. Phibbs in *Done on Both Sides* has this problem. He hesitates when asked what his occupation is, but when Lydia wants to know if he is uncertain as to his occupation, he says:

7 *My Wife's Second Floor.*
Oh, yes, I know what I am--of course I do. Nevertheless, I've been what I am for a considerable period, I've never once been distinctly able to say what I am. In short, to be candid with you, I can't pronounce the word! However, to oblige you, I don't mind trying once more. You must know then, that I'm a Veterinary--a Veteri-inny--a Vet--it's no use! But I attend to the bodily infirmities of quadruped in general, and of horses in particular.

Longer segments of language are sometime misunderstood by a character. In the case of Rosamond in A Capital Match the misunderstanding in intentional. Sunnyside is trying to create a romantic interest between Rosamond and Captain Tempest, but neither is interested. Rosamond deliberately misunderstands what Sunnyside wishes her to do, and the following scene is the result:

Sun. Give the man some encouragement--smile at the man!
Ros. (looking at the man, and smiling) Will that do? (aside to Sunnyside)
Sun. It's more like a grin, but it's better than nothing! Now speak to him.
Ros (to Tempest) How do you do, sir? I hope you're pretty well.
Sun. (aside, and triumphantly to Tempest) There, d'ye hear that? She hopes you're pretty well--didn't I tell you she adored you? (aloud) Well, Miss Rosamond, you see my gallant friend, the Captain, has followed you to Cheltenham. (hastily aside to Rosamond) Give a start!
Ros. Ah! (with a violent start)
Sun. Poo! don't be a fool--you could give a start without jumping a yard-and a half off the ground, couldn't you? (aloud) Yes, Miss Rosamond--and, what's more, he talks of making a long stay here--(prompting Rosamond in a very rapid tone)--the longer the better.
Ros. (in the same rapid tone) The longer the better.
Sun. (in an agony) No, no!
Ros. (aloud) No, no!
Sun. Not so!
Ros. Not so!
Sun. Hush! (aloud) Yes, and who knows but he may have the intention of marrying and settling here if a certain young lady--(aside)--turn red!

Ros. (aside to him) I can't.

Sun. Then turn white, blue, green--I don't care what, as long as you change color! (aloud) I repeat, if a certain young lady--

Cap. (taking Sunnyside's arm, and aside to him) My dear fellow, I'm very much obliged to you--but this is all labour thrown away. I have seen Mrs. Singleton--I've proposed to her for Miss Rosamond--

Sun. Well.

Cap. (taking out his pocket-handkerchief) And have been rejected (burying his face in his hands).

The Captain's sorrow is feigned, since he and Mrs. Singleton are in love and plan to be married.

_whitebait at Greenwich is one long misunderstanding._

Benjamin and Lucretia Buzzard both think that John Small has come to their house for the sole purpose of blackmail. They both married against the wishes of a wealthy aunt who has said she will disinherit the one who marries, and each was served a wedding dinner by John Small at the Crown and Sceptre inn in Greenwich. Now, much to their horror, John Small has been sent to them as a servant by their aunt. Benjamin tries to dismiss Small, but he is mortified when Small pulls out a snuff box that Benjamin left at the Crown and Sceptre. They both speak, but because of the situation, they each misunderstand what the other is saying.

Buz. Indeed! Ah, but I have changed my mind, my young friend; besides, you don't suit me.
Small. Come, I like that, you haven't tried me yet! I can only say I gave satisfaction at my last place, the Crown and Sceptre, at---

Buz. (interrupting him and still pretending to brazen it out) Crown and Sceptre--what's that--where's that?

Small. What's that--where's that? Come that won't do--do you mean to say you've never been there to eat whitebait--you know you have (nudging him).

Buz. (aside and fanning himself) He says, I know I have--it's all over with me! no it isn't! --as I've said more than once already, he's got no proof's, so here goes again--who's afraid? (aloud to Small) Once for all, young man, I decline taking you into my service.

Small. Very well, Mr. Buzzard, only you'll allow me to say this isn't exactly the ticket--no, sir, it's several degrees removed from the ticket; in short, Mr. Buzzard, it isn't the sort of treatment one gentleman expects from another (pulling out the snuff box and taking a pinch of snuff, then twists the box about between his fingers)

Buz. (recognizing the box--aside) My snuff box (aloud and suddenly grasping SMALL'S arm, and in a low and pathetic tone to him) I see that further concealment is impossible --you know everything.

Small. (aside) He says I know everything. (aloud) No, not everything, but of course I couldn't pursue my avocation as a waiter, for a whole whitebait season, at the Crown and Sceptre--

Buz. Hush!

Small. Especially in the Diana and the Apollo---

Buz. Hush!

Small. Without occasionally picking up some useful matter or other. (tapping the box)

Buz. Hush!

Small. Which it will be my own fault if I don't turn to my advantage.

Buz. (very loud) Hush! (still grasping his arm) you've got me in your clutches.

Small. Excuse me, you've got me in yours, and rather too tight to be pleasant too.
Buz. And now--I tremble while I ask it--what are your intentions?
Small. Why since you won't engage me, I must make the best of it I can, of course.
(tapping the lid of the snuff box)
Buz. (aside) That's as much as to say I must purchase his silence. (aloud and mysteriously)
I understand you, what's your figure?

This conversation continues, and the misunderstandings grow even more pronounced, but enough has been quoted to illustrate the point. A little later in the show a similar misunderstanding leads Small to conclude that Benjamin is his father. Since the audience was well aware of the true situation, the dialogue between the two men must have been quite funny.

Another incident of this nature occurs in Ticklish Times. Jansen, a seaman, has been told that Sir William Ramsey is now going by the name of Griggs, so when he finds a man who answers to the name of Griggs, Jansen assumes the man is Sir William. The following conversation is the result:

Jansen. (L.--mysteriously--in a strong Dutch accent.) Are you Mister Griggs?
Griggs. (hesitating) Well---
Jansen. I know--dat is de name you go by.
   (significantly.) De captain couldn't come.
Griggs. Oh! The captain couldn't come. (bothered)
Not poorly, I hope?
Jansen. Nein! So he say to me, "Jansen"--dat is my name.
Griggs. Oh--Johnson!
Jansen. Nein--Jansen!
Griggs. Well, I said, "Johnson."
Jansen. "Jansen, go up to Mr. Bodkin's house--see Griggs--and tell him it's all right down dere." (significantly, and pointing over his shoulder.)
Griggs. Well, I'm glad to hear it's all right down there--because it's all wrong up here.
Jansen. "Then tell him de 'Lively Polly' is waiting for him two miles out to sea.
Griggs. I'm sure I'm very much obliged to lively Polly--whoever the lady is.
Jansen. Lady! Bah! she's de sheep.
Griggs. Oh! She's the sheep, is she?
Jansen. Yah, de prig--you know what I mean.
Griggs. Of course, she's a prig: (aside.) I haven't the most remote particle of an idea what he's talking about.
Jansen. Yah, and a beauty she is--she'll carry you over the water like a duck.
Griggs. Will she? (aside.) Then she must be an extraordinary woman.

Morton seems to have been very fond of verbal repartee. The Times of 1849 said in its review of John Dobbs, "the dialogue is in Mr. Morton's best manner, abounding in repartee really extravagant, but so skillfully managed as to seem almost natural, ..." The master/servant conflicts mentioned in the preceding chapter were a form of repartee, but this was a technique that Morton often used with other characters. Fast, witty exchanges exhibiting verbal dexterity and abounding in misunderstandings and retorts are characteristic of this device. Puns and a touch of the absurd is noticeable in an exchange between Silvertop and Woodpecker as they talk about the dinner they have ordered in Who Stole the Pocket-Book?

---

8 The Times (London), April 24, 1849, p. 8.
Sil. By-the-bye, Woodpecker, what have you ordered in the way of eating and drinking? Eh--any fish?
Wood. Yes.
Sil. What?
Wood. Soles?
Sil. Fried?
Wood. Fried!
Sil. I've ordered fried soles! What to follow?
Wood. Mutton.
Sil. Leg?
Wood. Leg!
Sil. Roast?
Wood. Roast!
Sil. That's awkward, I've ordered roast leg of mutton! Any pastry?
Wood. Gooseberry.
Sil. Pie?
Wood. Pudding!
Sil. So have I. Malt Liquor?
Wood. Porter.
Sil. Bottled?
Wood. Bottled!
Sil. So have I! Why the dinners are exactly the same.

After reading a number of Morton's plays, one begins to look for one or two instances of verbal repartee to appear in each play. They did appear in a majority of the plays, and, for the most part, they were an integral part of the dialogue. Occasionally, however, they appeared to be placed indiscriminately in a blatant effort to cause laughter. Such was the case in My Wife's Bonnet. Poor Pillicoddy, on the other hand, contained an example of repartee that contributed to the delineation of character, or at least was in keeping with the rest of the dialogue. Pillicoddy falsely assumes that the Captain O'Scuttle who appears saying that Mrs. O'Scuttle is in Pillicoddy's house is the O'Scuttle everyone thought drowned, and since he has
married the "widow" of the drowned Captain O'Scuttle, Pillicoddy believes the man has come to demand Mrs.
Pillicoddy on the basis of his prior claim. On the other hand, Captain O'Scuttle, who is a cousin of the drowned captain, did see his wife enter the house of Pillicoddy. She has come, unknown to Pillicoddy, to visit Mrs. Pillicoddy. The following scene then takes place between Pillicoddy and Captain O'Scuttle:

Pil. You and I, at this present moment, have only one wife between us.
Capt. What, you don't mean to say you've married my wife?
Pil. Certainly not, sir. I've married your widow.
Capt. Widow? How can that be, when I'm alive?
Pil. But you have no business to be alive--it's the height of absurdity on your part to be alive.
Capt. Faithless, perjured woman! But I'll be the death of her!
Pil. Then we shall be worse off than we are now--we shall have no wife at all between us.
Capt. It certainly is a bit of a blunder.
Pil. A very considerable bit.
Capt. However, luckily, the remedy is simple enough.
Pil. I'm delighted to hear it. What is it?
Capt. Either I shoot you, or you shoot me.
Pil. It's very handsome of you to give me the choice. I'll shoot you.
Capt. (Fiercely.) No! Pil. Can any thing be fairer?
Capt. No!
Pil. Very well, then---
Capt. No!
Pil. Why, just now you---
Capt. No!
Pil. You distinctly said---
Capt. No!
Pil. Yes--you've said no several time, but---
Capt. That'll do! Tell Mrs. O'Scuttle---
Pil. Mrs. Pillicoddy!
Capt. Mr. O'Scuttle!
Pil. Pillicoddy!
Capt. Tell her to pack up instantly, and prepare to accompany her lawful husband—-
Pil. That's me!
Capt. Me!
Pil. Me!
Capt. I'll be back directly.
Pil. (Not listening to him.) Me!
Capt. You hear!
Pil. Me! (Shouting after him.) Me!

Just as repetitions constituted a part of the plot structure, they also appear as a language device. There are three distinct ways in which Morton used this device: (1) general repetitions, (2) the repetition of a name, and (3) the repetition of a phrase.

General repetitions are somewhat difficult to explain in that specific words were not often repeated. And yet, a feeling of having heard the language before kept occurring in reading certain plays. For instance, *Box and Cox* seems to repeat itself a number of times before the play ends, and Benjamin, Lucretia, Sally, and Glimmer keep saying basically the same thing to John Small in *Whitebait at Greenwich*. Occasionally, however, certain basic speeches are repeated. In *Poor Pillicoddy* the following conversation takes place between Sarah and Mrs. Pillicoddy:

Mrs. P. When your master comes in, tell him I wish to speak with him.
Sarah. Yes ma'am. Any orders for dinner, ma'am?
Mrs. P. Ask your master.
Sarah. Yes, ma'am. Hadn't the kittens better be drowned, ma'am?
Mrs. P. Ask your master. (Exit, D.L.H.L.E.) Sarah. Ask your master. And when I go ask master, it'll be, "Ask your missus." I begin to suspect there's a change a-taking place.

And when Sarah does ask Pillicoddy, she gets the reply she expected:

Sarah. (Going.) Any order for dinner, sir? Pil. Ask your mistress. Sarah. (aside.) I said so... (Stopping at R.H.) Hadn't the kittens better be drowned, sir? Pil. Ask your mistress. Sarah. (Aside.) I said so... .

Morton gets good mileage out of the repetition of a name in a few plays. Eugene Ionesco used this technique in the repetition of the name Bobby Watson in his 1952 play, The Bald Soprano.\footnote{Eugene Ionesco, The Bald Soprano, trans. by Donald M. Allen (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1965).} Repeat anything often enough over a period of time, and it tends to be humorous. Northrop Frye postulates that "repetition overdone or not going anywhere belongs to comedy, for laughter is partly a reflex, and like other reflexes it can be conditioned by a simple repeated pattern."\footnote{Northrop Frye, "The Structure of Comedy," in Aspects of the Drama, edited by Sylvan Barnet, Morton Berman, and William Burto (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1962), p. 77.} Frye further expounds on repetition and its uses in comedy in the same article.
The principle of repetition as the basis of humor both in Johnson's sense and in ours is well known to the creators of comic strips, in which a character is established as a parasite, a glutton (often confined to one dish), or a shrew, and who begins to be funny after the point has been made every day for several months. Continuous comic radio programs, too, are much more amusing to habitués than to neophytes.\footnote{Ibid.}

In A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion Morton has Snoozle repeat the name of a young man from whom he has just received one of many letters asking for permission to marry Snoozle's niece.

Holloa! what's this? (taking a letter from off the table, and examining it) Another letter from Mr. John Johnson, Junior. I'll swear to the hand--and well I may--I've had sixteen of them. Now, if there is any one thing in the world that could possibly put me into a state of excitement, it is this Mr. John Johnson, Junior's indefatigable perseverance. To his first letter--containing a modest proposal for the hand of my niece, Maria Matilda--I returned a civil, but decided negative. I didn't know Mr. John Johnson, Junior--I had never seen Mr. John Johnson, Junior--I had never heard of Mr. John Johnson, Junior--and it wasn't very probable that I was going to give myself the trouble of enquiring who Mr. John Johnson, Junior, was--or, what Mr. John Johnson, Junior was. Was it rational to suppose that I, of all men in the world, was going to put myself into a state of excitement about Mr. John Johnson, Junior? Of course not! Consequently, his next half-dozen letters were unanswered--and his next lot, of which this is the ninth, weren't even opened--so go in there, Mr. John Johnson, Junior!

Morton has another character's name repeated in
a similar fashion in Betsy Baker. Crummy brings news to Mr. Mouser, the head man in their law firm, that Mrs. Major-General Jones wants a divorce from her husband, and she wants Mouser to handle the case. Mouser says:

I'll have nothing to do with it. Major-General Jones has never offended me--what right, then, have I to stand between Major-General Jones and Mrs. Major-General Jones, and say to Major-General Jones, "Major-General Jones, take a last look at Mrs. Major-General Jones, for you'll never set your eyes on Mrs. Major-General Jones again?" It's absurd.

The third type of repetition was the most frequently used by Morton. In this case, a servant or rather "stupid" character repeats a single phrase throughout the play. In My Wife's Bonnet Fanny is fond of saying "queer! decidedly queer," and Peggy is continually saying "that's right, hollar again" in The Two Puddifoots. Jacob Close is proud that his motto is "eyes open, mouth shut," which might be countered with Hugh De Brass's "I don't know why I should, but I did." Finally, Woodpecker keeps repeating "them's my sentiments, and I'll stick to 'em" in Who Stole the Pocket-Book?, and Colonel Chaos frequently says that "I may be wrong, but that's my opinion."
Buffles, in *The Two Puddifoots*, has a line in the first part of the play that is highly reminiscent of the very funny, and oft repeated "Brazil, where the nuts come from" line in *Charley's Aunt*.\(^15\) Buffles is telling Mrs. Figsby about his sister, and he says, "to cut a long story short, Mrs. Figsby, my sister Betsy, who lives in Banbury—you know, where the cakes come from—has a daughter christened Caroline—. . . ."

Perhaps the most original and greatest of Morton's contributions to the art of playwriting came in the use of absurdities, that is, Morton's use of the ridiculous, the improbable, the incongruous, and the non-sensical. It will be recalled that one definition of farce was "a play in which exaggerated types of possible people are found in possible but improbable circumstances, where actions are usually out of all proportion to the motives which prompt them, . . ."\(^16\) The exaggerated improbabilities of farce led Eugene Ionesco to use the farcical form in writing his plays. He says:


It was not for me to conceal the devices of the theatre, but rather make them still more evident, deliberately obvious, go all-out for caricature and the grotesque, way beyond the pale irony of witty drawing-room comedies. No drawing-room comedies, but farce, the extreme exaggeration of parody. Humor, yes, but using the methods of burlesque. Comic effects that are firm, broad and outrageous. No dramatic comedies either. But back to the unendurable. Everything raised to paroxysm, where the source of the tragedy lies, a theatre of violence: violently comic, violently dramatic.17

Much of the action and dialogue of many of Morton's plays lies in the realm of the improbable—the absurd. The words of the reviewer for The Times of 1860 should be recalled:

It is by a startling violation of all logical rule, or a striking contradiction to the teachings of universal experience, that he surprises his audience into a roar. Absurdity could not go further than the assertion of Box that Cox must be his long-lost brother, because he had not a particular mark upon his arm. Nothing could be more outrageously nonsensical than the statement of a gentleman (in his last new farce) to the effect that his father died in giving him birth, and that his mother died of grief shortly afterwards.18

The section of Box and Cox to which the writer referred is found at the end of the play. Box and Cox have received the letter from Penelope Ann saying she has decided to marry another, and Mrs. Bouncer has informed


18The Times (London), October 13, 1860, p. 7.
them that one of them may move into another room. By this time, however, they have grown fond of each other and neither wants to move. The following conversation then occurs:

Cox. I don't want it!
Box. No more do I!
Cox. What shall part us?
Box. What shall tear us asunder?
Cox. Box!
Box. Cox! (about to embrace--Box stops, seizes Cox's hand, and looks eagerly in his face)
You'll excuse the apparent insanity of the remark, but the more I gaze on your features, the more I'm convinced that you're my long-lost brother.
Cox. The very observation I was going to make to you!
Box. Ah--tell me--in mercy tell me--have you such a thing as a strawberry mark on your left arm?
Cox. No!
Box. Then it is he! (they rush into each other's arms)

Ridicule in Morton's writings often appeared in the form of a deliberate corruption of a man's name. When Brownjohn is told, in Done on Both Sides, that the name of the person he takes to be the servant is Pygmalion, he says, "Pygmalion is such a mouthfull! You should abbreviate him--curtain him--cut him down!" When asked how this should be done, Brownjohn says, "I'll show you. (to Phibbs.) Here Piggy!" The device is also used in Poor Pillicoddy. Pillicoddy has trouble keeping the name of Captain Fitzpatrick O'Scuttle straight, and Captain O'Scuttle returns the favor with interest. Upon meeting Pillicoddy, the Captain derisively says:
Capt. I believe your name is Pilli something or other?
Pil. No, sir, it is not Pilli something or other—it's Pillicoddy! John Peter Pillicoddy.
Capt. No matter.

To mix-up a man's name in such a manner is the ultimate ridicule, for to each man his name is something that matters. To corrupt that name is to say that the person is a nonentity. If it is accidently done, it implies that the man is so unimportant that his name is not worth remembering; if it is deliberately done, it is to insult by taking away a man's name. In Lend Me Five Shillings, the ridicule is exaggerated to the point of the laughable--the ridiculous. Captain Phobbs thinks Golightly is making advances toward his wife, so he is in a very foul mood:

  Capt. P. (coming back to Golightly.) So,—Mr. Go--brightly!
  Goli. Go--lightly, Sir.
  Capt. P. Your're still here--eh?
  Goli. I'm not aware of being anywhere else!
  Capt. P. Then Mr. Go--slightly---
  Goli. Go--lightly, Sir, ---omit the S.
  Capt. P. Yet stay--before I enter into particulars, allow me to give you an insight into the state of my mind.--Mr. Go--tightly!
  Goli. Go--lightly, Sir,--I never do go tightly!

The author of a "Letter on The Imposter," written in 1667, gave his views as to why the ridiculous is so funny:

When we see a ridiculous action, our knowledge of the folly of this action raises us above the one who performs it, because on the one hand, since no one consciously behaves unreasonable, we assume that the person involved does not know
it to be unreasonable, and believes it to be reasonable. Therefore, he is in error and in ignorance, which naturally we consider evils; besides, by the very fact that we recognize his error, are we exempt from it. Hence, in that, we are more enlightened, more perfect—in short, more than he. Now this knowledge of being superior to another is very pleasing to us; from it derives the fact that the contempt which enfolds this knowledge is always mixed with pleasure. Now this pleasure and this contempt comprise the emotions which the ridiculous provokes in those who witness it. And as these two emotions are founded on the two most ancient and most peculiarly characteristic weaknesses of the human race, pride and complaisance in the ills of others, it is not strange that the sense of ridicule is so strong and that it transports the soul as it does.19

Morton's writing is often funny because of its sheer incongruity. All of a sudden a line that is completely out of keeping with the remainder of the dialogue surprises an audience into a fit of laughter. Such is the case in Betsy Baker. When Crummy asks Betsy if she has been walking in the evenings with a young clerk from his office, she replies: "Yes, sir. We've rather delicate constitutions both of us, so we generally go out for a little fresh air and exercise every Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday, and Saturday, after work hours. We can't get out any other evenings, sir. . . ."

William Hazlitt says "the essence of the laughable... is the incongruous, the disconnecting one idea from another, or the jostling of one feeling against another." The incongruity of the lines in a scene in The Two Puddifoots undoubtedly proved to be quite laughable for the audience. Mr. Puddifoot is telling Buffles about his former relationship with Clementina Jones:

Puddi. Then I'll tell you--finding myself a widower with a he baby of ten years growth, I resolved to give it a stepmother, and after mature deliberation I at length pitched upon Clementina Jones--you remember Clementina Jones?

Buffles. Did I ever see her?

Puddi. Never!

Buffles. Then I don't remember her!

Puddi. The day was fixed for our nuptials, when somehow or other I suddenly discovered that I couldn't possible exist without Charlotte--tall Charlotte--you remember her?

Buffles. Tall Charlotte! Let me see, she was tall, wasn't she?

Puddi. Pshaw! Clementina was furious, and a terrific scene took place, ... .

The absurd qualities of the language often have a very modern sound, and there is even an almost ominous quality in some of the Intruder's lines from A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion. The Intruder thrusts himself into the home of Snoozle unwanted and unannounced. He does not identify himself and insists that he must spend the rest of his life protected by Snoozle. He is going to

---

tell, unsolicited, his life story. At the beginning of
the dialogue Snoozle says he wishes he were in the next
county.

Int. Do you. Well, wait till you've heard my
story, and then you can go! Now, then--
but before I begin, I think it necessary
to mention--(taking up a plate from off
the table, and playing with it--Snoozle
takes it out of his hand) I repeat, I
think it necessary to mention that there
are one or two points in my history that
may probably strike you as somewhat re-
markable.

Sno. (disgusted) Oh, go on, do!

Int. In the first place, I never had any mother
or father. That's a singular fact, isn't it?

Sno. Oh, come, come--

Int. Well, if you doubt it, I refer you to them!
Consequently, I never had any name. That's
another singular fact! So what do you think
I did? I christened myself--stood my own
godfather and godmother! That's another
singular fact, eh? (opening and shutting
tea caddy--Snoozle removes it to table R.)
And what name do you think I gave myself?

Sno. I'm sure I don't know.

Int. Of course you don't--but you can guess,
big man--you can guess--(taking toasting
fork, and pricking him.)

Sno. (disgusted) Well, then, perhaps you called
yourself Thomas, or John--

Int. That's it! John! Ah, somebody told you.
Yes, I called myself John. I like John--
don't you?

Sno. (yawning) Very much indeed!

Int. I don't believe you do. If you don't, say
so. I've not the slightest objection to
christen myself again--it's not the least
trouble. Perhaps you prefer James? With
all my heart. We'll say James!

Sno. (shouting) I don't care!

Int. You're sure you don't? Then why object to
John?

Sno. I didn't!

Int. Very well--then John it is. But, seriously--
if you really prefer James--
A little later the Intruder asks Snoozle what he calls himself, and the following scene is the result. The Intruder is talking about his mother.

Int. Well-(putting a piece of sugar in his mouth--Snoozle removes sugan basin)--the house she lived in--I mean, while she was alive, not since--was surrounded by a hedge of flourishing young ash plants. Well, one day, Mr.------- By and bye, what's your name?

Sno. Snoozle, Sir!

Int. Snoozleser!

Sno. Snoozle!

Int. Snoozleser--it suddenly occurred to me that I'd call myself Ashplant, and what's more, I did call myself Ashplant. Well, I thought the name would do very well. What do you think?

Sno. I think so too.

Int. Then you're wrong, because it won't! No, for on revisiting, the other day, the scenes of my childhood, I found, to my dismay, that every alternate ash plant has been removed, and its place supplied by a holy bush.

Sno. Well, what of that?

Int. What of that? Well, I'm surprised at you! Doesn't it follow, as a natural consequence, that I don't know now whether to call myself Ashplant or Hollybush? Which do you like best?

Sno. (very quickly) Ashplant, Sir! I unhesitatingly decide in favour of Ashplant--so, get on!

Int. Well, I'm sorry for that, because I rather prefer Hollybush. However, if you're particular about your Ashplant, I'll give up my Hollybush. I can't say more.

The Times writer of 1860 spoke of the nonsensical quality of the dialogue in A Regular Fix. He said:

Mr. Morton's dialogue comes off with all the freshness of originality, his characters rattling away their defiances to common sense in a manner that no author can approach. The whole thing is nonsense from beginning to end, and will be called nonsense by every one who has seen it. But there
is no mistake about the laughter which this nonsens
evokes. The plot of A Regular Fix is jumbled and complicated in the
telling, but it is undoubtedly crystal clear when seen on the stage. Hugh De Brass accompanies a friend to a party
in a stage of advanced inebriation, where he falls asleep in an arm chair and does not wake up until the following morning. Then, much to his surprise, he finds a letter in his pocket, which had been given to him the day before, saying that the law officials were looking for him because of past debts. Since he does not have any money or prospects of getting any unless a cousin thirteen times removed dies and leaves him an inheritance, De Brass decides to try to avoid the law. At this moment he looks out of a window and sees Pounce, a law official, leaning against a lamp post on the opposite side of the street. The entire play is thus concerned with De Brass's efforts to remain in the house to keep from encountering Pounce. He learns bits and pieces of information from several members of the family and uses this knowledge to keep from going outside. At one point he has to face the head of the house, a lawyer, and explain to him what his mission is. The following scene is the result, and although it is quite long, it cannot be fully appreciated without being

21The Times (London), October 13, 1860, p. 7.
read in its entirety. It is utter nonsense, totally absurd, and even though the purpose is not the same, it is highly reminiscent of the language of The Bald Soprano by Eugene Ionesco.

De B. Ahem! (aside) I've not the remotest idea what to say! (aloud) Amidst the gathering thunder-clouds which threatened to convulse the social and political economy of the civilized world—I allude, of course, to the latter period of the reign of the Second George—-

Surp. Beg pardon—but you're going a long way back!
De B. Very well—I'll begin with myself. You must know then—that I was born—it may seem extraordinary—that I was born of humble, but honest parents, and came into this world at a very early period of my existence.

Surp. (smiling) There's nothing very extraordinary in that!
De B. I didn't say there was—I merely mention it as a fact. (Half rising in his chair, and looking towards window, aside) There must be something positively adhesive in that lamp-post, for Pounce to stick to it as he does! (aloud) Let me see—where was I?—Perhaps I'd better begin again. Amidst the gathering thunder-clouds—-

Surp. No no—You had just come into the world at a very early period of your existence.
De B. True! Unfortunately—with pretended emotion) my father died in giving my birth.
Surp. No! No! your mother!
De B. Alas! she soon followed him!
Surp. No—you mean your father soon followed your mother.
De B. (looking at Surplus with admiration) True! You're a great creature! nothing escapes your gigantic intellect! Well! where was I?—perhaps I'd better begin again. Amidst the gathering thunder-clouds—-

Surp. No, no—you had just lost your parents.
De B. True! And consequently I was left childless! (affected)
Surp. (affected) Yes, yes! (suddenly) No, no!
De B. Yes—yes—no—no—yes—no! Really you confuse me to that degree—I'd better begin again. Amidst the gathering thunder-clouds that—-
(looking towards window) He's gone! Pounce has vanished! Huzzah! (jumps up and seizing Surplus's hand shakes it violently)
Bless you, bless you! (taking Surplus's hat off table, and putting it on, as he runs up stage towards door, C.—suddenly stops)
Zounds! Pounce is back at his post again! Confound it! (dashing Surplus's hat violently on table, comes down)

Surp. Holloa! What the deuce are you about?
De B. (R. quietly seating himself again) Why, of course I'm about to--Let me see, where did I leave off?--Perhaps I'd better begin again. Amidst the gathering thunderclouds---

Surp. Psaw! In a word, my dear Mr.---
De B. Brown.
Surp. No, you said White!--no, it was Grey!
De B. Of course, Grey.
Surp. Then you can't be Brown!
De B. Eh! Really, my dear sir, you confuse me so, it's enough to make any man change colour! However, as I was saying, on the death of my uncle Benjamin---

Surp. Who the devil's he?
De B. Didn't I tell you?--my father's sister.
Surp. Pshaw! you mean brother.
De B. I said so distinctly--my brother's sister. Well, when he died he left three sons behind him: John the eldest---

Surp. John the eldest.
De B. Jeremiah the youngest.
Surp. Jeremiah the youngest.
De B. And James in the middle.
Surp. And James in the middle.
De B. Be good enough to remember the order in which they come, because it is important: John the eldest, Jeremiah in the middle---

Surp. No, James in the middle!
De B. I said James in the middle!
Surp. No, you said Jeremiah!
De B. And I say it again: Jeremiah the eldest---
Surp. No, John the eldest!
De B. I was going to say so, if you'd only give me time. John in the middle---

Surp. No, James in the middle!
De B. Exactly. Let me see. Perhaps I'd better begin again. Amidst the gathering---

Surp. (impatiently) Ugh! In one word, Mr.---
De B. Green.
Surp. Green!—No! Never mind. Your statement is really so confused—
De B. Not at all. Nothing can be clearer, that at the death of my uncle Christopher—
Surp. Just now you said Benjamin!
De B. Good gracious! What does it signify—Benjamin Christopher or Christopher Benjamin? Suffice it, that he left his property to be equally divided between his four sons—
Surpr. Four sons!—three!
De B. I say three. There was a little'un in, but he died, therefore three be it—namely, Jeremiah the eldest—
Surp. (shouting) No, John!
De B. I was going to say so. John in the middle—
Surp. No, no, no! James—I should say, Jeremiah!
De B. Mr. Surplus—it's really a tax upon my good nature—but as you evidently wish me to begin again—
Surp. But I don't! Well, well, this property! What did it consist of—eh?
De B. Hay? no such thing. Uncle Joseph wasn't a farmer!
Surp. Uncle Joseph! Why, just now you said—
De B. I know I did! But what does it signify? Benjamin Christopher Joseph, or Joseph Christopher Benjamin; as I said before, he died!
Surp. Very well!
De B. No, he was very ill.
Surp. No matter; he died, I presume, with a will.
De B. No, very much against his will!
Surp. I mean, he left a will behind him.
De B. No, he didn't—not that I mean to say he took it with him.
Surp. I see, he died intestate.
De B. Wrong again—he died in Kent.
Surp. Pshaw! And the property had to be divided.
De B. Exactly! and that's the point which a comprehensive, gigantic intellect like yours, alone can grasp and grapple with. The property had to be divided; but unluckily in the meantime—(very rapidly) Jacob marries—Alexander disappears—Jonathan dies—and up starts Timothy; I don't know why he should, but he did—and what does Timothy say? Why, Timothy says—"oh, oh!" says Timothy, 'thirty days hath September, April, June and November—" but if this is the way the cat jumps, up goes the income tax—and then what becomes of Aunt Sally? Don't you see? (poking Surplus in the ribs)
Surp. (shouting) No! my brain's in a whirl! Hark ye, Mr. White or Grey--or Brown--or Green--or whatever your colour--I mean, your name is--you'd better consult another lawyer.

De B. I'd rather not! Let me see (looking at watch) I've three-quarters of an hour to spare--so sit down, and I'll begin again! (pushing Surplus suddenly back into chair) Amidst the gathering--

Surp. (jumping up again) Sir! you must allow me, most reluctantly, but most civilly, to shew you to the door.

Morton used absurdities a great deal in his best writing. Box and Cox, A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion, and A Regular Fix were all heavily interspersed with the use of this technique, and they are three of his better plays. One other play, My Wife's Bonnet, contained a bit of absurd dialogue which could almost be labeled as a breakdown in the use of language. Topknot and Cutwater are talking about the lady at the Olympic Theatre who dropped her bonnet from a proscenium box to the stalls below, and who, upon leaning over the railing and seeing her husband below, rushed out of the theatre with her escort. The bonnet fell on Topknot, and he recognized it for his wife's. He rushed home as quickly as he possibly could, only to find Mrs. Topknot in the house and in possession of a bonnet exactly like the one that had fallen. Cutwater is now visiting Topknot, and they are talking about the mysterious lady. In fact Cutwater has just revealed that his wife has a bonnet exactly like the one that fell.
Topk. Well, then, but don't let what I say make you uncomfortable, we'll suppose, just for the fun of the thing, of course, I say, we'll suppose that your wife was at the Olympic this evening.

Cutw. Stop a bit, suppose we say your wife! Oblige me by saying your wife.

Topk. Very well—your wife.

Cutw. No, yours!

Topk. Don't interrupt me. Well, alarmed at seeing her head fall off, I mean her bonnet, into the Stalls below, what does your wife do?

Cutw. I wish you'd say your wife.

Topk. I did say your wife. She leaves the theatre, jumps into a cab—

Cutw. Drives to her milliner's—

Topk. And buys a bonnet—

Cutw. Exactly like the other. But no, no, Topknot, I can't believe it of her (shaking Topknot's hand)

Topk. Well, if it's any satisfaction to you Cutwater, no more can I (shaking Cutwater's hand) besides, after all, you must be the best judge.

Cutw. On the contrary, you must know her better than I can.

Topk. Know who, Mrs. Cutwater?

Cutw. No, Mrs. Topknot.

Topk. Psha! we're speaking of your wife.

Cutw. No, yours.

Topk. Yours! together

Enter Mrs. Topknot, L. 2 E.

Mrs. Top. Heyday! high words, gentlemen. What is the matter?

Topk. Nothing; Cutwater was saying—

Cutw. No! you were saying—

Mrs. Top. Will you explain?

Topk. I will. Says Cutwater to me, "Topknot," says he.

Cutw. No! Says Topknot to me, "Cutwater," says he.

Mrs. Top. One at a time.

Topk. One at a time, don't you hear! (together)

Cutw. One at a time, don't you hear! (together)

Topk. "Well, don't you think it odd, Topknot," says he.


Topk. "That there should only be two heads for three bonnets?" "Not at all, Cutwater," says I.
"Not at all, Topknot," says I.

Mrs. Top. Certainly not; the third bonnet, of course, belongs--

Topk. To the lady at the Olympic. My very words. Upon which, says Cutwater to me, "Topknot," says he.


Topk. "My wife," says he.

Topk. "Who dopped her bonnet--what more easy for her,"--says he.

Cutw. "To drive to her milliner's," says he.

Topk. "And buy a bonnet," says he.

Cutw. "Exactly like the other," says he.

Topk. Says he.

Cutw. Says he.

Both (shouting) Says he.

Another language device used by Morton to produce humor was that of a mix-up. A mix-up as to the situation, and a mix-up in identity have already been discussed. The last mix-up to be considered is that of a mix-up in phrasing. In this device, a character gets words turned around or out of order, and thus often says something that is totally unlike what he wanted to say. For instance, Golightly in Lend Me Five Shillings is asked by Mrs. Major Phobbs to escort her home. She then leaves the stage and Golightly says, "It's too much--it's much too much!--a tete-a-tete with a one-horse women, in a fly--I mean with a fly with a one-horse woman!--No, that's not it.--With a woman, in a one-horse fly! . . ." At another point in the play, Golightly is telling Moreland about the first time he met Mrs. Major Phobbs. Her husband, who was sick and dying, was not very civil, so Golightly was shown out of the house. Moreland says, "And the door slammed in your face?" To which, Golightly replies, "No Sir, not slammed--
but shut.--I flatter myself I know the difference between a slut and sham.--I mean between a slut and a sham.--I should say between a shut and a slam."

The same device was used in The Two Puddifoots. Caroline tells Puddifott, Junior that she has an intended and that if he doesn't leave she will tell her uncle. Puddifoot, Junior says: "This is just like my luck! I form a sudden attachment to a second-class female in a carriage. I mean a female in a second-class carriage; she allows me to precipitate myself at her boots, and then coolly tells me, she's got an 'intended.'"

A device which is akin to the mix-up is that of the confusing statement. A speaker tries to explain a situation, and by a long, detailed, twisting explanation completely confuses the issue. Morton used this device when he had a character in trouble who was doing his best to avoid a beating. Sunnyside's explanation to the Captain as to why he tried to get the Captain to marry a woman already married is a masterpiece of confusion.

Now I'll tell you all about it. I propose to you to propose to Miss Rosamond, because her aunt won't marry till Miss Rosamond's married, and I want to marry her aunt don't you see? Miss Rosamond can't marry, because she is married. I promise not to tell the niece that the aunt's got a husband--I mean the niece--ergo--mark the ergo!--I can't marry the niece--I mean the aunt--you understand! And there we are in a regular fix! At that moment, in you came; upon which, I says I to myself, "Ah!" says I, "I've a capital idea," says I; and so it was: "And what's more," says I, "I'll do it," says I--and so I did! There! if that
isn't a clear and satisfactory explanation, I don't know what you would have.

Puns have long been considered as a part of farce. Puns appear in Morton's plays but not with great frequency. Whitebait at Greenwich and Betsy Baker are the two plays that relied on puns far more than the others. In Whitebait John Small tells his life story. His parents deserted him as a child, and the only description of his father that he has is that he is five feet seven inches tall and has a first name of Benjamin. John, therefore, goes around with a measure in his pocket, and when he finds out that Buzzard's first name is Benjamin, he quickly pulls the measure from his pocket, puts it against Benjamin, and says, "I've got your measure." Later, when Glimmer says to Small, "You began life on your own account," Small answers, "Yes, sir, started on my own bottom." There is also some punning on the names of the characters in Whitebait. Glimmer says, "the Buzzards feed at half-past one." And Benjamin says, "fell a victim to the fascinations of our Sally, and last Monday three weeks she became a Buzzard."

A rather long, somewhat bawdy pun appears in Whitebait. Miss Lucretia Buzzard thinks John Small came to blackmail her, and she is determined to find out how far he intends to go. Therefore, she is talking about money and blackmail, and John Small thinks she is talking about his ability as a waiter. The following scene results:
Miss L. (aside) What do I hear? then he did recognize me, I thought as much; there's only one thing to be done, and that must be done at once! (hurries to table behind Small grasps him by the arm and drags him forward--then hurriedly aside to him) It's evident you know everything.

Small. (aside) She says I know everything.
Miss L. And it is also evident that you have come here to make the most of the information you possess.
Small. Of course I have.
Miss L. I like your candour.
Small. She like my candour. (aside)
Miss L. No. (aside) he must be bribed to keep the secret. (aloud) Let us perfectly understand one another.
Small. That's what I say, and the sooner the better.
Miss L. But I must first tell you that I am rather pinched just now.
Small. Pinched?
Miss L. Yes,--a little behind--you understand.
Small. A little behind--what can she be alluding to. (aside)
Miss L. Consequently as this is simply a question of figures, if I find yours too high--you must bring it down to mine.
Small. (after a pause of astonishment, then aside) 'Pon my life, I don't know which of the two Buzzards is the strangest bird--it seems to me to be a toss up between the male and the female.
Miss L. (suddenly) Hush! Some one's coming.
Sit down--make haste (pushing Small to table) Sit down, I say (pushing him into chair)

Betsy Baker is the second play in which a good many puns appeared. Again punning on a name is one of the major methods used. When Betsy is extolling the virtues of Mouser to Crummy, she says, "'Tisn't every woman, sir, as get's a Mouser. No, sir--Mousers are scarce." And when Crummy tries to back out on his bargain of setting her up in a small business if she will only make Mouser
fall in love with her, she screams for all the house to hear, "I want my Mouser." At another point in the play Betsy tells Crummy that her last name is Baker and that she has fifteen sisters. She says, "Yes, sir, Elizabeth Baker, the youngest of sixteen sisters, and all of 'em girls, sir--and hard-working girls, too, sir. It's worth going over to our laundry to see us, sir. Fancy sixteen Bakers a washing, all of a row!"

Some of the best, or worst depending on how one looks at it, puns are not in the two plays just mentioned. For instance, in A Capital Match Rosamond is angry with Mrs. Singleton, because Mrs. Singleton has snubbed Charles Marlowe. Mrs. Singleton says, "A medical student forsooth, with nothing in his pocket but his case of instruments." To which Rosamond replies, "And capital things too for a young man to cut his way in the world with! . . ." Perhaps the only pun to rival this one occurs in A Regular Fix. Abel Quick enters and tells Emily about seeing a "vulgar-looking fellow" at the door of the house who insists he has a cousin inside. Abel tells Emily that "I think the name he said was Brass--yes, that was it--Brass!" He then says, "The idea of coming to a lawyer's office for Brass, eh? Ha, ha, ha!" De Brass, who has been standing out of sight, says, "Ha, ha! Very good, Quick--very good indeed!"
For Victorian England, Morton's plays contain an amazing number of mild curse words. A number of "damns" occur in several plays, and other mild expletives are also found. *Chaos is Come Again* probably contained the greatest number of oaths. Tottenham says, "Oh, damn the bill," and Bunce says, "Egad, not a bad thought!" Chaos says, "Damn it, I hate pumps; . . .," and later he adds "Odds blood!" Chaos also says "'Sdeath and furies," and "zounds."

In a few of the plays Morton uses a logical form in mock fashion—that is, he will have a speaker use A and B in a seemingly logical manner when, in reality, the conclusion reached is far from logical. In *A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion*, the Intruder throws himself into Snoozle's fish pond with the seeming purpose of drowning himself. Snoozle rescues him, and as a result, the Intruder concludes that Snoozle wants to provide for the Intruder for the remainder of his life. Snoozle assures him that what he did was a "trifling service." The Intruder responds in the following manner:

"Trifling service? You may call it a trifle, but I don't. I contend, that if A. saves the life of B.—that B. being a total stranger to A.—solely for the purpose of providing for the remainder of B.'s life, and totally regardless of the approbation of the public—whom I shall designate as C. and D.—why it's evident that in preserving the aforesaid B., the above mentioned A. can only have been actuated by the purest motives—and that, I am sure, would be the opinion of the great majority of the enlightened British C. and D.!"
Ionesco calls farce the "extreme exaggeration of parody." If parody is used to mean ridicule or caricature, then Morton did, from time to time, use parody. In *My Wife's Second Floor*, Mrs. Topheavy and Miss Maylove talk of dueling (a parody in itself). In the process, they duel with words. Their reduction to an absurdity of the language used by men in giving and accepting a challenge, choosing weapons, and so forth, is a parody of men and their fights.

Mrs. T. Take care, young woman, or you'll put my back up. It's no joke to put my back up.
Fanny. Don't think to frighten me, m'am! If we were men, I should demand satisfaction!
Mrs. T. Then let us act like men! Name your time!
Fanny. Whenever you please.
Mrs. T. Weapons?
Fanny. Whatever you choose.
Mrs. T. The place of meeting?
Fanny. Wherever you like.
Mrs. T. I'll be there.
Fanny. So will I! Swords?
Mrs. T. Swords.
Fanny. Or pistols?
Mrs. T. Pistols be it. Here on the spot?
Fanny. As you please—or behind the barracks?
[They cross each other.]
Mrs. T. Which ever you please.
Fanny. Just as you like.
Mrs. T. Then swords on the spot.
Fanny. Agreed! Pistols behind the barracks.
Mrs. T. I see you prefer pistols behind the barracks.
Fanny. And you're determined on swords on the spot.
Mrs. T. I am, and won't give way.
Fanny. No more will I.

---

Mrs. T. I admire your spirit. Then I shall be here with swords on the spot.
Fanny. And I shall be with pistols behind the barracks.
Both. Agreed! /Shake hands./

The use of language in a dramatic situation, dialogue, was one of the greatest abilities of John Maddison Morton as a playwright. All of those who have written about him attest to this fact, and an examination of this plays causes one to agree. His use of language is characterized by misunderstandings, repartee, repetitions, absurdities, mix-ups, puns, and parodies. Morton is unusual for the manner in which he used the devices at hand. His language is set apart by its tone or style, which depended heavily on pure wit rather than device.
CHAPTER IX

ACTING

A long established dictum of the theatre is that farce is the most physical of the types of drama. From Aristophanes to Harlequin to Neil Simon, speed, noise, and slapstick antics have been considered the constituents of farce. In other words, farce has been considered as an actors' theatre. Eric Bentley recently expressed the idea anew as he distinguished some of the characteristics of melodrama and farce.

If melodrama is the quintessence of drama, farce is the quintessence of theatre. Melodrama is written. A moving image of the world is provided by a writer. Farce is acted. The writer's contribution seems not only absorbed but translated. Melodrama belongs to the words and to the spectacle; the actor must be able to speak and make a handsome or monstrous part of the tableau. Farce concentrates itself in the actor's body, and dialogue in farce is, so to speak, the activity of the vocal cords and the cerebral cortex. . . . One cannot imagine melodrama being improvised. The improvised drama was pre-eminently farce. In its pride it would call itself commedia.¹

In speaking of the farces of the nineteenth century, Allardyce Nicoll says that "most of them were written for

low-comedy actors who could 'put across' almost anything, ..." It is certain that the outstanding actors of the day acted in the farces of the leading writers. Rowell maintains that at least two of them could "convulse an audience without completing a single line." Undoubtedly Bentley, Nicoll, and Rowell have a point; and yet, the importance of the author is in no way diminished. Except in a completely improvisational situation, the final product in the theatre is a co-creative effort, and the playwright has contributed as much, if not more, than any other artist. The happiest situation is one in which the roles created by the author agree completely with the talents of the actors.

The Times of 1850 said that Morton's "verbal jokes in his best pieces are always original and thoroughly English, and in these and his power of fitting his actors his real strength consists." As one reads Morton's plays the truth of the reviewer's statement becomes increasingly evident. Morton handled the English


4The Times (London), April 17, 1850, p. 8.
language with felicity and skill, and the roles he created were peculiarly suited to the actors who originally played the parts. This chapter will be concerned, therefore, with two basic elements: (1) the techniques used by the actors in the creation of the roles they played, and (2) the appropriateness of Morton's creation in relation to the skills of the actors who played the parts.

The first quality of the acting to be discussed is that of exaggerated physical action. With a few noticeable exceptions, Morton created at least one character in each of his plays who exhibited a great deal of bodily activity. This was usually the stupid person, or the person on whom the joke was played. Without him there would not be a play, for he was usually the person around whom the action revolved. Bonnycastle, Pillicoddy, Griggs, Ominous, Golightly, and Sunnyside, to name only a few, are all characters of this stamp. The Times, in reference to Clipper in The "Alabama," said that "the chief drollery of the whole piece consists in the abject terror shown by the cockney amid the pomp and circumstance of war." The same newspaper called attention to the broad acting of Mr. Robson, who played the part of Griggs in Ticklish Times, by saying that Mr. Robson, "knowing that the whole success of the farce depends on him alone, ... gave himself up last night to a hurricane of rage and grief, with that sort

5Ibid., March 9, 1864, p. 12.
of recklessness in which he is unequalled . . . "6

Perhaps the exaggerated physical action can best be illustrated by reference to a particular play. In Chaos is Come Again the servants and Tottenham, the landlord of the inn in which they are quartered, are told by Bunce that Chaos is mentally unbalanced and may turn violent. Therefore, when Chaos enters the ballroom, he is closely followed by Tottenham and the servants. It does not take much imagination to visualize the servants as moving in unison, step for step with Chaos, and although they undoubtedly walked stealthily, they were about as hidden and unnoticeable as the Empire State Building on the New York horizon. Bunce persuades Tottenham to goad Chaos to anger, and when Chaos does become irritated, the servants jump on him and hold him down while Bunce snatches off his wig. The stage directions say that "Bunce snatches off his wig, flourishes it in his face, and runs among the dancers--Chaos follows, crying." The dancers and the entire ensemble are thrown into confusion as Chaos, who broke away from the servants, chases Bunce through the crowd crying "stop."

The general impression is that of great physical movement. Bunce seems to have jumped, whirled, and moved about with great dexterity and speed, and when he is

---

6Ibid., March 9, 1858, p. 12.
finally caught and finds out who Chaos really is, he falls on his knees asking pardon. Chaos grabs his wig back and puts it on his head "wrongside foremost."

The broad acting style of Robert Keeley is evident in the acting of the part of Mouser in Betsy Baker. Crummy, who is Mrs. Mouser's cousin and Mouser's law partner, tells Mouser that Mrs. Major-General Jones wants Mouser to handle her divorce case. Mouser at first refuses, but when he hears how badly Major-General Jones treats his wife, he becomes indignant and vows to expose the Major-General. The stage directions relate the exaggerated physical activity used by Mouser in his anger.

Mous. (with a look of horror) "Stasy, can such things be? (drags off his dressing gown, which he throws into Crummy's face, who places it on back of chair, R. of table) My coat--my hat--my blue bag--quick! (Crummy exits into office, R.D.F.) Oh, the monster! But I'll hold him up to the execration of mankind. "Not particular as to the number of his attachments!" Gracious goodness! And to think that such a man is able to walk the streets without a policeman on each side of him. (Crummy returns with hat, coat, and blue bag) But, as I said before, I'll expose him! (in his excitement he puts on the dressing gown again--puts on Crummy's hat, and takes Crummy's umbrella from table) I shan't be long, my 'Stasia,. I shall soon return on the wings of love--(going)

Mrs. M. (L., detaining him) You're surely not going out in your dressing gown?

Mous. Eh? Yes--it is my dressing gown, I declare. On second thoughts, I really don't see why I should interfere between these Joneses. (places hat and umbrella on table) I'd rather by half stop with you, my 'Stasy.
Crum. Nonsense. You must go. Mrs. Major-General Jones expects you. (taking hold of one of the sleeves of the dressing gown)

Mrs. M. (taking hold of the other) Of course—Mrs. Jones expects you.

Crum. You wouldn't keep a young and pretty woman waiting? (handing him his coat)

Mous. Oh, she's young and pretty, is she? You hear, 'Stasia—she's young and pretty. (puts on coat) You expose me to her fascinations, 'Stasia—

Mrs. M. (smiling) I'm not at all afraid.

In Who Stole the Pocket-Book? Tipthorp had a great deal of physical action. Tipthorp found a pocketbook filled with money, a large part of which he spent on Fanny, his fiancée. However, his conscience starts to bother him greatly, and when he is left alone on the stage, he can no longer hold still. Apparently Edward Wright was a master at acting a drunk part, a frightened part, and a nervous part. He had a chance to do all three in this play, and he obviously did so with great gusto. The stage directions indicate that he was "laughing wildly" and "dancing wildly about" when the ladies, who had left the stage momentarily, reenter. Fanny tries to quieten him.

Fan. (running to Tipthorp, and stopping him jumping about) My dear Tipthorp.
Tip. Don't stop me—Fanny, if you love me, don't stop me—its the joy—the excitement—the enthusiasm of the moment! Let's have a dance. I must have a dance—a waltz, a polka, a jig, a hornpipe—I don't care what. So, ladies, take your partners. (dancing all the time with his arms round Fanny's waist)

Miss D. But we havn't got any partners.
Tip. Then I'll dance with all three of you (seeing SILVERTOP and WOODPECKER, who enter R.D.) Ah!
The doorbell rings at this moment in the play, and Tipthorp, realizing it is Blossom, but never guessing that Blossom is the man he saw drop a pocketbook, rushes outside to invite him in. He then "rushes in R.H., exceedingly pale and disordered in his manner and appearance; slams the door, and leans with his back against it." When Blossom finally pushes the door partly open, the stage directions say that Tipthorp "starts suddenly away, and Blossom is thrown forward into the room, almost falling; Tipthorp runs about, then falls into chair, R.C. up, with his back to Blossom and opens his large umbrella, which he holds behind him so as to conceal himself." A few moments later Fanny tries to introduce Tipthorp to Blossom, her rich uncle; but as she pulls Tipthorp forward, he "takes up SILVERTOP'S hat and puts it on, cocking it very much over his eyes." When Blossom tries to look at Tipthorp under the hat, Tipthorp "cocks it still more on his nose."

The ending of Poor Pillicoddy gave J. B. Buckstone a chance to use wildly exaggerated physical action. Pillicoddy thinks that he has lost Mrs. Pillicoddy to Captain O'Scuttle, so he decides to commit suicide by taking poppy seeds over a prolonged period. He becomes very sleepy and has to be "roused" a number of times as the play comes to an end. Mrs. Pillicoddy and Sarah find Pillicoddy walking about fast asleep.
Sarah. Lor, ma'am--whatever's the matter with master? Only look at him! He looks for all the world like a goose a-going to roost.
(Sarah and Mrs. Pillicoddy run to Pillicoddy.)

Mrs. P. Pillicoddy!
Mr. P. Master! (They shake him violently; his hat tumbles off, and a number of poppy heads fall out.) Poppies! He's gone and poisoned him­self. (They all pull him and shake him, cry­ing,) "Rouse yourself."

Pil. That's right. Rouse me--keep continually rousing me! Anastasia, it was all on your account--I thought he was going to tear you away from me!

Mrs. P. He? Who?
Mr. P. Who? Why--Sarah, rouse me! (Sarah takes a pin out of her dress, and runs it into Pillicoddy's arm.) Thank ye.
(To Mrs. P.) Why, your first--my predecessor the once supposed to be lost, but lately turned up Scuttle!

Capt. If you mean Captain O'Scuttle, I am husband to this lady, and second cousin to my second cousin, the late Captain Fitz­patrick O'Scuttle.

Mr. P. Ah! Then you're not Robinson Crusoe--you're not my friend with the barnacles! Sarah, rouse me! (Same play.) Thank ye! I thought you were Patzfitrick--I mean Fitzpitrick--Sarah, rouse me! (Same play.) Thank ye! And now I've nothing to fear.
(Mrs. Pillicoddy goes from L. to C., and points to audience.) Well, what of that?
(To Mrs. Pillicoddy.) I repeat, I've nothing to fear. It isn't the first time that I've stood my trial here, and, there­fore--Sarah, rouse me! I say, I'm inclined to hope that the same indulgent jury, without even retiring from their boxes, will once more return a verdict of "Not Guilty"--then no one will be more transported than "POOR PILLICODDY."

Occasionally, as in Aunt Charlotte's Maid, exaggerated physical action became a function of several characters. The entire last part of the play seems to be just one entrance and exit, with fast, physical bits between.
Pivot is even drenched with water on one occasion and flees from a second drenching. A warming pan filled with hot coals also provides the impetus for several funny bits of business.

Since exaggerated physical action is obviously funny, it is important to understand why. Sigmund Freud gave a reason in an essay on "Jokes and the Comic."

A person appears comic to us if, in comparison with ourselves, he makes too great an expenditure on his bodily functions and too little on his mental ones; and it cannot be denied that in both these cases our laughter expresses a pleasurable sense of the superiority which we feel in relation to him.7

Not only was there much exaggerated physical activity in the plays, there was often violent physical action. Much has been written about violence in farce, but statements by Eric Bentley and Al Capp will serve as a summary of the opinions expressed. Bentley says:

If farce shows man to be deficient in intellect, it does not show him deficient in strength or reluctant to use it. Man, says farce, may or may not be one of the more intelligent animals, he is certainly an animal, and not one of the least violent either. He may dedicate what little intelligence he possesses precisely to violence, to plotting violence, or to dreaming violence. . . .

"A Mad World, My Masters!" A play with a cast of fools tells us that it is a world of fools we live in. . . . What wisdom can there be without a poignant sense of wisdom's opposite,

which is folly?  

Al Capp sees all comedy as essentially a drama based on the physical and mental tortures that men inflict upon their fellow men. He says:

"All comedy is based on man's delight in man's inhumanity to man. I know that is so, because I have made forty million people laugh more or less every day for sixteen years, and this has been the basis of all the comedy I have created. I think it is the basis of all comedy."

Violent physical action of one kind or another appears in a majority of Morton's plays. Violent physical action differs from simple physical activity in that there is actual physical contact between characters. Sometimes the contact is quite pronounced. There is no apparent purpose, except for the comic effect, for the violent action that occurs when Major Choker and Lionel Larkins meet in The Little Savage. Perhaps one could say their actions are a parody of the manner in which men test the masculinity of others by hitting, slapping, and so forth. Larkins has come to the Major's house for the purpose of courting the Major's niece, Kate. He is the son of an old friend of the Major's, and the scene that follows occurs at their first meeting.

---


Major. Well, and how is your father, my old friend Larkins (slaps Larkins sharply on the shoulder, he winces)
Lionel. Thank ye—he's hearty (slapping Major on shoulder). Indeed, to use a strong expression, I may say, he's jolly! (giving Major another violet slap on the shoulder.

Major. Ha, ha! But egad, you must be hungry after your ride.
Lionel. Hungry! you forget, Smoker, that I have been feasting on a delicious banquet of grace and loveliness for the last quarter of an hour (with an admiring look at Kate, who again looks at him, and then goes on with her work--aside) She is either a deafy, or that black and white poodle monopolizes her entire mental faculties.
Major. True! and what is a little privation after all? Nothing! and you'd say so if you had been a soldier.
Lionel. I have been a soldier!
Major. Have you, my hero? (slapping him on back)
Lionel. (wincing--then giving the Major a terrific slap on the back) Yes, my Trojan! in the militia! and remarkably well I looked in my regimentals, at least so the ladies said, (pointedly to Kate, who looks up at him again, and then quietly resumes her work--aside) If ever that black poodle falls in my clutches, I'll tear him piecemeal. (aloud) But you'll allow me to retire, and make myself a little more presentable. Lady Barbara, (bowing) you most obedient; Miss, (to Kate, bowing) your most devoted (Kate looks up, and then goes on quietly with her work), she seems to me to be not only a deafy but a dummy, (going L., stops) By the bye, I met the postman coming towards the house, so I took charge of the letters (presenting them to Lady B.)
Lady B. Oh, thank ye. (to Kate) For you my dear, (giving her a letter) Why don't you thank Mr. Larkins?
Lionel. Oh dear, no! (Kate looks up at him, and again goes gently on with her work) She's decidedly a dummy. (crosses to L.)
Major. (to Larkins as he is going) You won't be long, Larkins! (slapping him on the shoulder)
Lionel. (wincing again, and giving the Major a thundering slap on the shoulder) Decidedly not, Smoker.

Major. (forcing a laugh, and rubbing his shoulder) Ha, ha, ha! (at side) Damn the fellow, how hard he hits . . .

Some of the action in *Who Stole the Pocket-Bock?* is also tinged with physical violence. At the beginning of the show, Silvertop and Woodpecker take great pleasure in laughing at Tipthorp because he does not have enough money to pay for his and Fanny's dinner. Tipthorp leaves with great bravado, saying that he will soon return with plenty to buy Fanny whatever she wants. Luckily he stumbles on a pocketbook filled with money, and he returns to the inn in triumph, bringing merchants with him so they can lay their wares at Fanny's feet. Silvertop and Woodpecker are amazed and made to look like fools for laughing at Tipthorp. He is not gently in his victory. He even adds insult to injury by buying gifts for the lady friends of Silvertop and Woodpecker.

Tip. No—and to prove it, there's a yard and a half of yellow ribbon for Miss Dainty's sky-blue polka—and here's three-penny-worth of groundsel for Miss Julia's canary—and now what's to be done? As for me, I'm ready for anything. Ha, ha, ha! (laughing wildly) Silvertop, my boy, (giving him a violent slap on the shoulder) say something funny! Woodpecker, my old cock, (hitting him on the stomach) give us a song, or stand on your head—do something to amuse the company. Here! champagne for the ladies—that's the time of day—eh? My jolly old pawnbroker! (gives Silvertop another violent slap on the shoulder)
Miss D. You really must excuse us, Mr. Tipthorp—remember, we've got to dress for dinner.

Tip. Of course--of course--can I help you?--ha, ha, ha! Don't be offended, Silvertop. (another violent slap on the shoulder) I'm sure you don't mind it, Woodpecker. (another blow on the stomach)

Wood. I'm a man of few words--but I wish you'd hit me somewhere else, cause it hurts--them's my sentiments, and I stick to 'em.

Tip. Of course I will--why didn't you mention it before? (gives him a slap on the stomach) Ha, ha, ha?

The manner in which Tipthorp treats the other two gentlemen is perfectly in keeping with farce. When the worm turns, it often turns with a vengence, and the former object of jokes is not at all merciful. He has triumphed, and he enjoys it to the utmost.

Another example of rather violent physical action occurs in *A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion*. The Intruder makes a wreck out of a room in Snozzle's house. He pulls papers out of the desk drawer which he says he will pick up "tomorrow, or the day after." He throws muffins into the fish bowl. He rearranges the furniture to please himself, putting it into a state of great disorder, and he is also very menacing toward Snozzle. He changes other things to please himself, takes Snozzle's snuff box and refuses to give it back, re-paints a portrait, takes Snozzle's dressing-gown, and even takes his purse. He also stands on chairs, flings a bookshelf forward throwing its contents over the room, pricks Snozzle with a toasting
fork, and violently slaps him on the back.

An acting device that was used in several shows might be called repetitive action. A gesture or movement is repeated a number of times until the repetition makes it funny. There is such a scene in My Wife's Bonnet when Mr. and Mrs. Topknot are trying to get Mr. Cutwater to leave before he sees the bonnet and naturally concludes that his wife might have been the lady at the Olympic. Topknot turns Cutwater toward the door, Cutwater turns back in for a line, Topknot turns him out again, and so on. This action is repeated several times until Cutwater sees the bonnet.

A similar incident occurs in Who Stole the Pocket-Book? Tipthorp starts to leave the stage for the purpose of buying Fanny a present. The stage directions contained in Tipthorp's exit speech reveal the action that occurs.

By-the bye, Fanny, if Mr. Blazes, the manager, should happen to forward me a cheque for a couple of hundred for the three Tragedies, two Comedies, five Dramas, and thirteen Farces, I sent him last week, you can pay it into my banker's for me. (going--stops) You're sure you don't want any shawls? (going--stops) Better have a few bonnets! (going--stops) Perhaps three or four hundred yards of calico would not be amiss! (going--stops) Suppose we say a few counterpanes? (going--stops) How are you off for blankets?

Still another example of repetitive action occurs in My Wife's Second Floor. Fanny and Mrs. Downy get Toddle between them and turn him back and forth as they fire rapid
questions at him. Each in turn pulls him to a face-to-face situation as the questions are asked.

Several plays contain action that require the actors to move in unison or in a contrasting pattern. Attention has been called to incidents of such movement which occur in *Box and Cox* and *Chaos is Come Again*. *Aunt Charlotte's Maid* is another play which contains such movement. In this case, the Major enters the stage for the first time and finds Horatio standing at the top of a small set of stairs trying to take curtains down from the window. The stairs had steps on both sides, which provides the basis for a humorous bit of contrasting action. The Major asks Horatio what he is doing on the stairs, but since Horatio does not want to tell the Major that he is doing what the maid told him to do, he quickly tries to think of a sane reason for standing on the stair unit.

Spark. Eh! (bothered, and not knowing what to say.) Up here! so I am, I declare! If you'd got such a toothache as I have, you'd be glad to get up anywhere--Oh!

Major. Poor fellow! (gets up on one side of the steps as Horatio gets down the other--looking down from top of steps, and seeing Horatio.) Halloa! (coming down as Horatio goes up--looking up from bottom of steps, and seeing Horatio at the top again.) Halloa! not let's perfectly understand one another: will you stop where you are till I get up, or shall I stop where I am till you get down?

Spark. It's just the same to me.

Major. Very well, then I'll get up (ascending).
Spark. And I'll get down. (descending.)
Major. No, no; stop where you are. (mounts to top.) How deuced unlucky that toothache of yours! Such a disappointment to poor Fanny!
Spark. Hush! lower! lower!
Major. You wish me to get lower? Oh! very well! (getting down a few steps.)
Spark. No! (pulling him up.) I mean, speak lower.

In some cases, costumes undoubtedly added a great deal to the acting of a particular role. For instance, exaggeration is undoubtedly the proper description of the costume worn by Clipper in The "Alabama." The Captain's uniform was much too large for Clipper. The ill fit surely gave Belmore a chance to create some interesting business, and it probably helped to create a feeling in the audience of superiority to Clipper. After all, their clothes did fit better than his, and they were not subjected to the loss of dignity inherent in wearing such clothing.

If a part of Morton's power as a playwright lay in "fitting his actors," a look at the acting style of some of the actors who created his major roles should prove fruitful. Of the twenty-one plays used in this study, Buckstone created five roles, Keeley five, Bedford and Wright three, Frederick Robson two, Benjamin Webster and others one each. Testimony was given regarding the overall abilities of these gentlemen in the chapter of players and playbills, but little was said about their acting styles.
J. B. Buckstone created the roles of Phibbs, Pillicoddy, Box, Golightly, and Bonnycastle. With the possible exception of Box, a close examination of these roles will reveal a likeness in that they all require a great deal of physical action. The Times says that Buckstone represents "all the grotesque grief of Pillicoddy," and that he acts the part of Golightly with "the usual amount of fright on the one hand, and blustering on the other, . . ." Buckstone and Harley, as Box and Cox, are described as playing "off their oddities against each other with surprising zest," and Buckstone as Bonnycastle is said to bring "out the drollery with immense force. The story of the watch, which he narrates to the audience, is a capital bit of quiet humour, and in the stormy actions his frenzies of terror and jealousy are inimitable." As revealing as these statements are regarding Buckstone's acting style, the most complete statement, when considered with a quotation from the play, came in the review of Done on Both Sides. The reviewer says: "The swelling indignation which is constantly on

---

10 The Times (London), July 13, 1848, p. 5.
11 Ibid., February 20, 1846, p. 8.
12 Ibid., November 2, 1847, p. 4.
13 Ibid., November 26, 1851, p. 8.
the point of breaking through all warnings, and which ultimately exposes all the swindle of the menage, is admirably portrayed by Buckstone."

A good idea as to what the reviewer for The Times was referring to can be gathered from the following quotation. Phibbs, played by Buckstone, is mistakenly thought to be a servant by Brownjohn, and he in turn thinks Brownjohn is a man of importance who can help him obtain a much desired position. Brownjohn insults Phibbs by calling him "Piggy" and by giving orders for the serving of a dinner. The stage directions reveal the action just prior to the opening of the scene. Phibbs throws "plates for each person round the table." He "places thureen \[soup\] on table, then wipes his hands with the napkin that is on his arm, and throws is \[sic\] on table--Brownjohn takes it up and flings it at him." Phibbs then "takes bread tray, and puts it down in centre of table--takes several pieces for himself, and goes back to his seat." At this point in the action, Brownjohn explodes:

Browj. Oh, this is intolerable--unbearable! (getting up, and walking about.)
Phibbs. (aside) Good gracious! I've offended the President, (following Brownjohn, plate in hand.) Really, my dear sir--upon my honour, I didn't mean--

\[sup][14]\textit{Ibid.}, February 26, 1848, p. 8.
Whif. (to Brownjohn, aside) Don't be annoyed with the poor fellow--you hear--he didn't mean--(aside to Phibbs.) Sit down, do! (pushing Phibbs towards table, who sits down in Brownjohn's chair, and begins to help himself to soup.)

Brownj. Look at him! Come out of that! (taking Phibbs by the collar, and twirling him round, seats himself.)

Phibbs. (aside, and shaking the soup ladle, which he has in his hand.) That President has reason to congratulate himself that he is a President--else with this self-same weapon which I now convulsively grasp, would I---

Whif. (aside to him) Now sit down, there's a good fellow!

Brownj. (to Phibbs, as he is going towards the table.) Stop, sir! clear away, first.

Phibbs. Clear away? Me? Oh, damn it! (dashes the ladle down on the little table and breaks it.)

Brownj. Bravo! To it Piggy! There goes eighteen-pence out of your wages!

Phibbs. Wages?

Whif. (very quickly) Ha, ha, ha? (to Phibbs.) Don't you see the fun? Ladle--wages--wages ladle--ha, ha! You'd better laugh, or he'll think you don't see it.

Phibbs. (solemnly.) Ha, ha, ha! (aside.) I don't see it a bit--never mind. (aloud) Capital! ha, ha! You'll be the death of me, you funny man, you!--"lay the cloth"--"Look sharp!"

If the quotations from The Times and Done on Both Sides are considered, together with the quotation used earlier from Poor Pillicoddy, a definite picture of Buckstone's acting starts to emerge. He was very physical, used a great deal of business, such as the poppy seeds and ladle, and was most effective in scenes of terror and bluster. With this in mind, a final statement from The Times is in order. This quotation is from a review of
The Milliner's Holiday.

Buckstone, who represents a Cockney Giovanni, is the hero of the piece, and adds much to the fun thereof by the shortness of his coat, which he is perpetually obliged to rearrange. . . . The terrors of Buckstone in the midst of this crowd of visitations are as extravagantly represented as possible, but the whole tendency of the piece is to be "funny" at any expense. One of the best practical jokes is that of Buckstone disguising himself as an armchair by putting the cover of one over his head, and using his arms of flesh and bone for the arms of wood, when he is pursued by the milliners. The joke has been used before, but "don't be frightened" at that; it is a very good joke, and when Mrs. Humby sits in the false chair, and screams at finding herself hugged by its arms, the roar is immense.15

Robert Keeley was the second actor who created five roles in the twenty-one plays. Keeley much have been a favorite of the writer, or writers, for The Times. Never was anyone praised in the reviews of that newspaper with quite the same fervor as Mr. Keeley. The following statement from the review of Whitebait at Greenwich should serve as an example:

To Mr. Keeley, who really supports the farce, the most unqualified praise is due. Well known as the merits of that excellent comedian are, he actually surprised his audience by the immense amount of humour which he combined with the smallest appearance of pretension. The look, half cunning, half stupid, with which he received the confidence of his friends, the complacent chuckle when he thought he had made an impression, his explosive sentiment on the supposed discovery of

15 The Times (London), July 1, 1844, p. 5.
his father--these were no more grotesque buffooneries, but instances of genuine comic art. There is no doubt that the engagement of Mr. Keeley has given a high-tone to Adelphi farce than ever was known before.16

Mr. Keeley was not the only member of his family with considerable acting talent; Mrs. Keeley was also known as a very talented performer. In 1850 they created the roles of Mouser and Betsy in *Betsy Baker*, and thirty years later, long after Mr. Keeley's death, Mrs. Keeley was called upon to play Betsy in a benefit performance for Maddison Morton.17 Undoubtedly one of the finest bits they had to perform in *Betsy Baker* was the scene in which Betsy seduces Mouser. Mr. Mouser is so devoted to his wife that he finds it difficult to leave her even for a moment, and when he is forced to do so, it is only after repeated expressions of affection, deep sighs, and fond embraces. Mrs. Mouser is quite bored with too much affection and says that Mouser is "too attentive by half." Crummy, her cousin, fearing that Mouser is going to destroy Mrs. Mouser's love by his over indulgence, and wanting to show Mrs. Mouser just how fortunate she is to have a husband who is truly devoted, develops a plan. His plan is to have Betsy Baker, an

attractive young laundress, make love to Mouser. If Mouser can be made to look at another female, then perhaps he will stop being so unrealistic in his devotion to Mrs. Mouser; and if Mrs. Mouser can be made to be even a tiny bit jealous, then perhaps she will be thankful for the devotion of an overly attentive husband. He gets Betsy to play her part by promising her a small grocery store if she will make Mouser fall in love with her. A small grocery store would be a giant step up the social ladder for Betsy, and she and her fiance can then be married with some feeling of security, so she readily agrees.

The scene in which Betsy tries to seduce Mouser is indeed funny. One reason for its humor is that the audience knows what is going to happen. They know that Betsy is going to pretend to be in love with Mouser, and that he is going to swallow it hook, line, and sinker. There is nothing unpredictable in the scene; its humor is carried by the lines and the acting.

Perhaps there are two reasons why the scene is so humorous: (1) the audience feels just a bit of vicarious pleasure at the thought of their being in such a situation, and (2) they feel superior to the poor soul who is going to lose control and dignity, especially as he seems to be such a good man. There is pleasure in knowing that no man is so good that he cannot fall, for if there were such a man, he would make everyone else look pale by comparison.
The first part of the scene is spent in Crummy setting Mouser up for the kill. The kill takes place as Crummy exits. Betsy said a little earlier, "There stands my wretched victim! He little knows what's going to happen to him." She now proceeds to make it happen.

Bet. Poor man! He'll never begin, so I suppose I must (aloud) Sir!

Mous. (aside) Mouser, be firm, No damned nonsense! Do your duty, Mouser, and that duty commands you instantly to plunge a dagger into the heart that adores you. Well, Miss Baker? (with great indifference—his back towards her)

Bet. Those as like me calls me Betsy. (in a plaintive tone) Call me Betsy, sir!

Mous. No, Betsy—I shall not call you Betsy—I never do call people by their Christian names, Betsy—never. Betsy! Never, Betsy!

Bet. No more do I—unless they're very—very pretty ones indeed such as John, and Timothy, and Marmadook (in a tender tone, and approaching him.)

Mous. (aside) Mouser, be firm (turning to Betsy and seeing her close to him, begins whistling again. Betsy retires a step or two, and approaching him again) So, you think Marmadook a pretty name, eh?

Bet. Yes, sir. I could go on making rhymes to it all day long, as I stand at the washing-tub; just like the man in the play.

There's not a name in any book, As can compare with Marmadook, No breeze as e'er the treeses shook, sounds half as sweet as Marmadook.

Mous. (aside) It was wrong in me to stop. I feel, it was highly wrong in me to stop. (aloud) But remember, you are going to marry a Joseph.

Bet. (with sudden violence, and close to Mouser) Never!

Mous. (jumping away) Don't. But why not?

Bet. I don't want to marry—I never will marry— I'll live and die a Baker. (with great energy)

Mous. But your reason—your notion—for dying a Baker?
Bet. (with a pathetic look at Mouser) Can you ask? You! You? Oh, 'tis too much. Oh! Oh! Oh! (aside) I wonder how I'm doing it. (hiding her face in her hands and sobbing)

Mous. Hush! (tenderly) Don't cry—don't make such a row, Miss Baker.

Bet. Call me Betsy!

Mous. Very well, Betsy. (aside) I've been too firm, Mouser, you've been by many degrees too firm. ( aloud, and talking Betsy's hand) Now, don't cry, there's a dear. (aside) I called her a dear!

Here Crummy looks in from Office, and observes.

There—there—and, now laugh—laugh directly, you little rogue. (aside) I called her a little rogue. (chucks Betsy under the chin).

Bet. (looking nervously towards the door) Oh, I think I'd better go now, sir.

Mous. Don't be in a hurry, Betsy. He, he he! My pretty little Betsy— for you are pretty—very—very—he, he! (laughs to himself, aside) I'm going it! I feel I'm rapidly becoming a horrid, good-for-nothing little rascal! But I can't help it.

Bet. (trying to disengage her hand) But, sir, what would Mrs. Mouser think?

Mous. (recklessly) Mrs. Mouser may think whatever she likes. There, what d'ye say to that? Ha, ha, ha! who's afraid?" (suddenly and very loud) Betsy, embrace your Marmadock.

Bet. (frightened, takes up her pattens, and holds them out, threatening him)

Mous. (rushes at Betsy—she avoids him, leaving the veil in his hand)

Cru. (without) Very well. I shall find him.

Bet. Oh, lud! (runs out of door, L.D.F.)

Mous. Cousin Crummy! (follows her to the door, then crams the veil into his pocket, and begins to whistle very loud)

The reviewer for The Times was exuberant in his praise of Mr. and Mrs. Keeley the next day:
the acting of Mr. and Mrs. Keeley was absolutely perfect. Mrs. Keeley's indignant demand of her pattens, that she may depart, when first she hears the cousin's proposal and is not yet ready to consent, and the gradual thawing of Mr. Keeley's stern morality on hearing that he has made a compact, are little touches of nature that could not be surpassed. The pair were loudly demanded at the fall of the curtain. 18

Other reviews of Keeley's acting help to complete the picture of the chief abilities of the actor. In 1843, The Times said of his performance in A Thumping Legacy, that "all know how unique Keeley is in the expression of terror, and the wildness of his delight when he feels he is out of a scrape." 19 As Titus Tallboy in The Trumpeter's Wedding, his performance was reviewed in this manner:

The constant embarrassments in which he is placed he manages with infinite humour; indeed, there is no one on the stage who can give like Keeley the notion of a man in a 'fix.' The sudden change, when he is boldly marching up to browbeat his rival, and is checked by a whisper from Nelly, was one of the happiest touches in the piece. 20

As Sunnyside in A Capital Match, Keeley had a number of bits of comic business. His first entrance is marked by the fact that he brings his whip into the house.

18 The Times (London), November 14, 1850, p. 5.
19 Ibid., February 13, 1843, p. 6.
20 Ibid., March 22, 1849, p. 7.
with him. One can imagine what little things he managed to do with the whip to help delineate character.

Rosamond tries to get Sunnyside to keep her marriage a secret. He pretends not to understand, so she tries to frighten him by saying that her intended is an excellent shot. She also tries to bribe him by pretending affection, but when he still refuses to understand, the stage directions say she becomes very angry, and "crossing to R. vehemently, and throwing his arm violently away, making him spin round again--then walking hurriedly to and fro."

When Mrs. Singleton calls Rosamond to tell her that Sunnyside wants to marry her, Sunnyside is extremely confident that Mrs. Singleton is simply making a fool of herself, for he knows that Rosamond is already secretly married. Therefore, he knows absolutely that Rosamond will laugh, so he assumes a bodily position of extreme confidence or even arrogance, places "his hand in his breeches pockets," and sways "to and fro." He continues to do this through several speeches, so when Rosamond throws herself into his arms, the stage direction says he is "perfectly bewildered."

Late in the play, Sunnyside rushes out of the house to deliver a letter to the city magistrates. As he goes he grabs his whip and then grabs the whip of a
servant. Thus armed with a whip in either hand, because "when one's in a hurry, there's nothing like having plenty of whips," he rushes out of the door. In a few moments he returns, "his hat and coat muddy, and both his whips broken." His sudden appearance in this state probably brought gales of laughter from the audience.

Again The Times was very complimentary in its praise of the acting of Mr. Keeley:

The odd situations that arise out of a story which, though it appears somewhat complicated in the telling, is perfectly clear when shone upon by the footlights, would lose half their value were the principal figure sustained by a less excellent artist than Mr. Keeley. We have rarely seen finer comic acting, as distinguished from buffoonery, than is displayed by Mr. Keeley in the character of Sunnyside. The sense of annoyance at being employed in the arduous pursuit of husband-hunting, the fits of upstart irascibility which every now and then shook the stout, swelling frame, and the vein of unctuous good humour which showed itself through every change, were all perfect of their kind.21

Mr. Keeley's acting strengths now seem fairly clear. He had an amazing ability to show fright and terror, annoyance and joy. His acting sometimes bordered on buffoonery but was never really degraded to that degree. He was also greatly proficient at expressing great happiness and great disappointment.

21The Times (London) November 5, 1852, p. 5.
A look at the roles played by Keeley reveals that Ominous was characterized by great terror; Sunny-side, Mouser, and Tallboy by happiness, confusion, and disappointment; and John Small by wonder bordering on stupidity and great happiness.

Paul Bedford and Edward Wright were an early acting team. The Times called Bedford the usual "companion-picture" of Wright, and together they were referred to as "twin fountains of mirth and laughter." They appeared together in two of the twenty-one plays used in this study, and Wright played in a third. They performed together in Who Stole the Pocket-Book? and A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion. The broad physical action used by Wright as Tipthorp in the first of these plays and as the Intruder in the second will be recalled from earlier quotations. The Times praised both actors for their performance in A Most Unwarrantable Intrusion, saying that "the well-known contrast of the comic favourites is sustained throughout this little piece, and the laughter of the audience was unceasing." Wright performed the lead role in Who Stole the Pocket-book? and he received the lion's share of praise in the review.

22Ibid., July 6, 1849, p. 8.
23Ibid., February 26, 1845, p. 6.
24Ibid., June 11, 1849, p. 8.
Mr. Wright is of course the life of the farce, and plays the part of Tipthorp in his best manner, with quiet natural humour, as he always does when he has a part worthy of him. His shambling, depressed drunkenness during his interview with the supposed owner of the pocket-book, gradually giving place to the most triumphant exhilaration when he discovers the real state of the case, is a most accomplished piece of acting; and it is to be regretted that Mr. Wright has so few similar opportunities of showing himself, in the most thorough sense of the word, a genuine comedian.25

Paul Bedford must have been a man of considerable size. The Intruder refers to Snoozle as a "corpulent being," "bulky individual," "extensive creature," and "big man." Since nothing was said about Wright's physical size, one can only assume he was certainly no more than of "average" height and weight. Thus, they would fit the pattern of some other great comedy teams: Mutt and Jeff, Laurel and Hardy, Abbott and Costello. From all indications, Wright was the more physical of the two in his acting. Bedford appears to have been a foil for Wright's greater activity and bluster. The roles they played would certainly fit this pattern.

Frederick Robson played the roles of De Brass in A Regular Fix and Griggs in Ticklish Times. The reviewer for The Times of 1858 said "The sole object of a new farce by Mr. J. M. Morton, called Ticklish Times, is to exhibit Mr. Robson worked up to a fever of comic rage that borders

25Ibid., April 3, 1852, p. 5.
on insanity." Later in the review the writer was more explicit in his remarks about Robson's acting:

the audience, who roar at Mr. Robson's frenzy when he cannot establish his Griggism, care but little for probabilities. Knowing that the whole success of the farce depends on him alone, he gave himself up last night to a hurricane of rage and grief, with that sort of recklessness in which he is unequalled, and created an enthusiasm of mirth in spite of the flimsiness and extravagance of the piece.

The reviewer for The Times indicated that the part of Hugh De Brass in A Regular Fix was not one that Robson might normally be expected to play. In fact he seemed surprised at how well Robson played the part, undoubtedly indicating how well the role was written. The reviewer said:

Mr. Robson has never been seen to greater advantage in what we may call a purely farcical part than in this new piece. His greatest "hits" have hitherto been made in burlesques, in semi-pathetic characters, and in those highly finished portraiture of low life which, though they occur in farces, belong to the genus comedy, as far as the actor is concerned. But Hugh de Brass is a gentleman with no especial attribute beyond consummate impudence; he typifies no class save that of the ordinary stage adventurer; he is not "made up" as a droll figure; in a word, he is not a personage whom one would naturally associate with Mr. Robson. But the readiness with which this admirable actor goes out of his way to give effect to the piece is surprising. The odd accompaniments of voice and gesture with which he seasons the oddities of the dialogue, his perfect consciousness that he is in the land of unreason, and the heartiness with

26 Ibid., March 9, 1858, p. 12.
27 Ibid.
which he enjoys all the privileges of his position, render him one of the most amusing of objects. The sudden elevation of his eyeglass to the place of sight when a lie has recoiled upon him with more than ordinary violence, and he can only stare and say nothing, is of itself a masterpiece.28

One must conclude that the usual style of Mr. Robson was close to rant and bombast. He seems to have played Griggs in such a manner. His performance in *A Regular Fix* was probably tempered with a degree of restraint that was unusual in his acting but which proved very successful.

Early in this chapter attention was called to the fact that Morton usually created at least one character in each of his plays who exhibited a great deal of bodily activity. After an examination of the comments made about the actors who played these roles in fifteen of the twenty-one plays, it is evident that their forte as a group was acting in a style suitable to the roles Morton created. In other words, Morton's ability as a playwright to "fit his actors" certainly does appear to be one reason for his success.

One further word about the actors who played in Morton's major roles is in order. All of the men who played these roles were apparently rather small men physically. Attention has already been called to the probable size of Wright, and pictures of Buckstone

28Ibid., October 13, 1860.
indicate that he was certainly not a large man. Keeley was beyond doubt rather small. Rosamond calls Sunnyside "the most adhesive little man I ever knew," 29 and Crummy refers to Mouser as a "good-for-nothing little hypocrite." 30 Mrs. Mouser says she wanted to return home from her sister's and "give my poor dear affectionate little husband an agreeable surprise," and Mouser even refers to himself as a "little rascal."

Regardless of their physical size, the actors who played in Morton's plays were the giants of their profession in the nineteenth century. And John Maddison Morton wrote for them with amazing insight and ability.

29 A Capital Match.

30 Betsy Baker.
CHAPTER X

THEMES AND STAGING

Deep into the twentieth century many people considered a theme or moral as an indispensable part of a play. And because of this attitude, any play written and produced in the Victorian period might be expected to vividly proclaim a social or moral theme. This was not, however, the case with Morton's plays. One can hunt in vain for moral or social themes in a vast majority of his works. For instance, what is the theme of A Regular Fix? Hugh De Brass, it will be remembered, wakes up in a strange house after having attended a party in a drunken condition the night before. He sees a policeman outside the window, and having read a letter which said the police were looking for him because of past due debts, De Brass uses every trick and device he can think of in an effort to remain in the house. At the end of the play a policeman finally enters the house but not to arrest De Brass. Instead, he brings news that De Brass's cousin "thirteen times removed" has died leaving him a large estate. If one is facetious in the extreme, the theme of this play might be: "Don't get caught, or if you do, have a rich cousin thirteen time removed who
will die just in time to leave you an inheritance." To continue in a facetious vein, the theme of *The Two Bonnycastles* might be: "Don't run away too soon"; and the theme of *Aunt Charlotte's Maid* might be: "Don't get involved with servant girls, and if you do, don't give them tangible evidence that may be used against you."

In reality, however, these plays do not have social or moral themes, and there is most assuredly nothing like a "purple" passage in any of them. In a review of Morton's play, *The Milliner's Holiday*, the writer for *The Times* expressed an opinion as to why Morton wrote his plays and about themes in farces in general.

We have no protest to enter against such good, broad, reckless creations as *The Milliner's Holiday*, the new farce which was produced on Saturday. If it was absurd and improbable, it was meant to be absurd and improbable, and that, in affairs of this kind, disarms objection. When authors come forward with a vast deal of pretence, and hint or boldly tell us that they are going to edify us with the stores of their wisdom and experience, and exhibit British manners in a new and clear light, then, we say, if their wisdom does not go beyond clap-trap morality, and their light does not contribute so much towards the illustration of British manners as the clown and pantaloon do every Christmas, we have a right to grumble. But here the intent was simply to raise a laugh, and most assuredly Mr. Maddison Morton, the author, with the assistance of Mrs. Humby and

---

1Holiday was spelled "Holyday" in the first few bills and in the review. However, the spelling was soon changed to *holiday* in the playbills and remained that way for the remainder of the run.
Buckstone, carried out this intent to their own satisfaction, as well as that of everybody else.²

There was only one play of the twenty-one that were analyzed that could be said to teach a moral lesson, and even that is doubtful. Tipthorp, in *Who Stole the Pocket-book?*, sees a gentleman drop his pocketbook, or so Tipthorp thinks. Tipthorp picks up the pocketbook and really does not make an effort to return it. He spends most of the contents, and then his conscience starts to bother him. At the end of the play, it turns out that the contents of the pocketbook were intended for him as payment for plays he had written. The moral implication of the play is: "If a person finds something, the only honest thing to do is to try to return the property."

Tipthorp expresses this idea himself when he says, "it was very wrong of me to appropriate the contents of the pocket-book—it was pleasant, but wrong. The only consolation—that is, the only moral consolation I have, is that I stole—no, I mean I appropriated, my own property—."

The concept of Puritan morality as expressed in *The Trumpeter's Wedding* is somewhat surprising. Puritans are pictured as an extremely gay group at the supposed wedding of Titus and Nelly, and they are not

²*The Times* (London), July 1, 1844, p. 5.
at all hesitant about drinking healths to the bride and groom, even to the point of drunkenness.

The general picture of Victorian morality obtained by reading all of the plays was also slightly different from what one might expect. The mild curses used were pointed out earlier, and the implied promiscuousness has also been discussed. Perhaps the play which contained the more obvious incidents of questionable conduct was *Who Stole the Pocket-Book?* When the ladies say they must dress for dinner, Tipthorp rather pointedly asks if he can help them change their clothes. Naturally his assistance is refused, but while they change in another room, he "accidently" peeps through the keyhole. He explains his actions by saying, "I forgot the ladies are dressing; and I must say, from the passing glance I had, that Miss Dainty makes up remarkably well--I often had my suspicions, but now they are confirmed." His actions were undoubtedly quite bold for the mid-nineteenth century.

A lack of social or moral themes in Morton's plays is really not as surprising as it might at first appear. Morton was a maker of farces, and farce does not attempt to present preachments or morals. Rather, farce brings laughter because it presents a situation as it exists. It is man and his predicaments that are the concern of farce. John Dennis Hurrell expressed the idea in a rather complete statement in *The Quarterly*
Journal of Speech.

There is surely something to be said for l'homme moyen sensuel, the perennial hero of farce, who frequently knows that he can get along very well with his ingenuity, without recourse to morality, for he is aware that the average man must pit his wits against a world that seems always ready to collapse about his ears, and that he must do a great deal of running to stay in the same place. If farce ignores morality it is because, to be an artistically effective reflection of the life of the average man, it must do this. The writer of farce knows that morality is what we turn to when all else fails, but he is a man who has not been made cynical by this knowledge. Our definitions of farce need not, then, be in any way pejorative or apologetic. It is not necessarily a lower form of drama simply because it portrays what, for want of a better term, we must continue to call a "lower" human faculty. It does not deny morality: it simply isolates it and leaves it for treatment in a different form. It is not comedy which has failed to come off, since it does not undertake to criticize life in any way, and constantly refuses to generalize. Where, then, does it stand in the hierarchy in relation to tragedy? The answer is simple. It stands to one side and makes the very positive and valuable statement that tragedy might not even be necessary and might, even, be a little ridiculous.  

There were very few surprises in the staging of Morton's plays. For the most part, the plays were obviously played in front of painted backdrops. An entrance was usually located upstage center, and numerous entrances were provided by using the spaces between the

---

wings. The description of the scene for *Box and Cox* was as follows:

A room decently furnished: at C. a bed with curtains closed: at L.C. a door; at L. 3 E. a chest of drawers; at back, R., a window; at R. 3 a door; at R. 2 E. fire-place, with mantel-piece; table and chairs; a few common ornaments on chimney-piece.

Although one might get a fairly clear picture of a room at first glance, the use of L. 3 E. and so forth is the tip-off. L. 3 E. is shorthand for stage left, third entrance, and it was in reference to the wing and border sets that this terminology was used. Most of the descriptions of the scenes which appeared in *The Plays* referred to the stage and scenery in this manner. Occasionally, however, unusual elements were called for. The scene for *Who Stole the Pocket-Book?* is described as "A Work Room at Miss Dainty's, doors R. and L., folding doors at C. open and showing table within laid for dinner . . . ." These things could have been painted on a backdrop, except for the fact that a later direction says that Silvertop, when the dinner is served, "throws open folding doors at C., and the dinner table is seen elegantly laid—lighted candles, champagne bottles, &c." Obviously, therefore, the center doors had to be practical, but just how much of the remainder of the set was functional is unknown.

A description of a somewhat similar set for *Lend Me Five Shillings* sounds even more like a modern box set.
The description reads:

A Room adjoining the Ball-Room, at an Hotel. The Ball-Room is seen at back, through three large folding doors.—Chandeliers on the stage, and also in the Ball-Room, lighted. Doors 2nd entrance, R. and L., also doors R. and L. in flat.—Table and Chairs at wing, R.—At the rising of the Curtain, a Quadrille band, heard from Ball-Room, in which two Quadrille sets are formed. . . .

Obviously the doors at the rear of the stage were functional, and the statement "doors R. and L. in flat" makes one wonder if a box set was used. On the other hand, the statement that there were "Doors 2nd entrance, R. and L." would lead one to believe that wings were used. All that can be said with certainty is that the doors leading into the ball-room were practicable.

A vast majority of Morton's plays had only one scene, and thus only one set. The "Alabama," however, had three scenes. The first was a "Public Room" in an inn, the second was a "Cabin on board the Alabama," and the third was "The Quarter Deck of the Alabama war steamer; funnel in C.; companion ladder in front of it; the stern of the ship at back, with man at the wheel; paddle box on each side of stage." The third scene is the important one, especially as one considers a stage direction that contained the action that was to be going on as the curtain opened. The stage direction said: "Crew clearing for action; Boys in the rigging; great activity and bustle; piles of shot; O'Flynn with a speaking trumpet issuing
orders." It would be extremely difficult to make a wing and border set take on the characteristics of a ship's deck as the stage directions describe. On the other hand, the use of three scenes in a one-act farce that ran only one hour and ten minutes demands very rapid changes, and the common wing and border sets of the day were ideal for that purpose. Considering the great amount of stage decorations that had to be changed, even the shifting of wing and border sets would be demanding. Since speed was a necessity in shifting the scenery, and since the expense of producing a one-act farce with three scenes would be exorbitant with any other kind of scenery, wing and border sets were probably adapted and used in some way. Furthermore the fact that the play was produced at Drury Lane is important, for it is likely that the expense incurred was impossible for any other theatre with the exception of Covent Garden.

Perhaps the most unusual bit of staging that occurred in Morton's plays, though not concerned with sets per se, was the use of the proscenium box and audience area for the opening scene in My Wife's Bonnet. The play was first performed in 1864, a time when Tom Tobertson and the Bancrofts were leading the trend toward realistic staging, so for a scene to be played within the confines of the audience space must have been unusual indeed.

The costumes were, for the most part, the normal
costumes of the day. A few plays were set in periods or places other than nineteenth century England, but it is unlikely that any great effort was spent to secure costumes that were historically accurate. The plays that were out of the historical setting or the time period in which Morton wrote were: Ticklish Times, England, 1750; The Trumpeter's Wedding, England, Commonwealth period; A Thumping Legacy, Corsica, nineteenth century; and The "Alabama," Havana, Cuba and on board the "Alabama," American Civil War period.

Staging and costumes did not present a major production problem in producing Morton's plays. And themes, moral and social, did not occupy a strong position in the plays. They were not necessarily neglected either. It seems that they were simply not considered one way or the other. They were irrelevant to the purpose and construction of farces and thus not included.
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

At the beginning of this study, attention was called to the fact that even though farce and melodrama were the two most popular play forms of the nineteenth century, a work in German is the only study to deal exclusively with English farce. A study of the farces of John Maddison Morton was proposed as one means of furthering our knowledge as to the characteristics of nineteenth century English farce. Morton's farces were chosen for two basic reasons: (1) he was the most prolific and probably the best of the low farce writers, and (2) a number of his works were available. The study has now been completed. The only thing that remains to be done is to summarize and try to determine the significance of what was found.

Since a playwright is subject to a number of forces which have a direct influence on his writing, a study of the three most powerful of these forces was conducted. These included: playhouses, audiences, and players. A study of playbills was also included in an effort to determine what dramas were produced and in what order in a nineteenth century theatre.
Several conclusions were reached. First, since the patent houses, Covent Garden and Drury Lane, found it necessary to rely heavily on spectacle in order to attract audiences, most of the farces of the period were written to be performed in the somewhat smaller, and far more numerous "minor" theatres of the day. Second, the growing population of London, changing as it was in composition and dramatic taste, had a profound influence on the size and number of playhouses. At the beginning of the century, proscenium doors and an extended fore-stage were still in existence; but by the end of the century, the stage had completely adopted the proscenium form. The demand for spectacle brought about many changes in staging; and scenery, costumes, backstage equipment, audience space, and lights all moved steadily toward the day of the Bancrofts, Robertson, and Ibsen. Third, audience composition and taste also had a very deep influence on the types of dramas that were presented. The advent of an audience composed of the butcher and baker signaled the rise of spectacle and numerous entertainments of various kinds which were later called vaudeville. The rights of authors, copyrights, and the rise of play leasing companies were all closely related to a large popular audience. An audience of the nineteenth century was quite capable of banter, hisses, cat-calls, and general repartee with the actors on the stage. They
were also lovable and loving. Fourth, the players who performed in Morton's plays were the leading low comedy actors of the day. Some of them were: J. B. Buckstone, Robert Keeley, Edward Wright, Paul Bedford, Miss (Mrs. Leigh) Murray, Charles Selby, Mr. Howe, Charles Mathews, Mrs. L. S. Buckingham, Frederick Robson, J. Vining, John Harley, Miss P. Horton, and Miss Reynolds. The leading theatre managers of the day produced Morton's plays. They were: Benjamin Webster, Madame Celeste, Madame Vestris, William Farren, Charles Kean, Frederick Robson, H. Wallack, Horace Wigan, and others. Fifth, Morton's plays were given a position of importance. According to the testimony of Morton's contemporaries, as well as major writers since, the usual position for a farce in the playbill was the last position of the evening. There were usually three or more plays or kinds of entertainment presented each evening, so if a farce were not presented until the third position in a bill, it often did not start until well after midnight. The theatre managers who produced Morton's plays considered them important enough to place them in either first or second position in forty of the fifty playbills that were obtained.

The final pattern derived by studying the playhouses, audiences, players and playbills is that a vast majority of John Maddison Morton's plays were written for specific managers (Webster, Celeste, Vestris, Farren, Kean,
and others) who produced the plays in selected playhouses (Haymarket, Adelphi, Strand, Lyceum, Princess's, Olympic, and others) with a fairly limited number of outstanding actors (Buckstone, Keeley, Wright, Bedford, Selby, Miss Murray, and others).

Before a complete study of a specific group of farces could be conducted, it was necessary to define farce as it is generally conceived in the theatre. Farce was therefore defined as a form of comedy in which recognizable people often do improbable things. The more recognizable they are, the more absurd, thus human and funny, they may seem. It was decided that the purpose of farce was not just to incite laughter, but to delineate a kind of Everyman as he faces the realities of life and the universe. In the process, man is often made to look ridiculous, absurd, and ludicrous. The plots of farces were defined as those which traditionally revolve about the machinations of several stock characters: the grave old man, the braggart soldier, the knave, the distressed mother, the parasite, the scheming slave, the saucy maid, the rich old fop, and the young lovers. Plots and character development have often used such devices as deformity, caricature, parody, irony, and disguise-unmasking. It was further stated that the speed with which farce is acted helps to create a feeling of abstractness,
and the acting itself is highly exaggerated in style. Exaggeration, however, does not imply a lack of reality or seriousness. Costumes are usually simple, but again exaggeration is often the basis of comic action or character. Finally, the language of farce was determined to be that of everyday life, liberally interspersed with puns and incongruities.

With this information as a background, a complete analysis of twenty-one of Morton's farces was conducted and certain conclusions were reached regarding his plots, characters, language, acting in his plays, his themes, and staging.

Morton's plots were divided into three major categories: (1) plays in which an uncle is trying to marry his niece, a guardian his ward, or a parent his child; (2) plays in which a husband or wife, a lover or fiancee masquerade as the conjugate partner of a third party; and (3) plays with divergent plots which were designated as non-marriage plays. Morton used a number of devices which were designed to carry the action forward or to serve as elements of comedy. Among these were: misunderstandings, deus-ex-machina endings and farcical accidents, letters, repetitions, tricks, and jokes, and conflicts between master and servant. Finally, Morton occasionally introduced unusual elements into his plots, and he always ended his plays with a "tag."
The characters in Morton's plays were the everyday characters one might meet in a home situation. They were members of the common occupations, and for the most part, the action of the play did not revolve around them but what happened to them. Characterization was accomplished through asides and soliloquies and through certain devices—the braggart soldier; the device which reveals personal characteristics, such as vanity and foolishness as revealed through baldness; and the "stupid" character of farce.

The use of language in a dramatic situation, dialogue, was one of the greatest abilities of John Maddison Morton. All of those who have written about him attest to this fact, and an examination of his plays causes one to agree. His use of language was characterized by misunderstandings, repartee, repetitions, absurdities, mix-ups, puns, and parodies. What made Morton's dialogue unusual, however, was not the devices he used, but the results he achieved. His language was set apart by its tone or style, which depended heavily on pure wit rather than device alone.

Like Shakespeare, Molière, and others who preceded him, Morton created his characters for particular actors, especially the lead roles. His skill at fitting the talents of those actors was probably his second great ability as a
playwright. The lead actors were performers who employed a broad acting style, and Morton included at least one role in almost every play that a broad actor like Buckstone or Keeley could perform. Furthermore, this character was the person around whom the play centered. He was the character to whom things happened and without whom the raison d'être of the play would evaporate.

For the most part, the plays were staged by using painted backdrops, wing and border sets. One play, however, was quite exceptional in that the opening brief scene was played in the audience. Costumes were also quite simple. Contemporary British costumes were worn in most if not all of the plays.

Morton's plays were not written to proclaim moral or social themes. Instead, they depicted a kind of Everyman who continually fought against the things which tended to degrade him.

The farces of John Maddison Morton were, in many ways, like all farce. But they were also unlike many of the farces of the well-known writers of that genre. They were not of the drawing-room kind, but more basic. Their characters were the common everyday characters one meets on the streets and in the marketplace. Their concerns were also quite basic, dealing with marriage, love and faithfulness-unfaithfulness. Placed in historical perspective,
the farces of John Maddison Morton are more akin to
Plautus and Heywood, than to Moliere and Shakespeare.
When other studies have been conducted, perhaps a clearer
picture of what the "low farce" of the nineteenth century
was really like will start to emerge.
APPENDIX

MORTON'S PLAYS

The following is a list of the twenty-one plays used in this study. Available publication data is given, and a list of characters is included for each play. The original production date and the theatre in which the play was produced are included when that information is known.


   **Characters**
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Captain Clipper</th>
<th>Mr. Christopher Clipper</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lieutenant Grappling</td>
<td>Joe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terence O'Flynn</td>
<td>Negro Porter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phoebe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


   **Characters**
   
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Horatio Thomas Sparkins</th>
<th>Major Volley</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pivot</td>
<td>Mrs. Puddifoot</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fanny Volley</td>
<td>Matilda Jones</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Characters

Box

Mrs. Bouncer

Cox


Characters

Mrs. Singleton
Mr. Sunnyside

Rosamond
John

Captain Tempest


Characters

Colonel Chaos
Tottenham
James

Jack Bunce
Sam
Blazes

Harriet


Characters

Mr. Whiffles
Mr. Pygmalion Phibbs

Mr. John Brownjohn
Mrs. Whiffles

Lydia

Characters

Mr. Golightly
Captain Spruce
Sam

Captain Phobbs
Moreland
Mrs. Major Phobbs

Mrs. Captain Phobbs


Characters

Mr. Nathaniel Snoozle

Intruder


Characters

Major Choker
Mr. Lionel Larkins
Lady Barbara Choker

Mr. John Parker
Jonathan
Kate Dalrymple


Characters

Mr. Topknot
Alfred Jones
Mrs. Cutwater
Fanny

Mr. Christopher
Topknot
Mrs. Topknot
Mrs. Appleby
First produced at the Princess's Theatre, June 22, 1843.

Characters

Captain Topheavy
Jacob Close
Mrs. Topheavy

Mr. Felix Toddle
Tim
Fanny Marlowe
Mrs. Downey

First produced at the Royal Lyceum Theatre, July 12, 1848.

Characters

Mr. Pillicoddy
Mrs. Pillicoddy

Captain O'Scuttle
Mrs. O'Scuttle
Sarah Hunt

Produced at the Royal Olympic Theatre, October 11, 1860.

Characters

Mr. Hugh De Brass
Charles Surplus
Mrs. Surplus
Smiler
Mrs. Deborah Carter

Mr. Surplus
Abel Quick
Porter
Emily
Matilda Jane

First produced at the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, February 11, 1843.

Characters

Filippo Geronimo
Bambogetti
Brigadier
Second Carbineer

Jerry Ominous
Leoni
First Carbineer
Rosetta
First produced at the Royal Olympic Theatre,  
March 8, 1858.

Characters

Sir William Ramsey  
Launcelot Griggs  
Mrs. Griggs  
Dot  
Bodkins  
Jansen  
Winifred  
Constables

17. **THE TRUMPETER’S WEDDING.** London: Duncombe and Moon,  
n.d. First produced at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, March 21, 1849.

Characters

Sir Charles Rivers  
Titus Tallboy  
Stamp  
Lady Mary Pringle  
Soldiers  
Goodlamb  
Corporal Muzzle  
Clerk  
Nelly  
Villagers

First produced at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket,  
November 25, 1851.

Characters

Mr. Smuggins  
Mr. Bonnycastle (Jorum)  
Helen  
Mr. John James Johnson  
Mrs. Bonnycastle  
Patty

19. **THE TWO PUDDIFOOTS.** London: Thomas Hailes Lacy,  
n.d. First produced at the Royal Olympic Theatre,  
October 14, 1867.

Characters

Puddifoot, Senior  
Buffles  
Mrs. Figsby  
Puddifoot, Junior  
Caroline  
Peggy

Characters

Mr. Benjamin Buzzard  
John Small  
Sally  

Mr. Glimmer  
Miss Lucretia  
Buzzard


Characters

Mr. Tomkins Tipthorp  
Mr. Woodpecker  
Miss Dainty  

Mr. Silvertop  
Mr. Benjamin Blossom  
Fanny Smart  
Julia Jenkins
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS


Doran, Dr. *In and About Drury Lane and Other Papers*. Vol I. London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1881.


**NEWSPAPERS**

*Illustrated London News*, November 6, 1847.

*The Times* (London), 1835-1891.

**PERIODICALS**


"Death at the Play." *Knowledge,* III (May 18, 1883), 297.


"Fashionable Farces." *Contemporary Review,* XXX (1877), 1049.


"In the Pit of a Theatre." The Eclectic Magazine, XLII New Series (December, 1885), 750-751.


New Englander, LIII (1890), 441.


Merivale, Herman. The Drama of the Day." Temple Bar, LXXVII (July, 1886), 374.

"Mr. J. M. Morton." The Athenæum, II (December 26, 1891), 876.


"Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature, with the Minutes of Evidence. Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed, 1832." The Edinburgh Review, LVII (July, 1833), 281-311.

"Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature, with the Minutes of Evidence. Ordered by the House of Commons to be Printed, 1832." The Westminster Review, XVIII (January, 1833), 31-35.


"The Cost of Playgoing." The Theatre, 2nd Series (September 1, 1878), 100-103.

"The Drury Lane Theatre." The Theatre, 2nd Series (March 1, 1879), 79.


Tomlins, F. G. "The Past and Present State of Dramatic Art and Literature, addressed to Authors, Actors, and Managers." The Edinburgh Review, LXXVIII (October, 1843), 204-215.

PLAYS


Chaos is Come Again; or The Race-Ball. London: Chapman and Hall, n.d.


AUTOBIOGRAPHY

Billy Dean Parsons was born in Danville, Arkansas, August 9, 1930. He attended elementary school at Boonville and Magazine, Arkansas. In 1942, he moved to Memphis, Tennessee, and graduated from L. C. Humes High School in 1949. He worked for one year before entering Georgetown College, Georgetown, Kentucky, where he graduated in 1955. In 1956, he entered Louisiana State University as a graduate student and a graduate assistant in the Department of Speech. In January, 1958, he received an M.A. degree and immediately became an Assistant Professor in speech and drama at Mississippi College, Clinton, Mississippi. Since that time, he has taught at Memphis State University, Kentucky Southern College, and is presently an Associate Professor and Director of Theatre at Western Kentucky University. He has written articles for the Southern Speech Journal and the Quarterly Journal of Speech. He served as president of two statewide professional organizations in Kentucky, was the State Representative from Kentucky to the Southeastern Theatre Conference, is a member of Phi Kappa Phi, an Honorary Kentucky Colonel, and, in 1968, was listed in Who's Who in the South and Southwest.
Candidate: Billy Dean Parsons

Major Field: Speech

Title of Thesis: The Farces of John Maddison Morton

Approved:

[Signatures]

Major Professor and Chairman
Dean of the Graduate School

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

[Signatures]

W. J. Deeve

L. S. Humefeld

M. W. Broden

C. W. Bradford

Date of Examination:

September 28, 1970